

Afterword

Robert Bonazzi

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Fearlessness is the first requisite of a spiritual life.
Cowards can never be moral.

—Mohandas Gandhi

Being invisible and without substance, a disembodied voice, as it were, what else could I do? What else but try to tell you what was really happening when your eyes were looking through? And it is this which frightens me: Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?

—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

Fifty years ago John Howard Griffin embarked upon his 1959 journey through the Deep South disguised as a Negro. He risked a bold experiment based upon a simple but provocative premise never before tested. His intention was to experience daily life as a black laborer and to keep a journal with absolute truthfulness, even if his discoveries proved to be prejudicial, embarrassing or naive. His honesty was tested the very first time he looked at the mirror to examine his disguise. There he perceived "the face and shoulders of a stranger—a fierce, bald, very dark Negro" glaring back at him.

This powerful passage from *Black Like Me* reads like a loss of identity scene in a modern literary novel, but it was not fiction. Within that illuminated instant, his sense of self—physical, mental, emotional—had been thrown into chaos. But who had glared at whom? Was he the dark face reflected in the glass or the white consciousness reflecting upon it? Soon he realized he was both "the observing one and the one who panicked..." Griffin had projected his deepest fears onto the mirror, causing him to deny the truth of what he had witnessed. The emotional prejudice that intellect had long rationalized was exposed by his unexpected reaction of antipathy. "The worst of it was that I could feel no companionship for this new person. I did not like the way he looked," he writes. "But the thing was done and there was no possibility of turning back."

The stranger in the mirror was none other than the *Other*—that threatening mask of the stereotype that every culture affixes upon the face of every other culture. Griffin had encountered the *Other-as-Self*, coming face-to-face with his own unconscious racism. Initially he denied the truth he had witnessed, rationalizing it as the shock of recognition—even though it was his *lack* of recognition that truly startled him. However, from that transforming encounter emerged a unique

double perspective, perceiving clearly the bias projected on his darkened skin by whites and the reality of racism known by Negroes. While he could never plumb the depths of experience that only African-American people can know, he was exposed for several weeks to the insane hatred of racial discrimination.

Griffin delivered over 1,200 lectures to mostly-white student audiences at the request of the Negro civil rights leaders of his time. He encouraged students to repudiate the bigotry of earlier generations and envisioned in them the hope of healing the white community and the future of a peaceful, desegregated society. The core concept in his writings about racism—that members of dominant groups tend to view minorities, because they *seem different* in some extrinsic way, as *intrinsically other*, and "as merely underdeveloped versions of their own imprisoning culture"—was intuited in his classic *Black Like Me* and articulated in a seminal essay, "The Intrinsic *Other*" (1966).

In that essay Griffin examines this inculcated attitude and clarifies the logical fallacies inherent in the racist viewpoint. "One of the characteristics of our expression of such attitudes is that they are often perfectly natural to the speaker and unnatural to the hearer," he writes. "They reveal in the speaker the falsity of viewing others as intrinsically *Other*, intrinsically different as men. This intrinsic difference always implies some degree of inferiority."

Prejudices are taught directly or indirectly by elders but we are all submerged in the inculcation process. This unconscious environment of communication in which we are imprisoned blinds our perceptions to institutionalized racism. We tend to deny that racism exists in this new century, but our denial perpetuates the systemic process. "Implicit in this process," Griffin writes, "is a consent to racism." He cites the Irish jurist Edmund Burke for providing the "touchstone of this error when he said: 'I know of no way to draw up an indictment against a whole people.' Racism begins when we draw up an indictment against a whole people merely by considering them as a whole underdeveloped versions of ourselves, by perpetuating the blindness of the stereotype."

After the publication of *Black Like Me* in 1961, Griffin was asked the same question persistently: Why had he done such a thing? He thought the question irrelevant, pointing out that it was a question black people *never* asked. Nonetheless, he attempted to answer it by saying: "If I could take on the skin of a black man, live whatever might happen and then share that experience with others, perhaps at the level of shared human experience, we might come to some understanding that was not possible at the level of pure reason."

But the real answer—never an easy answer—must be tracked along the path of events that forced him to confront his own cultural conditioning. Griffin had grown up in Dallas, Texas, which was as segregated as the Deep South, and where the dominant white culture cast black people into *Otherness*. He characterized his childhood as "Southern in the old sense, the terrible sense. We were not rich but not poor either; we were genteel Southerners, and I was taught the whole mythology of race."

As a student he had excelled in the sciences but felt under-challenged by the Fort Worth public education system that stifled rapid advancement. Searching for greater challenges, he responded to a newspaper advertisement for a private boys' school in France, saying he would sweep floors to earn his keep. To his amazement, six weeks later he was offered a scholarship to the Lycée Descartes in Tours. Although he spoke no French, and his reluctant parents could afford only one-way passage and a small monthly stipend, he sailed for Europe at the age of fifteen, in 1935.

Leaving for Europe, where he would encounter different cultures, initiated profound changes over the next several years. He recalled being pleased to see African students in classes, but became indignant when they sat at the same table for lunch. He asked why and his French friends immediately responded: "Why Not?" The teenager was stunned and embarrassed to realize that he had never asked that question. While a "classical education" had expanded his knowledge and consciousness, his unconscious racism persisted.

After graduating from the lycée, he attended literature classes at the University of Poitiers and attended medical school at the École de Médecine in Tours. Two years later, he became a graduate assistant to Dr. Pierre Fromenty, Director of the Asylum at Tours. During the German occupation, the director was conscripted into the French medical corps and the American, who could not be conscripted, was left in charge of 1200 patients, along with a nursing order of Catholic nuns. Soon after he joined fellow students in the underground resistance, and the asylum became a safe house where wounded soldiers got treatment.

The underground also gave temporary sanctuary to Jewish families from Germany, Belgium and France. Hidden in alley boarding houses, where Griffin heard parents (who realized that they would be shipped to concentration camps eventually) plead with him to take their children to safety. He helped smuggle children under the age of fifteen in the asylum ambulance—disguised as mental patients in straitjackets—out of Tours to the countryside, where other teams moved them on to England. In 1940, when the underground intercepted the Gestapo's death list that included Griffin's name, he was smuggled out of France, through England then Ireland, and back to the United States.

Griffin had witnessed the tragic effects of the Holocaust—refined to hideous perfection by the Nazis, who had drawn up *an indictment against a whole people* (the Jewish community of Europe), blaming their victims for every problem of German society. But he had *not* understood then the parallels between the Warsaw ghetto and every urban American ghetto; between anti-Semitism and white racism toward Negroes. Segregation—technically legal yet ethically unjust and immoral—was also an indictment drawn up against a whole people, the black community of America.

Enlisting in the Army Air Corps in 1941, he was shipped to the Pacific theater the following year. Impressed by his linguistic skills, the high command assigned him to an island in the Solomon chain where he lived for a year in a remote village. He studied the indigenous culture, translated their dialect and gathered strategic information from the native allies. Initially, he viewed the natives as "primitives"—as *Other*. But after he was unable to navigate jungle trails and had to rely on a five-year-old child as a guide, it became obvious "that within the context of that culture, I was clearly the inferior—an adult man who could not have survived without the guidance of a child. And from the point of view of the local inhabitants—a valid point of view—I was *Other*, inferior, and they were superior." It was an experiential truth he could not deny.

While living with the islanders, Griffin developed a friendship with John Vutha, Grand Chief of the Solomons, who was a staunch ally of America in battling against Japan's occupation. Vutha provided crucial information by tracking enemy movements and, when he had been captured and tortured by the Japanese, he refused to divulge allied positions. After 22 bayonet wounds, they left him for dead, hanging from a tree as an example. "There is little doubt that if he had given in and spoken," Griffin writes, "the American victory at Guadalcanal might have been much slower in coming. Countless lives would certainly have been lost that were saved by his silence." For his heroism, Vutha received the highest awards accorded by American and British governments.

In 1945, when a Japanese invasion plan was intercepted, Griffin was reassigned to the landing base on Morotai and resumed his duties as a radio operator. When the air raids were imminent, orders were sent to select one soldier for a dangerous mission. He drew the short straw and was dispatched to the radar tent at the edge of the airstrip with orders to destroy the files if the enemy invaded. That evening brought a steady rain. For the first time, he felt "a foreboding of violence, a certainty of death." At nightfall he heard the scream of air raid sirens and the rumble of distant bombers. He ran down a slope toward a slit-trench for protection as the pattern bombing exploded along the airstrip. Just as he reached the rim of the trench, a nearby explosion catapulted him over the edge into darkness.

Two days later Griffin regained consciousness in the base hospital, suffering from a severe concussion that had impaired his eyesight. He kept his injury secret, pretending to read mail and playing the role of the recovering soldier until they promised to send him home. He earned the rank of sergeant, won medals and commendations, but never saved the stripes, claimed the awards, or filed for benefits. Griffin had known war on both sides of the world, and thereafter became a life-long pacifist.

Back home, he consulted eye specialists and was declared legally blind. Griffin was told that remaining light perception would be gone within a year. He sailed to France in the summer of 1946 to study music composition with Nadia Boulanger and pianist Robert Casadesus. After realizing he would not become a composer, he made a retreat to the Abbey of Solesmes, the fabled monastery of Gregorian Chant, where he was granted permission to study with the Benedictine monks. In 1947 he experienced an epiphany that nudged him "out of the agnosticism I had drifted into and led me eventually into the Catholic Church." By Good Friday of that year he was totally blind.

Returning to America, Griffin settled on his parents' country property near Mansfield, Texas. He raised livestock as a two-year experiment to prove that the sightless could become independent. His Poland-China hogs were judged best of show locally and the experiment was a success. He wrote a guide for the sighted in their relationships with the blind, *Handbook for Darkness*, published in 1949. That same year he wrote a 600-page novel in seven weeks, based on his experiences with music and monasticism in France. He began his *Journal* in 1950, which he would keep over the next 30 years, and also studied audio tapes on theology and philosophy, lectured on Gregorian Chant, and converted to Roman Catholicism in 1951.

His first novel, *The Devil Rides Outside* (1952), became a surprise bestseller. In 1953 he wed 17-year-old Elizabeth Ann Holland in a Catholic ceremony and the couple moved into a cottage on her family's farm west of Mansfield, eventually raising four children during their 27 years of marriage. The 1954 paperback of *The Devil Rides Outside* was censored in Detroit, and then submitted by the publisher as a test case on pornography. This historic battle was adjudicated by the US Supreme Court in the publisher's favor in 1957. The ruling established the significant precedent that a book must be evaluated in its entirety and *not* censored on the basis of objectionable words or passages quoted out of context. His second novel, *Nuni*, set on a remote island in the Pacific, came out in 1956. His third novel, *Street of the Seven Angels*, a satire on pornography, appeared forty years after it was completed in 2003.

During a decade of sightlessness Griffin experienced what it was like to become the *Other*, because the sighted perceived him as handicapped. "A man loses his sight then, but let it be understood that he loses nothing else," he declares in *Scattered Shadows: A Memoir of Blindness*

and Vision (2004). "He does not lose his intelligence, his taste, his sensitivity, his ideals, his right to respect and remains as much an individual as always."

Without warning on January 9, 1957, Griffin began perceiving reddish glints of light that stunned and frightened him. He telephoned his wife to say that he thought he was seeing and then broke down in tears. Elizabeth dispatched the doctor to her husband's studio and followed soon after. On that day he glimpsed images of his wife and children literally for the first time. In a state of shock, he was sedated and taken to a specialist. The media was on the trail of the story, so Griffin was sequestered in the nearby Carmelite monastery, where he had made regular retreats. He needed calm, for it was not known immediately if eyesight would improve or fade. With weeks of rest, optical exercises, and the aid of powerful lenses, his sight steadily improved and he was astonished by the glorious gift of sight. Griffin had accepted blindness as a matter of Divine Will, believing that he had been plunged into a long night of the soul for a purpose, and also that his sight-recovery had been a revelation of mystical healing. This spiritual dimension grounded his demand for equal justice as a human right, no matter what his personal sacrifice.

On the night before departure to New Orleans to begin the *Black Like Me* experiment, Griffin writes in his *Journal*: "Nothing is more difficult than to face this, than deciding to look squarely at profound convictions and to act upon them, even when doing so goes contrary to our desires. Yes, it must be done—deciding to abandon ourselves deliberately and completely to that which is so beautiful, justice, and to that which is so terrible, the reprisals, the disesteem of men. We know it, perhaps we have even done it—made the act, said the yes."

When Griffin returned from the Deep South journey, he wrote a series of articles for the black monthly magazine, *Sepia*, published between April and October of 1960 as "Journey Into Shame"—a hasty first draft of *Black Like Me*. Before the first installment hit the news stands, he and his family were receiving death threats by mail and over the phone from white racists in their hometown of Mansfield. After being "lynched in effigy" (Griffin's phrase) in April of 1960, his frightened parents made plans to sell their acreage and to resettle in Mexico, where their older son Edgar owned real estate. By mid-August they had departed by car, and Griffin put his wife and three children on a plane bound for Mexico City two days later. He packed his own car and joined them all soon after.

They settled in a small village overlooking the Spanish colonial city of Morelia, in the Sierra Tarasca mountains of Michoacán, about 130 miles west of Mexico City. It was their new home for nearly a year and Griffin wrote the final draft of *Black Like Me* there. This "lost" chapter in his story is told in *Available Light: Exile in Mexico* (2008). But during a series of communist student uprisings in Morelia, Griffin sent home his young family and elderly parents. He stayed on to write a report on the unrest, reflecting on the ironic fact that he had been hounded by the Nazis out of France, by the racists out of Mansfield, and finally by the communists out of Mexico.

Griffin returned to Texas in the spring of 1961. On August 20, he received an advance copy of *Black Like Me*. "Always a strange moment," he writes in the journal, "to see one's work printed into this format, complete—a year of labor that weighs less than a pound; and yet few pounds of any substance have produced the explosion this has, the repercussions, the changes in our life and status." His daily existence, if not his status, dramatically changed during the 1960s when the solitary writer soon transformed himself into a dynamic public advocate for the cause of equal justice by nonviolent means.

The uniqueness of Griffin's story and his harsh denunciation of the segregated system was aired in interviews with Mike Wallace, Dave Garroway, Studs Terkel and others, stirring controversy before *Black Like Me* appeared in November of 1961. For the publisher, uncertain if the book would have interest to general readers, it was a free publicity campaign from heaven; for its author it initiated a nearly-endless purgatory only slightly less hellish than the journey itself. The book received rave reviews from major media on both coasts, was hailed in the Texas press but, with the exception of the Atlanta papers, it was entirely ignored in the South. However, the segregationists whose human rights violations had been exposed, would not ignore its author. While *Black Like Me* ascended bestseller lists, Griffin's name was added to hate lists and he was targeted as "an enemy of the white race." A decade later the Klan caught up with Griffin, beat him mercilessly with chains, and left him for dead on a back road in Mississippi. But he survived the beating and continued to lecture about racism, and his later treks cross country uncovered a geography of prejudice hidden beneath a thin veneer of tolerance.

On the lecture circuit for a dozen years, Griffin admitted that he had withheld criticism of the Catholic Church in *Black Like Me*, naively believing that once the hierarchy were made aware of the segregation of black Catholics, this immoral practice would be abolished. "I knew the Church's teaching allowed for no racial distinction between members of the human family," he writes in "Racist Sins of Christians" in 1963, because the Church "regarded man as a *res sacra*, a sacred reality. God created all men with equal rights and equal dignity. The color of skin did not matter. What mattered was the quality of soul." He had been guided by the words of Father J. Stanley Murphy, who said: "Whenever any man permits himself to regard any other man, in any condition, as anything less than a *res sacra*, then the potentiality for evil becomes almost limitless." Every religion professes the sacredness of human rights, but Catholic officials rationalized their discrimination "for fear of alienating souls." Griffin "knew they were referring to the souls of prejudiced white Catholics," and wondered "why they appeared to have so little 'fear' of alienating the souls of Negroes."

If this cover story for the mainstream Catholic monthly, *Sign*, had not embarrassed the hierarchy enough, an even deeper alienation among the black clergy was revealed in a second 1963 cover piece for *Ramparts*, the most radical Catholic magazine of the day. It was in his dialogue with Father August Thompson, that the young priest from Louisiana declared that "in some areas, we Negro priests might be called second-class Christs, if that's possible." Stunned by this, Griffin says: "We know that we do have the profound scandal of second-class Catholics—I mean this is a situation that is too well-known to hide any longer—but when it is the scandal of a 'second-class Christ' it becomes inconceivable." Both pieces stirred controversy but many Church officials denied these claims and Father Thompson's bishop tried to censor the interview. But leading thinkers like Thomas Merton, French philosopher Jacques Maritain and black theologian Albert Cleage confirmed the truth of these allegations.

In Dr. King's 1963 *Letter From A Birmingham Jail* clarifies the morality of resisting segregation: "An unjust law is a code that a majority inflicts on a minority that is not binding on itself. This is difference made legal." He poses a question answered by civil disobedience. "Isn't segregation an existential expression of man's tragic separation, an expression of his awful estrangement, his terrible sinfulness? So I urge men to disobey segregation ordinances because they are morally wrong." Like his mentor Mohandas Gandhi, King drew on Christ's teachings and the work of Henry David Thoreau, saying: "In no sense, do I advocate evading or defying the law as a rabid segregationist would do. This would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do it *openly, lovingly...and with a willingness to accept the penalty.*" Both holy men awakened public

conscience peacefully, accepted imprisonment willingly, and expected to be martyrs. They were victims of violence, despite their nonviolent creed and espousal of a religious ideal whose source was Christ's crucifixion, which Gandhi called "a perfect act of Charity."

The strategy of peaceful resistance helped erase segregation ordinances in the South. But after the 1964 Civil Rights Bill became law, "racists redoubled their efforts in the name of patriotism and Christianity, to suppress not only black people but all nonracists," Griffin declares in his 1969 book, *The Church and the Black Man*. Since social integration "always depends on the conversion of the hostile force," blacks abandoned King's dream and pursued other political strategies.

Black Power called for "black people to consolidate behind their own, so they can bargain from a position of strength," wrote the authors of *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. In their 1967 blueprint for new political action, Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton envisioned a different result from white power. "The ultimate values and goals are not dominion or exploitation of other groups, but rather an effective share in the total power of the society." The most common criticism judged Black Power as a form of reverse racism. This was a false analogy, since blacks had not lynched whites or bombed their churches. According to Carmichael, racism was not merely a question of attitude, because "the problem of racism arises only when there's power to carry out your acts." Racist attitudes can cause emotional pain but without the power to injure or kill a black person with impunity, which was the case in some tacit police states. Carmichael was perceived by most whites as a militant leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. "What few whites realize," Griffin writes, "is that for years Stokely Carmichael—a man of great insights—was a flawless advocate of nonviolent resistance; not only was he an advocate, he lived nonviolence heroically. For years when he was slapped down, insulted, jailed and abused, he would fall on his knees and pray for those who abused him....he prayed for the dehumanized white who loathed him for the unforgivable sin of not being a 'good nigger'. . . Finally, he could take no more," and turned to Black Power. Carmichael later took the African name Kwame Turé, never preaching violence but advocating the right to bear arms for self-defense, as did most white citizens, all gun clubs, and hate clans.

According to Reverend Albert Cleage (in *The Church and the Black Man*), the question of violence was irrelevant, observing that fellow blacks "were rather weird creatures dedicated to nonviolence in the midst of a nation as violent as America is, has been, and will be." As for separatism, he points out that "we were separate and yet we dreamed of integration and therefore did not utilize the separation to our benefit, but permitted it to be utilized for our exploitation." During the Black Liberation Movement there emerged a new sensibility, a recognition of black identity and beauty, a demand for self-esteem, self-determination and pride in peaceful communities.

While always a believer in nonviolence, Griffin insisted in 1971 that the lecture bureau represent him with this statement: "I'm a firm believer in Black Power, as I believe any man who wants the good of the total community must be. It is a tragedy that nonviolence didn't work. The black man was trying to cure his white brother with it, but the white man wouldn't be cured. Nonviolent resistance has done more than we realize, though. I think history will show that it accomplished an enormous thing in men's souls. It didn't fail, it just didn't complete the job. Black Power is a progression from it. It's the black's assertion of his humanity, and it requires us to confront one another as equals."

These developments gained political power for individuals and group efforts, but the black community could not attain equal footing against an entrenched system supported by centuries of institutionalized racism. Any critique of the black liberation struggle from 1955 to 1975 cannot be judged as *progress* from a white capitalist perspective. Rather it must be understood as a *process* of revolutionary awareness of the necessity for simple justice as the basis for a sane, moral and peaceful society. We know of the leaders during that period but tend to overlook the contributions of students who were the foot soldiers of the movement. "Because of these young people," writes Fannie Lou Hamer, who organized the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party of black delegates in 1964 with the support of students, "I think for the first time we have a chance to make democracy a reality in the United States."

For Griffin, the tumultuous 1960s began with the unexpectedness of *Black Like Me* and ended with *The Church and the Black Man*, his anthology of radical black voices that fell on deaf white ears. The only similarity between his two works was the hate mail each had generated. He endured the return of censorship during the mid-1970s, when his *Black Like Me* was pulled from library shelves—along with Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (considered the most illuminating novel of black experience in the 20th century), and Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*—all due to "objectionable" language. One lawsuit, later dismissed, was filed against *Black Like Me*, contending it was "totally objectionable, obscene and perverting" when "intentionally directed to 13-year-olds." Griffin was bewildered by the white backlash, especially the claim that his lectures were "a deliberate plan to subvert the minds of young children." By the 1980s these banned books had become part of the literary canon, and today they are required reading from mid-school through college levels.

From the outset of his lecture tours, Griffin told audiences: "I don't stand up here and represent myself as a spokesman for black people," emphasizing this point in his later writings. "This is a personal book," begins *A Time To Be Human*, his final overview on racism in 1977. "I will simply talk about my own experiences with racism; first as a white child growing up in Texas, then as a black man in the South in 1959, and since then as a white man once again in the ghettos of most of our major cities and in many other countries." Griffin explains his position: "I have become far less visible as a public figure involved in racial reconciliation. Once a few whites had to speak out for justice and interracial dialogue at a time when whites would not listen to blacks. But those days are over and it is absurd for a white man to presume to speak for black people when they have superlative voices of their own." He agreed with black leaders who suggested that white activists focus on educating their own communities. He had done that, but also perceived his role as "a bridge to reconcile the tremendous duality of information and viewpoint which whites and blacks have and on which they make their judgments—as well as the kind of misinformation whites believe that leads them to make judgments that are ethnic rather than human."

Griffin was an effective voice equal justice because of the unique perspective of the *Black Like Me* experience and his direct involvement in the human rights movements and crises of the 1960s and 1970s. But he was effective also because of his communicative gifts and a compelling truthfulness. He served as a bridge for dialogue between the two communities since he had "access to and experience in both black and white cultures." However, his work was "not a vocation that is specifically black and white," but a deeper spiritual quest that he called "a vocation for the reconciliation of humanity." Yet he held no heroic illusions about who he was or what he did, realizing that this was "not the kind of work which produces statistical or measurable results." He never expected to witness the end of racism or the beginning of King's "Beloved Community" in his lifetime. He continued the struggle even as it went against his deepest personal inclinations. "It isn't my nature to be an activist," he told Studs Terkel in a 1978 interview, "but your vocation doesn't

necessarily conform to your nature." Being the reluctant activist, public life cut against his desire for family intimacy, for writing novels, for spiritual contemplation. And often he lectured while ill or recovering from surgeries and traveled when mobility was reduced to crutches or a wheelchair. But Griffin answered to a higher calling that demanded merciful acts in a merciless world.

Looking back in *A Time To Be Human*, Griffin writes about the hate stares when disguised as a Negro, and skeptical readers claimed he had overstated the case. "Whites have sometimes argued that I felt this degradation more deeply than black people because it was new to me, whereas black people had known nothing else all their lives." He realized this was a matter of *thinking white*, of projecting cultural stereotypes. "This is utterly untrue," Griffin says, because prejudice "burns any man, and no person ever gets accustomed to it that it does not burn. Such whites say it the way they have *seen* it, but I say it in the way I have *experienced* it."

Before *Black Like Me*, he held the same stereotypes to be true without questioning their inherent logical fallacies—assuming Negroes "led essentially the same kind of lives whites know, with certain inconveniences caused by discrimination and prejudice." His deepest shock came not from inconvenience but as a total shift in reality. "Everything is different. Everything changes. As soon as I got into areas where I had contact with white people, I realized that I was no longer regarded as a human individual. Surely one of the strangest experiences a person can have is suddenly to step out into the streets and find that the entire white society is convinced that an individual possesses qualities and characteristics which that person knows he does *not* possess. I am not speaking here only of myself. This is the mind-twisting experience of every black person I know."

All questions concerning the authenticity of his experiment cannot be *answered* only intuited. Complex subjectivity cannot be distilled to a precise point of objectivity. But Griffin was a keen observer of people and witnessed the behavior of whites caught up in the racist syndrome, as if "blackness" were absolute proof of inferiority. Also he was a careful listener and, since he was accepted as a Negro in their community, black people expressed their true thoughts and feelings without fear of reprisal. What he was privileged to hear, no white person would have been trusted to hear. And what he learned was that "blackness was not a color but a lived experience."

Because Griffin faced his racism with harsh self-criticism, he was able to deprogram the prejudices he had been taught. What he does not say directly but which the overall spirit of *Black Like Me* implies, was that his journey was inspired by religious ideals and pushed forward by a vow of obedience to those ideals. His "motives" for risking the experiment can be understood only in this spiritual context. In his Preface that was written after the experiment, he says the book "traces the changes that occur to heart and body and intelligence."

Yes, and it also traces a soul's journey through change. *Black Like Me*, a creative act of insight *par excellence*, transcends the conventional limits of cultural perception to reveal a spiritual vision for overcoming man's inhumanity to man.

We are all born innocent with the essentials we call human nature, and not one of us entered this world with any inborn bias. Yet we all learned prejudice, because every culture teaches us to honor its way while subtly denigrating other cultures. At best, we are taught conscious lessons in tolerance, but prejudices are slippery, precisely because they are often unconscious. Eventually these cultural attitudes are codified through irrational emotion, unfounded opinion and blind belief. Even though prejudice changes names—colonialism, racism, genocide, anti-Semitism, apartheid, ethnic-cleansing and profiling—every alias results in the same injustice. We shall remain prisoners of

culture unless we become aware of the process and force ourselves to confront it and to deprogram it. Griffin accomplished this through the experience of *Black Like Me* and then clarified the process of racism in "The Intrinsic *Other*" in 1966. "Beyond Otherness" revisits both works, and it was the last piece he wrote about racism in 1979, the year before he died.

The inculcated misconception that posits the *Other*, simply because a person has darker pigmentation or worships a different god or follows "strange" customs or speaks in a "foreign" tongue, has led humanity to tragic consequences. Extrinsic differences separate us instead of the deeper commonalities that should unite us—survival and basic needs, raising families, creating art, desiring peace, risking love, daring to hope, enduring pain, and dying—everything that makes us human. How can we know the suffering of innocents and not be human rights advocates? "This is insidious," Griffin writes, "because it is often done in good faith, is often accomplished with an illusion of benevolence. It leads to master delusion. The delusion lies in the fact that no matter how well we think we know the *Other*, we still judge from within the imprisoning framework of our own limited cultural criteria, we still speak within the cliché of the stereotype."

That *master delusion* began when we were taught to pre-judge a person from another culture without the benefit of sufficient or unbiased knowledge of their culture. This tragic phenomenon, based on faulty and rigid generalizations, reveals our unconscious hostility toward other groups. It fulfills the irrational function of making us believe we are superior to all "outsiders" and that our culture reigns supreme. But culture is *not* human nature, even as it shapes our view of human nature. What we learn to label as differences in human nature are merely the stereotypes of our cultural viewpoint. Never shall we understand fully another culture if we are imprisoned in our own; and never shall we fully understand our culture if it remains out of awareness. Yet encountering another culture can provide a dramatic contrast that may awaken a fresh view of ourselves, may illuminate our blind spot toward the *Other*. "I believe that before we can truly dialogue with one another"—says Griffin in "Beyond *Otherness*"—we must first perceive intellectually, and then at the profoundest emotional level, that there is no *Other*—that the *Other* is simply *Oneself* in all the significant essentials."

Look around, sisters and brothers, the Global Village arrived while we were out to lunch or napping through re-runs of starving children on the death channel. Look inward to the Great Spirit and know that the reality of human nature has been—and will always be—universal. *Black Like Me* means *Human Like Us*.

John Howard Griffin and *Black Like Me*

John Howard Griffin (1920-1980) received the following awards for his humanitarian work: The *Journey Into Shame* series in *Sepia* magazine was recognized in 1960 by the National Council of Negro Women; the annual Ainsfield-Wolf Award from *Saturday Review* went to *Black Like Me* in 1962; Griffin shared the first *Pacem in Terris* Award with President John F. Kennedy in 1963; he received the Christian Culture Award from Assumption University of Windsor, Ontario in 1968; and in 1980 he was given the Kenneth David Kaunda Award for Humanism from the Pan African Association.

Black Like Me has remained available in English since being published in 1961. It has been translated into 16 languages, selling over 12 million copies worldwide. It was first published by Houghton Mifflin in cloth, then reprinted in 1962 as paperback from New American Library.

Houghton Mifflin published a second cloth edition that included Griffin's "Epilogue" in 1976 and Penguin issued a new paperback in 1977.

The first Wings Press publication of the Griffin Estate Edition of *Black Like Me* (edited from the original manuscript) appeared in 2004, the first cloth edition since 1976. The second printing of 2006 included the first index to the American classic. This 50th Anniversary edition, under copyright by the Estate of John Howard Griffin and Elizabeth Griffin-Bonazzi, will be with us for the next 75 years.

Notes

The following notes on the works and authors cited in the Afterword, in order of appearance:

The Mohandas Gandhi's quote is from *Gandhi on Non-Violence* (edited by Thomas Merton, New Directions, 1965); Ralph Ellison's quote is from *Invisible Man* (Random House, 1952).

"The Intrinsic *Other*" was written in French in 1996 and anthologized in *Building Peace* (edited by Dominique Pire). Its first U.S. publication was in *The John Howard Griffin Reader* (edited by Bradford Daniel, Houghton Mifflin, 1968). The essay was reprinted in *Encounters With the Other: A Personal Journey* (edited by Robert Bonazzi, Latitudes Press, 1997); that edition also included a personal essay by Griffin on Chief John Vutha.

Scattered Shadows: A Memoir of Blindness and Vision (Orbis Books, 2004) was published 40 years after it was written. Several chapters appeared in *The John Howard Griffin Reader*.

Griffin's *Handbook for Darkness* was produced by the Lighthouse for the Blind in 1949, both as an English-language text and in a Braille edition.

The Devil Rides Outside was published by Smiths, Inc. of Fort Worth, Texas in 1952. It was an alternate selection of the Book of the Month Club. The 1954 paperback from Pocket Books was banned in Detroit. It was submitted as a test case and adjudicated as "not pornographic" by the United States Supreme Court in a landmark case (*Butler v. Michigan*) in 1957.

Nuni, was published by Houghton Mifflin in 1956 and *Street of the Seven Angels* was published by Wings Press in 2003, 40 years after Griffin had completed it.

"Racist Sins of Christians" was first published in 1963 as the cover story in *Sign* magazine; it was reprinted in *The John Howard Griffin Reader*. "Dialogue with Father August Thompson" first appeared in *Ramparts* magazine as its cover story in 1963; it was reprinted in *The John Howard Griffin Reader* and *Encounters With the Other: A Personal Journey*.

Dr. Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" was written in April 1963 in response to a statement by eight white Alabama clergymen, calling for a cessation to the civil rights demonstrations in Birmingham. It has been reprinted in 40 languages.

Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America was written by Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton (Knopf, 1967).

The Church and the Black Man included Griffin's texts and photographs, a manifesto by the Black Priests Caucus, and a diskette with speeches by Reverend Albert B. Cleage and Father James Groppi (Pflaum, 1969). A French edition by Brouwer appeared in 1970.

A Time To Be Human was published in 1977 by Macmillan (US/Canada), and by Collier in the UK that same year.

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—Robert Bonazzi