

## HAKIM JAMAL INTERVIEW

# James Baldwin Speaks His Mind

By HAKIM A. JAMAL.

Malcolm X once said: "Only the ignorant man becomes angry; the wise man understands."

Interviewing James Baldwin does not make me a great writer nor a great understander (is that a word?); it just makes me one more intellectual trophy added to his fabulous display of those who have tried to out-talk or out-point this man, Baldwin. I tried to be clever; he out-clevered me. I got dirty but he knew that game, too. What is the end result? Complete and utter respect for this master of the noun and pronoun.

James Baldwin is no more than 5 foot, 2, but I rapidly remembered the sage advice of Malcolm X . . . "Always judge a man from the neck up." I did.

"Tell me, Jim," I said in my interview tone of voice. "what do you think is the real problem that has to be dealt with . . . right now."

"If you want to interview me, tell people what is on my mind . . . right now, by that I mean the black youth . . . like the Black Panthers. Their suppression, the treatment that they are receiving . . . right now. This worries me. What I think about the mayor and the things that he is failing to do . . . this worries me."

"Well, Jimmy, last week I wrote a story dealing with the 'Operational Unity mess,' whereby the middle-class Negroes are being placed at the head of everything, just as Brother Malcolm X predicted in his famous recording of 'The Message To The Grassroots.' He warned at that time that the middle-class Negroes were not involved; to the press and the establishment placed them in positions of leadership . . . just as they



HAKIM JAMAL . . . interviewing James Baldwin.  
—Alan Zak Photo.

are doing now under this foolishness."

"Yes, I agree." Jim Baldwin agreed with me that this is also an attempt to remove Brother Malcolm's name from the minds of black people. A conspiracy of silence. No mention of Brother Malcolm's death in any of the Negro publications, just reverends and middle-class Negroes. Something is up.

"Then there is the ignorance of the police departments, the very dangerous ignorance of these policemen . . . this worries me."

The frog-eyed genius named Baldwin does not really allow interruptions, he passes them right by and continues on relentlessly with his probing style of speech; each phrase nudges the next phrase into position to be said, and he says it, with much thought but little or no effort.

"What did you think of the actors putting part of their salary into an effort to help this civil rights thing?"

"It's good."

### THAT'S BALDWIN

That's a heck of an answer, but that's Baldwin. "Who did it?"

I explained to Jim what had taken place in the Hollywood Bowl last Sunday, where Bill Cosby, Eartha Kitt and a whole bunch of movie folks pledged 1 per cent of their salaries to aid the civil rights struggle.

"I'm impressed at what they are trying to do. Many of those same people were helping Dr. Martin Luther King for years. Many just feel guilty. I'm concerned about sincerity. Malcolm X gave far more than just 1 per cent of his life . . . he gave his all."

What do you think of your white friend's stand?

"What white friend are you talking about?" said old Baldwin, feeling for a trick question . . . and he was right, I was being sarcastic, but honest at the same time.

"Marlon Brando. This white cat is either insane or dead serious. Now I know that you and he have known each other for years, I've watched you two together . . . it's obvious that you and he are really friends; so tell me honestly: Is he jivin'?"

Baldwin's already small face gathers itself in the middle and gets even smaller; he puffs on a half-smoked, borrowed cigarette, close to anger at my question-statement.

### MARLON'S SINCERE

"I like Marlon very much. He's sincere. He's been helping Martin and others in the struggle for racial understanding for more years than most of these other publicity-grabbers. He has given money when it was unpopular to give money. He was on the line when there were no photographers. All Martin had to do was place a call to Marlon and he responded. He's been involved from his own desire. Long before most of your black nationalists, also, and don't you forget this little thing when you refer to him as 'my white friend'."

"Hold it man . . . hold it. I didn't say that this fool wasn't sincere."

"I know it, Jamal; and, I also know that you like Marlon Brando, too. Maybe you don't have the nerve to admit it; but I watch you when you're with him . . . you do not hate him, even though you try to."

I changed the subject.

"What did you say before about the mayor and the things that he is doing in Los Angeles to assist Los Angeles in any direction?"

"As I said before, it is the things that he is not doing that worry me. To most black people, he doesn't exist, except on television, when he is telling them that they are wrong for doing something or other. He's quick to mention the errors made by Martin, that's Dr. Martin Luther King, you know. He said that he felt that Dr. King was in the wrong area when he worried about the war in Vietnam. Martin said many times that he is where he is because injustice is there."

"Billy Graham went to Vietnam. He came back and urged Americans to a greater involvement, fight on, stick to their guns . . . the mayor didn't say that he should stay out of politics. Cardinal McIntyre is what is referred to as a 'Hawk,' that means pro-war in Vietnam, I think. Why doesn't the mayor tell him to stay in his cathedral and preach?"

"The conditions that black people are living in in Los Angeles are very explosive. Dope, jobs, no voice, police problems that are running rampant. Right or wrong, black people feel that the police are against them. Maybe they are, but something should be done about these conditions, and nothing is being done . . . at all."

"Well, Jimmy, I'm sorry. Mr. Baldwin, in all areas I fully agree with you. Now, tell me what do you think about the Malcolm X Foundation and the work that we have begun to do in the name of Malcolm X?"

"It's good."

What does that mean?

### CONCERNED WITH DOPE

"I mean that Brother Malcolm X did concern himself with dope, and he in some way made people get off of dope. He certainly gave people, black people, an honest voice, much to our credit. I'm with you 100%. I know the work that you and the people in the Foundation are undertaking; it's beautiful and I plan on helping you as much as I can. You're honest."

Excuse me, Mr. Baldwin, just for a minute; I have to put our address in the paper . . . The Malcolm X Foundation, 430 E. Compton Blvd., Compton, California, telephone number—636-1861 or 636-1862.

Okay Jim, that's done.

"Is there anything else that you feel must be said to people that you can say in the space we have left here?"

"Yes. My concern in the American scheme of things is real; people must move in the right direction . . . and now! Malcolm X told black people years ago about white racism and white racists. Now, the President's commission agrees with Malcolm. Why can people not believe Malcolm but believe this commission? Let's

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**WESLEY BRAZIER HONORED** — Retiring after 20 years service with the Los Angeles Urban League, Wesley Brazier is honored by friends, colleagues and representatives of the city, county and state at a luncheon Monday at the Staller Hilton Hotel. Highlights of the affair captured by The Sentinel photographer: Brazier is handed a gold key to a 1968 Lincoln Continental by ace auto salesman Ed Aubrey of O'Connor Lincoln-Mercury (top, L.); Mrs. Willie Beatrice Brazier shares her husband's good fortune (top, R.), as Mrs. Ella K. Mays (r.), member of the Urban League board, presents a gift to her. A plaque from the City Council is

presented to Brazier (middle, L.) by Councilman Gilbert Lindsay (l.) and Billy G. Mills. Brazier receives best wishes and a plaque (middle, R.) from his successor as Urban League executive director, Dr. Frank L. Stanley Jr. Seated on the dais (lower L.) were the honoree's daughters, Ellen Rochelle (l.), Benita Ileen, Mrs. Brazier, Brazier and (standing) master of ceremonies Tom Hawkins. Brazier's response (lower, R.) was heartfelt. He says retirement will not mean inactivity, looks forward to serving as a consultant.

—Harry Adams Photos.

# Hakim Jamal . . .

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move . . . now . . . or die now. One or the other. We can't move backward and forward, nor can we stand still and move forward. We'd better realize that."

"Lastly, Jim, do you agree with the Malcolm X Foundation on the celebration of Malcolm's birthday on May 19th. Are you with us on this day?"

"Of course, I'm with you. I'm going to do all I can to see to it that the Foundation is a success. It's good, I know your aims; they are good. I know that Malcolm's widow, Sister Betty, gives you her full support. All these things are very important. More people should check things out. They should not get wrapped up in the wrong things. All they have to do is look into anything they want to support, then they won't be fooled. Now, that I am writing the script for the Malcolm X picture for Columbia Pictures, I know more about Malcolm X.

He was quite a man. All people should read about him. They'd be surprised at the man they missed . . . the man I found!! Keep up the good work, Jamal.

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Mr. Baldwin then had to go. We shook hands. We are friends. He is quite a man. Honest and all that this word encompasses. This, in itself is a rare quality, but a much-needed one in the black ethos that is emerging and seeking to raise its head to the position of black manhood. With so many thieves and phonies it is good to find a James Baldwin, a man who refuses to let go of a time-worn, black creed . . . "honesty is the best policy."

With that though the mind let me take a grain of this honesty and use it now and say . . . "James Baldwin, you're right . . . I do like Marlon Brando."