

# Introduction

The Rhodesian problem, which is not new, is only now beginning to paralyze the attention of the West. This is not, alas, due to black suffering in the region, it is not even because of black rage: Rhodesia paralyzes the attention of the West because of white fear. Disturbing sporadic reports have filtered through for years, but until recently nothing seemed really menaced; that is, nothing *white* seemed menaced. Now, time has blown a whistle—with an incredible lack of gallantry, time is running out.

This book is by a young white Rhodesian, a native of the region—African, therefore, by birth. That he is white puts him at a certain painful, wondering distance from the events and the people he describes. If he were not young, he would have too much to defend to be able to write this book, and if he were black, he would be a guerrilla, a hostage, or a corpse. This is a chilling formulation, but I believe it to be exact, and is among the reasons you should read this book.

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line, said the great black American scholar and writer W. E. B. Du Bois in 1903. No one paid much attention to these words then; and only those who *must* pay very much attention to these words now. There are people in this world, then, now, white, as they imagine, who believe that the past, and the present—neither of which they understand even remotely—are in their custody, and at the dictates of their power: this is the most cruel and dangerous delusion of our age.

Michael Raeburn's book consists of dramatic accounts from Rhodesia of the personal experiences of people we hear so much about today: the *terrorist*, the *guerrilla*. Mountains of pious prose are produced every day concerning these dreadful

creatures: it appears that no one knows where they came from. I have no credentials as a terrorist, but I think I know where terrorists come from, what produces this creature called a terrorist. They are produced by human need, a human need exacerbated by the chilling performance of the defenders of the status quo. About ten years ago, for example, I had occasion to address the World Council of Churches on questions related to the poverty of the Third World—this poverty having been correctly perceived as a menace to all life, everywhere. I knew, of course, though I did not address the question directly, that England, to name but one of the ex-colonial powers, had tremendous economic interests in South Africa, and Rhodesia, and that these interests were in conflict, to put it mildly, with their Christianity. But the English representative who followed me was forced, by the questions put to him from the floor by Third World priests, to state, in brutal terms of pounds and pence, the extent of the English dependence. This was chilling because it revealed that England in particular, and the Western world in general, were totally unprepared to deal with their former slaves as free men. If this is so, it brings into question the entire moral life of the West and the Western sense of reality. And that was ten years ago: not more than ten days ago I heard a debate concerning U.S. investment in South Africa. The South African delegation felt that American interests should withdraw, that the American presence materially aided a Fascist government. But the American position was that the American presence aided the black South African and would, eventually, lead to his freedom.

American business interests, and with the weight of the law on their side, have failed to liberate black people *here*, making it difficult to see how they can liberate blacks elsewhere. Arguments such as these can cause one to throw up one's hands and despair of anything resembling a dialogue. It is certainly one of the reasons that a man, a woman, or a people finally reject the only social reality that they know, and resolve to form a new one: they have discovered that they, literally, have no choice. This is the reason that they rise up, and say No. They are at opposite ends of the pole

from the man who is compelled to defend an order he dares not question, and who insists on an identity he dares not examine.

Now it is revolution in Africa—somnolent, black Africa, Europe's lucrative playground for generations. But Africa was not, is not, only that. It was the pagan key to the joy white men forbade themselves. It was the heart of darkness. It was everything white men were not. And, in that sense, it contained some profound and mystic hope, now being smashed.

Violence is not new to Africa: Africans have been violent with each other for generations. Every colonizing power in Europe has used violence without the remotest scruple. What is new is the violence of the attack on the white man's self-esteem, the white self-image. White people really appear to believe that they are the authors, and custodians, of civilization, and that they are to be revered, and above all loved, for having played so noble and indispensable a role. Well, white people have played a great role, certainly, in human affairs, but so has everybody else, and I should imagine that the white delusion has something to do with the brief and blatant passage of their power, and with their somewhat utilitarian concept of religion.

Leaving, however, such heresies aside, I think you will see, if you read this book, how a people deprived of a heritage drive themselves furiously into the present, in order to redeem their past: they do not simply lie down and die. My inheritance is all that I will be able to leave for those who come after me. An inheritance is never a matter of safety, or accumulated inventions, an inheritance is not so tangible—it is a sense of the self strong enough to enable one to look both life and death in the face. When one aspect of the human inheritance is reclaimed, it is reclaimed for everyone. White men buried much of themselves in Africa, and will not be free until that aspect of themselves they have so long denied flowers freely in them again. Then they will not need to hate, or fear, black people any more, or debase themselves to a level far lower than the level assigned to the blacks. You will say that I am speaking of the New Jerusalem, and I am; it comes in fire and blood and anguish. That is true; and who will live

to see it? Someone will. We are, in any case, beginning to live through the beginning of the end of the nightmare of color, and if this is freedom for the black man, it will bring to the white man a joy and a freedom he does not, now, dare imagine.

New York, November 1978

—James Baldwin