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College Writing II

April 18, 2023

In James Baldwin's "Sonny Blues" it embraced the lifestyle of African Americans. Baldwin showcased the importance of how you can achieve anything you put your mind too. The story is set in the 1950s which an older brother who has escaped a difficult childhood receives a letter from his younger brother. The story is written in the perspective of the older brother and how he views his brother's career choice of music. It is hard for him to understand how he is passionate for music. Later in the story the older brother starts to understand how Sonny expresses himself through music. The main themes of the story are family, addiction, and identity.

To add perspective incorporated are three articles that support the thesis. In the article "Sonic Living: Space and the Speculative in James Baldwin's short story "Sonny's Blues" it added a look on how the scenery affected the brothers. In my second source "Sonny's Blues": James Baldwin's Image of Black Community" by John M. Reilly it takes more of a role of explaining the black community and how Baldwin embraces the characters. In the third article, "The Jazz-Blues Motif in James Baldwin's 'Sonny's Blues'" by Richard N. Albert it focuses on the significance of Jazz in the story.

Baldwin portrays the struggle of individuality between siblings, personal aspirations and staying loyal to family. In this paper I will argue that Baldwin emphasizes the importance of empathy and understanding to balance the gaps between different paths in life. Conformity and individuality is an importance because of the brothers lives. Social inclusion is also a main component due to the social normalities in this world.

Through the conflict between conformity and individuality and the brothers. One brother, the narrator, chose the path of conformity by being a math teacher. While his brother chose the path of jazz which took him to a road of addiction and jail. The way that the narrator did not see the path his brother took it tarnished their relationship. As he starts to come around and feel the way of the music he develops a type of empathy. The tension between conformity and individuality represents the need for understanding individuals that take different paths in life.

Family loyalty and personal aspiration is also a main mark in the short story. This started when the narrator distanced himself from Sonny because of the shame of his choice of career. As the story prolongs the narrator comes around to support Sonny and help with his addiction and help with his career. Reilly the author of "Sonny's Blues": James Baldwin's Image of Black Community" highlighted communication and understanding in the story. It showed how passive the narrator was originally and how he started to understand where and why Sonny needed help. The typical story of an African American family life would have that they continue to live in a poor life. In the article it displays how Baldwin shed light on how it moved beyond stereotypes and demonstrated the challenges faced. This helps develop the importance of family support and understanding in promoting individual growth and development.

An underlying key point in the story is the impact of addiction in families and communities. The story highlights the difficult childhood both of the brothers lived through but in the midst of the development between the two brothers there is one that succeeded and one that got stuck. Now while the one brother has stayed put he put his brother in a weird situation with his addiction problem. This shows how some family members may have to put their lives on halt to help them. In the story it was more like understanding how he could do that to himself. While in reality he was still chasing a dream he aspired to have the addiction just sadly came with it. The whole reason of the addiction is because of Sonny's passion for jazz in "The Jazz Blues Motif in James Baldwin's 'Sonny's Blues'" by Richard N. Albert it emphasizes the thought process of how Baldwin used jazz to demonstrate the lives of African Americans. Sonny could have been connected to the music due to the cultural and historical background that is brought with it. Brought with jazz is almost a sense of overcoming challenges within the community, his embracing of the music allows for him to make the community feel welcome. Addiction affects the community by making it a social normality. This is terrifying because it will be normalized and be seen as something not as bad as it truly is. Addiction affects everyone around the person not just the person that is initially addicted. In this case of the story the narrator, Sonny's brother was affected based off of having to take care of Sonny.

To bounce off of the topic of Jazz the metaphor of music was very important for promoting social inclusion. The topic of jazz was predominately for African Americans, in the story jazz allowed Sonny to express himself. Since Sonny embraced jazz it allowed for him to convey a message of hope. The hope showing that he can overcome the cultural heritage that his community has put on him. Each article touched on different ways that jazz was used. Most

importantly it was the way that Sonny got into addiction. Then it represented the community that he was surrounded by and how it affected the brothers differently. This also goes with what the article by Reilly said on black men dealt with stereotypes of “dangerous, deviant, and criminal”. In this context it is apparent that jazz got that type of connotation as well. Jazz in the 1950s was associated with a negative interpretation of city life and poverty. Sonny never escaped that as his brother did and is experiencing a middle-class lifestyle. Jazz seems to be a different type of release for Sonny it is his gateway from growing up in poverty and racism. Jazz is know for its resilience and power to be creative.

In “Sonny’s Blues,” James Baldwin highlights the importance of empathy, understanding, and acceptance in promoting social inclusion Baldwin did this by using Sonny and his brother as references. While he used the conflict of individuality and conformity, the tension between family loyalty and personal aspirations, and the impact of addiction on families and communities. Baldwin’s use of music as a metaphor highlights the power of art and bridges the gaps between individuals and promotes social unity. The three sources, The story serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of empathy, understanding and acceptance in building a more inclusive society.

### **Works Cited**

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