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TÍTOL:

**“To Be In A Rage, Almost All The Time”: Expressing
Anger to Fight Racial Oppression**

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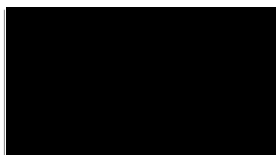


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Abstract

This paper aims to analyse Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddam" and James Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son" in order to examine the ways in which anger is expressed through music and literature, respectively, during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. By examining Simone's and Baldwin's expressions of anger, I will try to explore its political and personal uses and to throw light upon the following questions: Is the expression of anger necessary and effective in the context of the Civil Rights Movement to fight racial oppression by changing or reforming the established socio-political system of the US? Is it possible to confront one's anger in a productive and effective way in this context? Is it necessary that the expression of anger takes the shape of violence for a political protest to be effective, or is it possible to achieve the same objective through nonviolent means?

Keywords: anger, hate, violence, racism, African American community, Civil Rights Movement

Resum

Aquest treball pretén analitzar "Mississippi Goddam" de Nina Simone i "Notes of a Native Son" de James Baldwin per investigar com s'expressa la ira mitjançant la música i la literatura, respectivament, durant el moviment afroamericà pels drets civils als anys seixanta. Examinar com Simone i Baldwin expressen aquesta ira permetrà tractar-ne els usos polítics i personals, així com aprofundir en les següents qüestions: Expressar ira és, en el context del moviment afroamericà pels drets civils, necessari i efectiu per combatre l'opressió racial volent fer canvis o reformes en el sistema sociopolític establert dels EUA? És possible confrontar la ira d'un mateix de manera productiva i efectiva en aquest context? És necessari que la ira s'expressi en forma de violència perquè una protesta política sigui efectiva, o és possible assolir el mateix objectiu mitjançant la no-violència?

Paraules clau: ira, odi, violència, racisme, comunitat afroamericana, moviment afroamericà pels drets civils

Table of Contents	Page
I. Introduction	...1
II. Anger in the African American Culture	...2
2.1. Conceptualising Anger	...2
2.2. The Politics of Anger: Martin Luther King and Malcolm X	...4
III. The Aesthetics of Anger: Nina Simone and James Baldwin	...7
3.1. Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddam"	...7
3.2. James Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son"	...15
IV. Conclusion	...21
V. References	...23
VI. Annex	...25

I. Introduction

Emotions such as anger and hatred have had a central role in constructing the national identity of the United States and have also shaped racial relationships since the formation of the nation. As Baldwin states in a radio interview in 1961, “To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a state of rage almost, almost all of the time — and in one’s work¹.” Considering the relevance these emotions have in American society, this paper will analyse Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddam" and James Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son" in order to examine the ways in which anger is expressed through music and literature. By analysing Simone's and Baldwin's expressions of anger, I will try to explore its socio-political and personal uses and to throw light upon the following questions: Is the expression of anger effective and necessary in the context of the Civil Rights Movement to fight racial oppression by changing or reforming the established socio-political system of the US? Is it possible to confront one's anger in a productive and effective way in this context? Is it necessary that the expression of anger takes the shape of violence for a political protest to be effective, or is it possible to achieve the same objective through nonviolent means?

In order to fulfil this, the first section of the paper will focus on anger in the African American culture. Its purpose is to define the concept of anger and how it is culturally perceived, which will help in illustrating the psychological and physical repercussions that feeling anger and suppressing it may have, and in understanding the reason why this emotion is connected to the African American community and to politics. Moreover, the section will provide an account of the views on the political uses of anger to justify violence and nonviolence during the Civil Rights Movement by examining the discourses of the two most influential and debated figures in the movement: Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. The second section will begin by explaining why the expression of anger in the artistic productions of these authors is relevant during the Civil Rights Movement for the African American community, and, in general, for America. It will also offer an analysis of "Mississippi Goddam" and of "Notes of a Native Son". This analysis will serve to understand in which ways their emotions are translated into art, and how this helps them cope with them, which allows them to reflect on racial relationships in America.

¹ thepostarchive. (2016, Jan 17). "The Negro in American Culture" a group discussion (Baldwin, Hughes, Hansberry, Capouya, Kazin). [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNpitiJ5XWY>

II. Anger in the African American Culture

2.1. Conceptualising Anger

Anger is “a strong feeling of distress or displeasure in response to a specific provocation” (Thomas, 13) that happens frequently and that is easily recognized when it occurs. It can also be defined as “an important form of emotional upset” (Mabry and Kiecolt, 98) that is “provoked by perceived misdeeds.” (Averill, 1150) In other words, anger is an emotional response triggered by the brain when it detects that individuals may be involved in a harmful, unjust, or disadvantaged situation. It serves as a mechanism that temporarily puts both the body and the mind in a state of alert and stress that may allow the individual to defend against a potentially harmful situation. However, as Mabry and Kiecolt point out, socially marginalised communities may tend to experience anger and distress continuously as a result of the stress that being constantly treated unfairly can produce:

“individuals become angry when others fail to confirm their identities or expected meanings in interaction, violate cultural norms, deny them their perceived due status, or treat them unfairly or disrespectfully [...], particularly when the others' actions seem deliberate. Members of social groups that systematically are treated unfairly or disrespectfully ought to have more anger than members of more privileged groups. Anger, like psychological distress, may be viewed as an outcome of stress that is linked to social disadvantage.” (86)

Thus, members of marginalised communities such as African Americans repeatedly suffer mental, physical, and social costs while trying to cope with anger: “Not only is anger unpleasant, but it can have social and personal costs. Expressing too much or too little anger can lead to familial discord and divorce [...], aggression and violence [...], and health problems [...], such as coronary artery disease and hypertension [...], from which African Americans suffer disproportionately.” (Mabry and Kiecolt, 98) All these humanitarian costs have, inevitably, caused anger to be traditionally perceived in the cultural imagination as a negative, problematic, and sometimes even incomprehensible passion that is generally considered to be immoral. The assumption that feeling and openly expressing anger can be bad – for both the angry individuals and for those around them – dates back to ancient Greece and continues to be a popular perspective nowadays.

These perspectives² generally sustain that the extent to which anger is expressed must be minimized, as it may lead to harmful attitudes that not only have the potential to cause or intensify disagreements, but they can also take the shape of violence and cause harm, social unrest, or hostility between different communities. Additionally, anger is closely associated to a desire for equal payback for past events. This desire for retribution “makes anger inherently harmful from a moral perspective, counterproductive from a pragmatic perspective, and incoherent from a rational perspective. Ultimately, what [they] propose is to find ways to communicate disapproval and change unfair circumstances without feeling and expressing anger.” (Sahi, 54) According to these views, therefore, it should be possible – and even necessary – not to express anger when it arises, as other ways of communicating disapproval should be more than enough to solve problems.

However, Sara Ahmed, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, points out that “even if emotions have been subordinated to other faculties, they have still remained at the centre of intellectual history.” (Ahmed, 4) According to her, emotions have a crucial role in the construction of history and can determine its shape. Trying to suppress feelings such as anger or hatred in an attempt to avoid dealing with them, therefore, not only can be pointless, but also counterproductive because, as she argues “what is relegated to the margins is often, as we know from deconstruction, right at the centre of thought itself” (Ahmed, 4) Moreover, research has shown that dealing with anger by trying to suppress it can be counterproductive, because, as mentioned previously, it can have mental, physical, and social costs³. On the contrary, expressing anger is not necessarily problematic, as it “enables high-energy expenditure to defend individuals from an offensive act [...], researchers often characterize the function of anger as *the reparation of injustice* [...]. Thus, anger promotes behaviors that help individuals respond to and repair, or fix, injustices in their environment, thereby enabling them to protect themselves

² Sahi, in the article, refers to these perspectives as “anti-anger” and mentions the following authors: Aristotle. (1984). “Rhetoric”. W. Rhys Roberts (tr.), in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. II, Jonathan Barnes (ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 2.2.1378a pp. 31–3; Nussbaum, M. C. (2016). *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press. pp. 5-15; Pereboom, D. (2014). *Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 134–35.; Haidt, J. 2003. “The Moral Emotions.” In *Handbook of Affective Sciences*, edited by R. J. Davidson, K. R. Scherer, and H. H. Goldsmith, pp. 852–70. Oxford: Oxford University Press.; Van Dijk, W. W., and F. Van Harreveld. 2008. “Disappointment and Regret.” In *Research Companion to Emotion in Organizations*, edited by N. Ashkanasy and C. Cooper, pp. 90–102. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

³ Mabry, J., & Kiecolt, K., in “Anger in Black and White: Race, Alienation, and Anger.” note and provide evidence to all these costs.

from continued harm.” (Sahi, 61) Mabry and Kiecolt also point out the useful outcomes anger may have: “It can help individuals to assert power and status, communicate disagreement, contest threats to their identities and status, and readjust their interpersonal relationships.” (98) Therefore, if it is expressed and regulated effectively anger can be useful in a political and personal level, as it has interpersonal functions that do not necessarily have a negative or detrimental outcome, regardless of how painful can be processing it, as Audre Lorde writes: “anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification, for it is in the painful process of this translation that we identify who are our allies with whom we have grave differences, and who are our genuine enemies. [...] Anger is loaded with information and energy.” (280)

2.2. *The Politics of Anger: Martin Luther King and Malcolm X*

“Everything can be used, except what is wasteful. You will need to remember this, when you are accused of destruction.” – Audre Lorde

Taking into consideration the abovementioned views on anger, this section will discuss the role of anger in shaking the established socio-political system to achieve change or reform. This will be done by considering the political implications that arguing against or for the uses of expressing anger has in the context of the Civil Rights Movement by shedding light to the views Martin Luther King and Malcolm X – the two most influential and debated figures in the movement – had on the use of violence and nonviolence to achieve its political objectives in the 60s. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X represented two radically different approaches to fight racial oppression. On the one hand, Martin Luther King’s political strategy to fight racial injustice during the Civil Rights Movement was essentially nonviolent:

“For King, nonviolence was not only an effective strategy of social change; it was the heart of his philosophy of life. There was no limit to his advocacy of nonviolence in conflict situations. He contended that nonviolence was the most potent weapon for both blacks in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and for other oppressed peoples struggling for justice throughout the world. Nonviolence was not only the best tool for solving conflicts within nations; it could also resolve differences between nations.” (Cone, 173)

He promoted nonviolence by speaking of the importance of channelling anger so that revengeful attitudes and thoughts could be avoided in order to prevent violent attacks from the part of both the oppressors and the oppressed. Moreover, after some nations acquired nuclear weapons, he stated that at that moment, “the choice is no longer between nonviolence and violence. It is either nonviolence or nonexistence⁴.” Because of this, his discourse was often misunderstood as being against the expression of anger. However, despite considering violence as counterproductive to achieve social reform, he acknowledged the uses that anger could have in motivating and mentally preparing individuals to fight and considered it a moving force that could ease change: “The supreme task [of a leader] is to organize and unite people so that their anger becomes a transforming force⁵”. In sum, even though Martin Luther King was conscious that anger could be a powerful force, he argued that it could be harmful if uncontrolled, as it may easily lead to use violence, which he considered to be counterproductive. Anger, therefore, should be channeled to avoid causing even more harm to people and, specially, to black communities.

Malcolm X, on the other hand, fiercely critiqued Martin Luther King’s nonviolent politics and embraced the effective role that expressing anger could have in shaking the established socio-political system. Young activists of the movement, who felt disappointed by the effects of nonviolent politics, turned to Malcolm X’s politics of self-defence through violent means as an alternative to Martin Luther King’s. Malcolm X “viewed retaliatory violence as a necessary response to criminal acts. That is the only language criminals understand, he contended. To love someone who hates you to speak a language they do not understand.” (Cone, 178) He considered that releasing anger in the shape of violence was the way to reinforce and clarify his opinions to oppressors who did not seem to be willing to empathise the suffering of African Americans. Therefore, Malcolm X’s politics conceive anger as a motivating force that can prepare individuals for active confrontation and resistance, thereby helping them in communicating unacceptable attitudes or situations. Sahi points out the benefits of expressing anger:

“Anger is practically beneficial to feel and express when individuals need to actively confront a source of injustice, particularly when there are no positive

⁴ King, M. L., (1986). *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, James M. Washington, San Francisco: Harper. p. 39

⁵ King, M.L. (2015). *The Radical King* (ed. Cornel West). Boston: Beacon Press.

expectations from the wrongdoers, and the wrongdoers do not sympathize with those they have harmed. In such cases, down-regulating anger in favor of disappointment would likely backfire by preparing individuals to withdraw from necessary confrontation, signaling weakness, and potentially eliciting additional harmful behavior from the wrongdoers.” (Sahi, 66)

Under Malcolm X’s viewpoint, arguing against anger meant not acknowledging the anger of the African American community, and, therefore, not considering violent social justice movements to be legitimate or morally acceptable. This kind of arguments could be used, then, to reinforce established structures of institutionalised power that perpetuate white supremacy, instead of allowing social change to happen, which could help improving race relationships and, thus, building a more just society.

In this paragraph, Cone accurately illustrates the opposite nature of both political strategies:

“Malcolm's attack on white liberals was persistent and brutal. He exposed their link to the creation of the urban black ghetto where drugs, poverty, crime, unemployment, and bad housing are its defining characteristics. While Martin King praised white liberals for their support, Malcolm castigated them for their hypocrisy-professing to be for integration while creating de facto segregation in schools, housing, and other segments of American life. When blacks manage to move in a white community, the liberals are the first to leave. No issue angered Malcolm X more than what whites said about violence and nonviolence in the Civil Rights Movement. They urged blacks to follow Martin King-embrace nonviolence and reject violence in any form.” (Cone, 180)

Overall, both political approaches to violence acknowledged the anger of the African American and looked for the best way of dealing with it: Martin Luther King’s strategy was to avoid violence by channeling anger, whereas Malcolm X’s approach was to unleash it towards the oppressor, even if the means were violent. As Cone explains, “They were both disciplined thinkers and responsible activists. Though their views on nonviolence and violence were different, they complemented and corrected each other, showing us that an abstract, absolutist, and uncritical commitment to violence or nonviolence, to [Malcolm X] or [Martin Luther King] is wrongheaded.” (182) Therefore, the relevance of both points of view lies in the contradictions and the nuances that emerged from the debate that generated.

III. The Aesthetics of Anger: Nina Simone and James Baldwin

Having provided an account of the views on the political uses of anger to justify violence and nonviolence in the socio-political context of the 60s, this section will analyse Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddam" and James Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son" in order to examine the ways in which anger is expressed through music and literature. First of all, both of them were part of an interracial avant-garde of Black American artists, intellectuals, and activists in late 1950s and early 1960s that were politically involved in Civil Rights Movement. Because of this, Simone's and Baldwin's cultural productions were representative of the views that Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, respectively, had on the political uses of anger and on the ways in which this anger had to be expressed. Simone's "Mississippi Goddam" marks a before and after in her musical and political career; she was explicitly committed to the movement from that moment onwards. Through her performances, she seemed to combatively express her anger in a way that could provoke or encourage the audience to fight racism through violent means. Baldwin, however, was deeply concerned with the psychological effects of racial oppression – for both the oppressed and the oppressor. In "Notes of a Native Son", he examines these effects by exploring his anger to reflect on how all individuals should channel it to build up healthy human relationships based on love, instead of on hatred. Additionally, both of them were public figures; they never got a mainstream education and developed their skills from what they learn of their experiences. Their artistic productions were emotionally and politically engaged with America and with the black community. Their anger, therefore, stemmed from the love and preoccupation they felt for the community. And because they were deeply concerned and they truly cared, their anger seemed, to me, the most meaningful.

3.1. Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddam"

As mentioned previously, Simone's performance of this song marks a before and after in her musical and political career, as she was explicitly committed to the Civil Rights Movement from that moment onwards. Her positioning in the civil rights can be seen as an emotional reaction to specific racially motivated attacks, which was representative of her general hatred and anger towards racial discrimination in the country. These changes in her political and artistic agenda can be read in the narrative of "Mississippi Goddam" itself: "For the first time Simone integrated her political ideology and consciousness into

her music, which moved her from being regarded as a jazz singer to a political singer.” (Ali, 31) It is relevant to consider the process of composition of the song, as it gives information about how and why Nina Simone decided to use music as a means to unleash her anger and as a way to channel her desire for violent revenge in reaction to the atrocious events of the 60s. As she explains in her autobiography,

“The bombing of the little girls in Alabama and the murder of Medgar Evers were like the final pieces of a jigsaw that made no sense until you had fitted the whole thing together. I suddenly realised what it was to be black in America in 1963, but it wasn’t an intellectual connection of the type Lorraine [Hansberry] had been repeating to me over and over – it came as a rush of fury, hatred and determination. In church language, the Truth entered into me and I “came through”.⁶

Nina Simone clearly explains that her reaction to those assassinations and how she positioned herself in relation to them was purely emotional, as opposed to the connection that other intellectual such as Lorraine Hansberry had with those events and with the Civil Rights Movement. She later explains how she attempted to build or obtain a gun to go to the streets and unleash her “fury” and “hatred”, to which her husband reacts by saying “Nina, you don’t know anything about killing. The only thing you’ve got is music.” Simone’s response is to sit down at her piano and write:

“An hour later I came out of my apartment with the sheet music for ‘Mississippi Goddam’ in my hand. It was my first civil rights song, and it erupted out of me quicker than I could write it down. I knew then that I would dedicate myself to the struggle for black justice, freedom and equality under the law for as long as it took, until all our battles were won.”⁷

Even though many people already considered her an activist just because she gave publicity of the Civil Rights Movement in several occasions in interviews and in her performances, and because she had recorded songs dedicated to the some emerging black nationalist organizations⁸, it is with this song when she started considering herself an activist, actively involved in the movement.

⁶ Simone, N. & Cleary, S. (2003). *I Put a Spell on You: The Autobiography of Nina Simone*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, pp. 89-90.

⁷ Ibid, p. 90.

⁸ Songs such as Oscar Brown’s “Brown Baby” and Michael Olatunji’s “Zungo” from her 1962 album *Nina at the Village Gate* celebrated the heritage and culture of people of African descent.

“Mississippi Goddam” is part of Nina Simone’s album *In Concert*. It was first performed at the Village Gate nightclub in Greenwich Village, and recorded at Carnegie Hall, New York, on March 21, 1964 in front of a mostly white audience⁹. The song is at first presented as a showtune with an up-tempo rhythm, with a confident, humorous, and almost cheerful tone. Before Simone starts to sing, she claims “the name of this tune is Mississippi Goddam... And I mean every word of it!”, which is received with laughter from the audience. Right after this introduction, the opening lines demonstrate its political focus by directly addressing the issue of the civil rights with a straightforward, compelling statement that later functions as the chorus of the piece:

Alabama's gotten me so upset
Tennessee made me lose my rest
And everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam

Here, Simone alludes to the bombing in the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham and to the assassination of Emmett Till and Medgar Evers in Mississippi¹⁰, manifesting from the very beginning that the song was a response to these racially motivated attacks, which contributed significantly to the tumultuous fight for civil rights. By using these lines as the chorus and, thus, structuring the song around the lines, Simone ensured that the political focus of the song was clear to the audience during all the performance. These opening lines, when repeated, may be also suggesting the audience to sing along. However, the tune reveals to be more difficult to follow as Simone changes the melody and directly addresses the audience with a series of rhetoric questions before going back to the chorus, which finishes the first part of the song:

Can't you see it
Can't you feel it
It's all in the air
I can't stand the pressure much longer
Somebody say a prayer

At this point, she sarcastically describes the song as a show tune in the following interjection: “This is a show tune, but the show hasn't been written for it, yet”, to which

⁹ Brooks, D. (2011). “Nina Simone's Triple Play.” *Callaloo*, 34(1), p.181. In this paper, Brooks states that, even though the performance was not recorded in video, it is fair to assume that her audience at Carnegie Hall was mostly white and liberal, taking into consideration the socioeconomic status of the people that attended there.

¹⁰ For more information on the assassination of Emmett Till and Medgar Evers see Rubin, A. (1995). Reflections on the Death of Emmett Till. *Southern Cultures*, 2(1), 45-66. and Williams, M. (2011). *Medgar Evers: Mississippi Martyr*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press.

the audience responds laughing less than before. It is relevant to note that humour seems to have a double function in the song: it helps to cope with Simone's anger and hatred and, at the same time, it lightens the uncomfortable mood that Simone's message may transmit to the audience – which was mainly white and liberal – during her performance. Humour, therefore, manages the conflictive political issues that Simone is bringing to the surface in the song, reducing the tension between the audience and the musicians in a way that keeps the audience curious and expectant of what may be coming next. After this interjection, she denounces more explicitly the poor mental and physical conditions of the African American community in the US by highlighting how racial dynamics create an unsafe, fearful environment: “Hound dogs on my trail / School children sitting in jail / Black cat cross my path / I think every day's gonna be my last.” In the lines of the following verse, Simone unfolds a series of grim, hopeless images: “we all gonna get it in due time”; “I don't belong here, / I don't belong there / I've even stopped believing in prayer”; “me and my people just about due”. Then, she goes on singing “Don't tell me, I'll tell you / me and my people just about due”. These lines, instead of conforming with white acceptance, Simone demands self-actualization in America's racial relationships. She also critiques the typically given response of white Americans (“They keep on saying 'Go slow!'”), warning them that improving racial relationships in a slow pace will only lead to more suffering and death. Thus, this part does not only demand self-actualization but also expresses the urgency of progressing towards more healthy racial relationships by highlighting the horrific consequences of the current situation in America. As the tune maintains its momentum and slightly increases its tempo, Simone pauses for breath and moves into a new section, which serves as a refrain that has a call-and-response pattern¹¹. She calls out “But that's just the trouble”; “washing the windows”; “picking the cotton”; “You're just plain rotten”; “you're too damn lazy”; “the thinking's crazy”, to which her instrumentalists reply with a shout: “too slow!” after each of Simone's lines. Whereas the opening lines of the song seemed to invite the audience to participate in her protest song, here, with this call and response structure, this invitation seems to be rejected. Instead, Simone's calls allude to some of the most common prejudices against black people that perpetuated racial dynamics, leaving little room for improvement. Moreover, the shouted

¹¹ The call-and-response pattern is common to all African American folk music and jazz. It encourages interaction; it usually starts with a “call” made by a soloist and is normally “answered” by the rest of the musicians in the ensemble.

response “too slow!” points again to the slow-paced progress that the country was doing, while sharply contrasting it with the rapid tempo and rhythms of the song, which looks as if the song itself was suggesting that this pace should accelerate.

Simone returns to a slightly modified chorus before uttering her next sentence and starting the next section of the song: “I bet you thought I was kiddin’, didn’t you?” At this point, some laughter can be heard from the audience in the recording, even though it seems more hesitant, nervous, and less audible than before. Simone’s utterance of this sentence can be analysed as a breaking point in the performance, as a change of mood is perceived in the recording: Simone’s attitude seems now furious and hostile, antagonizing the audience; the audience, from this point onwards, does not seem to participate actively in the performance. After Simone’s comment, the song goes back to the verse-chorus structure of the beginning, leaving aside the call and response pattern. The following lines unfold again a series of situations (“picket lines”; “school boycotts”; “They try to say it’s a communist plot”), which are representative of the abuses that African Americans suffered while fighting for equality and for their civil rights, and end with a furious remark on the matter: “all I want is equality / for my sister, my brother, my people and me”. However, it is in the following verse that Simone’s expression of anger and hatred arrives to its climax, as her declarations are fiercer and more striking:

Yes, you lied to me all these years
You told me to wash and clean my ears
And talk real fine just like a lady
And you'd stop calling me Sister Sadie

Oh, but this whole country is full of lies
You're all gonna die and die like flies
I don't trust you any more
You keep on saying 'Go slow!'
'Go slow!'

In these lines, Simone not only questions racial and gender prejudices in America, but also introduces the issue of mistrust in African American communities by fiercely claiming “I don’t trust you anymore”. As the historian Feldstein states, “when Simone rejected impulse to “talk like a lady,” she effectively claimed that doing so would not halt such discriminatory practices as calling black women “Sister Sadie.” Simone undermined a historically potent gendered politics of respectability that persisted in African American activism of the late 1950s and early 1960s. In a critique of both whites and blacks, she challenged the notion that certain kinds of gender roles were a route toward improved

race relations. Her lyrics unleashed a liberation of another sort – the liberation from doing the right thing in the hopes of being recognized as deserving. In both songs, elements that potentially repressed black activism (nonviolence) and elements that potentially repressed female sexuality were linked in ways that challenged liberalism itself” (1365-1366) Thus, those references in that verse constitute a critique of racial and gender prejudices that were very present in both the social fabric of the US and in the activism during the Civil Rights Movement, and, at the same time, were a demand for Black women’s respectability¹². Moreover, mistrust is an emotion that is associated with racial discrimination in the US, and that may trigger feelings of anger. As Mabry and Kiecolt claim, mistrust implies “judgments about the probable risks and benefits posed by interaction” (88). They also point out that “race is strongly associated with mistrust. Quantitative studies find that African Americans are much more mistrusting of people in general than whites are, independent of socioeconomic status. [...] Qualitative studies of African Americans describe a pervasive mistrust of whites, owing to repeated experiences of discrimination” (88). Simone, then, by expressing mistrust openly when singing “I don’t trust you anymore”, is raising awareness of the damaging psychological effects that racial discrimination has on African Americans. Finally, Simone’s aggressive vocals end the verse by replying twice with the phrase, “Go slow!”. Simone pauses and moves again into another section with a call-and-response pattern. This time she calls out “But that’s just the trouble”; “desegregation”; “mass participation”; “reunification”; “Do things gradually”; “But bring me more tragedy”, to which her musicians reply with a shout: “too slow!” after each of Simone’s lines. In this verse, the lines “desegregation”, “mass participation” and “reunification” refer to key words that were used during the Civil Rights Movement’s marches and emphasize what the protests were demanding. The response “too slow”, which is repeated with little variations throughout the whole song, along with the lines “Do things gradually” and “But bring me more tragedy”, tried to ridicule those who preferred gradual, slow-paced change over immediate desegregation, and also articulates her anger at the slow pace of the Civil Rights Movement, and at how that pace was mostly dictated by liberal politics. The concluding lines of this last call-and-response section directly address the audience (“Why don't you see it, Why don't you

¹² For more info about gender politics in Simone’s performances and music see Feldstein, R. (2005). "I Don't Trust You Anymore": Nina Simone, Culture, and Black Activism in the 1960s. *The Journal of American History*, 91(4), 1349-1379. and Heard, D. (2012). "DON'T LET ME BE MISUNDERSTOOD": Nina Simone's Theater of Invisibility. *Callaloo*, 35(4), 1056-1084.

feel it / I don't know, I don't know”) and emphasize Simone’s anger and frustration towards those who choose to ignore America’s racial politics. As the song enters its final verse, it goes back to the opening tune, finishing with a turnaround¹³ that substitutes the first two lines “Alabama's gotten me so upset” and “Tennessee made me lose my rest” with “You don’t have to live next to me / Just give me my equality”. With this change in the lines, Simone emphasizes even more how urgently civil rights for African Americans were needed. After finishing the song, Simone adds a determined, punctuating “That’s it!” that ends the show. The use of a turnaround passage in the ending verse reminds the audience about the racially motivated attacks in Mississippi and Alabama that made Simone compose this protest song.

You don't have to live next to me
Just give me my equality
Everybody knows about Mississippi
Everybody knows about Alabama
Everybody knows about Mississippi goddam, that's it!

Furthermore, the harmony has a crucial role in the song, as it helps in creating the right atmosphere to convey the message with the appropriate emotions. Simone’s performance and vocals, which seemed playful and inclusive at the beginning, progressively become defiant and declamatory towards the end, making her critique of racial relationships and of civil rights in America more poignant, powerful, and effective. The chords of the song help in generating this specific emotional effect. The song starts in the key of G major, and the chords mainly follow the ii-V-I progression¹⁴, which helps creating the confident, humorous, and almost cheerful tone that the opening of the song has at the beginning. After the first section of the song, when Simone sarcastically presents the song by saying “This is a show tune, but the show hasn't been written for it, yet”, the song modulates the key from G major to its relative minor key: E minor. Minor tonalities tend to be associated in Western culture with emotions that have been traditionally perceived as negative such as sadness, anger, distress and grief, as the chords progressions that stem from the minor scale generally create a feeling of more ambiguity and uncertainty than major tonalities¹⁵.

¹³ In jazz, a turnaround is a common cadential progression that is usually located in the last two bars at the end of a section of a song. These chords help bring the chord progression back to the tonic key. The most common chord progression used as a turnaround is the ii-V-I progression.

¹⁴ The ii-V-I is an extremely common chord progression in jazz that gives a strong feeling of resolution.

¹⁵ For more information on the cultural associations of major and minor tonalities see Parncutt, R. (2014). The emotional connotations of major versus minor tonality: One or more origins? *Musicae Scientiae*, 18(3), 324–353: “The minor triad has a more ambiguous (less salient) root than the major, and the minor scale has

After that sentence that Simone utters, the whole song is played in E minor, except when it goes back to the chorus, which is always played in G major. Even though the harmony of the parts in minor are as straightforward and unembellished as the parts in major and both follow a similar pattern, the change of tonality creates a harmonic narrative that feels more tense and dissonant, which can be easily perceived by the audience. All this tension and dissonance, along with the up-tempo rhythms that increase and the lyrics of the song, help building progressively an atmosphere of social unrest and agitation while Simone's singing becomes angrier and angrier. It could also be argued that some of the shifts from minor to major chords in the chorus after the song modulates from one key to the other lighten slightly the mood of the song, as these are more consonant and brighter chord progressions, which may help in reducing the tension produced by the minor ones. These chords, then, have a similar function as the use of humour has, and these factors often seem to operate together to balance the emotional baggage and distress of the performance.

"Mississippi Goddam", therefore, captures Simone's emotional reaction to the racially motivated attacks that preceded the Civil Rights Movement. As Pavlic points out, "the lyrical mode", and music more generally, "bridges the distinction between discourse and experience by becoming an experience itself. A song is discourse as experience, interrupting the boomerang from word to referent, holding our attention to physical and emotional textures woven in the rhythms of the utterance itself." (17) Through the performance of this song, it can be argued that Simone, apart from clearly expressing rage, invited the audience to experience with her the impact that racist discourses had on her emotional life. By doing this, she succeeded in creating a collective, shared experience through music in which anger, a central emotion in African American life, could be expressed. In that sense, the bursts of anger unleashed in her performances seem to be useful and effective in confronting anger and hatred at least during the 1960s.

more variable form and a more ambiguous (less stable) tonic; uncertainty is associated with anger, sadness, distress, and grief."

3.2. *James Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son"*

Through the portrayal of his father, Baldwin exemplifies the impact that systematic racism in America has on human beings, illustrating the psychological and physical consequences of feeling anger, hatred and alienation towards others (within and outside of the African American community). In his narrative, he starts by depicting his father as “indescribably cruel in his personal life” and as “certainly the most bitter man I have ever met” (*NNS*, 89), but also as a man with a “tremendous crushing power and, even, a rather crushing charm” (*NNS*, 89). He also points out that “he knew that he was black but did not know that he was beautiful.” (*NNS*, 89) His father’s bitterness and cruelty, however, was an emotional reaction to the pride he had in his blackness: “He claimed to be proud of his blackness but it had also been the cause of much humiliation and it had fixed bleak boundaries to his life.” (*NNS*, 89) Baldwin’s portrayal of his father is completely honest: it expresses both the hatred and love he feels for him and recognises him as a tormented, twisted, and complicated man, devastated by the racism present at the time:

“In my mind's eye I could see him, sitting at the window, locked up in his terrors; hating and fearing every living soul including his children who had betrayed him, too, by reaching towards the world which had despised him. [...] He could not understand why, if they had so much energy to spare, they could not use it to make their lives better. He treated almost everybody on our block with a most uncharitable asperity and neither they, nor, of course, their children were slow to reciprocate.” (*NNS*, 92)

In his narrative, he describes how the inner tension and distress that all the anger and hatred inside him provoked was translated into every action he performed and was notorious enough to be noticed by the other people: “When he took one of his children on his knee to play, the child always became fretful and began to cry; when he tried to help one of us with our homework the absolutely unabating tension which emanated from him caused our minds and our tongues to become paralyzed, so that he, scarcely knowing why, flew into a rage and the child, not knowing why, was punished.” (*NNS*, 89) Baldwin’s narrative, therefore, presents his father not as a mere caricature of cruelty, hatred, and hostility, but as a three-dimensional character full of inner contradictions and paralysed by the fear of confronting his hatred. Representing him in this way allows Baldwin to understand his father’s feelings with more depth, and to reflect on the complex, contradictory nature of these emotions and on how they affect one’s psyche.

Even though Baldwin's behaviour towards his experience of racial oppression does not seem to be explicitly related to his father's, he establishes a connection between his father's anger, hatred, and alienation and the inner bitterness and agitation that afflicted African Americans. In other words, it is by examining the distress and anger of his father that Baldwin is able to explore these emotions in relation to himself and the relevance they have in his life experience and in America's. Understanding and empathising with the other's emotions allows us to understand ours. In that sense, Baldwin sees himself reflected in his father:

“He had lived and died in an intolerable bitterness of spirit and it frightened me, as we drove him to the graveyard through the unquiet, ruined streets, to see how powerful and overflowing this bitterness could be and to realize that this bitterness was now mine. [...]

[I] discovered the weight of white people in the world. I saw that this had been for my ancestors and now would be for me I had an awful thing to live with and that the bitterness which had helped to kill my father could also kill me.” (*NNS*, 90)

In this passage, Baldwin depicts how, as Ahmed argues, “emotions should not be regarded as psychological states, but as social and cultural practices” (9) that can be passed through generations, no matter how different the experiences and dispositions of people may be. The fact that emotions can be socially and culturally shaped, suggests that they are “not what comes from the individual body, but what holds or binds the social body together.” (Ahmed, 9) Therefore, this “bitterness” that both Baldwin and his father carried through, is deeply interrelated with the experience of African Americans, and directly emerges from racial oppression. Taking this into consideration, some passages in the essay clearly illustrate the ways in which racial oppression causes African Americans to develop self-destructive attitudes towards others. This is shown when his father does not trust Baldwin's teacher – a white woman, that supports him and his family and meets him at their house – because of her race, which he cannot perceive as anything else than a threat. Baldwin describes how, in later years, his father's advice is to “have as little to do with them as possible” because, according to him, “white people would do anything to keep a Negro down. Some of them could be nice, he admitted, but none of them were to be trusted and most of them were not even nice.” (*NNS*, 94) His father's response, therefore, gives the readers an insight into the intensity and the impact of racial oppression in one's

mental state. This is further exemplified in the two following scenes: in the year before his father's death, Baldwin directly suffers the horrendous consequences of the Jim Crow laws in his jobs and in restaurants. These scenes illustrate the ways in which racism forces people to suppress their emotions and the emotional or humanitarian costs of it. In the following passage, Baldwin's conflicting emotions specifically draw attention to how "trying to eliminate anger in unfair situations can threaten an individual's identity and invalidate their experience" (Sahi, 68):

"I knew about the south, of course, and about how southerners treated Negroes and how they expected them to behave, but it had never entered my mind that anyone would look at me and expect me to behave that way. I learned in New Jersey that to be a Negro meant, precisely that one was never looked at but was simply at the mercy of the reflexes the color of one's skin caused in other people. I acted in New Jersey as I had always acted, that is as though I thought a great deal of myself –I had to act that way– with results that were, simply, unbelievable." (*NNS*, 92)

Furthermore, the following passage magnificently puts into words the psychological costs of overregulating anger by describing how he felt after having been fired many times. His awareness of racial oppression helps him understand that this "disease" or "fever", as he calls it, will accompany him the rest of his life:

"I first contracted some dread, chronic disease, the unfailing symptom of which is a kind of blind fever, a pounding in the skull and fire in the bowels. Once this disease is contracted, one can never be really carefree again, for the fever, without an instant's warning, can recur at any moment. It can wreck more important things than race relations. There is not a Negro alive who does not have this rage in his blood one has the choice, merely, of living with it consciously or surrendering to it. As for me, this fever has recurred in me, and does, and will until the day I die" (*NNS*, 96)

In the scene that follows, Baldwin's narration explains how, when entering in a restaurant for diner, the waitress tells him "We don't serve Negroes here." (*NNS*, 97) This sentence pushes Baldwin into a state of rage and fury that makes him hate the waitress: "the moment she appeared all of my fury flowed towards her. I hated her for her white face, and for her great, astounded, frightened eyes. I felt that if she found a black man so frightening I would make her fright worth-while. [...] I wanted her to come close enough for me to get her neck between my hands" (*NNS*, 98) The consequences of Baldwin's

emotional reaction come out in an explicitly violent and destructive way: he furiously throws a water-mug of water at the waitress, and, after realising what he has done, runs away desperately. Apart from the damaging psychological consequences of feeling anger and hatred, the passage illustrates how anger, if suppressed, can quickly take the shape of violence, causing harm to both the aggressor and the aggressed. It also demonstrates how Baldwin – and African American people in general – carry a destructive rage that is suppressed so that they can survive and function without damaging others. Moreover, Baldwin’s thoughts on this experience when seen in retrospect makes him realise that the intensity of his rage is incredibly powerful, to the point that it threatens his own mental and physical safety, which causes him to fear the anger and hatred that he has inside:

“I could not get over two facts, both equally difficult for the imagination to grasp, and one was that I could have been murdered. But the other was that I had been ready to commit murder. I saw nothing very clearly but I did see this: that my life, my real life, was in danger, and not from anything other people might do but from the hatred I carried in my own heart.” (*NNS*, 99)

Baldwin’s narration encapsulates his emotional conflicts with all its complexities, which allows him to illustrate the impact that the alienating forces of racism has on racially oppressed subjects, causing them to lose control of their emotions and actions. Therefore, these two scenes are representative of the emotional costs of suppressing anger. As Sahi argues, “the psychological costs associated with overregulating negative emotions like anger are greatest for those who experience the most harm, not simply because they experience the most anger, but because their anger may be the most meaningful. Because individuals and communities that experience high oppression are not able to escape that oppression, attempts to change feelings that respond to that injustice may be particularly invalidating at an experiential level and taxing at a cognitive level, resulting in an increased threat to well-being over time. Thus, attempts to eliminate anger can directly increase harm for those who experience the most injustice.” (69)

After these scenes, the essay moves back to Harlem right before the Civil Rights Movement. In this section, he comments on his father’s funeral and on the riots that were happening in Harlem to explore more deeply the function and effects of anger and hate. Firstly, Baldwin’s narration of his experiences during the funeral highlight his feelings of alienation towards his father and towards the ceremony, which makes it more difficult for Baldwin to mourn his death. This can be seen when he feels the preacher is not being

honest by presenting his father as “a man thoughtful, patient, and forbearing, a Christian inspiration to all who knew him, and a model for his children” (*NNS*, 106). As a response to the preacher’s words, he narrates: “This was not the man they had known, but they has scarcely expected to be confronted with *him*; this was [...] the man they had not known, and the man they had not known ay have been the real one.” (*NNS*, 106-107) At the same time, however, when hearing someone singing one of his father’s favourite songs, he suddenly remembers some experiences that they shared together, which allows him to recall happy memories with his father:

“I had forgotten, in the rage of my growing up, how proud my father had been of me when I was little. [...] I had forgotten what he had looked like when he was pleased but now I remembered that he had always been grinning with pleasure when my solos ended. [...] For now it seemed that he had not always been cruel.” (*NNS*, 108-109)

This passage shows how Baldwin’s rage and hatred towards the perception he had of his father not only helped in avoiding to confront his death and the pain that loss entails, but also may have impeded to move forward to a mental place where he can mourn and love him. As he claims earlier in his essay, “I imagine that one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, that they will be forced to deal with pain.” (*NNS*, 103) Desperately clinging to those emotions, then, prevented him from dealing with pain and, by extension, from having a meaningful relationship with his father. Secondly, Baldwin’s account of the riots in Harlem is also relevant to have better understanding of anger and rage in the community. As Baldwin describes, the atmosphere in Harlem seems to be tense, violent, and “infected by waiting” (*NNS*, 100) because of racial tensions: “something very heavy in their stance seemed to indicate that they had all, incredibly, seen a common vision, and on each face there seemed to be the same strange, bitter shadow.” (*NNS*, 102) In this brief passage, he captures how he can sense the thick, tense mood that invades the place. On the one hand, his account expresses his sympathy for the rioters but, on the other, he firmly questions the efficacy of the riots, and describes as being “the effect of a lit match in a tin of gasoline.” (*NNS*, 101) For him, the riots are representative of an expression of the rage that is common to all African American people. Even though suppressing the expression of this rage is not the solution, the outcome of these riots does not seem to satisfy Baldwin, because, instead of truly changing society, they exemplify how rage can be a self-destructive force. This is seen in

a passage in which the rioters smash the stores in Harlem to protest against white oppressors. By doing this, however, the only community affected by these attacks are not white people, but black ones:

“It would have been better, but it would also have been intolerable, for Harlem had needed something to smash. To smash something is the ghetto's chronic need. Most of the time it is the members of the ghetto who smash each other and themselves. But as long as the ghetto walls are standing there will always come a moment when these outlets do not work.” (*NNS*, 112)

Baldwin's essay critiques the self-destructive and counterproductive effects of the protest, despite understanding its motives. Rioters could not have directed all their rage towards white oppressors, not only because African Americans would undoubtedly have paid the consequences, but also because, as Baldwin points out in this excerpt, their relationship is something far more complex than pure hatred:

“The Negro's real relation to the white American [...] prohibits, simply, anything as uncomplicated and satisfactory as pure hatred. In order really to hate white people, one has to blot so much out of the mind—and the heart—that this hatred itself becomes an exhausting and self-destructive pose. But this does not mean, on the other hand, that love comes easily: the white world is too powerful, too complacent, too ready with gratuitous humiliation, and, above all, too ignorant and too innocent for that. One is absolutely forced to make perpetual qualifications and one's own reactions are always cancelling each other out.” (*NNS*, 113)

Finally, in the final passage of the essay, Baldwin returns to the words his father preached (“But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (*NNS*, 113)), trying to find meaning in them. Whereas in the past he had perceived his father's religious words as meaningless, after his death he saw those words as “empty bottles, waiting to hold the meaning which life would give them for me.” (*NNS*, 114) In this passage, Baldwin reflects on the contradictory and complex nature of his emotions to conclude that they can be a powerful, moving force that, if channelled effectively, they may lead him to start a healing process. Its contradictions and complexities, however, have to be constantly taken into account.

IV. Conclusion

Both Simone's and Baldwin's artistic productions were an emotional response to racial oppression in the 1960s; they explored effective ways to deal with anger and hatred, which are central emotions in the African American community. Music and literature offered them a means through which they could acknowledge and confront their anger and reflect on how it should be politicised for race relationships to improve. Simone, by performing "Mississippi Goddam", not only unleashed her anger openly – avoiding, thus, to repress her emotions –, but also chose to experience it in a cathartic, almost therapeutic way that could be shared with the audience. Baldwin, in "Notes of a Native Son", reflects on the anger that arouses when experiencing racism, and on its psychological and physical effects as a way to process his emotions. He also highlights the importance of channelling this anger to heal, recover, and build healthy relationships, which is crucial for the wellbeing of the country. Furthermore, both works are cultural productions that encapsulate the contradictions and complexities of their inner selves and of American society, and that represent two distinct viewpoints of a central debate during the Civil Rights Movement: is violence necessary for a political protest to be effective, or is it possible to achieve the same objective through nonviolent means? On the one hand, Simone's song questioned nonviolence as a strategy and, as Malcolm X did, embraced violence, and perceived it as a necessary response to the harm that racial oppression caused. In her performances, she highlighted the motivating force of anger to confront and resist oppression. Baldwin, on the other hand, emphasized in his essay the paralysing nature of anger and demonstrated how clinging to hate impeded moving forward and dealing with pain. He analysed his anger and hatred to find an effective way to channel it, so that both himself and the community could start healing. In that sense, Baldwin, just as Martin Luther King did, conceived anger as a moving force that could transform society and promoted nonviolence by speaking of the importance of channelling anger to avoid any desire of revenge.

These two perspectives on the political uses of anger, even though they can seem contradictory, proved to be complementary and were highly influential during the Civil Rights Movement. Expressing anger in that context, then, in the shape of violence or nonviolence, was necessary to fight racial oppression. Even though the established socio-political system of the US did not change radically, their cultural productions created a collective, shared space that allowed the following generations of African Americans to

express their anger in a more firm and confident way than they did, and to make clear to white oppressors how relevant is the political expression of anger of African Americans in American society. Therefore, both Simone's "Mississippi Goddam" and Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son" proved to be a suitable means for challenging racial oppression in the 1960s. Their artworks accomplished to construct a place in which anger could be expressed and processed in the musical and literary imagination, and, in general, in American life.

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VI. Annex

Transcribed lyrics of “Mississippi Goddam” from the album *In Concert* (1964):

[spoken introduction]

The name of this tune is Mississippi Goddam
And I mean every word of it

[Verse 1]

Alabama's gotten me so upset
Tennessee made me lose my rest
And everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam

[Verse 1]

Alabama's gotten me so upset
Tennessee made me lose my rest
And everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam

Can't you see it
Can't you feel it
It's all in the air
I can't stand the pressure much longer
Somebody say a prayer

[Chorus]

Alabama's gotten me so upset
Tennessee made me lose my rest
And everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam

At this point, the song modulates from
G major to E minor

[spoken]

This is a show tune
But the show hasn't been written for it, yet

[Verse 2]

Hound dogs on my trail
School children sitting in jail
Black cat cross my path
I think every day's gonna be my last

Lord have mercy on this land of mine
We all gonna get it in due time
I don't belong here
I don't belong there
I've even stopped believing in prayer

Don't tell me, I tell you
Me and my people just about due
I've been there so I know
They keep on saying 'Go slow!'

[Refrain 1]

But that's just the trouble
'Too slow'
Washing the windows
'Too slow'
Picking the cotton
'Too slow'
You're just plain rotten
'Too slow'
You're too damn lazy
'Too slow'
The thinking's crazy
'Too slow'

Where am I going, What am I doing
I don't know, I don't know
[Chorus]

Just try to do your very best
Stand up be counted with all the rest
For everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam

[spoken]

I bet you thought I was kiddin', didn't you

[change of mood]

[Verse 3]

Picket lines
School boycotts
They try to say it's a communist plot
All I want is equality
For my sister, my brother, my people, and me

Yes, you lied to me all these years
You told me to wash and clean my ears
And talk real fine just like a lady
And you'd stop calling me Sister Sadie

Oh, but this whole country is full of lies
You're all gonna die and die like flies
I don't trust you any more
You keep on saying 'Go slow!'
'Go slow!'

[Refrain 2]

But that's just the trouble

'Too slow'

Desegregation

'Too slow'

Mass participation

'Too slow'

Reunification

'Too slow'

Do things gradually

'Too slow'

But bring more tragedy

'Too slow'

Why don't you see it, Why don't you feel it

I don't know, I don't know

[Chorus]

You don't have to live next to me

Just give me my equality

Everybody knows about Mississippi

[Turnaround]

Everybody knows about Alabama

Everybody knows about Mississippi goddam

[spoken outro]

That's it!