



## **Into Oblivion: A Study of Carl Jung's Archetypes in John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me***

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Carl Jung believed that dreams offer solutions to the conscious mind and helped restore our psychic equilibrium. Jung also believed in an inherited collective, universal, and impersonal psychic system. John Howard Griffin, in his 1960 book, *Black Like Me*, darkens his skin in order to cross the color line and experience what life is like for African Americans in the southern parts of the United States. The characteristics of Griffin's recollection of experiences as a Black man in the south are familiar to that of a dream (confusion, anxiety, and fear). For the purpose of this study, Griffin's voyage into Blackness in order to truly understand what African Americans face in the racially hostile South is considered as dream, and therefore Jung's archetypes are applied to various aspects of Griffin's story to examine America's racial landscape as a dystopia that exists in the unconscious, collective American psyche.

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In his book, *Black Like Me* (1960), John Howard Griffin, a white man, through a series of medical procedures, temporarily darkens his skin in order to cross the color line and enter the world of black people in the racially hostile and violent South. As he leaves his relatively comfortable, white world to enter the

world of the Negro, his doctor shakes his hand and says, "Now you go into oblivion" (15). To "go into oblivion," as his doctor puts it, is to be oblivious, to be absorbed, forgotten, unaware, or unconscious. His doctor's parting words represent an intersection by which Griffin's experiences as a black man in the southern parts of the United States and Carl Jung's beliefs about the psychology of dreams cross.

One of the distinguishing characteristics between Carl Jung and his teacher, Sigmund Freud, is their different views on the unconscious. Freud believed that people repress certain urges on a conscious level, but in the unconscious, animalistic, instinctual, and sexual impulses are released through dreams. Carl Jung, perhaps Freud's most famous pupil, departed from his mentor's teaching on the role of the instinctual and sexual component of dreams. Jung, like Freud, believed in the unconscious, but believed that dreams were spiritual; they did not simply attempt to reveal repressed material from the unconscious, but offered solutions to the conscious mind (the ego). Jung believed that dreams are specific expressions of the unconscious that express an unrecognized idea or intention. He believed that dreams restore psychic equilibrium and help to enhance the qualities of conscious and unconscious. Jung suggests that the messages and images seen in dreams are symbolic and must be interpreted to find their true meaning. These symbols, which Jung suggests can have many meanings, are described through his concept of Archetypes. In *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Jung defines these archetypes as "the existence of definite forms in the psyche which seem to be present always and everywhere" (1935, 89). Jung further states that "there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical to all individuals" (1935, 43). He believed that this "second psychic system" was not developed, but inherited. In Jung's analysis, the symbols, or archetypes, in dreams have a universal meaning.

Personal experiences are connected to themes that are present in every culture throughout history. Jung identifies some of these universal patterns within the minds of all people such as the Trickster, the Great Mother, the Wise Old Man, the Divine Child, the Anima/Animus, the Persona, and the Shadow as examples of classic prototypes that all humans share. The Trickster, known as a clown or jester in various cultures, may appear to ridicule, embarrass, or to make the dreamer uncomfortable in a situation. The Great Mother appears as a nurturing figure to provide reassurance. Since the mother is the giver of life and the first teacher of the child, the image of The Great Mother is universal. The Old Wise Man may appear as a teacher, doctor, father, or any authority figure that one might seek for advice. Jung believed that this archetype appeared to provide guidance toward the right direction. The Divine Child represents the dreamer in his or her purest form. This archetype represents innocence, but it also represents potential that the dreamer may possess and is symbolized by a baby or small child. The Anima and the Animus represent both the female and the male aspects of the dreamer. The Anima or Animus may appear in dreams when the dreamer needs to further acknowledge his or her feminine or masculine qualities. The Persona is the image that dreamers present consciously. Jung believed that the

Persona was the public mask. Although the person in the dream does not look like the dreamer, the persona is recognized as the dreamer anyway. Finally, the Shadow is the part of the dreamer that is repressed and hidden because it is seen as negative. The Shadow symbolizes fears and anxieties, and, in dreams, may be represented by something as horrific as a murderer.

Jung also believed strongly in the concept of paired opposites. Therefore, the Shadow is the paired opposite of the Ego, the center of consciousness that provides consistency and direction. For this study, paired opposites such as good/evil, male/female, and love/hate can be encompassed within the context of Jungian theories on dreams and be compared to America's history of its racial caste system in which a similar view of paired opposites were set. America's paired opposites consisted of master/slave, human/subhuman, civil/savage, intelligent/ignorant, clean/dirty, beautiful/ugly, included/excluded, white/black. The theory of racial distinctions has been so clearly defined, and America as has historically used such measures to map out the destinies of its white citizens and its black population until the latter part of the twentieth century. In *Black Like Me*, Griffin attempts to explore the depths of America's paired opposites, or racial binaries, in order to come to a reconciliation of the opposites. It is Griffin's hope that through the union of opposites he will help whites, and perhaps himself, transcend their racial bigotry. Griffin attempts to use his experience as a disguised black man in the hostile South, and the symbols and archetypes that he perhaps inadvertently relates to his experience, to give his white audience a different perspective and maybe a different attitude about America's racial problem.

The racial landscape that Griffin chooses to survey has a history that dates back to 1619, when a Dutch ship brought 20 enslaved Africans to the Virginia colony in Jamestown. By the onset of the Civil War approximately four million African slaves lived throughout the United States. Nearly 240 years passed before the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution ended slavery in 1865. After Reconstruction, significant measures were taken all across America to strip the formally enslaved of all rights they had obtained through the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. These restrictions, which symbolize a castration of the Constitution, became known as Jim Crow laws. These laws systematically codified the subordinate condition of blacks by separating the races in public spaces, stripping black men of the right to vote, disenfranchising families and black owned businesses, and supporting ritualized mob violence (Davis 2008). In America, blacks were portrayed and treated as inferior, and Jim Crow laws and customs characterized blacks as biologically and culturally inferior. This reality is what John Howard Griffin's book explores: a side of America a majority of its citizens misunderstood - America's shadow.

The book, although written like a diary, is not the author's diary. He actually wrote the manuscript at the conclusion of his experiment, when he resumed his life as a white man. Griffin states that he decides to use the diary format because it gives the story a more personal and powerful effect. Though Griffin's account is not categorized as fiction, it possesses the elements of fiction. More pointedly, the narrator's experiment can be described as dreamlike. Like in dreams, the narrator is lifted from his surroundings and enters a totally unfamiliar

world. He sets out on a journey, and moves from place to place, often under the cover of night. He is often confused by what he sees, feels anxiety in situations that he would not find himself in his “real life,” and is even chased by his fears – violent whites. For the purpose of this study, Griffin’s voyage into blackness is considered a dream; therefore, Jung’s concept of universal archetypes can be applied to Griffin’s dreamlike experience as a black man in the South.

The patterns of racial identity that characterized American society in Griffin’s time are not universal like Jung’s archetypes; however, the symbols, themes, and messages that Americans received about race were inherited from previous generations. Blacks were expected to fit the description of certain stereotypes such as “Mammy” and “Sapphire.” Stereotypes such as these depicted blacks as loud, ignorant, dim-witted, dishonest, lazy, and promiscuous. These stereotypes, and numerous other negative stereotypes, were expected to be followed to the letter by blacks, and violent retribution from whites was quickly administered to anyone whose behavior shattered these images. Griffin’s first diary entry notes that “The Southern Negro will not tell the white man the truth. He long ago learned that if he speaks a truth unpleasing to the white, the white will make life miserable for him” (7-8). Because blacks were forced to embody these stereotypes generation after generation, it is clear that the images of blacks became archetypes in the American psyche. This racialized collective unconscious of the American psyche is what Griffin sets out to examine as he travels the South disguised as a black man. Furthermore, just as Jung’s belief in paired opposites can be used to typify the racial climate, his archetypal images of the Persona, the Wise Old Man, and, most notably, the Shadow are applicable as well.

## **The Ego**

In one respect, the author and narrator, John Howard Griffin, represents the ego. In *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, Jung writes, “We understand the ego as the complex factor to which all conscious contents are related. It forms, as it were, the center of the field of consciousness; and, in so far as this comprises the empirical personality, the ego is the subject of all personal acts of consciousness” (1951, 3). According to Jung, the ego is the center of consciousness that provides a sense of direction. In addition, Jung explains that “the somatic basis is inferred from the totality of endosomatic perceptions” (1951, 3). Based on Griffin’s life experience as white, of course the only way that he could experience the true world of the Negro is through the Negro’s endosomatic perception. In order to establish any valid perception of the Negro’s predicament, Griffin must take on the bodily form of his subject because his subjects’ form (skin color) is what bonds them to the status of second-class citizens.

According to Jung, the ego has four functions, or four ways of interpreting reality: thinking, feeling, intuition, and sensation. These functions consist of two diametrically opposed pairs: thinking v. feeling and intuition v. sensation (Kazlev 2004). As Griffin moves through his journey, each function of the ego manifests

itself over its diametrically opposed partner. For example, Griffin opens his “diary” thinking of what “if a white man became a Negro in the Deep South” (7). These ideas haunt him so much that he decides to act. Griffin realizes that he cannot arrive at a rational analysis by simply *thinking* about the subject; he must *feel* what being a black man is like in order to get a full understanding. The instant Griffin’s skin transformation begins to take form he states that his nerves simmered with dread. By becoming a Negro, Griffin’s feelings overwhelm his thoughts. When he sees the final effect of his transformation, he writes, “Even the senses underwent a change so profound it filled me with distress” (16). He writes about being appalled by his transformation and the great sense of loneliness that accompanied it. These feelings overwhelm him and take the dominant role in his thinking. As soon as Griffin goes into the outside world his mind (thinking) serves him little-to-no purpose. Because he has no idea of what life is like as a Negro, he cannot draw on past experiences to make analytical connections to his surroundings. Additionally, his feelings about his new condition, regardless to how powerful they are to him, matter even less. His anxieties, fears, and apprehensions about his newfound blackness cannot appeal to a system that views the black body that holds these feelings as inferior. Therefore, being stripped of his humanity (intellect and feelings), Griffin is forced to use his intuition.

He writes that when he realized the totality of his actions that his “inclination was to fight against it” (16). The “inclination” that he describes signifies a hunch, an instinctual feeling against something that comes on too suddenly. As soon as he steps into the New Orleans night, a white man emerges beside him, causing him to become paralyzed. This statue-like defense mechanism can be compared to some animals that instinctually become motionless at the perceived threat of danger. Also, after being chased by a heavy-set, muscular white boy, he realizes that he cannot run, so he chooses to fight. Trapped in an alley, he follows his gut and chooses to face his menace, only to see his antagonist acquiesce.

During his journey, Griffin is often overtaken by sensations. After his transformation, as he walks the streets as a Negro, he writes, “I was aware that the street smells, and the drugstore odors of perfume and arnica, were exactly the same to the Negro as to the white man” (18). Not only does he pay particular attention to smells, he also notices sounds on a keener level. He writes, “A dog barked nearby and his bark grew louder as another tune from the juke box blasted up through my linoleum floor. . . and I marveled that sounds could so degrade the spirit” (19). Based on the American myth that black people were sensual creatures, it is no surprise that Griffin’s preconceived notions of black life would lead him to draw conclusions about sensuality’s role in black life. As he continues through the streets, he comments that “sensuality was escape,” and that “Here hips drew the eye and flirted with the eye and caused the eye to lust or laugh” (22). And, after a few hours of work as a shoe shine boy, his thirst reminds him that for the Negro, something as simple as a drink of water might require a planned two block journey. Jung believed that the function of the ego is to develop the Self, or, in other words, give direction to the whole self. Therefore, first and foremost, Griffin’s experience through each of the four functions of the

ego is an attempt at becoming conscious of things that were once unknown to him.

## The Persona

Secondly, Griffin plays the Persona in a dual capacity. In one respect, Griffin has a persona within the context of the white world. In *The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious*, Jung writes, “The Persona is a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression on others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual” (1928, 192). In the white world, of course Griffin enjoys the benefits of being white in a society that deems black as inferior. In America’s racially segregated society, whites had access to the best public accommodations, the benefits of a justice system that worked for the community, and the best schools. In a country that used seclusion as a measure to enforce an inferior status on some of its citizens, certain societal markers determine what is acceptable and unacceptable. For whites to maintain this system of dominance, whiteness had to present a face of superiority. By defining superiority based on something as arbitrary as race, the definition itself is a façade, and therefore requires a mask. As a white man, even a racially sensitive white man, Griffin is almost forced to wear a mask that suggested he accepted the current state of racial affairs, even if just on a daily or casual basis.

When coming up with his plans to darken his skin and travel the South to discover the true nature of racial affairs, Griffin is sure to keep his plans secret from certain individuals. He is fully aware that his research will upset the power structure and erode the image of the white persona; therefore, in his planning he disguises his full intentions. His assumptions about the white community’s reaction are proved correct when he challenges its perception of itself. In *No Name in the Street* (1972), James Baldwin writes, “White America remains unable to believe that black America’s grievances are real; they are unable to believe this because they cannot face what this fact says about themselves and their country” (165). When Griffin disrupts the relationship between the individual consciousness and society he discovers that this archetype becomes activated, and the racist people threatening him suffer from some type of neurosis. Jung writes in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* that, “Whoever goes to himself risks a confrontation with himself. The mirror does not flatter, it faithfully shows whatever looks into it. . .” (1935, 20). As the white persona, Griffin ultimately confronts himself, and simultaneously forces white society to confront itself as well. The threatening and violent behavior of the racists who dislike his work is a reaction to the white persona being confronted by an image of itself that is unflattering.

In another respect, Griffin is the Persona in the context of the black world. Jung writes that the persona is a kind of “mask.” In dreams, the persona may not physically resemble the dreamer, or may not even behave as the dreamer;

however, the dreamer recognizes the archetype as himself. When Griffin turns his skin black, he does not look like himself and, of course, because of the social restrictions placed on blacks, he is also forced to behave differently. Still, the relationship he has with society is even more complicated because in his unconscious state his persona does not physically resemble him. Additionally, when he turns his skin black, he not only puts on a physical mask to conceal his true nature, he also puts on the invisible mask that blacks were forced to wear to survive in a hostile society. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1901), W. E. B. Du Bois writes:

The Negro is sort of a seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (11)

In Du Bois' explanation of the double consciousness, he invariably describes the mask that blacks were forced to wear in white society. In his poem, "We Wear the Mask," Paul Laurence Dunbar articulates a similar view of what Du Bois calls the double conscious. Dunbar writes, "We [blacks] wear the mask that grins and lies, /It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes. . ." (1896).

As Griffin prepares to leave his reality as a white man, a state in which he is aware and conscious of his surrounding, he moves into a state of being in which he is unaware of his surroundings. Since Griffin is now forced to wear a sort of "double mask," he is opened up to what Du Bois refers to as double consciousness. Since Griffin is now a black person, he must possess the appearance that whites expect blacks to have. When he tells Sterling Williams, the owner of the shoeshine stand, of his true identity and desire to work at the stand, Williams explains, "But you're way too well dressed for a shine boy" (27). As a black man, even a black man that performs a legitimate service, he is expected to look in a way that did not shatter whites' image of him. Along with the black skin that covers his public mask, Griffin is also forced to cover *that* mask in order to make himself invisible to the white world. While working at the shine stand he comments that as some whites paid him, "They looked and saw nothing" (30).

Griffin begins to better understand his new public mask, and he understands that he is required to have an additional mask as a show of inferiority that affects his black persona on a deeper level. He hears a conversation in which an elderly man comments that racists "tag every move toward justice as a communist-inspired, Illuminati-inspired, Satan-inspired. . . part of some secret conspiracy to overthrow the Christian civilization" (44). To which Mr. Gayle says, "So, if you want to be a good Christian, you mustn't act like one. . . So, if you want to be a good American, you've got to practice bad Americanism" (44). As Du Bois believed, this contradictory reality that the black American is forced to live out creates his "twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts,

two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body. . . (11). In Jungian terms this phenomenon can be referred to as paired opposites; however, considering the profound impact of race and its impact on black peoples' psyche, in Du Boisian terms this phenomenon is referred to as double consciousness.

Griffin himself recognizes the "double problem of the Negro" (44). He writes, "First, the discrimination against him. Second, and almost more grievous, his discrimination against himself; his contempt for the blackness that he associates with his suffering; his willingness to sabotage his fellow Negroes because they are part of the blackness he has found so painful" (44). Griffin's black persona shows a mask to white society, but, because of this mask, harbors conflicting, or dueling, feelings about himself. In *Concerning Rebirth* (1940), Jung writes:

Every calling or profession has its own characteristic persona. It is easy to study things nowadays, when the photographs of public personalities as frequently appear in press. A certain kind of behavior is forced on them by the world, and professional people endeavor to come up to their expectations. Only, the danger is that they become identical with their persona – the professor with his text-book, the tenor with his voice. Then the damage is done; henceforth he lives exclusively against the background of his biography. (221)

Just as the world forces certain behaviors on certain professionals, Griffin discovers that certain behaviors are forced on blacks, and the danger is that these behaviors can be internalized. Jung continues by stating that "One could say, with little exaggeration, that the persona is that which in reality one is not, but which oneself as well as others think one is" (1940, 221). According to the racial binary present in America, Griffin's ego benefits from identifying with the positive, stereotypical aspects that the white persona presents to the world: civil, intelligent, clean, beautiful, and literate. However, on the other end of the binary, Griffin's black-self experiences the catastrophe of identifying with the negative stereotypical aspects that the black persona presents to the world: savage, ignorant, dirty, ugly, and illiterate. Griffin writes of becoming acutely aware and empathetic to the looks of despair and hopelessness that can be seen on the faces of the black masses. Three weeks into his experiment, Griffin notes "that my face had lost animation. In repose, it had taken on the strained, disconsolate expression that is written on the countenance of so many Southern Negroes" (113).

Griffin's description of his own mental state and the projection of those feelings on the black masses echo the words of Frederick Douglass during his tenure with his most brutal slave driver, Edward Covey. In *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), of his time with Covey, Douglass writes, "Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished. . . the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute" (55)! The depression that Douglass describes is the result of unbearable oppression that has no foreseeable end that

takes its toll on every aspect of the oppressed being. The depression that Griffin experiences and senses as part of the black persona may be the effects of the black ego identifying with the persona, with some members of the community believing that they are who they pretend to be.

## **The Wise Old Man**

Another archetype that appears throughout Griffin's journey into oblivion is the Wise Old Man. Jung describes the Wise Old Man as the helper in one's dream. Represented by a father, teacher, or any authority figure, the Wise Old Man appears in the dream as a guide to help the dreamer find the right direction. Once Griffin decides to move ahead with his experiment, he meets with numerous people (publishers, friends, doctors) to get their input as to how best to approach the situation. But, as he moves into the unknown, he is lost and searches for a mooring to establish himself in his new world. Griffin's first Wise Old Man is Sterling Williams, an older black man who owns a shoeshine stand. After Griffin exposes his full plan to Williams, Williams allows him to work with him at the shoeshine stand so that he could observe how blacks get along in the South. Williams at once notices that Griffin has light hair on his hands, an oversight on Griffin's part, and tells him that he must cut it off before anyone notices. Williams also tells Griffin that he is dressed too well to be a shine boy. When Griffin asks Williams to tell him what he does wrong, Williams says, "You just watch me and listen how I talk" (27).

Under Williams, Griffin is made aware of nuances of black life that he could not have known otherwise. While working at the shine stand, Griffin discovers that most whites either treat blacks as if they have no moral standards whatsoever, or they are completely indifferent to blacks as human beings. Not only does his short time with Williams shine a light on what he is unaware of about his blackness and how whites interact with it, it also shines light on the concerns of everyday black life. When Griffin asks where he could get something to drink, Williams responds, "You've got to plan ahead now. You can't just walk in anyplace and ask for a drink or use the restroom" (28). Something that seems trivial to Griffin as a white man proves almost monumental to him as a black man. But, perhaps Sterling Williams' greatest contribution as the Wise Old Man to Griffin's journey is showing him the story in *The Louisiana Weekly* of Mack Parker of Poplarville, Mississippi. Mack Parker was accused of a crime and "deprived of a fair trial, kidnapped and murdered by a lynch mob from a Mississippi jail" (49). After reading the editorial page of this Negro newspaper and seeing the flagrant abuse of justice that Mississippi practices on its black citizens, Griffin writes, "I decided it was time to go into that state so dreaded by Negroes" (50). Even though Sterling Williams tries to talk him out of going, he still acts as the catalyst for Griffin's decision to go. Williams gives Griffin his start in the black community, tells him what to look out for and what to be careful of, and guides him in the direction of the next phase of his journey.

When he boards the Greyhound bus headed for Mississippi, Griffin

encounters a second Wise Old Man, this time in Bill Williams. Bill Williams, a truck driver, at first gives Griffin ease after a rude, loud passenger, Christophe, leaves the bus. Acting as another guide and teacher, Bill Williams instructs Griffin on the do's and don'ts while staying in Mississippi. He explains, "If you're not used to things in Mississippi, you'll have to watch yourself pretty close till you catch on" (60). When Griffin asks for specifics, Williams continues, "Well, you know you don't want to even look at a white woman. In fact, you look down at the ground or the other way. . . . If you pass by a picture show, and they've got women on the posters outside, don't look at them either" (60). He also tells Griffin to stay away from dark alleys since he is so well dressed, and if white boys called out to him that he was to keep walking. But, Bill Williams' guidance does not stop at instructing Griffin on survival tactics, he also helps him witness the racist landscape that makes up Poplarville, Mississippi, the place where Mack Parker was lynched. As the bus pulls through Poplarville, Bill acts as Griffin's tour guide, telling him, "That's the jail where they snatched him. They went up to his cell . . . and grabbed his feet and dragged him down so his head bumped against each stairstep" (63-64). He also points out the courthouse where the white jurors refused to convict the guilty mob, and the creek where Parker's tortured body was fished. This unofficial tour of Poplarville exposes Griffin to the ugly side of the otherwise beautiful town. Griffin is not only shown the sites, but, through Bill Williams, he gets to see these sites by someone who has a deep connection to the land itself. Because Mississippi is so dangerous, Williams provides Griffin with the names of "good" people that will make sure he is safe during his stay. With the help of this Wise Old Man, Griffin is able to maneuver through perilous and unpredictable territory.

Griffin finds that he needs help and guidance from yet another Wise Old Man once he settles in Mississippi. Before arriving, he is barraged by a number of unprovoked incidents that stem from the hatred of his black skin. He had received the "hate stare" from a young white girl who refused to cash his traveler's checks (67). His money is hurled at him as he buys his bus ticket to Mississippi. He receives the hate stare once more as he tries to find somewhere to wait for the bus. He and other passengers are humiliated by the bus driver as they are forced to stay on the bus and denied visits to the restrooms. And, once in Mississippi, fruit is hurled at him by a group of white boys riding in a truck.

All of this, coupled with the sadness and fright of what happened to Mack Parker, causes Griffin to seek refuge in a friend, P. D. East, a liberal newspaper editor. P. D. East, Griffin's next Wise Old Man, a strong advocate for racial equality, is ostracized by the white community and lives under the constant threat of violence from hate groups. East takes Griffin from his black world and brings him to his home.

But, this is not the only help that East provides. He allows Griffin to read the manuscript for his autobiography, *The Magnolia Jungle*. While reading about his friend's awakening to racial injustice, another aspect of his own enlightenment becomes clear. East writes about how whites are hurting themselves by denying Negroes freedom. He also writes about his call for fairness as whites used laws to further toughen the plight of blacks. Upon reading East's autobiography, Griffin

realizes that among racist “the most obscene figures are not the ignorant ranting racists, but the legal minds who front for them, who ‘invent’ for them legislative proposals and the propaganda bulletins. They deliberately choose to foster distortions, always under the guise of patriotism, upon a people who have no means of checking the facts” (77-78). After opening Griffin to the true, cruel and most insidious aspects of racism, East takes him away from Mississippi, and back to New Orleans where it is safe.

## **The Shadow**

Of the archetypes that appear throughout Griffin’s journey, perhaps the Shadow is the most significant. The Shadow represents the rejected and repressed part of a person that is hidden because it is deemed as ugly and undesirable. The Shadow represents what is considered the inferior parts of the personality. Jung believed that everyone carries a shadow. With that, the collective conscious of a nation of people may carry a shadow as well. With consideration of the racial climate in the United States in 1959, one could conclude that blacks represented America’s shadow. Blacks were rejected and stifled, labeled as ugly and undesirable and thought of as, and treated as, inferior in America. These assumed inherited flaws were used as justification to keep blacks marginalized in society. All of America’s ugly and unappealing traits were assigned to its black citizens. In dreams, the Shadow may appear as a bully, a beggar, an animal, or anything representing a figure of low-status. By extension, in *Black Like Me* the Shadow is represented by the image of the black man. Within the context of the book, and within the context of history, blacks were figures of lower status. In *The Fire Next Time* (1962), James Baldwin writes, “You [blacks] were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being. You were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to make peace with mediocrity” (7). Baldwin’s description of the supposed fate of blacks correctly characterizes the lives of millions who were expected to live within the shadows of American democracy. Griffin’s transformation into a black man is his attempt to explore the shadow aspects of his own personality, and simultaneously, to explore the shadow aspect of American society. In “Depth Psychology and a New Ethic,” Jung explains, “A conflict of duty forces us to examine our conscience and thereby to discover the shadow” (1969, 620).

The creation of blacks as the Shadow of American society is a result of projection. Jung wrote that the shadow can be assimilated into the conscious personality to some extent, and because of this, certain features prove to be resistant to influence. This resistance can be bound up with projections. Jung defined projection as the unconscious transfer of subjective elements onto an outer object. In *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, Jung writes that “projections change the world into the replica of one’s own unknown face” (1951,146). The characteristics attributed to blacks were founded on untruths, yet many whites believed these lies and passed them on through generations. These

untruths were merely projected qualities that whites unconsciously deemed undesirable within themselves. In “Archaic Man” (1951), Jung writes:

We still attribute to the fellow all evil and inferior qualities that we do not like to recognize in ourselves, and therefore have to criticize and attack him, when all that has happened is that inferior ‘soul’ has emigrated from one person to another. The world is still full of *bêtes noires* and scapegoats, just as it formerly teemed with witches and werewolves. (65)

In the American paradigm, the scapegoats, witches, and werewolves that Jung refers to are equated to and projected onto blacks.

In *Black Like Me*, whites certainly project ideas of inferiority and worthlessness onto blacks, but, more specifically, Griffin documents time and time again whites’ sexually deviant ideas and behaviors that are projected onto blacks. While working at Sterling Williams’ shoeshine stand, Griffin notices that whites did not consider that blacks have a sense of morality or code of decency and would often solicit Williams and himself for instructions as to how or where to find black women for sex. Williams says about the jovial behavior of such men, “Yeah, when they [whites] want to sin, they’re very democratic” (30). While hitchhiking in Biloxi, Mississippi, Griffin has a string of encounters with white men who are chiefly concerned with black sexuality. Cornell West, in his 1993 book, *Race Matters*, states, “Americans are obsessed with sex and fearful of black sexuality” (119). Since fear is a repressed emotion, it is clear to see how this repressed material is forced on blacks and manifests itself through forms of myths, assumptions, and stereotypes. Griffin writes, “All but two [whites] picked me up the way they would pick up a pornographic photograph or book – except that this was verbal pornography” (85). Griffin is probed about his own sexual habits, and even asked to expose himself by one of the drivers. One of the drivers says, “Well, you people [blacks] don’t seem to have the inhibitions we have. We’re all basically puritans” (87).

Despite the obvious contradictions from the position of the southern white men who screamed about the horrors of what they often described as miscegenation, it is clear through the actions of these whites that they possessed repressed sexual desires. Those repressed sexual desires and fantasies were, in turn, projected onto the black man and the black woman. Anxieties about penis size are projected onto the black man, and the myth of the oversized penis are conceived. Anxieties about monogamy are projected onto the black man and woman, and the image of the black stud and Sapphire are born. Anxieties about discretion promoted whites to believe that blacks have deviant sexual habits, have numerous sexual partners, have sex in public places, and have sex in front of various people – including children.

However, the Shadow in this context does not solely exist in reference to whites projecting undesirable traits to blacks. In addition to the “black shadow,” there exists another – a “white shadow.” Indeed, blacks were the proverbial poster children for the inferior aspects of the American personality; however, despite the scapegoating of blacks, aspects of the white shadow were apparent for various

reasons. In *Psychology and Religion* (1938), Jung explains:

Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is. If an inferiority is conscious, one always has a chance to correct it. Furthermore, it is constantly in contact with interests, so that it is continually subjected to modifications. But if it is repressed and isolated from consciousness, it is never corrected. (131)

In Griffin's world, the white persona sees itself as superior. By seeing itself this way, the individual conscious becomes disembodied from the shadow, therefore nothing is resolved. For example, many characters in the book comment about how the state of Mississippi boasts of the harmonious relationship it has with its black residents. But, Mississippi represses information about the true state of affairs with its Negro population, and therefore has no way of confronting its problems – because its shadow is ignored. The state of Mississippi, and the nation as a whole, is a good example of how systematic acts of violence occur. In *On the Psychology of the Unconscious*, Jung exclaims that an individual with his shadow is relatively harmless, “But let these harmless creatures form a mass, and there emerges a raging monster's body, so that for better or worse he must accompany it on its bloody rampages and assist it to the utmost” (1912, 35). By denying that he has a shadow, an individual white man is in danger of becoming part of the masses that hunt for innocent blood. In dreams, the shadow can be a rapist like the white man who gives Griffin a ride and describes how sexual assault on black women in his state is a common occurrence. The shadow can present itself as a murderer, like the mob that dragged Mack Parker from his jail cell and lynched him. Indeed, mob violence was a consistent weapon used to terrorize blacks while solidifying their place as second-class citizens. Jung discusses the destructive nature of normalized mass violence in *The Postwar Psychic Problems of the Germans*, in reference to the heinous crimes committed against the Jewish people by the Nazis. Surely, mob violence in America, with its ritualized, ceremonial lynching's, where blacks were burned and dismembered, and their body parts taken for souvenirs, can be compared to the barbarity of Hitler and his army.

The appearance of the Shadow in a dream forces the dreamer to confront things that he may be trying to avoid in his conscious state. Therefore, the appearance of the Shadow might cause someone to be angry or scared. When Griffin becomes aware of his own shadow, he learns things about himself that he could not have known before, and consequently, he forces his readers to examine and learn things about themselves that they do not care to discover. Griffin's journey through the South as a black man is an attempt to cast light on the black shadow of America; however, his journey also casts light on the white shadow. Besides what is projected on the black citizens of this country, the white racist psyche possesses, within itself, an ugly, inferior, violent, unappealing shadow that it chooses not to confront. In *Aion*, Jung states:

The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality,

for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self knowledge. (1951, 14)

The lack of self-knowledge by the larger American society is attributed to its belief in its own superiority. Because of its perceived god-like qualities, American society lacks the ability to recognize fault within itself. When forced to acknowledge these dark aspects of its personality, the white ego acts with violence and discrimination. In *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin writes, “Well, the black man has functioned in the white man’s world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations” (9). Baldwin’s assessment is evident each time white assumptions about inferiority are tested.

When Griffin’s friend, P.D. East, starts to fashion his newspaper around a platform of “fairness,” he loses sponsors and advertisers. Further, he is alienated by his friends, ostracized by the community, and threatened by hate mongers. All this occurs once he realizes that he was “prostituting his conscious,” and confronts his own shadow (74). But, Griffin also faces the consequences for shining light on the shadow. After his return into the white world, his subsequent publication in *Sepia* magazine, and interviews with a Hollywood talk show and *Time* magazine, Griffin begins to see the bitter, repulsive and violent side of white society that was reserved for people of its own racial group who pick up the cause of racial equality. He discovers the white shadow.

As a part of white society, Griffin, and other whites, is treated with warmth and brotherhood by his peers as long as he does not do anything to disturb racial harmony. Now, the part of white society that is otherwise repressed, is unleashed to protect aspects of the white persona. Jung writes in “Good and Evil in Analytical Psychology,” that, “Anyone who perceives his shadow and his light simultaneously sees himself from two sides and thus gets in the middle” (1960, 463). With his publications and interviews, Griffin confronts the white psyche with one aspect of its shadow; bothered by seeing itself from both sides, another aspect of the shadow is uncovered and retaliates. After the *Time* article hits newsstands, and the interview with Mike Wallace, Griffin and his family can no longer leave the house and be sure of their safety. He cannot enter into stores and cafes in his town, and eventually his likeness is hanged in Mansfield, Texas.

Interestingly, by confronting his own shadow, and attempting to recognize the dark aspects of his personality and the dark aspects of the personality of the American South, Griffin is treated like the shadow he sought to explore. Much like the black population, he is marginalized and restricted to certain areas, he is not allowed to enter white stores and cafes, and he is threatened with the same sort of violence that was used to instill fear in blacks – lynching. In *Psychology and Religion*, Jung explains, “If you imagine someone who is brave enough to withdraw all these projections, then you get an individual who is conscious of a pretty thick shadow. Such a man has saddled himself with new problems and conflicts” (1938, 83). By withdrawing his projections, and attempting to force

America to do the same, Griffin finds himself with problems that he was not required to face before. However, Jung continues by saying that this individual has done “something real for the world” (83).

When Griffin decides to go into oblivion, he consciously decides to explore unconscious elements of himself, and of American society. While on this dream journey through the collective unconscious, he meets and becomes the archetypes of his psyche in order to become fully aware of all aspects of his and America’s personality. Through his transformation, Griffin is able to exemplify the four functions of the ego in an attempt to explore and reconcile America’s racial binaries. His embodiment of the subject allows him to experience the black persona while becoming more aware of his own white persona. His need for direction brings him The Wise Old Men who light his path. And, most importantly, his journey into the repressed parts of himself and the nation uncover many different aspects of the Shadow. Ultimately, Griffin cannot bear the burden of the Shadow, and he leaves the country to seek refuge – or, he decides to wake up from his dream turned nightmare. Still, his attempt to find the Shadow opens the eyes of some, even if reluctantly. Jung, in *Psychological Approach to the Dogma of the Trinity*, states, “Good does not become better by being exaggerated, but worse, and a small evil becomes a big one through being disregarded and repressed. The shadow is very much a part of human nature, and it is only at night that no shadow exist” (1942, 286).

Griffin’s *Black Like Me* was published in 1960, and even by conservative estimates America has come a long way in terms of racial equality. Just shortly after the publication of *Black Like Me*, the country experienced the modern Civil Rights Movement that fostered the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and less than 50 years later elected a black president. However, through a close study of race in this country it would be almost impossible to suggest that America has arrived at full racial inequality. Despite some peoples’ premature declaration that this is a post racial America, many of the issues that Griffin set out to explore are still present today. Hate crimes have been on the rise according to the FBI, hateful speech and white nationalists have become mainstream, hateful rhetoric is again considered normalized – even at presidential political rallies.

To many Americans born of generations since Griffin’s experiment, the blatant racism of today is something that they have only read about in history books and seen in black and white film footage. There could be considerable time and space dedicated to why the tone of racial hatred is reminiscent of 1960, however, this has not been the focus of this study. What remains relevant is the existence and persistence of the Shadow. Because of the civility that has existed in American culture for the past few decades, many Americans may have been lulled into believing that racial hatred had nearly been eradicated. Outward expressions of racial hatred had surely been rejected and repressed in American culture. The vulgar racist aspect of the American persona had been deemed ugly and undesirable. However, “. . . the shadow is a moral problem. . .”, not a visual one, and the thin veneer of civility in America that has been used to cover many of its citizens racial animus is being pulled back.

In “Psychology and Religion,” Jung writes, “. . . but nothing could explode in us if it had not been there” (1945, 25). To an extent, John Howard Griffin’s action to disguise himself as a black man and travel the Jim Crow South is courageous. In doing so, he confronts his own Shadow. However, his attempt to force racist white Americans to confront their collective Shadow is unsuccessful. In “Good and Evil in Analytical Psychology,” Jung writes:

To confront a person with his shadow is to show him his own light. Once one has experienced a few times what it is like to stand judgmentally between the opposites, one begins to understand what is meant by the self. Anyone who perceives his shadow and his light simultaneously sees himself from two sides and thus gets in the middle. (1959, 852)

Griffin puts himself in the middle, and he suffers the consequences of being between two opposites. In many ways, the racialized American Shadow that Griffin sought to confront still exists today.

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