

English 390

In-class exercise

April 4, 2006

Relational Groups in James Baldwin's *Another Country*

Each group of two students will be assigned a different “relational group” composed of characters from the novel (e.g. Ida-Vivaldo, Rufus-Eric, Cass-Eric-Richard). You are asked to sort out the dynamics of the group as represented by Baldwin using the questions below as guidelines. Afterwards, talk to the class about what you have discovered.

1. Describe the dynamics of the group. What kind of trajectories of desire, identification, envy, attraction, repulsion, curiosity, contempt, interest, revenge, domination, etc., structure the dynamics? How do categories of identity (sexual /gender / racial / class / regional or national) structure the dynamic? In what ways are such categories adequate or inadequate to account for what is going on in your group?
2. What external contexts are relevant for the group? Think in terms of location, social networks, other relevant people, affiliations, ideology, time period., etc. How do these external frameworks structure what is going on within the group? Does the grouping fit into social expectations/frameworks or resist them? How so?
3. Pick a passage that is relevant for understanding your group and do a close reading of it. What is going on in this passage? Why does Baldwin write it the way he does? What does he emphasize, question, or undermine and how?