

Baldwin V. Buckley: The Debate of the American Dream

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Individual Website

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While I was choosing what topic I would do, I decided to research civil rights activists due to my passionate interest in the civil rights movement. Most activists I had already known, such as Martin Luther King and Charles Moore, but I had never done a project on James Baldwin. Therefore, I became interested in the Baldwin V. Buckley debate. Furthermore, I was interested in researching a debate where two people with polar views clash, giving a good depiction of the beliefs of the rising conservative movement while providing a stark contrast to a passionate civil rights activist.

I studied James Baldwin and William F. Buckley, their backgrounds, the debate, and the aftermath. I read books such as “Notes of a Native Son” and “Miles Gone By” by James Baldwin and Buckley, respectively, about their upbringing and their beliefs. I watched the debate, provided by AEON. Lastly, I researched the diplomatic careers of Baldwin and Buckley through the book, “The Fire Is Upon Us” by Nicholas Buccola. The most valuable sources I used were the debate recording itself for analysis purposes and “The Fire is Upon Us,” for interpretations of the debate and its aftermath by another expert. While I watched the debate recording, I wrote down key phrases and speech. Later, I interpreted that Baldwin was communicating the social alienation African-Americans faced in America to the world, while Buckley wanted the Black community to be satisfied with the pinnacles of American society. The most difficult part of my research was finding the reasons behind Buckley’s belief changes, turning from an inhumane racist to a sympathetic supporter of the civil rights movement, due to the limited resources available on Buckley’s life. However, I was soon able to infer enough information from the sources available to understand these changes.

During my research of the debate, I perused Baldwin and Buckley’s books as well as the debate. To best convey the major research, I needed a medium that could allow me to integrate video clips, quotes, text, and photographs. Therefore, the appropriate choice was a website.

Baldwin contributed to the civil rights movement through his speech in the debate. His messages of the repercussions of white supremacy and racism resonated among fellow Americans as well as the undergraduates present at the debate, garnering more support and national attention to the civil rights movement. His ensuing cultural diplomacy in the form of literature emphasizes his belief that though African-Americans have obeyed the American flag, the flag has not bowed down to them. Buckley has a change of heart in his beliefs and he became increasingly sympathetic to the civil rights movement. As another cultural diplomat, he began to write columns supporting civil rights protests while condemning white supremacists that interfered with the protests. Both Buckley and Baldwin debated if the well-being of the African-Americans was sacrificed to fulfill the American Dream and then contributed to the bettering of society through diplomacy, progressing the American dream.