Front Matter

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Introduction

Eleanor Traylor asserts that the "blues vision" is the vision of modernity, just as the tragic vision was the vision of antiquity. In the tragic tradition, the protagonist ends up mad, blind, castrated, or dead. In the blues tradition, the protagonist descends into his pain, claims it and whatever lessons it holds, and then ascends to live again.

Stated another way, if Oedipus and his mother/wife had been contemporary blacks, she would not have hanged herself and he certainly would not have blinded himself. (Lord knows there are already enough blind blues singers.) Instead, he would have composed a foot-thumping (no pun intended), head-shaking refrain. Then son/husband and mother/wife would have cried and laughed about life's ironies, bought each other drinks, and gone on about their business—the business of living.

Similarly, in spite of the assassination of Maurice Bishop and the rape of Grenada, Grenada's peoples and poets, presented here by Franklin Knight and Roberto Marquez, still sing and prophesy. The blues tradition demands it. There is no end. Setbacks, yes. Even death. But no end to the imperative to go on living, in spite of. . . .

Of course, no one articulates the blues vision better than our own prophet laureate, James Baldwin. Reprinted here, with the author's permission, is Baldwin's text from a book of photographs by Richard Avedon, Nothing Personal (Lucerne, Switzerland: C. H. Bucher, 1964).

This entire issue of Contributions is dedicated to the vision, life, and work of Mr. Baldwin in this, his sixtieth year.

Charles Frye, Editor
August 1984