

No fuss. No bother. Eliminate dirty smudges on the fingertips, broken nails, and messy erasure marks. You don't need to revise, rethink, or rewrite. You don't even need to write. Just think of it, folks: No more blood-shot eyes, or coffee bowels, or angry friends you've stood up to work just a little longer, harder, more. Sealed inside your own angry mortal human vacuum, to be just as fatuous as Margaret Mead and James Baldwin about the crisis of our time—particularly race—all you have to do is talk and not listen, always avoid expressing your feelings openly, refer constantly to other times and other cultures with historical and/or pseudo-historical truths, interrupt whenever possible, call yourself a prophet or a poet, insist that you are being emotionally sincere and/or objectively rational, and record it all on tape, to be transcribed later as a book.

You may perorate endlessly: "Well, I wonder. Perhaps it's a very bizarre wonder, but I can't get myself into the head of, let us say—we're speaking in such horrible generalities, speaking of white and black people." And the reader will be sure to note that your Tristram Shandy-esque syntax denotes sincerity. Or you can declare abruptly: "Of course, George Washington didn't have any children, fortunately." And the reader will observe this sudden rude intrusion of pseudo-mythical truth as a sign of profundity.

Announce that "love is the only wisdom." Assert such "in the name of your ancestors." Denounce any and all assertions of "racial guilt." Speak out fearlessly against the plight of Chicanos, Filipinos, Sephardic Jews of Israel. Presto! You're off the hook. You've got a book. You haven't had to say anything at all, and it will probably sell fairly well. This is called instantaneous wisdom, although

some may call it "A Rap on Race."

Basically, it will be the same old bilge you've heard from the fellow on the next stool to you in the saloon who turns abruptly and says, "Honestly babe, I think you're beautiful, a beautiful guy. Do you know what else I think? Three to one Israel beats them Arabs any day in the week."

Thus history will record the moment Baldwin said to Margaret Mead: "The point of being a man is being a man." To which she replied, with startling tautological ease, "In the South an essential element in the identity of each race was that they weren't the other." What did they say? It sure sounded like something or other.

*Caution:* You must either be a world-famous white liberal anthropologist, or a brilliant black writer, or else there isn't much of an audience for this sort of thing except among your friends, or in taverns and bars where people generally call it baloney. But wisdom and baloney are as blither is to blather; here and there ideas are speckled like pieces of fat in a slab of Hebrew National, though most of it is pretty bland, chewy stuff. We're all capable of it, but only some of us ever bother to publish it. It's akin to prose, but does not necessarily contain any insights. You get together and then what? If you're famous and supposedly wise its always a good idea to have a tape recorder in the room. Never can tell when you might spew out a line or two worth printing somewhere.

With their tape recorder, Margaret Mead and James Baldwin got together one steamy night last August. They had long admired each other. They had a mutual friend. So first they ate dinner and then they went blah blah blah in front of the recorder late into that night and then again the next day—about New Guinea, South Africa, Women's Lib, the South, slavery, Christianity, their early childhood upbringing, Israel, the Arabs. (Continued on Page 14)

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the bomb, Paris, Istanbul, the English language, Huey Newton, John Wayne, the black bourgeoisie, Baldwin's 2-year-old grand nephew and Professor Mead's daughter.

"We've got to be as clear-headed about human beings as possible," he said to her, poignantly enough, at one point, "because we are still each other's only hope." But, eventually, they got so angry and muddled that he was being accused of mouthing anti-Semitic nonsense and, as a final quid pro quo, he lumped her among his potential enemies and victimizers. Rather smugly, the anthropologist had said she could not possibly be a racist because of her impeccable upbringing and because she had once or twice coddled babies in Africa, Samoa, West Irian. Baldwin countered by asking how could he be an anti-Semite since one of his best friends was Jewish.

I couldn't help wondering if the very concept of anthropology wasn't, *au fond*, racist in that the West Irians seemed to have little or no interest until recent times in sending people here to study our quaint marriage and divorce customs. But then, I also wondered how a man as sensitive and intelligent as Baldwin could have allowed himself to say things such as: "I spent a fortune calling, fortunes and fortunes and fortunes, calling up New York from Paris or wherever I was whenever niggers were in the streets."

Margaret Mead and James Baldwin both agreed that touch is a necessity in human communications, but there is no record from this transcript that they ever did. Nor do we get any idea of what their feelings toward each other really were from tone of voice, or facial expression, or what they did with their hands and feet. On television, maybe Professor Mead can explain, from a social scientist's perspective, what she meant by her remark that "When the Irish get angry they're in love," and, of course, provide the necessary data; and I would also like to see Baldwin live up to his compassionate boast that he can "dance and sing as well as the Yemenites do. And pay the same price for it."

In the meantime, though, this sort of thing, if obviously impassioned, well-intentioned, and not always wrong-headed, is still not much more than a cut above the sort of thing that most blacks and whites are saying to each other now that we're all supposedly getting together. It may be a little bit more uptight, as Baldwin had

the humanity to admit at one point when he said: "Let me tell you something else. I think I do realize some things about other people. Maybe what I realize is more bitter than I would like it to be. I realize that. I was thinking about it all day long, and when this rather terrifying show is over, I'll come and have a drink with you without any microphones or anything, because I want us to be friends and you know I mean that."

Better luck next time, Professor Mead and Mr. Baldwin. For the rest of us, I think we better start talking to each other and stop listening to wise men and women among us except when they deign to write down what they have to say in novels and plays and poems and essays and, yes, then revise, if necessary. ■