**Stranger in The Village**

"Stranger in the Village" is an essay by African American novelist James Baldwin about his experiences in a small village in Switzerland. The essay was first published in Harper's Magazine in October 1953, and later in “Notes of a Native Son” that is a collection of ten essays by James Baldwin, published by Beacon Press on November 21, 1955. In this strong essay, Baldwin escribes his experience on how race, contributes to outsider or stranger status in a community.

He starts his essay by “From all available evidence no black man had ever set foot in this tiny Swiss village before I came. “. He chose to start his essay with this sentence to let readers know that his experience in this remote village is one of absolute isolation. James Baldwin explains in detail about the village geographical location, and very few attractions, churches, and places that the village offers. He continues by saying “The village's only real attraction, which explains the tourist season, is the hot spring water. A disquietingly high proportion of these tourists are cripples, or semi- cripples, who come year after year-from other parts of Switzerland, usually-to take the waters.” He uses the terms “the only attraction” and “cripple tourists” to emphasis on how isolated and remote the village is with minimum community services that makes it not very attractive for tourists. He therefore makes a conclusion that he is the only Black person the villagers have ever seen thus making him a stranger in the village.

James Baldwin continues by “Now it is winter again, a year later, and I am here again. Everyone in the village knows my name, though they scarcely ever use it, knows that I come from America though, this, apparently, they will never really believe black men come from Africa”. He uses “again” twice in one sentence to tell readers that he is not expecting to be treated as a stranger in the village, but the villagers treat him not only as a “stranger,” but as someone who is not even human. He starts his idea about a systematic racism by saying “I remain as much a stranger today as I was the first day I arrived, and the children shout Neger! Neger! as I walk along the street” he continues by talking about children curiosity about his physical features such as his hair and skin color “… put his fingers on my hair, as though he were afraid of an electric shock, or put his hand on my hand, astonished that the color did not rub off. “

“There is a custom in the village- I am told it is repeated in many villages- of buying African natives for the purpose of converting them to Christianity.” The villagers donate money to the [church](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/notes-of-a-native-son/symbols/the-church) to “buy” Africans and convert them to Christianity. The wife of a bistro owner happily tells [Baldwin](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/notes-of-a-native-son/characters/james-baldwin) that last year the village bought 6-8 Africans. These are a few examples that James Baldwin uses to support his idea about the racism with no shame among villagers. He compares the way that Africans treat the first white people who go to Africa maybe as missionaries with the way he is being treated in this village. “The astonishment, with which I might have greeted them, should they have stumbled into my African village a few hundred years ago, might have rejoiced their hearts. But the astonishment with which they greet me today can only poison mine.”. Baldwin uses this comparison to tell readers about white supremacy and how different it is to be a lonely black among white people. Baldwin also argues that there is more continuity between Europe and America than many believe, and that American principles and ideas did not originate in the States, but in Europe. The most important of these principles is, of course, white supremacy. Baldwin’s essay is full of examples that supports the systematic racism among European in a small village and he connects this to law of segregation in the US. I believe this essay has a very clear message for every reader, no matter white or black, and that is the existence of an accepted and supported racism in Europe and US not long time ago. Baldwin, to my opinion should be called a human right activist even based on this single essay.