Introduction

Who has the authority to constitute authentic identity and mark the boundaries between insiders and outsiders? What is at stake in the process of negotiating identity? Who benefits and who is maligned? These questions understand identity as a mutable construct of negotiations rather than a pure essence, and follow Shirley Anne Tate’s interpretation of Stuart Hall: “Identities . . . are positionings that are constantly being transformed. As such, they are never complete as ideas, world-views and material forces interact with each other and are reworked.”¹ These questions are important for the Letter of James because James, from beginning to end, is a complex negotiation of Judean identity that confronts both Roman imperialism and Pauline hybridity. The main body of the letter (2:1—5:6) fluctuates between anti-imperial polemic (2:1–13, 3:13–18, and 5:1–6) and anti-Pauline polemic (2:14–26, 3:1–12, 4:1–12, and

4:13–17) as a means to construct the boundary around authentic Judean identity within the early Jesus movement. Identity for James is determined by purity and perfection in contrast to impurity and double-mindedness or two-facedness. The only thing worse than the Roman “world” is anyone who would transgress the pure and perfect boundary that exists between the empire of God and Rome. James calls these boundary crossers “whores,” “two-faced,” and “transgressors” or “sinners” (4:4, 8).

**James, Nativism, and Postcolonial Biblical Studies**

James’s concentration on an essentialist identity characterized by purity functions as “an organizing principle within a politics of resistance” akin to the Negritude movement inaugurated by Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor, and Léon Damas. Negritude as a nativist movement from “below” provided a space and place for those in the African Diaspora, like Césaire, to claim human dignity as a minority living in a European center such as Paris, and to speak back to the center from within an antiracist movement. I do not propose a perfect parallel between James’s nativism and negritude, but reading the Letter of James as nativist discourse provides a helpful vocabulary for describing the letter’s anti-imperial and antihybrid or antiassimilationist stance, especially in relation to identity negotiation. The postcolonial critique of nativism in general and negritude in particular is also instructive because it shows the vast discrepancies between theories of hybridity and cultural purity. By engaging such cultural theory, the antagonism between James as a cultural purist and Paul as a cultural hybrid becomes clear. James’s nativist negotiation against empire (“the world”) places him at odds with Pauline hybridity (“double-minded”/“two-faced”).

2. Tate, *Black Skins, Black Masks*, 71.
The first part of this book concentrates on nativism as a heuristic tool and offers an analysis of James 1, which begins to construct the native. Chapter 2, which begins this work in earnest, is devoted to an extended definition of nativism and provides a rationale for using such a concept as a lens to read the Letter of James. After defining nativism and answering the question, why use nativism as a lens? I turn to first-century CE Judeanness and focus on what constitutes this as an identity. Who is negotiating Judeanness within Palestine, and how did that differ from negotiating Judeanness within the Diaspora? The Letter of James functions as a form of Judean nativism within Roman Palestine but projects that nativism onto the Diaspora.

Pure and perfect piety is central to James’s nativist discourse, which is the controlling topic in chapter 3. Here, I analyze the first chapter of James and pay close attention to the center/margin power dynamic at work within the short, but vitally important, greeting (1:1). At this juncture in the analysis of James 1:1, I agree with many modern commentators on the Letter of James and argue for an early dating of the letter and authentic authorship, which places the letter firmly in Jerusalem. From this standpoint, the Letter of James functions as an official letter from Jerusalem to the Diaspora, or Diasporabriefe. It is from this place of authority as the leader of the Jesus movement that James calls for purity and perfection.

In part 2, I follow James’s argument in the main body of the letter as he confronts Roman imperialism and Pauline hybridity. Chapter 4 focuses on the anti-imperial passages in James 2:1-13, 5:1-6, and 3:13-18. Since I sense a chiastic structure in James and consider 3:13-18 to be its fulcrum, I exegete it last. In these three pericopae, James confronts: 1) Greco-Roman patronage with God’s partiality for the poor (2:1-7) and the Law of God’s empire (2:8-13); 2) wealthy landownership that reflected Roman elitism (5:1-6); and 3) “worldly, unspiritual, and evil” wisdom with “wisdom from above”
that is “pure” (3:13-18). Here, James divides the universe between the “world” and “God”—“the world” being the Roman world.

In chapters 5 and 6, I exegete the anti-Pauline passages 2:14-26, 3:1-12, 4:1-12, and 4:13-17 after considering a “postcolonial” Paul. I try to emphasize the reasons why James would be anti-Pauline without making these two chapters entirely about Paul. I briefly overview the writings of the New Testament that detail the encounter(s) between James and Paul (Galatians and Acts) and focus on modern scholarship that emphasizes Paul’s hybridity in an attempt to produce a postcolonial understanding of Pauline identity. It is through this lens that I read the faith/works binary in the Letter of James as a confrontation against hybridity. James’s movement from action to speech in 3:1-12 censures the hybrid teacher whose tongue is like a spring that “pours forth from the same opening both fresh and salty water” (3:12).

Chapter 6 concentrates on the most aggressive argument against hybridity in the Letter of James (4:1-12) and on James’s critique of Pauline itineraries. The either/or of “friendship with the world”/“friendship with God” gives James the rhetorical force to call Judean/Roman hybrids “whores” (4:4), “double-minded”/“two-faced” (4:8), and “transgressors” (4:8). Indicative of this kind of friendship with the world is the arrogance and boasting that accompanies (Paul’s) travel itineraries. Here, James uses Pauline vocabulary to criticize his missionary activity. Although I understand these four pericopae as anti-Pauline, I do not think that James had any knowledge of Paul’s letters. Because of the early dating of James, his critique of Paul must be due to the messages that James received about Paul’s preaching and/or the personal encounters between the two—as we see from Paul’s perspective in Galatians.
Situating a Postcolonial Reading within Current Scholarship on James

I will briefly situate my reading of James within current scholarship on James; although a more thorough analysis of each issue will follow in the later chapters when these issues are addressed specifically. The primary issues related to the Letter of James for the past thirty years have been dating, authorship, structure, and literary relationship. There continues to be great diversity of opinion on each of these problems, but recently there has been a movement toward a traditional reading that argues for authentic authorship and an early date with a coherent structure that is not dependent on or antagonistic to the Pauline corpus. Each of these items is in direct contradiction to Martin Dibelius’s groundbreaking commentary on the Letter of James from 1921. Dibelius systematically unbraided the traditional view on James, which affirmed authorial authenticity and an early date. Dibelius argued that James was written in the early second century CE (anywhere between 80 and 130 CE) and was pseudonymous. In addition to this shift, Dibelius saw no organized structure to the letter, which evidenced the fact that the composition was paranetic in nature. “What one finds,” argues Dibelius, “is paraenesis in the form of unconnected sayings which have no real relationship to one another. . . . By paraenesis we mean a text which strings together admonitions of general ethical content.”


4. Dibelius dates James after Paul’s writings and before Jude; see *James*, 45–46. This late dating provides him evidence for pseudonymity; although, the obvious referent for James is the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem Church: “Our sources know only one person of reputation in primitive Christianity who could have been suggested by the way in which his name appears in the prescript of our letter: James, the brother of Jesus.” 12. For his extended analysis on pseudonymity, see Dibelius, *James*, 17–21.

Dibelius, “the entire document lacks continuity in thought.” With such a strong view on the lack of structure in James, it is surprising that Dibelius spills so much ink dealing with the issue of literary influence. Specifically, he contends that James’s relationship with Pauline writings is important; however, the two authors do not directly influence one another literarily. In other words, James is refuting a misunderstanding of Pauline thought regarding faith and works but not dealing with Paul’s writings themselves: “For though the section in Jas 2:14–26 seems to me to presuppose an acquaintance with definite Pauline slogans, it also demonstrates precisely the fact that any penetrating reading of the letters of Paul upon the part of James is out of the question.”

Since Dibelius’s commentary, most of his arguments have been challenged, but nearly all historical-critical commentaries written on James after Dibelius use him as their reference point. His dominance is only accentuated when reviewing modern German commentaries and works on James. Luke Timothy Johnson’s commentary, however, can be credited with changing scholarly opinion about most of Dibelius’s theses. Johnson’s commentary represents a total

6. Ibid., 2.
7. See Dibelius, James, 26–34, for his full analysis of the literary relationship.
8. Dibelius, James, 29.
9. See Manabu Tsuji, Glaube zwischen Vollkommenheit und Verweltlichung: Eine Untersuchung zur literarischen Gestalt und zur inhaltlichen Kohärenz des Jakobusbriefes (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997); Christoph Burchard, Der Jakobusbrief, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 15, no. 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); and Gerhard Maier, Der Brief des Jakobus, Historische Theologische Auslegung (Markgröningen: R. Brockhaus Verlag Wuppertal, 2004) for examples of how Dibelius continues to impact German scholarship on James. Tsuji continually references Dibelius in order to combat Dibelius’s refutation of structure in James. In his work, Tsuji goes to great length to show how succinctly organized James is contra Dibelius.
10. Luke Timothy Johnson, The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, Anchor Bible, 37A (New York: Doubleday, 1995). However, Peter H. Davids’s influential commentary, The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), prepared the way for Johnson by persuasively arguing for a definite literary structure throughout the Letter of James, which evidences a plausible Sitz im Leben. Davids is also influential in dating James. His development of the two-stage composition theory, Epistle of James, 22, was among the first challenges to Dibelius’s late dating of James.
break with Dibelius and a return to the traditional view about the letter of James regarding authorship, date, structure, and literary relationship. Johnson regards the authorship to be authentic, the date to be early, the structure to be coherent, and the setting to be real. He also argues forcefully that James and Paul are in harmony with each other and are simply using different meanings of similar words when they appear to disagree. In the process, Johnson makes an appeal to find the “voice” in the text and uses his (re)construction of James’s voice as the starting place for examining and (re)constructing everything else related to the text.\footnote{Johnson, \textit{The Letter of James}, 3.} In the process of defining this “voice,” Johnson studies the text, language and style, structure, and genre of James as well as all the possible literary relationships between James and other relevant literature. Johnson turns sermonic in the final analysis of James as he exhorts his audience to hear James’s voice: “Such explanation, however, does not yet constitute interpretation in the fullest sense. Interpretation demands not only that the text be described but that its message be engaged.”\footnote{Ibid., 162.}

This two-stage composition attempts to negotiate the difficulties in dating the Letter of James either early or late by arguing for a later redactor that polished the final version with excellent Greek. Martin and Davids, however, disagree regarding the hostility between James and Paul. Davids does not see any anti-Pauline material in James, while Martin argues for a correction in James to a perversion of Pauline thought.  

Johnson’s arguments regarding an early date, authentic authorship, and literary structure are convincing, and I agree with his assessment related to all of these issues. The problem with positioning James as early and authentic, however, is Johnson’s insistence on making James and Paul harmonious. If James is early, and I agree with Johnson that it is, then the rhetoric within the Letter of James is certainly antagonistic to Pauline sensibilities. This is only accentuated when we position James and Paul as first-century Judeans negotiating identity in relation to the Roman Empire—something Johnson and others simply never address. Among commentaries, Martin is the only commentator that seriously addresses issues related to Roman imperialism. I dramatically part ways with the harmonious James and Paul theory and argue that James is specifically critical of Pauline preaching and sensibilities because James and Paul negotiate Judean identity within the Roman Empire differently and in opposition to each other.

Likewise, all of these commentators presuppose a definitive distinction between Christianity and Judaism by the time the Letter of James was written—even while arguing for an early, pre-62 CE date. At this point in the development of the early Jesus movement, the movement itself is still firmly within the boundaries of Judeanness. James characterizes his Judeanness in terms of purity.

15. Davids, Epistle of James, 21; Martin, James, lxxi–lxxii.
and perfection throughout his letter. Paul, however, negotiates a hybrid, interstitial space that blurs the boundaries between purity and impurity. Reading James against Paul in postcolonial terms of nativism and hybridity provides effective vocabulary in describing how they opposed each other as they attempted to manage a subaltern, Judean identity in relation to Roman imperialism. This strange absence among most of these commentaries regarding the place and presence of the Roman Empire as it relates to James, and their concentration on James as a Christian document, allows them to focus on James as a theological/ethical letter rather than a letter with explicit political motivation. Focusing on the politics within James, I use a postcolonial biblical hermeneutic to elucidate the relationship between James and Paul and show them to be two competing voices within first-century Judeanness.  

16. I describe other pertinent postcolonial readings of the Letter of James later when I provide a rationale for nativism as a lens for reading.