



JAMES BALDWIN

James Arthur Baldwin was born in Harlem, New York City, Aug. 2, 1924 and died on Nov. 30, 1987. He offered a vital literary voice during the era of civil rights activism in the 1950s and '60s. The eldest of nine children, his stepfather was a minister. At age 14, Baldwin became a preacher at the small Fireside Pentecostal Church in Harlem. After he graduated from high school, he moved to Greenwich Village. In the early 1940s, he transferred his faith from religion to literature. Critics, however, note the impassioned cadences of Black churches are still evident in his writing. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), his first novel, is a partially autobiographical account of his youth. His essay collections [*Notes of a Native Son* (1955), *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961), and *The Fire Next Time* (1963)] were influential in informing a large white audience.

From 1948, Baldwin made his home primarily in the south of France, but often returned to the USA to lecture or teach. In 1957, he began spending half of each year in New York City. His novels include *Giovanni's Room* (1956), about a white American expatriate who must come to terms with his homosexuality, and *Another Country* (1962), about racial and gay sexual tensions among New York intellectuals. His inclusion of gay themes resulted in a lot of savage criticism from the Black community. Eldridge Cleaver, of the Black Panthers, stated the Baldwin's writing displayed an "agonizing, total hatred of blacks." Baldwin's play, *Blues for Mister Charlie*, was produced in 1964. *Going to Meet the Man* (1965) and *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968) provided powerful descriptions of American racism. As an openly gay man, he became increasingly outspoken in condemning discrimination against lesbian and gay people.

For more information about James Baldwin:

- * Bloom, Harold, ed., *James Baldwin* (1986)
- * Campbell, James, *Talking at the Gates: A Life of James Baldwin* (1991)
- * Leeming, David, *James Baldwin: A Biography* (1995)*
- * Troup, Quincy, ed., *James Baldwin: The Legacy* (1989).

* Available at the OGLBTC (1180 BSB).

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