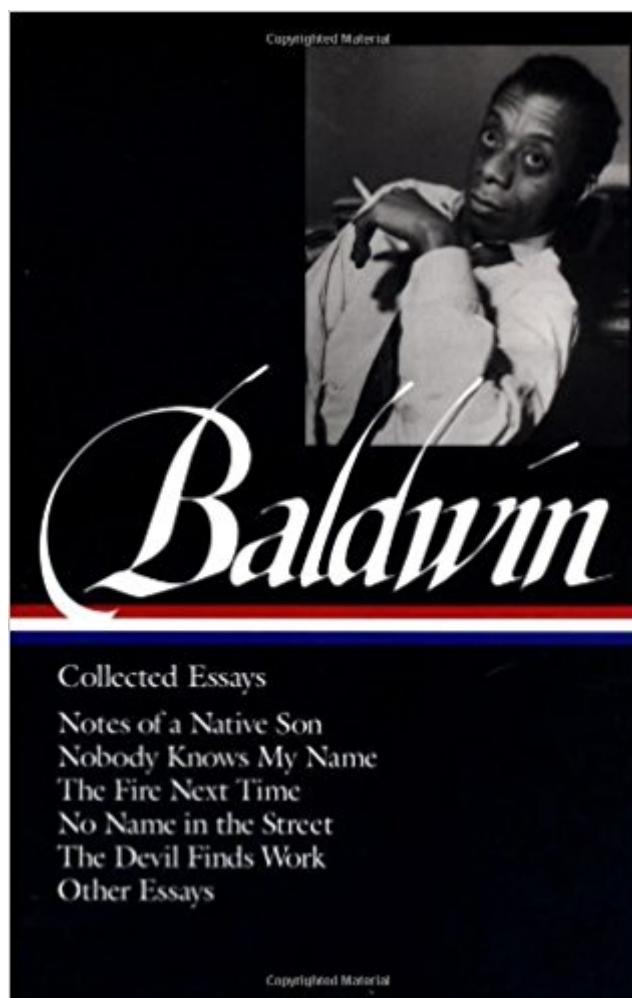


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# James Baldwin : Collected Essays : Notes Of A Native Son / Nobody Knows My Name / The Fire Next Time / No Name In The Street / The Devil Finds Work / Other Essays (Library Of America)





## Synopsis

James Baldwin was a uniquely prophetic voice in American letters. His brilliant and provocative essays made him the literary voice of the Civil Rights Era, and they continue to speak with powerful urgency to us today, whether in the swirling debate over the Black Lives Matter movement or in the words of Raoul Peck's documentary "I Am Not Your Negro." Edited by Nobel laureate Toni Morrison, the Library of America's Collected Essays is the most comprehensive gathering of Baldwin's nonfiction ever published. With burning passion and jabbing, epigrammatic wit, Baldwin fearlessly articulated issues of race and democracy and American identity in such famous essays as "The Harlem Ghetto," "Everybody's Protest Novel," "Many Thousands Gone," and "Stranger in the Village." Here are the complete texts of his early landmark collections, *Notes of a Native Son* (1955) and *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961), which established him as an essential intellectual voice of his time, fusing in unique fashion the personal, the literary, and the political. "One writes," he stated, "out of one thing only—•one's own experience. Everything depends on how relentlessly one forces from this experience the last drop, sweet or bitter, it can possibly give." With singular eloquence and unblinking sharpness of observation he lived up to his credo: "I want to be an honest man and a good writer." The classic *The Fire Next Time* (1963), perhaps the most influential of his writings, is his most penetrating analysis of America's racial divide and an impassioned call to "end the racial nightmare...and change the history of the world." The later volumes *No Name in the Street* (1972) and *The Devil Finds Work* (1976) chart his continuing response to the social and political turbulence of his era and include his remarkable works of film criticism. A further 36 essays—•nine of them previously uncollected—•include some of Baldwin's earliest published writings, as well as revealing later insights into the language of Shakespeare, the poetry of Langston Hughes, and the music of Earl Hines.

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## Customer Reviews

Writer James Baldwin earnestly championed the civil rights movement in both his fiction and nonfiction, a fact which, coupled with his extraordinary writing talent, assured not only his historical importance, but also his place as one of the finest African American writers of his generation. *Collected Essays* is a comprehensive collection of his most memorable prose, including "Stranger in the Village," "The Harlem Ghetto," and "Many Thousands Gone." Clear in voice and vision, the essays communicate the emotions of an entire historical movement. Combining politics, prophecy, and passion, Baldwin's essays are truly as thought-provoking today as they were some 30 years ago.

Baldwin's impassioned essays have been at least as influential as his novels in exposing the racial polarization of American society. This massive compilation reproduces in their entirety his early essay collections—*Notes of a Native Son* (1955), *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961), *The Fire Next Time* (1963)—as well as his later, less successful book-length essays—the pessimistic, doom-laden *No Name in the Street* (1972) and *The Devil Finds Work* (1976), a semi-autobiographical gloss on American movies. The book charts his trajectory from eloquent voice of the civil rights movement to disillusioned expatriate increasingly prone to grandiloquence and angry rhetoric. Also included is a miscellany of 36 articles, polemics and reviews, 26 of which were previously collected in *The Price of the Ticket* (1985), published just two years before Baldwin's death from cancer in France at age 63. Novelist Morrison's editing of this omnibus, which includes a chronology and notes, should help rekindle interest in Baldwin, whose recurrent themes—the African American search for identity, the hypocrisy of white America, the urgent necessity for love—make his work timely and challenging. BOMC and Reader's Subscription selections. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

While I've not yet finished the book I can state unequivocally that James Baldwin is one of the most important voices of the 20th Century. Anyone interested in the racial struggles of the United States would do well to read these stories.

It is great that interest has been revived in one of America's most important writers. Decades ago he confronted us with what has happened, was happening then and continues to happen with race in this nation. It is too sad that he did not receive the honors he should have in life, and that we seem unwilling to hear what he is saying to us even now.

A splendid volume, essential reading now more than ever. The collected essays of a profound writer and thinker, the subject of the acclaimed documentary *I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO*.

Throughout his career as a novelist and playwright, James Baldwin was a prolific essay writer. His five major published collections of essays, including *The Fire Next Time*, are printed here together with an additional 36 essays not published in any collection before this volume. *Notes of a Native Son* and *Nobody Knows My Name* were two early collections which were autobiographical in nature. However, these essays reveal Baldwin only as a political, social, and cultural critic; he reveals very little of himself as a living, breathing human being. In *The Fire Next Time*, one of Baldwin's most celebrated works, he continues his political, social, and cultural criticism, but the shades are drawn back slightly so that we are able to capture glimpses of the man behind these essays. He returns to the pattern established with his first two essay collections with *No Name in the Street*. *The Devil Finds Work* is an odd work of film criticism that stands in stark contrast to his other collections. The editor, Nobel laureate Toni Morrison, assembles an excellent collection of essays for the final section of the book. Not all essays are equal in quality, but Baldwin's essay on Martin Luther King is particularly noteworthy. I had begun to fear that Baldwin spoke only of his political, social, and cultural views in his essays, and avoided anything that might reveal his personal life and feelings. Fortunately, Baldwin's full character breaks through in the final three essays, giving us a fuller portrait of a well rounded life. These three essays are perhaps the finest included in this collection, thus showing the value of slogging through every one of the 842 pages that make up this text. The volume is almost but not quite comprehensive. The chronology appended to the end of the body of the text makes tantalizing references to essays I would have liked to have read. My guess is that rights issues prevented those essays from being included in this book. Nevertheless, this is an outstanding work which gives deep insight into one of the leading writers of the 20th century.

A beautifully produced collection of all of Baldwin's major non-fiction writing. Baldwin is a worthy Library of America subject. His writings remain deeply relevant to contemporary America. They

continue to influence writers and Baldwin's stature as a deeply sophisticated observer of presence and meaning of race in the fabric of America is still growing.

Baldwin isn't as widely read as he should be, and his views on race, sexuality, and American culture are perhaps even more important today than they were 30-40 years ago.

This is a must have/must read after seeing the movie. His thinking is provocative and especially relevant now.

strong, enduring, unforgettable.

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