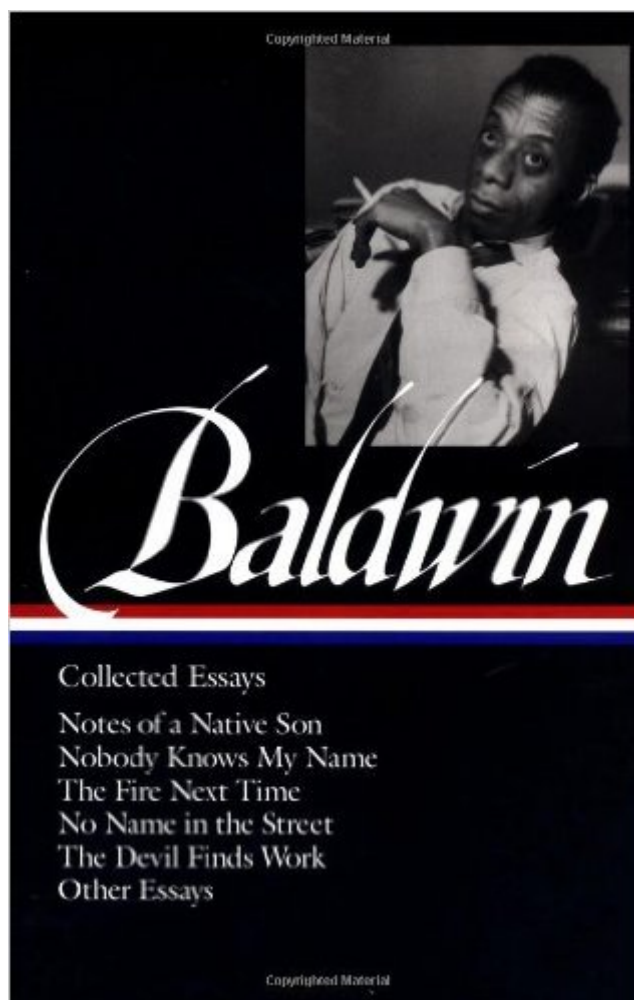


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# James Baldwin : Collected Essays : Notes Of A Native Son / Nobody Knows My Name / The Fire Next Time / No Name In The Street / The Devil Finds Work / Other Essays (Library Of America)





## Synopsis

Novelist, essayist, and public intellectual, James Baldwin was one of the most brilliant and provocative literary figures of the postwar era, and one of the greatest African-American writers of this century. A self-described "transatlantic commuter" who spent much of his life in France, Baldwin joined cosmopolitan sophistication with a fierce engagement in social issues. Edited by Nobel laureate Toni Morrison, the Library of America's Collected Essays "the most comprehensive gathering of Baldwin's nonfiction ever published" confirms him as a uniquely prophetic voice in American letters. 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I love James Baldwin--I think he's a tremendous writer, so Toni Morrison could hardly go wrong in selecting essays for this volume. All of the selections are excellent. Notes of a Native Son contains a touching eulogy for Richard Wright ("Alas, Poor Richard"), explaining the loneliness and problems Mr. Wright had at the end of his life. Baldwin displays his tremendous range as both a political commentator and a literary critic. The Devil Finds Work, in particular, is very insightful--and several parts humorous. What I don't understand--and why I struck a star off this collection--is why Ms. Morrison did not include "Evidence of Things Unseen," Baldwin's analysis of the Atlanta child murders from the early eighties. Perhaps Library of America is planning later volumes of Baldwin's works--The companion volume to these essays is his "Early Novels," most notably "Go Tell It on the Mountain" and "Giovanni's Room." I can't imagine that Library of America would not produce a volume including Mr. Baldwin's later works--especially "Just Above my Head." This particular edition is well worth having--despite the price. First, this is a good collection of Baldwin's essays, many of which are difficult to find. Second, the Library of America really does a commendable job in paper quality and binding. This is not a leather bound edition on 50 pound paper, so stiff you can't open it and printed so the back binding looks impressive on your bookshelf--this is tightly bound, cardboard cover that lies flat, and is easy to read. The paper is not heavy--but acid free, and tear resistant. The Library of America series are good collections that are meant to be read many times, by many people--these books hold up very well.

In Egypt, I met an extraordinary American. "I was born in New York, but have only lived in pockets of it. In Paris, I lived in all parts of the city - on the Right Bank and on the Left, among the bourgeoisie and among les miserables, and knew all kinds of people from pimps and prostitutes in Pigalle to Egyptian bankers in Nueilly. This may sound unprincipled or even obscurely immoral: I found it healthy. I love to talk to people, all kinds of people, and almost everyone, as I hope we still know, loves a man who loves to listen," he said. "The perpetual dealing with people very different

from myself caused a shattering in me of preconceptions I scarcely knew I held. This reassessment, which can be very painful, is also very valuable." His name is Mr. Baldwin, and I cherish this new acquaintance because his ideas have had such profound impact on my views of Egypt. I wanted to know the people, but as I reach out for them, sometimes, I'm shocked by what I see. I see people sleeping on the concrete patios along the Nile - many of them have migrated from the farmlands because they can make more money for their families if they work in Cairo. But desert nights can be bitter cold in January, and it cuts my heart. Yet, Mr. Baldwin's message is well heeded. The same problems of inner city growth that come with development in Egypt also came with development in Britain one hundred years ago. American inner city schools and slums still reflect this challenge. Would I have walked into the slums of Chicago if I were there? Would I have strolled through the southwest side of Kansas City or east St. Louis? Would I have walked into the anti-developing city blocks of L.A. if I were in America? Of course not. So why is it that traveling abroad opens my eyes to poverty in America?

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