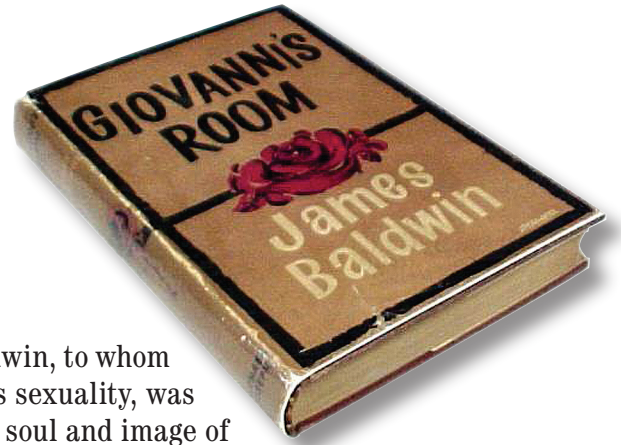


# JAMES BALDWIN

8/2/1924 – 11/30/1987



It is often the outsider who divines truth most clearly. James Baldwin, to whom many doors were closed by virtue of his poverty, his race and his sexuality, was a prophet and truth teller whose writing searingly delineates the soul and image of 20th century America.

In 1953, the publication of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* heralded the debut of a major literary voice. James Baldwin's semi-autobiographical novel depicts much of the writer's painful early life. Like Baldwin, John Grimes—the novel's bright, sensitive protagonist — battles poverty and suffers at the hands of a brutal stepfather in Harlem. Like Baldwin, John Grimes becomes a precocious storefront preacher at the age of 14.

As a gay African-American, Baldwin struggled with his identity in a racist and homophobic society. His disgust with the racial climate in the post-World War II United States impelled him to move to Europe, where he wrote *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) and his other early major works: the essay collection *Notes of a Native Son* (1955) and the play *The Amen Corner* (1955). His second novel, *Giovanni's Room* (1956), deals explicitly with homosexuality. It was published at a time when few other writers dared to publish gay-themed works.

After Baldwin returned to the United States in 1957, his writings increasingly reflected his engagement in the struggle for black civil rights. He explored black-white relations in a book of essays, *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961), and in his novel *Another Country* (1962). In *The Fire Next Time* (1963), Baldwin declared that blacks and whites must find ways to come to terms with the past and make a future together or face destruction. His incorporation of gay themes evoked savage criticism from the black community.

Following the assassinations of Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X in the late 1960s, Baldwin became increasingly pessimistic about the possibility of a positive relationship between the races. He returned to Europe and lived out his remaining years in the South of France, where he died in 1987.

**James Baldwin was a writer whose novels and essays captured the conflicted spirit of late 20th century America.**

Baldwin received many awards during his lifetime, including France's highest civilian award, Commander of the Legion of Honor, presented by President François Mitterrand in 1986.

