



Memorable Quotations: James Baldwin

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James Arthur Baldwin (1924-1987) was born in Harlem, New York City. The firstborn of nine children, his stepfather was a minister. When he was fourteen, Baldwin became a preacher at the small Fireside Pentecostal Church in Harlem. After graduating from high school, he moved to Greenwich Village. In the early 1940s, he shifted his faith from religion to literature. Critics, though, note the fervent cadences of Black churches are still apparent in his writing. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), his initial novel, is a partly autobiographical description of his youth. His essay collections, *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961), and *The Fire Next Time* (1963), were effective in informing a large white audience.

From 1948, Baldwin made his home mainly in the south of France, but often returned to the United States to lecture or teach. He began spending half of each year in New York City in 1957. 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 anxieties among New York intellectuals. His inclusion of gay themes resulted in a lot of ferocious criticism from the Black community. 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) presented compelling descriptions of American racism. As an openly gay man, he became more and more candid in attacking discrimination against lesbian and gay people.

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