



Notes of a Native Son

James Baldwin

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A new edition of the book many have called James Baldwin's most influential work

Written during the 1940s and early 1950s, when Baldwin was only in his twenties, the essays collected in *Notes of a Native Son* capture a view of black life and black thought at the dawn of the civil rights movement and as the movement slowly gained strength through the words of one of the most captivating essayists and foremost intellectuals of that era. Writing as an artist, activist, and social critic, Baldwin probes the complex condition of being black in America. With a keen eye, he examines everything from the significance of the protest novel to the motives and circumstances of the many black expatriates of the time, from his home in "The Harlem Ghetto" to a sobering "Journey to Atlanta."

Notes of a Native Son inaugurated Baldwin as one of the leading interpreters of the dramatic social changes erupting in the United States in the twentieth century, and many of his observations have proven almost prophetic. His criticism on topics such as the paternalism of white progressives or on his own friend Richard Wright's work is pointed and unabashed. He was also one of the few writing on race at the time who addressed the issue with a powerful mixture of outrage at the gross physical and political violence against black citizens and measured understanding of their oppressors, which helped awaken a white audience to the injustices under their noses. Naturally, this combination of brazen criticism and unconventional empathy for white readers won Baldwin as much condemnation as praise.

Notes is the book that established Baldwin's voice as a social critic, and it remains one of his most admired works. The essays collected here create a cohesive sketch of black America and reveal an intimate portrait of Baldwin's own search for identity as an artist, as a black man, and as an American.

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