



Baldwin's Harlem: A Biography of James Baldwin

By Herb Boyd

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***Baldwin's Harlem* is an intimate portrait of the life and genius of one of our most brilliant literary minds: James Baldwin.**

Perhaps no other writer is as synonymous with Harlem as James Baldwin (1924-1987). The events there that shaped his youth greatly influenced Baldwin's work, much of which focused on his experiences as a black man in white America. *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, *The Fire Next Time*, *Notes of a Native Son*, and *Giovanni's Room* are just a few of his classic fiction and nonfiction books that remain an essential part of the American canon.

In *Baldwin's Harlem*, award-winning journalist Herb Boyd combines impeccable biographical research with astute literary criticism, and reveals to readers Baldwin's association with Harlem on both metaphorical and realistic levels. For example, Boyd describes Baldwin's relationship with Harlem Renaissance poet laureate Countee Cullen, who taught Baldwin French in the ninth grade. Packed with telling anecdotes, *Baldwin's Harlem* illuminates the writer's diverse views and impressions of the community that would remain a consistent presence in virtually all of his writing.

Baldwin's Harlem provides an intelligent and enlightening look at one of America's most important literary enclaves.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Although James Baldwin (1924–1987) left his native Harlem as a young man and returned only for occasional visits, the New York neighborhood was a recurring theme in his essays and novels, and critics often claimed that the noted African-American writer exploited its squalor. His junior high French teacher was luminary Countee Cullen, who may have inspired Baldwin's later Paris sojourn and his first literary efforts, and Baldwin shared a stormy relationship with another Harlem Renaissance progenitor, poet Langston Hughes, who called *Another Country* juvenile. Baldwin shared a distrust of white liberals with Malcolm X and lent his powerful voice to Harlem's '60s causes, including a rent-strike rally and defense of the Harlem Six put on trial for the brutal murder of a Jewish shopkeeper. Longtime Harlem resident Boyd, managing editor of *Black World Today*, is authoritative, but in his self-proclaimed role as Baldwin's defender, he gives short shrift to the writer's homosexuality and comes across as rationalizing the anti-Semitism Baldwin was repeatedly accused of in his lifetime. The literary critiques of Baldwin's writings and other details render this volume primarily of interest to scholars of African-American studies (*Jan.*)

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Review

"Fascinating and authoritative."

--Arnold Rampersad

"Herb Boyd's study of Baldwin and Harlem features vivid literary portraits of a powerful writer in sometimes controversial dialogue with other major figures of his era. It also centers Baldwin's Harlem in a memorable, necessary way. Boyd's book is fascinating and authoritative on a subject that he knows well and writes about with insight and sympathy."

-- Arnold Rampersad, author of *Ralph Ellison: A Biography*

"Herb Boyd has written an original and extremely valuable book that captures the genius and complexity of James Baldwin, one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century."

-- Sondra Kathryn Wilson, author of *Meet Me at the Theresa*

"Herb Boyd takes Baldwin away from the ivory towers of literary scholars and elites, and centers him with, and within, the experience of his people. Required reading."

-- Todd Steven Burroughs, Ph.D., journalist

About the Author

HERB BOYD is an award-winning author and journalist who has published eighteen books and countless articles in national magazines and newspapers. Among his most popular books are *We Shall Overcome* and *The Harlem Reader*. Currently he is managing editor for *The Black World Today* and teaches at The City College of New York and the College of New Rochelle in the Bronx. He lives in Harlem with his wife.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Robert Johnson:

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