Study Guide

Notes of a Native Son by James Baldwin

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Introduction

Introduction

James Baldwin's collection of essays, *Notes of a Native Son,* with the individual essays having been originally written during the 1940s and 1950s, gives readers a thoughtful commentary on the social environment in the United States in the era of the Civil Rights Movement. Through the eyes and mind of one of America's most effective essayists, the conditions of being an African American living in a society that is grappling with the consequences of racial discrimination are witnessed firsthand. The subjects of his essays vary as Baldwin ponders his own reactions to the significance of the so-called protest novel to the circumstances that led many African-American writers of his time to become expatriates.

According to Baldwin's biographer, David Leeming, the idea for Baldwin's collection came from an old school friend, Sol Stein, who had become an editor at Beacon Press. Baldwin's first response to the suggestion of publishing his essays, which were largely autobiographical, was that he was "too young" to publish his "memoirs." Baldwin had, after all, only published one other book prior to *Notes*, and on top of this he was only thirty years old, which meant that he was in his twenties when he wrote the essays. Despite his lack of a long professional career, however, Baldwin would be surprised at the reaction he would receive upon publication. The collection significantly marked him as a writer that it became his signature work. It was through *Notes* that he would gain the massive audience he would enjoy throughout most of his writing career. *Notes* established Baldwin as one of the leading interpreters of the dramatic social changes that would soon erupt in the United States in the critical years ahead.

Leeming refers to the voice that Baldwin created in his essays as one that "seduces the reader." Baldwin invites the reader inside his mind, Leeming contends, as he observes the problems that exist in the society, problems that were borne of racial discrimination. However, in his observations, Baldwin does not make any of his readers feel guilty about the social conditions. Unlike some of his contemporary authors, Baldwin believed that he did not write through anger. In Leeming's evaluation of Baldwin's essays, he contends, "Baldwin's method is to reach consciences by way of minds."

Author Biography

Author Biography

James Baldwin was born in Harlem in New York City on August 2, 1924. In his "Autobiographical Notes" in *Notes of a Native Son*, Baldwin refers to his mother, Emma Berdis Jones, as "given to the exasperating and mysterious habit of having babies," for whom Baldwin, as the oldest child, was often called upon to be their main caretaker. Baldwin critiques his role as babysitter, stating that his siblings "probably suffered" due to the fact that he cared for them with "one hand and held a book with the other." Baldwin's stepfather, David, was a preacher and encouraged Baldwin to read the Bible, the one book that, for a long time in his youth, Baldwin refused to read. Instead, he read books like *Uncle Tom's Cabin and A Tale of Two Cities*, books whose style he tried to imitate in his own early attempts at writing, one of which won him recognition from the mayor of New York City, Fiorello La Guardia (1933-1945).

Baldwin's professional career as a writer began at age twenty-one, with a fellowship he won due to the influence he had gained through author Richard Wright, whom Baldwin considered, for a time, his mentor. After the fellowship money ran out and Baldwin was unable to get his first novel published, he turned to writing book reviews, which he ironically describes as "mostly . . . about the Negro problem, concerning which the color of my skin made me automatically an expert."

Frustrated not only with his inability to become published but also with the social environment at the time, Baldwin left the United States and settled in Paris. Living in France gave Baldwin the necessary distance that he required from the racial con- flicts that were brewing in his homeland, and he was finally successful in completing his first published novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953). Two years later, his book *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), a collection of essays, was also published, marking the beginning of a long career that would eventually lead to his being referred to as one of the most influential authors of his time.

Baldwin would go on to write *Giovanni's Room* (1955), *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961), *Another Country* (1962), and *The Fire Next Time* (1963) before *Time* magazine (May 17, 1963) placed a photograph of Baldwin on its cover, thus honoring his personal involvement in and the influence of his writing on the Civil Rights Movement. Baldwin eventually experimented with several genres, including writing a few somewhat successful plays. However, many critics believe that Baldwin's most powerful voice was expressed in his essays.

Baldwin continued to write throughout his sixty- three years, although his influence waned toward the end of his life. Baldwin concludes his "Autobiographical Notes" with a summation of what he considered his responsibilities as a writer. "I consider that I have many responsibilities," he wrote, "but none greater than this: to last . . . and get my work done." He then adds: "I want to be an honest man and a good writer." Baldwin died, in France, of stomach cancer on December 1, 1987. He was buried at Ferncliff Cemetery in Ardsley, New York.

Plot Summary

Plot Summary

Autobiographical Notes

Baldwin begins his *Notes of a Native Son* with a brief description of his childhood and the beginning of his professional career as a writer. He also introduces some of the themes that will be expanded upon in the essays contained in this volume. Some of these themes include the role of the African- American writer, self-identity of African Americans, and an observation and analysis of American society.

Everybody's Protest Novel

In this first essay, Baldwin launches into literary criticism, specifically focusing on Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*. Baldwin finds both works too political and, to his mind, thinly disguised political propaganda as a novel is not a serious literary activity. He also believes that, as literary works, both Stowe's and Wright's work lack merit. They are "both badly written and wildly improbable." As analyses of social problems, they lack strength. "Whatever unsettling questions are raised are evanescent . . . remote, for this has nothing to do with us."

Baldwin likens the protest novel to zealous missionaries who travel to Africa "to cover the nakedness of the natives" in an attempt to save them. He concludes his assessment of these two works by binding them together, writing that they resemble one another, with Bigger, the protagonist in Wright's novel, becoming the descendant of Stowe's Uncle Tom. "It seems that the contemporary Negro novelist [Wright] and the dead New England woman [Stowe] are locked together in a deadly, timeless battle; the one uttering merciless exhortations, the other shouting curses."

Many Thousands Gone

Baldwin begins this essay with the statement about the difficulty the "Negro in America" has in telling his/her story. "It is not a very pretty story," Baldwin writes and has best been told through music. The African-American story is covered in shadow and darkness. The African American is not known personally but rather through "statistics, slums, rapes, injustices, remote violence." The presence of African Americans in the predominantly white American society Baldwin likens to a "disease--cancer, perhaps, or tuberculosis--which must be checked, even though it cannot be cured."

The face of the African American has changed with time, Baldwin continues, but it has not changed enough. "The general desire seems to be to make it blank if one cannot make it white." Baldwin then mentions the use of the stereotypical images of Aunt Jemima, a heavyset black woman, usually shown in the kitchen, cooking for white people. Her counterpart is Uncle Tom. There was, Baldwin writes, "no one stronger or more pious or more loyal or more wise" than Aunt Jemima, and Uncle Tom was "trustworthy and sexless." However, Baldwin states that these descriptions of Aunt Jemima and Uncle Tom are only the surface realities of these two people. Underneath, Aunt Jemima is faithless, vicious, and immoral; Uncle Tom is "violent, crafty, and sullen, a menace to any white woman who passed by." It is their surface identity that most white people want to believe, Baldwin states. Their pleasant demeanor is an artificial creation, something that white people wanted to believe in because white people wanted peace.

In the second half of this essay, Baldwin continues his criticism of Richard Wright's *Native Son*. He refers to it as "the most powerful and celebrated statement . . . of what it means to be a Negro in America." However, he also states that Wright's novel does not work as Wright had intended it to.

Carmen Jones: The Dark Is Light Enough

In 1955, Otto Preminger produced the movie *Carmen Jones*, a modernization of George Bizet's opera *Carmen*. Preminger put together an all-black cast for the film, and in this essay, Baldwin analyzes that production.

Baldwin was not impressed with the film. One of the first things he complains about is the dialogue, which he says sounds "ludicrously false and affected, like ante-bellum Negroes imitating their masters." Baldwin then goes on to suggest that everything about this movie is improbable, a "total divorce from anything suggestive of the realities of Negro life."

Baldwin also sees a color consciousness in the casting that he does not fail to point out. For instance, there is Dorothy Dandridge, "a sort of taffy-colored girl," who is supposed to signify a "*very* nice girl." Pearl Bailey, in contrast, is "quite dark" and is cast as a "floozie." Likewise, the man who has evil designs on Carmen is also very darkskinned, whereas Harry Belafonte, also light-skinned, comes across as safe and sexless. The light-skinned actors seek love, whereas the dark-skinned actors live in some other world, Baldwin writes.

The Harlem Ghetto

In this essay, Baldwin shares his observations of life in Harlem during the 1940s. The picture that he paints is not very attractive. Most of the residents are poor, living in apartments that cost more than they can afford. In frustration, riots occasionally break out, and officials come around and suggest building new playgrounds to ease the social problems, a solution Baldwin compares to putting "makeup on a leper."

Baldwin writes about the black leaders of Harlem. The good ones eventually resign from their posts with broken hearts, and the not-so-good ones "are far more concerned with their careers than with the welfare of Negroes."

The next topic that Baldwin covers is the black press, which he likens to the worst of the white press, selling papers with stories of "murders, rapes, raids on love-nests, interracial wars." From the press, Baldwin then moves on to religion and to African Americans' relationship with their neighbors, the Jews.

Baldwin concludes this essay with the observation, "All over Harlem, Negro boys and girls are growing into stunted maturity, trying desperately to find a place to stand; and the wonder is not that so many are ruined but that so many survive."

Journey to Atlanta

"Journey to Atlanta" is about politics and the broken promises that Baldwin believes have disenfranchised African Americans. Baldwin uses phrases such as "the Negro is the pawn" and "bones thrown to a pack of dogs" when referring to the statements of politicians.

Baldwin wrote this essay when Henry A. Wallace was the presidential candidate for the Progressive Party. The party's platform included a statement about civil rights, thus influencing the African- American voters. The Party was hiring black entertainers to help their cause of getting out the vote, and Baldwin's brother David was a member of a musical quartet called the Melodeers, enlisted to perform at a rally in Atlanta. The essay follows the details of David's trip and the prejudice that he and his fellow musicians experienced.

At one point, the Melodeers were asked to perform outside in the cool night air. After singing four songs, they walked off

the stage. Their voices were hoarse, and they knew that if they sang another song, they would not be able to sing the next day. One of their sponsors, a white woman, took their refusal to sing personally and threatened to have them arrested. The woman withdrew her sponsorship, and David and his friends had to struggle to find enough money to buy food and train tickets to take them back to Harlem.

Notes of a Native Son

This essay is one of the most personal of all the essays in this collection. In it, Baldwin talks about his relationship with his father. The essay begins on the day of his father's death, which also happens to be the day of his sister's birth and the day of a massive Harlem riot.

Baldwin had a very bitter relationship with his father, a man he describes as, "Handsome, proud, and ingrown, 'like a toe-nail.'" His father died of tuberculosis and also suffered from a mental illness that caused him to be paranoid. His father scared people, kept friends away from the house, and had little patience with the nine children he sired. He had warned his son about the white world outside of Harlem, but Baldwin had learned not to trust his father.

However, when Baldwin moved away from home, he found that some of his father's beliefs were true. For a time, Baldwin worked at a defense plant located in a small town in New Jersey. For the first time in his life, Baldwin had to deal with prejudice and the effects of Jim Crow laws, which demanded a certain behavior from African Americans when dealing with white people, something that Baldwin had never learned. He was not used to being told that he could not eat in certain restaurants. He did not know that he was supposed to humiliate himself in front of white people. At one point, so angered and frustrated by not being able to do what he wanted to do, Baldwin throws a water pitcher at a waitress after she tells him that they do not serve Negroes there.

Baldwin ends this essay with the thought that he must learn to balance acceptance of life with the idea of equal power. "One must never . . . accept these injustices as commonplace but must fight them with all one's strength."

Encounter on the Seine: Black Meets Brown

Baldwin discusses, in this essay, various encounters with different types of people that he finds in Paris. First, he goes into the reasons why over five hundred African Americans living in Paris tend to avoid one another, feeling uncomfortable about being reminded of the conditions of living their previous lives in the States. Likewise, when a white American and a black American meet one another in Paris, they too suffer an uneasiness, unable to navigate between their relationship as it might be defined in the States and their relationship as it is characterized under European terms.

The third type of encounter that Baldwin describes is that between a black person from America and an African. On one hand, the African person has the benefit of a legitimate homeland, but his country has been colonized. Because of this, the African has lost his language and culture. The African American, however, has memories of slavery and can claim no allegiance to a homeland.

A Question of Identity

It could be argued that all of the essays in this collection deal with some aspect of Baldwin's search for identity. This specific essay, however, focuses most directly on the issue. Here he examines American soldiers living in Paris, studying at the universities on the G. I. Bill offered to them after the war. He studies the question of why some of the soldiers are successful in adapting to their lives in France and why some are not.

Baldwin concludes that the conflict that the soldiers must deal with is based on the clash between reality and fantasy. Some soldiers, he claims, have an imaginary, or ideal, concept of Paris in their minds. They have little real knowledge of the history of France, the sociology of its people, or an understanding of the language. When the reality of Paris hits them, Baldwin believes, it is then that they buy their tickets to go back home.

The more successful soldier, on the other hand, takes the time to study the history and culture of France. This soldier might even live with a French family, thus encouraging a deeper enculturation. However, even this soldier might encounter problems, because the French people might also maintain a fantasy of Americans. They might, for instance, view all Americans by what they see in the movies, what they read about the government, what they dream about in connection to the idealism and individualism of the relatively new country of the United States. In the end, Baldwin suggests that an American living in Paris should use the "vantage point of Europe" to discover "his own country."

Equal in Paris

Baldwin was once given a bed sheet from an American visitor to France. The bed sheet had been taken from a Paris hotel, where the American visitor had been previously staying. Several days later, police show up at the American visitor's hotel room, and shortly thereafter they are searching Baldwin's room. Upon discovering the bed sheet with the hotel's name clearly printed on it, the police arrest Baldwin for theft.

This essay is devoted to this ordeal, Baldwin's fears, and his frustrations of being held prisoner in a legal system that he does not understand. After several days of humiliation and hunger, Baldwin's case is dismissed.

Stranger in the Village

Baldwin visits a small, isolated village in Switzerland. He stays with a friend. The friend forewarns him that the villagers have never seen a black man. The implications of this statement do not hit Baldwin until he steps foot into the village and sees the reactions on the faces of the villagers and hears the children call him "*Neger*!"

Baldwin returns to this same village many times over the next few years. Although the villagers become used to his presence, he does not feel that they ever really get to know him. They never are able to see beyond his skin color, his curly hair. However, he does come to realize that these people look at him in a different way than white people in the States and that the difference is due to the fact that in America the black man is always seen as a former slave.

Everybody's Protest Novel

Everybody's Protest Novel Summary

Notes of a Native Son is a collection of essays written by James Baldwin during the 1940s and 1950s pre-civil rights era to illuminate the life conditions for the Negro people during this in America. In the book's first essay, Baldwin derides Harriet Beecher Stowe's pre-Civil War novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as the icon for inaccurately portraying the full scope of the Negro experience. Baldwin calls the book a very bad novel in its self righteous and virtuous sentimentality.

From that sentimentality stems dishonesty, and however well-intentioned Stowe may be, the novel does not accurately portray the complete dimensions of life in the time period. Stowe elicits sympathy from her readers in what Baldwin feels is the limited capacity of a pamphlet, not a full novel on the topic.

Furthermore, Baldwin believes that the only three important Negro characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are Eliza, whose mulatto status saves her from the dire situation of most Negro women of the period; George, whose mechanical skills redeem him from being the typical darkie; and of course, Uncle Tom, who is the epitome of the jungle black man, destined to a life as a beast of burden. Stowe has chosen to make Eliza and George as white as Negro people could be and has projected Uncle Tom to the extreme of the Negro spectrum. Baldwin feels that, in the novel, black equates with evil and white equates with grace, which is a completely ridiculous and inaccurate perspective.

Baldwin also criticizes Richard Wright's *Native Son* as a more modern piece of shallow propaganda for the Negro experience. Badly written and lacking any strength, *Native Son*, according to Baldwin, raises questions that have no real bearing on Negro people. The form of the protest novel is comparable to missionaries who attempt to cover the nakedness of African people in order to make them more like white people and therefore, more worthy of redemption.

Everybody's Protest Novel Analysis

In this essay, Baldwin uses the first person narrative perspective so that the reader knows the opinions are those of the author to establish the essay format. Baldwin's style is alternately rambling and concise which makes the writing more conversational than academic.

Baldwin immediately sets the topic and tone for the essay collection with the theme of racial prejudice, which will permeate the entire piece. It is Baldwin's contention that a writer can do justice only to the topics with which he is familiar and has experienced and sets himself up as expert on the theme.

Many Thousands Gone

Many Thousands Gone Summary

The author feels the story of the Negro in America is the story of Americans and, as such, is not pretty, as most stories of a people are not. The Negro in America has had difficulty telling his story outside of the music and stereotypes kept alive through generations of both black and white people. Shadowed by statistics of rapes, slums, and injustices, the Negro American is represented through statistics, not insight.

The negative and pervasive presence of the Negro in American culture is one that has been likened to a disease that cannot be completely cured, merely kept at bay with the appropriate precautions. According to Baldwin, even the face of black people has changed over time, with the white man's need for making Negroes as white as possible in order to interact with them. If the faces cannot be made white, at least they can be made blank, which is found to be less offensive to white society.

The stereotypical images of Uncle Tom and Aunt Jemima share both laudatory qualities as well as heinous ones, with the best possible traits coming to the surface for white consumption. However, the characters are capable of the gamut of shadow and light, with white people preferring the light side, because of the self-perceived reflection of themselves and for the preference for peace.

Baldwin also criticizes Richard Wright's *Native Son* because the book converts the Negro man's story of pride into one of anger that negates the whole race. The good will of the people as a whole is obliterated by the story of hatred and the idea that Negroes can only become validated if they become more like white men. This obliteration of the Negro personality constantly erodes the psyches of the race and reduces the individual to a state of anonymity.

Many Thousands Gone Analysis

Baldwin defines in this essay what it means to be a native son for every Negro man who has been reduced to the lowest common form assigned by the white man, the persona of nigger. Baldwin does not believe that it is important to debate whether or not the native son actually exists; it is enough that people of all races believe that he does. The perpetuation of the stereotypes in characters such as Aunt Jemima and Uncle Tom are misleading, according to Baldwin, who asserts that white people want to believe the happy, subservient personas that only cover the seething rage within the hearts of black people. The danger is not in acknowledging these shadow side characteristics but in pushing them down and away from the light.

Carmen Jones: The Dark Is Light Enough

Carmen Jones: The Dark Is Light Enough Summary

Baldwin's critique of the movie, *Carmen Jones,* the 1955 Hollywood interpretation of Bizet's opera, *Carmen,* purports the further negative stereotypes associated with Negroes. The movie utilizes an all-Negro cast, which, in one way, makes it safe in that there are no white people to which the Negroes may be compared, but in most other ways, the movie is a gross affront to the Negro population as a whole.

The sets are antiseptically clean, which may make white audiences more comfortable in looking at Negroes in situations where they themselves may feel comfortable, but do not accurately portray the environments of the working class Negroes characterized in the film.

Language and dialect in the film are more insults heaped on black people, because the characters speak with affected accents, as though they are antebellum Negroes adopting the language patterns of their masters. There is no parallel to Negro life in the operatic music pieces either, because the voices and songs are those of white people, dubbed over the black actor's lip syncs.

The character casting is consistent with the stereotypes associated with Negroes in that Dorothy Dandridge, who is a taffy-colored girl, plays the lead role. The male lead is played by Harry Belafonte, another light-complexioned Negro, who is not aggressive at all and therefore, not a threat to white audiences. The evil or immoral characters in the play are very dark-complexioned Negroes, whose intentions are nefarious and destructive.

The rampant sexuality upon which Carmen Jones' character is based perpetuates the negative stereotype of Negroes being associated with sexuality and basal desires although Belafonte is seen as the subject of Carmen's lust. This reduces Belafonte to a sexless Negro and therefore, not a threat to white audiences.

Carmen Jones: The Dark Is Light Enough Analysis

In this essay, Baldwin applies his critique to the world of film, which has a more critical impact for mass appeal and it has a greater potential for wider distribution of negativity. The same stereotypes and 'whitening' of Negroes found in literature have now reached mass audiences, and Baldwin's disdain for the movie is palpable. It is ironic that Baldwin can criticize the movie that was a major breakthrough venue for Negro actors in 1955 when it was released. Fifty years later, Baldwin's opinions seem more astute, in light of the progress made in the portrayal and participation of Negroes in the film industry.

The Harlem Ghetto

The Harlem Ghetto Summary

Baldwin describes the bleak personal and sociological picture of living in Harlem, which has not improved since his own father grew up there. The token attempts at altering the dire landscape include the fixtures of playgrounds and apartment buildings, which Baldwin contends are as effective as makeup for a leper. The residents live in an unending cycle of poverty and despair, made even worse now that the war is over and the jobs for Negroes are even scarcer.

The violence and hatred that erupts within Harlem cannot be kept at bay, even with the election of Negro political leaders. According to Baldwin, these leaders are victims of a system that promotes participation but eventually destroys those who want to affect the necessary changes. Those leaders with true social change at heart usually leave office with their aspirations destroyed, while those who remain have more self-important issues as priorities. Consequently, no real change is affected, and the dire cycle continues.

Baldwin also addresses the relationship of Negroes and Jews in Harlem, which is a contentious one, although not outright. Negroes do not like Jews or anyone who has not accepted Jesus Christ as the Savior, although there are some Negroes who liken the struggles of the Jewish people to the trials suffered by Negroes, which engenders a flicker of compassion and compatibility. There is also a feeling that Jews should behave more benevolently toward Negroes for this very reason, because a people which has suffered much should exhibit more empathy toward another people with similar trials.

The Harlem Ghetto Analysis

In this essay Baldwin combines his own personal recollections of growing up in Harlem with the broad scope of the Negro people as a whole in the now famous ghetto. Although the geographic landscape and poverty have not improved much since Baldwin's own father's lifetime, the author has made huge leaps in viewing the ghetto from a broader sociological and political perspective. The identification of Jews as another source of mutual distrust introduces another element of hatred into the already beleaguered lives of impoverished Negroes. Baldwin's sense of futility in the cycle of bitterness is the resignation to the fact that society's two scapegoats include the Negro and the Jew, their only real difference being skin color.

Journey to Atlanta

Journey to Atlanta Summary

Baldwin discusses the Progressive Party and the ineffectual relationship between politics and the Negro people, as a whole, in this essay. Overall, the lives of black people never seem to significantly improve, which leads to a continuing cycle of apathy and distrust when promises are continually broken. At the time Baldwin writes this essay, Henry Wallace is the presidential candidate representing the Progressive Party, which touts a platform of improved civil rights.

In an attempt to improve communications and influence Negro voters, the Progressive Party hires singing groups as diplomats, one group being the Melodeers, to which Baldwin's brother, David, belongs. With the hope of performing for the party and making some additional money, the Melodeers make the trip from New York to Atlanta to sing at various venues.

The support that had been promised to the group is not as expected, and ultimately, the group is completely cut off, because of their refusal to sing at the request of a white woman who is one of the party's sponsors. The group's reluctance to sing comes as a result of the cool night air and hoarse vocal chords, but that is not the reason to which the sponsor chooses to cling, and the group is sent back to New York with no financial means.

Baldwin is amazed that none of the group's members seems particularly enraged over the Atlanta fiasco and realizes that no one has any good intentions toward people like them. The only harm comes from believing what people say.

Journey to Atlanta Analysis

The futility of the black man's participation or hope in the political process is dramatically exemplified in Baldwin's retelling of the story of the Melodeers' trip to Atlanta. Although the young men made the trip on behalf of the Progressive Party, the racial discrimination against them, from the people who had promised support, exemplifies the chasm of prejudice on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line. The stereotypical persona of the black man who sings, dances, and laughs at insults is the mask that each black man must wear every day. This act disguises true feelings. Baldwin's account of his brother's story is palpably sad in tone, and the author's style pulls the reader in to share the same sense of resignation to a diminished fate.

Notes of a Native Son

Notes of a Native Son Summary

On the day that Baldwin's father dies, his father's ninth child is born, causing the author to recall thinking that the new baby is very smart and very lucky to have waited long enough to escape the wrath of a man feared by his other children. A powerful preacher, the elder Mr. Baldwin roused parishioners from the pulpit, but inflicted fear into the hearts of his children with his constant reprimands and unpredictable outbursts.

At the time of Mr. Baldwin's death, a horrible race riot breaks out in Harlem, and the funeral procession makes its way through streets filled with debris and broken glass. Baldwin remembers thinking that this tumultuous event is the closest thing to an apocalypse that he can experience, both culturally and personally.

Baldwin experiences a sense of melancholy that he never had the chance to bond with his father, who preferred filling his children with admonitions of hate about the world, in spite of the religious profession that barely paid enough to feed the large family.

Baldwin's inherent distrust and hatred for his father leads him to disregard any warnings. The younger Baldwin experiences a close call with racial prejudice during a period when he refuses to acquiesce and humiliate himself for white people. One incident stands out in particular, when Baldwin throws a water pitcher in a restaurant that refuses to serve Negroes. It is only quick wits and sheer luck that Baldwin escapes without a severe beating or a possibly worse fate.

The recollection of this first experience with real-world hatred rushes back to Baldwin on the day of his father's funeral. The author realizes that his father's legacy will be that nothing is ever escaped. The poignant moments during the day, when death passed life with the leaving of his father and the coming into the world of his sister, Baldwin knows that each man must make meaning out of his life experiences, no matter the past or the future. Even more importantly, one must hold on to the things that matter, not blackness or whiteness, and especially do not hold onto hatred, which, in the end, destroys only the man who keeps it.

Notes of a Native Son Analysis

This is the first essay in the collection to reveal Baldwin's reflections of a personal nature. The first person narrative, recalling the details surrounding his father's death, makes the tone of the essay more engaging, engendering more sympathy from the reader. Baldwin's recollection of his father's fierceness and very black skin paint the picture of an African warrior, not a minister in Harlem. Yet, that is the persona which Baldwin ultimately comes to respect in the father, whom he had despised for the very same qualities.

The death of Baldwin's father in 1943 places the senior Baldwin in a period of history where repression and hatred ruled the black man's life. Baldwin, however, is on the cusp of the civil rights movement in America, where the repression from so many years will finally find a voice and a face in the activists. Ironically, the author longs to share the sense of change with a father he never really knew and never understood, until it became too late.

Encounter on the Seine: Black Meets Brown

Encounter on the Seine: Black Meets Brown Summary

Baldwin is living in Paris in the 1950s, and he claims that Negro entertainers find it harder to make a living in the city now, compared to thirty years ago. Only Negro entertainers can maintain unquestioning friendships with other Negroes. There is a deliberate isolation among the five hundred American Negroes living in Paris at the time, many of whom are studying at the famous Sorbonne on the G.I. Bill.

Being reminded of the conditions that prompted their being in Paris to begin with, Baldwin finds that American Negroes are ill at ease with meeting others like themselves. Coming to Paris is an exercise in escape, and any encounter with someone with the same goal not only defeats the purpose, but it also serves as a constant reminder of a difficult past. Baldwin also observes that the meeting of a white American and a Negro American in Paris puts each in an awkward position of not being sure how to address the other without the restrictions of American society in place.

An almost equally puzzling situation is an encounter between an American Negro and a French Negro. Both share a sense of displacement, the French Negro from the colonization and loss of language and culture in the African homeland, and the American Negro seeks a home away from the land that offers neither captivity nor security. The sense of envy the American Negro feels about the French Negro rises from the history that the French Negro, at least, has a homeland to call his own at some point in life, a fact that will never be true for the American Negro.

Encounter on the Seine: Black Meets Brown Analysis

Ironically, Baldwin's escape to Paris brings a different sort of restriction, in that the American Negro is never completely free from the role imposed upon him by that society. Even while in Paris, the role is inherently in place, creating awkward moments for both the author and those he encounters, including white Americans and Negroes of other nationalities. The American Negro is, literally and figuratively, a man without a country. The escape to Paris for relief brings an unexpected sense of instability and envy. Baldwin muses that the only answer to the dilemma is the gift of time, in which the American Negro can ultimately become comfortable with himself, no matter his country of residence.

A Question of Identity

A Question of Identity Summary

In this essay, Baldwin addresses the phenomenon of those Americans who chose to remain in Paris after World War II. While they stayed to study on the G.I. Bill, many of them did not see active duty, and the only thing they have in common is that they wore a uniform at some point. There is a common bond, however, among this group that touches something deeper than studies. That is the fascination with everything French, from the food to the culture.

Baldwin contends that the romanticism associated with Paris is not the reality, and that, when this realization hits, many of the students make their way back to America. Very few of the Americans studying in Paris have any real knowledge of France or its culture. Even the language becomes less charming after awhile. Combine this tarnished romanticism with the fact that most Parisians have no interest in engaging with Americans, and the scenario for disappointment and disillusionment is complete.

Those students who do fully entrench into the Parisian lifestyle successfully are those who have taken the time to study the culture and may have even taken up residence with a French family to realize the full French experience. Ultimately, most of the Americans return home, eager to rejoin the native culture of freedom and shared experiences and mutual cultural identities.

A Question of Identity Analysis

Baldwin finds a sense of irony in the fact that many Americans opted to remain in Europe after the War to experience the cultural freedoms available there, only to return to the United States, hungry for the rules and society in which they were raised. Only by fully experiencing another country can a person fully understand his own country. Baldwin does not pass judgment, but observes that the quest for discovery is a universal one. Baldwin himself has escaped the racial prejudices of America for the tolerant Parisian sensibilities, and although not a formal student in the city, he learns much about the struggle for identity in the world by observing others, as well as examining his own growth.

Equal in Paris

Equal in Paris Summary

In December of 1949, when Baldwin has been in Paris a little over a year, he is arrested as a recipient of stolen goods, and he experiences the atrocities of the French legal system. There is despair, being at the mercy of those who do not understand Baldwin's language or his character.

Baldwin's life in Paris is one of bleak existence, a far cry from the great experience that he and the other Americans living there had hoped to find. Coming to the city with very little money and not being in a position to earn much as a writer, Baldwin spends his days at cafes and his nights in the dingy hotel where he has taken up residency. The few acquaintances he has are not deep friendships, so when he meets a man from New York, he befriends this other native son for the similar cultural aspects, if nothing else.

The New York man moves to Baldwin's hotel and brings with him a bed sheet from the hotel where he had been living. Baldwin accepts the offer of the sheet, because his own linens are filthy, and the hotel's laundry service is a disgrace.

Not long after that, the Paris police arrive and arrest Baldwin and his New York friend for the theft of the sheet, upon which has a clearly printed monogram of the hotel, marking it as the establishment's property.

Through the next ten days, Baldwin suffers the indignities and despair inherent with being incarcerated in a foreign prison. Not only does Baldwin not understand the French language, the French prison structure is a mystery, which interminably draws on, under the direst hygiene and deprivation situations. Never before has Baldwin suffered such fear and humiliation, feelings that are only exacerbated by the fact that the few acquaintances Baldwin has in Paris do not even know that he is in trouble.

Baldwin's rescue comes in the form of another prisoner who is released and offers to contact someone on the outside for anyone who is still incarcerated. Baldwin remembers a patent attorney for whom he had worked in his early days in the city and provides the attorney's contact information to the released man. Soon after, the attorney arrives with cigarettes and a promise of appropriate representation. Eventually, the charges are dropped against Baldwin and his New York friend.

Baldwin recalls the sound of his own laughter in the courtroom at the news of his release and cannot help but think that the laughter reminds him of the sound of those who feel they are removed from harm and are at a safe distance from the real pain of living. Baldwin thinks that, by being in Paris, he will never hear that kind of laugh again, but he knows now that this style of laughter is universal. It can never be silenced

Equal in Paris Analysis

Ironically, Baldwin has chosen to live in Paris for its liberating culture, but he finds the most horrific imprisonment ever imagined. The lack of resources forces Baldwin to live a life that humiliates and limits him in ways that he has not projected. The arrest for the petty crime of receiving stolen goods places Baldwin in a position in Paris from which he cannot navigate. Had Baldwin still been in the United States, he would have known what to expect and would have known how people and the justice system viewed him.

Clearly, he is a stranger in a strange land, and Baldwin relates the incident with a hint of melancholy for the punishment

that would have been more clearly defined had he been in America. Although the injustices are many for Negroes living in America during this time period, Baldwin contests that the knowledge of the system is a strange comfort in comparison to the unpredictability of the cultural and legal infrastructure in which he found himself during that Christmas season in 1949.

Stranger in the Village

Stranger in the Village Summary

In a remote village in Switzerland, Baldwin realizes he is probably the only black person the villagers have ever seen. Baldwin has come here to write and, along with his typewriter, he brings a uniqueness that fascinates the natives, who ultimately come to accept him on his return visits but always look at him as some sort of natural wonder.

When the children call him Neger on the streets, Baldwin realizes that they have no harmful intent, but he cannot help but recall the more inflammatory calls of 'Nigger' thrown at him on the streets in America.

Baldwin longs to be recognized for the person he is, not the oddity he has become in this isolated mountain town, and he likens himself to the ailing and crippled who come to the town for its healing waters.

Baldwin muses that there is nowhere on earth that the black man can call home. The family lineage of any black man in America abruptly stops with a bill of sale from the days of slave trading. The people in this village take pride in all the magnificent structures and cultural impact their ancestors have had, not only on Europe, but also on the rest world. Baldwin feels a poignant jealousy that he will never know this pride or sense of belonging to something so firmly rooted.

Baldwin believes the root of the issues surrounding racial prejudice in America stems from the white man's need to find a way to live with Negroes in order to live with themselves. The white man needs to protect his own identity, while the black man struggles to find one. This dichotomy is at the heart of the bitter relations that create a seemingly unending cycle of hatred and fear that has mitigated very little.

Stranger in the Village Analysis

Baldwin's experience in the Swiss village represents a microcosm of life among people who do not identify black people as negative. Baldwin finds the situation both comforting and disturbing in that he is not reviled but still has no real sense of belonging. In contrast, Americans have only one perception of Negroes and that is of a slave heritage. It is this perspective that cannot ever alter the balance of power between the races in America.

The introduction of Negroes into America changes not only the lives of black men but also of the white men whose ancestors owned the Negroes. Ironically, Baldwin is not a stranger to the people in the village who accept him without really knowing him, while the author will always remain a dangerous unknown in the country of his own birth.

Key Figures

Key Figures

Marian Anderson

Marian Anderson (1897-1993), a famous operatic singer during the first half of the twentieth century, enjoyed the notoriety of being the United States' third highest concert box office draw.

Anderson's popularity came to her in spite of the racial discrimination of her times. She was often refused hotel accommodations and service at restaurants while on tour. One of her most famous racist experiences gained national attention. In 1939, when managers at Howard University tried to arrange a concert for her in Constitution Hall, the largest and most appropriate indoor location in Washington, D.C., the organization called the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), who owned Constitution Hall, refused to allow Anderson to sing there. In response, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt helped to schedule Anderson's concert on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, which drew a crowd of over 70,000 people. The story of Anderson's confrontation with the Daughters of the American Revolution became the topic of many news stories, thus bringing attention to other issues of racial discrimination that existed in the United States.

In 1954, Anderson was given the chance to sing in the role of Ulrica in the Metropolitan Opera of New York's production of Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera*, thus becoming the first African American to sing on the Met stage.

Louis Armstrong

Some people believe that trumpeter/singer Louis Armstrong was responsible for bringing the concept of jazz to white audiences throughout the United States. He began his musical career during the 1920s and was known for his creative improvisations. Over the years, however, he gradually combined jazz elements with popular music until, at the height of the swing era in the 1930s, he was playing strictly conventional pieces. Armstrong possessed, however, a very appealing stage personality, upon which his popularity soared. Although he would return to a more traditional jazz repertoire in the late 1940s, it was through his renditions of popular music that he would gather his wealth.

Pearl Bailey

Pearl Bailey was a singer and popular entertainer. She sang with the big bands in the 1930s and 1940s and played various acting roles in film and on stage. She appeared in the movie *Carmen Jones* (1954) with Dorothy Dandridge, although the allblack stage version of *Hello, Dolly* (1967-1969) would become her most famous role. In the early 1970s, Bailey also starred in her own television show.

When she was sixty-seven years old, Bailey graduated from Georgetown University. She went on to publish several books about her life. In 1975, she served as a special ambassador to the United Nations and later received the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1975).

Harry Belafonte

Harry Belafonte was born in 1927 to West Indian parents and would eventually spend some of his youth in Jamaica, although he was a U.S. citizen. As a young adult, he would return to his birthplace in New York City and begin his acting

career, first on stage and later in film. In 1953, he won a Tony Award for his performance in *Almanac*. The following year, he would co-star with Dorothy Dandridge in *Carmen Jones*. In 1960, Belafonte became the first African American to receive an Emmy for the television program *Tonight with Belafonte*.

Acting was not the only talent that Belafonte possessed. In 1956, after having entered an amateur talent show, Belafonte recorded a collection of tunes with a West Indian bent, and his album *Calypso* became the first record to sell more than a million copies.

During the Civil Rights Movement, Belafonte developed a relationship with Martin Luther King, Jr., and it was he who put up the money for bail when King was sent to Birmingham City Jail, he who financed the Freedom Rides, and he who raised thousands of dollars to gain the release of other jailed civil rights protestors. He also was one of the principal organizers for the March on Washington in 1963. Belafonte was also involved in organizing the joint effort of producing the song "We Are the World," which generated millions of dollars in the fight against famine in Ethiopia.

Dorothy Dandridge

Dorothy Dandridge (1922-1965) began her acting career as a child, appearing on screen for the first time with the Marx Brothers in *A Day at the Races*. Many of the roles that she played in movies were bit parts, as the Hollywood film industry, during the early part of the twentieth century, offered very little opportunity for African-American actresses. Dandridge's most significant roles were in two of Otto Preminger's films: *Carmen Jones* (1954) and *Porgy and Bess*(1957).

Carmen Jones, a modernization of George Bizet's opera (first staged in Paris in 1875) tells the tragic story of a young, sensual gypsy woman. Preminger's movie featured an all-black cast with Bizet's music and lyrics arranged by Oscar Hammerstein II. Other African-American performers in *Carmen Jones* included Harry Belafonte and Pearl Bailey. Dandridge played the starring role of Carmen, for which she was nominated for best actress by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the first African-American actress to be so honored.

In 1999, a movie about Dandridge, *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge,* starring Halle Berry, aired on HBO. The movie covers the struggle Dandridge endured in combating racial prejudice in the movie industry as well as some of the abusive details of her personal life. In 1965, Dandridge was found dead, the apparent victim of an overdose of sleeping pills.

Chester Bomar Himes

Chester Himes was born on July 29, 1909. An author and expatriate living in Paris, he published a series of black detective novels. The voice of his writing is often described as more angry than the voices of his contemporaries, who included Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison.

Himes's writing reflects a strong awareness of racism, which he was not afraid to depict in very specific terms. Personal details about his life are often used to explain the source of his anger. Although raised in a comfortable and well-educated, middleclass environment, Himes's life took a turn for the worse when he first was physically impaired after suffering an accidental fall down an elevator shaft and later was expelled from Ohio State for what Himes claimed was a prank. Shortly afterward, at age nineteen, Himes received a twenty-five-year jail sentence for armed robbery. It was in prison, however, that Himes turned to writing.

Himes's first novel, *If He Hollers, Let Him Go* (1945), tells the story of a black man who works in a defense plant during World War II. The novel details the suffering that the man endures in a racist environment. His second novel, *Cast the First Stone* (1952), is about prison life.

Himes lived in Paris at the same time as Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison and often met with these other writers. Although not as well known in the States as he was in Europe, Himes, especially after he began his nine-book detective series, was able to make a comfortable living off his writing. In 1965, Himes's *Cotton Comes to Harlem* was published. Five years later, this book was made into a popular movie with the same title.

Lena Horne

Lena Horne is an African-American singer and actress. One of her first roles on Broadway was in the play *Blackbirds of 1939*. Eventually, she made her way to Hollywood where she signed a movie contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, insisting that the movie studio never cast her in a stereotypical black role. In 1942, she got her first big break, playing the leading role in *Cabin in the Sky*. The following year, she was cast in *Stormy Weather*, for which she also sang the title song, a song that would become her trademark.

Horne won a Grammy for the album based on her award-winning Broadway show *Lena Horne: The Lady and Her Music*, the longest running onewoman show in Broadway history. In 1984, she was honored with the Kennedy Center Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Arts.

Joe Louis

Joe Louis was the first African American to attain hero status both with the African-American community and the white community in the United States. Louis was a boxer, one of the first African- American athletes to enjoy a prominent role in the cultural history of the States. His career began in the 1930s, and he would go on to become the heavyweight champion of the world at a time when boxing was at its apex, thus giving Louis his prominent status. Known as the Brown Bomber, Louis first lost and then later won back his title from Germany's Max Schmeling, who was viewed as a symbol of Hitler's regime. The year was 1938, right before the beginning of World War II, which made Louis's triumph that much more celebrated. Louis died in 1981 in Las Vegas. President Reagan made arrangements for him to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C., thus honoring him as a hero.

Otto Preminger

Otto Preminger originally entered the world of stage and screen as an actor but made his fame as a director of plays and film. He worked for various studios in the first half of the twentieth century, but in the early 1950s he became an independent producer and director. It was at this time that Preminger gained a reputation for taking on controversial subjects. His movie *The Moon Is Blue* (1953) dealt with the topic of virginity and pregnancy, taboo subjects at that time, and *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955) was one of the first films to deal with drug addiction. Preminger's *Carmen Jones* (1954) and *Porgy and Bess* (1959) not only were successful musical movies but also involved all-black casts.

George S. Schuyler

George S. Schuyler (1895-1977), a journalist and columnist for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, one of the nation's premiere weekly newspapers written mostly for a black audience, has often been compared to H. L. Mencken for his style of writing and his crusade against hypocrisy. He wrote a novel called *Black No More* (1931), a satirical story about what would happen if African-American people could change the color of their skin whenever they found it more convenient to do so. The novel did not find a broad audience but has been recently reprinted.

Although his name has been all but forgotten and his works seldom studied, Schuyler is recognized as having been one of the first black journalists to gain prominence in the United States. He was also one of the first black foreign

correspondents for a major metropolitan newspaper, the *New York Evening Post*. Schuyler, whose conservative rhetoric ran contrary to the popular image of African- American thought during the Civil Rights Movement, eventually was unable to find outlets for his writing. In 1964, Schuyler was fired from the *Courier* for his opposition to Martin Luther King receiving the Nobel Peace Prize. He died in 1977. His autobiography, *Black and Conservative*, was published in 1966.

Harriet Beecher Stowe

Harriet Beecher Stowe, born in 1811, wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which relates a somewhat romanticized story of the cruelty of slavery and the challenge of escape. Although the book was well received in her time, due mostly to the topic and the Christian sensibility of her themes, modern critics tend to focus on the lack of literary merit of Stowe's writing.

Stowe lived in Cincinnati at the time she wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and thus witnessed first-hand the slave trading that occurred along the Ohio River. Her family, which included her father, Lyman Beecher, a Congregational minister and president of Lane Theological seminary, and her husband, Calvin Stowe, a professor of biblical literature at the seminary, shared her abolitionist sentiment and were often involved in hiding runaway slaves.

Although Stowe published many other works (writing a book a year across an almost eighteenyear span), she is best known for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Having been published in a popular weekly newspaper in forty separate installments and having been written in an episodic and suspenseful form, the reading of Stowe's novel became something of a habit for a large portion of the U.S. population. When the episodes were finally collected and published in book form, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sold a half million copies, breaking sales records at that time. Although Stowe's writing style and form do not fair well under close literary scrutiny and her characters come across as stereotypical representations rather than fully fleshed out people, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is considered a classic of its time and remains required reading on many college campuses.

Henry A. Wallace

Henry A. Wallace (1888-1965), vice president under F. D. Roosevelt and a prominent leader of the Progressive Party, was criticized for his social idealism and lax attitude toward communism. For these reasons, he lost favor with the Democratic Party and joined the Progressives. In general, the Progressive Party was against international military activity but supported peace discussions with the Soviet Union, the development of a strong United Nations organization, and civil rights. Wallace also spoke out against Senator Joseph McCarthy, the leading voice in the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

Wallace was often accused of being a communist, which in the late 1940s had taken on very negative connotations. When the Communist Party of America decided to endorse Wallace's candidacy, Wallace found himself in a very difficult position. He was often banned from speaking in certain areas of the United States and denied interviews by many members of the press. Wallace did not fare well in the presidential election of 1948, left the party, and retired from politics. After Wallace's resignation, the Progressive Party fell apart.

Richard Wright

Richard Wright was born in the deep South, the grandchild of former slaves. He was a contemporary of James Baldwin and helped launch Baldwin's writing career. Wright became famous after the publication of his novel *Native Son* (1940), a book that was so popular that it went into a second printing before the first printing hit the book stores.

Wright was one of the first African-American writers to move away from a style of writing that was heavily influenced by white audiences. His works are filled with anger and are often criticized for their overtly political stances. He is, however, credited with creating a new movement in African- American writing, one which promoted more realistic black characters in more significant, and socially relevant, life situations. Wright is also known to have had a heavy influence on Baldwin, despite the fact that Baldwin would later criticize Wright's work.

Like Baldwin, Wright became very frustrated with the social and political environment in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s and moved to Paris. His autobiographical work, *Black Boy*. (1945), also became a bestseller, but his later works received little popular attention. Wright died in France in 1960.

Themes

Themes

Racial Prejudice

The point of Baldwin's essays is not so much to make his readers aware of racial prejudice in the States as it is to attempt to look at that prejudice, analyze it, understand where it comes from, and decide how to deal with it. He does this in a variety of ways. One of these is by relating personal experience. For instance, in the essay "Notes of a Native Son," he writes about the incident of being told that he could not eat at a restaurant he had chosen. At first, he was somewhat oblivious to this type of prejudice. He had gone to one restaurant several times and did not realize that the lack of service he received was because he was African American. He thought the poor service was a restaurant problem, not a racial declaration. Later, as he noticed people staring at him on the streets of the mostly white town, he became more informed of prejudice. The more aware he became, the angrier he became. When he exploded one night, throwing a water pitcher at a waitress who refused to serve him, he realized the depth of that anger. Shortly afterward, he decided to move away from the States to gain a more objective distance, in order to become better equipped to understand not only the prejudice but also his reactions to it.

Baldwin also hypothesizes about prejudice. He looks at conditions and comes to conclusions, such as in "Many Thousands Gone," in which he discusses the stereotypical Aunt Jemima and Uncle Tom. According to Baldwin, these characters were created by a white population who wanted to believe that all African Americans were trustworthy, devoted servants, who only wanted to serve white people and who held no malice toward their employers. These stereotypical figures are dangerously misleading, Baldwin concludes, because anger and a sense of vengeance lurks deep down in the psyches of African Americans, contrary to the smiling faces that white Americans try to impose on all African Americans by using these stereotypical images.

Another way of discussing racial prejudice is through comparison. In "Stranger in the Village," Baldwin describes the more or less innocent prejudice of the Swiss people who live in a small town in the mountains and who are so isolated from the rest of the world that they have never seen a black man. Although the children of the village yell out "*Neger!*" when Baldwin passes by, Baldwin is more willing to forgive them than he would be to forgive someone in the States who might call out that same word. The Swiss children are ignorant and naive. They see a man who has dark skin, something that is very different from their pale complexions. Their reaction is based on visual effects. In the States, however, the word *nigger* has taken on derogatory connotations. Baldwin believes that this difference is based on the history of the black person in the States, which begins with slavery. The negative aspects of the word *nigger* in the States is an attempt to keep African Americans oppressed.

Identity

Throughout most of the essays in this collection, Baldwin searches for both a personal identity, such as in his reflections in "Autobiographical Notes" and "Notes of a Native Son," and for a cultural identity, as seen in many of the remaining essays, in which he tries to define what it means to be an African American.

In searching for a personal identity, Baldwin refers to his parents, the physical environment of Harlem, and the social atmosphere of growing up black in the States, prior to the passage of the Civil Rights Bill. He struggles to take an objective stance when discussing his father, attempting to separate himself from the image his father tried to force upon him. He wants to make sense of the poverty and crime that molded his youngest years. When he moves to Paris, he

makes an effort to define the distant American society that affected his definition of himself.

Baldwin also moves beyond the personal and strives to define a more general identity, that of the whole population of African Americans. In "The Harlem Ghetto," he looks at the outside forces that characterize the daily lives of a majority of blacks living in the North. In "Encounter on the Seine: Black Meets Brown," he distinguishes the differences between African blacks and American blacks in how they see themselves as well as in how others see them.

Style

Style

Narrator

Baldwin uses a variety of narrators in his essays. Sometimes he prefers to use the first person singular, such as in "Autobiographical Notes" and "Notes of a Native Son," the use of which fits the personal topics of these essays. Baldwin changes to a first person plural narrator in "Many Thousands Gone," using the pronoun we in a somewhat unusual manner. For instance, he writes: "Today, to be sure, we know that the Negro is not biologically or mentally inferior." In this way, Baldwin removes his personal investment in the "Negro" referred to and either joins himself to those who are not "Negro" or in some abstract way bridges the gap between black and white populations, encouraging a psychological blending of the races.

In some of the other essays in this collection, Baldwin takes on a more journalistic third-person tone, such as in "Carmen Jones" and "Encounter on the Seine," although the first person narrator does, on occasion, slip in.

Setting

Baldwin traveled back and forth between Europe and the States, and these settings are reflected in his essays. He was born in Harlem, and he uses that setting, as well as a broader scope of New York City, in several of his essays. Some essays are devoid of setting, however, such as "Everybody's Protest Novel" and "Many Thousands Gone." The essays that have no visible setting tend to read more like a lecture, whereas those with specific settings read more like short stories. "Journey to Atlanta" of course takes place in Atlanta, Georgia, and the section referred to as "Part Three" contains essays written about Paris and a small village in Switzerland.

Imagery

Baldwin's fiction-writing skills are displayed in his ability to create almost cinematic imagery in some of his essays. The most cinematic is "Notes of a Native Son," which is also the most personal essay in the collection.

Two of the more dramatic scenes that Baldwin paints are the scene of his father dying in a hospital room and the water-pitcher-throwing episode, both of them appearing in "Notes of a Native Son." Another essay that contains vivid scenes is "Equal in Paris," especially the jail sequences. An example of the type of scene that Baldwin creates for his readers in this collection is taken from his "Stranger in the Village":

> If I sat in the sun for more than five minutes some daring creature was certain to come along and gingerly put his fingers on my hair, as though he were afraid of an electric shock, or put his hand on my hand, astonished that the color did not rub off.

Historical Context

Historical Context

Baldwin wrote and published most of the essays in this collection during the late 1940s and early 1950s, decades during which the Civil Rights Movement was slowly gaining strength. The Communist Party, which had given many African Americans hope for gaining civil rights, was waning, mostly due to the political power and censorship of Senator Joseph McCarthy and his House Committee on Un- American Activities. To be a member of the Communist Party meant to be under the constant scrutiny of the FBI, something that the generation of writers before Baldwin had learned about the hard way.

In 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled, in *Smith v. Allwright*, that it was unconstitutional to have an all-white Democratic primary. With this ruling, the NAACP began its massive voter registration drive in the South, with members rounding up eligible voters, educating them on the issues, and making sure that they had completed all the necessary forms to vote in the next elections. Three years later, W. E. B. Du Bois sought unsuccessfully to enlist the United Nations in an international investigation of racial discrimination in the United States.

Harry Truman, faced with a close presidential race in 1948, in part due to the popularity among African Americans of the Progressive Party's candidate Henry A. Wallace, went after the black vote with a civil rights platform that he set forth at the Democratic National Convention. Angered by this move, southern Democrats left the convention and started their own party, the States Rights Party. Upon being elected, Truman desegregated the armed forces.

Martin Luther King, Jr., was still in graduate school at Boston University in 1950. In the next few years, however, he would become a leader in the push for civil rights and would eventually be deemed the most dangerous man in America by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

In the early 1950s two murders brought the full impact of racism to the nation's attention. First there was the assassination of Harry T. Moore, a leading NAACP organizer in Florida, and then the murder of Emmett Till, killed for whistling at a white woman in Mississippi. Till's mother insisted on an open-casket funeral, and pictures of his badly beaten face were shown in many newspapers. Despite the attention to the need for civil rights, victories for the movement were still not forthcoming. In 1956, Alabama passed a state law that banned any faction of the NAACP from operating in that state, and South Carolina banned any member of the NAACP from holding a state job.

The literary scene of the 1940s witnessed great change, beginning with Richard Wright's move away from the somewhat romanticized literature of the Harlem Renaissance Movement, with his angryvoiced *Native Son* (1940). Then, Ralph Ellison, in disagreement with Wright's rather stiff, social protest writing, produced a more poetic *Invisible Man* in 1952. Shortly thereafter, Baldwin wrote his semiautobiographical *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), a coming of age story about a young man's dissolution with the broken promises of the American democratic process.

Other works written by African Americans at this time included the 1946 novel *The Street* by Ann Petry; *A Street in Bronzeville* (1953), a collection of poetry by Gwendolyn Brooks; and the 1959 play by Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun,* which went on to win the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award.

By the 1930s, over 300,000 African Americans lived in New York City, with two-thirds of them living in Harlem. In the 1940s, rents soared in Harlem even as the apartments began to crumble. Overcrowding and underemployment raised tension, and in 1943, when soldier Robert Bandy interrupted two white policemen as they attempted to arrest an African-American woman, Bandy was shot. Rumors spread that Bandy was dead, shot in the back in front of his mother.

It did not take long for angry protestors to appear in the streets, and soon storefront windows were broken and merchandise looted. By morning, six people had died and an estimated two hundred people had been injured. Among the injured was Bandy, who had been shot in the arm.

There were also many positive outcomes in Harlem as witnessed by the talent that developed in that part of New York City. Many famous African American artists started out in Harlem. There were music greats such as Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, Eubie Blake, Charlie Parker, Ornette Coleman, Thelonious Monk, and Miles Davis. In the literary field, there were figures such as Ralph Ellison, Lorraine Hansberry, Audre Lorde, and, later, Maya Angelou.

Critical Overview

Critical Overview

Notes of a Native Son, when first published in 1955, did not sell well. However, when it was reissued in paperback form in 1957, after the publication of Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, it received outstanding reviews and brisk sales and would go on to become one of the most popular of all Baldwin's works.

An example of the praise that Baldwin received for*Notes of a Native Son* comes from Baldwin's biographer Leeming, who writes, "With the publication of *Notes of a Native Son,* Baldwin staked a large claim in an area of American literary territory inhabited by such masters of the essay and autobiography as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Frederick Douglass." Leeming would add that Baldwin "leads the white consciousness through the horrors of the black dilemma, not without passion, but with the subtlety and elegance of a Henry James."

In Nick Aaron Ford's essay "The Evolution of James Baldwin as Essayist," Ford states, "James Baldwin is one of the most talented American essayists since Ralph Waldo Emerson." Ford continues:

> Like Emerson . . . his major thrust is not to impart abstract or concrete knowledge, but to provoke humane thought and announce eternal truths intended to elevate the consciousness of the reader from animal passion to spiritual or philosophical contemplation.

Another noted African-American author, also a contemporary of Baldwin's, was Langston Hughes, who wrote a review of *Notes of a Native Son* for the *New York Times* in which he describes Baldwin:

> James Baldwin writes down to nobody, and he is trying very hard to write up to himself. As an essayist he is thought-provoking, tantalizing, irritating, abusing and amusing. And he uses words as the sea uses waves, to flow and beat, advance and retreat, rise and take a bow in disappearing.

Hughes believed that there were few writers in America who could "handle words more effec- tively in the essay" than Baldwin. Hughes adds: "In his essays, words and material suit each other. The thought becomes poetry, and the poetry illuminates the thought."

James Campbell wrote *Talking at the Gates: A Life of James Baldwin*, in which he praises Baldwin's gift as essayist, a type of writing in which Baldwin was best able to display his intellect. "The essay form enabled Baldwin to write as he spoke, to unfold his experience by discursive methods, until he came upon the meaning at the core." In a more specific analysis of *Notes of a Native Son*, Campbell writes:

> *Notes of a Native Son* unharnesses his gift for autobiographical rumination, his willingness to force his way into new and awkward challenges. The greatest challenge of all was to be free to set his own terms for the course of his life. . . . In order to achieve this, to slough off the old 'nigger' identity he had inherited, he had to invent another way of thinking about himself. The essay was the place to do it, and the didactic process is laid out in the pages of *Notes of a Native Son.*

In his "From a Region in My Mind, The Essays of James Baldwin," Hobart Jarrett declares that Baldwin is "a writer by choice, by talent, by calling." Jarrett does not temper his admiration of Baldwin and goes on to state that from the first time he read Baldwin, he has been "stimulated, exhilarated, and amazed by his essays ever since."

Criticism

Criticism

Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Hart is a published writer and freelance editor. In this essay, Hart examines the process of revelation that Baldwin experiences in his titled essay.

Baldwin begins the title essay in *Notes of a Native Son* with a statement of death and birth. He mentions that his father died on the same day that his father's last child was born. This theme of death and birth also works itself out on a larger scale, eventually encompassing the entire essay. By the end, while sitting at his father's funeral, Baldwin is able to see his father in a different light, one that includes both his negative and positive characteristics. In doing so, Baldwin is also able to see himself more clearly. By examining his relationship with his father, Baldwin experiences several revelations, which culminate in a type of symbolic death and spiritual rebirth by the end of the essay.

In laying out the details of his relationship with his father, Baldwin presents many examples of how he is both similar to his father and different from him. Sometimes Baldwin is very conscious of the differences. At other times, he seems oblivious to the differences, or maybe he just does not want to see them. For instance, at one stage in the essay, he points out that he had not gotten along very well with his father because they shared "the vice of stubborn pride." With this statement, Baldwin clearly sees the link between himself and his father. He also admits that his father's "intolerable bitterness of spirit" had unfortunately been handed down to him. However, there are other moments when Baldwin's rage and even a kind of paranoid madness descend upon him, possibly blinding him to the personal characteristics that he and his father share. He moves back and forth, throughout most of the essay, at times freely drawing parallels, at other times trying desperately to gain distance. The strength of the piece, however, is in his final resolution in which he comes to grips with his father's emotions as well as his own. In the end, he is able to separate himself from his father and yet still cherish in a place in his heart the fact that he and his father will be forever joined.

Sometimes Baldwin's connection to his father comes to him slowly. At first, he might not relate to some of his father's traits, such as when he flashes back to memories of his childhood; but then, after Baldwin has a later experience that sheds light on his father's beliefs, Baldwin gains a better understanding. For instance, he writes about his father's dislike of, and impatience with, white people. "It was clear," Baldwin relates, "that he felt their very presence in his home to be a violation." Baldwin then tells the story about when he was in elementary school and a white teacher took an interest in his writing abilities. She builds a relationship with Baldwin and his family, nurturing his talents and encouraging him to write. His father has trouble accepting this white woman in his home. He is suspicious of her. Baldwin, at that time, understood the power this teacher had. She could open up the world a little wider for him. He used her power to help him get out from under the oppressive nature of his father. At the time, he felt that his father was completely off-base in his fear of white people.

Throughout high school, Baldwin makes friends with white students. He is able to accept them in spite of his father's warnings that they are not to be trusted. Much later, however, after Baldwin has spent years dismissing his father's warnings about white people and how they will "do anything to keep a Negro down," Baldwin leaves home. He had spent his earlier years in Harlem, where the population was mostly black. When he leaves home, he lands a job in a defense factory in New Jersey, where black people were, at that time, in a small minority. Not only are the people with whom he works white, they are southern whites, people who are used to demanding very specific behaviors from black people. Baldwin has already admitted that he has a stubborn pride, so he is not one to humble himself easily simply because of the color of his skin. "I acted in New Jersey as I had always acted, that is as though I thought a great deal of myself."

Slowly but surely, the racist attitude of this white population wears away Baldwin's confidence. At first, he tries to ignore it, but in a fit of rage one night, he becomes so blinded with hate that he believes he could have killed someone. He never mentions that his father ever had such thoughts, but he does portray his father as someone who was "locked up in his terrors; hating and fearing every living soul." It is through this experience in New Jersey that Baldwin begins to understand his father's dislike of white people. It is as if, through their mutual rage, they are drawn together; through their now mutual distrust of white people, Baldwin has discovered a common language. If his father was right about white people, maybe he was right about other things, too. This marks the beginning of Baldwin's revelation.

It is during this time that Baldwin's father is diagnosed as suffering from paranoia. Baldwin does not ever mention this mental illness on a personal basis; that is to say, he never implies that he ever feels paranoid, but he does describe some of his thoughts that could possibly be interpreted as paranoid. For instance, he writes that during that year when he lived in New Jersey, he felt as if he had "contracted some dread, chronic disease." He then relates how he had been fired from his job several times, but through some undefined circumstances, he won his job back. Instead of seeing the positive implications in this, he describes the situation thus: "It began to seem that the machinery of the organization I worked for was turning over, day and night, with but one aim: to eject me." He also mentions that when he walked down the streets, the people who passed him "whispered or shouted--they really believed that I was mad." One further example of a possible paranoia that was brewing inside of him happens again when he is walking down the streets. He writes: "People were moving in every direction but it seemed to me, in that instant, that all of the people I could see . . . were moving toward me, against me."

On the same night that Baldwin suffered the mental anguish of feeling that everyone was turning on him--a night of his most intense anger and mental disorientation--he has another revelation. At the height of his rage and disorientation--the same night that he threw a glass water pitcher at a white waitress who refused to serve him in a fancy restaurant--he realizes that his life is in danger. He had allowed his anger to blind him to the point that he could have killed someone. If he had committed that murder, he too would have been killed. This danger to his life, he realizes, did not exist outside of him. It was not "from anything other people might do," he writes, "but from the hatred I carried in my own heart." Shortly after this revelation, Baldwin is told that his father is dying and that his mother is about to give birth; and he decides to move back home.

Like the prodigal son, Baldwin returns. There is tension all around him. It is the tension of waiting, of anticipating. He feels it in the unwillingness of the baby to be born. Her birth is well overdue. He feels it in his father's reluctance to die and wonders why he is hanging on to life. He also senses tension from people standing in the street in Harlem. Everything is poised for some inevitable action, just as Baldwin is poised for the final meeting with his father.

Before he goes to visit his father for the last time, Baldwin theorizes about what might be causing the anxiety that he senses in the people gathering on every corner in his neighborhood. In his description of that tension, he unwittingly draws attention to some of his own hidden emotions. For example, he mentions that almost everyone in his community was either related to or knew a young man who was a soldier. These people often gather together to share comments they have received in letters from the young "Negro boys in uniform," who have complained of the "indignities and dangers" they suffered, not in the war but in the boot camps where they trained in the South. The parents and relatives of these soldiers actually feel relief, Baldwin believes, when their sons are able to leave the South and go oversees to the war. "It was, perhaps, like feeling that the most dangerous part of a dangerous journey had been passed," Baldwin writes, and then he adds, "Such a death would be, in short, a fact with which one could hope to live."

Baldwin's reference to a dangerous journey encapsulates, on a symbolic level, his own journey away from his father, one in which he is consumed by rage and paranoia. In addition, his mention of a death that one could hope to live with, might also symbolize, or foreshadow, his own spiritual death and rebirth that he will experience at his father's funeral. It is interesting to note that in the beginning of the essay, Baldwin mentions his father's death before he writes about his baby

sister's impending birth. The placement of death before birth connotes the concept of rebirth. In this way, Baldwin, right from the first few sentences, suggests the events that will occur in the final passages of his essay in which he will experience his own spiritual rebirth.

Baldwin completes another segment of his journey as he travels with his aunt to Long Island to visit Baldwin's father for the last time. When he sees his father, Baldwin realizes that the reasons he had used to stay away from his father had merely been excuses. Once again, Baldwin is hit with another revelation. He thought he had stayed away from his father because he hated him, but he realizes that, in fact, the reason he had stayed away was that he wanted to hate him. He did not want to feel anything else but hate for him. He had learned to live with the hate. If it had not healed his wounds, it had helped him to forget about them. Seeing his father in the hospital, a withered old man breathing his last breaths, Baldwin was unable to hate him. "I imagine that one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, that they will be forced to deal with pain." At this moment, Baldwin begins to open up to his father. He is letting down his shields. He is looking at his father as a fellow human being, not as the tyrant who ruled his youth.

Later, after his father dies, Baldwin writes that he cannot find anything black to wear to his father's funeral. This could be a symbolic statement that he is not yet ready to mourn for his father. Not only is he unable to find the proper clothes, but neither can he face his father's death completely sober, so he borrows a black shirt and gets drunk before walking into the chapel. At this point, when he first arrives at the funeral, he is both there and not there. He is physically attending, but his emotions are numbed by the alcohol. At the funeral, he listens to the minister eulogize his father. At first, Baldwin does not recognize the man that the minister is describing. The minister is using words such as "thoughtful, patient, and forbearing." This is not the man that Baldwin knew as his father. Yet, Baldwin suddenly suspects that maybe the man he "had not known may have been the real one."

As these suspicions work their way through his mind, Baldwin hears someone singing one of his father's favorites songs, and childhood memories rush in on him. In a flash of recognition, Baldwin now remembers how proud his father used to be of him. He recollects his father beaming at him when he used to sing: "I had forgotten what he had looked like when he was pleased but now I remembered." From this memory, he jumps to another, seeing through his mind's eye how his father used to tease his mother. Baldwin then questions his own reflections: "Had he loved her?" One question leads to another, and soon Baldwin is unsure of all his early impressions of his father. He now remembers a more loving father, one who took his hand, one who wiped away his tears.

At this point in the essay, Baldwin leaves the funeral and writes about the Harlem riots. All the glass windows in the storefronts are broken. Merchandise is lying all over the street. "I truly had not realized that Harlem *had* so many stores until I saw them all smashed open," he writes. Similarly, one might reflect that Baldwin had not realized all his father's emotions, nor all of his own, until his father's death pulled them out of him. Baldwin then writes about a metaphor concerning people's reactions to life's challenges. "One is always in the position of having to decide between amputation and gangrene," he writes. If a person chooses amputation, the reaction is swift, but later he or she may discover that amputation was not necessary. Could he be referring here to his having closed himself off from his father?

Baldwin closes his essay, by returning to one of his earlier revelations, the one in which he told himself that he must "hold onto the things that mattered." Then he confesses, mostly to himself, that "the dead man mattered." He also realizes that bitterness and hatred only destroy the person who holds on to them. He now understands that he must learn to accept, but not complacently, for he must also, simultaneously, find some way to fight injustice. These revelations come to him from his father's death, which opened his eyes and ears and cleared his memories. All the sermons his father had delivered, all the songs that his father had sung in church, whose meaning Baldwin had previously ignored, were now, in Baldwin's words, "arranged before me . . . like empty bottles, waiting to hold the meaning which life would give them for me."

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on *Notes of a Native Son*, in *Nonfiction Classics for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #2

Dybiec Holm is a published writer and editor with a master's degree in Natural Resources. In this essay, Dybiec Holm discusses the theme of societal constraint that links the essays in Baldwin's work.

James Baldwin's collection of essays, titled *Notes of a Native Son*, examines the African-American man's experience in terms that are brutally honest. Whether Baldwin is dealing with his experience as an African-American man in America or Europe, the reader is given a first hand view of the ingrained, societal obstacles that a minority faces. Baldwin examines these barriers in the context of African- American literature, experiences in Harlem and in the South, family death, and finally, his experiences as an African-American man outside of America. The common theme that unites these different slants is a pronounced fatalism--an African-American person can never escape the constraints and the expectations that society puts upon him.

Beginning with his "Autobiographical Notes," which serve as an introduction, Baldwin makes it clear that society is something to be struggled with. As a writer, he claims that "Any writer, I suppose, feels that the world into which he was born is nothing less than a conspiracy against the cultivation of his talent--which attitude certainly has a great deal to support it." But Baldwin goes further, stating that the African-American writer faces an additional obstacle--the fact that "the Negro problem . . . is not only written about so widely; it is written about so badly." He also admits that he is a good target for the fatalism that is such a central theme of this book: "I hated and feared the world . . . I thus gave the world an altogether murderous power over me.'

But the barriers that Baldwin describes in *Notes of a Native Son* go beyond those that are selfinduced. In "Everybody's Protest Novel," the author questions whether a novel that attempts to raise awareness of a societal problem (such as the "Negro problem") actually misses its mark. According to Baldwin, these novels run the risk of being read for the "very definite thrill of virtue from the fact that we are reading such a book at all. . . . As long as such books are being published, an American liberal once said to me, everything will be all right." For Baldwin, this represents another inescapable societal barrier--the rest of the populace's inability or unwillingness to face the state of race relations in America.

According to Baldwin, American society's reactions to certain African-American art forms demonstrate the same unwillingness to accept the true nature of race relations. African Americans have finally been able to tell their story through their music, according to Baldwin. However, "a protective sentimentality limits their (Whites, other Americans) understanding of it. . . . No American is prepared to hear." In a way, society has "dehumanized" the African-American person by refusing to accept the deeper and darker overtones of race interaction in America. But Baldwin warns that as society dehumanizes the African-American person, it also dehumanizes itself. Critic David Leeming, in *Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature*, describes Baldwin's journey as "a lonely search for identity in a world blinded by its own myths." Baldwin gives us plenty of examples of the world's blindness.

"We cannot escape our origins, no matter how hard we try," says Baldwin. The author sees this as an inherent problem in being an American, let alone an African American. Americans "reject all other ties, any other history, and . . . adopt the vesture of [their] adopted land." Yet the African-American person is unable to divest of his pre-American history, since "his shameful history was carried, quite literally, on his brow."

But if African Americans cannot escape the pre-conclusions and expectations that society lays upon them, neither can the rest of society, according to Baldwin. If the rest of society would choose to deny or soften racial tensions, Baldwin

claims that it is not possible.

> The 'nigger,' black, benighted, brutal, consumed with hatred as we are consumed with guilt, cannot be blotted out . . . let us refrain from inquiring at the moment whether or not he actually exists; for we *believe* he exists. Whenever we encounter him amongst us in the flesh, our faith is made perfect and his necessary and bloody end is executed with a mystical ferocity of joy.

Baldwin uses the African-American novel *Native Son* (by Richard Wright) as a telling example of ingrained societal constraints: "*Native Son* finds itself at length so trapped by the American image of Negro life and by the American necessity to find the ray of hope that it cannot pursue its own implications."

Even the African-American press is not immune to the constraints of society, according to Baldwin.

> It is the terrible dilemma of the Negro press that, having no other model, it models itself on the white press, attempting to emulate the same effortless, sophisticated tone--a tone that its subject matter renders utterly unconvincing."

Thus, *Ebony* runs an editorial admonishing African Americans to be more patriotic and stop bemoaning their lot in life. Only in the letters-tothe- editor section can "life among the rejected be seen in print." The African-American press suffers, in Baldwin's words, by "straining for recognition and a foothold in the white man's world." But Americans, to the author, wish to make "everyone . . . as much alike as possible." If the African- American press were truly representative of African Americans, according to Baldwin, the publications would include more violence, since "Negros live violent lives." As it stands, repressed African- American frustration and violence simmer to an emotional surface in African-American churches, since societal constraints block more direct avenues of expression.

It may be no accident that the essay "Notes of a Native Son" separates the previous essays about African-American life in America from the following essays, which detail Baldwin's experience as an African American abroad. Baldwin seems to change course in this essay, slowing down to examine his life from a more personal view that incorporates the death of his father. But the author still cannot escape the constraints of his life, even as he comes to realize--in this essay--that some are self-imposed. Says Baldwin, after telling of an incident of discrimination in a restaurant:

> I had been ready to commit murder. I saw nothing very clearly but I did see this: that my life, my *real* life, was in danger, and not from anything other people might do but from the hatred I carried in my own heart.

When Baldwin lives overseas in France, he comes to realize that societal expectations have followed him across the ocean. These differ from those of American society; but their presence rises up at inopportune moments. Leeming points out that Baldwin "use[s] incidents from [his] expatriate life in Europe as metaphors for the overall dilemma facing African Americans and other oppressed people." When Baldwin is arrested for possessing a sheet that has been stolen from a hotel (by an American acquaintance), he is frightened by the condition of the French prisons. He also realizes that the context of dealing with Caucasians is different in this country, and he feels helpless.

> I had become very accomplished in New York [at] guessing and, therefore, to a limited extent manipulating to my advantage the reactions of the white world. But this was not New York. None of my old weapons could serve me here. I did not know what they saw when they looked at me.

In the last essay, titled "Stranger in the Village," Baldwin describes his residence in a remote Swiss village. Here, the people have never seen a person with Baldwin's skin color, and the children innocently cry "*Neger! Neger!*" whenever

they see him. Though he knows the children are fascinated and well-intentioned, the cry can't help but raise dark, bitter memories in his mind. Claims Baldwin, "[history] may be the nightmare from which no one *can* awaken. People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them." It is perhaps the best explanation for the thread of fatalism that runs throughout this book.

Source: Catherine Dybiec Holm, Critical Essay on *Notes of a Native Son*, in *Nonfiction Classics for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #3

Korb has a master's degree in English literature and creative writing and has written for a wide variety of educational publishers. In this essay, Korb discusses Baldwin's thoughts about African- American identity in Baldwin's work.

The essays that comprise Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son* were initially published in numerous magazines over a period of seven years. Despite the different places and periods in which Baldwin wrote these ten essays, they are remarkably of a piece, in fact, so much so that when African American scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr., first read the collection as a teenager in 1965, he recalls that "It was the first time I had heard a voice capturing the terrible exhilaration and anxiety of being a person of African descent in this country." From its publication to the present day, *Notes of a Native Son* has stood as a definitive text on African American identity. F. W. Dupee wrote in 1963, "As a writer of polemical essays on the Negro question James Baldwin has no equals." Many contemporary critics and readers would agree with this statement.

In Part I of *Notes of a Native Son,* Baldwin turns his attention to the common media to examine the portrayal and perception of African Americans. He uses the method of analyzing social issues through popular media effectively. As F. W. Dupee wrote in the *New York Review of Books* on Baldwin's reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, such an effort "illuminates[s] not only a book, an author, an age, but a whole strain in a country's culture." In all three essays, Baldwin draws upon specific examples from literature and cinema to demonstrate white America's fear of the black man and to prove his assertion that in this society, "black equates with evil and white with grace."

He begins his investigation with "Everybody's Protest Novel," a discussion of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a work that vastly encouraged the abolitionist movement but which Baldwin dubs a "very bad novel" and one representative of the work of an "impassioned pamphleteer." The black-white dichotomy explored in this novel continued to pervade the American psyche for the next hundred years. By 1940, when Richard Wright published *Native Son*, which Baldwin calls "the most powerful and celebrated statement we have yet had of what it means to be a Negro in America," the black man is still constrained by the image that the white man holds of him as less than human, as a being primarily motivated by anger and little other emotion. By contrast, the all-black movie *Carmen Jones*, produced in 1955, presented a sanitized version of a black community and its problems. These characters, Baldwin contends, demonstrate a "total divorce from anything suggestive of Negro life.'

For Baldwin, such unrealistic portrayals of black America leads to an acceptance of these restrictive roles, and thus a negation of a person's essential humanity. Uncle Tom, the only truly black character in the novel that bears his name, must undergo "humility, the incessant mortification of the flesh" in order to eventually "enter into communion with God or man." This despite the fact that this God and this morality has been imposed on the "African exile" and celebrates a deity "who had made him, but not in His image." The opposite of Uncle Tom is Wright's Bigger Thomas, a man whose self-perception is intrinsically linked to how whites view him, for the "American image of the Negro lives also in the Negro's heart." Bigger fulfills the white man's prophecy of himself as subhuman when he allows rage to become his primary motivating factor. "[H]is fear drives him to murder and his hatred to rape," writes Baldwin, "he dies, having come through this violence, we are told, for the first time, to a kind of life, having for the first time redeemed his manhood." According to Baldwin, such a narrow characterization is the book's "overwhelming limitation," and one that will negatively influence whites' perceptions of blacks: "Recording his [Wright's] days of anger he has also nevertheless recorded, as no Negro before him had ever done, that fantasy Americans hold in their minds when they speak of the Negro." Thus, in the case of Wright, both white America and black America that feeds this image.

In Part II of the essay collection, Baldwin examines the role of African Americans with regard to typical segments of society such as institutions and groups. In so doing, Baldwin is able to demonstrate, through specific incidents and events, the extent to which African Americans exist according to the perception and whimsy of whites. Because whites create the prevailing social milieu and morality that govern the United States, African Americans must structure their own lives within the con- fines of others, thus rendering themselves isolated.

In "The Harlem Ghetto," Baldwin discusses the relationship between African Americans and Jews. Though both are historically oppressed groups, they are unable to form a common bond against white Protestant America because they see the other in relation to the majority population. "When the Negro hates the Jews *as a Jew* he does so partly because the nation does and in much the same painful fashion that he hates himself," Baldwin writes. Similarly, the Jew has taken on a "frenzied adoption of the customs of the country," that is, the nation's poor treatment of African Americans. White America "has divided these minorities," thus ensuring a continuing rule of the country. In "Journey to Atlanta," Baldwin investigates another relationship that should be beneficial to African Americans but is not: that between African Americans and the Progressive Party. Despite its claims of fellowship with the black man, members of the Progressive Party, as seen through their actions, do not have fidelity to equality and betterment for all. Baldwin chronicles the experiences of a Harlem singing quartet, the Melodeers, who travel south to sing on tour with the Progressive Party. However, their presence in the South is circumscribed by a wealthy white woman, the region's party director. After they incur her rage, by the simple act of refusing to continue singing at her party, they find themselves to be cut off without funds, far away from home.

Part II closes with the essay "Notes of a Native Son," which is widely viewed as a masterpiece. Michael Anderson wrote in the *New York Times Book Review* that this piece "remains profoundly moving in its emotionally charged conflation of the funeral of Baldwin's stepfather, the young Baldwin's harsh introduction to bigotry and a race riot in Harlem." In "Notes of a Native Son," Baldwin explores white-black racial relations from a more personal point of view--through his own relationship with his father, an embittered, isolated black man. When Baldwin leaves his native Harlem and moves to New Jersey to work in the wartime defense plants, he experiences the damaging forms of racism that shaped his father. After being refused service at a restaurant, Baldwin throws a pitcher of water at the waitress, then flees the white mob and the police. He sees for perhaps the first time "that my life, my real life, was in danger, and not from anything other people might do but from the hatred in my own heart." This rage is further fueled upon his return to Harlem for his father's funeral, which takes place on the day that racially provoked riots erupt. Wendy Brandmark wrote in the *New Internationalist:*

> Within the limits of one essay Baldwin shows us how the events of his life form part of a larger pattern: as he drives the hearse bearing his father's coffin through the rubble of 'those unquiet, ruined streets' he realizes how 'powerful and overflowing' his father's bitterness of spirit could be.

In Part III, Baldwin turns his essayist's pen to more universal issues of identity, oppression, and justice. These three essays are written from the point of view of the expatriate, after Baldwin relocated to France. In Paris, Baldwin is able to observe the relations that black Americans have with others-- white Americans, Africans, and Europeans--without the pervasive backdrop of a racially charged society. His newfound ability to funnel his experiences through a lens not focused solely on race as a motivating factor allows him to widen his viewpoint and ponder greater issues of the American experience overall, not just the African American experience.

According to Baldwin, African Americans in France develop relationships with other people that are unique from those they develop in the United States. With regard to black and white Americans, when the two groups meet in France, they talk about anything *but* the racial matters that typically define their relationship. However, while African Americans in Europe are thus able to transcend racial status--perhaps for the first time--to white Europeans, they will always be *black* Americans, never simply Americans. The meeting between black Africans and African American is equally constrained,

for Africans are still colonials while African Americans are, ostensibly, at liberty. At the same time, however, the two groups are markedly different; Africans have not been forced, through centuries of enforced migration and slavery, to become estranged from their own culture and history, while African Americans have more concrete ties to the United States than to Africa. Thus, it is in the relationship to America, from which African Americans are nevertheless excluded, that the African "American experience"-- " depthless alienation from oneself and one's people"--is found.

Baldwin also turns his attention to issues and incidents not characterized by race. In his essay "Equal in Paris," which describes the slow, yet brutal turning of the French wheels of justice, Baldwin puts forth ideas about the universality of oppression. At times, this "standard" is applied equally to people of any color or nationality. Baldwin's musings on American students living in Paris lead to his conclusion that the American identity is intrinsically and irrevocably linked with Europe. The final essay of the collection, "Stranger in the Village," describes Americans' longing for the socalled innocence of their European past, most de- finitively characterized as a return to "a state in which black men do not exist."

Baldwin's individual essays uphold the most important conclusion of *Notes of a Native Son:* African Americans *do* live, and their presence as free people on American soil has led to the separation of black and white in as many ways as possible, a social structure that continues to define America. To expect this division to exist, however, is not only disingenuous, but it also leads adherents of the policy of separation to overlook what Baldwin calls the "interracial drama acted out on the American continent [that] has not only created a new black man, [but] . . . a new white man, too." This fact is so crucial that until it is commonly accepted, no one-- white or black--will be able to face the world clearly and honestly.

Source: Rena Korb, Critical Essay on *Notes of a Native Son,* in *Nonfiction Classics for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Topics for Further Study

Topics for Further Study

Baldwin mentions the Progressive Party of the United States in his essay "Journey to Atlanta." Research the history of this political party. Who were its candidates? What were its prominent platform issues? Was the party ever successful in getting one of its candidates elected? What was the time period in which the Party was active? Which contemporary party most resembles it, if any.

Read Richard Wright's novel *Native Son,* keeping Baldwin's essays "Everybody's Protest Novel" and "Many Thousands Gone" in mind. Do you agree with Baldwin's assessment of Wright's work? Write a short paper that contains your conclusions and arguments.

Research the history of Harlem. Who were its earliest inhabitants? Describe the major population changes over the years. When did the riots occur? What is Harlem like today?

Baldwin wrote *Notes of a Native Son* during his twenties. He wrote *The Fire Next Time* more than a decade later. Choose one of the essays in his second collection of essays that best demonstrates a change in voice or attitude. Compare it to one specific essay in *Notes of A Native Son*. Is his later writing clearer? More accessible? Have his beliefs changed?

Compare & Contrast

Compare & Contrast

1900s: Several newspapers with a focus on African- American issues are in circulation. Two of these publications are Samuel E. Cornish's *Freedom's Journal* and Frederick Douglass's *North Star,* which are established as venues in which to discuss slavery.

1950s: By this time, almost every major city in the United States has its own newspaper with a focus on African-American news. Two of the oldest are the *Philadelphia Tribune* and the *Chicago Defender*.

Today: As newsrooms at formerly all-white newspapers are integrated, many of the most talented African-American journalists join major newspapers, thus leaving the traditional allblack newspapers drained of talent. Many of the African-American newspapers disappear. However, magazines published with an African-American audience in mind flourish.

1900s: Migration of large numbers of people from the South fill Harlem with a huge population of a full range of low-, middle-, and upperclass African-American families. The atmosphere in Harlem nurtures pioneering intellectual thought, and the arts prosper.

1950s: After World War II, the economic status of Harlem begins to plummet as middle-class residents begin a new migration to other integrated sections of New York City. Harlem, although it remains a haven for black artists, suffers from an infant mortality rate that is double that of the rest of the city.

Today: Harlem experiences a slow economic renaissance as rental rates in the rest of the city soar and the white population moves into the area and begins to renovate the old buildings. The presence of former President Bill Clinton's office in Harlem stimulates the increased interest.

1900s: In the films of the early 1900s, many of the roles of African Americans are played by white people in blackface. The few parts that African Americans do fill are written to reflect simplemindedness, providing the movie with comic relief.

1950s to 1970s: Around the middle of the century, there are more roles for African Americans. Sidney Poitier receives the Academy Award for best actor (*Lilies of the Field,* 1963). African- American producers such as Gordon Parks (*Shaft,* 1971) and Ossie Davis (*Cotton Comes to Harlem,* 1970) enjoy financial success.

Today: Spike Lee, an African American who writes, directs, and acts in his movies, gains a wide audience appeal despite the themes of his movies, which often reflect the harsh realities of racial prejudice that still exist in the United States. His films include *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *Mo' Better Blues* (1990), and *Bamboozled* (2000).

What Do I Read Next?

What Do I Read Next?

Native Son (1940) is Richard Wright's first published novel. The main character, Bigger Thomas, a young man living in Chicago during the 1930s, tries to rise above poverty and racism but becomes entrapped in a sequence of horrific events. It is a book about the effects of poverty and what it means to be black in America. Although Baldwin criticized Wright for his portrayal of such an angry character, most critics believe that this is Wright's most powerful work.

Collected Essays (1998) includes Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son, Nobody Knows My Name, The Fire Next Time, No Name in the Street*, and *The Devil Finds Work*. Many critics believe that Baldwin's writing was strongest when he wrote in the essay form. This book offers the full range of his nonfiction work.

W. E. B. Du Bois wrote essays almost fifty years before Baldwin was published. However, their topics run along very similar lines. *W. E. B. Du Bois: Writings* (1986) includes most of his collections of essays, such as *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade, Souls of Black Folk*, and *Dusk at Dawn*.

Zora Neale Hurston, an African-American writer associated with the Harlem Renaissance Movement of the 1920s, is most famous for her fiction. However, she was a prolific writer of essays, which can be found in her *Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings* (1995).

Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), although criticized by Baldwin, remains a classic. Stowe wrote the book to publicize the need to end slavery.

Everything and Nothing: The Dorothy Dandridge Tragedy (2000) tells the rags-to-riches story of this African-American movie actress, who rose from humble beginnings, won an Academy Award, and died under very suspicious circumstances.

Langston Hughes, a contemporary of Baldwin's, was both a poet and a fiction writer. His *The Ways of White Folks* (1969) is a collection of stories about the clashes between white and black people in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s.

If He Hollers, Let Him Go (1968) was written by another contemporary of Baldwin's, Chester Himes. The story takes place in southern California in the 1940s and relates the plight of the only black foreman in a shipyard during World War II.

Further Reading

Further Reading

Fabre, Michel, *From Harlem to Paris: Black American Writers in France, 1840-1980*, University of Illinois Press, 1993.

> Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald were not the only expatriate American writers who lived in France. Many African-American intellectuals, such as Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and W. E. B. Du Bois also sought out the freedom of Paris in order to write. This book chronicles the history of the African-American writer in France, including authors Richard Wright and James Baldwin.

Polsgrove, Carol, *Divided Minds: Intellectuals and the Civil Rights Movement*, W. W. Norton and Company, 2001.

> Polsgrove had gathered interviews and archival materials to research this book that demonstrates the lack of support by many white intellectuals during the drive for civil rights. She does praise a few brave African-American authors, however, most specifi- cally James Baldwin.

Standley, Fred L., and Louis H. Pratt, *Conversations with James Baldwin*, University Press of Mississippi, 1989.

> This collection of interviews, from 1963 up to the last interview that Baldwin gave in 1988, gives the reader an insider's view of Baldwin thoughts. Baldwin discusses such topics as apartheid, religion, the Civil Rights Movement, sexuality, and the process of writing.

Weatherby, William J., *James Baldwin: An Artist on Fire: A Portrait*, Donald I. Find, 1989.

> This biography was written by a friend of Baldwin's and offers readers a better understanding of Baldwin's literary works and the circumstances of his life. Weatherby also offers literary criticism of some of Baldwin's works.

Willis-Thomas, Deborah, and Jane Lusaka, eds., *Visual Journey: Harlem and D.C. in the Thirties and Forties*, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996.

> This book captures the work of five African-American photographers who documented segregated black communities in Washington, D.C., rural Virginia, and New York City in the 1930s and 1940s. The over one hundred photographs give the reader a visual understanding of the living conditions during those times.

Sources

Sources

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Dupee, F. W., "James Baldwin and the 'Man,"' Review of *The Fire Next Time*, in *New York Review of Books*, February 1, 1963.

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Hughes, Langston, Review of *Notes of a Native Son*, in the *New York Times*, February 26, 1958.

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Kinnamon, Keneth, *James Baldwin: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974.

Leeming, David, *James Baldwin: A Biography*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.

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Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

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Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Nonfiction Classics for Students (NCfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, NCfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NCfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NCfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members--educational professionals-- helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NCfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed--for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. o Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.

- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NCfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).
- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NCfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Nonfiction Classics for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Nonfiction Classics for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Nonfiction Classics for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NCfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

> "Night." Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NCfS (usually the first piece under the "Criticism" subhead), the following format should be used:

> Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on "Winesburg, Ohio." Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

> Malak, Amin. "Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition," Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Nonfiction Classics for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

> Adams, Timothy Dow. "Richard Wright: "Wearing the Mask," in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Nonfiction Classics for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Nonfiction Classics for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535