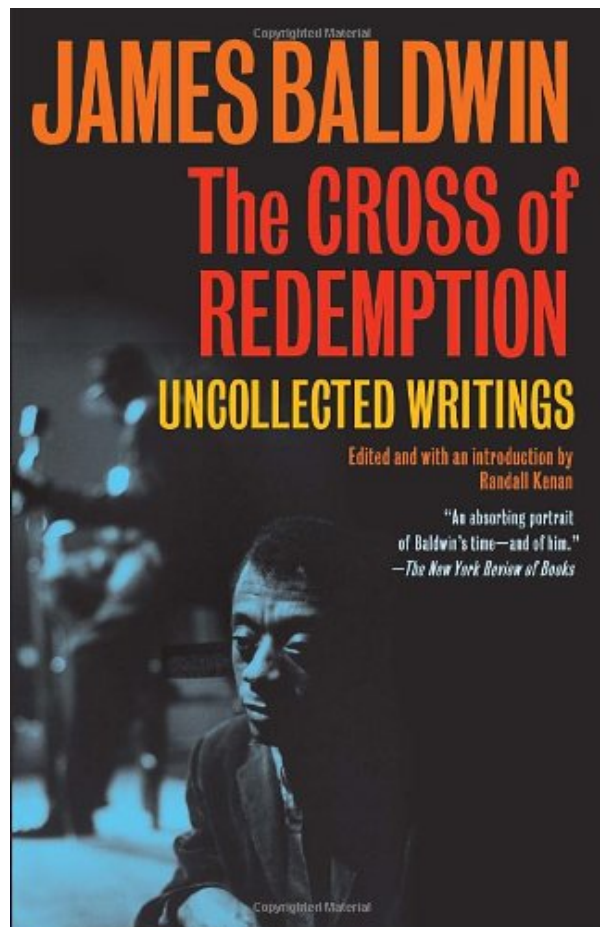
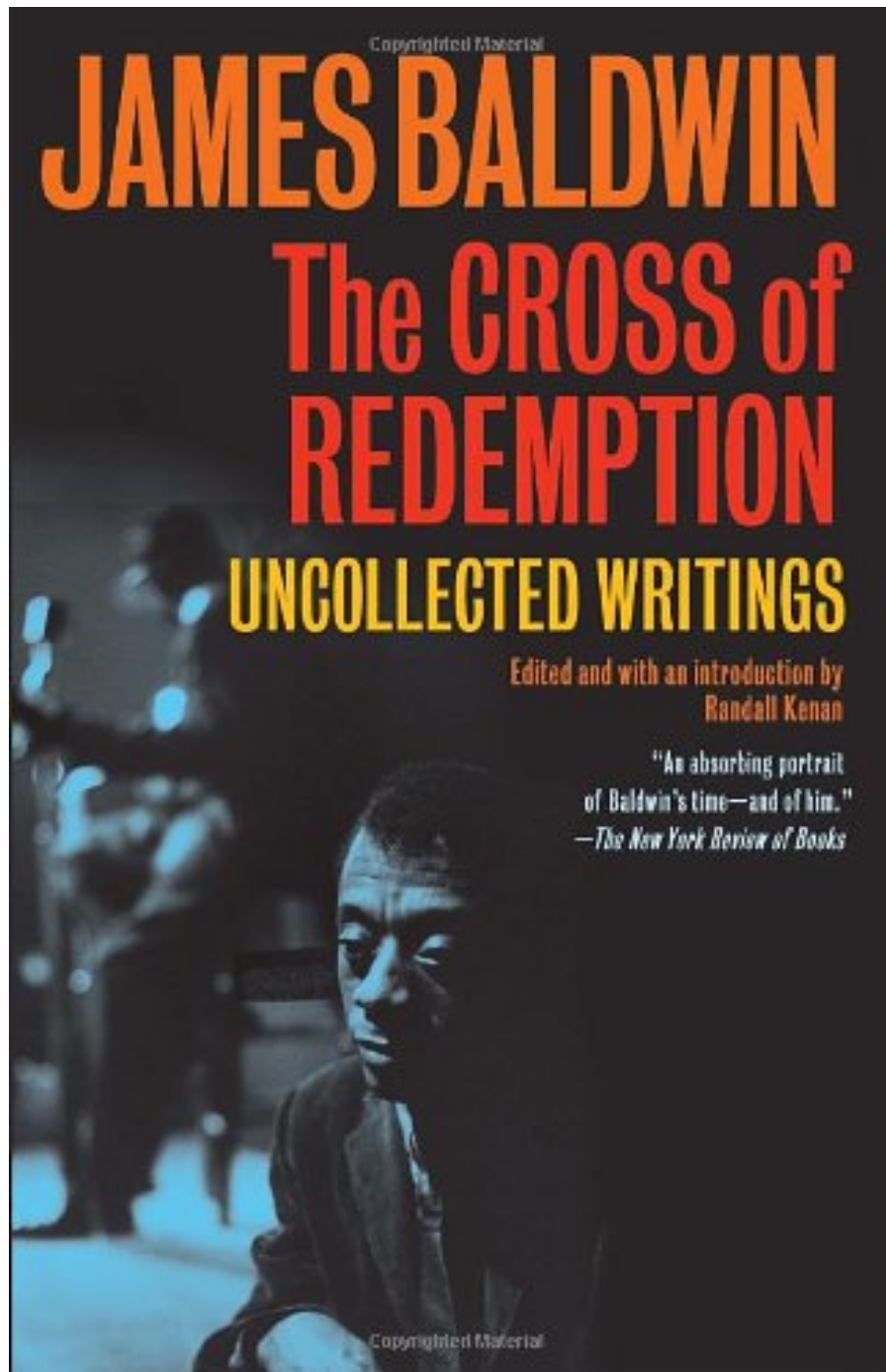


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UNCOLLECTED WRITINGS (VINTAGE  
INTERNATIONAL) BY JAMES BALDWIN**



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James Baldwin was one of the most brilliant and provocative literary figures of the past century, renowned for his fierce engagement with issues haunting our common history. In *The Cross of Redemption* we have Baldwin discoursing on, among other subjects, the possibility of an African-American president and what it might mean; the hypocrisy of American religious fundamentalism; the black church in America; the trials and tribulations of black nationalism; anti-Semitism; the blues and boxing; Russian literary masters; and the role of the writer in our society.

Prophetic and bracing, *The Cross of Redemption* is a welcome and important addition to the works of a cosmopolitan and canonical American writer who still has much to teach us about race, democracy, and personal and national identity. As Michael Ondaatje has remarked, "If van Gogh was our nineteenth-century artist-saint, Baldwin [was] our twentieth-century one."

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Soul on Fire

By Foster Corbin

Randall Kenan, author of *LET THE DEAD BURY THEIR DEAD* and *A VISITATION OF SPIRITS*, has edited the uncollected writing of James Baldwin for which we can all be grateful. The book is divided into Essays and Speeches, Profiles, Letters, Forewords and Afterwords, Book Reviews and Fiction. The writings cover 1947 when Baldwin was writing book reviews until the year of his death in 1987 when Baldwin was at the height of his powers in what is one of the best articles included here, "To Crush a Serpent."

No subject is off limits for Mr. Baldwin as he writes unflinchingly about white racism, Jews, black power, black English and religious fundamentalism. He has an open letter to Angela Davis and essays on Sidney Poitier and Lorraine Hansberry. Baldwin is a hard marker. In his review of the novel *THE MOTH* by James M. Cain-- probably most famous for *THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE* and *DOUBLE INDEMNITY*-- he says simply "Mr. Cain is no novelist: he has, indeed, his first sentence still to write; he has yet to achieve his first valid characterization." But it is Mr. Baldwin on the role of the Negro in America that he is sharpest and that he will probably be remembered for in a hundred years rather than his book reviews. I can think of no writer who has written better or with more passion on race in America than this great writer.

Time and time again Baldwin refers to what he calls "the nightmare of history" and laments that no one seems to learn from that history. In his essay "The Price May Be Too High," he opines that white people are beyond

hope." And to persuade black boys and girls that their lives are less than other lives is "the sin against the Holy Ghost. He reminds us that slave labor made this country wealthy and that the American prison is filled with dark people. Baldwin does not mince words when it comes to white politicians, in particular Bobby Kennedy who could not understand why a black man would not want to take up arms to fight for this country. The Italian and other immigrants in this country spend their lives hating their parents, refusing to speak Italian in an effort to become American or upwardly mobile. Or as Baldwin says so eloquently, anyone making it in England did not get on the Mayflower. About fundamentalist religion, he says that the "Right Reverend Robertson" does not know the man from Galilee and that fundamentalists do not know that poor people exist. He sees white ministers and deputy sheriffs as one and the same. Finally Baldwin laments that President Eisenhower's favorite writer is Zane Grey. (He believes, by the way, that Henry James is America's greatest novelist.)

But for all of Baldwin's jeremiads, he hopes in the essay "Black Power" that "something will happen in the human heart that will change our common history." But if that something doesn't happen, then black people should remember that they come from a long line of runaway slaves "who survived without passports."

Although Mr. Baldwin has been dead almost 25 years, one wonders what he would think about our first black president. (He asked in one of his essays the question: why would a black man want to be president?) I fear that he would find many things the way he left them. Although integration may have come to the White House, sad to say, ours is still a segregated country where children in black and Latino neighborhoods often go to inferior schools and-- to paraphrase another fine writer of color-- too often find their dreams of a better life deferred.

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

He who has not read Mr. Baldwin has not read anglophone America  
By Love Thy Enemy

Yet to begin with this book is like buying a collection of Jimi Hendrix studio out takes and concert bootlegs and claiming to have heard and to know his oeuvre.

Begin, rather, with *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and work forward through the novels, all of them.

And the political analyses intended for publication.

Read then, only then, and just as carefully, this rich banquet of leftovers, from one of our deepest thinkers and most gifted literary stylists in American English.

And come to know our America, backwards and forwards, inside and out.

For context read as well the complete works of Richard Wright, such as *Richard Wright : Later Works: Black Boy (American Hunger), The Outsider*, and the great work of Ralph Ellison, the greatest anglo American novel, *Invisible Man*. His next novel tragically was lost in a mysterious house fire and never completely resurrected.

They simply do not teach this stuff in our schools anymore, as we must.

Know our history. Read these great works of American writing.

13 of 15 people found the following review helpful.

Not all "uncollected" or even "written" but Baldwin shines  
By Francis A

It's always a great pleasure to return to Baldwin's unmatched prose. The first thing you ask of a writer is that he can write (a question too rarely answered in the affirmative), and Baldwin used the English language as well as anyone has done.

This brings me to the first of a few quibbles about the book. A few of the longer pieces are not in fact "written", or at least not written in the form presented here. I don't know the extent to which Baldwin wrote a script for his speeches, but he clearly didn't stick to it. And he certainly didn't write the words he spoke in debates and discussions. A couple of the longer pieces fall into this "unwritten" category. And while the pieces may never have been collected together in one volume, many have certainly been collected somewhere, as half were familiar to me and only one of those from its original source.

The more significant problem is that while some of the writing in here is as good as anything Baldwin has written, a lot of it is relatively casual (insofar as Baldwin's writing was ever casual) and ephemeral stuff. In passing we learn how much effort and care went into "Another Country" and the "Down at the Cross" (the major part of "The Fire Next Time"), and you wonder what Baldwin would have thought of a rather random collection of pieces like this one. It would certainly be a shame to begin your knowledge of Baldwin with this book.

But there is more than enough great writing, passion and (over four traumatic decades) consistent bravery of thought and analysis to savour and encourage you to revisit the best of his writing.

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“...This book, which includes early fiction sketches that grew into *Go Tell It On The Mountain* and *Giovanni’s Room* was vibrant to the last, and his final products were a fitting, natural end to the long trajectory of his joyful misanthropy. . . . Baldwin’s essays are among the best in English since Orwell’s, and are freighted with the same weary skepticism, the same register of encomium and warning.” —Bookslut

“The Cross of Redemption amounts to an album of ‘studio tapes’ on which we hear songs we know in ways we’ve never heard before.” —Quarterly Conversation

“The concept of racial identity as a conscious choice had never occurred to me before I encountered it in Baldwin’s work. . . . Baldwin exposes the seamlessness of America’s racial past, present, and future.” —Timothy Ledwith, *Open Letters Monthly*

“These assorted essays, letters, reviews and profiles act as a reminder of the great power language has when used in the service of a talent like Baldwin’s. . . . Kenan has done us all a great service.” —Austinist

“This momentous collection of essays, book reviews, speeches, letters and journalism—and one short story—is a fierce and felicitous reminder of how towering a literary figure James Baldwin was.” —*Outlook Columbus*

“There are many gems here: Baldwin’s impassioned essays on music, his talks on anti-Semitism, and article about a boxing match. . . . These days, it can be difficult to find something as lasting as a Baldwin essay—as the kind of writing that gets under the skin and makes it itch.” —*The Harvard Crimson*

“Read this book to gain insight into James Baldwin, the World, and more importantly; Yourself!” —WAGTi Radio

“These previously published writings, gleaned for the most part from a variety of periodical sources, have a more powerful resonance when read together in book form. A useful addition for African American scholars.” —*Library Journal*

“...Offers a searing introduction to readers unfamiliar with his work and a welcome reminder to his fans of his sorcery with the English language. . . . Even at his most acerbic and skeptical, Baldwin clings to the ideas of hope and reconciliation in America.” —*The Seattle Times*

“The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings, James Baldwin’s passionate hope for a better America, a United States that he can believe in and that believes in a brilliant black person, comes through in each piece of this disparate collection.” —*South Florida Times*

“...Brings the lights of day to many excellent pieces excluded from the Library of America’s ‘Collected Essays of James Baldwin’. . . . essential.” —*SF Gate*

“...While Baldwin was committed to pulling back the curtain on the forces he felt were manipulating America’s problems, he was also very serious about closing the gap between those in power and the disenfranchised. This new collection shows that he was willing to take on black, white, rich, or poor to see that happen.” —Christian Science Monitor

“The opportunity to further bask in Baldwin’s readably precise prose is a welcome gift. . . The Cross of Redemption shows why Baldwin should never be allowed to go out of fashion.” —Austin Chronicle

“Baldwin is biting and insightful in his critique of religious fundamentalism, the prospects of a black president, the hypocrisy of the American art and cultural scene, the challenges of black nationalism, and the complexities of race and identity. In the long passages of his essays and the short, acerbic comments in his interviews, Baldwin shows a masterful sweep of language and ideas and feelings that continues to resonate.”  
—Booklist

“Kenan’s introduction and headnotes are models of critical good sense; his awareness of both ‘Baldwin’s achievements that beggar the imagination’ and of the ‘grab bag’ quality of some pieces makes him the perfect shepherd for those ‘lost’ works.”—Publisher’s Weekly

“What you find here is a book that superbly reopens an unfinished life. In an age that people claim is ‘post-racial,’ the Baldwin’s-eye-view still seems to answer more questions than most other living writers. . . [an] invaluable book of uncollected writings.”—Buffalo News

“His writing was diamond: sparkles, flashes and hard. The beginning of the collection, Baldwin states the purpose of his writing was to tell the truth. He succeeds. The Cross of Redemption is a remarkable collection.”—aalbc.com

“Baldwin’s Cross burns with rage, smoothly, like a cocktail mixed perfectly, Manhattan or Molotov.”—studio-walton muyumba

### In Praise of James Baldwin

“Baldwin’s gift to our literary tradition is that rarest of treasures, a rhetoric of fiction and the essay that is, at once, Henry Jamesian and King Jamesian.”  
—Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

“Baldwin’s way of seeing, his clarity, precision, and eloquence are unique . . . He manages to be concrete, particular . . . yet also transcendent, arching above the immediacy of an occasion or crisis. He speaks as great black gospel music speaks, through metaphor, parable, rhythm.”  
—John Edgar Wideman

“Moralistic fervor, a high literary seriousness, the authority of the survivor, of the witness—these qualities made Baldwin unique.”  
—The New York Review of Books

“The best essayist in this country—a man whose power has always been in his reasoned, biting sarcasm; his insistence on removing layer by layer the hardened skin with which Americans shield themselves from their

country.”

—The New York Times Book Review

“He has not himself lost access to the sources of his being—which is what makes him read and awaited by perhaps a wider range of people than any other major American writer.”

—The Nation

“[Baldwin is] among the most penetrating and perceptive of American thinkers.”

—The New Republic

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