



The Evidence of Things Not Seen

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An extended development of an essay on the Atlanta child murder case originally published in PLAYBOY magazine, this book examines the relationship between that case and the larger context of racial tension in the United States. Concentrating on the trial of Wayne Williams, Baldwin reiterates numerous themes from his past works: the interrelationship of victim and victimizer, and the absence of any real concern on the part of the government for the black underclass.

Taking into account the political pressures on the black administration of Atlanta to close the case, Baldwin argues convincingly that the trial failed to establish Williams' guilt beyond a shadow of a doubt. Some of the most fascinating material in the book concerns the pattern of murders which provided the center of the persecution case. Emphasizing the continuity between the events in Atlanta and the history of racism in the United States, Baldwin points out that any set of events can be interpreted as a pattern, and that the pattern perceived reveals more about the perceiver than the events themselves.

Much of the cultural analysis in this book will be familiar to readers of Baldwin's previous novels and essays. Alternating between journalistic observation and historical meditation, Baldwin combines the rhetorical flourishes and moral intensity of the Afro-American preacher with a finely polished literary irony. Nevertheless, the new book lacks the power of Baldwin's best work, in part because of the familiarity of his positions and in part because of what seems a lingering uncertainty--perhaps inherent in the events--concerning the actual significance of the Atlanta tragedies.

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