



The Price of the Ticket

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Bringing together all of the author's substantial (and much of his relatively ephemeral) nonfiction, this volume provides a welcome opportunity for reassessing the development of James Baldwin's encounter with the political, moral, and intellectual complexities of the modern world. This opportunity seems particularly important since so much of Baldwin's work--and the reaction to that work--was, and is, intertwined with volatile racial issues and events that frequently excite a greater degree of passion than useful insight. Happily, what emerges from these diverse pieces, ranging from the early aesthetic essays through the politically influential *THE FIRE NEXT TIME* to the introductory essay written specifically for the collection, is a clear sense that a large percentage of Baldwin's insights remain as relevant in 1985 as they were at the height of the civil rights movement.

In addition to providing a montage-style autobiography, Baldwin's essays provide an excellent introduction or recapitulation of the development of American racial relations since the 1930's. Reflecting the transitions from the relative optimism of the integrationist era to the militance of the late 1960's and on to the wary (and, at times, weary) determination of the Ronald Reagan backlash, Baldwin insists on clear acknowledgement of the conditions of life in black America. Perhaps his most important contribution to American culture, however, rests on his ability to address the interrelationship between those conditions and the spiritual dilemmas confronted by white Americans. The volume should confirm James Baldwin's lasting place in the American literary tradition.

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