



The Critical Reception of James Baldwin, 1963-2010: An Honest Man and a Good Writer (Literary Criticism in Perspective)

Conseula Francis

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James Baldwin is a widely taught and anthologized author. His short story "Sonny's Blues" remains a perennial favorite in literature anthologies, and all of his essay collections and novels are still in print. His first essay collection, *Notes of a Native Son*, is a seminal work that led a new generation of African American writers from beneath the shadow of Richard Wright. *The Fire Next Time* is widely held as one of the most profound and accurate articulations of black consciousness during the Civil Rights movement. It is difficult to imagine teaching a survey of African American literature or considering the development of black intellectual thought in the twentieth century without mentioning Baldwin. For more than half a century, readers and critics alike have agreed that Baldwin is a major African American writer. What they do not agree on is why. Because of his artistic and intellectual complexity, his work resists easy categorization, and Baldwin scholarship, consequently, spans the critical horizon. Conseula Francis's book examines the major divisions in Baldwin criticism, paying particular attention to the way each critical period defines Baldwin and his work for its own purposes. Conseula Francis is Associate Professor of English and Director of African American Studies at the College of Charleston.

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