

Name _____

Date _____



James Baldwin

James Baldwin was ahead of his time:

An author, an essayist, a poet, and even a playwright.

To a young single mother James Baldwin was born

Up in Harlem, New York, 1924.

His grandfather was enslaved;

His stepfather was a minister.

The library on 135th was his choice for extracurricular activities.

The Division of Negro Literature was growing rapidly.

He developed a passion for reading and writing,

And later mentored by two great writers of that timing,

Countee Cullen and Richard Wright,

And the Harlem Renaissance helped to shape his life.

He wrote openly about racism and reality,

Including men and women in his own sexuality.

After graduating high school,

He decided not to attend college but he wasn't no fool!

He worked to support his family and eight siblings.

During this time he faced discrimination.

This was during the peak time of segregation,

So after a racist incident, he couldn't take it.

He moved along to Greenwich Village,

Where other popular artists and writers were living.

In 1948 he moved on to Paris.

He loved it there, discovered himself, and further flourished.

Go Tell It on the Mountain, published 1953,

Was his first novel and semi-autobiography.

Future novels and essays gained notoriety.

James was on his way to changing the game, undeniably.

James continued to write largely

About the Black identity,

The pain and the struggle,

Using brutal honesty.

A leading voice in the Civil Rights Movement,

Addressing white people, stirring the revolution.

Not a Black writer, but a self-claimed American writer,

Asking whites to examine themselves and aim higher.

Criticized through the '60s and '70s

For not creating just for Black folks but catering to white society.

His novels broke new ground and gained him praise

As he explored complex themes in nuanced ways.

If Beale Street Could Talk, well, lets talk about it:

A Black man doing time for a crime he didn't commit.

In the novels Another Country and Giovanni's Room,

His character relationships were interracial,

Some same-sex, some extra-marital.

These topics were deemed unfavorable.

James believed these things weren't easy to label.

In France, 1987, James died from cancer.

Spent most his life seeking all the answers.

Long live his work and iconoclastic ways.

Things we've learned from James still apply today.