

James Baldwin

New York, New York, August 2, 1924 – December 1, 1987

Born in 1924 in Harlem, New York City, James Arthur “Jimmy” Baldwin was a novelist, essayist, and playwright who was one of America’s most influential writers and Civil Rights intellectuals.

Baldwin spent much of his life abroad, including extended stays in Turkey, primarily between 1961 and 1971. Baldwin’s claim that Turkey “saved my life” referred to the freedom he felt in Istanbul from racial and sexual oppression, the freedom that transformed him both as a gay Black writer and as a Civil Rights activist.

Speaking in *James Baldwin: From Another Place* (1970) – a short film by Sedat Pakay chronicling three days in Baldwin’s life in Istanbul – the author says that “one sees [the United States] better from a distance...from another place, from another country.”

He first arrived in Turkey in 1961, worse for the wear in both body and spirit, struggling with the book that would become *Another Country* (1962). In Istanbul, surrounded by the welcome and generosity of his friends, Baldwin was able to quickly finish this novel. During the time he spent in Turkey, he worked on many of his later books, including *No Name in the Street* (1972), and he also collaborated with Turkish artists, including by helping stage an adaptation of John Herbert’s *Fortune and Men’s Eyes* for a Turkish audience.

To this day, Baldwin’s legacy remains strong in Turkey, just as Turkey left a strong impression on Baldwin’s later work and his relationship to the U.S.’ reckoning with race and sexuality in the latter half of the 20th century.



Photos by Sedat Pakay of James Baldwin in Istanbul reprinted with the permission of the James Baldwin Project (jamesbaldwinproject.org).