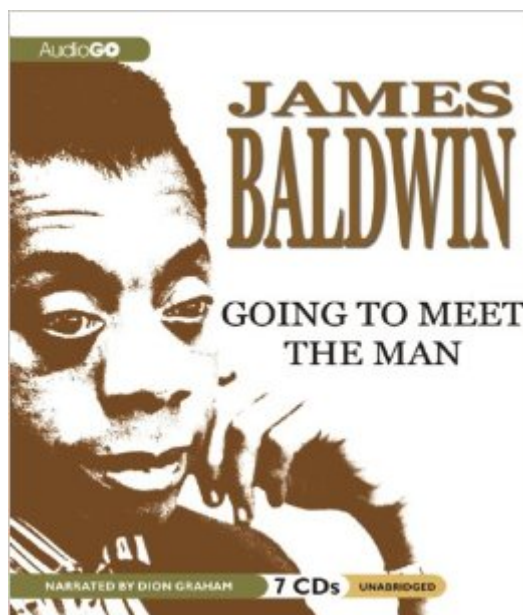


The book was found

Going To Meet The Man



Synopsis

There's no way not to suffer. But you try all kinds of ways to keep from drowning in it. The men and women in these eight short fictions grasp this truth on an elemental level, and their stories, as told by James Baldwin, detail the ingenious and often desperate ways in which they try to keep their heads above water. It may be the heroin that a down-and-out jazz pianist uses to face the terror of pouring his life into an inanimate instrument. It may be the brittle piety of a father who can never forgive his son for his illegitimacy. Or it may be the screen of bigotry that a redneck deputy has raised to blunt the awful childhood memory of the day his parents took him to watch a black man being murdered by a gleeful mob.

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Customer Reviews

I am slowly understanding why Mr. Baldwin elected to leave the United States for more than a decade in the 1940s and 1950s. He apparently is on record as saying that he needed to flee because his anger was going to destroy him if he did not seek a respite from American injustice. Upon reading this collection, I think I am really beginning to understand what must have been going through his mind. Read "Previous Condition" where a young African American man keeps being thrown out of hotels and denied jobs simply because of the color of his skin. There is nowhere he can go without meeting the hostile glances and conspiratorial whispers of people on the street simply because of his skin color. And there is a moment where it all came into focus for me, standing in the kitchen of his Jewish friend's Jules' apartment. And I quote: "Oh," I cried, "I know you think I'm making it dramatic, that I'm paranoid and just inventing trouble! Maybe I think so

sometimes, how can I tell? You get so used to being hit you find you're always waiting for it. Oh, I know, you're Jewish, you get kicked around, too, but you can walk into a bar and nobody knows you're Jewish and if you go looking for job you'll get a better job than mine!" (78) It is deeply disturbing to think that a person has the suspicion and rage of the world cocked against their temple, but that was how it was (and still is). I have read much about the Civil Rights struggle and as a Jew myself, have listened to many stories from members of my family about prejudice but these stories, they uncover something.

James Baldwin is known primarily for his essays and his first two novels ("Go Tell It on the Mountain" and "Giovanni's Room"), but I often tell readers that the place to start is with his first story collection, "Going to Meet the Man." Baldwin's short fiction is more straightforward and accessible than are his essays (which are indeed excellent); each of the eight stories presents a different aspect of Baldwin's worldview; and unlike his early novels, where racism is treated as one aspect in the lives of characters, several of these stories confront the "racial issue" full on. Baldwin's short fiction may be easier to read, but it does not avoid uncomfortable truths. In fact, some of Baldwin's most heated writing can be found in this volume, which was first published in 1965. It contains work written over a 20-year-period, including "Previous Condition," the first piece of fiction he ever published (in Commentary Magazine in 1948). A fledgling actor is torn between the black world of Harlem ("perfectly in his element, in his place, as the saying goes") and the white neighborhoods downtown. He stays at a friend's apartment in lower Manhattan, but has to hide from the landlord and leave the building at odd hours to avoid being seen by the other residents ("Why don't you go uptown, where you belong?"). Each of the other stories is unforgettable in its own way, but my two favorites open and close the volume. "The Rockpile" is an early (yet different) version of an episode in "Go Tell It on the Mountain"; two of Baldwin's strengths are his ability to capture the memories of youth and to present the complexities of family life. The incendiary title story that ends the volume depicts a white police officer whose racial attitudes were formed by a lynching he witnessed as a child.

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