COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course looks at the work of James Baldwin (1924-1987), an African American, gay writer and a keen observer of American and European life in the context of postcolonial modernity. One of the most prominent American authors of the past century, Baldwin was also an active commentator on and participant in U.S. and world politics. As an African American writer, he critiqued contemporary political and cultural trends in the U.S., many of which he traced to the global histories of racism and slavery. His place in the African American cultural and political scene was further complicated by his being an openly gay man (a moniker that he nevertheless sought to complicate—we will explore his reservations about such identity categories in class). Throughout his work from the late 1940s to the late 1980s, he developed his own form of ethics—of moving in a world while mindful of, and sensitive to, its perhaps irreconcilable differences. In this class, we will explore what such “Baldwinian ethics” consists of and how it may be relevant to our lives in the twenty-first century.

Apart from Baldwin’s work, the reading list also includes novels by Henry James, Richard Wright, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Malcolm X, as well as scholarly texts.

Our primary texts include some of the following:
Novels:
- Go Tell It on the Mountain (1954)
- Giovanni’s Room (1956)
- Another Country (1962)
Short Stories:
- Going to Meet the Man (1965)
Nonfiction:
- Notes of a Native Son (1955)
- Nobody Knows My Name (1961)
- The Fire Next Time (1963)
- No Name in the Street (1972)
- The Devil Finds Work (1976)
  Additional essays
Screenplay:
- One Day, When I Was Lost (1971)

Requirements: class attendance and participation; response papers; class presentation; research proposal and final research paper.