



The New York Public Library  
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,  
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

**James Baldwin's "Five Years" poetry manuscript**

1942-1948

Sc MG 934

## Summary

**Creator:** Baldwin, James, 1924-1987

**Title:** James Baldwin's "Five Years" poetry manuscript

**Date:** 1942-1948

**Size:** 0.01 linear feet (1 folder)

**Source:** Purchased from Locus Solus Rare Books, December 2016.

**Revision History:** Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

**Abstract:** James Baldwin (1924-1987) was the premiere African American writer and public intellectual of the post-War period. He authored six novels, three plays, dozens of short stories, a book-length work of non-fiction, a children's book, scores of essays and reviews, and a book of poems. Baldwin won renown in the U.S. and internationally for his writing, his leadership in the civil rights movement, and for championing human rights around the world. His essays and reviews, especially, are remarkable not just for their mastery of literary technique - their marriage of music and sharp analysis - but for the breadth of the African American experience which they interpret, dramatize, honor, and lament. These prose masterpieces are unique in the history of American literature for the depth, subtlety, and daring with which they explore the psycho-political causes and consequences of racism and other ideologies of political exploitation. His best known works include *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), *Giovanni's Room* (1956), *The Fire Next Time* (1963), and *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974). "Five Years" is an 18-page typescript of sixteen unpublished poems (the last two being carbons) written by Baldwin between 1942 and 1948 prior to the publication of his first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. The poems, which are dated, explore themes of love, fear and mortality, lifelong preoccupations of the author best known for his insightful essays and probing fiction.

## Conditions Governing Access:

Researchers are restricted to a facsimile of the manuscript.

**Preferred citation:** [Item], James Baldwin's "Five Years" poetry manuscript, Sc MG 934, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York

Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

**Related Materials:**

Also found in the Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schombur Center for Research in Black Culture:

James Baldwin papers, Sc MG 936

James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket documentary film collection, Sc MG 851

Ten Screenplays for Malcolm X Film collection, Sc MG 969

## **Creator History**

James Baldwin (1924-1987) was the premiere African American writer and public intellectual of the post-War period. He authored six novels, three plays, dozens of short stories, a book-length work of non-fiction, a children's book, scores of essays and reviews, and a book of poems. Baldwin won renown in the U.S. and internationally for his writing, his leadership in the civil rights movement, and for championing human rights around the world. His essays and reviews, especially, are remarkable not just for their mastery of literary technique - their marriage of music and sharp analysis - but for the breadth of the African American experience which they interpret, dramatize, honor, and lament. These prose masterpieces are unique in the history of American literature for the depth, subtlety, and daring with which they explore the psycho-political causes and consequences of racism and other ideologies of political exploitation. His best known works include *Go Tell It on the Mountain*(1953), *Notes of a Native Son*(1955), *Giovanni's Room*(1956), *The Fire Next Time*(1963), and *If Beale Street Could Talk*(1974).

## **Scope and Content Note**

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The typescript contains a small number of minor corrections, which might be Baldwin's. The title leaf bears the following inscription in the author's hand: "These are my only copies - bit by bit I'd like you to send me copies - and I'll send the things I have back to you -- Jimmy". Poems include: "Epitaph"; "On the Subway"; "Eighth Street"; "Song (1)"; "Song (2)"; "Wastrel Song"; "Sonnet"; "Song"; "Duel in the Tavern"; "Portrait"; "For Chris"; "Devotional"; and untitled poems.

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

African American poets

American literature -- African American authors

American poetry -- African American authors

Authors, Black

**Names**

Baldwin, James, 1924-1987