

## *Sol Stein, Publisher, Author and Champion of James Baldwin, Dies at 92*

A founder of the publishing house Stein and Day, he also worked with Dylan Thomas, Budd Schulberg and David Frost and wrote more than a dozen books.



By Sam Roberts

Published Sept. 25, 2019 Updated Sept. 27, 2019

Sol Stein, a prolific novelist and playwright, savvy publisher and visionary editor who helped fashion a collection of trenchant essays by James Baldwin, a former high school classmate, into a literary classic, “Notes of a Native Son,” died on Thursday at his home in Tarrytown, N.Y. He was 92.

The cause was complications of dementia, his wife, Dr. Edith Shapiro, said.

A Chicago-born transplant to the Bronx, Mr. Stein had in the 1950s been a fiercely anti-Communist scriptwriter for the Voice of America, Washington’s Cold War propaganda radio network, and a leading defender of civil liberties. But he made his most lasting mark in publishing.

In 1962 he and his wife at the time, Patricia Day, founded the publishing house Stein and Day, which had immediate success that year with the director Elia Kazan’s debut book, the novel “America, America.” The story of a Greek youth who makes his way to the United States, the book sold three million copies, and Mr. Kazan turned it into a movie, released the next year. Mr. Stein was Stein and Day’s editor in chief.

Among the other authors and scholars he worked with were Jacques Barzun and Lionel Trilling, his former professors at Columbia; and David Frost, Budd Schulberg and Dylan Thomas. Stein and Day also published the defense lawyer F. Lee Bailey, the writer Claude Brown, the critic Leslie Fiedler, the socialite and memoirist Barbara Howar and the Soviet Union scholar Bertram Wolfe, among many others.

In one of the many books Mr. Stein himself wrote, “Bankruptcy: A Feast for Lawyers” (1989), he exposed the “bureaucratic nightmare” that had accompanied the financial implosion of Stein and Day after 27 years in business.

He was also among the 10 founding members in 1957 of the Playwrights Group of the Actors Studio, which included Robert Anderson, Lorraine Hansberry, William Inge and Tennessee Williams.

Mr. Stein's lifelong association with Mr. Baldwin began when they were both editors of *The Magpie*, the literary magazine at DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx. It was perhaps an unlikely bond: As Mr. Stein would say, he was white, Jewish and attracted to women while Mr. Baldwin was black, the stepson of a Pentecostal minister and attracted to men.

Their friendship resumed after World War II, reaching its literary apex in 1955 with the publication of Mr. Baldwin's "Notes," his anthology of essays on the black experience. Mr. Stein edited the book.



James Baldwin in New York in 1963. He and his editor Mr. Stein had an unlikely bond. As Mr. Stein would say, he was white, Jewish and attracted to women while Mr. Baldwin was black, the stepson of a Pentecostal minister and attracted to men. Dave Pickoff/Associated Press

Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr., director of the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research at Harvard, once described the friendship between the two men as

“one of the great moments in interracial harmony and intimacy in the history of American literature.”

Mr. Stein chronicled their relationship in “Native Sons: A Friendship That Created One of the Greatest Works of the Twentieth Century: Notes of a Native Son” (2004).

Solomon Stein was born in Chicago on Oct. 13, 1926, to Louis and Zelda (Zam) Stein, Jewish immigrants who had fled Russia. His mother became a translator for the United Nations. His father was a jewelry designer. The family moved to the North Bronx in 1930.

Sol was considered charming and cheeky, prickly and precocious. He was said to have performed as a magician at Carnegie Hall as a teenager.

In high school, by Mr. Stein’s account, The Magpie’s faculty adviser would read out loud the students’ published short stories with so anesthetizing a delivery that it drove another classmate, Richard Avedon, to shift his career goals from writing to photography. But Sol persevered.

Mr. Stein went on to enroll at City College, but his studies there were interrupted when he enlisted in the Army Air Forces in 1944. He voluntarily transferred to the infantry and served in Germany during the post-World War II occupation. After returning from military service, he completed his bachelor of social science degree and earned a master’s in English and comparative literature at Columbia.

His first two marriages, to Sondra Klein in 1947 and to Ms. Day in 1962, ended in divorce. He married Dr. Edith (Tennenbaum) Shapiro in 2000.

In addition to Dr. Shapiro, his survivors include four sons, Kevin, Jeff, Leland and Andrew, from his marriage to Ms. Klein; two sons, Robin and David Day Stein, and a daughter, Elizabeth Day Stein, from his marriage to Ms. Day; his sister, Toby Stein; Dr. Shapiro’s children from a previous marriage, Mark Shapiro and Lynn Helmer; six grandchildren; three step-grandchildren; and two step-great-grandchildren.

Besides working as an anti-Communist scriptwriter for the Voice of America, Mr. Stein was a member of its ideological advisory staff starting in the early 1950s. The journalist Robert Scheer, who was editor of the left-leaning Ramparts magazine in the late 1960s, branded him “The Archdeacon of the Cold War.”

“His work at Voice of America and later in publishing,” Mr. Scheer said in an email, “was critical to the central mythology of the Cold War based on a unified internationalist communist enemy committed to world conquest.”

Mr. Stein was opposed to infringement of civil liberties from both the left and the right. He was also the executive director of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, which condemned the excesses of Senator Joseph McCarthy's quest for subversives in the early 1950s.

Mr. Stein contributed articles to magazines, worked as an editor at Beacon Press and wrote plays. He became so frustrated by the feuding among the principals of a British production of one of his plays that in 17 days he transformed it into his first novel, "The Husband," published by Coward-McCann in 1969.

Two years later, he published his second novel, "The Magician," which portrays justice as illusory. Writing in The New York Times Book Review, Webster Schott, an author and critic, described it as "superior fiction" and added, "I cannot recall a novel of this kind with greater momentary pleasure."

Altogether, Mr. Stein was the author of more than a dozen books, including how-to guides for novelists, and he sold software that was marketed as "guaranteed to eliminate writer's block."

He said the best advice he received as a fledgling author was from a college teacher: "He said to me, 'Stein, your jacket is blue, your shirt is blue, your tie is blue — that's what wrong with your stories!' From that point on my stories and eventually my novels became 'colorful' in every meaning of that word."

But he did not ignore other aspects of the writer's craft. In "Stein on Writing" (1995), he advised: "Be sure you don't stop the story while describing. You are a storyteller, not an interior decorator."

"Good writing is supposed to evoke sensation in the reader," he added. "Not the fact that it's raining, but the feeling of being rained upon."

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A version of this article appears in print on , Section B, Page 16 of the New York edition with the headline: Sol Stein, Publisher, Author and Champion of James Baldwin, Is Dead at 92