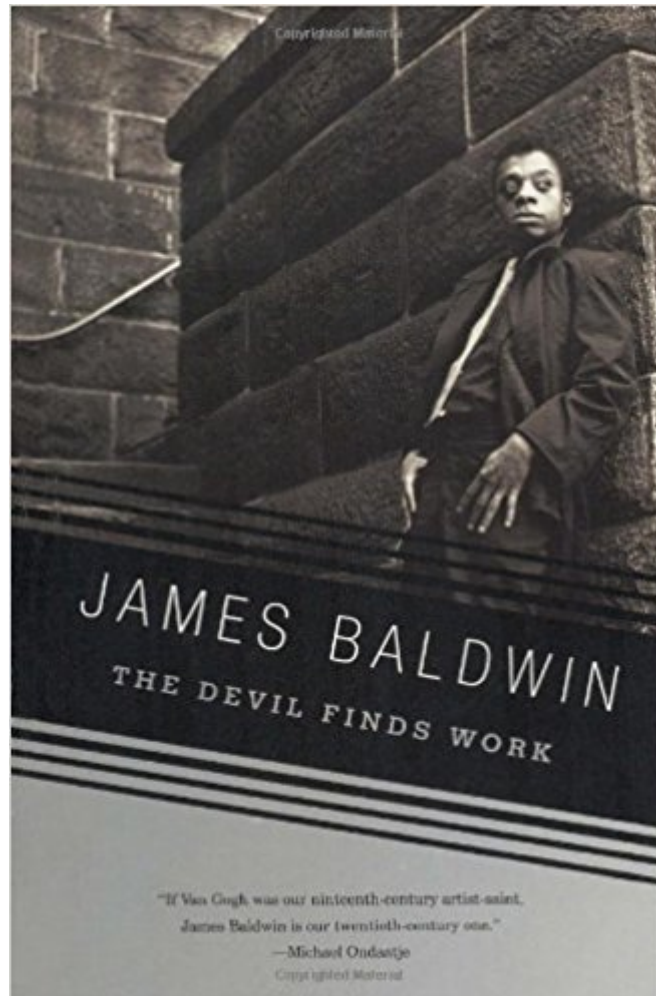




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The Devil Finds Work (Vintage International)



Synopsis

Baldwin's personal reflections on movies gathered here in a book-length essay are also a probing appraisal of American racial politics. Offering an incisive look at racism in American movies and a vision of America's self-delusions and deceptions, Baldwin challenges the underlying assumptions in such films as *In the Heat of the Night*, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, and *The Exorcist*. Here are our loves and hates, biases and cruelties, fears and ignorance reflected by the films that have entertained us and shaped our consciousness. And here too is the stunning prose of a writer whose passion never diminished his struggle for equality, justice, and social change.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In this short work, Baldwin tries his hand at film criticism--and his unique and perceptive observations will change the way any filmgoer will watch movies. While Baldwin's focus is on racial representation (and misrepresentation) in the cinema, he expands his comments to various national obsessions that are reflected on the screen. As with most of Baldwin's work, there is power and precision in every sentence--and he nearly always quotable. The essay is divided into three chapters. In the first, Baldwin discusses his adolescent love of movies and how it conflicted with his brief career as an adolescent minister in a church where the cinema (and the theater) were both regarded as "the devil's work" (thus, one of the implications of the title). The movies he dissects range from "A Tale of Two Cities" to Fritz Lang's "You Only Live Once," and he contrast the experience of film-watching with that of live theater, recalling Orson Welles's production of

"Macbeth," which featured an all-black cast. In the second chapter, Baldwin hits his stride, tearing into the patronizing portrayal of non-white roles in such films as "In the Heat of the Night," "In This, Our Life," "The Defiant Ones," and "Lawrence of Arabia." Baldwin observes about a type that reappears in many movies of the first seventy years of cinema: "It so happens that I saw 'The Birth of the Nation' and 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner' on the same day . . . [Yet] in two films divided from each other by something like half a century, [there was] the same loyal [black] maid, playing the same role, and speaking the same lines." Noting how this stereotypical woman never seems to have her own family and how her only concerns are those of her white masters or employers, Baldwin exclaims: "How many times have we seen her!"

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