

Welcome to..





FILM NOIR

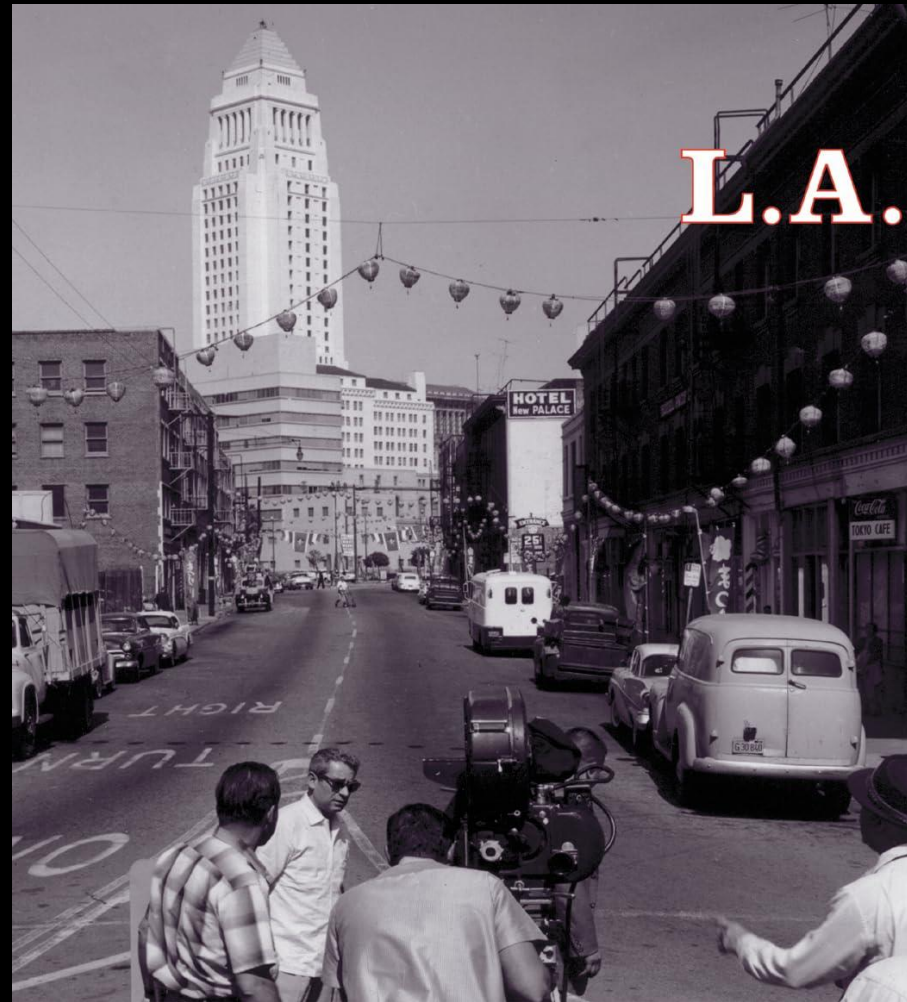


Today's Movie...

This movie is set in Los Angeles in 1948.

**The following will help
you understand it better.**

• From



L.A. NOIR

THE CITY
AS CHARACTER

ALAIN SILVER &
JAMES URSINI

- **A large African-American population migrated to L.A. during the Second World War to take jobs in the armament factories concentrated in Southern California. Consequently, ordinances were passed in various municipalities throughout the county and covenants written in to deeds, bank mortgages and leases which specified neighborhoods closed to "people of color" As a result of this "red-lining," African-Americans were confined to traditional "colored" neighborhoods...**



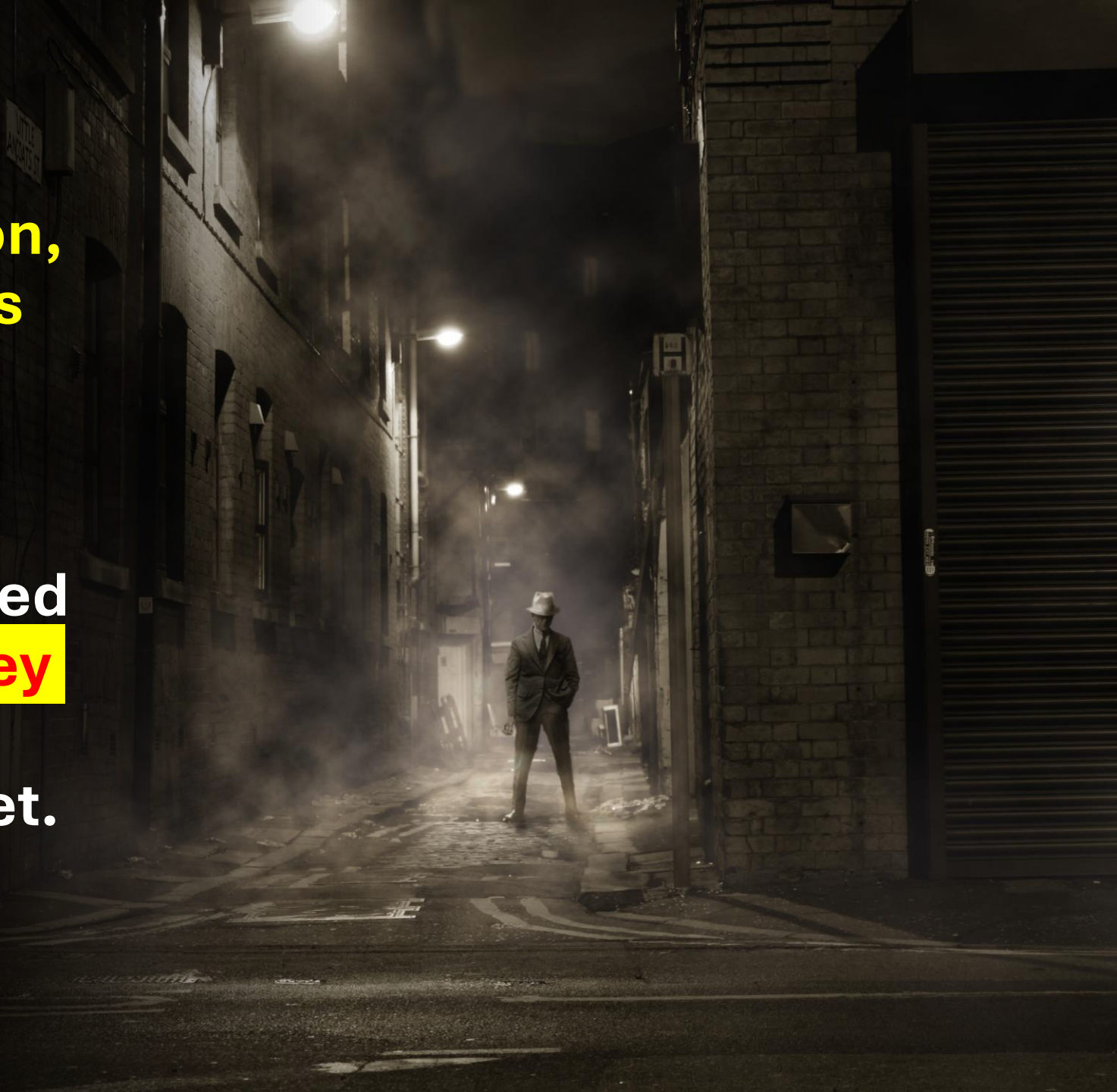


- They built up these areas with **middle-class housing, shops and entertainment districts like Central Avenue** which became a **mecca for jazz musicians** from around the country.



• The names alone let you know where you stand with **"Devil in a Blue Dress."** Easy Rawlins. DeWitt Albright. Daphne Monet. These are **names from the noir universe**, from the hard-boiled **books and films of the 1940s** that **created a world that existed more on the screen than in the streets** - a world of shady deals and moral compromise, blackmail, revenge and secrets from the past.

- **But Easy Rawlins, who lives in the 1940s, is a modern fictional creation, born in the recent novels of Walter Mosley. As a private eye, Rawlins is made, not born.**
- **The movie is constructed to follow him on a journey into noir, as he picks up the trail of Daphne Monet.**



- as Easy finds his way further into the case, it begins to take on overtones of "Chinatown," a pre-war Los Angeles noir in which the past has unexpected relationships to the present, and the most unexpected people have connections you'd never dream of.



Robert Evans production of a

Roman Polanski film

Jack Nicholson · Faye Dunaway



• "You only been in my house five minutes, and you already done shot someone,"



Variety review:

- An engrossingly atmospheric dip into the dark waters of postwar urban intrigue, *Devil in a Blue Dress* ushers in the welcome subgenre of **black noir**. First screen adaptation of a Walter Mosley mystery novel featuring private detective Easy Rawlins, this long-awaited follow-up feature from *One False Move* helmer Carl Franklin navigates **a complicated story of blackmail, race and politics** in confident fashion.



Looper review:

- An ordinary man in over his head. A beautiful woman with secrets. Billows of **cigarette smoke** and bottles of **whiskey**. A murder that unravels a vast conspiracy.

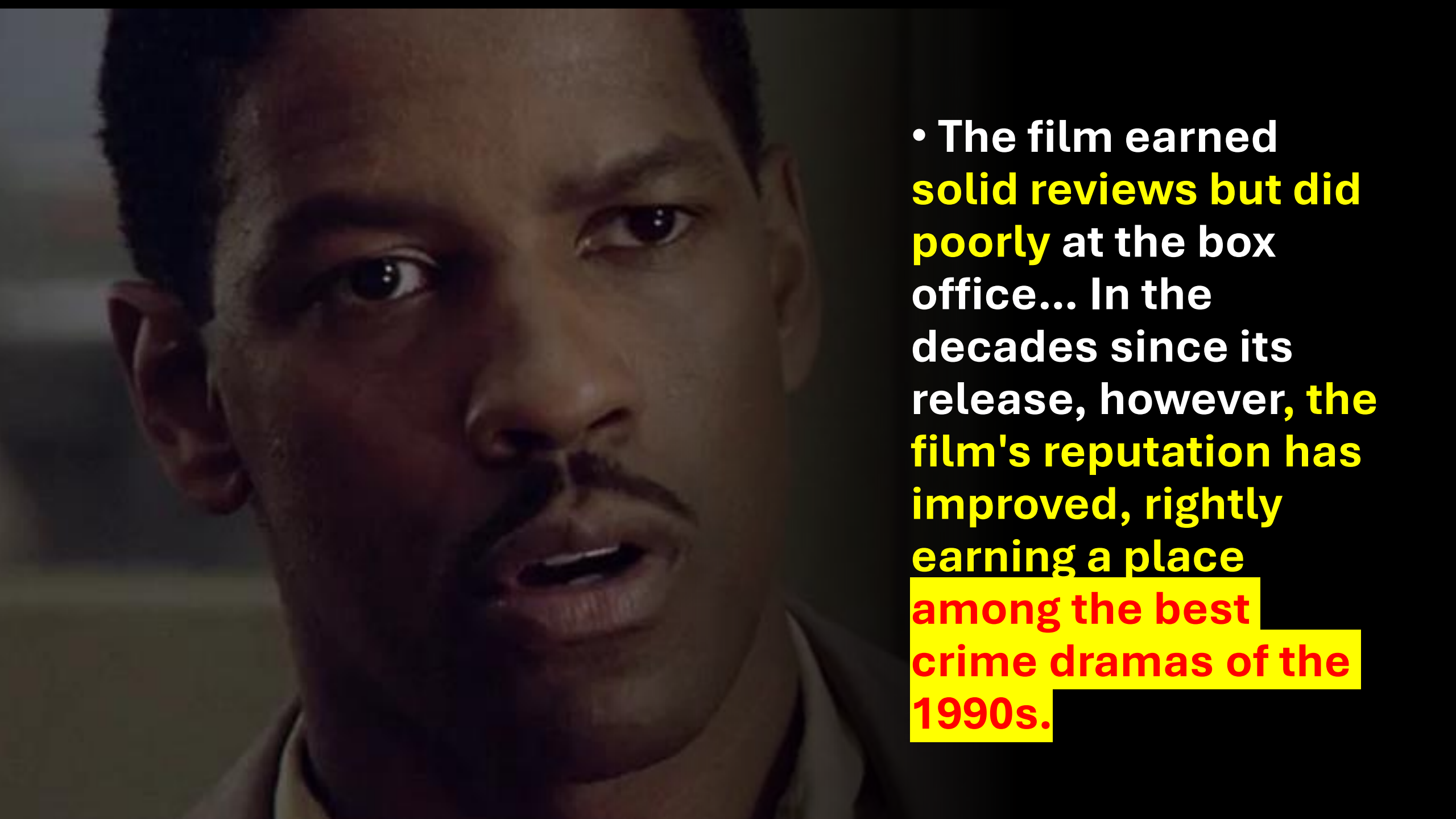
- These are the building blocks of **hardboiled detective fiction and film noir...**



Walter Mosley (author) & Carl Franklin (director)

- One of both Mosely and Franklin's aims with **"Devil in a Blue Dress"** was to use the detective genre as a frame for chronicling African American life in the post-war decade, in all of its joys and dangers.



A close-up, slightly dimly lit photograph of actor Laurence Fishburne. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious, intense expression. His dark hair is short, and he has a light beard and mustache. The background is out of focus, showing what appears to be an interior setting with some architectural elements.

- The film earned **solid reviews but did poorly** at the box office... In the decades since its release, however, **the film's reputation has improved, rightly earning a place among the best crime dramas of the 1990s.**

Walter Mosley, novelist:

- The notion of a Black private eye intrigued him (Mosley) as someone who could be invisible on both sides of the color line: Black people wouldn't expect him to be a detective, while white people wouldn't expect him to be anything.
- Mosley also wanted to write about the men and women of his parents' generation who came to California from the South for a better life, only to find the same old Jim Crow forces at work.





- Arguably the best line in the film:

- ***"Easy, if you ain't want him killed, why'd you leave him with me?"***

"Devil in a Blue Dress" is a
modern classic, a heady
blend of genre thrills and
social history

•BEFORE
•THE
•MOVIE





CENTRAL
MEAT MARKET

TRADE
CRYSTAL
GLEES

REGINA
MUSIC HALL
THE DETROIT

CENTRAL
DOWN

15-21 E



AFTER THE MOVIE





Jennifer Beals (1963 -)

**Don
Cheadle
(1963 -)**





Tom Sizemore (1961-2023)

JAMES NAREMORE

MORE THAN NIGHT
FILM NOIR IN ITS CONTEXTS

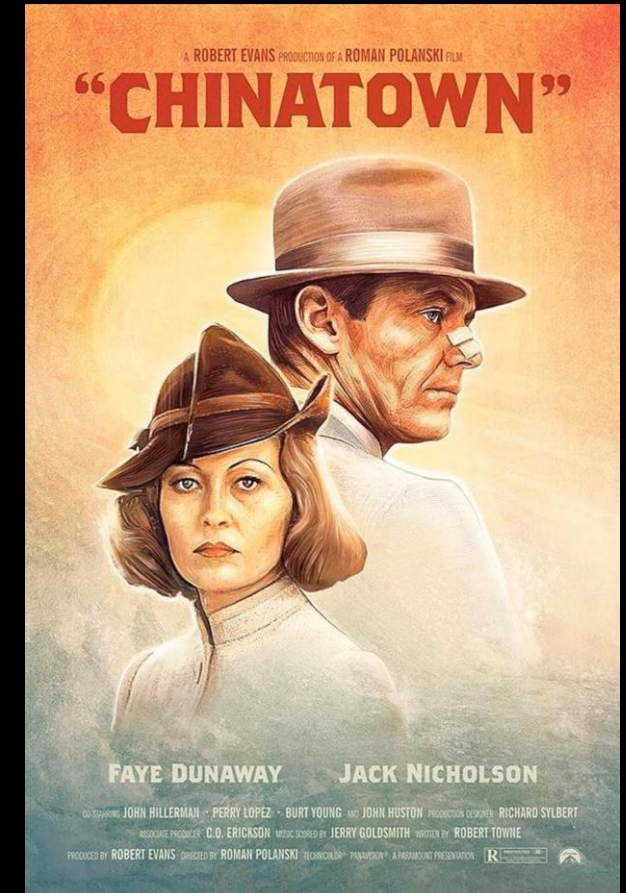
UPDATED AND EXPANDED



More Than Night: Film Noir In Its Contexts

by James Naremore

- Carl Franklin's **Devil in a Blue Dress** invites **direct comparison with Chinatown** and the tradition of **hard-boiled private eye literature**.
- ...the film **begins in 1948 Los Angeles**, near the spot on **Central Avenue** where **Raymond Chandler** placed the opening scenes of **Farewell, My Lovely**. As in **Chandler**, the plot involved a **missing woman who has changed her identity**.



- But because the action is viewed from a different social, economic and racial perspective, **familiar motifs of urban noir are either intensified or neatly reversed.**

- Trying to solve a mystery, **he defamiliarizes the entire city. In this film, “the white districts and their basis of individual and institutional domination...serve as the heart of darkness.”**

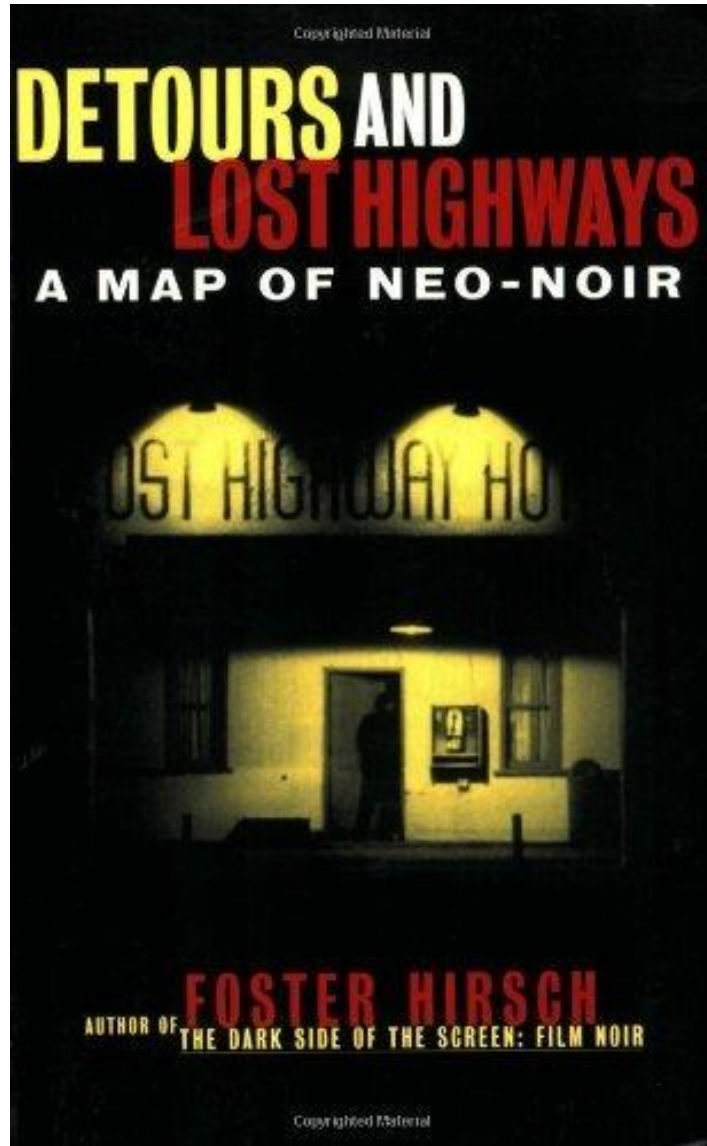
Devil rewrites Chinatown in much the same way that Mosley rewrote Chandler

- Its **Cinematography** recalls **Chinatown's**
- Its **romantic musical score** recalls **Chinatown's**
- The **crucial recognition scene** in which Rawlins discovers Daphne's true identity: **"Frank is my brother"** recalls Chinatown's
- Evelyn Mulray's (Faye Dunaway): **"She's my daughter! She's my sister!"**

Naremore's Conclusion:

- “Although it (**Devil**) **reveals the corruption** beneath sleek, art-modern in the same manner as any retro-style film noir, **it is designed to celebrate the resilience and tenacity of the post-war black community** and to recover a lost or underrepresented culture.”

- **Chinatown** and most of its imitators are **pessimistic stories**, involving the disillusionment or death of **an alienated white male, a crisis of “family values,”** and an implicit critique of capitalism.
- In contrast, **Devil in a Blue Dress** is **optimistic**, involving a **black protagonist who moves upward towards the middle class and who becomes stronger at the end...the closing shots depict him as a hero**, striding confidently down the sunlit street in front of his house, smiling at mothers and children.
- **...he has more in common with a redemptive figure like Chandler’s Marlowe.**



- ...unlike his white predecessors, **he (Easy) remains morally unstained...a decent fellow**, wary, resigned and ironic...rewarded in ways that blacks in noir rarely are. **This (the movie's ending) Edenic image, suffused with a sense of well-being, all but unprecedented in noir, "corrects" the standard representation of black life in crime movies**, made by black, as well as white filmmakers.

Critical Success but Box Office Failure Why?

- **Franklin's view:**
- ...**film noir** as a genre has always been **valued by critics and film buffs more so than general audiences.** "**Chinatown**,' as fantastic as that movie was ... was **not a huge success financially at the time.**" In 2022, he also noted that **the film was released on the eve of a verdict in the OJ Simpson murder case,** when a movie about a **Black man searching for a white woman in Los Angeles** may not have been the most palatable for audiences.

**In July 2022 the
Criterion Collection
released a 4K
restoration of "Devil,"
complete with new
interviews with Mosley,
Franklin, and Cheadle.**

and a new essay by critic **Julian Kimble**. "Franklin's film isn't just '**Chinatown**' painted Black," he writes. "It's **a taut story about Black people's ongoing struggles and a gem that shines on noir's possibilities with race front and center.**"