

I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO

RAOUL PECK | USA



WINCHESTER
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Photo: Spider Martin

Whatever you think about the past and future of what used to be called “race relations” — white supremacy and the resistance to it, in plainer English — this movie will make you think again, and may even change your mind. Though its principal figure, the novelist, playwright and essayist James Baldwin, is a man who has been dead for nearly 30 years, you would be hard-pressed to find a movie that speaks to the present moment with greater clarity and force, insisting on uncomfortable truths and drawing stark lessons from the shadows of history.

To call *I Am Not Your Negro* a movie about James Baldwin would be to understate Mr. Peck’s achievement. It’s more of a posthumous collaboration, an uncanny and thrilling communion between the filmmaker — whose previous work includes both a documentary and a narrative feature about the Congolese anti-colonialist leader Patrice Lumumba — and his subject. The voice-over narration (read by Samuel L. Jackson) is entirely drawn from Baldwin’s work. Much of it comes from notes and letters written in the mid-1970s, when Baldwin was somewhat reluctantly sketching out a book, never to be completed, about the lives and deaths of Medgar Evers, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.

Reflections on those men (all of whom Baldwin knew well) and their legacies are interspersed with passages from other books and essays, notably *The Devil Finds Work*, Baldwin’s 1976 meditation on race, Hollywood and the mythology of white innocence. His published and unpublished words — some of the most powerful and penetrating ever assembled on the tortured subject of American identity — accompany images from old talk shows and news reports, from classic movies and from our own decidedly non-post-racial present.

Baldwin could not have known about Ferguson and Black Lives Matter, about the presidency of Barack Obama and the recrudescence of white nationalism in its wake, but in a sense he explained it all in advance. He understood the deep, contradictory patterns of our history, and articulated, with a passion and clarity that few others have matched, the psychological dimensions of racial conflict: the suppression of black humanity under slavery and Jim Crow and the insistence on it in African-American politics and art; the dialectic of guilt and rage, forgiveness and denial that distorts relations between black and white citizens in the North as well as the South; the lengths that white people will go to wash themselves clean of their complicity in oppression

Baldwin is a double character in Mr. Peck’s film. The elegance and gravity of his formal prose, and the gravelly authority of Mr. Jackson’s voice, stand in contrast to his quicksilver on-camera presence as a lecturer and television guest. In his skinny tie and narrow suit, an omnipresent cigarette between his fingers, he imports a touch of midcentury intellectual cool into our overheated, anti-intellectual media moment.

You feel entirely in [Baldwin’s] presence, hanging on his every word, following the implications of his ideas as they travel from his experience to yours. At the end of the movie, you are convinced that you know him. And, more important, that he knows you. To read Baldwin is to be read by him, to feel the glow of his affection, the sting of his scorn, the weight of his disappointment, the gift of his trust.

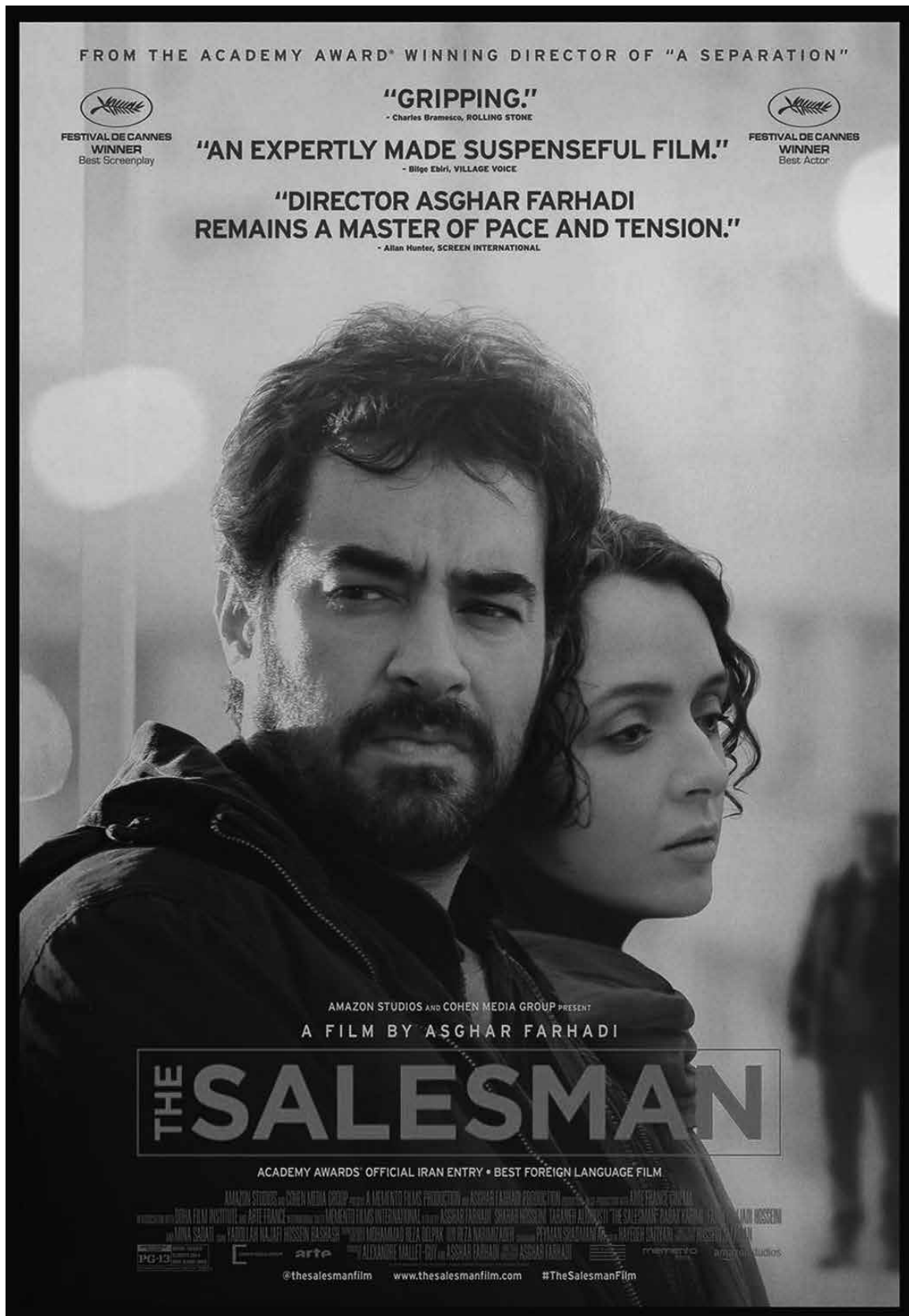
A.O. Scott, *New York Times*

WRITERS: Raoul Peck, James Baldwin **CINEMATOGRAPHY:** Henry Adebajo, Bill Ross, Turner Ross **Music:** Alexei Aigui
CAST: James Baldwin Himself | Plus archive footage of actors, musicians and politicians

VOTING FOR THARLO A26 | B47 | C24 | D8 | E0 | Rating 72% | Attendance 112

Next screening | **The Salesman** | Tuesday 20 February 2018 8.00pm
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For further information, please visit
www.winchesterfilmsociety.co.uk