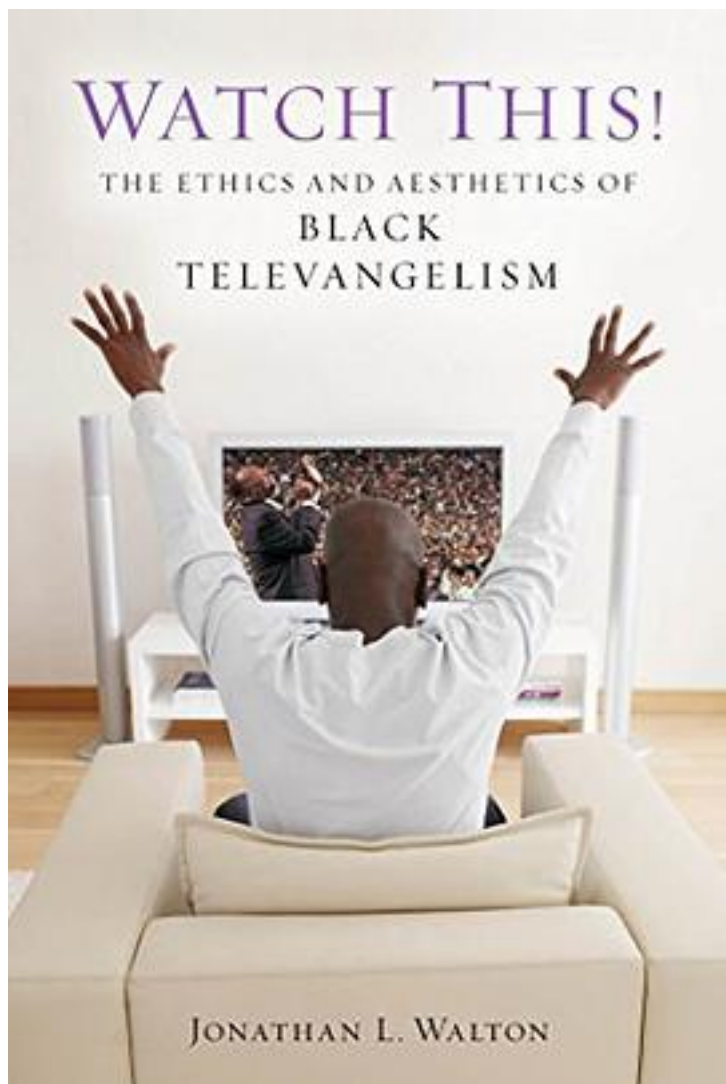


Watch This!



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In the post civil rights era, African American religious broadcasters have a seemingly ubiquitous presence in popular culture. Through their constant television broadcasts, mass video distributions, and printed publications they have greatly influenced the landscape of African American Christian practice. They are on par with popular entertainers and athletes in the African American community as cultural icons even as they are criticized by others for taking advantage of the devout in order to subsidize their lavish lifestyles. For these reasons questions abound. Do televangelists proclaim the message of the gospel or a message of greed? Do they represent the 'authentic' voice of the black church or is it the Christian Right in blackface? Does the phenomenon reflect orthodox 'Christianity' or ethnocentric 'Americanity' wrapped in religious language? "Watch This!" seeks to move beyond such polarizing debates by critically delving into the dominant messages and aesthetic styles of African American televangelists, and evaluating their ethical implications. With an early focus on 'Rev. Ike' and initial versions of the prosperity message, Walton places the contemporary phenomenon of black religious broadcasting in historical perspective, demonstrating that the types of syncretic and sensational black Christian practices witnessed on today's airwaves have been brewing within Pentecostal storefronts and on black religious radio for the majority of the twentieth century. He goes on to illumine the diversity of theology and social thought among popular black religious broadcasters in order to delineate the differences among figures often lumped together as monolithic. In so doing, Walton provides a principled ethical analysis that situates televangelists against a larger cultural backdrop, evaluating them according to their own self-understandings and ecclesial agendas. From T.D. Jakes to Bishop Eddie Long to Pastor Creflo Dollar, Walton argues that despite their emphasis on social and economic advancement in the African American community, these leaders' ministries frustrate their own liberatory aims and unwittingly reinforce class, racial, and gender injustices in America. "Watch This!" provides a nuanced examination of African American religious broadcasting that is certain to enrich our understanding of this prevalent and pervasive form of popular and political culture.

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