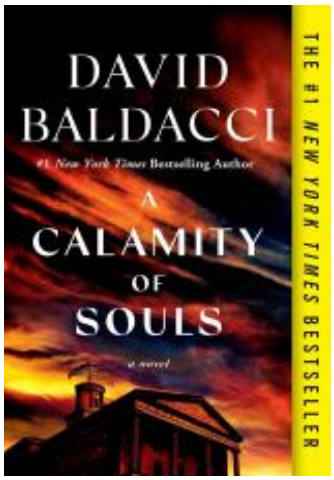
A Calamity of Souls

by David Baldacci



About the Book

Set in the tumultuous year of 1968 in southern Virginia, a racially charged murder case sets a duo of white and Black lawyers against a deeply unfair system as they work to defend their wrongfully accused Black client in this courtroom drama from #1?*New York Times* bestselling author David Baldacci.?

Jack Lee is a white lawyer from Freeman County, Virginia, who has never done anything to push back against racism, until he decides to represent Jerome Washington, a Black man charged with brutally killing an elderly and wealthy white couple. Doubting his decision, Lee fears that his legal skills may not be enough to prevail in a case where the odds are already stacked against both him and his client. And he quickly finds himself out of his depth when he realizes that what is at stake is far greater than the outcome of a murder trial.

Desiree DuBose is a Black lawyer from Chicago who has devoted her life to furthering the causes of justice and equality for everyone. She comes to Freeman County and enters a fractious and unwieldy partnership with Lee in a legal battle against the best prosecutor in the Commonwealth. Yet DuBose is also aware that powerful outside forces are at work to blunt the victories achieved by the Civil Rights era.??

Lee and DuBose could not be more dissimilar. On their own, neither one can stop the prosecution?s deliberate march towards a guilty verdict and the electric chair. But together, the pair fight for what once seemed impossible: a chance for a fair trial and true justice.

Over a decade in the writing, A CALAMITY OF SOULS breathes richly imagined and detailed life into a bygone era, taking the reader through a world that will seem both foreign and familiar.

Discussion Guide

1. What was your reaction to the opening chapter, in which Jerome is being arrested? How did the scene set your expectations for the rest of the novel?

2. By the end of the novel, the key takeaway is that Jack and Desiree each needed the other in order to get a not-guilty verdict for their clients. What qualities/traits in each of them were critical to the success of their partnership?

3. After agreeing to represent Jerome, Jack immediately doubts whether he should have done so and if he has the skill to make a sound case for his client. What factors created this uncertainty in Jack, and how do you think he overcomes them?

4. How do you think the case would have played out had Jack stepped down and allowed Desiree to take over completely? Additionally, how do you think it would have turned out had Desiree never come to town to offer her expertise?

5. In Freeman County, many of the citizens are resistant to change and the Black-white divide is staunchly held, even to the point of framing a Black couple for murder. While this is a fictional county, how did this story teach you about that time period in American history? Did you learn something new? If yes, what was it?

6. While Jack and Desiree aren?t on trial for committing any crimes, they are still villainized by some for defending their Black clients and furthering the causes of social justice. And their work then puts their lives, and the lives of their loved ones, at risk. What would you have done if you found yourself in that position? Why?

7. Hilda Lee is a complex character with a past she wants to keep hidden and an outward appearance she wants to keep up. How do you think this affected the way she raised her children? What cues did Jack pick up on that shaped his view of the world, even if he didn?t realize it?

8. At the end of the book, while justice is achieved, the ending is not completely happy. How did you expect the story to end, and why did you come to that conclusion? And how did the actual ending make you rethink the ways in which people hold on to hate, even when there?s evidence of innocence and inequality within the system?

Author Bio

David Baldacci has been writing since childhood, when his mother gave him a lined notebook in which to write down his stories. Many years later, when David thanked her for being the spark that ignited his writing career, she revealed that she?d given him the notebook to keep him quiet, ?because every mom needs a break now and then.?

David published his first novel, ABSOLUTE POWER, in 1996. The feature film adaptation followed, with Clint Eastwood as its director and star. In total, David has published over 50 novels for adults; all have been national and international bestsellers, and several have been adapted for film and television. His novels are published in over 45 languages and in more than 80 countries, with over 200 million copies sold worldwide. David has also published seven novels for young readers.

A lifelong Virginian, David received his Bachelor?s degree from Virginia Commonwealth University and his law degree

from the University of Virginia School of Law, after which he practiced law in Washington, D.C.

In addition to being a prolific writer, David is a devoted philanthropist, and his greatest efforts are dedicated to his family?s Wish You Well Foundation®. Established by David and his wife, Michelle, the Wish You Well Foundation supports family and adult literacy programs in the United States. In 2008 the Foundation partnered with Feeding America to launch Feeding Body & Mind, a program to address the connection between literacy, poverty and hunger. Through Feeding Body & Mind, more than one million new and gently used books have been collected and distributed through food banks to families in need.

David and his family live in Virginia.

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