



A Day in the Night of America

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The project Kevin Coyne took on in A DAY IN THE NIGHT OF AMERICA, his first book, is fascinating. Coyne, a journalist by trade, set out to portray a diverse sample of Americans working the night shift, approximately midnight to 8:00 AM. In order to do this, he engaged in an odyssey covering forty-one states and essentially became nocturnal himself.

The execution of this project is successful in many ways. In revealing the way our meat reaches the supermarket or the way our checks are cleared through a complex banking system, Coyne provides insight into the hidden springs and gears which profoundly affect our lives. On the other hand, for those readers who work or have worked the night shift, the book provides moments of recognition and perhaps even nostalgia. Often, Coyne's voyage of discovery gives us a sharper perspective on the distress of economic decline, as when he visits a Cleveland steel mill.

The book has some problems as well. Coyne's coverage is uneven. For example, he spends a lot of time describing nighttime radio talk shows, but passes over the fishermen of Gloucester with annoying precipitousness. In general, the book's rapid-fire approach leaves the reader hungry for greater depth of characterization and more technical details. Finally, Coyne's frequent rhapsodic interludes and artsy metaphors misfire all too often, becoming a bit tedious.

Nevertheless, a flawed tribute to our nocturnal workforce is far better than none at all. Coyne's book, at the very least, provides a memorable introduction to a part of our lives about which most of us are painfully ignorant.

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