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Separate Pasts: Growing Up White In The Segregated South



Synopsis

In *Separate Pasts* Melton A. McLaurin honestly and plainly recalls his boyhood during the 1950s, an era when segregation existed unchallenged in the rural South. In his small hometown of Wade, North Carolina, whites and blacks lived and worked within each other's shadows, yet were separated by the history they shared. *Separate Pasts* is the moving story of the bonds McLaurin formed with friends of both races—a testament to the power of human relationships to overcome even the most ingrained systems of oppression. A new afterword provides historical context for the development of segregation in North Carolina. In his poignant portrayal of contemporary Wade, McLaurin shows that, despite integration and the election of a black mayor, the legacy of racism remains. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a recollection of a boy's life growing up in a world that was segregated racially, specifically the world of American rural South in the fifties and early sixties. The author had more contact with the lives and culture of local black people than most young white people of that period because he worked in his grandfather's small grocery store that primarily served black people. In that regard, his experiences are atypical for his region, more like that of young people in other areas of America, though the author seems not to recognize that. Yet the book affords a window on a time and place that changed dramatically in the closing years of the 20th century. For what it shows about the white perspective of that era, it is interesting. It is also interesting for its male perspective on the

experience of puberty in such a world. We know a lot about the female sense of this experience, but as a woman, I found reading about the boy's experience enlightening. Having been told 'there is no way a woman can understand the way sex dominates boys' thoughts in adolescence,' I appreciated the author's chapter on the way his burgeoning manhood informed his experiences and views, particularly his views of black women. It struck me that in his case, adolescence itself was something of a leveler. Yet, the reader looking for sharp insight or the unified experience of a memoir will be disappointed. The book is marred by the absence of a unifying thesis or theme. Its relation is chronological, with little attention to coherence. It jolts from chapter to chapter with a decided lack of literary skill. I also found it marred by a certain sense of piousness on the part of the author at having "overcome" the world in which he was reared.

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