



Dixie: A Personal Osysey Through Historic Events That Shaped the Modern South

Curtis Wilkie

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Dixie is a political and social history of the South during the second half of the twentieth century told from Curtis Wilkie's perspective as a white man intimately transformed by enormous racial and political upheavals.

Wilkie's personal take on some of the landmark events of modern American history is as engaging as it is insightful. He attended Ole Miss during the rioting in the fall of 1962, when James Meredith became the first African American to enroll in the school. After graduation, Wilkie worked in Clarksdale, Mississippi, where he met Aaron Henry, a local druggist and later the prominent head of the Mississippi NAACP. He covered the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964 and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party challenge at the national convention in Atlantic City, and he was a member of the biracial insurgent Democratic delegation from Mississippi seated in place of Governor John Bell Williams's delegation at the 1968 convention in Chicago. Wilkie followed Jimmy Carter's campaign for the presidency, becoming friends with Billy Carter; he covered Bill Clinton's election in 1992 and was witness to the South's startling shift from the Democratic Party to the GOP; and finally, he was there when Byron De La Beckwith was convicted for the murder of civil rights leader Medgar Evers thirty-one years after the fact.

Wilkie had left the South in 1969 in the wake of the violence surrounding the civil rights movement, vowing never to live there again. But after traveling the world as a reporter, he did return in 1993, drawn by a deep-rooted affinity to the region of his youth. It was as though he rejoined his tribe, a peculiar civilization bonded by accent and mannerisms and burdened by racial anxiety. As Wilkie writes, Southerners have staunchly resisted assimilation since the Civil War, taking an almost perverse pride in their role as "spiritual citizens of a nation that existed for only four years in another century."

Wilkie endeavors to make sense of the enormous changes that have typified the South for more than four decades. Full of beauty, humor, and pathos, *Dixie* is a story of redemption -- for both a region and a writer.

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