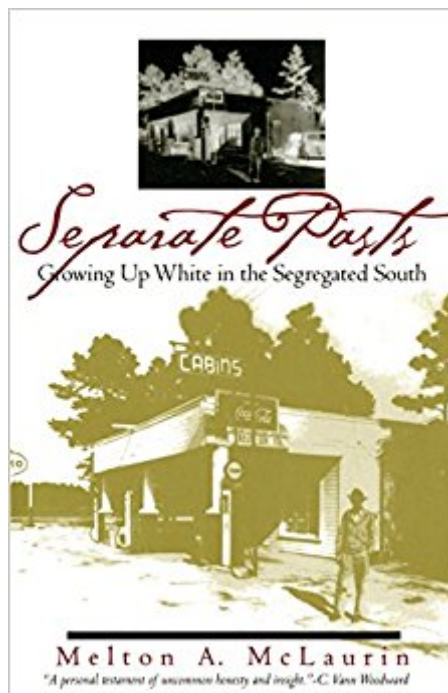




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Separate Pasts: Growing Up White In The Segregated South (Brown Thrasher Books Ser.)



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—*à* *à* 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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Vivid episodes and character sketches . . . Shows both sides of a society that could be cruel and paternalistic, oppressive and benevolent. (Chicago Tribune) Makes an adolescent's confusions illuminate much of the moral confusion of white society. (The Nation) A[n] affecting autobiography . . . It is a dispatch from a time that mercifully is no more. That such a statement can be made is tribute not merely to the blacks who fought against the old ways but to the whites such as McLaurin who learned from them. (Washington Post)

Melton A. McLaurin is a professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. He is the author of "Separate Pasts: Growing Up White in the Segregated South" for which he received the Lillian Smith Award, and "Celia, a Slave" (both Georgia).

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. Those of us who grew up in the South of the same period recognize the great complexity of racial or any other kind of integration of groups so sharply separated for so long a time. One does not "overcome" a limited perspective: he enlarges it. As developmental psychologists remind us, our seminal early experiences imprint our ways of viewing the world, limiting to some extent our visions in adulthood. Evidence of this is clear in the book, but the author seems innocent of its implications. I did not find this book a page-turner, and because of its lack of an organizing theme, I sometimes opened it merely so that I might complete it. Yet it has value for its recreation of one boy's viewpoint on growing up in a society with sometimes equally large populations of black and white people, but where equal opportunities and shared cultural experiences often do not exist. It is the serious account of a man who lives not far from where he grew up and who has experienced change from inside the mid-South. For those looking for a more nuanced book about the experience of growing up white in the segregated South, this might

not prove useful. But if you can get a remaindered or good used copy, it's worth a read.

Separate Pasts: Growing up White in the Segregated South is an excruciatingly honest and beautifully written account of a white boy's coming of age while living the lie of a legally segregated society. It should be required reading at the high school level (at least in excerpt) and in its entirety in every college core curriculum. Furthermore, it should be given every government official. Americans of every kind need to be aware of our ignoble as well as admirable history. We need to realize that "separate but equal" is never a possibility, that all were/are still adversely affected by the false teaching of one race's superiority or inferiority. Furthermore, we need to constantly face the reality of our human tendency to scapegoat persons who are "different" and strive to prevent its damage to individuals and to society.--Rubynelle Thyne

If you're a student, and your teacher/professor is making you read this, go say thank you to them. I know I will. I typically don't like reading books that educators assign, simply because they have no basis in real-world applications. This however, does. Much of the issues addressed are semi-relevant to issues currently faced by youth growing up in a community of mixed races. It seems odd to say that since this selection is about segregation, but it's much more than that. Overall, I learn through listening to stories, fortunately I have a professor that does just that, and fortunately he picked a book that also is full of stories.

I remember those days. We are together, but separate in so many ways now. Reading books like this, has really taught me to judge each person as an individual. I'm thankful I read this book.

I enjoyed reading this novel. It was uniquely written to describe old south life and racial discrimination from the standpoint of a reformed Southerner.

Very educational for a Yankee. Hard to believe.

Warning to other students!!!! It's an alright book, but there are random sporadic pages that are blank!!!! Waited too long to pick it up and now I'm stuck with this bad copy. Check your copy when you receive it!!!!

I found the narrative easy to relate to, and I could see myself in the pages of Separate Pasts. Well-

written, easy to access and engaging. I loved reading it and relating to it.

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