



Confederacy of Silence : A True Tale of the New Old South

By Richard Rubin

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When Richard Rubin, fresh out of the Ivy League, accepts a job at a daily newspaper in the old Delta town of Greenwood, Mississippi, he is thrust into a place as different from his hometown of New York as any in the country. Yet to his surprise, he is warmly welcomed by the townspeople and soon finds his first great scoop in Handy Campbell, a poor, black teen and gifted high school quarterback who goes on to win a spot on Mississippi State's team -- a training ground for the NFL.

Six years later, Rubin, back in New York, learns that Handy is locked up in Greenwood, accused of capital murder. Returning south to cover the trial, Rubin follows the trail that took Handy from the football field to county jail. As the best and worst elements of Mississippi rise up to do battle over one man's fate, Rubin must confront his own unresolved feelings about the confederacy of silence that initially enabled him to thrive in Greenwood but ultimately forced him to leave it.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

With no prospects for employment after his Ivy League graduation in 1988, Rubin, a 21-year-old Jewish New Yorker, accepted a job as a reporter in the heart of the Mississippi Delta. At the Greenwood Commonwealth Rubin covered sports and local news, wrote obituaries and features and photographed "local color." He also followed the short, happy career of Handy T. Campbell, an African-American high school quarterback from the projects and this story forms the core of the book. Rubin believed Campbell's prowess on the gridiron would parallel Rubin's own promise in the newsroom. But after a year wrestling with his conscience for not decrying abhorrent attitudes and behavior he encountered in the bigoted bigwigs of Leflore County, Rubin fled. Six years later, he returned to Greenwood to understand how the star athlete (now an Ole Miss dropout) and an accomplice could find themselves indicted for the murder of a local UPS man rumored to be bisexual. Rubin focuses the latter part of his book on the sleazy maneuverings of college recruiters and coaches, the investigation into the victim's death, and the prosecution of the trial, which provides the book's frisson. The narrative benefits from Rubin's perceptive observations, but it is his emotional investment in the story that coheres the book's two halves: a memoir of a watershed year in his life and the sordid, convoluted tale of a gross miscarriage of justice. A grittier depiction of the New Old South than *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, to which it will undoubtedly be compared, Rubin's memoir exposes the racial polarity of the Delta in clear, effective prose.

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From Library Journal

This powerful docudrama provides a searing look at a true crime story through the eyes of a naive young man on his first job as a reporter. At 21, aspiring writer Rubin, currently a contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *New York Times Magazine*, left New York for Greenwood, MS, to settle in as a sportswriter for the daily newspaper. His first assignment included coverage of local football star Handy Campbell, a poor black athlete from the housing projects who became friends with Rubin. Six years after returning to New York, Rubin found out that his friend ended up in jail for the murder of a flamboyant man from Greenwood whom Rubin also knew. Stunned by the turn of events, Rubin returned to Greenwood on a mission to follow the trail of the promising athlete from college to prison. The result is a book that goes beyond the personal to provide a portrait of a Southern community torn by racism and bigotry. Similar to John Berendt's *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, this well-written debut will appeal to anyone interested in the South, racism, or true-crime stories. Recommended for all public libraries and for strong sociology collections in academic libraries. Sandra Isaacson, US Environmental Protection Agency, Las Vegas

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From [The New Yorker](#)

At the age of twenty-one, Rubin, an Ivy League-educated New Yorker, went to work as a sportswriter in Greenwood, Mississippi. Almost in spite of himself, he came to love Greenwood, even as he remained aware of the ways in which the New South resembled the old. He also befriended a black high-school quarterback who he believed would become an N.F.L. star. Five years after Rubin left town, though, he heard that the player had been indicted for murder, and he returned to find out what had gone wrong. His investigation leads him to some dubious conclusions (particularly about college football), but his willingness to look honestly at the complexity of race in today's South is invigorating, and the book's conclusion, when Rubin realizes just how much he has not understood, is shattering.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jeremiah Burroughs:

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