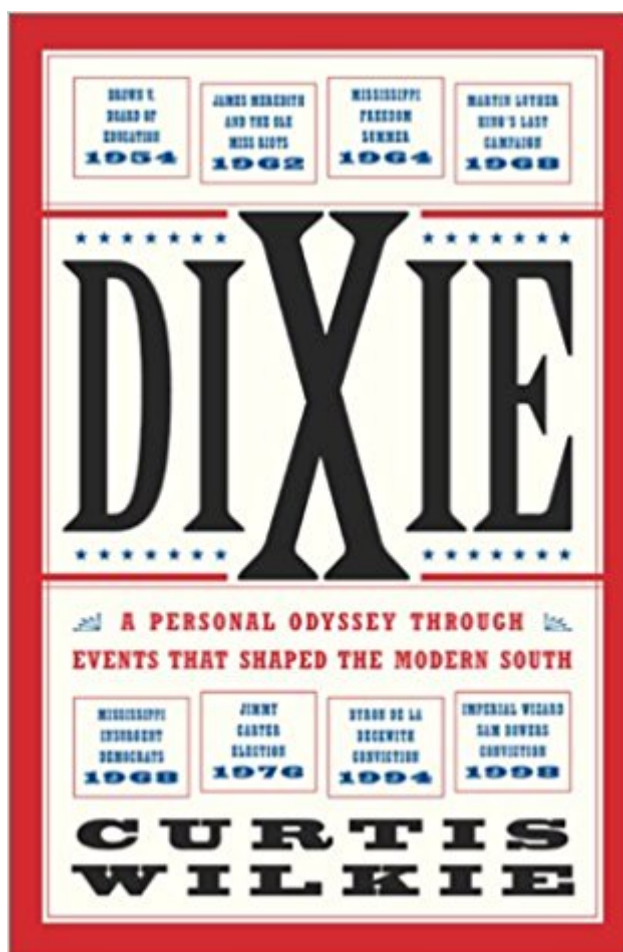


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# Dixie: A Personal Odyssey Through Events That Shaped The Modern South



## Synopsis

"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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In this social chronicle of the American South's past 40 years, Wilkie (coauthor, *Arkansas Mischief*), a native Mississippian who exiled himself, proves that, indeed, you can't take the South out of the boy. Drawing on his own memories and dozens of books and magazine articles, Wilkie retells the big stories he covered as a journalist, most notably for the *Boston Globe*: Ole Miss's forced acceptance of its first black student in 1962; "Freedom Summer" of 1964, "the most terrible year of violence since the Civil War

Wilkie, a noted journalist, grew up in Mississippi and launched his career there. His book is a series of essays "based primarily on memory . . . freshened and reinforced" by recent and extensive background reading. In recalling the Mississippi of his childhood, youth, and young manhood, he in essence takes his readers on a political and sociological tour of the South during the region's cataclysmic sea change, for he grew up during the years when black resistance to Jim Crow laws was gathering momentum. He attended Old Miss during that institution's worst days of attempting to preserve its segregationist policies, and as a cub reporter for a Mississippi newspaper, he witnessed civil rights violence firsthand. Getting his fill of his home state's foot-dragging, he left the South for more than two decades, working for the *Boston Globe*. But he always felt like a misfit in the North, and his southern consciousness eventually drew him back to Dixie. His book is a very effective observance of the lay of a land swept by irreversible forces. Brad Hooper Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

I am a native New Yorker who lives in Oxford, MS. The South is such a complicated place easy to condemn for its reactionary intransigence. Unfortunately, the typical Northern appraisal of the South is an unfair over simplification. Wilkie writes lovingly and insightfully of the South he deservedly loves and criticizes. Wilkie joins a long line of great Mississippi authors who continue to be both repelled by and magnetically held by their state. It is impossible to understand America without understanding the South and this book is an eloquent effort in a continuing dialogue.

As someone who recently relocated to the Deep South I thoroughly enjoyed Curtis Wilkie's tales, including civil rights struggles and the political strategies used to get the Southern vote. Both historically educational and entertaining, I highly recommend this book.

My husband is the same age as Curtis Wilkie and I am only a few years younger. We grew up just south of the author in southern Louisiana and southern Mississippi from the 40's to the 60's. We both thought the book extremely well written and insightful. We have given it as a gift and recommended it to others as a must-read. Mississippi is slowly joining the 21st century and has much to offer now that the white paternalism and good old boy networks are shrinking and there are the beginnings of a black middle class. We can all hope that the south will rise again - with equality for all.

I could not put this book down. This combination autobiography/social and political history seamlessly weaves personal anecdotes, biographical narratives, and historical commentary. Wilkie's strengths lie both in his compelling journalistic prose and his intimate knowledge of many of the events he discusses. His firsthand accounts of already famous (and some not-so-famous) events add rich color to our collective knowledge of the region and era.

Fabulous book

Mr. Wilkie knows his history and has created a thorough and interesting read. He includes many facts and perspectives on Southern history.

Curtis Wilkie is a Mississippian who paints a broad picture of the Civil Rights movement from the inside out. He catalogues his growth from childhood to young adult as a journalist in waiting, one with a sympathetic ear for the plight of the descendants of slaves in central Miss. His descriptions of his upbringing in a town divided by race are quite good. And his stories of Ole Miss football games and the atmosphere surrounding them are excellent as they foreshadow the struggle of the civil rights community in what Stevie Wonder referred to as "hard times Mississippi." It's a well told story. As a young adult he escapes to Manhattan and literally and figuratively joins the literati at Elaine's, that popular Manhattan nightspot frequented by those the likes of Willie Morris. His soft hearted leanings help him fit right in as a typical evening's discourse is often filled with lamentations with regard to

those unenlightened ones, those knuckle dragging country folk left behind. The book is an ongoing narrative of Wilkie's life from his work within the movement in his home town, his migration to NYC, his marriage there, and his subsequent return to Mississippi as an older man. It was a time of great change in the South and Wilkie captures it as well as anyone I've read. Let's just say that it's certainly different there today. A good companion read would be "Rising Tide" by John Barry. It's about the great Mississippi river flood of 1927, a disaster that not only changed the landscape of the south, but also that of America. It's a great lead-up to Wilkie's story which bridges the link between the old south and its new beginnings. One cannot read these books without feeling the tribulations of the misbegotten and dispossessed; it's a tonic for softening the hardest of hearts.

For anyone searching for in-depth studies of the postwar American South, this is absolutely it. Wilkie brings the keen eye of a child of the South to the descriptions of life in his home town, county, state and region, and uses his journalist's skills to make it all vibrant and immediate to readers of any geographic locale. He does not pull punches in his frank descriptions of what was true in the South's postwar decades, nor does he excuse his own participations and prejudices as he passes through his own changes on a long journey to understanding the nation's necessary reassessments of civil rights and collective wrongs. While it helps to have a prior knowledge of the Civil Rights movement in this country, and a sense of how the Dixiecrats became Republicans, this book is accessible to any reader of American history and social change.

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