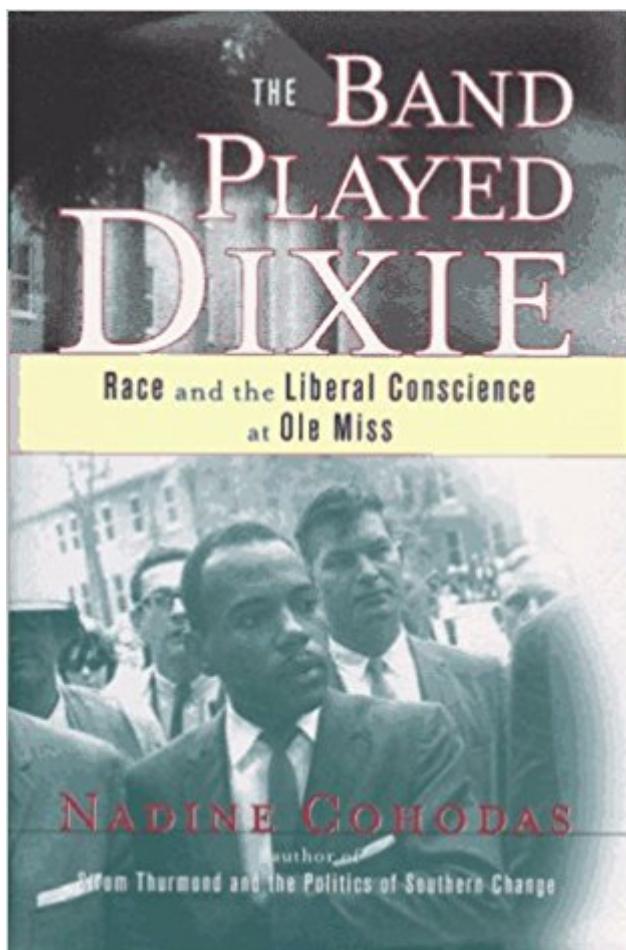


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The Band Played Dixie: Race And The Liberal Conscience At Ole Miss



Synopsis

Mississippi, with its rich and dramatic history, holds a special place in the civil rights movement. Perhaps no other institution in that state, or in the South as a whole, has been more of a battleground for race relations or a barometer for progress than the University of Mississippi. Even the school's affectionate nickname - Ole Miss - bespeaks its place in the legacy of the South: now used as short for Old Mississippi, "Ole Miss" was once a term of respect used by slaves for the wife of a plantation owner. Throughout the first part of this century, the state's "Boll Weevil" legislators presented the most implacable hostility to black enrollment. The campus itself - with its stately white columns and field of Confederate flags at sporting events - seemed almost frozen in time. With the civil rights movement and the arrival of the first black student in 1962, the quietly determined James Meredith, violence and hatred erupted with regularity on the verdant campus. Even following years of progress, when a young black man and young white woman were elected "Colonel Rebel" and "Miss Ole Miss, " the highest campus honors, the pair appeared in the traditional yearbook photograph separated by a picket fence, still suggesting old taboos. Once an unrepentant enclave of educational separatism in the South, the history of Ole Miss has paralleled the nation's own in race relations: the rocky beginnings of integration following Meredith's admission; the discord of the sixties and seventies, when activist black students eschewed crew cuts and varsity sweaters for Afros and clenched fists; to the delicate reconciliation of recent years. A drastically changed campus today, Ole Miss continues to wrestle with its controversial mascot, "Colonel Rebel, " and questions of whether the emotional chords of "Dixie" should still be heard at its football games. The history of Ole Miss offers a detailed portrait of the uneasy yet cautiously optimistic ways in which American society continues

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Customer Reviews

I used this book as my primary information source during a recent History class research project on the James Meredith affair. Frankly, from reading it, I believe it to be one of the best nonfiction books I have ever encountered. Cohodas really did her homework on this one, and the detail evident the book shows how well she conducted her research. The other aspect of this winning combination is that she possesses a real ability for relating a story-- I have never been so captivated by a nonfiction piece. While part of this is due to the fact that the subject matter (the history of the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss)) is engrossing, it continues to amaze me that Cohodas has not been more prolific in her documentation of Southern politics, for she certainly does it better than anyone else I have read.

I came to this book knowing almost nothing about Ole Miss or its integration history. This book was an excellent summary of the history of the college, especially in its early years, and how that history played into the integration struggles. It was interesting to see how racial relations at the college have changed and not changed since the 1960s, and to get another perspective on the Confederate flag. The book is well-written and it's hard to believe that the author didn't spend her whole life in Mississippi. The book bogs down towards the end a bit, but otherwise is quite engrossing. An excellent book, especially for those who were not taught much about integration in the South.

It is unfortunate that the defenders of white supremacy are panning this book, for it is an excellent review of the post-civil rights era. The author shows that the struggle for racial equality did not end with desegregation. As much as the neo-confederates would claim otherwise, the rebel flag is a symbol of white supremacy - if it was not, then the Dixiecrats would not have adopted it in 1948 and the state of Georgia would not have put on their state flag in response to the Brown decision. Defenders of the rebel flag need to recognize those facts, just as they need to remember that Nathan Bedford Forrest massacred prisoners at Fort Pillow (which was corroborated by Confederate officers). That's the "heritage" they so proudly speak of, and Colonel Reb is just a softer version of it. Read the book, look at the photos, and see for yourself.

Anyone interested in the Integration of Ole Miss should read this book. It provides a startlingly objective account of how difficult true integration is. Not because of racism, but because of social differences, how we relate to one another and how frightening it is to learn to trust people. It also reveals the heroes of Ole Miss, black and white.

In the year this book was published, one of the main subjects, Cleve McDowell, was murdered. Nadine Cohodas (Thank goodness!) had interviewed McDowell about his treatment at Ole Miss when he became the first African-American admitted there as a law student. Times were difficult, and McDowell was left with absolutely no protection from the Justice Department - on a campus where students still had guns from the James Meredith riot. This is a wonderful history of those moments and provides excellent insight into those times. For those interested, I've placed more information on McDowell at [...]

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