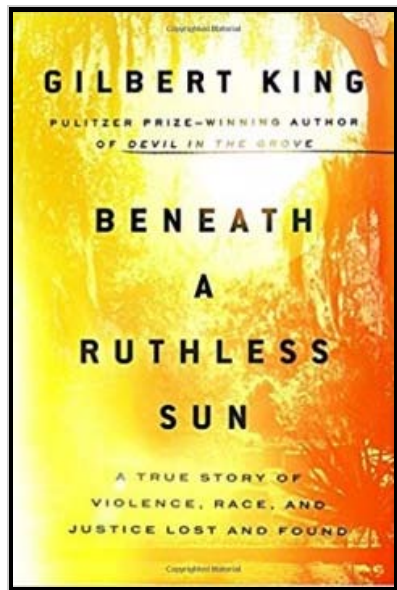


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Beneath a Ruthless Sun

A True Story of Violence, Race, and Justice Lost and Found

by Gilbert King

Price: \$28.00(Hardcover)

Published: April 24, 2018



Rating: 0.0/5 (0 votes cast)

From the Publisher: "Compelling, insightful and important, Beneath a Ruthless Sun exposes the corruption of racial bigotry and animus that shadows a community, a state and a nation. A fascinating examination of an injustice story all too familiar and still largely ignored, an engaging and essential read." --Bryan Stevenson, author of Just Mercy From the author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning bestseller Devil in the Grove, the gripping true story of a small town with a big secret. In December 1957, the wife of a Florida citrus baron is raped in her home while her husband is away. She claims a "husky Negro" did it, and the sheriff, the infamous racist Willis McCall, does not hesitate to round up a herd of suspects. But within days, McCall turns his sights on Jesse Daniels, a gentle, mentally impaired white nineteen-year-old. Soon Jesse is railroaded up to the state hospital for the insane, and locked away without trial. But crusading journalist Mabel Norris Reese cannot stop fretting over the case and its baffling outcome. Who was protecting whom, or what? She pursues the story for years, chasing down leads, hitting dead ends, winning unlikely allies. Bit by bit, the unspeakable truths behind a conspiracy that shocked a community into silence begin to surface. Beneath a Ruthless Sun tells a powerful, page-turning story rooted in the fears that rippled through the South as integration began to take hold, sparking a surge of virulent racism that savaged the vulnerable, debased the powerful, and roils our own times still.

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About The Author

Gilbert King

Gilbert King was awarded the 2013 Pulitzer Prize in Nonfiction for *The Devil in the Grove: Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of a New America*, which was also a *New York Times* bestseller and a finalist for the Dayton Literary Peace Prize. A featured contributor to *Smithsonian* magazine and The Marshall Project, King also writes about justice for *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. He lives in New York City.

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What We Say

Pulitzer Prize winning writer Gilbert King delivers another remarkable true crime story about racial injustice, social inequality, the treatment of the mentally ill and about a dozen other burning, important issues. He won the Pulitzer for another true crime book that centered on an early case involving future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. Remarkably, this book is set in the same small Florida town and involves the same infamous sheriff, Willis McCall. In fact, this town was the scene of not one, not two, but three major cases that made it to the Supreme Court and proved hugely influential. This story begins in December of 1957 when a powerful man is away from home dallying with his mistress. In his absence, the man's wife is allegedly raped by a husky black man. Needless to say, the KKK-leading sheriff soon has every black man from 8 to 80 rounded up. The only question left is who will deliver "justice" first -- the police or a lynch mob. But days later a mentally challenged young white boy who has never hurt a fly is taken into custody. This confused innocent is labeled the rapist but declared insane and bundled off to a mental asylum, seemingly for the remainder of his days. He is never tried or convicted of anything other than being delusional. His delusion? Insisting he had nothing to do with the rape. The boy's poor parents do what they can for him and they are abetted by a crusading journalist named Mabel Norris Reese. She simply won't rest, despite threats, burning crosses and her weekly newspaper being driven out of business. It's a jaw-dropping story complete with secret confessions, backroom deals, murder, corruption and some twists so unexpected one might be ashamed to include them in a daytime soap. But can I recommend this book? At times, it was so depressing in its catalog of injustice that I had to put it down. At other times it was so infuriating, I threw it down. And this is no fairy tale with a neat and happy ending. Author Gilbert King presumably had to wait for some of the principal people to die before he could unroll this amazing story. Besides being a gripping tale of a deeply corrupt small town in which a poor white boy may never get justice, "Beneath A Ruthless Sun" hits on numerous topics: the KKK, prisoners used as enslaved labor, the frightening history of lobotomies, the degrading treatment of the mentally ill, the poor not getting a decent defense (it's during the 15 or so year arc of this tragedy that the Supreme Court rules everyone has a right to an attorney) and much more. King might have ended on some of the genuine good news to be found here. Crimes are unearthed, the truth comes out and justice of a sort is done. But he follows this story to the end and its sobering fall-out leaves you dissatisfied. Like the tireless journalist Mabel Norris Reese, you feel the prickly sense that more work needs to be done. -- Michael Giltz

What Others Say

"A spellbinding true story of racism, privilege, and official corruption...By turns sobering, frightening, and thrilling, this meticulous account of the power and tenacity of officially sanctioned racism recalls a dark era that America is still struggling to leave behind." —*Kirkus Reviews* (starred)

"Compelling, insightful and important, Gilbert King exposes the corruption of racial bigotry and animus that shadows a community, a state and a nation. A fascinating examination of an injustice story all too familiar and still largely ignored, an engaging and essential read." —*Bryan Stevenson, author of Just Mercy*

"In the tradition of Harper Lee, Gilbert King tells the story of a small southern town corrupted by racism, a perverse genteel honor, and utter disdain for poor "crackers." Three women stand out in this gripping tale of a falsely accused man: an unrelenting reporter, a mother, and a victim doubly victimized as a pawn of others' ambitions. In deftly unraveling a tragic mixture of lies, violence, and hatred, King powerfully reminds us how the unpalatable beliefs of 1957 haunt us still." —*Nancy Isenberg, author of White Trash*

"Gilbert King's stunning chronicle of race, sex and power in fatal combination yields so many truly tragic turns that it's almost uncanny when goodness endures. With breakneck drama and cold clarity, Beneath a Ruthless Sun captures the sultry particulars of a uniquely charged place and time as well as a universal truth about how difficult it is for humans in the aggregate to do the right thing." —*Diane McWhorter, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama—the Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution*

Praise for Devil in the Grove:

"Must read, cannot put down history." -*The New York Times*

"A taut, intensely readable narrative." -*Boston Globe*

"A powerful and well-told drama of Southern injustice." -*The Chicago Tribune*

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