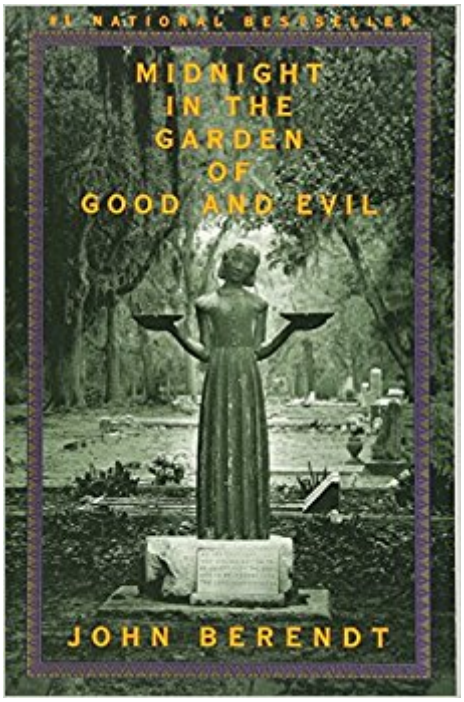
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Midnight In The Garden Of Good And Evil: A Savannah Story



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Synopsis

Shots rang out in Savannah’s grandest mansion in the misty,early morning hours of May 2, 1981.Ã Â Ã Â Was it murder or self-defense?Ã Â Ã Â For nearly a decade, the shooting and its aftermath reverberated throughout this hauntingly beautiful city of moss-hung oaks and shaded squares.Ã Â Ã Â John Berendt’s sharply observed, suspenseful, and witty narrative reads like a thoroughly engrossing novel, and yet it is a work of nonfiction.Ã Â Ã Â Berendt skillfully interweaves a hugely entertaining first-person account of life in this isolated remnant of the Old South with the unpredictable twists and turns of a landmark murder case.It is a spellbinding story peopled by a gallery of remarkable characters: the well-bred society ladies of the Married Woman’s Card Club; the turbulent young redneck gigolo; the hapless recluse who owns a bottle of poison so powerful it could kill every man, woman, and child in Savannah; the aging and profane Southern belle who is the "soul of pampered self-absorption"; the uproariously funny black drag queen; the acerbic and arrogant antiques dealer; the sweet-talking, piano-playing con artist; young blacks dancing the minuet at the black debutante ball; and Minerva, the voodoo priestess who works her magic in the graveyard at midnight.Ã Â Ã Â These and other Savannahians act as a Greek chorus, with Berendt revealing the alliances, hostilities, and intrigues that thrive in a town where everyone knows everyone else. Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil is a sublime and seductive reading experience.Ã Â Ã Â Brilliantly conceived and masterfully written, this enormously engaging portrait of a most beguiling Southern city has become a modern classic.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

John Berendt’s Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil has been heralded as a "lyrical work of nonfiction," and the book’s extremely graceful prose depictions of some of Savannah, Georgia’s most colorful eccentrics--remarkable characters who could have once prospered in a William Faulkner novel or Eudora Welty short story--were certainly a critical factor in its tremendous success. (One resident into whose orbit Berendt fell, the Lady Chablis, went on to become a minor celebrity in her own right.) But equally important was Berendt’s depiction of Savannah socialite Jim Williams as he stands trial for the murder of Danny Hansford, a moody, violence-prone hustler--and sometime companion to Williams--characterized by locals as a "walking streak of sex." So feel free to call it a "true crime classic" without a trace of shame.

After discovering in the early 1980s that a super-saver fare to Savannah, Ga., cost the same as an entree in a nouvelle Manhattan restaurant, Esquire columnist Berendt spent the next eight years flitting between Savannah and New York City. The result is this collection of smart, sympathetic observations about his colorful Southern neighbors, including a jazz-playing real estate shark; a sexually adventurous art student; the Lady Chablis (’ "What was your name before that?" I asked. "Frank," she said.’ "); the gossipy Married Woman’s Card Club; and an assortment of aging Southern belles. The book is also about the wealthy international antiques dealer Jim Williams, who played an active role in the historic city’s restoration--and would also be tried four times for the 1981 shooting death of 21-year-old Danny Handsford, his high-energy, self-destructive house helper. The Williams trials--he died in 1990 of a heart attack at age 59--are lively matches between dueling attorneys fought with shifting evidence, and they serve as both theme and anchor to Berendt’s illuminating and captivating travelogue. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Reading this book was a long time coming. I finally picked it up because I was going to Savannah and, well, yes, of course, read "The Book."So I did.I enjoyed the first half, but felt like the author’s journalist background was coming out more than a cohesive story. It was more like a series of mini-biographies on various interesting people in Savannah. Like those long articles where a magazine writer meets with someone of interest over an extended period of time and talks about their interactions (there was a fascinating one with Fiona Appel in the past couple years...). I.e., it was very interesting and definitely put you in the mood of Savannah, but it wasn’t exactly a story. There didn’t appear to be a fluid tale coming out. It was more like "oh this person! Oh and that thing!

oo, and then there was this one time... And oh yeah, she was interesting too!" And it was. Interesting. But not, as I say, a story. So the first half I'd give about 3 1/2 stars.Except for the Jim Williams stuff which is the beginning, occasionally throughout, and most of the latter half of the book. And I'd give all that 5 stars. Berendt truly brings to life Jim Williams and his house (Mercer House), his experiences, his trade, his peoples, his parties, his personalities... I loved reading all of that. And Berendt did a fantastic job bringing to life the trialS related to Jim Williams.... without being boring or repetitive or, frankly, overly legalistic. It was just interesting and endearing and wonderful.And what's it about? It's about Savannah. It's about the people in Savannah and the nature of Savannah and what makes Savannah, Savannah. This is apparently why the people in Savannah simply refer to this as "The Book." Because it did its job well. And it's also about a murder trial. And about big personalities. And about a journalist's discovery of a city, its people, and even himself.And I recommend it. Just to everyone. It's a pleasure reading and a good one to have read.FOUR AND A HALF stars.Note: This book is true... mostly. As Berendt explains, not only have many of the names been changed, but the timeframe has also been changed, and perhaps small other details, to provide a story that's truer in "feel" than perhaps in explicit detail.

I love this book. Always have. It is one of my favorites and one of the only books I have re-read a few times. It is that enjoyable. I'm not a true crime fan, but with John Berendt's narrative this is so hard to put down. Here he has a remarkable ability to describe the settings, characters, and all that makes Savanna great with such vivid color, I can get lost in the streets and venues with all these interesting folks. Of course I've watched the movie, and I own a first edition of this book. And since the power and ease of the internet has come about, I've been able to do my own research and delve deeper into these very real characters and the great city and area itself. I love it every time!

It feels strange to recommend a book released 23 years ago (that has sold 5 million copies and holds the record for weeks on the NYT Bestseller list). But you need to read this.The true story of a New York writer who, when the price of a fancy dinner went up and airfare dropped, started spending his weekends exploring different parts of the country. He fell in love with Savannah, a city he visited on a lark from Charleston, and he makes it easy to understand why. He encounters the most eccentric cast of characters: the man who walks an imaginary dog every day (there's a good reason), the dispossessed inventor of the flea collar who is rumored to have a poison that could wipe out Savannah, the rake Joe Odom whose home is open to revelers day and night, the Lady Chablis (!), and of course Jim Williams.Avoid learning anything about the book. I somehow

managed to go in with only a vague understanding of its contents and this is as it should be. Perhaps no author ever worked with richer source material and Berendt is a gifted storyteller. In the process, he lived every author's dream: to write something meaningful and have 5 million people read it, and 10s of millions of people learn about it through the movie.Having lived her most colorful characters and stories for the past few days I am counting down the days until I can be there in person.

This is the second time I have read this book. I read it again because I was planning a trip to Charleston SC and Savannah GA and I wanted to refresh my memory about the story. On the trip we saw the Mercer house and the office of the lawyer who defended him for some of the trials. He is still practicing law! We also visited the Bonaventure Cemetery which was featured in the book. Savannah is a very beautiful place and, thankfully, the old buildings and houses are being preserved for future generations.

In this book, there are two main characters: Jim Williams and the town of Savannah. The use of colorful eccentrics provides both entertainment and insight. I won't spend much more time outlining the pros of this book; the reviews are almost all positive. This is an enjoyable read.

This was an excellent book! I really had a difficult time putting it down and then I was sorry when I was finished reading it. The characters are very diverse and interesting. Berednt is very skillful in storytelling. I highly recommend this book, but be aware you will want to view the house in person in Savannah.

Finally read this book. Years ago, when it was so popular, I never wanted to read it. But so glad I finally did. This was completely enchanting. I was charmed, entertained and got good laughs in every chapter. What a brilliantly written book. And, of course, I now want to visit Savannah.

I use to live in Savannah and as I was reading this book, I found myself thinking it was more exciting and suspenseful than man of the fiction books I've read. This is truly an awesome book!

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