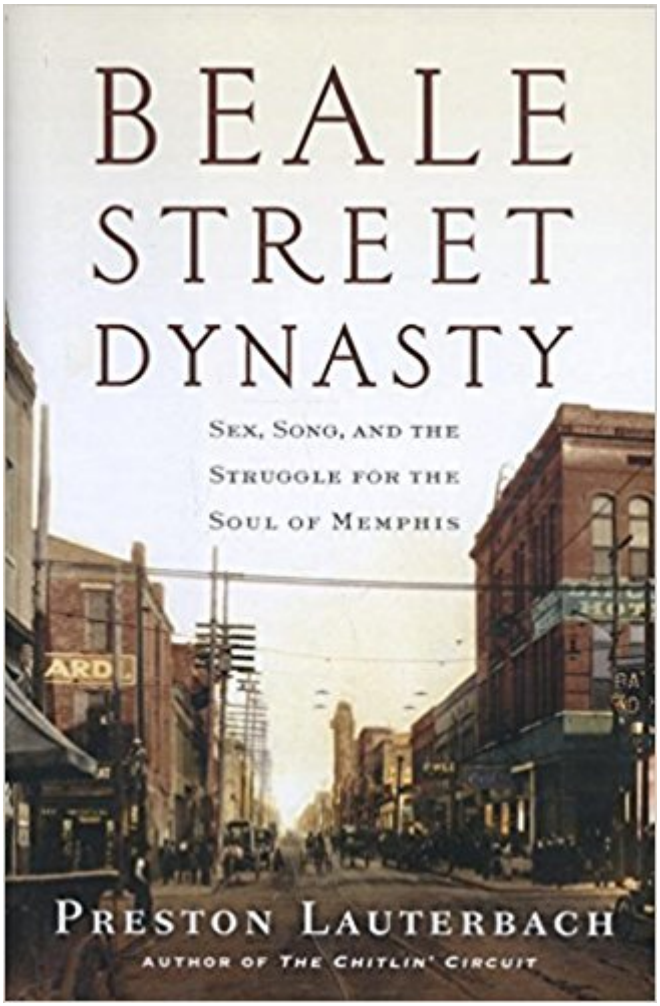
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Beale Street Dynasty: Sex, Song, And The Struggle For The Soul Of Memphis



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Synopsis

The vivid history of Beale StreetÃ¢â ¬â ¢a lost world of swaggering musicians, glamorous madams, and ruthless politiciansÃ¢â ¬â ¢and the battle for the soul of Memphis.Following the Civil War, Beale Street in Memphis, Tennessee, thrived as a cauldron of sex and song, violence and passion. But out of this turmoil emerged a center of black progress, optimism, and cultural ferment. Preston Lauterbach tells this vivid, fascinating story through the multigenerational saga of a family whose ambition, race pride, and moral complexity indelibly shaped the city that would loom so large in American life.Robert Church, who would become Ã¢â ¬Å“the SouthÃ¢â ¬â„¢s first black millionaire,Ã¢â ¬Â• was a mulatto slave owned by his white father. Having survived a deadly race riot in 1866, Church constructed an empire of vice in the booming river town. He made a fortune with saloons, gambling, andÃ¢â ¬â ¢shockinglyÃ¢â ¬â ¢white prostitution. But he also nurtured the militant journalism of Ida B. Wells and helped revolutionize American music through the work of composer W.C. Handy, the man who claimed to have invented the blues.In the face of Jim Crow, the Church fortune helped fashion the most powerful black political organization of the early twentieth century. Robert and his son, Bob Jr., bought and sold property, founded a bank, and created a park and auditorium for their people finer than the places whites had forbidden them to attend.However, the Church family operated through a tense arrangement with the Democrat machine run by the notorious E. H. Ã¢â ¬Å“BossÃ¢â ¬Â• Crump, who stole elections and controlled city hall. The battle between this black dynasty and the white political machine would define the future of Memphis.Brilliantly researched and swiftly plotted, Beale Street Dynasty offers a captivating account of one of AmericaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s iconic citiesÃ¢â ¬â ¢by one of our most talented narrative historians. 8 pages of illustrations

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Customer Reviews

Ã¢â ¬Å“Adds a fascinating chapter to civil rights history. But for all the hatred it depicts, this gracefully written book never loses sight of the fun that made Handy exalt that stretch of dirt road.Ã¢â ¬Â• - James Gavin, New York Times Book ReviewÃ¢â ¬Å“All aspects of this complex, fascinating history are toldÃ¢â ¬Â|with verve and vivid erudition.Ã¢â ¬Â• - Tom Nolan, Wall Street JournalÃ¢â ¬Å“Lauterbach brings the history of Memphis to life in this vivid reconstruction of its volatile historyÃ¢â ¬Â| an engaging, entertaining, and thorough history. Lauterbach superbly handles the cityÃ¢â ¬â„¢s race relations and the black struggle for equalityÃ¢â ¬Â| a wonderful portrait of a city in flux and a neighborhoodÃ¢â ¬â„¢s lasting, though oft-overlooked, legacy.Ã¢â ¬Â• - Publishers WeeklyÃ¢â ¬Å“Lauterbach here provides the exceptional story of a southern city that matches in sheer bravado and outrageousness any rival metropolis, and in so doing he fills in a gap in AmericaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s urban and racial historyÃ¢â ¬Â| [F]ascinating.Ã¢â ¬Â• - Mark Levine, BooklistÃ¢â ¬Å“Excellent study of an iconic Southern place and the fraught, violent history behind itÃ¢â ¬Â| Lauterbach adds to the rich library devoted to Ã¢â ¬Å“old, weird AmericaÃ¢â ¬Â• established by writers such as Michael Ventura, Peter Guralnick and Greil Marcus. Beale Street is mostly a tourist trap now, but it was a place of Ã¢â ¬Ëœwhorehouses, saloons, and bullet holesÃ¢â ¬â„¢ not so long ago. By LauterbachÃ¢â ¬â„¢s illuminating account, the past was more funÃ¢â ¬â ¢or at least more interesting.Ã¢â ¬Â• - Kirkus ReviewsÃ¢â ¬Å“[A]n engaging, surprising, at times edifying tour of a civic pastÃ¢â ¬Â| Beale Street Dynasty is both good history and a good yarn. Ã¢â ¬Â| [A] Southern answer to Martin ScorseseÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Gangs of New York or HBOÃ¢â ¬â„¢s similarly titled Boardwalk Empire.Ã¢â ¬Â• - Memphis Commercial AppealÃ¢â ¬Å“Preston Lauterbach takes readers on an uproarious, sometimes shocking jaunt through Memphis history by way of Beale Street, the remarkable thoroughfare that has hosted the likes of W.C. Handy, Ida B. Wells, and Richard Wright. Beale Street Dynasty is a compelling, witty, deeply researched, and always enlightening book.Ã¢â ¬Â• - Gary Krist, author of Empire of SinÃ¢â ¬Å“In his last book, The ChitlinÃ¢â ¬â„¢ Circuit, Lauterbach shone light into obscure, all but unknown rooms of the rock-Ã¢â ¬â„¢nÃ¢â ¬â„¢-roll story. This time he turns to a chapter we thought we knew wellÃ¢â ¬â ¢Beale Street, one of the grounds zero of American culture, with Tin Pan Alley and Congo Square and ConcordÃ¢â ¬â ¢and the result is every bit as illuminating. Lauterbach has become one of my favorite people to read on 20th-century popular music.Ã¢â ¬Â• -

John Jeremiah Sullivan, author of PulpheadÃ¢â ¬Å“Preston Lauterbach has conjured a fascinating demimonde thatÃ¢â ¬â„¢s dead and gone. After reading this, I dreamed all night about street hustlers, hoodoos, and snake oil salesmen on Beale Street, the Main Street of black America. Here Lauterbach gives us Beale in its heydayÃ¢â ¬â ¢the chitlin joints, the rough-and-tumble politics, the fecund musicÃ¢â ¬â ¢and deftly paints a portrait of the one improbable millionaire who towered over this vibrant world. Read Beale Street Dynasty and you begin to feel youÃ¢â ¬â„¢re communing with ghosts.Ã¢â ¬Â• - Hampton Sides, bestselling author of Hellhound on His Trail

Preston Lauterbach's first book, The Chitlin' Circuit: And the Road to Rock 'n' Roll was named a best book of the year by the Wall Street Journal, Boston Globe, and NPR. A Curb Visiting Scholar in the Arts at Rhodes College, Lauterbach lives near Charlottesville in Nelson County, Virginia.

First, as a history bluff, Beale Street Dynasty was a great read! I gained more knowledge about various popular Memphis figures, many that have streets and/or parks named after them. I regrettably read about many instances that hate reared its ugly head in the form of racism and discrimination in our city. Second, as a Christian, it was disconcerting to find out the foundation of one of the most well-known entertainment streets in the world was built upon exploiting the sins of lust and greed (it's probably not an exception to the rule either). Third, as an American of African descent, I'm disappointed that the information I gleaned about Beale Street's history isn't taught in Shelby County Schools (formerly Memphis City Schools). My community has much to be proud of in terms of Beale Street.

As a child growing up in Memphis in the 50's and 60's, I was vaguely aware that African-American people were badly treated in the South, but I had no idea of the degree of the mistreatment and absolutely no idea that it was going on all around me in Memphis. This book was most informative and intriguing. I am appalled at their treatment and equally appalled that NO ONE talked about it. We had Tennessee History classes and civics classes, but nothing was said about what was happening in our own town. We learned about Boss Crump and W.C. Handy, but it was all very clean and innocent. Of course, this was before desegregation and I was a student in an all-white school taught by all-white teachers. I must assume that those teachers were complicit in their failure to mention any of those injustices. Would they have lost their positions if they had taught us what was really going on? Would a cross have been burned in their front yard if they spoke out? Perhaps they were afraid even of being shunned by their neighbors. What you learn from this book should

make you very angry. I know I am.

Here is a book that shows how Reconstruction worked (or failed) in one city following the Civil War and through the 1940s. We find a black business empire built around vice (liquor, gambling and prostitution) by Robert Church and his son Robert, Jr. There is a political machine run by "Boss" Edward Crump, a machine more dominant than Tammany Hall or others of the period. Lynchings were common, and racial animosity led to a series of white race riots in which black citizens were raped and killed, and their homes and businesses were burned. Following one such orgy of violence many blacks, to be known as the Exodusters, left Memphis for Oklahoma. Blacks found themselves caught between Republican officials who paid lip service to equal rights, and Democrats who cared even less. Through all of this Church, his son and other black leader sought to turn their wealth and influence into improved opportunities for black Memphians. Along the way we read of people such as the pioneering journalist and civil rights activist Ida B Wells, the songwriter and musician W.C. Handy, W.E.B. Dubois and other national figures in the movement for racial equality. We also see how, in the end, the political machine of Boss Crump, and the lack of political will in Washington D.C., triumphed.While the outcome of this story may not be surprising, the richly researched details provided by Lauterbach provide a vivid picture of what life in a southern city was like during reconstruction. Aspects of everyday life--work, leisure, and the terror of white violence--come alive. The details of machine politics, official corruption, and political reprisal are also described. This is a work of history that succeeds both in narrative vision and in gritty detail.

Mr. Norton has written something rare which is a substantive book about historical events in Memphis. The vast majority of books about Memphis are either picture books or boilerplate repetitions of very tired stories of questionable worth and provenance. I know because I wrote one of them. This book however covers an important subject and covers it well. It’s NOT a book about music btw.Aside from painting a picture of crime and vice on Beale, Mr. Norton gives an interesting and cogent account of the public lives of Robert Church and his son, Robert Jr. The book reads like a novel, but it’s not fiction. It’s a thoroughly footnoted and a tribute to the author’s ability to synthesize scattered bits of information and weave it into a fun read. I recommend this book with my whole heart.

Lauterbach immersed himself in Memphis and did an incredible amount of research, and takes the reader back in time ti relive the events and stories of this diverse and unusual city. The story of how

the first black millionaire in America, Bob Church, made his fortune, and his struggle to help the community and make it grow is an almost unbelievable. The corruption in the Memphis government, from the beginning to the end, is exposed and explained in detail and the rampant racism that was prevalent in the south is enough to make the reader angry and sad on a very deep level. I knew a lot about the history of the blues and Memphis before reading this book, but I learned so much from it that I actually read several parts twice, and never wanted it to end. I'd read his previous book about the chitlin circuit before, so knowing his writing I was very excited to read this one. For any music history fan, this is a must read. Memphis is a very unique city and it's history is a compelling story. Congrats to the author!

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