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Harry S. Ashmore

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Harry S. Ashmore : CIVIL RIGHTS AND WRONGS: A Memoir of Race and Politics, 1944-1994 before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised CIVIL RIGHTS AND WRONGS: A Memoir of Race and Politics, 1944-1994:

A vivid personal account of the post-World War II civil rights movement assesses the causes, events, and ramifications of the movement in terms of the political developments that both fostered and hampered it. 12,500 first printing. History Alt. Tour.

From Publishers WeeklyAshmore (Hearts and Minds: The Anatomy of Racism from Roosevelt to Reagan) has been commenting on race for years, notably as executive editor of the Arkansas Gazette during the Little Rock desegregation crisis. He and the paper led the opposition to segregationist governor Orval Faubus and won Pulitzer Prizes for their coverage. At times his memoir/history bogs down, often neither close enough to the action nor offering new insight into race relations. Some passages remain interesting: how this white son of South Carolina grew skeptical of monolithic views of his region, especially W. J. Cash's *The Mind of the South* (1941); how the NAACP's Walter White bested him in a 1948 segregation debate; how he helped presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson forge policy on

race. Ashmore has encountered many important historical figures, from presidents to Malcolm X, and offers interesting context for the notorious Moynihan Report on the "pathological condition" of the black family. But his survey of racial issues in the past decade is armchair commentary--he unaptly describes Spike Lee's movies as "sensational, antiwhite." Ashmore's heart may be in the right place, as he criticizes the conventional wisdom that racial prejudice no longer disfavors blacks, but he has tried to stretch a modest memoir into a major narrative. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal

Ashmore, best known for his courageous newspaper coverage of the 1950s civil rights confrontations in Arkansas and for his historical analysis *Hearts and Minds: The Anatomy of Racism from Roosevelt to Reagan* (McGraw-Hill, 1982), has written an ambitious, involving, and often very personalized account of how the federal government has gradually come to accept its responsibilities in protecting the constitutional rights of black Americans. Ashmore's direct involvement in many of the events he discusses and his close associations with presidents, legislators, and civil rights leaders give his extended, detailed narrative an authority that most historical accounts lack. Although the book focuses on civil rights, its backdrop often reads like Theodore White's "The Making of the President" series; it is filled with fascinating political details of presidential campaigns during the last 50 years. Ashmore's clear, mannered prose criticizes friend and foe alike, but readers will not have any trouble deciding who are the good guys (moderate and liberal Democrats) and who are the bad (conservative and right-wing Republicans). Still, for all the civil rights progress that is documented here, Ashmore believes that "a majority of whites have not yet put aside the traditional belief in their race's inherent superiority," which fosters black racism; he sees little hope that more progress can be made until the beliefs of white Americans are changed. Recommended for all Civil Rights collections. Jack Forman, Mesa Coll. Lib., San Diego

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A philosophical and factual history of race relations in this country. Ashmore (Unseasonable Truths, 1989), a distinguished writer, editor, and teacher, is both erudite and immediate--a straight thinker of strong feeling who has been a long-time participant in, as well as observer of, the racial struggle. Ashmore's account, dense with information, begins even before his direct involvement (he was executive editor of the *Arkansas Gazette* during its Pulitzer Prize-winning coverage of the integration of Little Rock's Central High). He gives the history of segregation, extending into circumstances and qualities of personality and character not obviously connected to his subject, but essential to the full understanding of it. Nixon's weaknesses, Arkansas governor Orval Faubus's virtues, Vietnam's pressure, Roosevelt's and Eisenhower's shortcomings, Truman's greatness, and Martin Luther King's nobility, as well as the distortions that come from media attention are all part of the story. Over the years, the author has met almost everyone, and seen everything, pertaining to civil rights, and he shares his long and full view here. Minutiae (Know what a Yellow Dog Democrat is? Remember for which politician the term "egghead" was coined?) blend with the impact of individuals, the findings of think tanks and commissions, and the critical strains of political leanings from Dixiecrats to gradualists to black separatists. Ashmore ends by quoting a lovingly rendered Thurgood Marshall ("You know...sometimes I get awfully tired of trying to save the white man's soul") and by saying himself that "the task of redemption remains unfinished..." though his hope is evident. A highly detailed, encompassing account that is both clear and complex, honoring the intricacies and complexity of America's deepest problem. -- Copyright ©1994, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.