

# Tupelo Man (Willie Morris Books in Memoir and Biography)

Robert Blade



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In 1924, George McLean, an Ole Miss sophomore and the spoiled son of a judge, attended a YMCA student mission conference whose free-thinking organizers aimed to change the world. They changed George McLean's.

But not instantly. As vividly recounted in the first biography of this significant figure in Southern history, Tupelo Man: The Life and Times of a Most Peculiar Newspaper Publisher, McLean drifted through schools and jobs, always questioning authority, always searching for a way to put his restless vision into practical use. In the Depression's depths, he was fired from a teaching job at what is now Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee, over his socialist ideas and labor organizing work.

By 1934 he decided he had enough of working for others and that he would go into business for himself. In dirt-poor Northeast Mississippi, the Tupelo Journal was for sale, and McLean used his wife's money to buy what he called "a bankrupt newspaper from a bankrupt bank." As he struggled to keep the paper going, his Christian socialism evolved into a Christian capitalism that transformed the region. He didn't want a bigger slice of the pie for himself, he said; he wanted a bigger pie for all.

But McLean (1904-1983) was far from a saint. He prayed about his temper, with little result. He was distant and aloof toward his two children--adopted through a notorious Memphis baby selling operation. His wife, whom he deeply loved in his prickly way, left him once and threatened to leave again. "I don't know why I was born with this chip on my shoulder," he told her. Tupelo Man looks at this far-from-ordinary publisher in an intimate way that offers a fascinating story and insight into our own lives and times.



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