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The Emporia Gazette

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William Lindsay White, 1900-1973: In the Shadow of His Father. By E. Jay Jernigan. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. xiv + 346 pp. \$29.95.

Every now and again someone will call up *The Emporia Gazette* and utter the following line: "I know William Allen White was quite the newsman. And if you want a great news story you'll check into this." White, a nationally prominent writer who won two Pulitzer Prizes during his tenure as *The Gazette's* editor, has been dead for fifty-five years, but he still casts a shadow in his hometown. Perhaps no person felt that shadow more keenly than White's own son, William Lindsay White.

E. Jay Jernigan documents the struggle of William Lindsay—Jernigan calls him "Bill" to differentiate him from his father—to escape the shadow. He found some success in that struggle on the national stage, but was never able to escape comparisons at home. He made his first attempt in September 1920 by leaving the University of Kansas for Harvard, where he departed from his father's Republican politics and showed his own flair for the written word, first as a member of the *Harvard Lampoon's* editorial board, then as the co-author of two productions for the Hasty Pudding Club. After graduation in 1924, Bill returned to Emporia to work for his father at *The Gazette* and spent the next decade at the paper, writing many editorials wrongly ascribed to William Allen. After 1930 he initialed his editorials, particularly when he knew his father did not share his views.

Bill married Katherine Klinkenberg, a former Kansan who worked for *Time*, in 1931. After the wedding, he felt his father's influence in a more than accidental way—Will White changed his son's honeymoon plans from two weeks in Bermuda to a trip to New Orleans and Mississippi. A mix of such parental interference, Katherine's frustration with "stodgy" Emporia, and a need to find his own identity led Bill to leave Emporia for New York City in 1934. He remained on *The Gazette*

payroll, but spent the next few years working at East Coast magazines and newspapers—usually finding himself fired after intervals of a few months. In a later interview, Bill said many of those publications assumed they were getting a copy of his father, a stalwart Republican. "So after a little while these publishers would hear that I was saying things that weren't solid Republican and they'd feel betrayed," he said. "They'd feel that I had gotten them to hire me under false pretenses. So I'd have to move on."

Bill was also haunted by manic depression during this time. Symptoms often included gastrointestinal pains forcing him to take breaks from work throughout his life. He sought psychiatric help, tabooed for a Midwesterner then.

Although he became a mildly successful author with the 1938 publication of *What People Said*, a *roman à clef* about a Kansas bond scandal, it was the outbreak of World War II that freed Bill from his father's shadow on the national stage. He left the United States for Europe soon after the war started, sending back a syndicated column from various fronts. He also began offering commentary from Germany for the CBS radio network and won an award for best European broadcast of the year. The elder White dashed his son's hopes for a larger radio career, however, by persuading Bill's newspaper syndicate to order him away from the front to the Balkans, where war was expected to break out. It didn't, but the move forced Bill to break with CBS. Years later, after her husband's death, Katherine wrote: "His parents who had been proud of his broadcasts took the position that they had meant what they did for his own good because he was a newspaper man, not a radio man." Bill continued to make a name for himself throughout the war, most famously with his book *They Were Expendable*, also made into a movie.

With William Allen White's death on January 29, 1944, Bill found himself more tied up in his paternal legacy than ever, saddled with the responsibilities of finishing the elder White's autobiography and ensuring *The Gazette* could continue on without his father's

guidance. He spent most of the next few years as a roving editor for *Reader's Digest* and an absent, but active, editor of *The Gazette*. His magazine job made him independent, both financially and mentally, from the demands of the newspaper, though his absence from Emporia made his occasional attempts to involve himself in the town's politics a source of tension in the community. "While you think you are an Emporian," wrote one friend during a controversy, "there are not six Emporians who so regard you, and your best friends don't want your moral advice [on Emporia] as an export commodity from New York."

During the '50s and '60s Bill became increasingly present in Emporia as fewer of his *Reader's Digest* stories made it to print. He redesigned *The Gazette* to national acclaim and brought cable television to Emporia. His accomplishments as a best-selling author and award-winning editor took second place to his lineage in his obituaries, however, when he died in 1973. Even in death, comparisons to his father were inevitable.

E. Jay Jernigan's biography of Bill White results from deep research through personal family correspondence and unindexed *Gazette* files, as well as the libraries of several Kansas universities. Jernigan uses this research to paint a multifaceted portrait of Bill White, whose Eastern sensibilities made his fellow Emporians regard him as an elitist, yet whose capabilities, Jernigan says, often exceeded those of his more famous father. The end result is a fascinating biography of a man who never entirely escaped his father's shadow—but made every effort to cast one of his own.

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