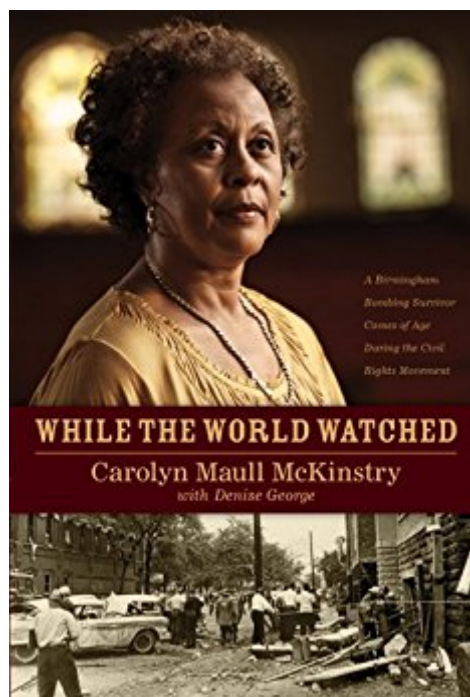




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# While The World Watched: A Birmingham Bombing Survivor Comes Of Age During The Civil Rights Movement



## Synopsis

On September 15, 1963, a Klan-planted bomb went off in the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Fourteen-year-old Carolyn Maull was just a few feet away when the bomb exploded, killing four of her friends in the girls' restroom she had just exited. It was one of the seminal moments in the Civil Rights movement, a sad day in American history . . . and the turning point in a young girl's life. *While the World Watched* is a poignant and gripping eyewitness account of life in the Jim Crow South: from the bombings, riots, and assassinations to the historic marches and triumphs that characterized the Civil Rights movement. A uniquely moving exploration of how racial relations have evolved over the past 5 decades, *While the World Watched* is an incredible testament to how far we've come and how far we have yet to go.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I wish I could place a copy of it into the hands of everyone I know. While Carolyn Maull was growing up in "black" Birmingham, I was spending every long summer of my school years visiting my

grandparents in "white" Birmingham. While her father was waiting on tables at the Birmingham Country Club, I was receiving gracious engraved invitations from my grandparents' friends to enjoy swimming there during my summer visits. I wonder how many times I was entertained at Sunday after-church dinner in that sunlit, high-ceilinged dining room. I wonder how many times I was driven past the imposing structure of the 16th Street Baptist Church. It's as familiar to me as any other Birmingham landmark. But where I might have seen it in passing, Carolyn Maull was there every Sunday morning of her life. It was her church, her Sunday School, her four young friends whose lives were destroyed by hatred. For as ignorant as I was (and I was pretty ignorant), I carried one searing lesson away from that terrible September day when four young girls had their lives snatched away. I was the same age as they were--twelve years old in 1963. I've been able to move freely through my life's story--through school and college, marriage, family, and career, and into the sorrows of widowhood and the joys of being a grandmother. I've been able to do all of that, but their lives were stopped in an instant. They were robbed of their futures by a monstrous hatred, shored up by an unbelievable indifference. Read this book and Carolyn Maull will tell you what it was like to grow up as an African-American child in the most segregated, most racially violent city in America. You'll learn about how anxious parents tried to shelter their children, hedging them about with rules and restrictions designed to protect them from the worst of the violence. You'll understand just a little better about the baffling restrictions on everything from water fountains to lunch counters to highway restrooms. You'll feel some of the confusion and hurt that she felt when reaction to this bombing, and all the others, was muted and stifled--swept under the rug so that some semblance of normal life could go on. You'll feel at least some of the fear and pain of a little girl who, upon hearing of the murder of Medgar Evers in Mississippi could only think, "Is that going to happen to my Daddy, too? Is somebody going to shoot him in front of our house?" The author has paid a terrible personal price for the events of that long-ago Sunday morning. She has shared her struggle with us in all frankness, and we can rejoice with her that she has forgiven, she has prevailed, and she has grown stronger. I believe this book is vital to the chronicles of those terrible times, and that it contains lessons we can apply now and in the future. I'd like to see it on best-seller lists all over the country. Please avail yourself of this story and give it a thoughtful, careful reading.

While the World Watched is a first person account of the 1963 16th Street Church Bombing where four young teenage girls died, and her life after that bombing. This is a book well worth reading to get a sense of the civil rights movement for someone that was a young teen. She was probably the last person to see the four girls before they died (she left the bathroom just before the bomb went

off). The book does a good job not lionizing the civil rights movement, while at the same time showing how normal people were both scared and pissed off by the system. It also spends time talking about pain, depression, eventual descent into alcoholism and what would probably be described as PTSD today. That is a side that most other books don't seem to mention and I think is important to telling the whole story of the civil rights movement. Other reviews complain about the long extended quotes of speeches, sermons, songs and other documents of the era. I think that these other documents (especially in the audiobook) give greater context. I expected that much of the book would be about the particular day, but really the book is mostly about her life after the day. Today she is the head of the foundation that oversees the 16th Street church and she has gone to seminary and works for reconciliation. That story is as important as remembering the bombing.

I really wanted to love this book. Carolyn has a powerful and inspiring story to tell. I just wish it wasn't buried below pages and pages of quotes from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr and President Kennedy. Around halfway through the book I just started to feel like I couldn't keep going. I came here to Goodreads to see if other people had the same experience with the book or if I just wasn't trying hard enough. But it appears from other reviews that my complaints are pretty similar to the complaints of others. The story was very disjointed. At times I had a hard time keeping track of whether we were in the present, a flashback to a memory or even a jump ahead to some other piece of history that they wanted to reference. There were far too many quotes from other people that were stuck in to the story in weird places and made it hard for the story to flow. Carolyn lived through more than anyone should. She is incredibly brave and I'm grateful to her for sharing her story. I just wish the editor or whoever she worked with to put the story together, had done a better job of conveying her incredibly powerful message.

This book is an intensely personal recollection of the events that the author experienced in her childhood in Birmingham and how those events helped shape her as a person as well as direct her work later in life. Being white and having been born in 1976, I had only heard of some of the things that were said to have happened. I had seen some appalling photos too, yet I had always imagined that it was a brief struggle to "get the bad guys" and set things straight during the Civil Rights Movement. It seemed so foreign and distant that it may as well have been ancient history. Reading this book has helped me enter into the Southern black experience and realize that equal rights were not quickly or easily brought off paper and into reality. It has also helped me better understand the history and trauma behind the way many in black communities still think and what they, I believe

justly, fear. If you'd like to let the history of black people in America touch your heart and lead you towards understanding and reconciliation not just between white and black people but all people, read *While the World Watched* by Carolyn Maull McKinstry.

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