



Rot, Riot, and Rebellion: Mr. Jefferson's Struggle to Save the University That Changed America

Rex Bowman, Carlos Santos

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Thomas Jefferson had a radical dream for higher education. Designed to become the first modern public university, the University of Virginia was envisioned as a liberal campus with no religious affiliation, with elective courses and student self-government. Nearly two centuries after the university's creation, its success now seems preordained?its founder, after all, was a great American genius. Yet what many don't know is that Jefferson's university almost failed.

In *Rot, Riot, and Rebellion*, award-winning journalists Rex Bowman and Carlos Santos offer a dramatic re-creation of the university's early struggles. Political enemies, powerful religious leaders, and fundamentalist Christians fought Jefferson and worked to thwart his dream. Rich students, many from southern plantations, held a sense of honor and entitlement that compelled them to resist even minor rules and regulations. They fought professors, townsfolk, and each other with guns, knives, and fists. In response, professors armed themselves?often with good reason: one was horsewhipped, others were attacked in their classrooms, and one was twice the target of a bomb. The university was often broke, and Jefferson's enemies, crouched and ready to pounce, looked constantly for reasons to close its doors.

Yet from its tumultuous, early days, Jefferson's university?a cauldron of unrest and educational daring?blossomed into the first real American university. Here, Bowman and Santos bring us into the life of the University of Virginia at its founding to reveal how this once shaky institution grew into a novel, American-style university on which myriad other U.S. universities were modeled.

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