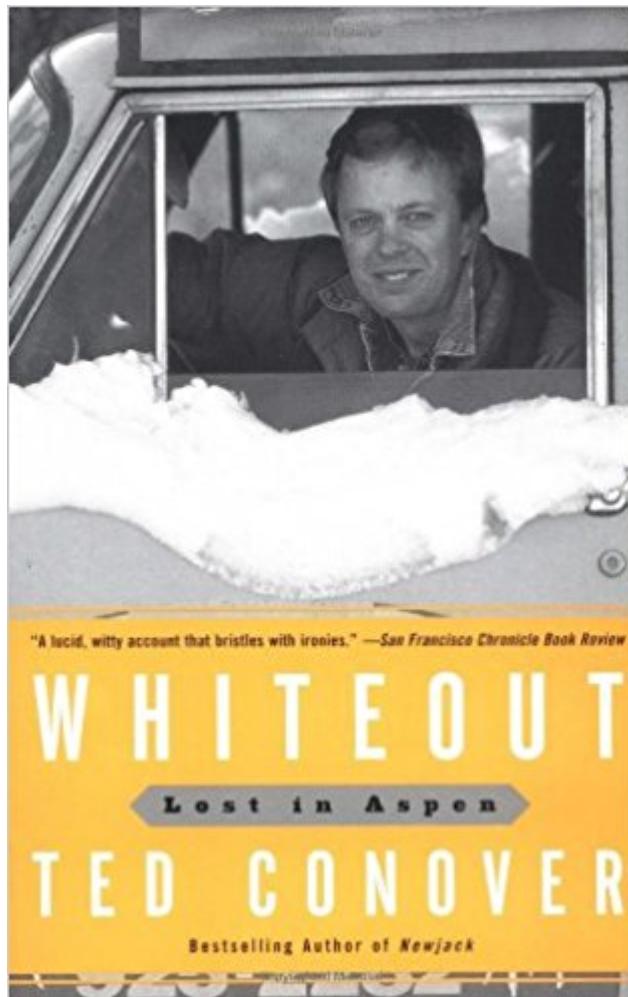


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# Whiteout: Lost In Aspen



## **Synopsis**

Irreverent, poignant, and revealing, this meditation on the sweet temptation of wealth and the vainglorious quest for paradise as they exist in Aspen, Colorado, features a "cast of characters (that) includes such barn-size satirical targets as exclusive health clubs, over-the-hill drug dealers and movie stars and rock stars of wattages bright and dim" (The New Republic).

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## **Customer Reviews**

Conover's entertaining, unpretentious account of his two years in Aspen, Colo., lets the resort town's events and people speak for themselves. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Silver boomtown in the 1880s, bust a decade later due to the adoption of the gold standard, Aspen, Colorado, now is home to celebrities, Saab police cruisers, and a stagecoach taxi service whose equine employees are fitted with diapers. Working here for two years as cabbie, caterer, and newspaper reporter, Conover serves up an enticing melange appropriate both for stargazers hooked on the lifestyles of the rich and famous and pop sociologists. Rubbing shoulders with people as diverse as John Denver, Hunter S. Thompson, New Age cultists, and a 1980s miner, he offers intriguing commentary on modern Aspen's change from a planned utopia, combining skiing with high culture, to a sybaritic playground. A good addition to larger public library and regional collections.- Jim Burns, Broward Cty. Lib. System, Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This is not Conover's best work...."Newjack" about his stint as a prison guard is his best by far. But, this is a solid book. It is dated, and reading about the Aspen of the 1980s is pretty funny. Don Johnson? John Denver? Who? But, replace the names with up-to-date celebrities and his analysis of the culture of the rich is pretty much dead on, maybe moreso today than it was then. He describes the construction of a 70,000 square foot mansion, or crazy parties - and there is little different from the excesses Dennis Kozlowski of Tyco, Bernie Madoff, etc. One aspect of the book that seems less current is the "New Age" healers, etc., that populated Aspen at the time he was there. That part didn't seem to hold up very well in the present day. Also, it's the one section where Genoways is clearly judgemental - but without turning the mirror on himself. And, drugs are part of the culture, but he gives them a little more attention than they deserve (but cocaine was everywhere in the late '80s, so at the time it probably seemed very current). He does a better job of exposing his own flaws in the rest of the book, and how he gets sucked into this "lifestyle" (a relevant word in the text). He's not trying to act better than anyone, and so the reader can accept him as a reliable narrator. He has great skill with relating conversations and anecdotes, and his attention to detail is marvelous. In 2011, a reader obviously won't pick this up to learn anything current about 1993 Aspen, Colorado. But, if you read it as an "ethnography" of an insular, high-end 'culture,' I think there are still things to learn. If you have a bunch of large houses in your town, but never see the residents, this will help explain why - it's because they don't view themselves as citizens of the same place you are, and they don't want their paths to cross with yours. This book will give you a look into that world, even if it has nothing to do with where you live. Read Conover's "Newjack" or "Rolling Nowhere" first, but this is good too (I did not really care for his new "Roads of Men" book, but it has its moments as well).

Interesting commentary on a slice of society we seem to only know from the entertainment shows or gossip sections of newspapers. It should be noted that this book is dated. In over 10 years, I am sure Aspen has changed some and the main players have changed or just been replaced. The author writes well, has insightful commentary. Some reviews complain that the book jumps around and is a bunch of "mini" stories. I thought the book flowed well. The author took different jobs and moved through different circles of Aspen society, so the book had to move with him. If you ever did the "circut" of working resort jobs: beach towns in the summer and ski resorts in the winter, this book may resonate more with you than someone who has never lived in a resort town. It certainly is a society of us and them of the many sub-groups/cultures that inhabit those towns and the author captures that very well. Overall, an easy and enjoyable read, with some thought provoking passages

and commentary.

Conover is expert at gate-crashing and we are so lucky that he's a great writer, too. Here, he's written about his stint as a cab driver in Aspen, but the engrossing part is his own ability to crash celebrity-only functions. It's an interesting study in the interaction of haves and have-nots, for the rich and pampered of this famed snow town NEED the hardworking waiters and drivers and maids and ski instructors and yet are often bizarrely detached from the realities of working a steady job. Conover finds ways of crossing into the world of the haves, without ever forgetting who he is. Conover doesn't show real envy for the rich and famous, but he enjoyed their parties. He's a downhill skier and cyclist, so he certainly enjoyed the outdoorsy life there and treats a venture into a star studded party as just another nature hike worth detailing. Conover shows a kind of pity, in fact, in a brilliant little section about hanging out in a bar booth with Mick Fleetwood and friends. Who you'll meet in the vignettes and tales of Conover's observations of Aspen life: the plethora of fine-looking young ladies, the unreal mansions with their no-holds-barred parties, the spoiled nouveau riche corporate wives, movie stars and rock stars, the crotchety old guard of the small town, drunks and granola eaters, skiers and commuters from the working class lowland. It's not a gossip-fest, nor is it a boring social critique. But it's a real slice of life. And you get a little local history and politics, too. It's a fine book for anyone who is fascinated by how the other half lives. The author's own mobility, personable nature, and mutability are his true assets. He seemed to walk away from Aspen satisfied and with a desire to explore other realms. Which he does, again and again, in his brilliant books. Good gift for a ski bum, for a social climber, for anyone who admires the art of schmoozing and faking it. Could be a bit too depressing for someone who lost in an attempt to get rich and join the upper crust.

I became a fan of this author after reading *Newjack*, his account of his year as a corrections officer at Sing Sing. Next I read *Coyote*, where the author joined up with Mexican illegal immigrants and lived their life in order to write his book. Now *White-Out*...hmmm. I found it pretty boring. Living in Aspen, the author is first a taxi driver, and then he moves on to other jobs, but all we read is about how this celebrity was seen here, another one attended this party with a new girlfriend, another few famous people belong to the same health club he joined. Oh wow. Not exactly riveting stuff. Skip this book but don't give up on the author - his other books I've read get five stars. (By the way, the previous reviewer, Sartin, was writing about the book *Coyote*, so how her review ended up on this page is a mystery!)

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