

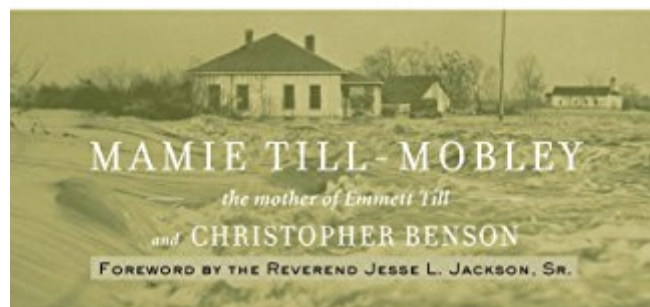
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Death Of Innocence: The Story Of The Hate Crime That Changed America



DEATH *of* INNOCENCE

*The Story of the Hate Crime
That Changed America*



Synopsis

There are many heroes of the civil rights movement—men and women we can look to for inspiration. Each has a unique story, a path that led to a role as leader or activist. *Death of Innocence* is the heartbreaking and ultimately inspiring story of one such hero: Mamie Till-Mobley, the mother of Emmett Till—an innocent fourteen-year-old African-American boy who was in the wrong place at the wrong time, and who paid for it with his life. His outraged mother's actions galvanized the civil rights movement, leaving an indelible mark on American racial consciousness. Mamie Carthan was an ordinary African-American woman growing up in 1930s Chicago, living under the strong, steady influence of her mother's care. She fell in love with and married Louis Till, and while the marriage didn't last, they did have a beautiful baby boy, Emmett. In August 1955, Emmett was visiting family in Mississippi when he was kidnapped from his bed in the middle of the night by two white men and brutally murdered. His crime: allegedly whistling at a white woman in a convenience store. His mother began her career of activism when she insisted on an open-casket viewing of her son's gruesomely disfigured body. More than a hundred thousand people attended the service. The trial of J. W. Milam and Roy Bryant, accused of kidnapping and murdering Emmett (the two were eventually acquitted of the crime), was considered the first full-scale media event of the civil rights movement. What followed altered the course of this country's history, and it was all set in motion by the sheer will, determination, and courage of Mamie Till-Mobley—a woman who would pull herself back from the brink of suicide to become a teacher and inspire hundreds of black children throughout the country. Mamie Till-Mobley, who died in 2003 just as she completed this memoir, has honored us with her full testimony: "I focused on my son while I considered this book. . . . The result is in your hands. . . . I am experienced, but not cynical. . . . I am hopeful that we all can be better than we are. I've been brokenhearted, but I still maintain an oversized capacity for love." • *Death of Innocence* is an essential document in the annals of American civil rights history, and a painful yet beautiful account of a mother's ability to transform tragedy into boundless courage and hope.

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Customer Reviews

For everyone who has heard of Emmett Till and sworn "never again" and for those who don't believe the horrors of life for too many Blacks in the South, this book is essential. This is a mother's story of the brutal murder of her young son and the travesty of justice that followed in a rural Mississippi town in the mid-1950's. She refused to let her son's murder be hidden, and it became an early rallying point for the Civil Rights Movement. Mamie Till-Mobley moves the rock under which the roaches of racism hide and exposes them to the bright light of truth. Her words are both inspirational and disturbing. We don't want to believe that this happened fifty years ago here in the "Land of the Free", but it did. We can't even tell ourselves that it could never happen now, because she tells us of a recent and terrifyingly similar murder of a young Black male in the South. Not far from where I live, four young men have just been charged with burning a cross in the yard of a Black family who had moved into a white neighborhood. Mamie Till-Mobley had her son's casket kept open so the world could see what was done to her son. Now, her book opens the "casket" of the buried past to show us once more. Mamie Till-Mobley was a courageous woman whose story is very moving. She talks about her youth, her family, her relationship with Emmett, the lives of Blacks in the south and in Chicago. Her story would be an important one solely because she lost a child to violence. However, her story is much, much more. She stands with other Black women of the 20th century: Marian Anderson, Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King, the mothers of the girls killed in the church bombings.

Most Americans, one assumes, know who Emmitt Till was: a 14 year-old African-American boy who was murdered and brutally mutilated for allegedly whistling at a white girl in Money, Mississippi in the summer of 1955. Few know anything more about the boy or the travesty of justice that followed the trial of those accused of the murder. *Death of Innocence* is a hard read - a reminder of our not-too-distant past, and of who we Americans are. The book is Emmitt's story - and that of his mother - written in what I can only assume is her voice: it is plain, simple, and almost bursts with a mother's pride, love and joy for her son. This, of course, makes the reading all the more powerful and tragic reading her reaction and emotions upon learning of the death of her son. The book is also the story of the Civil Rights Movement - of what the Jim Crow south was like, of its petty indignities, the daily injustices African-Americans had to face, and of the brutal realities those who did not "play by the rules" faced. For me, these were equally powerful - too many think only of lunchcounter sit-ins, Rosa Parks and the bus boycott, or Brown v. Board (the Supreme Court decision ironically handed down the same year of Emmitt's death.) This is a reminder that it was much more about who gets to eat or sit where. The first quarter of the book is a bit dull as Mamie Till shares the minutiae and details of Emmitt's growing up; this later serves to heighten the emotional impact of her loss. The retelling Mamie gave her son before he went to Mississippi to visit family is chilling: always respond with "Ma'am" or "Sir" when speaking to a white person. Don't look white folks in the eye. When a white approaches, step off the sidewalk into the street, look down, and don't look back when they pass.

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