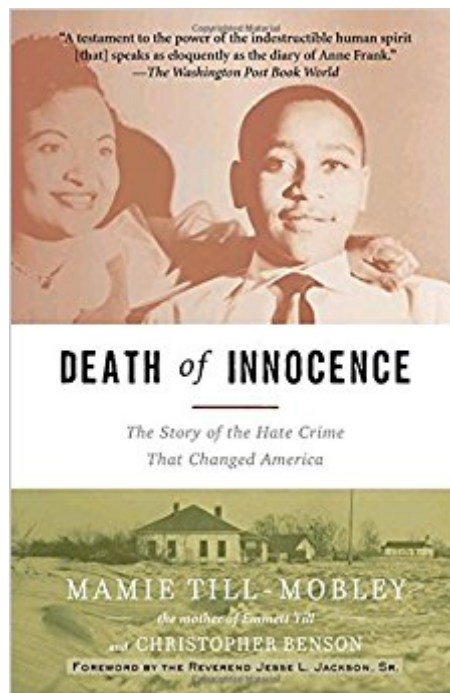




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# Death Of Innocence: The Story Of The Hate Crime That Changed America



## Synopsis

The mother of Emmett Till recounts the story of her life, her son's tragic death, and the dawn of the civil rights movement—with a foreword by the Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, Sr. In August 1955, a fourteen-year-old African American, Emmett Till, 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. The killers were eventually acquitted. 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, whose actions galvanized the civil rights movement, leaving an indelible mark on our racial consciousness. *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. Praise for *Death of Innocence*—“A testament to the power of the indestructible human spirit [that] speaks as eloquently as the diary of Anne Frank.”—*The Washington Post Book World* “With this important book, [Mamie Till-Mobley] has helped ensure that the story of her son (and her own story) will not soon be forgotten. . . . A riveting account of a tragedy that upended her life and ultimately the Jim Crow system.”—*Chicago Tribune* “The book will . . . inform or remind people of what a courageous figure for justice [Mamie Till-Mobley] was and how important she and her son were to setting the stage for the modern-day civil rights movement.”—*The Detroit News* “Poignant . . . In his mother's descriptions, Emmett becomes more than an icon; he becomes a living, breathing youngster—any mother's child.”—*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* “Powerful . . . [Mamie Till-Mobley's] courage transformed her loss into a moral compass for a nation.”—*Black Issues Book Review* Robert F. Kennedy Book Award Special Recognition *BlackBoard Nonfiction Book of the Year*

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## Customer Reviews

Nearly 50 years after the murder of Emmett Till, his mother, Till-Mobley, has added her perspective on the tragedy. In what came to be seen as a seminal event in the fledgling civil rights movement, two white men abducted 14-year-old Emmett from the home of a relative in rural Mississippi in August 1955. That night they tortured the boy before dumping his lifeless body into the Tallahatchie River. His crime: he inadvertently whistled in the vicinity of a white woman who happened to be the wife of one of his killers. Although the events surrounding the murder have been recounted many times, Till-Mobley fills readers in on her son's childhood in Argo, Ill., and later Chicago. As a single mother, she tried to instill Emmett with self-confidence and a sense of life's possibilities. In her view, these two qualities helped cause his death when he journeyed to Mississippi, where the "code" demanded that blacks efface themselves in the presence of whites. Her memoir, written with Chicago journalist Benson, is told chronologically, with a large portion devoted to the events leading up to the murder and its aftermath. As she puts it, "I wanted to rip the sheets off the state of Mississippi." Till-Mobley, who died last January, spent the final 35 years of her life as a teacher and spokesperson for civil rights. While her accomplishments are admirable, her memoir has a perfunctory quality, except when describing the events surrounding Emmett's murder, and the narrative voice is uneven. Till-Mobley was a social activist but not necessarily a social critic. As a result, the example of her life is far more valuable than the insights that she draws from it. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The mere mention of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old Chicago boy murdered in Mississippi in 1955, brings horrific memories for Americans. Till, on vacation in the south, was reportedly killed for whistling at a white woman. His murder and mutilation--he was wrapped in barbed wire and thrown into a river--shook the conscience of America and became a central stimulus for the modern civil rights movement. The graphic brutality of the murder and the courage of Till's mother were

imprinted on American consciousness as she chose an open casket that displayed the horror of the crime to the world. In this as-told-to memoir, Till-Mobley recalls her son's early childhood through his 14 years of life. The second half of the book focuses on Till-Mobley herself, a woman determined to find meaning in the life and murder of her young son. Relying on the love and support of family, Till-Mobley earned college degrees late in life, works with the church, and makes a career of giving hope to other youth, surely meeting her objective that her son not have died in vain. Vernon Ford

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We live in a world where there are two sides to every story! No matter how you slice it, everyone has different views and their own take on how something impacted them. What do you really know about Emmett Louis Till? He was a 14-year old teen from Chicago who went down to Mississippi and whistled at a white woman. That's the story I've heard all of my life, but one thing never occurred to me -- just who was Emmett Till? Most people in the African-American community tell the story the same, as if Emmett was some stupid smart eleck kid who thought he could bring his northern attitude down to the dirty south. I've heard about the horrific savage beating and murdering of Emmett. I saw the pictures heard the whispers throughout, never really knowing! If you thought you knew the real Emmett Till story--guess again! Who other than the person that gave Emmett life could know this story? Who other than the person who had the strength to forge on and change civil rights history in the making, other than a mother--Emmett's mother. Think you know the real story behind why Emmett was murdered? I guarantee you, the reader truly has no idea, but I tell you what, after you read Mrs. Mamie Till-Mobley's story--a story so shocking and horrifyingly gripping, you'll be left in awe! All this time I had been asking the wrong questions. I wanted to know why Emmett Till would whistle at a white woman back in the mid 50s in Mississippi? What I should have been asking is did he actually whistle at a white woman? Did anyone witness him whistling, and if so, why didn't someone kill him after the whistle left between his lips? Did things happen the way the media portrayed his murder? Welp, once again, who better to tell you the story than the one person who lived the nightmare -- Mrs. Mobley. My God, I have never, ever read a story so haunting in all of my life. I've read some of the most gruesome true-crime stories that you can possibly imagine, but they all seem to pale in comparison to what happened to a cute, having-the-rest-of-his-life-ahead-of-him -- Emmett, to go be with relatives down south to learn about where his mother was born and raised and to become one with mother earth, only to go back to Chicago in a pine box. Jesus!! finally learned who Emmett Louis Till was. He was a person before

his murder happened. He wasn't just a teen who went down south and ended up dead. He was a human being with real feelings, real kid problems and just trying to grow up and become something--much like all of us have done to be the people we are. Unfortunately, fate wouldn't allow Emmett to ever have hopes or dreams. It wasn't in the cards for him. He will forever be an eternal 14 year old, but at least now I know the real story and I know Emmett. Thank you Mrs. Mobley for telling your story. Your son did not die in vain. I've received your message as you wanted readers to do. I got it! I get it! May you and Emmett rest in eternal peace! Outstanding read and great for Black History month or any month for that matter! You can't know strength unless you've walked a mile in Mrs. Mobley's shoes. If you think you're strong, you can't begin to know what courage is!

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. Its "yes" and "no" - never "yeah" or "naw." A shock, then, when two white men, armed, literally took Emmitt from his uncle's house at 2 am. His body was later recovered from the Tallahatchee river. The details of his burial - and Mamie's courage to give her son an open casket funeral - shocking to the rest of the world and an embarrassment to Mississippi - made for difficult reading. More outrageous was the way in which the two men who abducted Emmitt became victims

in the Southern press; more appalling was the Sherriff's contention that perhaps the body recovered wasn't even Emmitt's. (Never mind it was sent to an African-American undertaker, something no white in the Jim Crow south would have done.) Most outrageous and infuriating of all was the defense of the accused: of the five attorneys in the county, all wanted to help the defendants. Both were acquitted of any wrong-doing. In the early 21st century, we like to think we live in a "post-racial" nation. For a growing number of Americans, the Civil Rights movement is as much ancient history as the Civil War or the Crusades. However, Emmitt Till would be 61 today had he lived - maybe a retiree, perhaps a grandfather, certainly a similar age as loved ones we all know. These events were not that long ago. As uncomfortable, ugly, painful and humiliating as these injustices done to Americans by Americans were, we owe it to ourselves, to our children, and to Emmitt Till's memory to not forget them. This is a difficult read because of this. At the same time, it is a necessary read. Recommended.

This is such a good book. A life on the right track ended by pure ignorant people. It's sad that there was no punishment for the crime of killing a black boy in Mississippi. Very sad even now. A book about a boy who brought so much joy to those around him and the mother who only wanted to tell his story. Mamie did so much in his memory as well as etch so much more in American history. This book makes you stop and think that not too long ago this was what was happening. I recommend this book to anyone. It should also be a reading assignment in schools everywhere. It makes you think and makes you appreciate what all these people did to help shape America. The land of the free.

Very good book, very detailed, but it was very long. This book will make you happy and sad all at the same time.

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