



Emmett Till in Different States: Poems

Philip C. Kolin

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The poems in *Emmett Till in Different States* span more than 7 decades of events in Emmett Till's legacy from the 1940s to the present. In them Philip Kolin shows how Emmett Till's importance has expanded from being a Civil Rights martyr to becoming a choric, heroic commentator on the tragedies of Civil Rights injustices (e.g. Medgar Evers's murder, the Freedom Riders, the murders of Chicago's children, Trayvon Martin), and a voice of conscience for America to hear and heed. The title of this collection points to the multiple ways we can see Emmett Till through time and space (e.g. geographic, historical, psychological, and theological.) Kolin weaves other voices throughout the poems in this collection, most notably Mamie Till, Gospel great Mahalia Jackson who bought Till's gravestone, an old black woman (Aunt Aretha) who meets Till in the Delta, Till's fictionalized brothers (other black men who have been slain and their bodies left to rot), his fictionalized sister based upon the Shulamite woman in the Song of Songs, the Chicago River, and even Carolyn Bryant, the white woman whom Till was said to have offended. These voices—and Till's as well—emerge from a variety of traditions—Biblical, the blues, classical mythology, spirituals. According to Natasha Trethewey, the 19th Poet Laureate of the United States, "In the history of a nation still on the long journey toward full realization of its creed, there are stories that need to be told again and again. The murder of Emmett Till is one such story; it belongs to all of us and should be sung by many different voices. In *Emmett Till in Different States*, Philip Kolin adds his voice—a necessary retelling so that we might be transformed by the listening." (Philip C. Kolin *Emmett Till in Different States*)

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