



SCHOOL of
GRADUATE STUDIES
EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

East Tennessee State University
Digital Commons @ East Tennessee
State University

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Student Works

5-2018

An Intersectional Feminist Perspective of Emmett Till in Young Adult Literature

Claire Jones
East Tennessee State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd>



Part of the African American Studies Commons, American Literature Commons, American Popular Culture Commons, Cultural History Commons, United States History Commons, and the Women's Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

Jones, Claire, "An Intersectional Feminist Perspective of Emmett Till in Young Adult Literature" (2018). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 3413. <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd/3413>

This Thesis - unrestricted is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Works at Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. For more information, please contact digilib@etsu.edu.

An Intersectional Feminist Perspective of Emmett Till in Young Adult Literature

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of English

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in English

by

Claire Jones

May 2018

Dr. Scott Honeycutt, Chair

Dr. Michael Cody

Dr. Thomas Holmes

Keywords: Emmett Till, Feminist, Intersectional, Young Adult Literature

ABSTRACT

An Intersectional Feminist Perspective of Emmett Till in Young Adult Literature

by

Claire Jones

Emmett Till's murder inspired many novelists, poets, and artists. Recently, Till has inspired several feminist young adult novelists who are introducing his case in an intersectional way to a new generation of readers. The works that I have studied are *A Wreath for Emmett Till* (2003) by Marilyn Nelson, *The Hunger Games Trilogy* (2008-2010) by Suzanne Collins, and *Midnight without a Moon* (2017) by Linda Jackson. By examining how the authors employ a feminist perspective, readers can understand how they are striving for a more inclusive, intersectional feminist movement. This is significant because the publishing industry, specifically for Young Adult Literature, is not diverse. These works, while often overlooked by critics, may be the first exposure most young readers have to Emmett Till. Each of these novels could be used to teach readers not only about Till's case, but also about current events to help foster a multicultural consciousness.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	2
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	4
2. <i>A WREATH FOR EMMETT TILL</i> : USING MATERNAL EMPATHY TO INSPIRE ACTIVISM.....	13
3. <i>THE HUNGER GAMES</i> : RESURRECTING EMMETT TILL.....	22
4. <i>MIDNIGHT WITHOUT A MOON</i> : EMBRACING SELF-LOVE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE..	34
5. CONCLUSION.....	49
WORKS CITED.....	53
VITA.....	56

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1955, fourteen-year-old Emmett Till was sent to Money, Mississippi, to visit his aunt, uncle, and cousins. Being from Chicago, Till did not understand the dangers of the Mississippi Delta under Jim Crow law. No one could have predicted what awaited him or that Till would become a part of our cultural memory. On August 25, 1955, Emmett Till was kidnapped and brutally murdered. His murder is one of the most gruesome in American history, and it had serious social ramifications. Till soon became memorialized by several notable artists, songwriters, poets, and authors. While all these visual, musical, and literary expressed the need for equality in their works about Till, they discuss equality in different ways. Specifically, many women take an intersectional approach in their writing about Till. “Intersectionality” is a term first used by Civil Rights Advocate and Professor Kimberle Crenshaw. In her groundbreaking 1989 essay, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” she explains intersectionality:

Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender. These problems of exclusion cannot be solved simply by including Black women within an already established analytical structure. Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated. Thus, for feminist theory and antiracist

policy discourse to embrace the experiences and concerns of Black women, the entire framework that has been used as a basis for translating “women’s experience” or “the Black experience” into concrete policy demands must be rethought and recast.

To take an intersectional approach or to enact intersectional activism means to be more inclusive, instead of separating these two aspects of human identity. A common misconception is that all prejudice is equal, but sexism and racism affect people differently, creating a cumulative experience of prejudice. By incorporating intersectional theory into young adult literature, authors are introducing a new generation to the importance of inclusivity regarding the feminist movement. My chapters will examine how three young adult authors build on the foundation laid by early feminist works, like those of Audre Lorde and Gwendolyn Brooks, and how these authors convey an intersectional message in a way that inspires young people.

While Emmett Till’s lynching is widely known, it is important to offer a brief review of his case to understand different references made in the works I will cover. During the time of Jim Crow laws, white on Black violence was simply an accepted fact, especially in the Mississippi Delta. Till’s case, however, stood out among all of the rest. For one, Till was not from Mississippi. While Mississippi residents were subjected to gross mistreatment and inequality, Till had never encountered this treatment before. His mother Mamie Till-Mobley had raised him in Chicago; she felt that they had escaped the terror of the South. Like many people who had gone north in search of liberty and Civil Rights, Till-Mobley still wanted Emmett to be close to his Mississippi family members. During this time, it was common for people to send their children on trips to visit family during the summer. The fact that she had raised her son away from the brutal, Southern prejudice makes it all the more heartbreaking that Till was

murdered during his brief visit. Another reason his case shocked the world is because of his age. Black children were subject to mistreatment and murders, but the force and brutality the murderers used in killing Till was exceptional. Till's body showed that he had been tortured, not merely killed. His lynching made Black people confront the fact that children are not safe in Mississippi.

The facts surrounding Till's kidnapping are well-documented. Professor Chris Crowe details the kidnapping and murder trial in his book *Getting Away with Murder: The True Story of the Emmett Till Case* (2003). On August 25, 1955 Emmett Till was kidnapped from his Uncle Mose's home by Roy Bryant and his half-brother, J.W. Milam. Their motivation for kidnapping Till was that he had allegedly whistled at Carolyn Bryant, Roy Bryant's wife. Had Till whistled, it was most likely due to a speech impediment. Crowe claims, "A few weeks after his death, Mamie Till Mobley explained that what had sounded like a wolf whistle was probably just Emmett's attempt to whistle out a sound to clear his stutter" (55). Much later in Carolyn Bryant's life, she revealed in an interview with Timothy Tyson in his work *The Blood of Emmett Till* (2017) that Till had never whistled at her at all and that she had lied. Despite her admission, Till's whistle remains a part of the collective cultural memory of his case.

When Bryant and Milam kidnapped Till, Mose and his wife, Elizabeth Wright, begged them not to take him. In response, the two men threatened to murder them and, potentially, the rest of their family. Wright begged them to whip Till instead of taking him, but they were determined. Before they took him from the Wrights' property, Bryant and Milam asked Carolyn Bryant, who was sitting outside in the truck, if Till was the boy who had whistled at her in the store that day. She confirmed it was him. At that moment, she sentenced him to death. Carolyn Bryant had the potential to save Emmett, knowing that her husband and brother-in-law were

going to harm him. She knew that she could stop them by saying that it must have been a different boy, but Carolyn did not (60).

After Till was kidnapped, the sequence of events is unclear. What is known for sure is that a group of at least five men murdered Till. On August 28, 1955, three days after the kidnapping, Till's body was found in the Tallahatchie River. Crowe describes the horrific state of Till's remains:

The body had swollen to almost twice its normal size; the head had been severely beaten, "torture, horrible beatings," said one deputy. One side of the victim's forehead was crushed, an eye was gouged out, and the skull had a bullet hole just above the right ear. The neck had been ripped raw by the barbed wire wrapped around it. The beatings and three days in the river had turned the face and head into a monstrous mess of stinking flesh. The remains were so grotesque and mangled that deputies could only determine that it was a young Black male. Closer examination produced the only clear mark of identification on the body: a silver ring with the inscription *May 25, 1943, L.T.* Mose Wright recognized it as the ring of Louis Till, Emmett's father, a ring that Emmett had worn. (64)

The sheriff in Money, Sheriff Strider, demanded that Till be buried that day, but Mamie Till-Mobley took swift action to get her son's body back to Chicago with help from A.A. Rainer, the local mortician. Once she had Emmett's body, Till-Mobley made a bold decision that changed the course of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. She refused to have his body embalmed or to have any touchups applied to his body; she was determined to have an open casket funeral for her son. In an interview with Stanley Nelson hosted by NPR's Michelle Norris, Mobley's actions are discussed with Norris explaining, "Mamie Till insisted that her

son's body be displayed in an open casket, and the funeral director tried to talk her out of this." Mobley refused to allow her son's body to be embalmed and refused any sort of makeup or touch up. Mamie Till-Mobley is quoted as stating, "I was just willing to bare it all. I think everybody needed to know what had happened to Emmett Till" (Norris). The funeral lasted a total of three days (Norris). According to "Mamie Till Mobley 1920-2002" published by *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, "More than 100,000 people passed by the casket as it lay in a Chicago church. [...] Mobley also consented to have her son's body photographed. These pictures were published in *Jet* magazine and were seen by millions" (89). It was important to Till-Mobley that "the people see what they did to my boy" (66). Not only did she allow the general public to attend his funeral, but she also welcomed press coverage of the funeral. One magazine was of particular importance in reporting Till's murder: *Jet*. Crowe claims, "*Jet*, a national weekly news magazine for Blacks, launched the case to national prominence when it was published an article about the murder case that included a close-up photo of Emmett's disfigured head. People across the nation then joined with Blacks in Chicago and Mississippi in their outrage of the fourteen-year-old boy" (67). Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam were indicted and tried. Ultimately, they were found not guilty, but the indictment and trial alone were big steps to a more equal justice system (69). At the time, it was almost unheard of that any white person in the South would have to stand trial for the murder of any Black person.

Emmett Till has impacted American culture as a young martyr, and writers have tried to capture his impact in different ways. Two of the most well-known female authors to initially write about Till are poets Gwendolyn Brooks and Audre Lorde. Although they are not young adult authors, they provide a foundation for young adult authors to build upon. Both Lorde and Brooks focus on maternal empathy as a means to cross racial boundaries, but they each employ

this maternal empathy in a different way. In “A Bronzeville Mother Loiters In Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon,” published in 1960, Brooks chooses to focus on the perspective of Carolyn Bryant. Laura Dawkins explains the significance of this approach in her work “It Could Have Been My Son: Maternal Empathy in Gwendolyn Brooks’s and Audre Lorde’s Till Poems” (113). Dawkins claims:

Brooks re-creates the terror and revulsion that perhaps lurked behind the young woman’s public pose of loyalty to her husband. The poet imagines Bryant as an effaced and passive figure, who “says not a word” during the course of the poem, yet who silently wrestles with the horror of her husband’s act, painfully—and fruitlessly—attempting to reconcile the grim reality of child murder with the romantic southern mythology ingrained in her since girlhood. (113-14)

This “romantic southern mythology” is the idea that her husband is a “Fine Prince” saving her from the “Dark Villain” (114). However, Bryant is unable to keep the narrative intact as she realizes that “the ‘Dark Villain’ is not a sinister stalker of ‘undisputed breadth, undisputed height,’ but a blackish child” (114). Instead of being loyal to her husband, Carolyn continues living with him only out of fear and intimidation. What her husband has done haunts her forever, as every time he touches her or her children, her mind floods with images of Till (115).

Brooks is identifying Carolyn Bryant with Emmett Till, as they are both victims.

Instead of faulting Carolyn Bryant, Brooks fights the “southern mythology ingrained in her since girlhood,” advocating for southern women to be given a different narrative. Brooks creates a fictionalized Carolyn who identifies with Emmett’s mother, Mamie. Brooks claims that Carolyn became fearful of her husband’s being with their children after the murder. Dawkins claims, “Believing that ‘the Hand’ of her husband has become a deadly weapon menacing her

children, the white mother's maternal terror and sense of helplessness implicitly connect her with the bereft black mother" (115). It is important that Bryant connects with Mamie in order to reach a place of redemption as a person. As time passes, she grows to hate her husband. Brooks states, "She did not scream./She stood there./But a hatred for him burst into glorious flower" (116). Describing her hatred as a "glorious flower" symbolizes "her blossoming awareness—the potentially redemptive awakening of her social consciousness" (116). This "blossoming awareness" also proves that maternal empathy is greater than "the white patriarchal power that it contests" (116). Motherhood's being stronger than any patriarchal power shows the power of maternal empathy, as motherhood crosses all racial boundaries. By uniting these two mothers against the white patriarchy, Brooks is advocating for a more inclusive feminism.

Lorde also uses maternal empathy in her 1981 poem "Afterimages," but she uses it in a different way. Instead of, like Brooks, having a mother directly empathize with another mother, Lorde becomes a "symbolic mother" of Till (119-120). Lorde declares that in the Tallahatchie River, he has been "baptized my son forever" (120). She has to assume the symbolic mother role "to legitimize her right to speak and establish authenticity of her emotional engagement" (120). This brings Lorde closer to the murder and to Till than the reader, but, on a more complex level, it also unites the speaker with Carolyn Bryant. Dawkins explains, "The speaker reveals early in the poem that the images of 'a black boy hacked into a murderous lesson' and 'a white woman [who] stands bereft and empty' have become 'fused' in her mind" (123). In making herself the symbolic mother of Till, Lorde connects herself to Carolyn Bryant, recognizing the pain she must have as a mother. Dawkins states, "She [Lorde] acknowledges that 'the white girl besmirched by Emmett's whistle' was 'never allowed her own tongue,' and she recognizes the 'protected' white woman is also a victim of the child-killer's violence" (123). The poem ends

with a woman weeping but it is unclear whether that is the speaker or Bryant (124). By leaving this woman ambiguous, Lorde is fusing herself to Bryant as well, displaying solidarity with her as a mother and woman. Like Brooks's "A Bronzeville Mother," "Afterimages" calls for an intersectional approach to Till's case, as each poem identifies both Carolyn and Emmett as victims to Roy Bryant's violence.

Authors Marilyn Nelson, Suzanne Collins, and Linda Jackson each take a more intersectional approach to Emmett Till's murder in their young adult fiction. Chapter I will discuss how Nelson introduces her readers to Till's case with a crown of sonnets in her work *A Wreath for Emmett Till* (2003). Nelson relates closely to Lorde and Brooks by employing maternal empathy, but unlike Lorde and Brooks, Nelson's maternal empathy relates to her younger audience. Nelson allows her readers to imagine themselves in Till's place and envision their own mothers in Till-Mobley's place. Once Nelson's readers begin to feel empathy, she shifts to a discussion of how Till's murder relates to current events and atrocities, like terrorism. Her ultimate goal is to make her readers more socially aware, but she could not achieve this awareness without her feminist, maternal perspective.

Chapter II will explore how Collins creates a dystopian narrative that introduces her audience to Till's case in her *Hunger Games* trilogy (2008, 2009, 2010). Collins's recreates Emmett Till's murder with a young female character, Rue, taking his place. There are numerous similarities between Rue and Till throughout the novels. The events surrounding her murder and the way Katniss, the protagonist of the series, deals with her murder directly parallel to Till's case. Katniss becomes an activist like Till-Mobley after Rue's death and makes it a point to show the world what has happened to Rue has been unjust, and she will not let it be forgotten. Katniss accomplishes ensures Rue's death will become a collective cultural memory in Panem

by decorating her body with flowers instead of leaving Rue's side, forcing everyone to watch as the games are televised. This memorial parallels Mobley's choice to force America to look at what had happened to her son by holding an open-casket funeral and allowing his body to be photographed and for those photographs to be published in papers that made their way across the country. The deaths of Rue and Till also inspired others in Collins's fictional Panem and America to become activists fighting for social justice. Collins calls for women to begin to advocate for each other moving forward to create a more inclusive, feminist movement.

Chapter III will explore how Jackson uses her protagonist Rose to explain the importance of Till's case and what life was like in Mississippi during the time of Jim Crow laws. In her book *Midnight without a Moon* (2017), she details this experience, showing the different colorism and shadeism darker Black girls, like Rose, face. Coming from not only the outside but inside her family as well, prejudice surrounds Rose, as she is constantly belittled for her complexion. Emmett Till's murder teaches Rose just how important it is to stand up for her right to exist, and it forces her to find acceptance within herself. His murder brings her to a point self-actualization because she realizes that she could die at any moment. The problem is not—and has never been—her skin tone; the problem is people's misguided, racist perspectives. By confronting this issue, Jackson is calling for a movement to be more inclusive of Black women and to embrace darker Black women in particular.

CHAPTER 2

A WREATH FOR EMMETT TILL: USING MATERNAL EMPATHY TO INSPIRE ACTIVISM

Marilyn Nelson has carefully crafted a crown of fifteen sonnets in *A Wreath for Emmett Till* (2003) with young adult readers in mind. Much like Audre Lorde and Gwendolyn Brooks, Nelson employs maternal empathy to appeal to her young readers. Maternal empathy serves a different function in Nelson's poem cycle than in other works; instead of using this approach to appeal to fellow mothers, she is using the approach to appeal to the relationship children have to their own mothers. She specifically tailors her work to young adult readers by including notes that provide information about Till's case, a preface explaining why she chose to write about Till, and notes that break down each of her sonnets. Young readers may not understand this approach to her sonnets fully, but a teacher who is sensitive to previous feminist writings could use Nelson's poem to introduce students to Brooks and Lorde.

Her work serves as an introduction to poetry as a genre because Nelson has made it more accessible with explanations of the sonnet form she has chosen. Nelson explains, "A sonnet is a fourteen-line rhyming poem in iambic pentameter. The rhyme scheme I chose to use in these sonnets is called Italian, or Petrarchan. [...] A heroic crown of sonnets is a sequence of fifteen interlinked sonnets, in which the last one is made up of the first lines of the preceding fourteen" (1). The form also helped Nelson, as writing such an emotional work can be difficult (1). Nelson claims, "The strict form became a kind of insulation, a way of protecting myself from the intense pain of the subject matter, and a way to allow the Muse to determine what the poem would say" (1). Ironically, the sonnets have fourteen lines and there are fourteen poems; this is significant as Emmett Till was fourteen when he was lynched. Her fifteenth sonnet is an acrostic poem, comprised of the first lines of the previous fourteen poems, spelling "RIP EMMETT

TILL” with the first letter in each line. In addition to the preface, Nelson offers a brief history of Till’s case and includes a guide to many of her references and allusions.

In these notes, Nelson explains various references, word choices, and the purpose of her poems. While helpful for her readers, Nelson’s notes should not be the sole determining factor in analyzing her poems. By applying a New Critical approach, her poems can be analyzed without following her notes at all. New Critics William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley explain how readers can avoid using an author’s notes in their essay “The Intentional Fallacy.” They explain, “Notes tend to seem to justify themselves as external indexes to the author’s *intention*, yet they ought to be judged like any other parts of a composition, [...] and when so judged their reality as parts of the poem or their imagination integration with the rest of the poem may come into question” (1244). To give the author’s intention so much weight is a disservice to criticism, as the words alone have their own intrinsic value. By analyzing a text with methods like close reading, a poem can be truly understood. Nelson’s notes are important for her intention, but not necessarily for a critical approach to her poem. Although a strictly New Critical reading is tempting, Till is not solely a literary figure; he is a real person who lives in our cultural history. To ignore the history would be a disservice to both the work itself and to Till’s memory.

Nelson first introduces Mamie as she is preparing Emmett for his trip. While packing his things, she “told him the truth/of many a Mississippi anecdote:/Some white folks have blind souls” (Sonnet 4, lines 7-9). Nelson includes this warning, but she immediately makes sure that both Emmett and Mamie are relatable to her new generation of readers by describing the items being packed: a new White Sox cap, t-shirts, underwear, and comic books. These are items that many of the readers would pack themselves, which allows them to put themselves in Till’s position. Nelson then describes the last moment Mamie would ever see her son alive:

She'd given him a note
For the conductor, waved to his chubby face,
Wondered if he'd remember to brush his hair.
Her only child. A body left to bloat. (sonnet 4, lines 11-14)

Most of her readers will be able to recognize a similar moment they have had with their own mothers before a trip. When Mamie sent Emmett on the train, at that moment, her greatest concern was that he may not remember to brush his hair. The juxtaposition of a happy child boarding a train against the last line, "Her only child. A body left to bloat," again reinforces to young readers the tragic nature of what happened to Emmett (sonnet 4, lines 13-14).

In the fifth sonnet, Nelson proclaims, "Mother of sorrows, of justice denied. /Surely you must have thought of suicide" (sonnet 5, lines 2-3). Many of Nelson's readers may not be able to grasp fully the love that mothers have for their children or even the concept of grief. By claiming that Mamie must have been suicidal after the murder of her son, she is describing the depth of emotion that Mamie must have felt. Nelson then describes how differently Mamie's life was from anything that she could have possibly imagined, as she became the mother of a martyr. She then asks if Mamie were given a choice, "Would you say yes, like the mother of Christ?/Or would you say no to your destiny,/mother of a boy martyr, if you could" (Sonnet 5, lines 12-14). This comparison serves a few different important functions and it elevates both Mamie and Emmett to describe the importance of his case. For many of Nelson's readers, this book could be their first exposure to Till's case. Comparing him to Jesus tells readers how significant he was as a martyr figure. By asking if Mamie would have chosen a different path for her son, Nelson opens readers' minds regarding his life. Had he lived, he may have had a happy, normal, long life. However, many activists, such as Rosa Parks, were inspired by Till and began to take

action. Till inspired change and became a catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement. Here Nelson is speaking directly to Till proclaiming, “You were a wormhole history passed through,/transformed by the memory of your victimhood” (Sonnet 6, lines 13-14). By claiming Till was “a wormhole history passed through,” Nelson is explaining that the major social justice movements have happened because of him. Life as her readers know it is different because of his lynching (sonnet 6, line 13).

Published in 2003, *A Wreath for Emmett Till* occupies a time still recovering from the terrorist attack that occurred on September 11, 2001. Almost all of Nelson’s readers would have been familiar with the attack and the subsequent war that followed. Nelson explains that she would put Till in a “parallel universe,” but is quick to point out the potential dangers (sonnet 6, line 2). She claims that if he were in a parallel universe, he would “surpass your mother’s dreams. But parallel/realities may have terrorists, too./Evil multiplies to infinitude” (sonnet 6, lines 9-11). Evil is inescapable, and even if he had not been lynched when he was a child, he could have died at the hands of terrorists later in life. Nelson proclaims, “Erase the memory of Emmett’s victimhood./Let’s write the obituary of a life/lived well and wisely, mourned by a loving wife/or partner, friends, and a vast multitude” (sonnet 7, lines 1-3). She invites readers to think of his life had he not been a victim, but she shifts this line of thinking, knowing that history cannot be changed. Instead, she looks at alternate ways to view him, not as a victim, but as a hero. She states:

Remember the high purpose he pursued.
Remember how he earned a nation’s grief.
Remember accomplishment beyond belief,
Honors enough to make us ooh, slack-jawed, [...]

Let America Remember what he taught. (sonnet 7, lines 6-11)

The stanza demands readers not to view Emmett as a victim with the repetition of “remember.” She tells readers to remember him for inspiring the Civil Rights Movement, bringing a nation together, and teaching everyone an important lesson. People were overlooking these issues of racial injustice, but his murder was able to capture many people’s attention. Again, tying in current events, Nelson proclaims, “At least let him die in a World Trade tower/rescuing others, that unforgettable day,/that memory of monsters, that bleak thought” (sonnet 7, lines 12-14). She is bringing in the terrorist attacks to help connect his tragedy to one her young audience is more familiar with. Even if he had died on September 11, Emmett could have had a chance to be an adult and he would have been remembered as a hero and not as a victim.

Further connecting Till’s murder to other tragedies young readers may be more familiar with, Nelson lists different ways people have been murdered unjustly with examples such as mob violence, hangings, and even, in sonnet nine, the Holocaust in sonnet nine. Of this evil, she comments, “Sinners I can’t believe Christ’s death redeems,/your ash hair [...] Emmett, your eye” (sonnet 9, lines 8-9). The speaker feels so shaken by the evil that it leads to her questioning her own faith. Again, she uses September 11 as an example: “The broken towers, the air filled with last breaths, / the blasphemies pronounced to justify / the profane, absence theft of human lives” (11-13). While this allusion elicits an emotional response from her readers, she balances it with a message of forgiveness:

I cling to the faith
that innocence lives on, that a blind soul
can see again. That miracles do exist.
In my house, there is still something called grace,

Which melts ice shards of hate and makes hearts whole. (sonnet 10, lines 8-12)

Earlier, Mamie warned Emmett that “some white folks have blind souls” (sonnet 4, line 9). By declaring “a blind soul/can see again,” Nelson is claiming that there is still a chance that even the most racist, heartless people can one day believe in equality (sonnet 10, lines 9-10).

In sonnet eleven, Nelson reinforces the problems in America stating, “Thousands of oak trees around this country/groaned with the weight of men slain for their race,/their murderers acquitted in almost every case” (sonnet 11, lines 3-5). Nelson plays with the tree and floral imagery, juxtaposing sonnets eleven and twelve. For example, in sonnet twelve Nelson employs the floral imagery of the bloodroot poppy, determining it must be included in his wreath. She explains, “Though the white poppy means *forgetfulness*,/who could forget, when red sap on a wreath/recalls the brown boy five white monsters killed” (sonnet 12, lines 10-12). In the previous sonnet, she states, “One night five Black men died on the same tree” (sonnet 11, line 6). She is juxtaposing the five Black victims against the five “white monsters” (sonnet 12, line 12). The oak trees that the Black men have been hung on “groaned” and have always remembered those tragedies (sonnet 11, line 4). The white, bloodroot poppies, on the other hand, are determined to forget, like the “white monsters” (sonnet 12, line 12). Although the white flowers may try to erase the memories of Till, they, like the hands of the “white monsters,” are dripping with blood (sonnet 12, line 12). Nelson proclaims, “Forgetting would call for consciencelessness./Like the full moon, which smiled calmly upon his death” (sonnet 12, lines 13-14). To forget would be to feel nothing about his lynching, as the moon felt nothing. It may seem obvious that the moon would feel nothing as it is not sentient, but a line from the previous sonnet gives more clarity, as Nelson employs moonbeams and a direct reference to whiteness

with the phrase “white as moonbeams” (sonnet 11, line 14). Nelson is warning her readers that white people may try to forget and may be “conscienceless.”

Obviously, during the time of slavery, no one was charged with the murder of any African-American. Later, after the Emancipation Proclamation, it was very rare that anyone would be charged with the murder of a Black person, and, if murderers were arrested, the result was almost exclusively acquittal. Even in Till’s case, despite the evidence, Bryant and Milam were acquitted. Nelson describes the opposing duality of America’s message of hope coupled with its horrific history proclaiming, “My country, ’tis of both / thy nightmare history and thy grand dream, / thy centuries of good and evil deeds” (sonnet 11, lines 10-12). On one hand, the American dream tells the world that no matter where a person comes from or how little someone has, anyone can find success. On the other hand, this idealistic view of the United States is merely a façade. The American racist system denies the dreams of some races of people; instead, there are only nightmares of slavery and discrimination. Despite a constitution valuing equality, an entire race of people was enslaved.

Now that she has discussed his case, employed maternal empathy to elicit a response from her readers, and given insight into the nation’s tragedies and race relations, it is time for Nelson to make her readers aware that they can take action. Nelson claims, “Like a nation sending its children off to fight/our faceless enemy, immortal fear, the most feared enemy of the human race” (sonnet 13, lines 9-11). Nelson is making it clear that the war America had engaged in was not fought over the terrorist attack, but instead, the nation is fighting simply because it is afraid. She urges young readers to take action against fear. Nelson states:

Like his gouged eye, which watched boots kick his face,
we must bear witness to atrocity.

But we are whole: We can speak what we see.

People may disappear, leaving no trace,

unless we stand before the populace,

orators denouncing the slavery

to fear. (sonnet 14, lines 1-7)

Unlike Till who was literally broken, her readers are able to speak out against injustice. If her readers do not become activists who speak out, it is a great disservice to Till and his memory.

The activist aspect for Nelson is creating a social awareness and urging her young readers not to be complicit in any form of oppression. Every tragedy, every lynching, is in some way a result of fear:

For the lynchers feared the lynchee,

What he might do, being of another race,

A great unknown. They feared because they saw

Their own inner shadows, their vicious dreams. (sonnet 14, lines 7-10)

Till's lynchers were afraid of him because he was Black. The difference of race made it easier to justify his murder, as it is an othering mentality. However, their actual fear came from within themselves. Bryant and Milam had evil thoughts and were capable of committing a gross atrocity, murdering an innocent child. In these lines, Nelson is claiming that Milam and Bryant projected their own evil thoughts onto Till, thinking that because they were capable of murder, Till was also. While that could not be further from the truth, it is the rationalization Nelson offers of their fear. It is the readers' responsibility to advocate against it. Nelson concludes, "We can speak now, or bear unforgettable shame./Rosemary for remembrance, Shakespeare wrote" (sonnet 14, lines 13-14). If her readers do not speak now, their inaction will result in

more tragedies, and their silence will be to blame. By ending with “Rosemary for remembrance,” she urges her readers to remember Till and his too-short life so that they will speak out (sonnet 14, line 14).

In *A Wreath for Emmett Till*, Nelson employs maternal empathy, like Brooks and Lorde. However, instead of using this approach to unite women and mothers, she conveys to her young readers the tragic nature of his death. Nelson writes about how heartbroken his mother, Mamie, was in such a way that readers can feel empathy and sympathy for Emmett and Mamie. Once she puts her readers in this emotional space, Nelson discusses the problems facing America, both past and present. She writes of racial injustice, while also incorporating current events, such as the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack. Ultimately, her goal is to inspire her young readers to be socially aware and to speak out against social injustice instead of being complicit.

CHAPTER 3

THE HUNGER GAMES: RESURRECTING EMMETT TILL

Instead of choosing to write a poem or even discussing Till directly, author Suzanne Collins reimagines the murder of Emmett Till and the movement that followed his death in the *Hunger Games* trilogy. The series includes *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009), and *Mockingjay* (2010). Collins's books take place in the futuristic, dystopian society called Panem, which is based on the United States, consisting of the Capitol and thirteen districts. The Capitol enslaves the districts and each district serves a specific function to maintain the Capitol by manufacturing goods, growing food, or providing energy through resources like coal. Despite the districts' supporting the Capitol, many of the districts' citizens live in poverty. It is not uncommon for people to die in the districts as a result of the dangerous environment, lack of resources, or starvation. As a result, the districts have rebelled against the Capitol; this rebellion is known as the "Dark Days" (18). The Capitol has managed to defeat twelve of the thirteen districts; supposedly, District Thirteen is entirely destroyed by the Capitol (18). Once the Capitol has defeated the districts, "The Treaty of Treason" is created. The series protagonist Katniss explains the purpose of the treaty: "The Treaty of Treason gave us the new laws to guarantee peace and, as our yearly reminder that the Dark Days must never be repeated, it gave us the Hunger Games" (18). This creates a yearly cycle of violence as a punishment to keep the districts suppressed.

In book one, Katniss further describes the rules of the Hunger Games: "In punishment for the uprising, each of the twelve districts must provide one girl and one boy, called tributes, to participate. The twenty-four tributes will be imprisoned in a vast outdoor arena that could hold anything from a burning desert to a frozen wasteland. Over a period of several weeks, the

competitors must fight to the death. The last tribute standing wins” (18). The Hunger Games are televised from the time tributes are chosen until the winning tribute returns home. For the Capitol, the games are simply their favorite reality television series. For the districts, the message is, “Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there’s nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. Just as we did in District Thirteen” (19). This intimidation fostered a mindset in every district that rebellion was impossible.

Although the society in Collins’s books is fictional, the events that take place seem to be heavily influenced by Till’s death. Specifically, the character Rue, a tribute from District Eleven, becomes the female embodiment of Till. One of the first signs that Rue is inspired by Emmett Till is Collins’s name choice for Rue. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “rue” as a verb meaning to “bitterly regret.” In the past, it meant repentance, regret, compassion, and pity (*Oxford English Dictionary*). By choosing such a powerful, emotionally evocative word, Collins suggests how both her fictional Panem and the real American society feel about the deaths of Rue and Till. With that definition in mind, Collins defines “Rue” in *The Hunger Games* for her readers explaining, “Rue is a small yellow flower that grows in the Meadow” (99). As in the nonfictional world, rue is also a flower in Panem. The floral imagery creates a connection to Emmet Till’s name. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, when used as a verb, Till means to “prepare and cultivate (land) for crops.” Having the name Rue mean a flower links both Rue and Till, as both involve the earth. The land must be prepared in order for anything to grow from it.

Katniss first sees Rue when she is chosen as a tribute, and they quickly become allies once they are in the arena of the Hunger Games. Katniss describes Rue in particular detail, “She’s the twelve-year-old, the one who reminded me so of Prim in stature. Up close she looks

about ten. She has bright, dark eyes and satiny brown skin and stands tilted up on her toes with her arms slightly extended to her sides, as if ready to take wing at the slightest sound. It's impossible not to think of a bird" (99). By comparing Rue to Prim, Katniss's younger sister, Collins employs maternal empathy. Katniss is a mother figure to her sister, and Rue takes Prim's place as Katniss's child in the games. This symbolic mothering gives Katniss reason to be more emotionally invested, thus making the reader more invested in Rue as well.

Rue's home, District Eleven, is the agricultural hub of Panem. Unfortunately, it is perhaps the harshest as it is similar to a Southern plantation during the time of slavery. Rue explains to Katniss that despite being from the agricultural district, they are not allowed to eat any of the crops (202). If anyone does, "They whip you and make everyone else watch. The mayor's very strict about it" (202). When it is time for them to harvest the crops, everyone in the district is fed a little bit more than usual "so that people can keep going longer" (202). The children are not allowed to attend school during the harvest. Rue gives details of the conditions, including the murder of a mentally disabled boy named Martin, who was killed because he tried to keep the night vision glasses given to him so that he could harvest crops through the night (204). Clearly, Rue has grown up in a lynching culture, which allows for a greater parallel to both the South during slavery and to Mississippi in the 1950s.

Although Emmett Till went to visit family in Mississippi, which seems like a significantly more positive circumstance than being selected to participate in the yearly Hunger Games battles, the events that occurred when Rue and Till arrived at their destinations are strikingly similar, most notably the events that led to their captures. Like Till's alleged whistle, whistling led to the capture and murder of Rue. In her home district, District Eleven, she always sang to a specific kind of bird, mockingjays (212). This bird is symbolic because it alludes to

Harper Lee's work *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Lee's work is one of the most influential novels that deals with complex issues of race and rape. For Lee, the mockingbird symbolizes innocence, with different characters personifying that ideal. In addition to the allusion, Collins also creates a history of the bird in her fictional world. Katniss explains how mockingjays came into existence:

During the rebellion, the Capitol bred a series of genetically altered animals as weapons. [...] One was a special bird called a jabberjay that had the ability to memorize and repeat whole human conversations. They were homing birds, exclusively male, that were released into regions where the Capitol's enemies were known to be hiding. After the birds gathered words, they'd fly back to centers to be recorded. It took people awhile to realize what was going on in the districts, how private conversations were being transmitted. Then, of course, the rebels fed the Capitol endless lies, and the joke was on it. So the centers were shut down and the birds were abandoned to die off in the wild. (42-43)

The Capitol has assumed the jabberjays would die off, as they have created male jabberjays, but they mated with mockingbirds, making a new species called mockingjays (43). These birds can copy both bird whistles and human vocal sounds; they even have the ability to copy entire song melodies (43). Mockingjays are considered "a slap in the face to the Capitol" (42). Mockingjays are a physical reminder of their failed attempt to defeat the districts. To have Rue whistle to the mockingjays is a sign of rebellion.

Rue explains that the mockingjays in her home district repeat after her, singing a four-note tune to signal that the workday was over (210). Rue and Katniss form an alliance to win the Hunger Games, but they need a way to signal to each other. She teaches this tune to Katniss so

that the two of them can use it as a signal to let the other know that she was okay (213). As soon as Katniss executes part of the plan, she hears Rue's whistle (232). Shortly after that, Katniss hears a cry from Rue (232). Katniss explains, "When I break into the clearing, she's on the ground, hopelessly entangled in a net. She just has time to reach her hand through the mesh and say my name before the spear enters her body" (232). Just like Till, Rue calls out to a white woman, Katniss, and whistles are heard before Rue is captured and subsequently stabbed. Collins's choice for Rue to be captured before her murder is also important as Rue is the only tribute who is captured before her death, making it a parallel to Emmett Till's. In this scene, Katniss simultaneously takes on two roles: the role of Carolyn Bryant and the role of Mamie Till-Mobley. Katniss takes a similar place to Carolyn, as Rue's whistle to her led to her capture, but Katniss quickly shifts to Till-Mobley's place, as she deals with the aftermath of Rue's death. As Rue dies, she tells Katniss that she has to win, and Katniss promises that she will: "I'm going to. Going to win for both of us now" (233). Rue asks her to sing, and Katniss does. The entire time she sings to Rue, the Capitol is forced to watch.

Another striking similarity between Till and Rue is revealed in the decisions that Katniss and Mamie Till-Mobley have made after the deaths of fictional Rue and the real Till. Both Katniss and Till-Mobley determine to show the world what has been done to these two children in hopes that their deaths would bring societal awareness and change. Violence against Black people in the Mississippi Delta was all too common during the twentieth century. However, Mobley did not want the murder of her son to be forgotten so she decided to have an open casket funeral. Like Till-Mobley, Katniss wanted everyone to witness what happened to Rue and for them to realize the gravity of the loss of her life. Katniss explains, "Rue's death has forced me to confront my own fury against the cruelty, the injustice they inflict upon us" (236). After Rue

dies, Katniss realizes that she will be expected to leave so that they can “collect the bodies” (236). However, Katniss refuses to let Rue’s death go unnoticed. Katniss thinks to herself, “I want to do something, right here, right now, to shame them, to make them accountable, to show the Capitol that whatever they do or force us to do there is a part of every tribute they can’t own. That Rue was more than a piece in their games. And so am I” (236-237). In search of some special act, Katniss finds wildflowers and begins to decorate Rue’s body and cover her wound. Katniss explains, “A few steps into the woods grows a bank of wildflowers. Perhaps they are really weeds of some sort, but they have blossoms in beautiful shades of violet and yellow and white. I gather up an armful and come back to Rue’s side. Slowly, one stem at a time, I decorate her body in the flowers. Covering the ugly wound. Wreathing her face. Weaving her hair with bright colors” (236). The “wreathing” is likely a direct reference to Nelson’s *A Wreath for Emmett Till*, published six years prior (236). Katniss claims, “They’ll have to show it. Or, even if they choose to turn the cameras elsewhere at this moment, they’ll have to bring them back when they collect the bodies and everyone will see her then and know I did it” (237). Katniss decorates Rue’s body knowing that her actions will have to be broadcast to the world, just like Mamie Till-Mobley knew in having an open-casket funeral for her son, the world would have to acknowledge what happened to him.

When Katniss has finished decorating Rue’s body, forcing the entire Capitol to watch, she offers her goodbye and then she makes a bold decision: “I press the three middle fingers of my left hand against my lips and hold them out in her direction” (237), making the universal sign of resistance against the Capitol. An act of rebellion like this had never happened in the history of the Hunger Games. Typically, when a tribute dies, his or her body is immediately collected so that no one confronts or acknowledges the evil nature of the games. Like Till’s open casket, this

wreathing of Rue is the first time for many people that they see the dead body for a significant amount of time. Katniss's actions and desire for accountability connect her character to Till's mother and how the deaths have affected them both.

Katniss and Till-Mobley are similar in more ways than their initial reaction to the deaths of Rue and Till. The murders cause major changes in their lives and have permanent effects on their characters, which leads them both to become activists, fighting for equality and for an end to socially accepted brutality. In the second book in *The Hunger Games* series, *Catching Fire*, Collins describes the aftermath of the games when Katniss and Peeta, co-victor of the Hunger Games, are forced to go to each of the twelve districts on a victory tour. On the tour, they are given rehearsed speeches and are supposed to be celebrating the Hunger Games. However, when talking to District Eleven in front of Rue's family, Katniss does her part of the rehearsed speech, but then she decides that she must take a stand. Katniss thinks to herself, "I remember how I took care in the arena to cover her with flowers, to make sure her loss did not go unnoticed. But that gesture will mean nothing if I don't support it now" (61). Katniss then speaks of Rue exclaiming, "Everything beautiful brings her to mind. I see her in the yellow flowers that grow in the Meadow by my house. I see her in the mockingjays that sing in the trees. But most of all I see her in my sister, Prim" (61). By grouping Rue with her white sister, Prim, Collins is expressing that all women need to be advocated for and protected. Everyone in the crowd reacts in solemn solitude by reciting Rue's mockingjay song (61). Later in *Catching Fire*, Katniss makes the final decision to be an activist by resisting the Capitol and becoming the face of the resistance. She makes her motives for her activism clear, proclaiming, "Prim...Rue...aren't they the very reason I have to try to fight? Because what has been done to them is so wrong, so beyond justification, so evil that there is no choice? Because no one has the right to treat them as

they have been treated. Yes, this is the thing to remember when fear threatens to swallow me up” (123). This development shows the cultural need for women to advocate for each other, regardless of race, and enact a more intersectional activism.

Like Katniss, Till-Mobley was strongly influenced by the death of Till and spent the remainder of her life fighting for social justice. Barbara Ransby, associate professor of African-American studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago, writes about Till-Mobley’s activism in “Remembering Mamie Till Mobley, Tireless Crusader for Civil Rights,” explaining, “After the shock of her son’s death, Mamie Till decided to use the tragedy to expose the savage violence that undergirded southern racism.” Till-Mobley, fueled by Emmett’s murder, created activist works, including a book and two documentaries (Ransby). Had her son not been killed, it is likely that she would not have been an activist at all as her works were to preserve his memory and to prevent any future atrocities from happening to innocent Black children. As with Katniss, the brutal murder had a significant impact on her identity and the role she had in society.

The deaths of both Till and the fictional character Rue impacted far more people and characters than Mobley and Katniss. Till’s horrific murder influenced people across the country to become activists. Ransby explains, “Participants in the Montgomery, Ala., bus boycott and the student desegregation sit-ins cited the Till case as one of the motivations for their actions.” These were two of the most important protests in the Civil Rights Movement. Till also influenced two of the most prominent Civil Rights activists in the nation. National Public Radio (NPR) reporter Noah Adams discussed with these activists the impact that the pictures of Till had on them. Mississippi native and long-time activist Margaret Block tells Adams, “I remember not being able to sleep when I saw [the photos].” “Can you imagine being 11 years old and seeing something like that for the first time in your life and it being close to home? The

death of Emmett Till touched us, it touched everybody. And we always said that if we ever got a chance to do something, we were going to change things around here.” Adams continues explaining the effect it had on another activist: “For Charles Cobb, a Washington, D.C., journalist and author, the photos were also a catalyst for activism. Cobb first saw the pictures when he was 12 years old. He went on to develop the ‘Freedom Schools’ that mobilized Black voters throughout Mississippi in 1964.” Without these images and the publicity that Till-Mobley’s memorial of Till received, the Civil Rights Movement and the activists involved would have been drastically different, if even in existence at all.

The broadcast of Rue’s murder has a similar effect on those around her and influences numerous characters throughout the series. Just as the images of Till haunted many people, the image of Rue haunts those of Panem. Her image is used as a form of protest against further violence in Collins’s second book, *Catching Fire*. In *Catching Fire*, all of the previous victors are forced to participate in another hunger games called the Quarter Quell, a special Hunger Games because, instead of choosing new tributes to participate, all of the previous living victors must battle each other. As is standard, the gamemakers demand that all tributes display their talents to be ranked by most fatal and effective. Instead of showcasing their strengths in combat, some of the tributes decide to act defiantly and in protest. The most notable of these acts is Peeta’s. For Peeta’s display of talent, he paints a picture of Rue covered in the flowers, recreating the wreath Katniss has made for her. When asked what he is trying to accomplish by doing that, Peeta responds, “I just wanted to hold them accountable in that moment. For killing that little girl” (248). Peeta is not the only individual influenced by that moment. In the third book in the series, *Mockingjay*, District Thirteen, a district previously believed to have been destroyed, emerges as the leading district of the rebellion. Boggs, a high-ranking military

commander who serves the President of District Thirteen was asked what Katniss has done that has moved him. In response, he talks of Rue stating, “When she sang the song. While the little girl died” (75). For him to have been touched by that particular moment shows the significance of Rue’s death because he is described as a puppet-like “muscular robot” who does the President’s bidding (75). By having both Peeta and Boggs refer to Rue as a “little girl” instead of using her name, Collins suggests that this problem goes beyond Rue and extends to all young women. By gendering the Emmett Till figure as female, Collins creates a critical consciousness in the reader of both gender and race, which hopefully, creates a deeper awareness of these social issues for her young readers.

Rue’s image appears multiple times in the final installment of the series, and it is especially evident that she has inspired the activism of many through the symbolism of the mockingjay. In the third book, Katniss references Rue’s whistle and its significance when she suddenly calls out her four-note tune. Katniss explains, “Before I actually think about what I’m doing, I sing Rue’s four notes, the ones she used to signal the end of the workday in Eleven. The notes that ended up as the background to her murder” (122). Because the mockingjays’ whistles are the soundtrack to Rue’s murder, it is fitting that the most prominent symbol of the rebellion in the third book is the mockingjay. In fact, Katniss actually becomes “The Mockingjay” and helps lead the rebellion in a mockingjay costume, a physical representation of what has whistled as Rue dies. Collins uses the embodiment of the whistle to be the symbol of the revolution, building on Till’s alleged whistle. Also, it allows Katniss to move more easily between the Black mother figure and the white female figure, displaying a multiracial consciousness. There is clearly a cultural need for women to advocate for each other, regardless of race.

The last written words of both Till-Mobley and Katniss are hauntingly similar. Till-Mobley worked on an autobiography entitled *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America* (2003). Shortly before the book was released, Till-Mobley died. On the final chapter's penultimate page, Till-Mobley writes, "With each day, I give thanks for the blessings of life—the blessings of another day and the chance to do something with it. Something good. Something significant. Something helpful. No matter how small it might seem" (311). Till-Mobley's words are especially important because on the final page of the final chapter in the final book of the Hunger Games series, *Mockingjay*, Katniss states, "What I need is the dandelion in the spring. The bright yellow that means rebirth instead of destruction. The promise that life can go on, no matter how bad our losses. That it can be good again" (388). Both Till-Mobley and Katniss have almost identical hopes. Even more significant is Katniss's reference to a bright yellow flower. As explained earlier, in the first book Collins defines Rue as "a small yellow flower that grows in the Meadow" (99). This birth of a new flower gives Rue's symbol a new meaning. Her death is no longer the end; her death led to the rebirth of Panem. It inspires a revolution in a similar way that Till's murder inspired Civil Rights activists.

Emmett Till's murder was one of the most pivotal moments in American history, inspiring protests, activists, and the Civil Rights Movement. Collins exposes a new generation of readers to one of the most brutal and historically significant murders of the twentieth century through her novel series, *The Hunger Games*, through her character, Rue. There are numerous similarities between Rue and Till. Collins's name choice for Rue, the way Katniss makes it a point that Rue's death is remembered and broadcast, and the impact it has on both Katniss and the fictional society of Panem mirror the murder of Till. Katniss makes it a point that Rue not be forgotten by decorating Rue's body instead of leaving her side, forcing everyone to see her and

to not treat her as a typical Hunger Games death. This action parallels Mobley's choice to force America to look at what had happened to her son by holding an open-casket funeral and allowing his body to be photographed and for those photographs to be published in papers that made their way across the country. Neither Katniss nor Mamie Till-Mobley intended to be activists, but the killings of Rue and Till inspired them to live their lives as activists. The injustice of the deaths of Rue and Till also have inspired others in Panem and America to become activists fighting for social justice. By mirroring the life and death of Emmett Till in a fictionalized world, Collins resurrects Emmett Till's influence in literature and exposes a new generation to the tragedy and significance of his life and murder. Also, by making Till a female and using Katniss as a combination of Bryant and Till-Mobley, the *Hunger Games* author calls to action a new generation of activists to fight for women of all races.

CHAPTER 4

MIDNIGHT WITHOUT A MOON: EMBRACING SELF-LOVE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Unlike the *Hunger Games* series, *Midnight without a Moon* is not set in a dystopian world. Linda Jackson offers a unique, historically-rooted perspective of Emmett Till's murder in her young adult novel *Midnight without a Moon* (2017). Narrated in the first-person by Rose, a young Black teen living in the fictional town Stillwater, only one town over from Money, Mississippi, Jackson takes her readers to the summer of 1955. Living in Mississippi under Jim Crow laws was dangerous; as a result, many African-Americans fled Mississippi during this time for larger, more progressive, Northern cities, such as Chicago. Rose explains this migratory trend when she discusses the departures of her mother, stepfather, and stepsiblings moving:

Chicago. Colored folks didn't go to Chicago to visit. Colored folks went to Chicago to live. In the last few years it seemed everybody had been leaving. Folks were fleeing Mississippi so fast it was like birds flying south for the winter, except they were going north, or out west to California. "Migrating" is what my seventh-grade teacher, Miss Johnson, called it. "A great colored migration," she'd said. "Like a flock of black birds."

Except, unlike birds who returned in the spring, these folks rarely came back. (11)

There are countless reasons to leave, a few being desegregated schools, a safer environment, and more opportunities for success. The desegregated schools are particularly important to Rose. She asks, "Don't we deserve good schools too instead of that haunted school for coloreds where everything in it is junk the white folks didn't want in their children's schools anymore?" (23). Although Rose wants to leave with her family, Mr. Pete, Rose's stepfather, does not consider Rose or her brother Fred Lee a part of the family.

Mr. Pete, who owns a substantial amount of land in Mississippi, explains his reasons for moving to Chicago: “A Negro can own all the land in Mississippi and still be treated worse than a hog. I can’t even register to vote without the threat of being gunned down on the courthouse steps. I didn’t sell my land to buy a car. I sold my land to buy an opportunity. A future for my children” (23). Although African-Americans had the right to vote, they were often threatened for trying to exercise that right. Rose states, “Back in May, a preacher named Reverend George Lee had been killed for helping colored folks register to vote” (32). George Lee is fifty-one when murdered, in connection to voter registration *Midnight without a Moon* (129). The next person who registers is Levi, a family friend of Rose, who has just turned twenty-one (44). He has graduated high school and is attending college when he is killed (44). The third person to be murdered is Lamar Smith, a sixty-three-year-old war veteran and a farmer (129). Hallelujah, Rose’s best friend, tells her, “When he was shot down, he was at the courthouse, trying to help other Negroes register to vote” (129). Rose points out that each of these men could have left Mississippi instead of choosing to fight for their right to vote (129). Rose ponders the injustice of Mississippi:

At first, after seeing Mama and everyone else leaving Mississippi for a better life up north, I wanted to go only because I wanted that kind of life too. But after hearing that white folks in Mississippi would kill anybody, regardless of age, for simply wanting to exercise their right to vote, I wanted to leave before I was old enough to face the life and death decision of whether to stand up for my rights or just sit back and leave things the way they were. (130-31)

Many families chose to leave Mississippi so their children would not be subjected to racism and violence. After Levi dies, his parents and siblings moved to Detroit. Rose explains: “Right after

Levi's funeral and before the cotton chopping was all done, Mr. Albert and his wife, Miss Flo-
Etta, took their younger sons and joined their older sons in Detroit. He said he was done with
Mississippi and would never set foot on that demon soil again" (83). Levi's family moves out of
fear, knowing that the other children in his family were in danger as well.

Because exercising rights often led to violence, not everyone in Rose's family thinks
fighting for Civil Rights is in the best interest of the Black community. The strongest opposition
comes from Rose's grandmother, Ma Pearl, who raises her. Complex, harsh, and, at times,
physically violent, Ma Pearl is a problematic character whose views are difficult to understand.
Both Ma Pearl and Papa live in a house owned by the Robinsons. She cleans for Mrs. Robinson
and maintains the Robinsons' house. Papa farms the land and is responsible for the cotton
harvest. Her daughter, Belle, constantly tells Ma Pearl that she should want more from her life
than living under the Robinsons.

Rose's Aunt Belle and her husband Monty, both now living in St. Louis, work with the
NAACP as activists and who get involved as much as they can with making a change in
Mississippi. These two characters are the most determined to create change out of everyone in
Rose's family. For Pearl, it is more complicated: "Things is better than they used to be," she
says. "And they wouldn't be so bad as they is if the gov'ment wadn't trying to force the whites
down here to act like the whites up north" (148). Being older, she has seen much more violence
than her daughter Belle. As a result, her feelings for the NAACP are mostly negative. Pearl
exclaims, "The NAACP can go to hell for all I care. More Negroes been kil't since they came
down here than ever before. Whites, too, if they find themselves on the wrong side of the line.
The NAACP can't stop a Negro from being lynched, and they can't make the sheriff put a
peckerwood in jail for doing the lynching. This Miss'sippi. Ain't nothing go'n never change"

(148-149). Although she is not the only character who is afraid of fighting for Civil Rights, she is by far the most outspoken. Fighting for Civil Rights is more than a question of morals; it could be a decision of life or death.

In an interview, Jackson explains how she wants her young readers to feel about Ma Pearl: “I want readers to understand Ma Pearl’s fear and anger. She is like a trapped animal. She is stuck raising her grandchildren. She is dependent on her white employer for her livelihood, yet, outside forces keep telling her that she should want more and be willing to fight for it.” Pearl herself explains how she is trapped: “You sit here in my kitchen telling me how things got to change. But the man who own this house says I best leave things the way they is. Tells me I gots to leave if I let these northern Negroes tell me how I oughta live in Mississippi. Now you tell me this: Where we go’n go if we git throwed off this place?” (241) Living on the property of the white Robinsons complicates everything for Pearl. It is especially important that readers understand the reason many real people, like the fictional Ma Pearl, chose to be cautious instead of being more outspoken during the Civil Rights Movement. Jackson explains: “I want young readers to understand just how much courage it took to fight for civil rights. Many kids today probably think they would have easily stood up for their rights. But I don’t think they realize how dangerous that fight really was and how much was at stake for people who were dependent upon the ‘grace’ of white landowners.” By exposing the potential ramifications of fighting for Civil Rights, Jackson helps young readers understand and appreciate the sacrifices made by those who chose to be activists.

Another influence in Rose’s life is her best friend, Hallelujah, the son of Reverend Jenkins. Hallelujah is shockingly progressive for his young age, at only fourteen years old. Reverend Jenkins has connections with people who are a part of the NAACP and is able to get

news that is often not reported at all in Mississippi. Because Hallelujah has so much information, Jackson explains why she chose to write from Rose's perspective instead of using Hallelujah as a narrator: "The 'hook' of the story is to show an African-American family who is not on board with the upcoming Civil Rights Movement. If the story were told from Hallelujah's POV, then it would be like all the other civil rights books with the brave African-American family playing an integral part in the movement." Had Jackson chosen to exclude perspectives like Ma Pearl's, her readers would not be able to fully understand the complexity of fighting for Civil Rights.

Jackson describes to readers why Emmett Till's murder stood out among the period's pervasive violence and many murders. The first difference between him and the other murder victims is that Till is not a resident of Mississippi. At a special service her church had for him, Rose expresses her disbelief in Till's death:

My body rocked with emotion. Emotion I had never felt before. [...] Somehow I felt that something worse had happened than what happened to Levi. This boy, Emmett, they say his name was, had only been visiting. He wasn't like the rest of us—born in Mississippi, stuck in Mississippi, just waiting for our chance to get out of Mississippi. He'd come here to visit, to spend time with relatives, enjoying good food and laughter. [...] Instead he made one mistake, and he was sent back home in a pine box. (188-189)

He lived the dream of so many African-Americans, which was to grow up in a more progressive place, like Chicago. In just a couple of weeks, Till would have been sent home back to his mother in his comparatively safe city. At least the fictional Levi, Reverend Lee, and Lamar have been killed fighting for their rights. Each of them knows the risk of registering to vote. They

decided to accept that risk and register anyway. Till, on the other hand, had no way of knowing that, allegedly, whistling to Carolyn Bryant would lead to his death because he was not used to that culture.

For the residents of Money, Till's murder also took away the sense of security that children would not be killed. Ma Pearl tells Rose she needs to be baptized: "It's time. Past time. You thirteen. Should've been down in the water befo' you was twelve. Ain't nothing certain. You see that boy dead at fo'teen. That could be you" (197). Although unsure if she is ready to be baptized, Rose concedes, admitting, "Ma Pearl was right about one thing. I had felt as if I had all the time in the world—until the Chicago boy was killed. With the way colored folks were being murdered in Mississippi, I knew I needed to give a little thought to my soul" (198). Till's murder forces children, like Rose, to confront their own mortality. This new concept that none of the children is safe prompts a sermon at Rose's church to attempt to lead children in the church to baptism. Reverend Mims shouts, "Y'all young folks better be ready to meet the Lawd at any time. When death come to look for souls, he ain't looking at nobody's age. He'll take ya at eighty-four, sixty-four, twenty-four, fourteen, or even four. Yes, he take babies, too. He'll take you whether you a man or a woman, boy or girl, white or Black. He'll take you whether you live in Mississippi or just visiting" (212). In that same sermon, Mims asks, "Y'all think that boy from Chicago was ready to die? Y'all think he would've followed them white mens outta his uncle's house if he knowed they was go'n kill him? That boy didn't come to Miss'sippi to die. [...] Instead he saw the bottom of the Tallahatchie River" (213-14). Because of Mims words, Rose's brother, Fred Lee, makes the decision to be baptized. They have never felt a sense of urgency in choosing to declare their faith in this way, but they also have never been confronted with the possibility of such a sudden death, like Till's. The afterlife

becomes more important to Rose and Fred Lee than before because they realized how dangerous Mississippi really is.

Despite the clear injustice done to Till, many people blamed him for his murder because of the alleged whistle. Particularly, many older African-American people at Rose's church placed the blame on Till. Reverend Jenkins addresses the older generation's blame on Till, preaching,

I understand there's a certain bond between the older Negroes and the whites, but we're living in a new time, and Mississippi needs to change with the times. Respect is something I agree with, but the constant bowing down to whites because of Jim Crow scare tactics has got to stop. True, the young man had no business whistling at Mrs. Bryant, but not because she's white and he was a Negro, but because he was a fourteen-year-old boy and she is a grown, married woman. That's the kind of respect we need to teach our children. Respect for their elders, respect for authority, respect for their fellow human beings. Not respect based on some antiquated Southern way of life. (240)

Before Till's lynching, many people in the older generation were more easily define what would and what would not result in violence. Now that Till has been murdered, the lines that once seemed clear to them have become blurred, allowing messages and discussions like these to happen.

African-American media sources were allowed into the courtroom during the trial of Till's murderers (237). There were Black witnesses, bravely testifying against Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam (246). For the first time, the African-American community was hopeful that justice would be served in Mississippi; unfortunately, Bryant and Milam were found innocent. Rose

claims, “For as long as I live, I don’t think I’ll ever forget the looks on Aunt Belle’s and Monty’s faces when they walked through the front door. It was as if they had returned from a funeral. In a sense, I guess it could’ve been considered a funeral, seeing how hope had died that day” (258). Rose continues, “Defeated. That’s what we were. Every last Negro, not just in Mississippi, but in the nation. Even the northern Negroes, with their entourage of cameras and notebooks, NAACP leaders and prominent members, congressmen and dignitaries, couldn’t defeat the Jim Crow ways of Mississippi” (259). People expected injustice in Mississippi, but people also believed that having the kind of media and press coverage Till’s case did would make a difference. Till’s murder seemed so clear; everyone knew Bryant and Milam had lynched Till. The Mississippi justice system, on the other hand, thought differently. Rose claims, “Mississippi makes its own rules, and nobody can make us do otherwise, not the NAACP, not the Negro press, not even the president of the United States. We can kill all the Negroes we want. You can make us have a trial, but you can’t make us find our white citizens guilty” (265). It was this defeat that sparked a movement across the nation.

After Till’s murder, Rose’s Aunt Belle offers to take her to St. Louis to live with her, an opportunity for which Rose has been yearning. Shockingly, Rose decides to stay in Mississippi to fight for Civil Rights. Jackson concludes her book with Rose’s stating, “A chill came over me at the thought. But then, right there, the warmth of the Mississippi sun crossed my face while a single leaf fluttered down and brushed my cheek. I opened my eyes and stared down at the leaf that had landed in my lap. It was still green, with hints of yellow. Yes, a change was coming. And I, Rosa Lee Carter, would be right there to be a part of it” (308). Rose feels a sense of belonging to the land and understands that she has a right to be there.

In telling Till's story, Jackson takes an intersectional approach, looking not only at race but also gender. Rose constantly faces abuse because of her skin tone from her family. Discrimination not based on race but rather based on darkness of skin is known as "colorism" or "shadeism." Rose's being labeled an outcast does not come from the outside; instead, it is her own family that berates her. She has been judged on her skin tone since her birth: "Folks said that when I first came out of Mama, my skin was as pink as a flower. Mama said she took one look at me and declared, 'I'm go'n call you Rose, 'cause you so pretty like one.' But Ma Pearl said, 'Don't set yo' hopes high for that child, Anna Mae. Look at them ears. They as black as tar. By this time next year, that lil' gal go'n be blacker than midnight without a moon, just like her daddy'" (36). At first, her skin is praised only because it is light. Then, immediately she is compared to tar. This description is important because it reinforces the idea that white is equivalent to beautiful. She continues: "And according to Aunt Clara Jean, I was the ugliest little something Stillwater, Mississippi had ever seen" (36), solely because she is the darkest.

Aside from the emotional toll that being the family outcast takes on Rose, being the darkest forces more physical responsibility on her as well. Unlike her lighter-skinned cousin, Queen, Rose is forced to work in the cotton fields. She explains: "Of course, my dark skin is what sentenced me to the field. 'Queen too light to be out there in that heat,' Ma Pearl always claimed. But like Goldilocks's claim about Baby Bear's porridge, my dark complexion was just right" (36). The field is the only acceptable place for her to be. According to Rose, Queen is "light enough to pass for white [...] and [...] her long hair never needed the heat of a straightening comb" (35). The difference in their skin tones not only affects their daily treatment, but it also changes how each of them experiences the world. Till's death affects Rose much more than it impacts Queen because Rose does not have the security of passing. Although

Queen does not pass in Money, she is given preferential treatment by the white community and could pass if she were to go to another city. While Queen can avoid mistreatment, Rose cannot escape her darker skin tone. When Rose finds out Till is missing, she is sick and shaking, but Queen is more concerned about her dinner not being ready. Rose, accusing Queen of being selfish, asks if she ever thinks of anyone else (151). Queen responds, “Niggas oughta quit acting a fool round here. Nothing I can do ’bout him missing. He probably somewhere hanging in a tree by now anyways” (151). Her rhetoric suggests that Queen does not view herself as a part of the Black culture in Mississippi. Rose, on the other hand, is deeply affected by Queen’s words: “Fear gripped me and wouldn’t let go. What if Queen was right?” (151). Their different experiences are important because shadeism and colorism are an aspect of the Black female identity that is not often discussed in young adult literature.

Rose’s complexion not only affects her daily life as she is put in the fields, but she also feels that her dark skin is why her mother left her. Her mother, who is described as “tall, shapely, caramel complexioned, and movie-star beautiful,” leaves Rose and her brother Fred Lee when she marries a wealthy man (14). Although she abandons her own two children and sends them to live with her mother, Ma Pearl, she raises her husband’s two children, Sugar and Li’ Man. Both Sugar and Li’ Man are light skinned. Rose thinks that if she and her brother had been lighter, her mother would not have abandoned them. Rose states, “Every night after I finished reciting the Lord’s Prayer to Ma Pearl, I prayed earnestly, ‘Jesus, please let me wake up in the morning with bright skin and long hair like Sugar’s.’ But every morning I woke with the same chocolate complexion and short, nappy hair I had the day Mama left. I finally gave up on the prayer after two years and two seriously callused knees” (23-4).

Although Rose may have stopped praying, she does not stop hoping for lighter skin. Even in the African-American community, her dark skin is considered ugly. Rose claims, “I didn’t see one picture of a woman with dark skin among those listed as ‘the most beautiful women in Negro society.’ Also in *Jet* I saw an advertisement for a product that could make my skin light. After that, I started bleaching my skin with the stuff Aunt Clara Jean used to keep her complexion ‘even’” (168). There was never any celebration for dark, Black women. The only celebration is of light complexions and advertisements of products that could lighten skin. A woman could not be dark and pretty. To be beautiful, the darkness has to be removed. Rose continues: “I’d return home thinking that in no time at all, my skin would be pretty and caramel like the rest of the women in my family, with the exception of Aunt Ruthie. Of course, just like the prayer, the cream didn’t work, as it had to be used daily in order to see results” (168). Rose is being excluded by her own family and community.

When asked why she chose to have Rose’s family treat her harshly for her blackness instead of from the outside, Linda Jackson responded:

The teasing of Rose’s skin color from within comes from personal experience. African-American girls, more so than boys, are usually teased, or even devalued, based on the darkness of their skin tones. [...] Most of my siblings have a dark complexion, yet I was singled out and teased about it. This, in itself, confused me. When I asked my mom about it during my teens years, she said it was probably because I was born dark whereas my siblings were born “lighter” then darkened as they got older.

Jackson also explained how her story would have been different if Rose had been lighter claiming, “Had I chosen to give Rose a light complexion, then I suppose I would have either

made her equal to Queen or I would have left Queen out of the story altogether.” To Jackson, the light skin would mean an instantaneous change in status for Rose. Jackson shares how colorism and shadeism function within the Black community stating:

Often times people will try to make darker girls feel better by calling them a “pretty brown girl” or a “pretty chocolate girl” or sometimes even a “pretty little black girl.” This is where Jacqueline Woodson got the title for her memoir *Brown Girl Dreaming*. Her grandmother, I think, often referred to her as a pretty brown girl.

But what people don't realize when they are saying this is that they are showing to black girls the contradiction: a dark girl is not supposed to be pretty, so if you are then you are an exception to the rule.

The idea of being an exception only excludes darker women rather than including them. Jackson feels so strongly about having a more inclusive community that she has actively addressed shadeism in her own life. She discusses a time she decided to stand against this hurtful rhetoric:

I recently asked a grandmother, whom I felt comfortable saying this to, to stop referring to her granddaughter as a “pretty little chocolate girl.” I explained to her what I just said to you: By combining chocolate with pretty, she is saying that even for a dark girl, you are pretty. I also told her that just the week before, I had heard a lady speak about this and she said that she was often referred to as a pretty chocolate girl when she was growing up. She said she found it confusing that she never heard anyone refer to her lighter-skinned relatives as pretty vanilla girls. They were simply pretty girls.

The mistreatment of Rose serves not only to educate young readers about the discrimination darker young Black women face, but it also shows Rose's empowering journey to self-acceptance. Self-acceptance leads Rose to realize she is worth advocating for, furthering Jackson's intersectional inclusion.

Although shadeism may seem like a widely discussed theme as it is a common experience Black women are subjected to, there is a shocking lack of diversity in the young adult writing and publishing industry. In "Diversity in Book Publishing Isn't Just about Writers—Marketing Matters, Too," NPR's Jean Ho explains the results of a study that focused on diversity in the publishing industry. Ho states, "In Marketing and Publicity, 77 percent were white. These are people who make decisions on how to position books to the press and to consumers, and if and where to send authors on tour — critical considerations in the successful launching of any publication. For writers of color, the lack of diversity in book publicity departments can feel like a death knell." While there is a lack of diversity, the number of diverse writers and multicultural works are beginning to grow. Ho explains, "Over the past 20 years, the number of multicultural books has hovered around ten percent, with a sudden surge in 2015 to 20 percent." Because of the lack of Black female representation, Jackson's work becomes even more valuable as so many young, Black girls cannot find literature that reflects their own experience.

Despite being constantly belittled and berated, Rose manages to see that being dark does not mean that she is not beautiful. There is only one other person in her family who is dark, her Aunt Ruthie. Everyone thinks that she is beautiful, but Rose cannot understand how men are attracted to her even though she is dark. Rose proclaims:

I knew Aunt Ruthie was pretty. [...] For the same reason I couldn't think of myself as pretty—my own grandmother had made me feel ashamed of my

complexion, saying I was as black as midnight without a moon. But I had to remember my own strange words to Hallelujah on the night before the murder trial ended: *stars can't shine without darkness*. And I was determined that one day, instead of fretting over being as dark as midnight without a moon, I would shine as bright as the morning star—which, Reverend Jenkins told us, is the planet Venus and is also a sign of hope. (305)

If her Aunt Ruthie is beautiful, then so is Rose. She is determined not to be self-conscious because of her skin tone. Even though her own family may never accept her because of her complexion, Rose has come to accept herself.

Rose also comes to terms with God explaining, “I believed in God even though he didn’t answer my prayer and make me pretty like Queen and Sugar. As I grew older, I realized what a silly prayer it was anyway. God didn’t care what I looked like. He didn’t care what any of us looked like. [...] It didn’t matter how dark my skin was or how nappy my hair, I was still somebody” (277-78). Being dark does not make her any less of a person. While this may seem fundamental for many readers, it is deeply impactful. Jackson manages to include Rose’s journey of self-acceptance and encourages young Black women in particular to accept themselves.

Through Rose, readers experience the summer of 1955 in the Mississippi Delta. Jackson uses Rose to relate the importance of Till’s case, which changed the way everyone in Mississippi viewed their own personal safety and the safety of their children. While being the target of violence was a risk that was assumed along with being Black in Mississippi during this time, everyone felt that visitors were safe; Emmett’s murder destroyed that assumption. His murder also affected children differently than other murders had, which is evident in that Rose, her

siblings, and cousins are baptized partially out of fear that they could die —suddenly and unexpectedly—at the hands of racial injustice. The intense, emotional reaction children had regarding Till’s murder is also exemplified by Rose’s newfound determination to become an activist. The other murders related to voter registration did not push her to advocate for herself in the way that Till’s does. In telling the history of Emmett Till, Jackson manages to tie in the struggles specific to darker Black girls, especially in the South. Rose faces verbal abuse related to shadeism and colorism not only from outside her family but also from within her family. Learning to accept and love herself is not simple, but Rose manages to gain confidence. Jackson is advocating specifically for young women and is taking an intersectional approach to Till’s case by making the movement more inclusive of young Black women.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Young adult fiction is often overlooked by critics, but it should be brought to the forefront of literary study. This branch of literature can expose children to historical events, tragedies, and help shape their political opinions. Nelson, Collins, and Jackson expose young adults to Emmett Till's murder in a way that other authors have neglected to examine. While different from one another, each calls for readers to practice a more inclusive, intersectional feminism and activism. While the authors' goals are similar, they are also distinctly different. Nelson's goal is to make her readers more socially conscious of the injustice that surrounds them. Instead of simply advocating for one particular cause or movement, she is asking her audience to speak out against the ultimate enemy, fear. She does employ maternal empathy like Brooks and Lorde, but she uses it in a completely different way for an entirely separate purpose. Instead of appealing to adult mothers or women, she appeals to her readers to put themselves in Till's place. Giving examples of current events and historical atrocities, she is able to draw connections between the motives of Bryant and Milam and every other group who has committed evil acts.

Unlike Nelson, Collins and Jackson choose to immerse young readers in novels told from the perspectives of teens. Collins chooses to recreate Till's murder in a fictional, dystopian society through the character Rue. She also employs maternal empathy, but she does it through her character Katniss's taking on the role of Till-Mobley. There are numerous similarities between Rue and Till, the most notable being the parallels between their murders and the aftermath. Like Till's murder, Rue's fuels the entire movement that occurs after, with Katniss at the forefront. Rue provides motivation for people to end the Hunger Games when many other

murders did not. By having Katniss advocate for Rue, Collins creates a movement that is intersectional, asking women to advocate for other women, regardless of race.

Jackson also takes an intersectional approach, with a specific focus on shadeism and colorism. She takes her readers to 1955 Mississippi through the eyes of Rose. While many people understand the effect that Till's murder had on the Civil Rights Movement, they do not often consider how his murder affected children specifically. Part of Jackson's purpose is teaching her audience that being an activist is dangerous and comes with repercussions that people would not necessarily consider today. By having Rose learn to accept and love herself, her skin, and gain the confidence to advocate for herself, Jackson is telling readers that dark skin is beautiful and her readers need to be more inclusive of darker Black women.

While other young adult authors have written about Till and tried to encourage activism or better explain his story, the feminist angle offers a unique opportunity. The United States is still in the midst of racial injustices and discrimination, with the murders of young black men inspiring new movements, such as the Black Lives Matter movement. Many of these cases center on police brutality, showing that the United States has not progressed as expected when children, like Till, are still in great danger, simply because of their skin color. At the same time, women are also facing discrimination, with a disturbing number of women being raped, domestically abused, or even murdered just because of their gender. The prevalence of sexual assault has now sparked the Me Too movement and others. Movements like Me Too and Black Lives Matter are treated separately, but fusing them together, with an intersectional approach could make them all stronger. Instead of advocating for only one marginalized group, people should advocate for both, taking special note of the problems facing Black women specifically.

Students may not fully understand the different facets of these works on their own; however, with proper guidance from a teacher, each could be used in a classroom to discuss both current events and introduce young adults to the story of Emmett Till. Although my work has focused on an intersectional approach to Till's case, he is becoming a more popular topic in young adult literature. Two prominent young adult novels about Till written by male authors are *Mississippi Trial, 1955* (2003) by Chris Crowe and *Simeon's Story: An Eyewitness Account of the Kidnapping of Emmett Till* (2011) by Simeon Wright and Herb Boyd. Crowe's novel is told from the perspective of sixteen year old Hiram, a white teenager with a Civil Rights minded grandfather. While his novel does encourage activism in young adult readers and does cross racial boundaries, it is still male centered and tends to exclude the young women. Wright's story is of his own account as he was a witness to the Emmett Till case. His main focus is to tell who Till was as a person, but the larger focus is to clarify Till's actions. Simeon does acknowledge that Till's behavior was potentially risky for Mississippi, it was not aggressive. This aspect of Till's case is important, but it does not encourage any sort of activism; instead, it calls for readers to reevaluate what they feel they know about Till's case. Both works are important in preserving Till's literary memory, but their goals are dramatically different from those of current female writers. Another notable work that could be incorporated into the classroom is *Anne and Emmett*, a play by Janet Langhart Cohen (2009) that is a fictionalized conversation between Anne Frank and Emmett Till. This would pair well with *A Wreath for Emmett Till*, as Nelson incorporates the Holocaust into her work.

Through young adult fiction, Nelson, Collins, and Jackson are able to advocate a more intersectional, inclusive feminism. Nelson's work encourages readers to stand up against fear, which has led to the most violent, evil acts in the world. If more people stood against fear, every

group would be protected. Collins encourages readers—especially female readers—to advocate for each other regardless of race or ethnicity. Jackson brings attention to colorism and the discrimination that darker women face, and teaches her audience that they are beautiful, worthy, and can be confident like her character, Rose. It is important that they incorporate Till's case specifically because his lynching propelled the Civil Rights Movement more than almost any other single event. His murder made people choose to become activists when they otherwise might not have. It is important to keep his memory alive to remind readers not only to memorialize him but also to show readers how one event, one child, managed to change the world. With feminist perspectives, these authors have reintroduced Emmett Till to a new generation and are teaching readers that each of them has the power to impact the world, too.

WORKS CITED

- Adams, Noah. "Emmett Till and the Impact of Images." *NPR*, NPR, 23 June 2004, www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1969702.
- Anderson, David, and Marilyn Nelson. "An Interview with Marilyn Nelson." *African American Review*, vol. 43, no. 2/3, 2009, pp. 383–395. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41328615.
- Brooks, Gwendolyn. "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters In Mississippi. Meanwhile, A Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon." *PoemHunter.com*, 31 Dec. 2003, <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-bronzeville-mother-loiters-in-mississippi-mean//>.
- Collins, Suzanne. *Catching Fire*. New York: Scholastic, 2009.
- Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. New York: Scholastic, 2008.
- Collins, Suzanne. *Mockingjay*. New York: Scholastic, 2010.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol. 1989, no. 1, ser. 8, 1989, pp. 139–167. 8, <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf>
- Crowe, Chris. *Getting Away with Murder: The True Story of the Emmett Till Case*. New York: Phyllis Fogelman Books, 2003. Print.
- Crowe, Chris. *Mississippi trial, 1955*. New York, Speak/Penguin Group, 2003. Print.
- Dawkins, Laura . "It could have been my Son: Maternal Empathy in Gwendolyn Brooks's and Audre Lorde's Till Poems." *Emmett Till in Literary Memory and Imagination*, Louisiana State University Press, 2008, pp. 112–127.

Ho, Jean. "Diversity In Book Publishing Isn't Just About Writers - Marketing Matters, Too." *NPR*, NPR, 9 Aug. 2016,
www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/08/09/483875698/diversity-in-book-publishing-isnt-just-about-writers-marketing-matters-too.

Jackson, Linda Williams. *Midnight without a Moon*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017.

Jones, Claire. "Re: Questions about Midnight without a Moon for my Thesis." Message to Linda Jackson. 1 November 2017. Email.

Linder, Douglas. "The Emmett Till Murder Case: A Chronology." *The Emmett Till Murder Case: A Chronology*. Web. 20 Oct. 2015.
<<http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/till/emmettillchrono.html>>.

Lorde, Audre. "Afterimages by Audre Lorde." *Poetry Foundation*, Poetry Foundation,
www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42582/afterimages.

"Mamie Till Mobley 1920-2002." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 39, 2003, pp. 89–89. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3134389.

Nelson, Marilyn. *A Wreath for Emmett Till*. Turtleback Books, 2009.

Norris, Michelle. "Interview: Stanley Nelson discusses the 1955 murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till in Mississippi and his mother, Mamie, who persisted in keeping his case alive up until her death yesterday." *All Things Considered*, 7 Jan. 2003. *Literature Resource Center*,
http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A162002149/LitRC?u=tel_a_etsul&sid=LitRC&xid=3596cc15.

Ransby, Barbara. "Remembering Mamie Till Mobley, Tireless Crusader for Civil Rights." *The Progressive / Peace and Social Justice since 1909*, *The Progressive*, 20 Jan. 2003.

“Rue | Definition of Rue in English by Oxford Dictionaries.” *Oxford Dictionaries / English*,
Oxford Dictionaries, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/rue>.

“Till | Definition of till in English by Oxford Dictionaries.” *Oxford Dictionaries / English*,
Oxford Dictionaries, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/till>.

Till-Mobley, Mamie, and Chris Benson. *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That
Changed America*. New York: Random House, 2003.

Tyson, Timothy B. *The Blood of Emmett Till*. Simon et Schuster, 2017.

Wright, Simeon, and Herb Boyd. *Simeons Story: an Eyewitness Account of the Kidnapping of
Emmett Till*. Lawrence Hill Books, 2011.

VITA

CLAIRE JONES

Education: Public Schools, Seymour, Tennessee
B.A. English, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City,
Tennessee 2014
M.A. English, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City,
Tennessee 2018

Professional Experience: Information Research Technician II, Honors College at East
Tennessee State University, 2016-Present
Executive Aide, Office of Assessment at East Tennessee State
University, 2016
Transcript Analyst, Office of Undergraduate Admissions at East
Tennessee State University, 2014-2016