



The Execution of Willie Francis: Race, Murder, and the Search for Justice in the American South

Gilbert King

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On May 3, 1946, in St. Martinsville, Louisiana, a seventeen-year-old black boy was scheduled for execution by electric chair. Willie Francis had been charged with murder; his trial had been brief; his death sentence never in doubt. When the executioners flipped the switch, Willie screamed and writhed as electricity coursed through his body. But Willie Francis did not die.

Having miraculously survived, Willie was informed that the state would attempt to execute him a second time within a week. The ensuing legal battle went all the way to the Supreme Court, asking: Could the state electrocute someone twice? A gripping narrative about a brutal crime and its shocking aftermath, *The Execution of Willie Francis* offers a heroic—and ultimately tragic—tale of one man's quest for moral justice in a nation still blinded by race.



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