



Mourners pass Emmett Till's casket in Chicago on Sept. 3, 1955. Till, 14, was kidnapped, tortured and lynched by a White mob for whistling at a White woman in Mississippi.

By [DeNeen L. Brown](#)

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JACKSON, Miss. — Since 2000, there have been at least eight suspected lynchings of Black men and teenagers in Mississippi, according to court records and police reports.

“The last recorded lynching in the United States was in 1981,” said Jill Collen Jefferson, a lawyer and founder of Julian, a civil rights organization named after the late civil rights leader Julian Bond. “But the thing is, lynchings never stopped in the United States. Lynchings in Mississippi never stopped. The evil bastards just stopped taking photographs and passing them around like baseball cards.”

[\[Mississippi's history of lynchings haunts grieving mother\]](#)

Jefferson was born in Jones County, Miss., which was an epicenter of the Ku Klux Klan's reign of terror during the civil rights movement. “Coming from Mississippi and seeing stuff intersect, talking about this stuff is like talking about what happened down the road,” said Jefferson, a Harvard Law School graduate who trained as a civil justice investigator with Bond.

In 2017, Jefferson began compiling records of Black people found hanging or mutilated across the country. In 2019, Jefferson began focusing her investigation on Mississippi. In each case she investigated, law enforcement officials ruled the deaths suicides, but the families said the victims had been lynched.

Historically, lynchings were often defined as fatal hangings by mobs, often acting with impunity and in an extrajudicial capacity to create racial terror. Crowds of White people often gathered in town squares or on courthouse lawns to watch Black people be lynched.

From 1877 to 1950, more than 4,000 Black men, women and children were lynched in cities and towns across the country, according to the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), a human rights organization based in Montgomery, Ala., which opened the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in 2018 to honor thousands of lynching victims. During that period, Mississippi recorded 581, the highest number of lynchings recorded by state.

Historians say lynchings often evoke the image of public hangings, however EJI and the NAACP expanded that definition to include any extrajudicial racial terror killing and mutilation committed to uphold racial

segregation and a false premise of racial hierarchy.

The NAACP defines lynchings as “the public killing of an individual who has not received” due process under the law.

During her investigation focusing intensely on Mississippi, Jefferson began seeing patterns in the deaths and connecting the dots in recent cases of Black people found hanging.

“There is a pattern to how these cases are investigated,” Jefferson said. “When authorities arrive on the scene of a hanging, it’s treated as a suicide almost immediately. The crime scene is not preserved. The investigation is shoddy. And then there is a formal ruling of suicide, despite evidence to the contrary. And the case is never heard from again unless someone brings it up.”

Each day, Jefferson works on that list of eight suspected hangings — including the 2018 hanging Willie Andrew Jones Jr. — trying to bring justice to grieving families. The following are eight of those victims.

Raynard Johnson, 17

JUNE 16, 2000

Raynard Johnson was found hanging from a pecan tree in his front yard in Kokomo,

Miss. The Mississippi Bureau of Investigation called the hanging a suicide, according to records. But his family believes Johnson was lynched, Jefferson said.

In 2000, the Rev. Jesse Jackson traveled to Mississippi to call attention to Johnson's hanging.

"There's enough circumstantial stuff here that warrants a serious investigation. We will not rest until those who committed this murder are brought to justice," Jackson told demonstrators before leading a march to the pecan tree where Raynard was found. "We reject the suicide theory."

In February 2001, the Justice Department announced it ended its investigation into Johnson's death: "The evidence does not support a federal criminal civil rights prosecution."

Raynard's mother, Maria Johnson, says she is still waiting for some kind of justice. "My son's death marked the modern age of a fight that Black people have been in in Mississippi and this nation for centuries," Johnson said. "They tried to cover this up, but I've never given up hope. And that's the thing that should scare them, because I never will."

JAN. 9, 2003

Three years later, Nick Naylor, 23, was found hanging from a tree about 11 miles from his house in Porterville, Miss. A dog chain was wrapped around his neck. Police ruled the death a suicide, but an attorney for the family said it was a lynching.

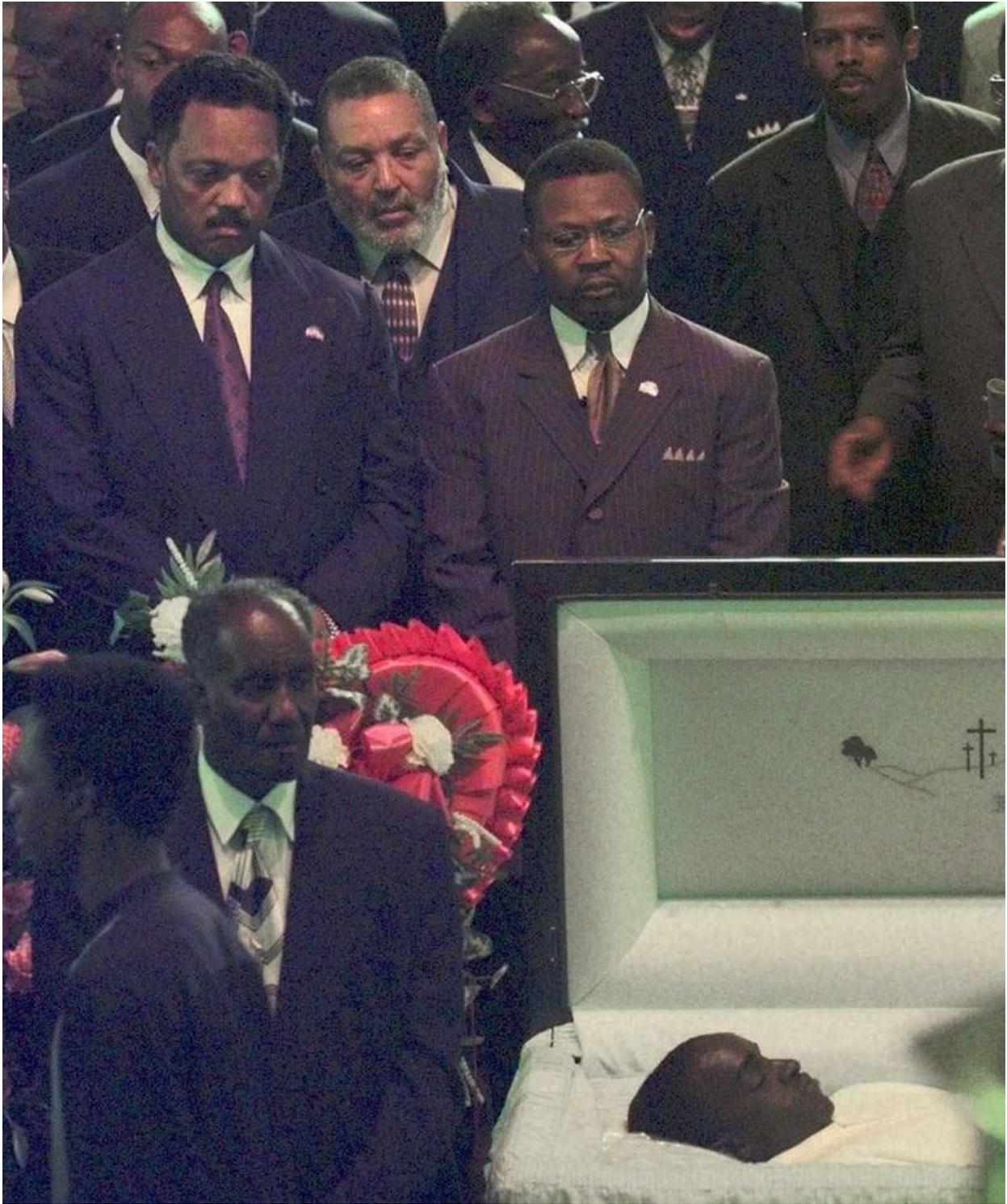
“Every time someone loses their life in a hate crime, it opens up the wound,” said Lequicha Naylor, 43, Naylor’s sister. “We have no closure. His killers are probably still around here, walking around. I have little Black boys. I’ve got grand boys — kids walking around the same place where my brother got hung. And we had tell them what happened for their own protection. One thing we always wonder is what they did to him before he died.”

Roy Veal, 55

APRIL 22, 2004

A year later, Roy Veal, was found hanging from a pecan tree near Woodville, Miss. Relatives said Veal was found with a hood over his head. A state police spokesman told reporters Veal’s death was “consistent with suicide.” Relatives said they believed Veal, who had returned to Mississippi to fight for his family’s land, was lynched. A spokesman for the sheriff’s office in Woodville said the case is with the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation.





LEFT: The Rev. Jesse Jackson holds the branch of a pecan tree on July 8, 2000, the site where Raynard Johnson was found hanging from a belt in Kokomo, Miss., on June 16, 2000. RIGHT: The Rev. Jesse Jackson is joined by ministers from across Mississippi for the funeral of Raynard Johnson in Sandy Hook, Miss., on June 27, 2000.

Frederick Jermaine Carter, 26

DEC. 3, 2010

Frederick Jermaine Carter was found hanging from a tree limb in a White neighborhood in Greenwood, Miss. The state medical examiner ruled Carter's death a suicide. Relatives called it a lynching and demanded for a federal investigation.

Derrick Johnson, then-state president of the Mississippi NAACP, told reporters that the community had "lost all confidence in the ability of local law enforcement to investigate" the case of Carter's hanging. He called on the Justice Department to investigate.

A spokesperson for the department declined to comment on the case.

The day before Carter was found dead, he had been working with his stepfather on a painting project. Relatives said he disappeared after his stepfather went to buy more paint.

"Not knowing what happened is a torment," Brenda Carter-Evans told reporters in 2010. "I need to know what happened to my son."

Craig Anderson, 49

JUNE 26, 2011

One of the most graphic examples of a modern-day racial terror killing occurred on June 26, 2011, when 10 white teenagers killed 49-year-old James Craig Anderson in Jackson, Miss.

The teenagers, who according to court records, decided to “go f---k with some n---s,” ran over Anderson in a parking lot while yelling “white power.”

That night two carloads of White teenagers drove into a motel parking lot where they spotted Anderson, according to records. Some teens jumped out of the cars and started beating Anderson, in an attack captured on a surveillance video.

In March 2012, three of the teenagers — identified as Deryl Dedmon, John Rice and Dylan Butler — pleaded guilty in federal district court to charges of conspiracy and committing a hate crime.

During a sentencing hearing, U.S. District Judge Carlton Reeves connected the killing of Anderson to the state’s gruesome history of lynchings, telling the courtroom that “a toxic mix of alcohol, foolishness and unadulterated hatred caused these young people to resurrect the nightmarish specter of lynchings and lynch mobs from the Mississippi we long forget.”

Reeves said the group of White teenagers targeted Black neighborhoods in Jackson, “for the sole purpose of harassing, terrorizing, physically assaulting and causing bodily injury to Black folk.”

The “marauders,” the judge said, prowled the community. “They recruited and encouraged others to join in the coordinated chaos; and they boasted about their shameful activity,” Reeves said. “This was a 2011 version of the n----- hunts.”

“Mississippi has expressed its savagery in a number of ways throughout its history, slavery being the cruelest example,” Reeves said, “but a close second being Mississippi’s infatuation with lynchings.”

Otis Byrd, 54

MARCH 19, 2015

Otis Byrd, who had been missing since March 2, 2015, was found hanging from a tree on March 19, 2015, in Port Gibson, Miss.

The Claiborne County sheriff’s office said Byrd was found with a bedsheet wrapped around his neck. Byrd had been convicted in 1980 of murder in the death of a White woman, according to the Mississippi Department of Corrections. He had been paroled in 2006.

The FBI and the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division launched an investigation. In 2015, the Justice Department released a statement regarding Byrd's death saying that investigators had found no foul play.

"After a careful and thorough review, a team of experienced federal prosecutors and FBI agents determined that there was no evidence to prove that Byrd's death was a homicide," the Justice Department said.

Phillip Carroll, 22

MAY 28, 2017

Phillip Carroll was found hanging from a tree in Jackson, Miss. Police called the death a suicide. Early reports said Carroll had been found with his hands tied behind his back. Police denied that account.

"If there's any other information or evidence that anyone may have to make us believe that it may not be a suicide, again, we're open to any information and any evidence to aid us in the investigation," Jackson Police Commander Tyree Jones told reporters.

"But as of right now, we don't have anything other than the fact that his death has been ruled a suicide."

Deondrey Montreal Hopkins, 35

MAY 5, 2019

Deondrey Montreal Hopkins, who lived in Columbus, Miss., was found hanging from a tree on a bank of the Luxapallila Creek. Columbus Police Chief Fred Shelton said Hopkins's death was not a homicide.

The Justice Department declined to comment on the case.