

A Slow, Calculated Lynching: The Story of Clyde Kennard

Devery S. Anderson

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A Slow, Calculated Lynching is Devery S. Anderson's biography of Clyde Kennard, whose desire for an education and opportunities led to his gradual martyrdom.

Kennard was born in Mississippi in 1927; he grew up facing entrenched racism. Nonetheless, after serving in World War II and the Korean War, Kennard hoped to attend college. Because he was Black and in the South, his options were restricted. He faced Jim Crow laws; a corrupt, insular power structure; and the presence of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission. His attempts to enroll at Mississippi Southern College, with its all-white student body, made him the target of systematic opposition. He faced resistance from the college's administration, Mississippi's governor, and local judicial and law enforcement officials. Because Kennard had no criminal record, false accusations of theft were made, followed by a spurious trial and a prison sentence. Once Kennard became a convicted felon, he was disqualified by state law from attending any Mississippi college or university.

While incarcerated, Kennard began to experience symptoms of colon cancer. His medical needs were ignored, however, and he was forced to work on the prison labor farm. Though Kennard's cause attracted media attention and prominent supporters, his cancer continued to progress. He was released from jail in 1963 and died six months later.

Methodical yet impassioned, the book details the turbulent beginnings of the civil rights era in time with Kennard's story. It notes that, within a single violent decade, three egregious incidents took place in his home state: the 1955 abduction, beating, and lynching of Emmett Till; the 1963 assassination of NAACP organizer Medgar Evers; and the 1964 murders of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner.

Eventually, Mississippi honored Clyde Kennard's legacy; *A Slow, Calculated Lynching* makes a case for his broader recognition as an earnest, tenacious man who advocated for justice.

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