

# SIDE BY SIDE: Moonshine and Murder in Mississippi

T.J. Ray

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At the dawn of the twentieth century, America was a land of promise—and a land of segregation. Technology and innovation swept across the country—and criminals openly flouted the law. In Oxford, Mississippi, the tug-of-war between modernization and chaos was never as apparent as in 1901. When two federal marshals went to arrest moonshiner Will Mathis, the marshals never guessed they would be gruesomely murdered, their bodies burned. After a massive manhunt, Mathis—a white man—and Orlando Lester—a black man—were sentenced to death for the crime after multiple trials. Frenzied media and more than seven thousand people from across the nation descended on Oxford to see a black man and a white man hanged side by side.

Grippingly retold by master storyteller T. J. Ray, this riveting account draws on primary sources to breathe to life the words and thoughts of the criminals and their accomplices, families, and community. Side by Side is an engrossing exploration of the deeds of two men unequal in society's eyes, equal in death. More than that, it paints a larger picture of a nation torn between past and future, between prejudice and progress.



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