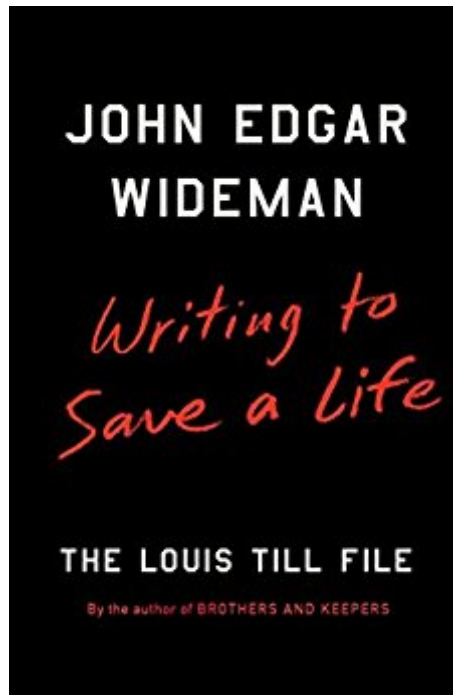




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# Writing To Save A Life: The Louis Till File



## Synopsis

An award-winning writer traces the life of the father of iconic Civil Rights martyr Emmett Till—a man who was executed by the Army ten years before Emmett's murder. An evocative and personal exploration of individual and collective memory in America by one of the most formidable Black intellectuals of our time. In 1955, Emmett Till, aged fourteen, traveled from his home in Chicago to visit family in Mississippi. Several weeks later he returned, dead; allegedly he whistled at a white woman. His mother, Mamie, wanted the world to see what had been done to her son. She chose to leave his casket open. Images of her brutalized boy were published widely. While Emmett's story is known, there's a dark side note that's rarely mentioned. Ten years earlier, Emmett's father was executed by the Army for rape and murder. In *Writing to Save a Life*, John Edgar Wideman searches for Louis Till, a silent victim of American injustice. Wideman's personal interaction with the story began when he learned of Emmett's murder in 1955; Wideman was also fourteen years old. After reading decades later about Louis's execution, he couldn't escape the twin tragedies of father and son, and tells their stories together for the first time. Author of the award-winning *Brothers and Keepers*, Wideman brings extraordinary insight and a haunting intimacy to this devastating story. An amalgam of research, memoir, and imagination, *Writing to Save a Life* is completely original in its delivery—an engaging and enlightening conversation between generations, the living and the dead, fathers and sons. Wideman turns seventy-five this year, and he brings the force of his substantial intellect and experience to this beautiful, stirring book, his first nonfiction in fifteen years.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I just do not like his writing style and it distracts from what he is trying to say. This one could have been written better. I have never been a fan and I am still not a fan.

Worth your time to read this book as Wideman explores and meditates in a broader historical and personal context black life, racism, history, crime and institutional shortcomings.

Very insightful. But the dialect and unusual approach took some getting used to.

Readers that have passion for civil and human rights of all people and students of history would love this book. Many well read people that kept up with current events didn't know that Emmet Till had a father Louis Till that was executed in the Army 13 years earlier under a unscrupulous court-martial that took place in a era and social environment of xenophobia. While John Edgar Wideman is a excellent, best selling writer, he narrated a drawn out story and made connecting the parallels of Emmet and Louis laborious. He doesn't get to the point, but rather, elongates the story going back and forth about son and father and the times each lived in instead of making the book more about Louis, the father and connecting from that point of view. In other words, about 3/4 in the book to the finish, you learn exclusively about Louis, the alleged criminal offense, the trial and about questionable "rush to judgement", sentencing; then, records of the trial in disarray for historians to piece together. Personally, the book could have been shorten. Otherwise, it was very enlightening. It brought another light into the world of African American men and how they were often times marginalized, labeled, ostracized, and often, looked upon as unworthy, untrusted, criminally inclined soldiers that had to be watched while doing overseas duty during WWII.

Very interesting! Included info I did not know about Emmet Till's father. Heart breaking story.

Poetic. You will want to read it out loud.

Simply a colossal work.

Writing to Save a Life: The Louis Till File authored by acclaimed award winning author John Edgar Wideman is a necessary and powerful tribute to the largely overlooked historical Emmett Till case. In 1955, Wideman was the same age as Emmett Till, when he saw the shocking horror of the civil rights martyr pictured in a magazine. The American Civil Rights movement and protests increased following Till's brutal murder when his killer's were exonerated in a Mississippi court of law and set free. The story of Louis Till was recalled in narrative details of the truth obtained from meticulous research of military records, the author traveled to France to visit Till's gravesite at a military cemetery. In a lyrical fictional account Till's young life is observed, meeting and dating his wife Mamie Till, and the routine observations as a private in the Army. On June 27, 1944, near the Italian town of Civitavecchia, where American soldiers were camped nearby, sirens sounded a false alarm, gunfire erupted as searchlights scanned the dark night sky. During this time, two Italian women were allegedly raped and another shot and killed. Two "colored" American Army privates Louis (NMI) Till and Fred A. McMurray were court martialed and hung for these crimes on July 2, 1945. The Till file is a disturbing haphazard inconsistent combination of documents in no chronological order, some were predictability missing. Wideman finds in the deafening silence of no statement given by Till at his execution, the fabrication of files layered with lies, a gross injustice and tragic loss of these innocent men. There was another true story, when the author returned to the site of his family heritage in Promiseland, S.C. The railroad tracks, the empty schoolhouse and vacant shanty's, the church where his grandfather preached, the graveyard where his people were laid to rest. The only thing that remained the same was his deepest unspoken fear of returning to the south. John Edgar Wideman has written a dozen bestselling books including: Philadelphia Fire, Brothers and Keepers, Fatheralong, Hoop Roots and Sent For You Yesterday. He resides in both New York and France. \* Also by Mamie Till-Mobley: Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America (2005 re-issue)

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