

A Note from  
CHS President Gary T. Johnson

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**November 2, 2005**  
***Without Sanctuary***

If you have not seen the special exhibition, [Without Sanctuary](#), you absolutely must come to the Chicago Historical Society and see it. The last day will be Saturday, December 4.

This haunting exhibition displays a collection of souvenir photographs and postcards recording lynching over almost a 100-year period. It also includes material relating to the killing of a Chicago youth, Emmett Till, 50 years ago during a visit to Mississippi.

You should brace yourself for before you begin – it is that disturbing. When I first saw it, I was overwhelmed by the power of the photographs, but it was the comments written by guests after seeing the exhibition that moved me the most.

These are some entries from just one section of one of our comment books. I will let the comments speak for themselves, but, again, I urge you to see this exhibition. I am very proud that my predecessor, Lonnie Bunch, arranged for us to show [Without Sanctuary](#), and I am proud of the work of its curator, Joy Bivins, and the contributions of the rest of our staff.

**Every page in the comments book says simply: "Share your thoughts."**

"It still hurts so much. May they all rest in peace."

"I agree that this exhibit needs to forever be shown around the country, so this never happens again. The people then were very cold-blooded. I will not say all, but, I will say some."

"I will remember Emmett Till and I will cherish his name and his mother's name as well for the sacrifices that they made for us as a people and a nation. May God bless the family of the Tills and may they be kept by the grace of God."

"The funny thing that happens with exhibits such as these, is that people walk in and walk out. They are disturbed by the brutality of history but recognize them as solely that: historical events that have no relevance or equal to the present. Unfortunately, this sentiment is not new, neither is it specific only to lynchings or racial violence. It might not be hard for us to separate them from us but what about finding the similarities. Lynchings were a part of mainstream American culture – what in present day American society will be condemned in decades and centuries to come, that we find so commonplace are embedded in our culture today, that we can't fathom its wrongness."

"We will always remember."

"Education isn't easy, fun, or fluffy all the time. Truth needs to come forward to eradicate ignorance. Only through information and learning can we remember the lives lost to brutality and fear and honor them accordingly."

"We have come long way in this country, but there are still many hills we must climb. Although racial violence and hatred is not as noticeable as it was many years ago, it still exists and we must work together as a nation to stop it."

"Viewing the horrors that existed before I was born makes me praise God for my family/elders who I did not know. It's a shame that my people who faced so much horrific terror & abuse, can't come to realize that today we shouldn't be inflicting similar types of physical/mental pain on each other. I'm saddened while believing that our modern day KKK has evolved to be ourselves. I think that many of my people need to view these horrors & ask themselves which side of God's creation are you on. The side that is producing & promotes prosperity & life or the side that perseveres on death & destruction."

"This is a very powerful exhibition. Only if our young black men could understand how beautiful it is to be privileged to have dignity instead of humility. Hopefully by me seeing this exhibition, I will pass along my thoughts and prayers to my students.... RIP My Kings & Queens of the Black Lynch Community."

"Billie Holiday first taught me part of the story, 50 years ago – not so long ago and far away, for here we are in 2005, with 'disturbing images' our national behavior still creates. We have a ways to go and a lot to learn, not so?"

"This exhibit was really hard for me to get through. I had to take it in two installments with a break in between where I sat and cried. The pictures weren't what disturbed me, alone, it was the descriptions complimenting the pictures that made me think if I didn't sit down I would throw up. I found it even more disgusting the miles on people's faces and the fact that someone stood in front of the lynching long enough to take a picture."

"It wasn't a long time ago.!"

"I'm 59. I went to church with Emmett Louis Till. 1955."

"Thank you for giving something for our children to remember."

"Please remember all those who suffered, and remember all those who are still being murdered and tortured today in the Middle East and Africa."

"Most revealing exhibit that I have ever seen."

"I wish people would listen to their hearts before acting to commit such monstrosities. I wish there was a simple way to ensure something like this will never happen again. But the road is long & hard, as any path worth following always is."

"Life changing experience."

"This is a moving exhibit. It reminds me of so many other atrocities in our past... and sadly, today. As we are at war in Iraq. The stories of torture from the prisons in Iraq – by Americans. These exhibits help educate all of us that our society must have balance... We must operate as a democracy and be 'innocent until proven guilty.' And then if proven guilty – treated with compassion and dignity."

"We are all God's children."

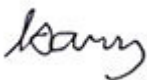
"All of the lost lives. And yet, racism persists."

"This exhibit cannot open America's eyes to the suffering of African Americans. Words cannot justify, a poem is not sufficient only pictures. God bless us all."

"I will always remember the Emmett Till story."

"This exhibit was very graphic. After a while of looking at the pictures I was ready to stop and not even finish viewing the exhibit. It was a little hard after a minute for me, but I got through it."

"Awed silence! Awed silence! Reverence for the dead!"



Gary T. Johnson  
CHS President