

“Strange Fruit”

This anti-lynching poem was written by Abel Meeropol, a teacher, songwriter, and member of the American Communist Party. He published it in a union publication in 1937 and then set it to music. It was most famously performed by Billy Holiday, who first sang “Strange Fruit” in 1939. After the conviction and execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg for espionage in 1953, during the early Cold War, Abel Meeropol and his wife Anne adopted and raised the Rosenberg’s two sons, Michael and Robert.

Southern trees bear a strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swingin' in the Southern breeze
Strange fruit hangin' from the poplar trees

Pastoral scene of the gallant South
The bulgin' eyes and the twisted mouth
Scent of magnolias sweet and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burnin' flesh

Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
For the sun to rot, for the tree to drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop