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The Silencing of Ruby McCollum: Race, Class, and Gender in the South

Tammy D. Evans

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On August 3, 1952, an African-American housewife, Ruby McCollum, drove to the office of Dr. C. LeRoy Adams with her two young children in tow and calmly gunned down the white doctor. According to public sentiment, it was an “argument over a medical bill.” Soon, a very different motive emerged, with McCollum alleging horrific mental and physical abuse at Adams’s hand. In reaction to these allegations and an increasingly intrusive media presence, the town quickly cobbled together what would become the public facade of Adams’s murder, and to ensure this would become the official version of events, prosecutors voiced multiple objections during her testimony to limit what she was allowed to say.

Tammy Evans analyzes the texts surrounding the affair to suggest that an imposed code of silence demands not only the construction of an official story but also the transformation of a community’s citizens into agents who will reproduce and perpetuate this version of events, improbable and unlikely though they may be. Evans finally allows Ruby McCollum’s voice to be heard.

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