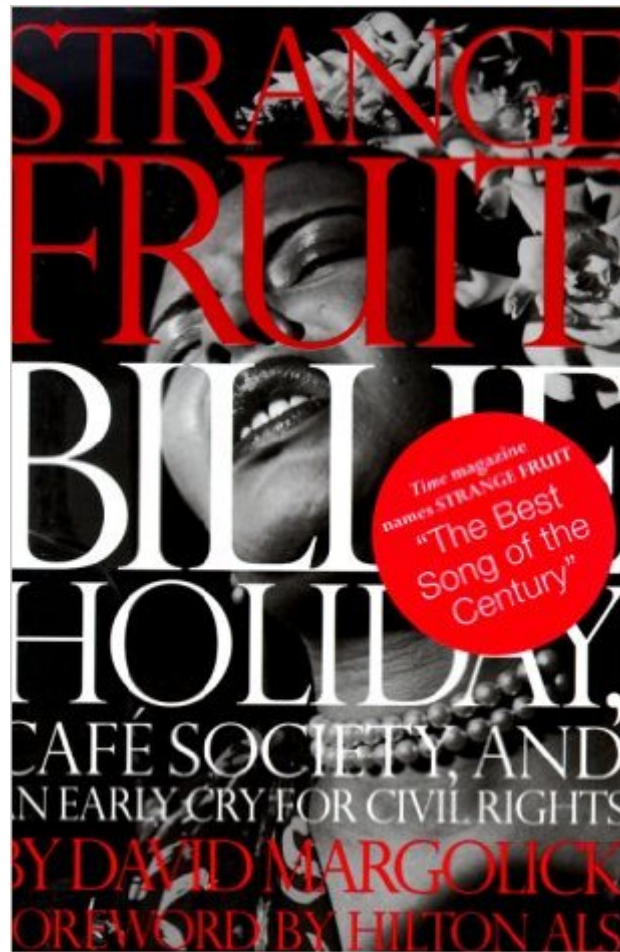


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Strange Fruit: Billie Holiday, Cafe Society, And An Early Cry For Civil Rights



Synopsis

From four-time Pulitzer Prize nominee David Margolick, *STRANGE FRUIT* explores the story of the memorable civil rights ballad made famous by Billie Holiday in the late 1930s. The song's powerful, evocative lyrics-written by a Jewish communist schoolteacher who, late in life, adopted the children of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg-portray the lynching of a black man in the South. Holiday's performances sparked conflict and controversy wherever she went, and the song has since been covered by Lena Horne, Tori Amos, Sting, and countless others. Margolick's careful reconstruction of the story behind the song, portions of which have appeared in *Vanity Fair*, includes a discography of "Strange Fruit" recordings as well as newly uncovered photographs that capture Holiday in performance at Greenwich Village's Caf  Society. A must for jazz aficionados.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It may seem odd to devote an entire book to a single song, but if ever a song demanded such an exploration, it's Billie Holiday's recording of *Strange Fruit*. Almost everyone thinks it's brilliant, yet few people listen to it often. Holiday makes this depiction of a lynching so real that the song is physically painful to listen to. To this day, it's rarely played on jazz-formatted radio stations. It's too disturbing. I've always wondered how Billie Holiday managed to get it recorded in 1939. Did radio stations play it? And where did she sing it? I simply could not imagine Lady Day, with a gardenia in her hair, singing such a horrifying song to people in a nightclub while they sipped martinis. And if she did, how did her audience react? The fascinating thing about this

book is that it not only answered my questions, it also raised many issues I hadn't thought about. David Margolick has collected comments and anecdotes about Strange Fruit and Holiday's performance from a wide variety of sources — musicians who worked with her, people who saw her perform the song at different time in her life, and contemporary singers who have recorded the song or performed it. What they say raises a lot of interesting questions about the relationship between art and politics, as well as the relationship between an artist and her art. The most fascinating and shocking thing to me was the number of people who worked with Billie Holiday who insist that her performance was a fluke, that she did not understand what she was singing. She was an uneducated, not terribly intelligent woman, her "friends" say, and didn't even know the meaning of the song's words. To anyone who has ever heard the song, that suggestion seems insane.

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