



## Blue Front: Poems

*Martha Collins*

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## **Blue Front: Poems** Martha Collins

**A stunning account of racism, mob violence, and cultural responsibility as rendered by the poet Martha Collins**

*the victim hanged, though not on a tree, this  
was not the country, they used a steel arch  
with electric lights, and later a lamppost, this  
was a modern event, the trees were not involved.*  
?from "Blue Front"

Martha Collins's father, as a five-year-old, sold fruit outside the Blue Front Restaurant in Cairo, Illinois, in 1909. What he witnessed there, with 10,000 participants, is shocking.

In *Blue Front*, Collins describes the brutal lynching of a black man and, as an afterthought, a white man, both of them left to the mercilessness of the spectators. The poems patch together an arresting array of evidence?newspaper articles, census data, legal history, postcards, photographs, and Collins's speculations about her father's own experience. The resulting work, part lyric and part narrative, is a bold investigation into hate, mob mentality, culpability, and what it means to be white in a country still haunted by its violently racist history.

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