

= Emmett Till =

Emmett Louis Till (July 25 , 1941 ? August 28 , 1955) was an African @-@ American teenager who was lynched in Mississippi at the age of 14 after reportedly flirting with a white woman .

Till was from Chicago , Illinois , and visiting relatives in Money , a small town in the Mississippi Delta region . He spoke to 21 @-@ year @-@ old Carolyn Bryant , the married proprietor of a small grocery store there . Several nights later , Bryant 's husband Roy and his half @-@ brother J. W. Milam went to Till 's great @-@ uncle 's house and abducted the boy . They took him away and beat and mutilated him before shooting him and sinking his body in the Tallahatchie River . Three days later , Till 's body was discovered and retrieved from the river .

Till 's body was returned to Chicago . His mother , who had mostly raised him , insisted on a public funeral service with an open casket to show the world the brutality of the killing . " The open @-@ coffin funeral held by Mamie Till Bradley exposed the world to more than her son Emmett Till 's bloated , mutilated body . Her decision focused attention not only on American racism and the barbarism of lynching but also on the limitations and vulnerabilities of American democracy " . Tens of thousands attended his funeral or viewed his casket and images of his mutilated body were published in black @-@ oriented magazines and newspapers , rallying popular black support and white sympathy across the U.S. Intense scrutiny was brought to bear on the condition of black civil rights in Mississippi , with newspapers around the country critical of the state . Although initially local newspapers and law enforcement officials decried the violence against Till and called for justice , they soon began responding to national criticism by defending Mississippians , which eventually transformed into support for the killers .

In September 1955 , Bryant and Milam were acquitted of Till 's kidnapping and murder . Protected against double jeopardy , Bryant and Milam publicly admitted in an interview with Look magazine that they killed Till . Problems identifying Till affected the trial , partially leading to Bryant 's and Milam 's acquittals , and the case was officially reopened by the United States Department of Justice in 2004 . As part of the investigation , the body was exhumed and autopsied resulting in a positive identification . He was reburied in a new casket , which is the standard practice in cases of body exhumation . His original casket was donated to the Smithsonian Institution .

The trial of Bryant and Milam attracted a vast amount of press attention . Till 's murder is noted as a pivotal catalyst to the next phase of the Civil Rights Movement . Events surrounding Emmett Till 's life and death , according to historians , continue to resonate . Some writers have suggested that almost every story about Mississippi returns to Till , or the region in which he died , in " some spiritual , homing way " .

= = Early childhood = =

Emmett Till was the son of Mamie Carthan (1921 ? 2003) and Louis Till (1922 ? 1945) . Emmett 's mother was born in the small Delta town of Webb , Mississippi . The Delta region encompasses the large , multi @-@ county area of northwestern Mississippi in the watershed of the Yazoo and Mississippi rivers . When Carthan was two years old , her family moved to Argo , Illinois , as part of the Great Migration of rural black families out of the South to the North to escape lack of opportunity and unequal treatment under the law . Argo received so many Southern migrants it was named " Little Mississippi " ; Carthan 's mother 's home was often used as a way station for people who had just moved from the South as they were trying to find jobs and housing . Mississippi was the poorest state in the U.S. in the 1950s , and the Delta counties were some of the poorest in Mississippi .

In Tallahatchie County , where Mamie Carthan was born , the average income per household in 1949 was \$ 690 (\$ 6 @, @ 755 in 2013 dollars) ; for black families it was \$ 462 (\$ 4 @, @ 523 in 2013 dollars) . Economic opportunities for blacks were almost nonexistent . Most of them were sharecroppers who lived on land owned by whites . Blacks had essentially been excluded from voting and the political system since the white @-@ dominated legislature passed a new constitution in 1890 , and had very few legal rights .

Till was born in Chicago and nicknamed " Bobo " as an infant by a family friend . His mother Mamie

largely raised him with her mother ; she and Louis Till separated in 1942 after she discovered he had been unfaithful . Louis later choked her to unconsciousness , to which she responded by throwing scalding water at him . For violating court orders to stay away from Mamie , Emmett 's father Louis was forced by a judge to choose between jail or enlisting in the U.S. Army in 1943 ; he was executed in Italy in 1945 after being convicted of rape and murder by a court @-@ martial . At the age of six Emmett contracted polio , leaving him with a persistent stutter . Mamie and Emmett moved to Detroit , where she met and married " Pink " Bradley in 1951 . Emmett preferred to live in Chicago , so he relocated to live with his grandmother ; his mother and stepfather rejoined him later that year . After the marriage dissolved in 1952 , Bradley returned to Detroit .

Mamie Till Bradley and Emmett lived together in a busy neighborhood in Chicago 's South Side , near extended relatives . She began working as a civilian clerk for the U.S. Air Force for a better salary and recalled that Emmett was industrious enough to help with chores at home , although he sometimes got distracted . His mother remembered that he did not know his own limitations at times . Following his and Mamie 's separation , Bradley visited and began threatening her . At eleven years old , Emmett , with a butcher knife in hand , told Bradley he would kill him if Bradley did not leave . Usually , however , Emmett was happy . He and his cousins and friends pulled pranks on each other (Emmett once took advantage of an extended car ride when his friend fell asleep and placed the friend 's underwear on his head) , and spent their free time in pickup baseball games . He was a natty dresser and often the center of attention among his peers .

In 1955 , Emmett was stocky and muscular , weighing about 150 pounds (68 kg) and standing 5 feet 4 inches (1 @. @ 63 m) . Despite his being 14 years old , whites in Mississippi claimed Till looked like an adult . Mamie Till Bradley 's uncle , 64 @-@ year @-@ old Mose Wright , visited her and Emmett in Chicago during the summer and told Emmett stories about living in the Mississippi Delta . Emmett wanted to see for himself . Bradley was ready for a vacation and planned to take Emmett with her , but after he begged her to visit Wright , she relented . Wright planned to accompany Till with a cousin , Wheeler Parker , and another , Curtis Jones , would join them soon . Wright was a sharecropper and part @-@ time minister who was often called " Preacher " . He lived in Money , Mississippi , a small town in the Delta that consisted of three stores , a school , a post office , a cotton gin , and a couple hundred residents , 8 miles (13 km) north of Greenwood . Before Emmett departed for the Delta , his mother cautioned him that Chicago and Mississippi were two different worlds , and he should know how to behave in front of whites in the South . He assured her he understood .

Since 1882 , when statistics on lynchings began to be collected , more than 500 African Americans had been killed by extrajudicial violence in Mississippi alone , and more than 3 @, @ 000 across the South . Most of the incidents took place between 1876 and 1930 ; though far less common by the mid @-@ 1950s , these racially motivated murders still occurred . Throughout the South , whites publicly prohibited interracial relationships (while indulging in affairs with black women) as a means to maintain white supremacy . This was meant to " protect " white women from black men . Even the suggestion of sexual contact between black men and white women could carry severe penalties for black men . A resurgence of the enforcement of such Jim Crow mores was evident following World War II , when African @-@ American veterans started pressing for equal rights in the South .

Racial tensions increased further after the United States Supreme Court 's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* to end segregation in public education , which it ruled as unconstitutional . Many segregationists believed the ruling would lead to interracial marriage . Whites strongly resisted the court 's ruling , in the case of a Virginia county , closing all the public schools to prevent integration . Other jurisdictions simply ignored the ruling . In other ways , whites used stronger measures to keep blacks politically disenfranchised , which they had been since the turn of the century. in the South was to constrain blacks forcefully from any semblance of social equality .

A week before Till arrived in Mississippi , a black activist named Lamar Smith was shot and killed in front of the county courthouse in Brookhaven for political organizing . Three white suspects were arrested , but they were soon released .

= = Encounter between Till and Carolyn Bryant = =

Till arrived in Money , Mississippi on August 21 , 1955 . On August 24 , he and cousin Curtis Jones skipped church where his great @-@ uncle Wright was preaching , joining some local boys as they went to Bryant 's Grocery and Meat Market to buy candy . The teenagers were children of sharecroppers and had been picking cotton all day . The market was owned by a white couple , 24 @-@ year @-@ old Roy Bryant and his 21 @-@ year @-@ old wife Carolyn ; it mostly served the local sharecropper population . Carolyn was alone in the store that day ; her sister @-@ in @-@ law was in the rear of the store watching children . Jones left Till with the other boys while Jones played checkers across the street .

According to Jones , the other boys reported that Till had a photograph of an integrated class at the school he attended in Chicago , and Till bragged to the boys that the white children in the picture were his friends . He pointed to a white girl in the picture , or referred to a picture of a white girl that had come with his new wallet , and said she was his girlfriend . One or more of the local boys dared Till to speak to Bryant .

The facts of what took place in the store are still disputed . According to several versions , including comments from some of the kids standing outside the store when Till walked in , Till may have wolf @-@ whistled at Bryant . A newspaper account following his disappearance stated that Till sometimes whistled to alleviate his stuttering . His speech was sometimes unclear ; his mother said he had particular difficulty with pronouncing " b " sounds , and he may have whistled to overcome problems asking for bubble gum . According to other stories , Till may have grabbed Bryant 's hand and asked her for a date , or said " Bye , baby " as he left the store , or " You needn 't be afraid of me , baby , I 've been with white women before . "

Bryant testified during the murder trial that Till grabbed her hand while she was stocking candy and said , " How about a date , baby ? " She said that after she freed herself from his grasp , the young man followed her to the cash register , grabbed her waist and said , " What 's the matter baby , can 't you take it ? " Bryant said she freed herself , and Till said , " You needn 't be afraid of me , baby , " used " one ' unprintable ' word " and said " I 've been with white women before . " Bryant also alleged that one of Till 's companions came into the store , grabbed him by the arm , and ordered him to leave .

Till 's cousin , Simeon Wright , writing about the incident decades later , challenged Carolyn Bryant 's account . Entering the store " less than a minute " after Till was left inside alone with Bryant , Wright saw no inappropriate behavior and heard " no lecherous conversation . " Wright said Till " paid for his items and we left the store together . " The FBI noted in their 2006 investigation of the cold case that a second anonymous source , who was confirmed to have been in the store at the same time as Till and his cousin , supported Wright 's account .

In any event , Bryant was allegedly so alarmed she ran outside to a car to retrieve a pistol from under the seat . Upon seeing her do this , the teenagers left immediately . It was acknowledged that while Bryant was running to her car , Till whistled . However , it is disputed whether Till whistled toward Carolyn or toward a checkers game that was occurring just across the street .

One of the other boys ran across the street to tell Curtis Jones what happened in the store . When the older man with whom Jones was playing checkers heard the story , he urged the boys to leave quickly , fearing violence . Bryant told others of the events at the store , and the story spread quickly . Jones and Till declined to tell his great @-@ uncle Mose Wright , fearing they would get in trouble . Till said he wanted to return home to Chicago . Carolyn 's husband Roy Bryant was on an extended trip hauling shrimp to Texas and did not return home until August 27 .

= = Murder = =

When Roy Bryant was told of what had happened , he aggressively questioned several young black men who entered the store . That evening , Bryant , with a black man named J. W. Washington , approached a young black man walking along a road . Bryant ordered Washington to seize the young man , put him in the back of a pickup truck , and took him to be identified by a companion of Carolyn 's who had witnessed the episode with Till . Friends or parents vouched for the young men

in Bryant 's store , and Carolyn 's companion denied that the young man Bryant and Washington seized was the one who had accosted her . Somehow , Bryant learned that the young man in the incident was from Chicago and was staying with Mose Wright . Several witnesses overheard Bryant and his 36 @-@ year @-@ old half @-@ brother John William " J. W. " Milam discussing taking Till from his house .

In the early morning hours ? between 2 : 00 am and 3 : 30 am ? on August 28 , 1955 , Bryant , Milam , and another man (who may have been black) drove to Mose Wright 's house . Milam was armed with a pistol and a flashlight . He asked Wright if he had three boys in the house from Chicago . Till shared a bed with another cousin ; there were eight people in the small two @-@ bedroom cabin . Milam asked Wright to take them to " the nigger who did the talking " . When they asked Till if it was him , he replied , " Yeah " , for which they threatened to shoot him and told him to get dressed . The men threatened to kill Wright if he reported what he had seen . Till 's great @-@ aunt offered the men money , but they did not respond .

They put Till in the back of a pickup truck and drove to a barn at the Clint Shurden Plantation in Drew . Till was pistol @-@ whipped and placed in the bed of the pickup truck again and covered with a tarpaulin . Throughout the course of the night , Bryant , Milam , and witnesses recall their being in several locations with Till . According to some witnesses , they took Till to a shed behind Milam 's home in the nearby town of Glendora , where they beat him again and tried to decide what to do . Witnesses recall between two and four white men and two and four black men who were either in or surrounding the pickup truck where Till was seated . Others passed by Milam 's shed and heard someone being beaten . Accounts differ as to when Till was shot ; either in Milam 's shed or by the Tallahatchie River . The group drove with him in the truck to Bryant 's store , where several people noticed blood pooling in the truck bed . Bryant explained he killed a deer , and in one instance showed the body to a black man who questioned him , saying " that 's what happens to smart niggers " .

In an interview with William Bradford Huie , published in Look magazine in 1956 , Bryant and Milam said they intended to beat Till and throw him off an embankment into the river to frighten him . They told Huie that while they were beating Till , he called them bastards , declared he was as good as they , and had had sexual encounters with white women . They put Till in the back of their truck , drove to a cotton gin to take a 70 @-@ pound (32 kg) fan ? the only time they admitted to being worried , thinking that by this time in early daylight they would be spotted and accused of stealing ? and drove for several miles along the river looking for a place to dispose of Till . They shot him by the river and weighted his body with the fan .

Mose Wright stayed on his front porch for twenty minutes waiting for Till to return . He did not go back to bed . He and another man went into Money , got gasoline , and drove around trying to find Till . Unsuccessful , they returned home by 8 : 00 am . After hearing from Wright that he would not call the police because he feared for his life , Curtis Jones placed a call to the Leflore County sheriff and another to his mother in Chicago . Distraught , she called Emmett 's mother Mamie Till Bradley . Wright and his wife also drove to Sumner , where Elizabeth Wright 's brother contacted the sheriff .

Bryant and Milam were questioned by Leflore County sheriff George Smith . They admitted they had taken the boy from his great @-@ uncle 's yard but claimed they had released him the same night in front of Bryant 's store . Bryant and Milam were arrested for kidnapping . Word got out that Till was missing , and soon Medgar Evers , Mississippi state field secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Amzie Moore , head of the Bolivar County chapter , became involved . They disguised themselves as cotton pickers and went into the cotton fields in search of any information that might help find Till .

Three days after his abduction , Till 's swollen and disfigured body was found by two boys fishing in the Tallahatchie River . His head was very badly damaged . He had been shot above the right ear , an eye was dislodged from the socket , there was evidence that he had been beaten on the back and the hips , and his body weighted by the fan blade , which was fastened around his neck with barbed wire . He was nude , but wearing a silver ring with the initials " L. T. " and " May 25 , 1943 " carved in it .

Confusion about Till 's whereabouts and a positive identification of the body retrieved from the river

compounded issues in the case that eventually influenced the trial . Hodding Carter in the Delta Democrat @-@ Times , a local Mississippi newspaper , reported that Till may have been hidden by his relatives or perhaps returned to Chicago for his safety . The body 's face was unrecognizable due to trauma and having been submerged in water . Mose Wright was called to the river and identified Till . The silver ring Till wore was removed and returned to Wright , and further passed to the district attorney . Stories from witnesses , both black and white , conflict about whether the ring was on Till 's body and who knew he had worn it previously .

= = Funeral and reaction = =

Although lynchings and racially motivated murders had occurred throughout the South for decades , the circumstances surrounding Emmett Till and the timing acted as a catalyst to attract national attention to the case of a 14 @-@ year @-@ old boy who had unknowingly defied a severe social caste system . Till 's murder aroused feelings about segregation , law enforcement , relations between the North and South , the social status quo in Mississippi , the NAACP , White Citizens ' Councils , and the Cold War , all of which were played out in a drama staged in newspapers all over the U.S. and abroad .

When Till went missing , a three @-@ paragraph story was printed in the Greenwood Commonwealth and quickly picked up by other Mississippi newspapers . They reported on his death when the body was found , and the next day , when a picture of him his mother had taken the previous Christmas showing them smiling together appeared in the Jackson Daily News and Vicksburg Evening Post , editorials and letters to the editor were printed expressing shame at the people who had caused Till 's death . One read , " Now is the time for every citizen who loves the state of Mississippi to ' Stand up and be counted ' before hoodlum white trash brings us to destruction . " The letter said that Negroes were not the downfall of Mississippi society , but whites like those in White Citizens ' Councils that condoned violence .

Till 's body was clothed , packed in lime , and put in a pine coffin and prepared for burial . It may have been embalmed while in Mississippi . Mamie Till Bradley demanded that the body be sent to Chicago ; she later said that she worked to halt an immediate burial in Mississippi and called several local and state authorities in Illinois and Mississippi to make sure that her son was returned to Chicago . A doctor did not examine Till post @-@ mortem .

Mississippi 's governor , Hugh L. White , deplored the murder , asserting that local authorities should pursue a " vigorous prosecution " . He sent a telegram to the national offices of the NAACP promising a full investigation and assuring them " Mississippi does not condone such conduct " . Delta residents , both black and white , also distanced themselves from Till 's murder , finding the circumstances abhorrent . Local newspaper editorials denounced the murderers without question . Leflore County Deputy Sheriff John Cothran stated , " The white people around here feel pretty mad about the way that poor little boy was treated , and they won 't stand for this . "

Soon , however , discourse about Till 's murder became more complex . Robert B. Patterson , executive secretary of the segregationist White Citizens ' Council , lamented Till 's death by reiterating that racial segregation policies were in force for blacks ' safety and that their efforts were being neutralized by the NAACP . In response , NAACP executive secretary Roy Wilkins characterized the incident as a lynching and said that Mississippi was trying to maintain white supremacy through murder . He said , " there is in the entire state no restraining influence of decency , not in the state capital , among the daily newspapers , the clergy , nor any segment of the so @-@ called better citizens " . Mamie Till Bradley told a reporter that she would seek legal aid to help law enforcement find her son 's killers and that the State of Mississippi should share the financial responsibility . She was misquoted ; it came out as " Mississippi is going to pay for this " .

The A. A. Rayner Funeral Home in Chicago received Till 's body . Upon arrival , Bradley insisted on viewing it to make a positive identification , later stating that the stench from it was noticeable two blocks away . She decided to have an open @-@ casket funeral , saying , " There was just no way I could describe what was in that box . No way . And I just wanted the world to see . " Tens of thousands of people lined the street outside the mortuary to view Till 's body , and days later

thousands more attended his funeral at Roberts Temple Church of God in Christ .

Photographs of his mutilated corpse circulated around the country , notably appearing in Jet magazine and The Chicago Defender , both black publications , and drew intense public reaction . According to The Nation and Newsweek , Chicago 's black community was " aroused as it has not been over any similar act in recent history " . Till was buried on September 6 in Burr Oak Cemetery in Alsip , Illinois .

News about Emmett Till spread to both coasts . Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley and Illinois Governor William Stratton also became involved , urging Governor White to see that justice be done . The tone in Mississippi newspapers changed dramatically . They falsely reported riots in the funeral home in Chicago . Bryant and Milam appeared in photos smiling in military uniforms and Carolyn Bryant 's beauty and virtue were extolled . Rumors of an invasion of outraged blacks and northern whites were printed throughout the state so that the Leflore County sheriff took them seriously . Local businessman , surgeon , and civil rights proponent T. R. M. Howard , one of the wealthiest blacks in the state , warned of a " second civil war " if " slaughtering of Negroes " was allowed . Following Wilkins ' comments , white opinion began to shift . According to historian Stephen Whitfield , a specific brand of xenophobia in the South was particularly strong in Mississippi , urging whites to reject the influence of Northern opinion and agitation . This independent attitude was profound enough in Tallahatchie County that it earned the nickname " The Freestate of Tallahatchie " , according to a former sheriff , " because people here do what they damn well please " , making the county often difficult to govern .

Tallahatchie County Sheriff Clarence Strider , who initially positively identified Till 's body and stated that the case against Milam and Bryant was " pretty good " , on September 3 announced his doubts that the body pulled from the Tallahatchie River was that of Till , who , he speculated , was probably still alive . Strider suggested that the recovered body had been planted by the NAACP : a cadaver stolen by T. R. M. Howard , who colluded to place Till 's ring on it . Strider changed his account after the comments made in the press about the people of Mississippi , later saying , " The last thing I wanted to do was to defend those peckerwoods . But I just had no choice about it . "

Bryant and Milam were indicted for murder . The grand jury 's prosecuting attorney , Hamilton Caldwell , was not confident that he could get a conviction in a case of white violence against a black male accused of insulting a white woman . A local black paper was surprised at the indictment and praised the decision , as did the New York Times . The high @-@ profile comments made in Northern newspapers and by the NAACP concerned the prosecuting attorney , Gerald Chatham ; he worried that his office would not be able to secure a guilty verdict , despite their compelling evidence . Having limited funds , Bryant and Milam initially had difficulty finding attorneys to represent them , but five attorneys at a Sumner law firm offered their services pro bono . Collection jars were placed in stores and other public places in the Delta , eventually gathering \$ 10 @,@ 000 for the defense .

= = Trial = =

The town of Sumner in Tallahatchie County served as the venue for the trial as the body had been found there . Sumner had one boarding house ; the small town was besieged by reporters from all over the country . David Halberstam called it " the first great media event of the civil rights movement " . A reporter who had covered the trials of Bruno Hauptmann and Machine Gun Kelly remarked that this was the most publicity for any trial he had ever seen . No hotels were available for black visitors . Mamie Till Bradley arrived to testify and the trial also attracted black congressman Charles Diggs from Michigan . Bradley , Diggs , and several black reporters stayed at Howard 's home in Mound Bayou . Located on a large lot and surrounded by Howard 's armed guards , it resembled a compound . The day before the start of the trial , a young black man named Frank Young arrived to tell Howard he knew of two witnesses to the crime . Levi " Too Tight " Collins and Henry Lee Loggins were black employees of Leslie Milam , J. W. 's brother , in whose shed Till was beaten . Collins and Loggins were spotted with J. W. Milam , Bryant , and Till . The prosecution team was unaware of Collins and Loggins . Sheriff Strider , however , booked them into the Charleston , Mississippi jail to keep them from testifying .

The trial was held in September 1955 , lasting for five days ; and attendees remember the weather being very hot . The courtroom was filled to its 280 @-@ spectator capacity , and as a matter of course was racially segregated . Press from major national newspapers attended , including black publications ; black reporters were made to sit segregated from the white press , farther from the jury . Sheriff Strider welcomed black spectators coming back from lunch with a cheerful , " Hello , Niggers ! " Some visitors from the North found the court to be run with surprising informality . Jury members were allowed to drink beer on duty , and many white men in the audience wore handguns holstered to their belts .

The defense 's primary strategy was arguing that the body pulled from the river could not be positively identified , and they questioned whether Till was dead at all . The defense asserted that Bryant and Milam had taken Till , but had let him go . They attempted to prove that Mose Wright ? who was addressed as " Uncle Mose " by the prosecution and " Mose " by the defense ? could not identify Bryant and Milam as the men who took Till from his cabin . Only Milam 's flashlight was in use , and no other lights in the house were turned on . Milam and Bryant identified themselves to Wright the evening they took Till ? the third man did not speak ? but Wright only saw Milam clearly . Wright 's testimony was considered remarkably courageous and a first in the state for a black man implicating the guilt of a white man in court .

Journalist James Hicks , who worked for the black news wire service , the National Negro Publishers Association , (later renamed the National Newspaper Publishers Association) , was present in the courtroom ; he was especially impressed that Wright stood to identify Milam , pointing to him and saying " Thar he " (There he is) , calling it a historic moment and one filled with " electricity " . A writer for the New York Post noted that following his identification , Wright sat " with a lurch which told better than anything else the cost in strength to him of the thing he had done " . A reporter who covered the trial for the New Orleans Times @-@ Picayune stated it was " the most dramatic thing I saw in my career " .

Mamie Till Bradley testified that she instructed her son to watch his manners in Mississippi and that should a situation ever come to his being asked to get on his knees to ask forgiveness of a white person , he should do it without a thought . The defense questioned her identification of her son in the casket in Chicago and a \$ 400 life insurance policy she had taken out on him .

While the trial progressed , Leflore County Sheriff George Smith , Howard , and several reporters , both black and white , attempted to locate Collins and Loggins . They could not , but found three witnesses who had seen Collins and Loggins with Milam and Bryant on Leslie Milam 's property . Two of them testified that they heard someone being beaten , blows , and cries . One testified so quietly the judge ordered him several times to speak louder ; he said he heard the victim call out , " Mama , Lord have mercy . Lord have mercy . " Judge Curtis Swango allowed Carolyn Bryant to testify , but not in front of the jury , after the prosecution objected that her testimony was irrelevant to Till 's abduction and murder . It may have been leaked in any case to the jury . Sheriff Strider testified for the defense his theory that Till was alive , and that the body retrieved from the river was white . A doctor from Greenwood stated on the stand that the body was too decomposed to identify , and therefore had been in the water too long for it to be Till .

In the concluding statements , one prosecuting attorney admitted that what Till did was wrong , but it warranted a spanking , not murder . Gerald Chatham passionately called for justice and mocked the sheriff and doctor 's statements that alluded to a conspiracy . Mamie Bradley indicated she was very impressed with his summation . The defense stated that the prosecution 's theory of the events the night Till was murdered were improbable , and said the jury 's " forefathers would turn over in their graves " if they convicted Bryant and Milam . Only three outcomes were possible in Mississippi for capital murder : life imprisonment , the death penalty , or acquittal . On September 23 the all @-@ white jury acquitted both defendants after a 67 @-@ minute deliberation ; one juror said , " If we hadn 't stopped to drink pop , it wouldn 't have taken that long . "

In post @-@ trial analyses , blame for the outcome varied . Mamie Till Bradley was criticized for not crying enough on the stand . The jury was noted to have been picked almost exclusively from the hill country section of Tallahatchie County , which , due to its poorer economic make @-@ up , found whites and blacks competing for land and other agrarian opportunities . Unlike the population living

closer to the river (and thus closer to Bryant and Milam in Leflore County) , who possessed a noblesse oblige toward blacks , according to historian Stephen Whitaker , those in the eastern part of the county were virulent in their racism . The prosecution was criticized for dismissing any potential juror who knew Milam or Bryant , for the fear that such a juror would vote to acquit . Afterward , Whitaker noted that this was a mistake , as anyone who had personally known the defendants usually disliked them . One juror voted twice to convict , but on the third discussion , acquiesced and voted with the rest of the jury to acquit . In later interviews , the jurors acknowledged that they knew Bryant and Milam were guilty , but simply did not believe life imprisonment or the death penalty fit punishment for whites who had killed a black man . This is somewhat disputed by later interviews with two jurors who stated as late as 2005 that they believed the defense 's case , that the prosecution had not proven that Till had died , nor that it was his body that was removed from the river .

In November 1955 , a grand jury declined to indict Bryant and Milam for kidnapping , despite the testimony given that they had admitted taking Till . Mose Wright and a young man named Willie Reed , who testified to seeing Milam enter the shed from which screams and blows were heard , both testified in front of the grand jury . T. R. M. Howard after the trial paid to relocate to Chicago Wright , Reed , and another black witness who testified against Milam and Bryant , to protect them from reprisal for testifying . Reed , who later changed his name to Willie Louis to avoid being found , continued to live in the Chicago area until his death on July 18 , 2013 . He avoided publicity and kept his history secret from his wife until she was told by a relative . Reed began to speak publicly about the case in the PBS documentary *The Murder of Emmett Till* in 2003 .

= = Media discourse = =

Reactions from newspapers in major international cities and Catholic , Protestant , Jewish , and socialist publications were furious about the verdict and very critical of American society . Southern newspapers , particularly in Mississippi , wrote that the court system had done its job . Till 's story continued to make news for weeks following the trial , especially sparking debate between Southern , Northern , and black newspapers , the NAACP and various high @-@ profile segregationists about justice for blacks and the propriety of Jim Crow society .

In October 1955 , the Jackson Daily News reported facts about Till 's father that had been suppressed by the U.S. military . While serving in Italy , Louis Till raped two women and killed a third . He was court @-@ martialed and hanged by the Army near Pisa in July 1945 . Mamie Till Bradley and her family knew none of this , having been told only that Louis had been killed for " willful misconduct " . Mississippi senators James Eastland and John C. Stennis probed Army records to uncover Louis Till 's crimes . Although Emmett Till 's murder trial was over , news about his father remained on the front pages of Mississippi newspapers for weeks in October and November 1955 , further engaging debate about Emmett Till 's actions and Carolyn Bryant 's integrity . Stephen Whitfield writes that the lack of attention paid to identifying or finding Till is " strange " compared to the amount of published discourse about his father . Emmett Till 's urges , to white Mississippians , were genetic instincts that were violently expressed by his father Louis Till . According to historians Davis Houck and Matthew Grindy , " Louis Till became a most important rhetorical pawn in the high @-@ stakes game of north versus south , black versus white , NAACP versus White Citizens ' Councils " .

Protected against double jeopardy , Bryant and Milam struck a deal with *Look* magazine in 1956 to tell their story to journalist William Bradford Huie for between \$ 3 @,@ 600 and \$ 4 @,@ 000 . The interview took place in the law firm of the attorneys who had defended Bryant and Milam . Huie did not ask the questions ; Bryant and Milam 's own attorneys did . Neither attorney had heard their clients ' accounts of the murder before . According to Huie , the older Milam was more articulate and sure of himself than the younger Bryant . Milam admitted to shooting Till and neither of them thought of themselves as guilty or that they had done anything wrong .

Reaction to Huie 's interview with Bryant and Milam was explosive . Their brazen admission that they had slain Till caused prominent civil rights leaders to push the federal government harder to

investigate the case . Till 's murder was one of several reasons the Civil Rights Act of 1957 was passed ; it allowed the U.S. Department of Justice to intervene in local law enforcement issues when civil rights were being compromised . Huie 's interview , in which he said that Milam and Bryant had acted alone , overshadowed inconsistencies in earlier versions of the stories . Details about Collins and Loggins and anyone else who had possibly been involved in Till 's abduction , murder , or the clean @-@ up of it , were , according to historians David and Linda Beito , forgotten .

= = Representation in culture = =

The story of Emmett Till began to seep into the consciousness of Americans through media and literature . Langston Hughes dedicated an untitled poem (eventually to be known as " Mississippi ? 1955 ") to Till in his October 1 , 1955 column in The Chicago Defender . It was reprinted across the country and continued to be republished with various changes from different writers . Author William Faulkner , a prominent Mississippi native who often focused on racial issues , wrote two essays on Till : one before the trial in which he pleaded for American unity and one after , a piece titled " On Fear " that was published in Harper 's in 1956 . In it he questioned why the tenets of segregation were based on irrational reasoning .

Till 's murder was the focus of a 1957 television episode for the U.S. Steel Hour titled " Noon on Doomsday " written by Rod Serling , who was fascinated by how quickly Mississippi whites supported Bryant and Milam . Although the script was rewritten to avoid mention of Till , and did not say that the murder victim was black , White Citizens ' Councils vowed to boycott U.S. Steel . The eventual episode bore little resemblance to the Till case .

Gwendolyn Brooks wrote a poem titled " A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi . Meanwhile , A Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon " (1960) . The same year Harper Lee published To Kill a Mockingbird , in which a white attorney is committed to defending a black man named Tom Robinson , accused of raping a white woman . Lee , whose novel had a profound effect on civil rights , has not publicly stated Robinson 's origins . Literature professor Patrick Chura notes several compelling similarities between Till 's case and that of Robinson . Writer James Baldwin loosely based his 1964 drama Blues for Mister Charlie on the Till case . He later divulged that Till 's murder had been bothering him for several years .

Bob Dylan recorded a song titled " The Death of Emmett Till " in 1962 . Till was mentioned in the 1968 autobiography of Anne Moody , Coming of Age in Mississippi , in which she states she first learned to hate during the fall of 1955 . Audre Lorde 's poem " Afterimages " (1981) focuses on the perspective of a black woman thinking of Carolyn Bryant 24 years after the murder and trial . Bebe Moore Campbell 's 1992 novel Your Blues Ain 't Like Mine centers on the events of Till 's death . Toni Morrison 's only play as of 2010 is Dreaming Emmett (1986) , a feminist look at the roles of men and women in black society , which she was inspired to write while considering " time through the eyes of one person who could come back to life and seek vengeance " . Emmylou Harris includes a song called " My Name is Emmett Till " on her 2011 album , Hard Bargain . According to scholar Christopher Metress , Till is often reconfigured in literature as a specter that haunts the white people of Mississippi , causing them to question their involvement in evil , or silence about injustice. The 2002 book Mississippi Trials , 1955 is a fictionalized account of Till 's death .

= = Later events = =

After Bryant and Milam admitted to Huie that they had killed Till , their support base in Mississippi eroded . Many of their former friends and supporters , including those who had contributed to their defense funds , cut them off . Their shops went bankrupt and closed after blacks boycotted them , and banks refused them loans to plant crops . After struggling to secure a loan and find someone who would rent to him , Milam managed to secure 217 acres and a \$ 4 @, @ 000 loan to plant cotton , but blacks refused to work for him . He was forced to pay whites higher wages . Eventually , Milam and Bryant relocated to Texas , but their infamy followed them , and they continued to generate extreme animosity from locals . After several years , they returned to Mississippi . Milam

found work as a heavy equipment operator , but ill health forced him into retirement . Over the years , Milam was tried for offenses such as assault and battery , writing bad checks , and using a stolen credit card . He died of spinal cancer in 1980 , at the age of 61 .

Bryant worked as a welder while in Texas , until increasing blindness forced him to give up this employment . At some point , he and Carolyn divorced ; he remarried in 1980 . He opened a store in Ruleville , Mississippi , and was convicted in 1984 and 1988 of food stamp fraud . In a 1985 interview , he denied that he had killed Till , but said : " if Emmett Till hadn 't got out of line , it probably wouldn 't have happened to him . " Fearing economic boycotts and retaliation , Bryant lived a private life and refused to allow himself to be photographed or reveal the exact location of his store , explaining : " this new generation is different and I don 't want to worry about a bullet some dark night " . He died of cancer in 1994 , at the age of 63 .

Till 's mother married Gene Mobley , became a teacher , and changed her surname to Till @-@ Mobley . She continued her life as an activist working to educate people about her son 's murder . In 1992 , Till @-@ Mobley had the opportunity to listen while Bryant was interviewed about his involvement in Till 's murder . With Bryant unaware that Till @-@ Mobley was listening , he asserted that Till had ruined his life , expressed no remorse , and said , " Emmett Till is dead . I don 't know why he can 't just stay dead . "

In 1996 , documentary filmmaker Keith Beauchamp , who was greatly moved by Till 's open @-@ casket photograph , started background research for a feature film he planned to make about Till 's murder . He asserted that as many as 14 people may have been involved , including Carolyn Bryant Donham (who had remarried) . Mose Wright heard someone with " a lighter voice " affirm that Till was the one in his front yard immediately before Bryant and Milam drove away with the boy . Beauchamp spent the next nine years producing *The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till* , released in 2003 . That same year , PBS aired an installment of *American Experience* titled *The Murder of Emmett Till* . In 2005 , CBS journalist Ed Bradley aired a 60 Minutes report investigating the Till murder , part of which showed him tracking down Carolyn Bryant at her home in Greenville , Mississippi .

A 1991 book written by Stephen Whitfield , another by Christopher Metress in 2002 , and Mamie Till @-@ Mobley 's memoirs the next year all posed questions as to who was involved in the murder and cover @-@ up , leading federal authorities to try to resolve the questions about the identity of the body pulled from the Tallahatchie River .

In 2004 , the U.S. Department of Justice announced that it was reopening the case to determine whether anyone other than Milam and Bryant was involved . David T. Beito , a professor at the University of Alabama , states that Till 's murder " has this mythic quality like the Kennedy assassination " . It was one of a number of cold cases dating to the Civil Rights era that Justice was investigating .

The body was exhumed and an autopsy conducted by the Cook County coroner in 2005 . Using DNA from Till 's relatives , dental comparisons to images taken of Till , and anthropological analysis , the body exhumed was positively identified as Till 's . It had extensive cranial damage , a broken left femur , and two broken wrists . Metallic fragments were found in the skull consistent with being shot with a .45 caliber gun .

In February 2007 , a Leflore County grand jury , composed primarily of black jurors and empaneled by Joyce Chiles , a black prosecutor , found no credible basis for Beauchamp 's claim that 14 people took part in Till 's abduction and murder . Beauchamp was angry with the finding , but David Beito and Juan Williams , who worked on the reading materials for the *Eyes on the Prize* documentary , were critical of Beauchamp for trying to revise history and taking attention away from other cold cases . The grand jury failed to find sufficient cause for charges against Carolyn Bryant Donham . Neither the FBI nor the grand jury found any credible evidence that Henry Lee Loggins , identified by Beauchamp as a suspect who could be charged , had any role in the crime . Other than Loggins , Beauchamp refused to name any of the people he alleged were involved .

" When it comes to a lynching , it is not just the actual killers who are guilty , " Till @-@ Mobley wrote , in her book . " It is the dominant culture , the entire society that permits such a thing , that encourages it . Bryant and Milam were not the only guilty parties in the lynching of my son .

Witnesses have pointed to at least six or seven people . But , in a way , there were so many thousands more . People who were responsible , powerful , influential . People who could have chosen to lead , and chose instead to incite . People who could have condemned hate crimes and chose instead to condone them . People who could have come clean and chose instead to live the rest of their lives with blood on their hands . "

= = Influence on civil rights = =

Through the constant attention it received , Till 's case became emblematic of the disparity of justice for blacks in the South . In 1955 The Chicago Defender urged its readers to react to the acquittal by voting in large numbers , a reminder that most blacks in the South had been disfranchised since the turn of the century under laws passed by white Democrat @-@ dominated legislatures . Myrlie Evers , widow of Medgar Evers , stated in 1985 that Till 's case resonated so strongly because it " shook the foundations of Mississippi ? both black and white , because ... with the white community ... it had become nationally publicized ... with us as blacks ... it said , even a child was not safe from racism and bigotry and death . " The NAACP asked Mamie Till Bradley to tour the country relating the events of her son 's life , death , and the trial of his murderers . It was one of the most successful fundraising campaigns the NAACP had ever known . Journalist Louis Lomax acknowledges Till 's death to be the start of what he terms the " Negro revolt " and scholar Clenora Hudson @-@ Weems characterizes Till as a " sacrificial lamb " for civil rights . NAACP operative Amzie Moore considers Till the start of the Civil Rights Movement , at the very least , in Mississippi .

The 1987 14 @-@ hour Emmy award @-@ winning documentary Eyes on the Prize begins with the murder of Emmett Till . Accompanying written materials for the series , Eyes on the Prize and Voices of Freedom (for the second time period) exhaustively encompass the major figures and events of the Civil Rights Movement . Furthermore , Stephen Whitaker states , as a result of the attention Till 's death and the trial received ,

Mississippi became in the eyes of the nation the epitome of racism and the citadel of white supremacy . From this time on , the slightest racial incident anywhere in the state was spotlighted and magnified . To the Negro race throughout the South and to some extent in other parts of the country , this verdict indicated an end to the system of noblesse oblige . The faith in the white power structure waned rapidly . Negro faith in legalism declined , and the revolt officially began on December 1 , 1955 , with the Montgomery , Alabama , bus boycott .

In Montgomery , Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white bus rider , sparking a year @-@ long well @-@ organized grassroots boycott of the public bus system , designed to force the city to change its segregation policies . Parks later said when she did not get up and move to the rear of the bus , " I thought of Emmett Till and I just couldn 't go back . " According to author Clayborne Carson , Till 's death and the widespread coverage of the students integrating Little Rock Central High School in 1957 were especially profound for younger blacks : " It was out of this festering discontent and an awareness of earlier isolated protests that the sit @-@ ins of the 1960s were born . " After seeing pictures of Till 's mutilated body , in Louisville , Kentucky , young Cassius Clay (later famed boxer Muhammad Ali) and a friend took out their frustration by vandalizing a local railyard , causing a locomotive engine to derail . It is thought that Till 's story influenced Harper Lee to create the character Tom Robinson in her novel To Kill A Mockingbird .

In 1963 , Sunflower County resident Fannie Lou Hamer , herself a sharecropper , was jailed and beaten for attempting to register to vote . The next year , she led a massive voter registration drive in the Delta region , and volunteers worked on Freedom Summer throughout the state . Before 1954 , 265 black people were registered to vote in three Delta counties , where they were a majority ; they made up 41 % of the total state population . The summer Emmett Till was killed , the number of registered voters in those three counties dropped to 90 . By the end of 1955 , fourteen Mississippi counties had no registered black voters . The Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964 registered 63 @, @ 000 black voters in a simplified process administered by the project ; they formed their own political party because they were closed out of the Democratic Regulars in Mississippi .

Till continues to be the focus of literature and memorials . A statue was unveiled in Denver in 1976 (

and has since been moved to Pueblo , Colorado) featuring Till with Martin Luther King , Jr . Till was included among the forty names of people who had died in the Civil Rights Movement (listed as martyrs) on the granite sculpture of the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery , Alabama , dedicated in 1989 . In 1991 , a 7 @-@ mile (11 km) stretch of 71st Street in Chicago , was renamed " Emmett Till Road " . Mamie Till @-@ Mobley attended many of the dedications for the memorials , including a demonstration in Selma , Alabama on the 35th anniversary of the march over the Edmund Pettis Bridge . She later wrote in her memoirs , " I realized that Emmett had achieved the significant impact in death that he had been denied in life . Even so , I had never wanted Emmett to be a martyr . I only wanted him to be a good son . Although I realized all the great things that had been accomplished largely because of the sacrifices made by so many people , I found myself wishing that somehow we could have done it another way . " Till @-@ Mobley died in 2003 , the same year her memoirs were published .

James McCosh Elementary School in Chicago , where Till had been a student , was renamed the " Emmett Louis Till Math And Science Academy " in 2005 . The " Emmett Till Memorial Highway " was dedicated between Greenwood and Tutwiler , Mississippi , the same route his body took to the train station on its way to Chicago . It intersects with the H. C. " Clarence " Strider Memorial Highway . In 2007 , Tallahatchie County issued a formal apology to Till 's family , reading " We the citizens of Tallahatchie County recognize that the Emmett Till case was a terrible miscarriage of justice . We state candidly and with deep regret the failure to effectively pursue justice . We wish to say to the family of Emmett Till that we are profoundly sorry for what was done in this community to your loved one . " The same year , Georgia congressman John Lewis , whose skull was fractured while being beaten during the 1965 Selma march , sponsored a bill that provides a plan for investigating and prosecuting unsolved Civil Rights era murders . The Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act was signed into law in 2008 .

= = = Casket = = =

On July 9 , 2009 , a manager and three laborers at Burr Oak Cemetery were charged with digging up bodies , dumping them in a remote area , and reselling the plots . Till 's grave was not disturbed , but investigators found his original glass @-@ topped casket rusting in a dilapidated storage shed . When Till was reburied in a new casket in 2005 , there were plans for an Emmett Till memorial museum , where his original casket would be installed . The cemetery manager , who administered the memorial fund , pocketed donations intended for the memorial . It is unclear how much money was collected . Cemetery officials also neglected the casket , which was discolored , the interior fabric torn , and bore evidence that animals had been living in it , although its glass top was still intact . The Smithsonian 's National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington , D.C. acquired the casket a month later . According to director Lonnie Bunch III , it is an artifact with potential to stop future visitors and make them think .