Emmett Louis Till Biography

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Biography

Emmitt Louis Till was a 14-year-old Chicago boy who visited relatives in Money, Mississippi, in the summer of 1955. A careless comment made to a white woman in the store cost Till his life when two white men beat and killed him for his remarks. Till was sent by his mother Mamie Till to visit his great-uncle Mose Wright. Till's mother had said that life was different for African-Americans in the South. She instructed her son to obey his relatives and to do whatever a white person asked him to do, with no complaints.

Till and his cousin, Curtis Jones, were in the general store in Money, Mississippi. Till had shown the other kids a class photo and bragged that a white girl was his girlfriend. On a dare, Till went into the store and spoke to a white woman in the store. He went in to buy candy and on his way out said, "Bye, baby."

It did not seem a serious offense until later that week, when two white men--Roy Bryant, the husband of the woman to whom Till spoke, and his half-brother, J. W. Milam--appeared on Wright's doorstep, asking for "the one that did the talking."

His body was discovered the following Wednesday in the Tallahatchie River. He had been beaten, mutilated, shot, and a cotton gin fan had been tied to his neck with barbed wire. Bryant and Milam faced kidnapping and murder charges. In spite of eyewitness testimony at trial, including Mose Wright identifying both men as those who took his great-nephew away, the all-male, all-white jury after deliberating for one hour found both men not guilty.

In an interview with reporter William Bradford Huie, both Bryant and Milam admitted to kidnapping Till. They said they did not intend to kill Till at first. They drove him around for three hours, trying to scare Till. Milam, a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserve at the time, admitted to firing the shot that killed Till.

Recent Updates

May 10, 2004: The U.S. Department of Justice is reopening the case involving Till's killing. **Source:** CNN.com, http://www.cnn.com/2004/LAW/05/10/civil.rights.killing.ap/index.html, May 11, 2004.