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# Emmett Till

In the summer of 1955, 14-year-old African-American Emmett Till had gone on vacation from Chicago to visit family in Money, Mississippi. He was shopping at a store owned by Roy and Carolyn Bryant—and someone said he possibly whistled at Mrs. Bryant, a white woman.

At some point around August 28, he was kidnapped, beaten, shot in the head, had a large metal fan tied to his neck with barbed wire, and was thrown into the Tallahatchie River. His body was soon recovered, and an investigation was opened.

It took fewer than four weeks for the case to go to trial: Roy Bryant and his half-brother J.W. Milam were accused of the murder, and an all white, all male jury acquitted both of them. No one else was ever indicted or prosecuted for involvement in the kidnapping or murder. Bryant and Milam, though, later confessed and told a magazine journalist all the grisly details of their crime. They are both, now, long deceased.

In May 2004, the FBI reopened the investigation to determine if other individuals were involved, working with the Mississippi District Attorney, U.S. Attorney, federal attorneys, and local law enforcement. Till's body was exhumed for an autopsy in 2005. In March 2006, the FBI announced that information developed in its exhaustive investigation confirmed the Department of Justice's earlier conclusion that the five-year statute of limitations on any potential federal criminal civil rights violation had expired, thereby precluding federal prosecution of this case. The FBI reported the results of its investigation to Joyce Chiles, the District Attorney for the Fourth Judicial District of Mississippi.

Although justice has not been served in the case, the tragic murder helped galvanize the growing civil rights movement in this country in the 1950s and beyond.

## For more information:

- FBI Report from the 2006 investigation
- 2021 Press Release on Closure of the Till Re-Investigation

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