



## COMMITTEE COMMENTARY

In the summer of 1955, Emmett Louis Till, a 14-year-old African American from Chicago, traveled to Money in the Mississippi Delta to visit his relatives. A few days after allegedly whistling at a white woman outside a store, he was forcibly abducted from his great-uncle's home, brutally beaten, and shot to death. His vicious killers dumped his body in the Tallahatchie River. *The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till* tells the story of Till's murder, his mother's striking courage in insisting upon an open-casket funeral to expose the brutality of his death, the trial of the two white men charged with his murder, and the pursuit of justice in the case. Director/producer Keith Beauchamp brings to life a time and a place and a tragic event that fittingly has come to represent one of the defining moments of the American Civil Rights Movement. The documentary, which aired on Court TV, features archival photos, newsreel footage, and recent interviews with commentators and eyewitnesses including, memorably, Emmett's mother, Mamie Till-Mobley. The documentary shows horrific images of Emmett Till's bloated and disfigured face. These photos were first published in 1955 in *Jet* magazine and elsewhere. Viewers experience for themselves the chilling impact they must have had. With a jury of 12 white men, the two defendants are acquitted in little more than an hour of deliberations—even though they subsequently confessed their role for a lucrative exclusive interview in *Look* magazine. The documentary makes painfully evident the role of "jury nullification" in 1950s Mississippi. Offering a historical lesson we must never forget, *The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till* highlights the legal and moral consequences that result from our failure to provide equal justice for all.

# The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till

Court TV and Till Freedom Come Productions  
New York, New York

Keith A. Beauchamp, *Producer and Director*  
Edgar E. Beauchamp and Ceola J. Beauchamp,  
*Executive Producers*



## INTERVIEW WITH KEITH BEAUCHAMP

*Keith Beauchamp is the founder and director of Till Freedom Come Productions, LLC, which is devoted to producing socially significant projects that can both educate and entertain.*

### Where did the initial idea for "Emmett Till" come from?

Using the power of filmmaking, I have devoted the past 12 years of my life to pursuing justice for Emmett Louis Till. I was first introduced to the case at the age of 10. While in my parent's study, I came across an issue of *Jet* magazine that covered the story. I can remember opening the magazine and finding the photo of Till's corpse. My parents came in and explained the case to me. Throughout my life, Emmett's story would be used as an educational tool to teach me about the racism that still exists in this country. Two weeks before my high-school graduation, I was assaulted by an undercover police officer for dancing with a white girl at a pre-graduation party. This incident spurred my interest in making sure that these things would never happen again, so I began to study Criminal Justice in hopes of becoming a civil rights attorney. During my junior year of college, I decided to move to New York to work in film. In 1996, I traveled throughout the country, researching and finding eyewitnesses who would later prove critical in developing this project and getting the Till case reopened. I was fortunate to work with Emmett's mother, the late Mamie Till-Mobley, who fought for 48 years to get her son's case reopened. With the help of Mrs. Mobley and Emmett's cousins, I was able to locate and convince witnesses who had never before spoken publicly to come forward.

### What resources were required to develop the documentary?

This project was financed initially by my parents and me from funds set aside for me to attend law school. Producing a story such as this was very controversial. It dealt with issues at the intersection of sex and race. It was very difficult to convince people to support this production

financially. Ultimately, however, with the help of small sponsorships from the Human Arts Association and the support of family and friends, my dream to tell this important story became a reality.

### How does the documentary foster public understanding? What do you see as its public impact?

Since the documentary's release and the reopening of the Till case, I have traveled extensively around the country, speaking and lecturing about my journey to tell Till's story. The production of this documentary became a great educational tool for the public. It has helped start an open cleansing dialogue among this generation, thus aiding the process of racial reconciliation, which is much needed in this country and in the world. In addition, the "Till Bill" has recently been introduced in Congress to establish a new "cold case" unit between the FBI and Department of Justice to reinvestigate murders committed during the Civil Rights era.

### What does winning the Silver Gavel from the ABA mean to you?

I am extremely overwhelmed by being recognized by the American Bar Association. Winning this distinguished award proves that one voice can move a mountain and make a profound difference in this society. Much work has been put in this project, and this award let's me know that I am on the right track and that I must continue to speak for those who can no longer speak for themselves.

**TITLE PAGE: MAMIE TILL-MOBLEY SEES HER SON FOR THE FIRST TIME.**

MAMIE TILL-MOBLEY: Well, I looked at Mr. Rayner. Mr. Rayner wanted to know, was I going to have the casket opened. I said, "Oh yes, we're going to open the casket!" He said, "Well Miss Bradley, do you want me to do something for the face? Want me to try to fix it up?" I said, "No, let the people see what I've seen!" I said, "I want the world to see this!" Because, there's no way that I can tell this story and give them the visual picture of what my son looked like.

REV. AL SHARPTON: The easiest thing would've been to say, "No, close the casket. I can't bear it." But she, somewhere, found the strength to say, "I'll bear my pain, to save some other mother from having to go through this." And because she put the picture of this young man's body on the conscience of America, she might have saved thousands of young black men and young black women's lives.

TILL-MOBLEY (recording): I believe that the whole United States is mourning with me. And if the death of my son can mean something to the other unfortunate people all over the world, then for him to have died a hero would mean more to me than for him just to have died.

**TITLE PAGE: THE MURDER TRIAL**

TILL-MOBLEY: I remember the first day of the trial every window was filled with a father and his son or sons and as I would come up the steps, they would aim the guns at me. And they would pull the triggers and the little caps would pop. And they would say, "bang bang bang." And the fathers, they thought this was the cutest thing. And the little guys were just firing away. You know the hair on my neck and down my back was just standing straight. It was a frightening experience.

DAN WAKEFIELD (Reporter, the Nation): The reporters who were there were shocked and kind of astonished at finding this situation in which it seemed that the people in the town knew that these men had murdered this "Negro" boy—that was the term used at the time—and at the same time, they did not want the murderers to be punished. I mean, that was the civic attitude. There was a great hostility to the reporters who were, as the local people put it, "making a big thing of this."

COURT REPORTER (recording): The highlight of the trial so far has been the dramatic testimony of Uncle Moses Wright. In court, he dramatically pointed at the two defendants Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam and said that they were the two men who came to his house on August 28 and took the boy away. Old Moses said he never saw the boy alive again.

WAKEFIELD: It may have been one of the most moving moments of the trial when Moses Wright stood as straight as an arrow and spoke clearly and firmly his testimony that indeed these were the men who had taken the boy from his house.

SIMEON WRIGHT: He stood up. He pointed his finger at him and said, "That's him," pointing at Milam. And that was, oh my, that was quite a moment then. You had the people rumbling and grumbling. We later found out that blacks didn't do that in Mississippi.

WAKEFIELD: He was willing to put himself at risk. He was not going to lie. He was not going to back down. He was not going to be intimidated. And you had to really admire the courage of somebody who, despite

being brought up in that culture, the culture really of slavery, would defy the mores by insisting on telling the truth.

CHARLES EVERS (brother of slain leader Medgar Evers): You've got to remember that back in those days it was suicide for a black man, a black person, to go into a courtroom and testify against a white man, cause the whole room, the whole court was white.

TILL-MOBLEY: Ruthie Hurley, Amzie Moore, and Medgar Evers at the trial, they came to the trial every day. Sometimes, Amzie Moore and Medgar were out looking for witnesses. Or Medgar was busy escorting Moses Wright to and from the courtroom, safely, because his life was being threatened every minute.

EVERS: Medgar was the one who actually was on the scene. And went to Money and places trying to get information. Most of the big shot NAACP folk, they sat back in their offices in Atlanta and New York and did nothing but direct. But Amzie Moore joined Medgar and went and investigated. And they were the ones taking all of the chances of being killed themselves.

**TITLE PAGE: CAROLYN BRYANT TESTIFIES THAT EMMETT TILL MADE LEWD ADVANCES TOWARD HER**

TILL-MOBLEY: When Carolyn Bryant made her testimony, I was not in the courtroom. They had me in another room. They didn't want me influenced by the witness, I guess. But when I heard the story, I knew for two reasons that that was a lie. Number one, Emmett's speech impediment under stress would not allow him to get these things out. And, number two, the respect that I had put into him for womankind and for mankind, he just wouldn't come off that way.

When I saw the antics that were going on in the courtroom, I could tell that everything was against us. And when the jury retired to render their verdict, I noticed that the black people who were lining the walls in the backs of the room, they were quietly leaving the courtroom. And I knew then that they knew we were not going to get a guilty verdict. And I said to my party, "It's time for us to go." Congresswoman Diggs said to me, "And miss the verdict?" I said, "This is one you don't want to hear. The verdict is not guilty." To satisfy me, they agreed to leave. I guess about forty-five minutes away from the courtroom, the verdict came in—not guilty.



Go to [www.abanet.org/publiced/gavel](http://www.abanet.org/publiced/gavel) for a link to the Court TV site for the documentary. The DVD is available for \$14.99 from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).