

# EMMETT TILL'S LEGACY



## ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Why was Emmett Till lynched? What impact has this incident had on historical and contemporary racial justice struggles?



## OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Define *lynching* and interpret data on its prevalence in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- Analyze a series of poems by Langston Hughes on lynching.
- Create a collage reflecting who Emmett Till was as an individual.
- Investigate the circumstances surrounding Till's murder and the choices made by individuals and institutions involved in the incident.
- Discuss the impact of Till's murder on the civil rights movement and the nation.
- Conduct independent research on contemporary issues related to police violence and/or societal racism.



## LEARNING STANDARDS

See the [standards alignment chart](#) to learn how this lesson supports New Jersey State Standards.



## TIME NEEDED

155–165 minutes (plus time for independent research)



## MATERIALS

- AV equipment for playing video clips and projecting a handout
- Materials for creating a collage (large paper, drawing implements, scissors, glue)
- Access to laptops or tablets for independent research
- *Lynching in the U.S., 1882–1968* handout (one to project)
- *Three Songs about Lynching* handout (one per student)
- *Questions: Three Songs about Lynching* handout (one per student)
- *Choices* handout (one per student)
- *Reflections on the Lynching of Emmett Till* handout (one per student)
- Articles by Arielle Newton, Lokia Poole, and Renée Watson from this website: <https://bit.ly/3k2T6uG> (one per student)



## VOCABULARY

Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement	civil rights movement	lynching
civil rights	discrimination	segregated
	intersectionality	white supremacy

# Procedures

## PART 1

### Lynching—a Tool of Terror (45 mins.)

- 1 Ask students how they would define the term *lynching*. Have them discuss in pairs and then share with the class. Introduce the definition below. Highlight that lynchings in the U.S. were carried out under the pretense of seeking justice but without a lawful trial; were instruments of intimidation and terror; and were public spectacles that celebrated and preserved white supremacy.

**lynching:** an unlawful public murder, often by hanging, carried out by angry mobs; white people used lynchings to control and terrorize Black people during the 1800s and 1900s, mostly in the South.

- 2 Project or distribute the handout *Lynching in the U.S., 1882–1968*. Review these figures with students so they have a sense of the prevalence of lynching in the U.S. Allow them to react to the data.
- 3 Divide students into small groups and distribute the handout *Three Songs about Lynching by Langston Hughes* and the accompanying discussion questions. Assign each group one poem to focus on. Have them read all three and then discuss the questions related to their assigned poem.
- 4 Form new groups in which there is a mix of students who have focused on different poems. Have them take turns sharing highlights from their analysis of each poem. Gather as a class and discuss how the poems work together as a trilogy and what overall messages they communicate about the forces underlying lynching.

#### NOTE

Hughes' trilogy of poems works together to expose the cruelty and hypocrisy of lynching, used to violently police the boundaries of Black behavior, often under the guise of protecting "white womanhood." The futility of truth underscored in the narrative leads to hopelessness and despair. Yet, the final poem ends on a triumphant "NOT I," signaling that despite physical death, Black virtue lives on while white people suffer a spiritual demise. For additional analysis, see "On 'Three Songs about Lynching'" by Heather Zadra in *Modern American Poetry*: <https://bit.ly/2TuddH0>.

## PART 2

### The Impact of Emmett Till's Murder (90 mins.)

**5** Ask students if they have heard of Emmett Till and allow them to share prior knowledge. Explain that Till was a 14-year-old Black boy who was lynched in Mississippi in 1955 after allegedly insulting a white woman. Tell students that before talking about his death, it is important to get a sense of who Till was in life. In small groups, have students read one of the biographical profiles below. Then direct them to create one item in response that they can contribute to a shared collage—a sketch, quote, image, poem, etc. Assemble the items onto a large sheet of paper. Display the collage and reflect on who Emmett Till was before he became a martyr.

- Emmett Till's mother describes child behind the icon (Chicago Tribune), <https://bit.ly/3xfkvsm>
- Who was Emmett Till? (PBS American Experience), <https://to.pbs.org/3qHjjex>
- Emmett Till (Biography.com), <https://bit.ly/366eoPj>

**6** Distribute the *Choices* handout and review the directions with students. Show the film clip from *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Movement*, Episode 1: *Awakenings (1954–1956)*: <https://bit.ly/2TvkZQZ> [10:28]. Direct students to take notes on the handout as they view the clip. After, allow students to share the observations they noted in pairs or small groups.

**7** Conduct a class discussion in response to some of the following questions.

- What was happening in the country prior to the summer of 1955 that made an already oppressive racial system even more charged?
- What were the reactions of Black community members after Till's interaction with Carolyn Bryant, the white woman in the store? What does this reveal about race and gender roles in the South at the time?
- What was the role of lynching in the segregated system that existed in the American South?

#### OPTION

For mature audiences, consider showing Time's 100 Photos documentary short, *The Body of Emmett Till*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4V6ffUUevaM> [8:29], <https://time.com/4399793/emmett-till-civil-rights-photography/>. It explores the impact of the momentous choice made by Till's family to have an open casket and allow the media to photograph Till's mutilated body. Note that this film contains graphic images of Till's corpse and may not be suitable for all students. If using, allow students the choice to opt out.

- 
- What important choices did Till's family make following his murder? What impact did these choices have on the movement and on the nation?
  - How did Moses Wright, Till's great uncle, protect Till both before and after his death? What risks did he face as he considered his choices?
  - What role did law enforcement play in Till's murder and, more broadly, in the system of lynching?
  - What role did the media (Black and mainstream) play in shaping the nation's response to the murder of Till? Why are images so important in the pursuit of justice for Black victims of violence?
  - How did awareness of the Emmett Till case impact ordinary Americans? How did it act as a spark that fired the civil rights movement?

## 8

In order to deepen students' understanding of the impact Till's lynching had on Black Americans and the civil rights movement, assign them to read one or both of the excerpts in the handout *Reflections on the Lynching of Emmett Till*. Have them do reflective writing in response, using the following prompts:

- What was the emotional impact of Till's lynching on other Black youth his age?
- How do you think the terror they felt shaped the civil rights movement in the years following Till's death?

## PART 3

### Contemporary Connections

**(20–30 mins. + time for independent research)**

## 9

Post and read aloud the quote below. Ask students if they see a connection between the murder of Emmett Till and the shootings of many Black people in today's world, and discuss.

*"These shootings of unarmed Black boys and men have been going on for decades. It is a manifestation of the same presumption of dangerousness that killed Emmett Till, that killed thousands of people of color during the lynching era."*

—Bryan Stevenson, Equal Justice Initiative

- 10** Access the website The Emmett Till Project here: <https://bit.ly/3k2T6uG>. In pairs, have students choose one of the following reflections from the website to read and discuss: *History Repeats Itself: Emmett Till and the continued Struggle for Civil Rights* by **Arielle Newton**, *Past in Present: The Emmett Till Trial and the Black Lives Matter Movement* by **Lakia Poole**, and *A Psalm for Emmett Till* by **Renée Watson**. Have them annotate the text by highlighting phrases that resonate for them and noting reactions and questions in the margins.
- 11** Have students choose one of the independent research projects below to work on in class and/or at home. Once the projects are complete, provide a forum for students to share and react to each other's work.
- Research one youth of color who was killed in recent times due to societal racism and/or police violence. Create a poster memorializing the young person that includes a photo, personal attributes, and a summary of the circumstances under which they lost their life. Examples of victims include Trayvon Martin (age 17), Tamir Rice (age 12), Adam Toledo (age 13), and Ma'Khia Bryant (age 16).
  - Research a community organization that is taking action to prevent racism and/or police violence and prepare a report summarizing local issues and what the group is doing in response. The report should include ways young people can get involved at the school or community level.
- 12** Conclude the lesson by discussing some of the questions on the next page.



# Discussion Questions

1

Was Emmett Till's murder inevitable or could different choices have been made to protect him? Explain.

2

In what ways was it dangerous to be a Black boy in Till's time? How would you compare that experience to today?

3

What was the role of imagery in the aftermath of Till's murder? What is the role of imagery in the current racial justice movement?

4

Why was Moses Wright's behavior considered among the bravest acts of the civil rights era? What are examples of bravery in your own community today when it comes to standing up for others?

5

Why is Emmett Till still a powerful symbol for the movement today? Why is his story still relevant?

6

What, if any, changes to policing do you feel would address the problem of racial violence in society today?

7

Do you have a choice or a role to play in protecting others from the effects of discrimination today? Explain.

# Lesson Extensions

- Assign students to research and report on how the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) escalated racial tensions that contributed to the lynching of Emmett Till (1955). Have them research how Till's murder, in turn, inspired the Montgomery bus boycott (1955–56). Discuss the connectedness of events during the civil rights era.
- Have students read the handout *Quotes from Civil Rights Leaders on Emmett Till* and select one quote to react to through reflective writing. Ask them to think about the meaning of the quote and why Till had such a great impact on people in the U.S. and around the world.
- Moses Wright's courage in standing up for his nephew in court despite the risks to his safety is noteworthy. Assign students to write an essay, design a poster, or create a short video profiling a current figure who stood up for the civil rights of others. The figure can be someone students know personally or someone they learned about in the news.
- Assign students to read about children and young people who changed their country and the world. Examples include Malala Yousafzai, Sophie Cruz, Samantha Smith, Iqbal Masih, Claudette Colvin, Jazz Jennings, Bana al-Abed, Anoyara Khatun, Ruby Bridges, Nkosi Johnson, Thandiwe Chama, Xiuhtezcatl Martinez and Mari Copeny. See the article, "These 30 Incredible Kids Really Changed the World" for more examples: <https://bit.ly/36cj1HY>.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

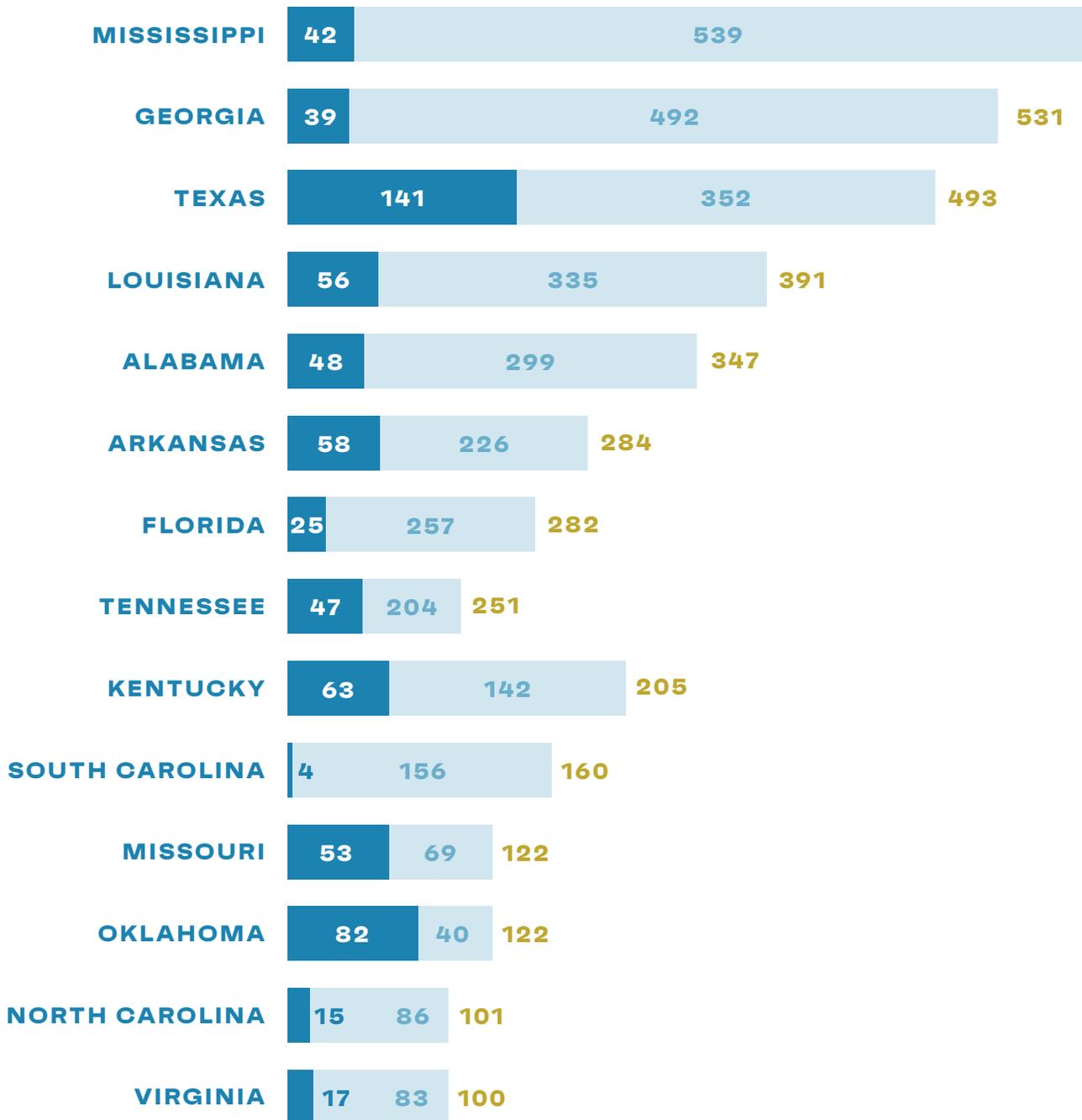
- + Blackside and Facing History and Ourselves. "Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Movement 1954–1985, A Study Guide to the Television Series." 2006. <https://bit.ly/3x-hVW2K>.
- + Costello, Maureen. "That Part's Not True." Learning for Justice. January 31, 2017. <https://bit.ly/3yfDuaW>.
- + Emmett Till Project. <https://www.emmettillproject.com>.
- + Facing History and Ourselves. "Emmett Till: A Series of Four Lessons." <https://bit.ly/3h9P-7dU>.
- + Gonchar, Michael. "Meting Out Justice." December 2, 2002. New York Times Learning Network. <https://nyti.ms/3xfNjfd>.
- + PBS American Experience. *The Murder of Emmett Till*. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/till>.
- + Time 100 Photos. "Emmett Till." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4V6ffUUevaM>, <https://time.com/4399793/emmett-till-civil-rights-photography/>.
- + Wright, Simeon. *Simeon's Story: An Eyewitness Account of the Kidnapping of Emmett Till*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2011.
- + Zinn Education Project. "The Murder of Emmett Till." <https://bit.ly/3dAmZhW>.



## Lynching in the U.S., 1882–1968

Between 1882 and 1968, more than 4,700 people were lynched in the U.S. While Black people made up between 10 and 13 percent of the population (depending on the year), they accounted for about 73 percent of lynchings (just under 3,500). About three-quarters of lynchings took place in former Confederate states.

(The dark blue areas represent non-Black victims and the light blue areas represent Black victims)



SOURCES: NAACP. History of Lynching in America. <https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/history-lynching-america>; O'Neill, Aaron. "Number of executions by lynching in the United States by state and race between 1882 and 1968." Statista, October 2, 2020. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1175147/lynching-by-race-state-and-race/>.



# Three Songs about Lynching

## SILHOUETTE

Southern gentle lady,  
Do not swoon.  
They've just hung a black  
man  
In the dark of the moon.  
  
They've hung a black man  
To a roadside tree  
In the dark of the moon  
  
For the world to see  
How Dixie protects  
Its white womanhood.  
  
Southern gentle lady,  
Be good!  
Be good!

## FLIGHT

Plant your toes in the cool  
swamp mud.  
Step and leave no track.  
Hurry, sweating runner!  
The hounds are at your  
back.  
  
No, I didn't touch her.  
White flesh ain't for me.  
  
Hurry, black boy, hurry!  
Or they'll swing you to a  
tree.

## LYNCHING SONG

Pull at the rope!  
O, pull it high!  
Let the white folks live  
And the black boy die.  
  
Pull it, boys,  
With a bloody cry.  
Let the black boy spin  
While the white folks die.  
  
The white folks die?  
What do you mean –  
The white folks die?  
  
That black boy's  
Still body  
Says:  
NOT I.



# Questions: Three Songs about Lynching

Read all three poems, then focus on your assigned poem and discuss the related questions below.

## SILHOUETTE

- What does it mean to “swoon”? Why is the speaker telling the Southern woman not to swoon?
- What do the terms “gentle lady” and “white womanhood” reveal about the reason for hanging the Black man?
- What might the speaker mean when he tells the woman to “be good”?
- How was the practice of lynching influenced by the relationship between gender and race?
- What is the mood or feeling of the poem?

## FLIGHT

- What is the irony of telling the “runner” to put his toes in the mud and leave no track? What is the speaker suggesting?
- What do the lines “I didn’t touch her” and “white flesh ain’t for me” reveal about why the Black man is being stalked?
- What is the speaker’s message about the possibility of escape or justice?
- What is the mood or feeling of the poem?

## LYNCHING SONG

- Who is speaking in this poem? Is there more than one speaker?
- What is the significance of the language shifting from “the black boy die” in the first stanza to “the white folks die” in the second?
- What does it mean for the white folks to die when they are the ones doing the killing?
- What is the meaning of “NOT I” at the end? What message is conveyed by the Black boy, even after he is dead?
- What is the mood or feeling of the poem? How is it different from the other two?



Photo source: Parks, Gordon, photographer. Portrait of Langston Hughes. United States, 1943. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017858893>.

**Langston Hughes** (1902–1967) grew up in Joplin, Missouri, and later settled in Cleveland, Ohio. Hughes began writing poetry as a teenager and, in 1921, he published his first poem—“The Negro Speaks of Rivers”—in the NAACP magazine, *The Crisis*. Hughes received praise for his poem and spent the next years in New York and Paris developing his writing. In 1926, Hughes’ first book of poetry, *The Weary Blues*, was published. His celebration of Black culture and analysis of racism in the U.S. made him an important contributor to the Harlem Renaissance throughout the 1920s. For the next several decades, Hughes published a rich collection of poetry, plays and novels, and he lectured throughout the U.S. and internationally.

He wrote a column for the Black newspaper, *The Chicago Defender*, and served as a war correspondent during the Spanish Civil War. Two of Hughes’ most important poems are “Let America Be America Again” and “Harlem (What happens to a dream deferred?)”, in which he explores the hope of America within the context of racism and segregation. Hughes never married. Many scholars believe he was a gay man, but there is little evidence due to Hughes’ secrecy about his personal life during a time when it was dangerous to be openly LGBTQ. Today, Langston Hughes’ work continues to be studied and translated, and he remains one of the most influential writers in American history.



# Choices

Choose three of the people or institutions below to focus on as you watch the video. For each, note the choices they made before, during or after the Emmett Till lynching. Consider other possible choices (taking into account that it was the 1950s) and note those as well.

- Emmett Till
- Mamie Till-Moseley
- Moses Wright
- Carolyn Bryant
- Roy Bryant
- J.W. Milam
- the criminal justice system
- the media
- the American people

**CHOICES MADE**

**OTHER POSSIBLE CHOICES**

*(taking into consideration the times)*

	<b>CHOICES MADE</b>	<b>OTHER POSSIBLE CHOICES</b> <i>(taking into consideration the times)</i>
<b>1</b>		
<b>2</b>		
<b>3</b>		



# Reflections on the Lynching of Emmett Till

*"I thought of Emmett Till, and when the bus driver ordered me to move to the back, I just couldn't move."*

*"My legs and feet were not hurting, that is a stereotype. I paid the same fare as others, and I felt violated. I was not going back."*

—Rosa Parks

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## EXCERPT FROM COMING OF AGE IN MISSISSIPPI BY ANNE MOODY

*In her 1968 memoir, Anne Moody writes about growing up as a young Black woman in rural Mississippi. She explores the themes of racism and sexism, and recounts her role in the civil rights movement. In this excerpt, Moody expresses her feelings about the murder of Emmett Till and the personal impact it had on her.*

I was now working for one of the meanest white women in town, and a week before school started Emmett Till was killed.

Up until his death, I had heard of Negroes found floating in a river or dead somewhere with their bodies riddled with bullets. But I didn't know the mystery behind these killings then.

When they had finished dinner and gone into the living room as usual to watch TV, Mrs. Burke called me to eat. I took a clean plate out of the cabinet and sat down. Just as I was putting the first forkful of food in my mouth, Mrs. Burke entered the kitchen.

"Essie, did you hear about that fourteen-year-old boy who was killed in Greenwood?" she asked me, sitting down in one of the chairs opposite me.

"No, I didn't hear that," I answered, almost choking on the food.

"Do you know why he was killed?" she asked and I didn't answer.

"He was killed because he got out of his place with a white woman. A boy from Mississippi would have known better than that. This boy was from Chicago. Negroes up North have no respect for people. They think they can get away with anything. He just came

to Mississippi and put a whole lot of notions in the boys' heads here and stirred up a lot of trouble," she said passionately.

"How old are you, Essie?" she asked me after a pause.

"Fourteen, I will soon be fifteen though," I said.

"See, that boy was just fourteen too. It's a shame he had to die so soon." She was red in the face, she looked as if she was on fire.

When she left the kitchen I sat there with my mouth open and my food untouched. I couldn't have eaten now if I were starving. "Just do your work like you don't know nothing" ran through my mind again and I began washing the dishes.

I went home shaking like a leaf on a tree. For the first time out of all her trying, Mrs. Burke had made me feel like rotten garbage. Many times she had tried to instill fear within me and subdue me and had given up. But when she talked about Emmett Till there was something in her voice that sent chills and fear all over me.

Before Emmett Till's murder, I had known the fear of hunger, hell, and the Devil. But now there was a new fear known to me—the fear of being killed just because I was black. This was the worst of my fears.



## REFLECTIONS ON THE LYNCHING OF EMMETT TILL (CONTINUED)

I knew once I got food, the fear of starving to death would leave. I also was told that if I were a good girl, I wouldn't have to fear the Devil or hell. But I didn't know what one had to do or not do as a Negro not to be killed. Probably just being a Negro period was enough, I thought.

I was fifteen years old when I began to hate people. I hated the white men who murdered Emmett Till and

I hated all the other whites who were responsible for the countless murders Mrs. Rice (my teacher) had told me about and those I vaguely remembered from childhood. But I also hated Negroes. I hated them for not standing up and doing something about the murders. In fact, I think I had a stronger resentment toward Negroes for letting the whites kill them than toward the whites.

SOURCE: Moody, Anne. *Coming of Age in Mississippi: The Classic Autobiography of Growing Up Poor and Black in the Rural South* (Reissue edition). New York: Dell Publishing, 1992.

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## EXCERPT FROM A MIGHTY LONG WAY BY CARLOTTA WALLS LANIER

*Carlotta Walls LaNier was one of the "Little Rock Nine," who bravely integrated Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. In this excerpt from her memoir, Walls LaNier remembers when she first learned of Emmett Till's murder and the emotional impact it made on her family.*

I first heard the name of Emmett Till whispered from the lips of adults, speaking in hushed tones around my house about the horrible thing the white people did to that little black boy in Mississippi.

It was one of those moments when legend meets reality. I had read stories before about the lynching of black folks in Mississippi and other areas of the Deep South. I'd even heard my relatives tell the story of a lynching in downtown Little Rock.

To me, such stories were tragic yet distant history. But I knew Emmett Till. I'd never laid eyes on him before the magazine photos, but in the handsome

face of the boy he had been before his murder, I saw my cousins, my friends, my classmates. He was just one and a half years older than me and as real to me as the black playmates I met on the softball field every day.

Because of what happened to Emmett Till, Mississippi became a fearsome place in my mind, and I wanted never to set foot there. That must have been the case with the adults in my family, too, because from that moment on, Daddy mapped out our road trips so that we never even passed through Mississippi.

SOURCE: Walls LaNier, Carlotta. *A Mighty Long Way: My Journey to Justice at Little Rock Central High School* (Reprint edition). New York: One World, 2010.



## HANDOUT

# Quotes from Civil Rights Leaders on Emmett Till

- "I thought about Emmett Till, and I couldn't go back [to the back of the bus]."  
**ROSA PARKS**
  
- "[Emmett Till's murder was] one of the most brutal and inhuman crimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century."  
**DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.**
  
- "It would appear that the state of Mississippi has decided to maintain white supremacy by murdering children."  
**ROY WILKINS, HEAD OF THE NAACP**
  
- "Nothing that boy did could ever justify what happened to him."  
**CAROLYN BRYANT DONHAM, EMMETT'S ACCUSER, 2007**
  
- "When people saw what had happened to my son, men stood up who had never stood up before."  
**MAMIE TILL-MOBLEY**
  
- "And the fact that Emmett Till, a young black man, could be found floating down the river in Mississippi, as, indeed, many had been done over the years, this set in concrete the determination of people to move forward."  
**REVEREND FRED SHUTTLESWORTH, CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER**
  
- "I was not even born when Emmett Till was brutally murdered in Money, Miss., but growing up in Detroit in the early 1960s, I knew his name well. When I took the long train ride to my mother's hometown of Greenwood, Miss., in 1967, I learned even more about him. I learned that he had violated the rigid rules of racial deference and hierarchy that governed the South, and had paid for it with his life."  
**BARBARA RANSBY, PROFESSOR OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDIES AND HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO**
  
- "I think the picture in Jet magazine showing Emmett Till's mutilation was probably the greatest media product in the last forty or fifty years because that picture stimulated a lot of interest and anger on the part of blacks all over the country."  
**CONGRESSMAN CHARLES DIGGS**

# How did nonviolence and direct action lead to change during the civil rights movement?

Many Americans take for granted that the philosophy of nonviolence was endemic to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights activists. The values of civil disobedience and direct action, however, were more of an evolution than an inevitability. As a seminary student, Dr. King was influenced by thinkers such as Henry David Thoreau and Mahatma Gandhi, but his real commitment to nonviolence developed “on the job.” King’s longtime adviser, Bayard Rustin, observed: “I do not believe that one honors Dr. King by assuming that somehow he had been prepared for this job. He had not been prepared for it: either tactically, strategically, or his understanding of nonviolence...he came to a profoundly deep understanding of nonviolence through the struggle itself.”<sup>10</sup>

Rustin—whose commitment to nonviolence began with his Quaker upbringing in Pennsylvania—organized nonviolent campaigns for the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in the 1940s. During World War II, he went to prison as a conscientious objector and subsequently spent time in India studying Gandhian philosophy. Rustin became a close adviser to King during the Montgomery bus boycott in 1956, and helped King translate his ideas about nonviolence into an effective strategy that would fuel the burgeoning movement.

Nonviolent direct action was a hallmark of the yearlong boycott, from legal challenges in the U.S. Supreme Court down to the grassroots. Georgia

Gilmore, for example, was a midwife and a cook, who organized “the Club from Nowhere” to prepare food for civil rights protesters. Her organization raised significant funds for the Montgomery Improvement Association, and Gilmore testified in the court case that put an end to segregated buses (and lost her job for it).

The 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom is perhaps the most well-known example of nonviolent direct action organizing. More than 250,000 people gathered peacefully to demand economic equality, employment opportunity, school integration and a robust civil rights law. A 23-year-old John Lewis—then national chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)—took to the podium and proclaimed that “the revolution is at hand, and we must free ourselves of the chains of political and economic slavery.”<sup>11</sup>

Paradoxically, the same march that lifted the voices of millions of persecuted Black Americans marginalized others. Only one woman, Anna Hedgeman, was part of the organizing committee for the march, and none were included as major speakers. A week prior to the event, lawyer and civil rights activist Pauli Murray expressed her outrage to A. Philip Randolph, director of the march: “It is indefensible to...send out a call which contains the name of not a single woman leader...‘tokenism’ is as offensive when applied to women as when applied to Negroes.”<sup>12</sup> In the end, the program contained a perfunctory

10 Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Weapon of Love: How Martin Luther King, Jr. Became Nonviolent*. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, January 16, 2017. <https://ab.co/3knHUN>.

11 Lewis, John. *Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998.

12 Spartacus Educational. *Anna (Pauli) Murray*. <https://spartacus-educational.com/USAMurrayA.htm>.

“Tribute to Negro Women,” but the serious speaking slots were designated for the “Big Six” civil rights leaders, all men. Dorothy Height, head of the National Council of Negro Women, had used her organizing might to recruit thousands of volunteers and mobilize hundreds of thousands to attend the rally. However, the woman who would later be called “the godmother of the civil rights movement” was not invited to the microphone that day.

Bayard Rustin, a chief architect of both the March on Washington and the broader civil rights movement, would also be omitted from the program that day. In 1953, Rustin had been jailed in California on a “morals charge” for having sex with another man in a car. Rustin was unapologetic about being gay, but his sexual orientation made the movement vulnerable to attack. This led to Rustin’s ouster from the movement for several years. When the decision was made to organize a march on Washington, there was unanimous agreement that no one was better prepared to lead it than Rustin. Fearing condemnation from opponents, a compromise was reached in which A. Philip Randolph would serve as director and quietly deputize Rustin to run the operation. No other leader did more than Rustin to make the March on Washington a triumph, yet bigotry has eclipsed his role.

The March on Washington contributed to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and a growing demand for Black political power. In June of 1964, the Freedom Summer Project was launched in Mississippi to harness that power through a voter registration campaign and the establishment of dozens of Freedom Schools to educate and mobilize Black voters. The project was run by organizations including the NAACP and SNCC, and leaders such as Bob Moses and Fannie Lou Hamer. Hamer ran for Congress that year as part of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), created to challenge the all-white Democratic party in that state. She addressed the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, recounting her experiences of being arrested, fired from her job, evicted from

her home, intimidated and beaten simply for attempting to register to vote. Hamer would famously tell America, “And I’ve been tired so long, now I am sick and tired of being sick and tired, and we want a change.”<sup>13</sup>

Though Freedom Summer garnered national attention, its results were limited—only about 12,000 new voter registrations were generated among the Black residents of Mississippi. Such gradual progress, coupled with extreme racist violence, deepened divisions between advocates of nonviolence and the growing Black Power movement, which demanded a more militant approach. “Concerning nonviolence,” asserted Malcolm X, “it is criminal to teach a man not to defend himself when he is the constant victim of brutal attacks.”<sup>14</sup> In 1966, Bobby Seale and Huey Newton formed the Black Panther Party for Self Defense in Oakland, California. Based on the Marxist view that oppressed peoples need to embrace a policy of self-determination, the Black Panthers developed a 10-point program demanding full employment, decent housing, inclusive education and freedom from police brutality. Though the Panthers are remembered for their armed patrols of police, they also established breakfast programs, medical clinics and after-school education. The Black Power movement was widely embraced in Black communities and, by 1970, there were more than 30 national chapters of the Black Panther Party across the country.

In 1967, the FBI established a counterintelligence program to destabilize the Black Panther Party and other Black Power groups. Similar operations had been conducted earlier to discredit Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement. Such campaigns, along with inaccurate media representations and culturally biased curricula in schools, have led to an incomplete understanding of the civil rights era. Groups that have stood against police brutality and other forms of violence and discrimination have often been vilified and accused of being radical or dangerous. These histories provide an instructive lens on current efforts to disrupt racial justice groups that continue to speak out against inequality.

13 Brooks, Maegan Parker and Houck, Davis W. *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell It Like It Is*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013.

14 Teaching American History. *DOCUMENT: A Declaration of Independence, Malcolm X, March 12, 1964*. <https://bit.ly/2UJld2N>.