



Legislation Text

File #: Res 0274-2004, **Version:** A

Res. No. 274-A

Resolution calling upon United States Attorney General John Ashcroft and the Department of Justice to reopen the case of Emmett Till, in light of the discovery of new information, for a complete and thorough investigation into his 1955 murder, and to move aggressively to indict the murderers of Emmett Till, and bring them to justice.

By Council Members Perkins, James, Barron, Clarke, Foster, Koppell, Lopez, Sanders, Serrano, Vann, Boyland, Brewer, Liu, Comrie, Jennings, Reyna, Weprin and Gonzalez

Whereas, In August of 1955, Mamie Till Mobley said good-bye to her son, 14 year-old Emmett Till, as he boarded a bus from his hometown of Chicago bound for Mississippi, to spend the last days of his summer vacation visiting with relatives living in Money; and

Whereas, After traveling with friends to Bryant's Grocery in the center of town to purchase gum and soda, Emmett Till was alleged to have been "too familiar" with the store owner's wife - a white woman; and

Whereas, At approximately 2:00 a.m. on August 28, 1955, young Emmett Till was abducted at gunpoint from the Money, Mississippi home of his uncle, Preacher Moses Wright, by store-owner Roy Bryant and Bryant's brother, J.W. Milam; and

Whereas, The men drove Emmett Till to Tallahatchie County, where he was brutally beaten, pistol-whipped, bludgeoned and shot, and thrown into the Tallahatchie River to drown in a vicious hate crime that sparked collective outrage across the nation and helped light the spark that ignited the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement; and

Whereas, Bryant and Milam admitted to abducting Emmett Till from his uncle's home, but both claimed they released him unharmed on the same night; and

Whereas, Bryant and Milam were subsequently tried for the murder of Emmett Till, their trial beginning

on September 19, 1955, but despite a large amount of evidence against them, and eyewitness testimony, the two men were acquitted of all charges on September 23, 1955, by an all-white jury which deliberated for 1 hour and 7 minutes; and

Whereas, In January 1956, Bryant and Milam admitted their guilt in an interview they sold to Look magazine for \$4,000, an interview which, they would later claim, had been fabricated, but which included admissions of their involvement in the slaying and provided gruesome details of their brutality that night; and

Whereas, Despite these glaring inconsistencies and the fact that their apparent confessions contradicted trial testimony by other witnesses which suggested that accomplices were involved in Till's slaying, the inconsistencies were never investigated and no one ever did time for Emmett Till's murder; and

Whereas, Until their deaths in 1981 and 1994, respectively, nothing more was ever said by either Milam or Bryant about the murder or about the possibility that other people had been involved; and

Whereas, Emmett Till's mother, Mamie Till Mobley, worked diligently until her death on January 6, 2003 at age 81, to reopen her son's case, with the intent of bringing all guilty parties to justice, without success; and

Whereas, A young documentary filmmaker named Keith Beauchamp began conducting research for a film he was making about the case, and during the course of his research, Beauchamp uncovered compelling new evidence that at least 10 people - five whites and five blacks - were involved in the kidnapping and killing of Emmett Till; and

Whereas, Such evidence is contained in his film, "The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till," which Beauchamp recently showed to federal prosecutors in Mississippi, and which asserts that there were a number of individuals - several of them still alive -- who were present at the time of the murder and that, if the case is reopened, these witnesses could lead investigators to other suspects who may still be alive; and

Whereas, While re-examining the nearly 50-year-old case poses some challenges, federal law provides the U.S. Department of Justice with wide latitude and discretion in conducting such an investigation, and

advanced technology and modern resources have made the solving of many old cases possible; and

Whereas, Since 1989, as many as 22 old murder cases that occurred both before and during the Civil Rights Movement, including the killing of NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers by Byron De La Beckwith, have been reopened and tried in recent years, and have resulted in convictions; and

Whereas, Given the historical significance of the Emmett Till case and in light of the compelling new facts uncovered surrounding his murder, family members of Till, as well as members of Congress, including Rep. Bobby Rush (D-Ill.), are urging the federal government to reopen its investigation of the case, just as it has with several other civil rights murders that were committed decades ago but solved only recently; and

Whereas, Mississippi State Senator David Jordan has stated that, “If there are ones alive who took part in the killing of Emmett Till, they should be investigated,” and “they should tell what they know and the case should be brought to justice;” and

Whereas, According to John Dittmer, author of Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi, “There’s a real historical need to set the record straight,” especially since “that case was so crucial in the development of the civil rights movement, we need to know as much as we can about what happened;” and

Whereas, We, as American citizens and members of the New York City Council, believe in justice and equal protection under the law; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon United States Attorney General John Ashcroft and the Department of Justice to reopen the case of Emmett Till, in light of the discovery of new information, for a complete and thorough investigation into his 1955 murder, and to move aggressively to indict the murderers of Emmett Till, and bring them to justice.

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