

## Treatment

### *Emmett—Legacy, Redemption & Forgiveness*

The story of the lynching of a 14-year-old Black Chicago youth, **Emmett Louis “Bobo” Till**, for whistling at a 21-year-old white woman, Carolyn Bryant, in Money, MS details how this incident ignited the Civil Rights Movement of the 50s and 60s. While there are numerous 21<sup>st</sup> century documentaries that utilized the original material in *Emmett Till: The Sacrificial Lamb of the Civil Rights Movement*, the 1994 publication of Clenora Frances Hudson’s 1988 groundbreaking Ford Doctoral Dissertation, entitled “Emmett Till: The Impetus of the Modern Civil Rights Movement” (U of Iowa), this movie will be the 1<sup>st</sup> film highlighting the struggle of the main players, specifically the mother. We have the problems surrounding Hudson’s relentless struggle in setting the record straight, using invaluable documents and primary informants, most of whom are deceased. Thus, we are now able to understand that both **Emmett Till**, the **Child of the Movement**, and **Rosa Parks**, the **mother of the Movement**, together compliment **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**, the **father of the Movement**, a trilogy of a sort. We see Mamie’s seminal role at the inception of the Movement with her commitment to her son and to her people. Also we witness the unyielding activities of Rayfield Mooty, driven by his commitment to the struggle as he puts into motion his expertise as Civil Rights activist and Labor Union leader. Finally, this movie tells the ultimate story of racial healing via the remorse and atonement of Atty. John Whitten, Jr., the spirit of redemption<sup>1</sup>

The story is told from the perspective of four (4) key people:

**CLENORA FRANCES HUDSON**, researcher and interpreter of the Till Murder Case, was the first to resurrect and establish Till as the true catalyst of the Modern Civil Rights Movement. In bringing the case to Academe, and finally changing people’s traditional perception about what really set the stage for the 1956 Montgomery Bus Boycott, according to distinguished scholar, the late Dr. C. Eric Lincoln of Duke U, Hudson, “. . . a careful, independent thinker, unafraid to unsettle settled opinions . . . challenges the most sacred shibboleths of the origins of the Civil Rights Movement.”<sup>2</sup> When cautioned by her dissertation committee that changing the catalyst of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks (a more palatable scenario) to Emmett Till was virtually impossible and questioning her as to what happens if she is unable to defend her dissertation, since all historians had already agreed on the inception of the Movement, Hudson responded, **“It’s simple. I don’t get a PhD and I’m willing to take that chance.”**

**Mamie Till Mobley**, the mother of Emmett, spent her life, since the death of her only child, telling his story in hopes of eradicating the source of his demise--racism. She took her 1<sup>st</sup> step in this direction via her decision to have an open casket funeral so that **“the world could see what they did to my child.”** According to Hudson-Weems, “his bloated face was the ugliness of American racism staring us right in the eye.”<sup>3</sup> Racism is

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<sup>1</sup> Hudson-Weems, *The Definitive Emmett Till*, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> C. Eric Lincoln Book Jacket Blurb for *Emmett Till: Sacrificial Lamb*.

<sup>3</sup> Hudson-Weems quoted in Kareem Abdul-Jabbar’s *Black Profiles in Courage*, p. 206.

a long-existing phenomenon, one which this story seeks to transcend via love and respect for humanity. In questioning God during her insatiable grief, Mamie experiences a vision which reveals to her, **“Mamie, it was ordained from the beginning of time that Emmett Louis Till would die a violent death. You should be grateful to be the mother of a boy who died blameless like Christ. . . . Have courage and faith that in the end there will be redemption for the suffering of your people and you are the instrument of this purpose. Work unceasingly to tell the story so that the truth will arouse men’s conscience and right can at last prevail.”**<sup>4</sup>

**Rayfield Mooty**, second cousin of Mamie Till Mobley (the mother of Emmett), who was a Chicago Civil Rights activist and Labor Union Leader with national Labor Union President, A. Phillip Randolph, participated in numerous national protest rallies in New York, D. C, etc. While exposing the injustices of the infamous Till Murder Case, he openly proclaimed that society and “Historians will talk about the good and the bad, but they don’t to deal with the ugly.”<sup>5</sup> Emerging as the strategist who became the preserver of the Till legacy, he also facilitated Mamie as her chief advisor during the whole ordeal, who contended that “Moody was sort of like the one who was steering me which way to go because he was quite active in the labor movement; he knew the politicians. I didn’t know a politician.”<sup>6</sup> Orchestrating the return of Emmett’s body to Chicago by going to the Governor J. Stratton of Illinois and demanding that the child be returned to his state of residency, Mooty insisted that the ceiled box containing Emmett’s body be opened. Finally, he served as the chief informant for Hudson during her research and questioned her initial plan to have only a chapter in her dissertation on Till, proclaiming **“I hate to disappoint you, lady. But Emmett ain’t no chapter; Emmett’s a book, all by himself.”** At the end of her fourteen-hour interview with Mooty, imbued with unimaginable documents of all sorts housed in his basement, thus, validating her thesis, Hudson concedes, **“And by the way, Mr. Mooty, Emmett is a book.”**

**John Whitten, Jr.**, one of the five defense attorneys for the murderers, Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam, delivered the defining closing remarks at the mock trial, encouraging the all-white male jurors that **“Every last Angle-Saxon one of you has the courage to free these men.”**<sup>7</sup> From a participant in the crime as legal representative, he moves to a remorseful sympathizer, an exemplar for correcting racial attitudes and acts. Responding to the question as to how he feels about Emmett today, he passionately admits, **“Misery, misery. I’ve always felt nothing but misery. From the very beginning, I’ve felt nothing but misery. You know, you’re not always committed to what you do; sometimes you do what you do to earn a living. I did what I did to earn a living.”**<sup>8</sup> He spent his life atoning for his role in this case by legally representing poor Blacks in the state of Mississippi “pro bono.”

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<sup>4</sup> Mamie Till Mobley quoted in *Emmett Till: Sacrificial Lamb*, p. 94.

<sup>5</sup> Mooty quoted in *Emmett Till: Sacrificial Lamb*, p. 39.

<sup>6</sup> Mamie Till Mobley quoted in *Emmett Till: Sacrificial Lamb*, 1994, p. 154.

<sup>7</sup> Whitten quoted in *Emmett Till: Sacrificial Lamb*, p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> Whitten quoted in *The Definitive Emmett Till*, p. 233.