

NEH *The Most Southern Place on Earth* Workshop

Vanessa Johnson Week 2 June 21-26, 2010

**Lesson Plan**

**Subject:** English/History Grades 11-12

**Objective:** To evaluate and synthesize various sources surrounding the 1955 case of Emmett Till.

**Key Vocabulary/Concepts:**

1. Lynching
2. Mississippi Delta
3. Segregation
4. A jury of one's peers
5. Great Migration
6. The Mississippi Flood of 1927

**Previewing activity:** Students should view a map of the United States to help understand the geography of the Mississippi Delta in relation to their own home states. In addition, students should do research on the Great Flood of 1927 and the Great Migration prior to a class discussion using the following talking points:

1. Why was a concentration of enslaved Africans in the American south?
2. What is the major cause of racial tension in America?
3. What events or factors precipitated the Great Migration of Blacks from the south to the north

**View:** Students will view the PBS documentary *The Murder of Emmett Till* and discuss the case in a class setting. Students should use a journal to capture notes about the film.

Students should also read an actual newspaper article of the actual Till case. Talking points include:

1. What was Mamie Till's warning to her son Emmett and why?
2. Would you consider an all white male jury a fair jury and/or a jury of peers for the defendants Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam?
3. Was the jury fair and balanced based on this concept?

### Activity: Essay Question

This question requires students to synthesize a variety of sources into a coherent, well-written essay. When synthesizing sources, they should refer to them to develop a position and refer to and cite them accurately. *The argument should be central not any particular source. The sources should support the argument. Avoid merely summarizing the sources.* Remember to attribute both direct and indirect references.

**Directions:** Read the following sources (including the introductory information) carefully, including all dates. **Then, in an essay that synthesizes at least three of the sources for support, evaluate and contrast the varying opinions and points of view of the Emmett Till case. You may refer to sources by their titles (Source A, Source B, etc.) or by the document description.**

### Introduction

The Emmett Till murder was a tragic event in the history of America. The murder of this Chicago youth, which took place in Mississippi in 1955 and the subsequent trial and acquittal of his killers, has had lasting effects on many. Poems, films, novels, and other media have been produced expressing a variety of interpretations of this event.

Source A: John Edgar Wideman Excerpt

Source B: Editorial Cartoon Chicago

Source C: Letters to the Editor

Source D: Telegram

Source E: Bryant/Milam Picture

Source F: Magazine Confession

Source A

Wideman, John Edgar. "The Killing of Black Boys." *Essence* 1 Nov. 1997. Research Library Core. ProQuest One. 23 Jun. 1997.

**Excerpt:**

Like Emmett Till, in 1955 I had just graduated from junior high. I'm trying to remember if, like Emmett Till, I carried pictures of White girls in my wallet. Can't recall whether I owned a wallet in 1955. Certainly it wouldn't have been a necessity because the little bit of cash I managed to get hold of passed rapidly through my hands. *Money burns a hole in your pocket, boy*, my mom said. Wanting to feel grown-up, wanting to radiate at least a show of what seemed to represent manliness, I probably stuffed some sort of hand-me-down billfold in my hip pocket. The same urge may have prompted me to carry around a White girl's picture. No doubt about it, possessing a White girl's photo was a merit badge for a Black boy. A sign of power. Your footprint in "their" world. Proof you could handle its opportunities and dangers. Any actual romance with a White girl would have to be underground, clandestine, so a photo served as prime evidence of things unseen. A ticket to status in my clan of brown boys in White Shadyside, a trophy copped in another country I could flaunt in Black Homewood. So I may have owned a wallet with pictures of White girlfriends or classmates in it, and if I'd traveled to Promised Land, South Carolina, with my grandfather Harry Wideman one of those summers he offered to take me down home to his briar patch, who knows? I was a bit of a smart aleck like Emmett Till. I liked to brag. Take on dares like him.

Source B

Editorial Cartoon by Tim Jackson, *Chicago Defender* 2005



Source C

Letters to the editor in response to Roy Bryant's confession in Look Magazine, 1

Taken from PBS.com [www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/sfeature/sf\\_look\\_confession.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/sfeature/sf_look_confession.html)

Letters to the Editor in response to the Look Magazine article by William Bradford Huie in 1956.

... If you are slurring the people of Mississippi because they did not condemn the two white men, then remind yourself that the two men did not deliberately start the chain of action. For that matter, neither did the Till boy. All of it was precipitated by backgrounds and events outside the main actors in the drama. Regrettable to be sure. But you and I are as much to blame for the killing as the ones who were directly involved...The things is done and nothing anyone can do will bring the Till boy back, but if we fail to learn the obvious lessons from this, there will be other and worse such cases...

**C. R. L. Rader**

Marion, North Carolina

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...*Look's* story of the Till murder in Mississippi carries the material covering the alleged remarks and acts of the dead boy as "facts" ...Who stands behind these "facts"?

**Roy Wilkins,**

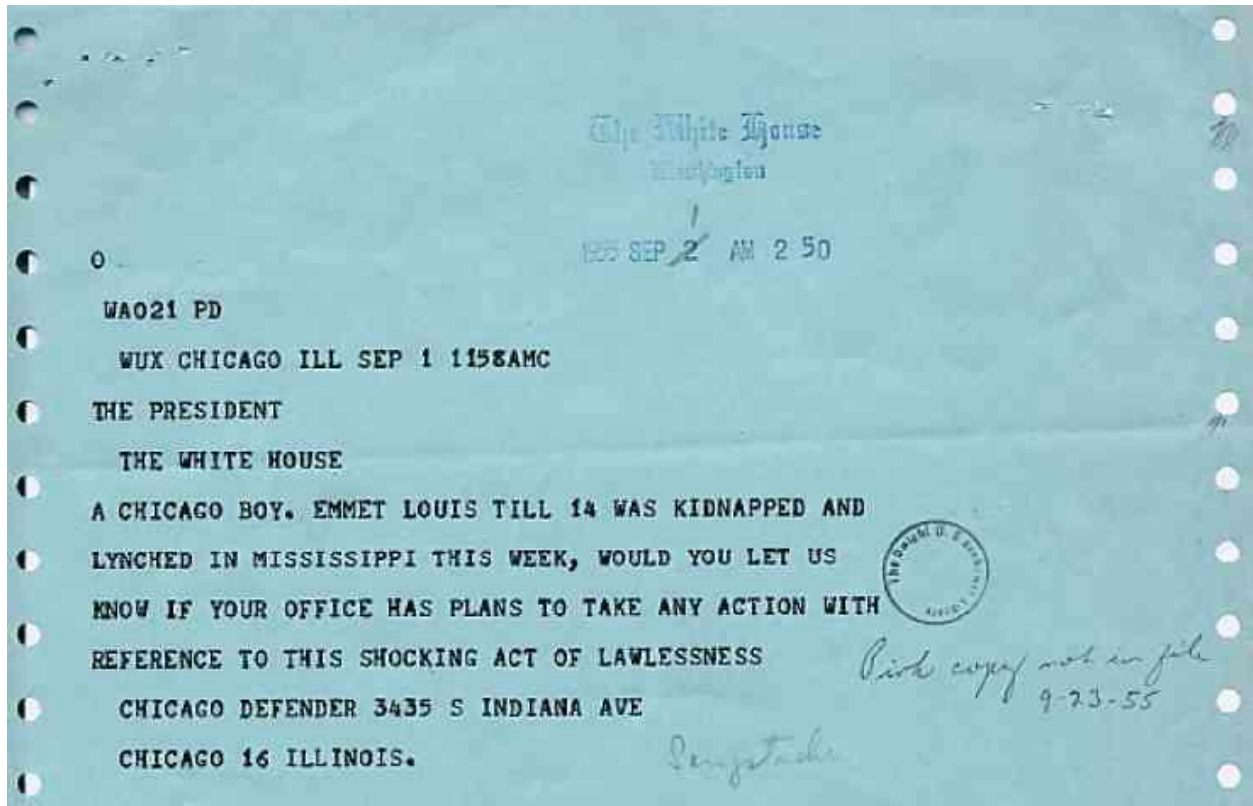
Executive Secretary

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

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Source D

Telegram to the White House from family the mother of Emmett Till, 1955



Source E

Roy Bryant (left) and J.W. Milam celebrate with their wives after the two men were acquitted Sept. 23, 1955, in the murder of Emmett Till.

Taken from The Commercial Appeal

<http://www.commercialappeal.com/photos/2007/oct/06/17354/>



Source F

Look Magazine article of the confession of the accused killers of Emmett Till

Taken from PBS.com [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/sfeature/sf\\_look\\_confession.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/sfeature/sf_look_confession.html)



WILLIAM BRADFORD HUIE

Excerpt:

J.W.Milam: "Well, what else could we do? He was hopeless. I'm no bully; I never hurt a n----- in my life. I like n----- in their place -- I know how to work 'em. But I just decided it was time a few people got put on notice. As long as I live and can do anything about it, n----- are gonna stay in their place. N----- ain't gonna vote where I live. If they did, they'd control the government. They ain't gonna go to school with my kids. And when a n----- gets close to mentioning sex with a white woman, he's tired o' livin'. I'm likely to kill him. Me and my folks fought for this country, and we got some rights.