

REGIONAL / NATIONAL

Ernest Withers' Iconic Photographs on Exhibit with Till Film



Ernest C. Withers, Sr.



Rosalind Withers, Ernest C. Withers' daughter.

By Wiley Henry
MEMPHIS, TN – One of this country's preeminent civil rights photographers is receiving widespread attention from Hollywood notables 15 years after his death this month in 2007.

Rosalind Withers, daughter of Ernest C. Withers Sr. and director and conservator of The Withers Collection Museum and Gallery in Memphis, said her father's work is reaching a global audience.

In partnership with Orion Pictures (an MGM company) and United Artists Releasing, some of Withers' iconic photographs are being exhibited with others in tandem with the Till movie.

"We (The Withers Collection) worked with the premiere release of the film," said Rosalind Withers, who met the president of Orion Pictures, Alana Mayo, at a prior Withers exhibit.

According to Rosalind Withers, Mayo said, "We need to do something together on this film (Till) ... and somehow incorporate the Withers collection into this film."

The movie premiered at the Samuel Goldwyn Theater in Beverly Hills on Oct. 8 to much fanfare and debuted in New York and Chicago as well. Till also pre-

miered in London on Oct. 15.

Rosalind Withers attended the Beverly Hills screening of Till and the exhibit entitled "Till: Impact of Images," featuring African American photographers and journalists from the Black press corps who captured that dark and turbulent era in American history.

"It was amazing. It was probably one of the greatest functions I've attended in a long time," Rosalind Withers said. "It was LA.'s first time seeing the film."

Withers, L. Alex Wilson, Clotye Murdoch, Simeon Booker and others who risked their lives for the story were described on the website for "Till: Impact of Images" as "soldiers without swords."

Their stories and images, cobbled together at times under dire circumstances, exposed humanity at its worst when Black lives were imperiled and relegated to a harsh reality during the Jim Crow South.

The "Till: Impact of Images" collection is organized by K Period Media Foundation and Lead With Love, with support from Orion Pictures, United Artists Releasing, and the Till movie.

Personal photographs from the families of Emmett Louis Till and Mamie Till-Mobley and Medgar and Myrlie Evers

are part of the "Till: Impact of Images" collection as well.

The Emmett Till Legacy Foundation, The Medgar & Myrlie Evers Institute, and The Withers Collection are cited for their continued fight for equality and battle for civil rights.

The Withers Collection also collaborated on a commemorative art piece for attendees at the Till movie premiers in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, and provided them with a keepsake ticket stub honoring the aforementioned organizations.

The movie is based on Till-Mobley's courageous and relentless fight for justice after her 14-year-old son was brutally lynched in 1955. Till opened in select theatres on Oct. 14 and will open nationwide on Oct. 28.

It was directed and co-written by Chinonye Chukwu and produced by Whoopi Goldberg, Frederick M. Zollo, Thomas Levine, Keith Beauchamp, Michael Reilly, and Barbara Broccoli.

It has been 67 years since Emmett Till's life was snuffed out by white men

for whistling at a white woman in Money, Miss. His gruesome death is not the crux of this Till movie.

After the lynching of Emmett Till and all the hullabaloo over his death, Withers went to Sumner, Miss., and risked his life to photograph the trial of Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam, who were acquitted of killing the Chicago lad.

"One of the things that we showed in our exhibition was my father's image of Mose Wright pointing (at Milam and Bryant when he testified at their trial)," Rosalind Withers said. "He was the only person who took that picture."

Withers published a pamphlet of photographs from the trial and marketed them as the "Complete Photo Story of Till Murder Case." The cost: \$1.00. The pamphlet is now part of the Smithsonian collection, Rosalind Withers said.

She has one other copy in her possession and declared it to be "extremely valuable." A descendant of President Thomas Jefferson gifted it to her, she said.

"It shows you how far-reaching Dad's work [has] impacted our history."



Ernest Withers snapped this photo of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at Medgar Evers's funeral in Jackson, MS in June 1963.

Museum Exhibit Reveals True Story of Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley and How It Influenced the Civil Rights Movement



Nationwide — Three years in the making, the Emmett Till & Mamie Till-Mobley: Let the World See exhibit has made its national debut at The Children's Museum of Indianapolis and runs through October 30, 2022. It will then make a historic tour across the United States traveling to the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute in Alabama, Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library in Washington, DC, Two Mississippi Museums in Mississippi, DuSable Museum of African American History in Illinois, Atlanta History Center in Georgia and National Civil Rights Museum in Tennessee before reaching its permanent destination at the Emmett Till Interpretive Center in Sumner, Mississippi. This historic exhibit is recommended for ages 10 years old and older.

"Learning more about Emmett Till's story is difficult, but I believe it's crucial for families to understand what happened during the cruel and senseless tragedy to help people heal from prejudice and discrimination and to prevent senseless acts of violence today," said Jennifer Pace Robinson, President and CEO, The Children's Museum of Indianapolis.

Families will also learn how two of Emmett Till's murderers were tried & found not guilty in just 67 minutes by an all-White, all-male jury—despite eye-witness testimony from Emmett's great uncle, Moses

Wright. His murderers later confessed and were paid \$4,000.00 for their story by Look magazine.

Facilitators within the exhibit will share conversation starters to help families understand what happened during the Jim Crow era and reflect. There is also a Building Bridges workshop that will guide visitors to turn a fence into a bridge—symbolizing ways to break down racial barriers. An actor lead performance will feature a social justice educator and their reflection on the negative response they received after sharing Emmett Till's story with students.

"Let the world see what they did to my boy," are the heart-wrenching words spoken by Mamie Till-Mobley who insisted upon an open casket for her 14-year-old son who was brutally tortured and murdered for whistling at a White woman in Money, Mississippi in 1955.

It all started in August of 1955. Fun-loving, Emmett Till could hardly wait to visit family in Mississippi. The 14-year-old grew up near Chicago and had never ventured far from home. After stern warnings from his mother about racism and social etiquette in the South, he took a summer trip to visit relatives in Mississippi with his great uncle and cousin, Wheeler Parker. That trip and a visit to the local store changed their lives forever. "They came out of the store and Emmett

loved to make people laugh — telling people jokes. He wolf-whistled right there in front of the store and we could have just died," said Rev. Wheeler Parker Jr., Emmett's cousin. Later, the husband and brother-in-law of the woman who Emmett whistled at, abducted 14-year-old Emmett from his Great Uncle Moses's home in the middle of the night. "I heard them coming. In walked this guy- his name was Milam," said Parker. "He had a pistol in one hand and a flashlight in the other. I was shaking, literally shaking like a leaf on a tree."

This is just one of the memories you'll hear from the last surviving eyewitness to the kidnapping and the subsequent brutal murder of Emmett Till. The Emmett Till & Mamie Till-Mobley: Let the World See (EmmettTillExhibit.org) exhibit created by the Till family, Emmett Till & Mamie Till-Mobley Institute, Emmett Till Interpretive Center, and The Children's Museum of Indianapolis will travel to seven cities before being permanently displayed steps away from where the trial for his murder took place in the Second District Tallahatchie County Courthouse in Sumner, MS. The exhibit shares how a mother's bravery and fight for justice more than six decades ago fueled the Civil Rights Movement in America. When Emmett's body arrived in Chicago, his mother insisted on an open casket so the world could see the ugly face of hatred and racism.

Historic markers installed near the Tallahatchie River (acknowledging where Emmett Till's lifeless body was recovered) have been continually stolen, shot at, and vandalized. One sign made headlines after a group of students from the University of Mississippi posed in front of it with rifles and then posted their photo on Instagram in March of 2019. That shot-riddled sign will be on display to show that racism continues today as people try to destroy the memory of what happened to 14-year-old Emmett Till.

Rev. Wheeler Parker wants people to know, "History is history. It's not who we

are today. What matters is what we choose to do about it today. So what are you going to do?"

Executive Director of the Emmett Till Interpretive Center, Patrick Weems, hopes it means people will take positive action, "Despite the repeated vandalism of these signs, our community has united again and again to replace them to tell the truth about what happened to Emmett Till. We believe that telling the truth about these acts of violence and injustice is the first step toward racial healing. These vandalized signs show just how much further we have to go to combat racism in our country."

Learn more about Emmett Till Historic Landmarks as part of the Civil Rights Trail and historic sites.

After 100 years and 200 failed attempts, a bill named the Emmett Till Anti-lynching Act was finally passed in March 2022. It criminalizes lynching and makes it punishable by up to 30 years in prison. Exhibit developers hope visitors will feel empowered to stand up against racial violence and to make a difference in their own communities.

Rev. Wheeler Parker's memoir: "A Few Days Full of Trouble" published by Random House, to be released January 10, 2023, tells the story of his friendship and his search for justice for his cousin and best friend, Emmett Till.

To learn more about the Emmett Till story, watch the ABC mini-documentary series called, "Let the World See".

This project was made possible in part by The National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy demands wisdom, the Maddox Foundation in Hernando, MS, The Institute for Museum and Library Services [MH-249226-OMS-21], and The Historic Preservation Fund administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior [15.904]. The Children's Museum of Indianapolis is proud to partner with Riley Children's Health, Old National Bank, Ice Miller LLP and the Heritage Group.

This 90-Year-Old Black Woman from Michigan has a 5th Degree Karate Black Belt



Nationwide —Thelma Jones, a 90-year-old Black woman from Southfield, Michigan, recently earned her 5th-degree black belt in Isshinryu karate and she's not planning to just stop there.

Jones has been practicing karate for 50 years and still continues taking karate lessons 3 times a week at Southfield Martial Arts despite her age.

Her instructor, Willie Adams, who is a 77-year-old grandmaster with a 10th-degree black belt, said that anyone who knows Miss Jones would say that she is "tough."

"It really does teach you to listen, behind you, in front, and be aware of all

things," Jones told Fox 2 Detroit.

In fact, there were times Jones had to use her karate skills to fight off criminals. When she was 60 years old, she was able to defend herself from robbers at a bus stop.

Just recently, she felt a suspicious man was following her. She said she was able to elude the man skillfully because of the senses she developed through karate and she didn't have to fight him off anymore.

Moreover, Jones, who maintains her shape at her age, wants to motivate others to do the same. She said, "Take care of your body, take care of your mind, and think a situation through before you react."

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