

Race relations in the us since 1954 essay



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In this essay I am going to analyse, explain and conclude the murder cases and trials of both Emmett Till and James Byrd. I will further my answer by including information obtained from historical developments which took place after the murder of Emmett Till. Emmett Louis “ Bobo” Till was an African-American teenager from Illinois, Chicago.

Maime Till Bradley gave birth to him on July 25th 1941 when she was married to Louis Till. Maime and Louis Till had separated in 1942. Till and his cousin went to Till’s great-uncle Mose Wright’s for the summer of 1955. Till’s Mother had warned Emmett precedent to his departure to mind his manners in Money, Mississippi, specifically with white people. Mississippi had had many lynchings in the past century, thus Maime Till was extensively aware of the possibility of a racially motivated murder.

Also, a year prior to Till’s visit, a decision concerning the end of segregation in public education was made which created further tension. On top of this, the Jim Crow Laws were still enforced. These laws - which were enacted in Southern states between 1876 and 1965 - made sure African Americans were “ separate but equal” to white people. However, they were certainly not equal.

This image is one example of the poor treatment that blacks received solely on the reason that they were thought to be inferior to whites. These laws basically made sure as much segregation as possible was used to separate blacks from whites in almost every aspect of life. Black people were prohibited from sitting in the same section as whites in buses and trains; they couldn’t attend the same schools as whites and were separated in

theatres. Black school children would be harassed and spat on by “ mature” white adults.

This emphasises how racist America really was. One rule stated: “ Blacks were not allowed to show public affection towards one another in public, especially kissing, because it offended whites”. A Civil Rights movement was in place in America from around 1945 and many claim President Harry Truman supported the campaign. In 1947 a committee was set up by the President to investigate the violence against blacks. The report summarised that USA could not claim to lead the world while blacks were not equal.

However, while a lot of action was taking place in the northern states, the south was still ruled by the Jim Crow Laws. Some states still retained discrimination and many whites remained members of racist organisations. So although campaigns were going on, racism was still at large.

Consequently, if a black person got on the wrong side of a white person, then who knows what would happen? Emmett Till arrived in Mississippi on August 21. A few days after his arrival, Till participated in a visit to the Groceries, with other teenagers, to purchase candy. As Till was leaving the shop, he apparently shouted or whistled at Carolyn Bryant.

Till's accomplices fled in terror due to their knowledge of the racial situation in Mississippi. When Roy Bryant returned home and discovered the acts of Till, he was furious. Carolyn Bryant had claimed that Emmett Till had grabbed her at the waist and asked her for a date. However, Till's cousin, Wheeler Parker Jr. , said that Emmett did nothing but whistle at the woman.

Three days after the incident, almost everybody in the Tallahatchie County had heard about it.

Bryant and his half-brother, J. W. Milam had agreed to teach Emmett Till a lesson. At approximately 2: 30 in the morning on August 27th, Roy Bryant and J. W.

Milam kidnapped Emmett Till from his great-uncle's home. They allegedly took him to a shed in a neighbouring County and barbarically beat him. A fan was then attached to his neck, which weighed down his body when he was dumped into the Tallahatchie River. The murderers along with police had tried to persuade people that Emmett Till was still in Chicago and the victim had been somebody else. However, Till was identified by the ring on his finger that belonged to his father.

On August 29th Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam were arrested on suspicion of murder. The murder didn't take place simply because Emmett Till had been 'cheeky' by whistling to Carolyn Bryant. It had been a ruthless and barbaric racist lynching. Bryant and Milam believed that because they were white, and Till was black, they could do anything they want to him.

This - unfortunately - included murdering the young boy. James Byrd was born on May 2nd 1949 in the southern state of Texas. Byrd belonged to the last segregated class to graduate from Jasper's Rowe High School. Byrd had moved to Houston with his wife Thelma Adams in 1970 and later relocated to Dallas.

However, the couple had divorced in 1993 after have three children. In the space of 30 years, Byrd had been in and out of prison several times. A Jasper Police Chief had stated that ' Byrd wasn't a bad guy, just one of those people who seems to always get into trouble". James Byrd did not own a car; therefore he was frequently seen walking about town. On June 7th 1998, James Byrd had encountered three men who kindly offered him a ride. However, James Byrd was in a lot more than he bargained for.

He was brutally beaten and tied to the back of a pickup truck with a chain. Byrd was then dragged across the road for a total duration of approximately three miles. Forensic evidence suggest that James Byrd had been trying to keep his head up while being dragged for a portion of the ride and was killed upon impact with a culvert where his arm and head were severed. However, one of the men, Lawrence Russel Brewer, had said that Byrd's throat had been cut before the dragging. The three men involved in the murder were identified as Shawn Allen Berry, Lawrence Russel Brewer and John William King.

Evidence showed that King and Brewer were known as white supremacists thus being extremely racist. They were members of white supremacist groups whilst being in prison and had often joked about torturing and lynching members of the black population.. A racist murder with them as the offenders isn't at all surprising. The FBI were immediately brought into investigate the case.

John William King was later discovered to have various racist tattoos. One displayed the hanging of a black man from a tree, other involved Nazism and

Aryan Superiority. While King and Brewer were well-known white supremacists, the involvement of Shawn Berry was at first a mystery to the FBI. The murders of Emmett Till and James Byrd share both similarities and differences. The first similarity between the two murders is the race of the victim. Both Emmett Till and James Byrd were African-Americans.

This fact is the dominant reason why these two people were murdered. The second similarity is the location of the murders. Emmett Till was lynched in Mississippi, as James Byrd was murdered in Dallas. Both these states are situated in the southern half of America.

This similarity backs up the opinion - or fact - that the southern states of America were more racist than those in the north. Thirdly, in both cases, witnesses were incredibly difficult to find. However, the small amount of witnesses who were found refused to testify. The fourth similarity is the extent of media interest. Both murders attracted intense attention from the media. Look magazine published a confession of Milam and Bryant on their murder of Emmett Till.

They had sold this story to Look magazine for \$4000. James Byrd's case was also engaged with the press. On the other hand, many contrasts are present between the two cases. The first - possibly most important - difference is the date. Emmett Till was murdered on August 27th 1955, whereas James Byrd was killed on June 7th 1998.

The 43 years that separated these racist murders may seem small. However, the improvement and progress that was reached within those 43 years were enormous. Yet the reason behind the lynchings was almost identical. This

brings me on to the second difference. The Jim Crow Laws were enforced between 1876 and 1965. These laws were used basically to ensure blacks were made inferior to whites.

Emmett Till was murdered during the 'reign' of the laws. A racist murder within these 89 years in southern USA wasn't incredibly uncommon. On the other hand, James Byrd was lynched 33 years after the termination of the Jim Crow laws where a racist murder was prodigiously rare. The trials for King, Brewer and Berry took more than a year to organise and complete. Whereas the trial of Emmett Till's murderers didn't need to be prolonged due to the obvious outcome. The trial for Roy Bryant and J.

W. Milam (the murderers of Emmett Till) had a jury, which consisted of 12 white males. Considering a substantial quantity of southern Americans were in favour of white superiority, a dominantly white jury isn't the fairest of decisions. However, the jury at the James Byrd trial contained a range of different races and ethnic groupings.

This difference took a massive impact in the final decisions of the juries. The jury of Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam's trial had come to a conclusion after just one hour of discussion. According to sources, within that hour they took a soda break to amplify the duration of time. On the other hand, Byrd's jury took several hours on each of the three participants.

The final verdicts of the two cases were also different. Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam were immediately not guilty.

No punishments in any way whatsoever were given. Oppositely, Shawn Allen Berry, Lawrence Russel Brewer and John William King were all found guilty of murder. King and Brewer were sentenced to death by lethal injection.

However, Berry was sentenced to life in prison because his record hadn't shown any previous racist actions and he didn't have any white supremacist tattoos unlike Berry and King. When Byrd's murderers were found guilty, Americans from all ranges of ethnic groups applauded the verdict.

However, when Emmett Till's offenders were charged not guilty, the most of America weren't really surprised. This emphasises the extreme progress, which happened within the space of the two murders. It also shows that by 1998, America had acknowledged, accepted and supported the negativity of racism. As you can see, there are several similarities in the build-up of the trials. However, the trials themselves are almost opposite in structure and verdict. After Emmett Till's death, the awareness of racism within the media and public eye increased greatly.

Therefore, various different campaigns and organisations were formed. One of which took place in December 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama. Rosa Parks, a black 42 year-old woman refused to give her seat up to a white man on a segregated bus. Rosa Parks was tired after a hard day of working but would've most probably given up her seat to a child or elderly person. However, on this occasion she was fed up of racist discrimination and stood up for what she believed in. She was expected to leave her seat solely due to the origin of her family and colour of her skin.

But due to her strong attitude she rebelled against the segregation and Jim Crow laws. Rosa Park was arrested and charged with violating the Montgomery city bus segregation. This punishment was a small price to pay to stand up for what she and the black community believe in. Rosa Parks had felt so strong about racism that prior to the event she had joined the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People and had been selected to represent the Montgomery branch.

The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People with the help of black students from Alabama State College decided to promote Rosa Parks' protest by distributing leaflets as well as working with the media. On top of this, they worked with various church leaders, including the later important figure of Martin Luther King. He allowed these anti-racism groups to plan protests and a potential bus boycott to increase the public awareness. Previous bus boycotts had taken place in southern states including the one in Baton Rouge.

It had proven extremely effective due to blacks have significant economic influence because they generally used the bus service more than whites. The Montgomery bus boycotts were set to go ahead and Martin Luther King was elected to lead the protest. King was an omnipotent public speaker with powerful and inspirational messages behind his speeches. It was stressed that this protest was ' non-violent' and no violent conduct would take place.

Black taxi drivers backed the boycott and decided to reduce black peoples fares. However, city officials demanded a halt to the reduction, otherwise a fine would be issued. Many protesters were charged with fines of \$500 and if

they didn't pay, they'd be sent to prison for a year. However, this backfired immensely and the public interest increased. In 1960, sit-ins took place within places such as Woolworths.

Within these sit-ins, black people sat down and refused to move. White people constantly insulted them, abused them and spat at them yet they refused to retaliate. It was once again, another non-violent protest. Possibly the most significant character within the civil rights movement was the work of Martin Luther King. Not only did he organise and participate within the bus boycotts but he also took part in 'Freedom Riders'.

Protestors were challenging segregation by riding buses south. Many people were arrested, including MLK. King's most influential technique was his use of speeches. The most famous of which was called: "I Have a Dream".

Within this speech, Martin Luther King explained his dream. This dream talked about equality between all human beings and the abolishment of segregation. MLK's speeches attracted massive media attention, which was a key factor in the successfulness of the civil rights movement. In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was signed which gave equal opportunities for black Americans in employment and education as well as ending public discrimination.

However, Martin Luther King was becoming too influential and powerful and was beginning to change a lot of people's opinions of racist discrimination. On 4th April 1968, Martin Luther King was shot dead. Some of the black population rejected the non-violent approach to the civil rights movement and felt that violence was needed to achieve their goal. This movement,

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known as Black Nationalism, wasn't trying to reach equality; it was trying to gain separation. A key figure in this movement was Malcolm Little, also known as Malcolm X. He wanted blacks to rise up and claim their own State, using violence when needed.

However, he was also becoming influential and was therefore also assassinated, in 1965. The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Council - involved with sit-ins and Freedom Rides - swayed to the Black Nationalism ideas when Stokely Carmichael took over leadership. A famous slogan of his was 'black power'. The power of black people to rise above whites. Carmichael later changed the name of the organisation by swapping 'Non Violent' with 'National'.

This showed he had similar views to those of Malcolm X. A typical comment of Carmichael: " This nation is racist from top to bottom and does not function by morality, love and non-violent, but by power. " That sentence sums up his beliefs on the situation. Another movement known as " The Black Panthers" were an intimidation group. They had about 2000 members and were a political party but also had a small private army.

They believed that whites should give blacks equal rights and black Americans should arm themselves in order to force them to do it. They often had conflicts with police and killed nine officers within a 2-year period. Between 1965 and 1967, race riots were causing havoc in American cities. They suffered waves of riots, which were caused by conflicts between police and black people. These conflicts were ignited by the allegations of the police's injustice towards the black community.

The biggest race riot occurred in Detroit in 1967. The riot lasted for 4 days, over 1000 shops were looted, 300 fires were started and 43 people died. President Johnson had said that the race riots were solely down to racism and discrimination. He described America as 2 countries: one black and one white. In conclusion, I believe that Emmett Till's death triggered off a domino effect of campaigns against racial discrimination.

With the use of a successful variation of methods, the civil rights movement was a huge success. This success was started with Rosa Parks' simple, yet incredibly influential, refusal to give up her seat. In the end, I believe that Martin Luther King's campaigning and speech giving gave blacks the edge in order to reach the equality they were after. Thanks to brave and courageous individuals, on top of huge public involvement, the civil rights act was signed, and equality is now almost a reality and no longer a dream.

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