

Emmett Till

In August 1955, Parks was devastated to hear the news that a 14-year-old Chicago boy named Emmett Till had been lynched in Mississippi for making a comment to a white woman, Carolyn Bryant. Bryant's husband Roy and brother-in-law J.W. Milan kidnapped the boy from his uncle's house, tortured him and killed him. Till's mother had insisted on an open casket and allowed JetMagazine to take a picture of her brutalized son, leading to the indictment of two men for his murder. The picture sickened Parks.

Rosa Parks had known other cases like Till's and was heartened by the attention that people managed to get to the case. Such indictments were exceedingly rare. A young black minister that Raymond knew was killed for appearing to make an advance toward a white woman. But the difference in this case from Till's, she explained, was that Emmett Till came from the North and the media picked it up. "In this case, of course it was kept very much hidden so that is why in, around Montgomery it was supposed to have been a good race relations quote unquote... There were several cases of people that I knew personal who met the end of their lives in this manner and other manners of brutality without even a ripple being made publicly by it." The custom, Parks noted, about killings such as Till's was "to keep such things covered up."

Despite all the attention to the case, on September 23, after only 67 minutes of jury deliberation, the all-white jury acquitted Bryant and Milan of the charges.

Related primary source: [Interview with Rosa Parks about the death of Emmett Till](#). Courtesy of Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.