



Mamie Till-Mobley, who died Jan. 6, traveled America telling the story of her son Emmett's death in Mississippi in 1955. He was murdered for allegedly whistling at a white woman.

Reliving Mamie Till Mobley's memorable visit to Dallas

By Cheryl Smith
Special to Sentinel-Voice

DALLAS (NNPA)—Mamie Till Mobley was one strong woman. She had to be. How else could she bear to see her son, mutilated and lying in a coffin, and then request that the coffin remain open so the "whole world could see" what was done to him?

It was a sad day on Jan. 6, when the news came of Mobley's death after suffering cardiac arrest. The Rev. Jesse Jackson issued a statement from her house that evening.

"We often say the modern Civil Rights Movement began with Rosa Parks in Montgomery. That's really not accurate. More than 100,000 people saw his (Emmett's) body lying in that casket here in Chicago. That must have been at that time the largest single civil rights demonstration in American history."

Mobley visited Dallas in 1995, 40 years after the death of her son, Emmett Till. The name is familiar to many because they heard the story repeated over and over again. That's right, he was the 14-year-old Chicago boy who was brutally murdered for allegedly whistling at a white woman in Mississippi. Mobley and her husband, who at the time was Emmett's barber, always believed that it was a family member who told on Emmett.

During her Dallas visit, Mobley told of a speech impediment that caused her son to make a whistling sound when he talked, adding that she did not believe that he was whistling at Carolyn Bryant, a local woman. Emmett was a bit outgoing, said Mobley, and carried the attitudes of and way of life of the North—which was new to his kinfolks—with him to

the Jim Crow South. He also showed a picture of a white girl from home, which he called his friend.

Whatever the case, the brutal beating that Emmett received was incomprehensible, that is until 1998, 43 years later, when three white men tied James Byrd Jr. to a truck and dragged him down a Texas dirt road with his body parts leaving a trail. And while those assailants were tried and convicted, Emmett's murderers went about their daily lives and Carolyn Bryant and her husband later divorced.

Mobley was a stylish woman back in the '50s when the world watched her mourn her loss, and even in her late '70s as she continued to spread the word about the injustice her son was subjected to.

During that two-day visit to Dallas, Mobley and Emerge Magazine Editor in Chief George Curry addressed the congregation at St. Luke Community United Methodist Church, and then pastor Rev. Zan Holmes Jr. referred to her as courageous.

Then she participated in a program sponsored by the Don't Believe the Hype Foundation. As we commemorated the 45th anniversary of that horrible crime, there was a panel discussion that included Curry, Judge L.A. Bedford, journalists Bob Ray Sanders and Clarence Gentry.

The audience listened intently as she recalled what was probably the lowest point in her life. Mobley told of deciding to leave the coffin open and how she never regretted making that decision.

Mobley never had any other children, but she was like a mother and grandmother to many. Following Emmett's death, she married

Gene Mobley, who traveled with her to Mississippi to identify her son's body. He also made the trip with her to Dallas.

I recalled him telling me that through all of the horrific injuries, the battered body and face, Mobley could identify Emmett by his haircut. Mobley was Emmett's barber and he had cut Emmett's hair for the trip from Chicago to visit relatives in Money, Miss.

He loved Mamie Till and openly flirted with her during their visit. Mrs. Mobley was beautiful as an elderly woman and the dapper Mr. Mobley said she was gorgeous "back in the day."

The love she had for Emmett manifested into a love for all children. She started a non-profit organization for young people. She mentored area youth and she told the story of her son and the brutal way he died to anyone who would listen. She spoke out against racial injustices and up for children she felt deserved to have an advocate.

While hateful, dysfunctional minds carried out the lynching of Emmett, there was nothing hateful or dysfunctional about Mamie Till Mobley. She goes down in history as a heroine, a soldier in the civil rights struggle.

Kweisi Mfume, NAACP president and CEO, sent condolences to the Till and Mobley families.

"We mourn the loss and honor the life of Mamie Till Mobley, whose personal tragedy stands as an example of huge sacrifice in the struggle for equality. Mrs. Mobley's efforts to find justice should remind all of us of the constant need to fight for civil rights."

Cheryl Smith writes for The Dallas Weekly.

Black Catholics rediscover saints

PITTSBURGH (AP) - Name the patron saint of lovers: easy, St. Valentine. The patron saint of travelers: not too hard, St. Christopher.

How about a black saint?

Stumped? So are many black Roman Catholics, but that's changing.

"When I came up in the church, I thought all the saints were white because that is all I saw. Nobody ever told me any of the saints came from Africa. I never knew there were black saints," said the Rev. David Taylor, head of the St. Charles Lwanga Church and the only black priest in the Pittsburgh diocese.

Taylor, 56, and the heads of other predominantly black Roman Catholic churches in his area hope to raise the profile of influential blacks and Africans in the church with Masses, celebrations and other programs, beginning Sunday.

"It is sort of a reflection of our times. We are now living in a society that wants to regain the heritage of a people who had their heritage taken away by slavery," said James Cavendish, a Catholic and sociology professor at the University of South Florida.

In Philadelphia, the archdiocese celebrates a Mass in November for St. Martin de Porres, the first black Dominican priest and first black saint in the Western Hemisphere.

The same archdiocese last year named a parish for St. Cyprian, who as Bishop of Carthage, the ancient north African city, took his church underground to avoid Roman persecution.

In New Orleans, black Roman Catholics

recognize black saints each November with a party and parade.

Saints are held up as role models in the church, giving parishioners examples of how to act. There are saints of almost every age, occupation and country - St. Agnes or St. Maria Goretti for girls; St. Stephen for bricklayers, and St. Martha for cooks; St. Nicetas for Romania.

Although there are many saints who are black and from Africa - St. Martin de Porres, St. Moses the Black and St. Benedict the Moor - they have largely been overshadowed by more well-known, white saints, said Deacon Daniel Vincent, head of Black Catholic Ministries for the Archdiocese of New Orleans, where one-fourth of the 400,000 parishioners are black.

The absence of black saints may have hurt the church's efforts to bring more blacks into the faith, Vincent said.

Black Catholics make up 2 million to 3 million of the 62 million Roman Catholics in the United States, according to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, which is affiliated with Georgetown University.

In October the Vatican published a list of saints that included Africans, said Beverly Carroll, executive director of the Secretariat for African American Catholics in the United States Conference of Bishops.

"Everybody likes to emulate people and know people of their race who have a list of good deeds," Carroll said. "We want our children to know there are black saints and that God didn't exclude us from people with special gifts."

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