

FEBRUARY PEACE AND JUSTICE BLOG

THE TRAGIC MURDER OF EMMETT LOUIS TILL

BLOG BY REV. JOHN L PARKER SR.

My family was part of the Great Migration of African American Families moving from the segregated south. My father, like so many others, escaped the manacles of the Jim Crow South. My father left Magnolia Arkansas and relocated to Muskegon Michigan. My father was employed by Campbell, Wyatt, and Cannon Foundry. Campbell's was one of the largest Gray Iron Factories in the nation. In June of 1951, my father was able to move our family to Muskegon. I remember riding in the cab of a truck with my father, and two of his coworkers. My mother and two sisters rode in the back of the truck covered with a canvass tarp. I recall our belongings loaded on the back of the truck as well.

As a very young child, I recall making two visits to Magnolia between the years of 1952-1954. Forever etched in my memory is my maternal grandmother, holding me in her arms, and telling all of her neighbors I was her grandson from Michigan. Those trips to Magnolia took an ominous turn after August 28, 1955. I remember at the age of eight, my mother sharing with me the horrific death of Emmett Till. As we prepared to travel to Magnolia for my grandmother's funeral. My mother uttered this phrase to me, "Remember Emmett Till".

I can only imagine my mother was one of thousands of mothers trying to protect a son from the horrors of racism in the deep south. It was on August 28, 1955, a fourteen year old African-American teenager was abducted, tortured, and lynched in Money Mississippi. The death of Emmett Louis Till (07.25.1941-08.28.1955) became a flash point for race relations in America. I did not understand the true horror of the brutal attack on a teenager, until I saw pictures of his mutilated body in Jet Magazine. Sixty seven years later, I still remember my mother's forewarning, "Remember Emmett Till"!