

## SCENE ON RADIO

### S1 E30: Movement Time

**John Biewen:** Facts are stubborn things. John Adams said that. He said it in a courtroom, in fact, in a murder trial. A lot of talk right now about facts, and alternative facts, and whether the truth still matters. Well, sometimes a fact, or a photograph of that fact, can spark a movement that changes a nation, the world. In the late summer of 1955, Americans and people all over the globe saw photos of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old African American boy from Chicago. Pictures of his body, after it was pulled from that river in the Mississippi Delta, disfigured almost beyond recognition by a brutal beating and the bullet wound and by water taken on in the Tallahatchie. This is John Biewen. In the last episode of *Scene on Radio*, we heard parts of Mike Wiley's play telling the Emmett Till story. This time, a different look at the meaning of Emmett Till's lynching, through a new book that tells the story like it's never been told before.

**Tim Tyson, reading:** 'The older woman sipped her coffee. She said, "I've thought and thought about everything about Emmett Till: the killing, the trial, telling who did what to who." Back when she was 21 and her name was Carolyn Bryant, the French newspaper *Aurora* dubbed the dark-haired young woman from the Mississippi Delta a 'crossroads Marilyn Monroe'. News reporters, from Detroit to Dakar, never failed to sprinkle their stories about the Till affair with words like 'comely' and 'fetching' to describe her. William Bradford Huie, the Southern journalist and dealer in tales of lynching, called her 'one of the prettiest black-haired Irish women I ever saw in my life'. Almost 80 and still handsome, her hair now silver, the former Mrs Roy Bryant, served me a slice of pound cake, hesitated a little and then murmured, seeming to speak to herself more than to me, "They're all dead now anyway." She placed her cup on the low, glass table between us and I waited.'

[Music]

**John Biewen:** Tim Tyson is my colleague here at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke. That's him reading the first lines of his book, *The Blood of Emmett Till*. Besides being a PhD historian and author, Tim is an activist. He spends a lot of his time working closely with the Reverend William Barber, head of the NAACP and the Moral Monday movement here in North Carolina, Tim's home state. In this episode, a rare thing for our show, a sit-down interview. Tim and I started by talking about the interview that he was just describing with that 'older woman'. It was a huge scoop, one that Tim did not seek out. The scoop came to him.

**Tim Tyson:** I got a phone call from a nice woman from Raleigh who complimented me on *Blood Done Sign My Name*, a previous book. I was sort of thanking her and getting off the phone and she said, 'Well, my mother-in-law is coming next week and we'd really like to have a cup of coffee with you.' So I sort of pretended she hadn't said anything and kept being warm, polite and getting off the phone. She said, 'You might know about my mother-in-law. Her name is Carolyn Bryant.' Of course, I'm a historian of the civil rights movement. And practically every historian in the country knows that Carolyn Bryant was the woman in whose name Emmett Till was lynched and who hasn't said a word about that since 1955. No one has been able to interview her. She's been pursued by journalists and scholars here for

## SCENE ON RADIO

60 years and she's calling me on the phone, wanting to have a conversation. She wanted to tell her story.

**John Biewen:** Had Carolyn Bryant read *Blood Done Sign My Name*?

**Tim Tyson:** Her daughter-in-law firstly told me how much she liked *Blood Done Sign My Name* and then she said, 'I gave it to my mother-in-law for Christmas and she really liked it. She thought that you were the one she wanted to talk to. She thought you would understand.' I originally wanted to just interview her, put the recordings in the archive and then someday, some historian was going to be mighty lucky. But when I started preparing for the interview and I read what had been written—a lot of things had been written, like plays, stories, songs, novels and all kinds of things but there's not really been a solid, complete history of the Emmett Till case until this year.

**John Biewen:** Let's come back later to what Carolyn Bryant actually said to you but let's start with 1955 Mississippi, Tim, and give us that context. The year before, there was a little Supreme Court decision called *Brown v. Board of Education*. What was life like? What was the climate like in Mississippi in 1955?

**Tim Tyson:** *Brown v. Board of Education* smacked of the federal intervention during Reconstruction. It was an atmosphere of war. The Citizens' Council was born there in the Delta and had 100,000 members and then 200,000 members before you could turn around good. By late 1955, there's not much difference between the state government structure and the Citizens' Council, which is dedicated to preserving segregation by any means necessary. To read the *Jackson Daily News* for 1955 is to be in terror, because even though you know what happened, you see a race war unfolding. The incredible thing about the atmosphere was that the NAACP filed all these school integration petitions. They organized hundreds and hundreds of Black parents to sign a petition saying they wanted their kids to go to a previously white school, which was like signing your death warrant, potentially. You certainly were going to lose your job right away. But people did it and they filed a whole lot of these petitions. Usually, within a week or two, most of the names would have been retracted because the Citizens' Council would engage in all manner of reprisals against people, and terror. They were pursuing voter registration. There were majority Black counties all over Mississippi that didn't have a single registered African American voter. A tiny, minuscule percentage of eligible Black voters in Mississippi were registered. They didn't let you register. The Mississippi Democratic Party just did not let Black people vote in the Democratic Party, and during the months right before the lynching of Emmett Till, several people were assassinated for helping to organize potential Black voters to register to vote. On the front page of the *Jackson Daily News*, there was an editorial basically telling the NAACP to back off or there would be violence. They were threatening violence. The President of the Mississippi NAACP said, 'If Black people are going to die, they're not going to die alone.' There were going to be some white people dying too.

**John Biewen:** Wow.

## SCENE ON RADIO

**Tim Tyson:** You can't compare it to anything since Reconstruction in terms of violence, terrorism and intimidation. It was a struggle created by the efforts of Black people in Mississippi to become full citizens.

**John Biewen:** So into this environment comes 14-year-old Emmett Till, sent down to visit relatives from Chicago. His mom sends him down to stay with some relatives for some weeks, right?

**Tim Tyson:** Yeah, he came down to stay three or four weeks. Most of the African Americans in Chicago have roots in Mississippi and lots of Black families in Chicago sent their kids down to Mississippi for the summer to be with Mamaw and all them, you know, Mississippi was like the old country for Black people in Chicago. There were still ties. As many did, he was spending a few weeks with his great-aunt and great-uncle in Money, Mississippi.

**John Biewen:** And something happens in an encounter between Emmett Till, a 14-year-old Black kid from Chicago, and Carolyn Bryant, who is running this little store that her family owns in Money. Emmett goes in with a friend to buy some candy or something, right? And something happens. He says something or, the suggestion is that he says or does something. And he disappears and turns up dead. Now, everybody who knows anything about this story knows that these two men, Carolyn Bryant's husband, Roy Bryant Jr., and his half-brother, J.W. Milam, killed Emmett and essentially they admitted as much in a magazine interview after the fact when they could no longer be prosecuted.

**Tim Tyson:** That's right.

**John Biewen:** But tell us about the, in case anybody thinks there was any reason for them to be acquitted [*laughter*] by the jury, let's talk about the evidence that was presented of their guilt.

**Tim Tyson:** First of all, I just want to address that story that they told. Because William Bradford Huie, who was writing for the largest circulation magazine in America, *Look Magazine*, paid them a good sum of money to tell their story, but of course, to get the money, they had to tell about killing Emmett Till. So they did. And so people just assumed that if you admit to killing a 14-year-old boy, then everything else you say must be true [*laughter*], because you....

**John Biewen:** Right.

**Tim Tyson:** Why would you lie about anything else? But, in fact, their whole story is made up. It lies about how he was killed, and where he was killed, and who killed him. They were protecting their kinsmen. There were quite a few people involved in the lynching of Emmett Till, not just two. But Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam were the two men who stood trial.

**John Biewen:** And, for that matter, things that they claimed that Emmett said...

**Tim Tyson:** Yeah, the idea that two armed white men, in Mississippi, would drag a 14-year-old Black boy out of his family's house, take him to a remote place, obviously very angry

## SCENE ON RADIO

with him, and that he would say that he had had sex with white women, and that he was going to do it again, and that he was just as good as they were - you know, that was the murderers' story. People believed that mess. Eyes on the Prize tells the story the way that they did. But what they were saying is, he committed suicide. They imagined their audience as being white people in Mississippi, the white people they knew, and so they said, you know, we had to kill him. You would have killed him. Did you hear what he said? Then J.W. says, 'I like 'em. I can work with them. But they're not going to go to school with my children, and they're not going to vote because if they vote, they're going to pick the officials that represent me and I won't have it.' He basically says that they were taking a stand. That tells you what's going on in Mississippi. He's speaking to that audience. But none of that is true. Also, in their account, he mouths off and they just can't take it anymore and so J.W. shoots him in the head. They leave out the part about torturing him for several hours, and breaking his bones and shattering his skull. The autopsy will, it'll ruin your supper. These are not small men, and they both come into the house to get him with guns in their hands. There's no way in hell that he mouthed off to them.

**John Biewen:** So they admitted, even in the courtroom, that they had come in the middle of the night to Emmett's great-uncle's house to get him because he had "done some talking" in Money, and took him away.

**Tim Tyson:** That's right, and then they told that to the sheriffs when they were arrested, that they took him but they let him go. They didn't know what happened to him after they let him go but they had let him go. Yeah, so that was already on the table.

**John Biewen:** The other evidence had to do with - well, there were eyewitnesses to a beating taking place in a shed, right?

**Tim Tyson:** There were. In fact, there were several other people there. Well, there were several people who participated. There were two Black men who were with the men who killed Emmett Till. I doubt that they took part. They basically were laborers. But Sheriff Strider put them in his jail during the whole period of the trial under different names, so that they could not be found and could not testify against J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant. There were also a couple of witnesses. Willie Reed, who was 18. Willie was walking early in the morning to the store and passed by the shed where Emmett Till was being murdered, and he heard screams and begging and blows. But then he heard it stop.

**John Biewen:** Was it him or someone else who saw J.W. Milam come out of the shed?

**Tim Tyson:** Oh yes. Yes, he saw J.W. Milam come out of the shed, wearing a .45 automatic on his belt and come out to the well and get a drink of water and go back into the shed. So that decisively tied J.W. Milam to a place where Emmett Till was killed. So Willie Reed was really the strongest witness. Now, the prosecution found no witnesses beforehand. Sheriff Strider was supposed to be doing the investigation and he said that he had evidence that suggested to him that the NAACP had planted this body in the Tallahatchie River and that it wasn't Emmett Till. And he said that when they pulled it out of the river, he couldn't tell if it was Black or white. Although, oddly enough, they figured out which funeral home to take it to. He was supposed to be a witness and an investigator for the prosecution, but he found

## SCENE ON RADIO

no witnesses. So local people, activists in Mississippi, and a handful of Black journalists who were there visiting, went out dressed in sharecroppers' clothing and made their way out through the fields and across the land in the Mississippi Delta, going from somebody who heard or knew somebody who had heard that there was somebody, until they found several witnesses. And they protected the witnesses, they were able to testify at the trial, and then all the witnesses moved that day, moved to Chicago. When Willie Reed testified against J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant, he knew he had to leave. He got on a plane in Memphis that day and moved to Chicago for the rest of his life.

**John Biewen:** Okay, but he, with amazing courage and all this effort to find him in the first place, and they get this into the trial.

**Tim Tyson:** And Reverend Moses Wright, who was Emmett Till's great-uncle, testified about the men who came to get Emmett Till and pointed at them and said, 'There he is. That's him.' He identified them, which was tantamount to committing suicide. After he agreed to testify at the trial, he slept in his car with a shotgun. He'd park in a cemetery here and a cemetery there. He didn't stay in his house. Although, he was sometimes close by and he saw armed men with flashlights going in his house. And he spent that couple of weeks carrying a shotgun and a rifle everywhere he went. He had a cotton crop that he was going to harvest and sell, which he did. He harvested his cotton crop with a shotgun and a rifle beside him. And he too moved to Chicago.

**John Biewen:** Right. So there was plenty of evidence presented in the courtroom, despite the atmosphere of terror around anyone testifying against these guys, they did so.

**Tim Tyson:** Yes, the prosecution tried hard, actually. Though they, because they had had Sheriff Strider doing the investigation, they basically had no witnesses. But the activists in Black Mississippi provided the witnesses. But anyway, the judge, Judge Curtis Swango, tried to give them a fair trial and conducted himself as judiciously as any judge in the country would have. And the prosecutors were passionate and argued their case with skill.

**John Biewen:** That's one thing that really strikes me in the story you tell in your book, that the judge, as you mentioned, Swango, and the lead prosecutor, who was a guy named Gerald Chatham, and he seems to have argued passionately for the guilt of these men. How does that square with, because there's often this general picture that all the white people in Mississippi were in cahoots, basically. But these were white people who were fighting hard for justice for Emmett Till.

**Tim Tyson:** They were, they were, and risking their standing in the community and their safety, really. But while most of white Mississippi was in a furor against the idea of school integration and against the idea of Black citizenship, that wasn't unanimous. Furthermore, much of white Mississippi, in the beginning, was outraged by the murder of a child. But the criticism came from outside and was searing, and for outsiders to be criticizing Mississippi in these national papers and stuff, it got their back up and opinion turned, really, toward justifying what the murderers did. But Judge Swango and prosecutor Gerald Chatham did their jobs with great integrity. Chatham said in his summation, 'This case has been dripping with the blood of Emmett Till from the first day,' which is where the title of

## SCENE ON RADIO

the book comes from. He argued his case beautifully. Mamie Bradley, Emmett Till's mother, as soon as he finished his summation, she turned to the people sitting with her and said, 'He could not have done better.'

**John Biewen:** Wow. But she didn't therefore expect...

**Tim Tyson:** No. In fact she didn't even stay to hear the verdict. She got out of there and she and Willie Reed and Congressman Charles Diggs of Chicago caught a plane in Memphis and they never came back.

**John Biewen:** So the jury is all white men. Were they all, or most, cotton farmers?

**Tim Tyson:** I think all but one of them were cotton farmers.

**John Biewen:** And the case that the defense attorneys for J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant, the case that they presented was not simply about the evidence, was it?

**Tim Tyson:** Well, it's an interesting argument because the first thing they did was they argued that this is not the body of Emmett Till. So you don't have a body, therefore, you can't have a murder trial without a body. You can't prove there's been a murder. Because there was a body in the river but they said it was so badly mutilated and bloated with water from the river that it was unrecognizable, that the body could not be proved to be Emmett Till. But then they put Carolyn Bryant on the stand. She essentially tells a story about an attempted rape. And it's sort of the 'Black beast rapist' versus this 'unblemished Southern lily'. And this is the old story of justifying lynching. In other words, they argued 'they did not do it, and the 'sumbitch had it coming' *[laughter]*.

**John Biewen:** Yeah, and I think there was someone you detail in the book - someone who spoke with the jurors some times after the trial and they all said...

**Tim Tyson:** Yes, a young man in the community went to Florida State and was getting his Master's degree and came back to his hometown and interviewed the attorneys, the witnesses that he could find and the jurors, and he interview most of the jurors. And they all said they knew that Milam and Bryant had killed Emmett Till and that his having talked fresh to a white woman was reason enough to kill him.

**John Biewen:** And what she testified was that he had really cornered her and put his hands on her and that he had really tried...

**Tim Tyson:** Yeah, he had grabbed her hand forcefully. She had snatched it back, then he came around the counter and put his hands around her waist. He talked filthy to her. He said he'd had sex with white women and he wouldn't let her go. In other words, he was trying to rape her. And that she had escaped from his grasp. So that was what she testified in the trial. But immediately after the murder and after her husband had been arrested, she talked to the family's attorney, And she told her side of the story, and he took very careful notes. I got those notes. And essentially, she told her lawyer that he had annoyed her, that he was rude. Insulting. She found his manner insulting. You know, he had violated racial

## SCENE ON RADIO

etiquette, in other words, and made her mad. That was she told her attorney in private. Then, she's 21 years old. One of her brothers-in-law, having told her that Roy and J.W. were in jail, she said, 'Well, Roy told me that they hadn't done it.' He said, 'Well, Roy didn't kill him. Melvin did.' So she said, 'Well, why isn't Melvin in jail?' Immediately, they then took her to family homes in other towns in remote, rural Mississippi and kept her away from anybody for about a month. They wouldn't let her talk on the telephone. They wouldn't let her contact her family. And of course, she was being coached on how to testify.

**John Biewen:** And who's Melvin?

**Tim Tyson:** Melvin was another brother-in-law of hers. Melvin was married to Roy and J.W.'s sister.

**John Biewen:** Do you believe he was with them and was part of it?

**Tim Tyson:** Oh, definitely. He was definitely with them. Yeah, I feel like I know that for a fact.

**John Biewen:** Okay.

**Tim Tyson:** That was the story told inside the family. When you say, 'Who killed Emmett Till?' He would have died without being shot in the head. They beat him so badly. His head was caved in. But Melvin did shoot him in the head.

**John Biewen:** And Melvin was never prosecuted.

**Tim Tyson:** No, no.

**John Biewen:** At all.

**Tim Tyson:** Nor were any of the others. There were several other people there as well. Roy got arrested and then they decided that Roy might - Roy wasn't exactly, he wasn't the strongest stick in the bundle, and they decided J.W. should turn himself in so he could be with Roy in jail and keep him from messing up the story, spilling the beans somehow.

**John Biewen:** So you sit down with Carolyn Bryant, close to 60 years later. What does she tell you about what happened in that store on that day, compared to the story that she told in the courtroom?

**Tim Tyson:** Well, of her testimony in court, she said, 'Well, that part's not true.' And so of course my next question was, 'Well, what was true? What happened?' She then said, 'Honestly, I don't remember. I would like to tell you. It's been 50 years. You tell these stories until they seem real, but that part's not true.' And then she said, 'Nothing that boy did could ever justify what happened to him.' She was discerning between what she remembered and what she felt confident was true. And what do you say when you remember something that you know is not true? You know, we all tell these stories and they get shined up with every telling until we have pat stories with clear meanings, you know, that we have in our heads.

## SCENE ON RADIO

Family stories are like that. But I believe that she couldn't remember exactly what had happened. And I found her to be thoughtful and discerning. She had clearly thought about this a great deal.

**John Biewen:** And why do you think she wanted to talk to someone? Why do you think she wanted to talk to you all these years later?

**Tim Tyson:** I think she thought I would understand, that I would know the dynamics of such a story. I went there as a historian to interview her and yet it turned into a kind of pastoral call there. There was a confessional quality there at the beginning when we'd had our pound cake and our coffee and gotten to know each other a little bit. And then as soon as we settled into the interview, she just sort of took a deep breath and said, 'They're all dead now anyway.' Meaning, of course, all her relatives that she had been protecting all these years. And then said, 'Well, that part isn't true.'

**John Biewen:** And you are a southern, white, son of a preacher *[laughter]*.

**Tim Tyson:** Yeah, and I have rural and small town, southern roots. My father and all his five brothers are ministers. Honestly, Carolyn Bryant could go to my family reunion and just fit right in *[laughter]*, so she was very familiar to me.

**John Biewen:** And how do you feel about the situation that she wound up in? Because she was—apparently she was, as you say, annoyed or offended by something that Emmett did in the store, and she came out, right? Did she come out and look for her gun in the car?

**Tim Tyson:** This really also gives the lie to her story about the attempted rape and the forceful, frightening encounter that she'd had. Because she could have bolted the front door to the store. She could have gotten her sister-in-law, who was in the back room. She could have gotten a butcher knife from the meat counter and stayed behind a locked door with her sister-in-law. But instead she walked out the front door of the store right through all these young Black men, and went to the car and got a pistol from underneath the seat and then walked angrily back into the store. I believe she was mad.

**John Biewen:** And she said something to her husband or somehow her husband...?

**Tim Tyson:** No, in fact, her husband was out of town driving a truckload of shrimp down to Brownsville, Texas. And so he was gone for a couple or more days, and she decided not to tell him. And she asked Juanita, her sister-in-law, not to tell her husband, J.W. Milam. At that point, she apparently didn't consider it to have been serious enough that it needed redress and she was afraid of what Roy and J.W. might do to Emmett Till. So she tried to prevent that from happening. Her husband was quite angry that she hadn't told him to begin with. They heard from somebody else.

**John Biewen:** The other woman, besides Carolyn Bryant, who looms very large in your story is Emmett Till's mother, Mamie Bradley. Starting with, she makes an enormous decision when she sees her son's body, right?



## SCENE ON RADIO

**Tim Tyson:** Yes, Sheriff Strider in Mississippi tried to have them bury the body almost immediately. But Mamie called down and told family members not to let them bury the body and to ship it to Chicago where she had an open casket funeral. 'Let the world see what they did to my boy.' She did another thing that was interesting, especially for a Black woman in 1955, when she gets on the phone and starts calling newspapers. So when Emmett Till's body arrives in Chicago, there's a lot of people waiting at the railroad station and lots of reporters. She also immediately got in touch with the Black political structure in Chicago, so the Black press, Black labor unions, and the Black political machine, Mamie is in touch with all of these folks, the NAACP. So she mobilizes. She's determined to turn her private agony into a public issue, and to use this tragedy to change things. And she does so with passion and persistence and brilliance. It's an amazingly courageous thing that Mamie Bradley did, and without that, we probably never would have heard the name Emmett Till.

**John Biewen:** And the other thing that struck me about the book, you know, I had this kind of vague sense that the murder of Emmett Till was an important moment in the lead up to what we think of as the major milestone episodes of the Civil Rights Movement, that it helped to generate it, but that connection is more direct than I realized. For example, you talk about Rosa Parks.

**Tim Tyson:** Yeah, the trial of Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam is over in late September. But on the first of December, Rosa Parks was arrested on the bus in Montgomery. Now, what happened was that Dr T.R.M. Howard, who is one of the Black activists who found the witnesses during the trial - what I call the 'Mississippi Underground' - T.R.M. Howard spoke at Dexter Memorial Baptist Church, invited there by Reverend Dr Martin Luther King. When he spoke, and he spoke well everywhere he spoke, Rosa Parks was in the congregation and was deeply moved. And it was four days later that she was arrested on the bus in Montgomery, and she later said, 'I thought about Emmett Till and I couldn't move.' So there's that. Then the murder of Emmett Till and the acquittal of his killers inspired a national protest movement fed by Mamie Till and Black Chicago, the largest Black newspaper in the country; huge Black labor unions; large Black NAACP, the strongest Black political machine in the country. That's what makes this an international issue. It becomes a global issue, getting into the politics of the Cold War. It's also the birth of television. This is about the first moment when a whole lot of people have a television. This was a different day. So it wasn't just something that happened in the deep, dark, exotic, Southern wild, but instead was about African American life and it was about the chasm of race in America in Chicago, as well as in Mississippi. It lays the groundwork for a national civil rights movement. The other really important moment in the birth of the Civil Rights Movement is the sit-in movement that the students start on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960, that spreads in just a couple of months to nine states and a couple of hundred communities, cities and towns. That turns the movement into a mass movement. The sit-in movement also turned that movement into a movement that was rooted in non-violent, direct action. Now, the sit-in students were Emmett Till's age. Joyce Ladner, who was from the Mississippi Delta, who was Emmett Till's age, who organized for voting rights in Mississippi, who was one of the students who founded the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and one of the early sit-in students, she calls her contemporaries the 'Emmett Till generation'. If Emmett Till had lived till 1960, five years later, he would have been 20. They were 19. They were 20. They were 21. They were 18. All of them can tell you where they were when they saw the

## SCENE ON RADIO

picture in *Jet* magazine of Emmett Till's body or when they heard what had happened to Emmett Till. All of them have a story about how the Emmett Till lynching affected them.

**John Biewen:** Including John Lewis, who was one year older than Emmett.

**Tim Tyson:** Yes, John Lewis, just like all of the young people who organized the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, who organized the sit-ins, who were the shock troops of the civil rights movement, John Lewis is one of the people that turned the civil rights movement into a mass movement. John Lewis is one of the key people that made the movement non-violent out of his deep, passionate, religious conviction. He told the story about, as a child of sharecroppers in rural Alabama, he heard about Emmett Till and he thought about, 'That could have been me at the bottom of the river.'

[Music]

**Tim Tyson:** So it's stayed with us. It's a story that won't go away and yet, it's a story we haven't really known very well.

**John Biewen:** I asked Tim how, as a historian and an activist on race issues, he sees the election of Donald Trump. He starts by saying that Trump's victory makes clear the enduring force of white supremacy in American political life and he points out that much of what was achieved by the civil rights movement has been eroded: the gutting of the Voting Rights Act; the resegregation of schools. But...

**Tim Tyson:** It's two steps forward and one step back. There has been a clarifying step back with the election of Donald Trump but we're going to see two steps forward because it's movement time. And you can see it all over this country, with the young people of the Black Lives Matter movement and Latino movements. You see LGBTQ movements. You see the NAACP all over the country. You see Moral Monday coming up out of North Carolina. You see 'Fight for 15' where people are demanding living wages. All over the country, these struggles are happening and they're coming together. This is more interracial than the Civil Rights Movement ever was. It's as interracial as the Civil Rights Movement dreamed it would be. It's about inequality. It's about a repressive criminal justice system that doesn't make us safer. It's about the neglect of our environment. It's about an attack on women's rights. All of these movements are coming together and we're going to see a reawakening of the movement spirit, and I predict that this is going to be an age, eventually, of great progress and a great opening in American life.

[Music]

**John Biewen:** Tim, can I get you to read the last words of your book? There's a quote by James Baldwin.

**Tim Tyson:** Baldwin writes, 'Not everything that is faced can be changed but nothing can be changed until it is faced.' Our strivings will unfold in a fallen world among imperfect people who have inherited a deeply tragic history. There will be no guarantee of success, but we have guiding spirits who still walk among us. We have the courtroom of historical memory

## SCENE ON RADIO

where Reverend Moses Wright still stands and says, 'There he is.' We have the boundless, moral landscape where Mamie Bradley still shakes the earth with her candor and courage. We have the bold voices of the Black Lives Matter movement demanding justice now and reminding us to remember Emmett Till, to say his name. We have the enduring NAACP and the interracial Moral Mondays' coalition spreading out of North Carolina, like the sit-ins once did, and dozens of other similar crusades across the country. We can still hear the marching feet of millions in the streets of America, all of them belonging to the children of Emmett Till.'

**John Biewen:** Facts are stubborn things. Though, a lot of the time, of course, they don't win out, or not right away. Those white men on the jury in the Emmett Till murder trial chose to ignore the facts or to override them with racist ideology. 'He had it coming.' But out in the court of public opinion, those same facts triggered a massive national movement, a movement that helped this country make big strides toward living up to its own stated ideals. I guess we'll find out if Tim's right, that it's movement time again. Big thanks to Tim Tyson, author of *The Blood of Emmett Till* and to my colleagues Alexa Dilworth and Liz Phillips for editing help on this one. Music in the episode by Lucas Biewen. Next time, we launch a new series, *Seeing White*, a bunch of reporting and storytelling that explores what it means to be, or to think that you are, or to be seen as, white in these United States. You're invited to like our Facebook page. Though, the truth is - the fact is - I'm a lot more active on Twitter @sceneonradio. The website is sceneonradio.org. The show comes from CDS, the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University.

[Outro music]

From PRX

Transcribed by  
PODTRANSCRIBE