

A Word of Caution, Consideration, and Hope

The Jim Crow Museum's second traveling exhibition -- *Them: Images of Separation* -- explores the subjugation of women, poor Whites, gays, Jewish Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, African Americans, and Asian Americans -- and others. It does so by displaying visual images of death, violence, dehumanization, hatred, exclusion, prejudice, and suppression.

There are a few words of caution. Some viewers may find some of the messages and images within the exhibit to be "offensive," "shocking," "pornographic," or "hostile." We encourage people to be mindful of this possibility when considering whether to view the exhibit.

This content warning is not intended to discourage anyone from viewing material that challenges, shocks, or disturbs them. On the contrary, this notice is designed to help viewers' engagement with the displays by giving them the ability to take charge of their own health and education. When presented with a scene that depicts death, violence, hate, discrimination, subjugation, or exclusion, some viewers might shut down, disassociate, panic, become angry, or otherwise disengage from the materials, as they seek to manage the emotional and physical symptoms of viewing what might be triggering material.

Viewing horrific and shocking images of injustice can be emotionally and physically challenging. But such viewing and engagement can also motivate people to take action to bring about necessary changes and remedies to hatred, exclusion, and discrimination.

For example, in August 1955, a 14-year-old boy, Emmett Till, was brutally beaten, mutilated, and murdered in Mississippi. He was killed by two white men because he was Black. In planning for his funeral, Emmett Till's mother, Mamie Till-Mobley, insisted that her son's casket remain open at the funeral despite the fact that his body was almost unrecognizable due to the violence inflicted upon him. According to *The Washington Post*, Mamie "wanted the world to see what two white men had done to her only child."

Many historians and civil rights activists point to this decision and the subsequent viewing by thousands of people of the shocking images of Emmett Till in his open-casket as the beginning of the modern-day civil rights movement. (Note: one such funeral image of Emmett Till is presented in the current *Them* exhibit). In the book *Race* (1992), author Studs Terkel wrote, "[i]t is difficult to measure just how profound an effect the public viewing of Till's body created." According to Terkel, "without question, it moved Black America in a way the Supreme Court ruling on school desegregation could not match. Contributions to the NAACP's 'fight fund,' the war chest to help victims of racial attacks, reached record levels."

Similarly, in May 1963, Birmingham, Alabama's public-safety commissioner, Bull Connor, ordered police officers to use police dogs and fire hoses to stop and disperse student activists engaging in peaceful civil rights protests. This directive led to Black children being viciously attacked by dogs and violently knocked to the ground and dragged down the street by forceful torrents of water. Images of this cruel and unnecessary treatment appeared on nightly television newscasts. Many historians regard the viewing of these horrific images as one of the primary factors in motivating President John F. Kennedy to change his policies and approach to racial

discrimination and as an influential factor leading to the Congressional passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

And so, we invite you to view the images presented in *Them: Images of Separation* with the caution, carefulness, and preparedness that might be necessary to engage with what might be regarded by some as disturbing and provocative material. But we also invite you to come to the display with the open-mindedness and hope that such engagement might lead to a larger appreciation for the need to continue the pursuit of equal justice for all. As Dr. Martin Luther King stated, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”