NAME Statement on the Emmett Till Anti-lynching Act

The National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) knows that action on the Emmett Till Anti-lynching Act is centuries overdue. The U.S. House in February voted 410-4 at long last to make lynching a hate crime under federal law. Till was a 14-year-old African American from Chicago who was visiting relatives in Mississippi. Based on the now-unfounded allegation that he whistled at a white woman in a grocery store, Till was abducted from his relative’s home, beaten and lynched on Aug. 28, 1955. The four votes against the measure were cast by Independent Rep. Justin Amash and Republican Reps. Louie Gohmert, Thomas Massie and Ted Yoho. Rep. Bobby Rush, an Illinois Democrat, introduced the bill in January 2019, saying it will outlaw “an American evil.” The U.S. Senate in February 2019 passed by unanimous consent the Justice for Victims of Lynching Act, which was introduced by Sens. Kamala Harris, Cory Booker, Tim Scott and more than 40 of their colleagues from both sides of the aisle.

After the Union defeated the Confederacy in the Civil War, which was fought over the enslavement of Africans in the United States, Congress passed the 13th Amendment on Jan. 31, 1865, and it was ratified by the states on Dec. 6, 1865, freeing more than 3.9 million slaves, or then-12.6 percent of the U.S. population. But in the post-war period that followed, lynchings were used in the U.S., from the 1880s to 1960s to terrorize and impede the progress of newly freed black Americans. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) reports that from 1882-1968, 4,743 lynchings occurred in America — 3,446 of the victims were black. The fear of lynchings or being gunned down by police or vigilantes is still a daily part of reality for African Americans, Indigenous, Latinx, and particularly non-binary communities.

NAME on Oct. 7-11 will hold its 30th annual international convention in Montgomery, Alabama, where those in attendance can visit the Equal Justice Initiative’s sobering National Memorial for Peace and Justice. It includes plaques giving the senseless reasons why white mobs lynched black people. For example:

- Nathan Bird was lynched in Luling, Texas, in 1902, for refusing to turn his teenaged son over to a mob; his son, accused of fighting with a white boy, was also lynched.
- Benjamin Hart was lynched near Jacksonville, Florida, in 1923 after he was wrongly accused of peeping into a white girl’s window.
- Robert Mallard, a prosperous farmer, was lynched near Lyons, Georgia, in 1948 for voting.
- Anthony Crawford was lynched in Abbeville, South Carolina, in 1916 for rejecting a white merchant’s bid for cottonseed.

The lynching of Till and his mother’s decision to open his casket so the world could see the brutality inflicted on her son, prompted Rosa Parks on Dec. 1, 1955, to refuse to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Ala., bus, which led to the successful Montgomery bus boycott and resulted in the start of the Civil Rights Movement. People attending the NAME conference will have the opportunity to visit the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church in Montgomery, where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was pastor and history was made on the bus boycott, as well as visit the nearby Rosa Parks Museum and see why she refused to give up her seat on that Montgomery bus.

In the meantime, NAME with other social justice organizations such as the NAACP urge every member of the Senate to support the swift passage of the newly titled Emmett Till Anti-lynching Act, and then to insist that President Trump sign it into law as soon as possible. This nation and all of its people have waited too long for this action. It also will be another reason for NAME members to celebrate when they convene in Montgomery, AL.