

NARRATIVE TREATMENT

The Emmett Till Memory Project (ETMP) uses a GPS-enabled smartphone app to take visitors to ten sites in the Mississippi Delta related to the murder of Emmett Till. From the site of the whistle at the iconic Bryant's Grocery, to the haunting site of the murder, to the site of the historic trial, and points in between, the ETMP will take users to the places that sparked the country's outrage and cemented a teenager's civil rights legacy.

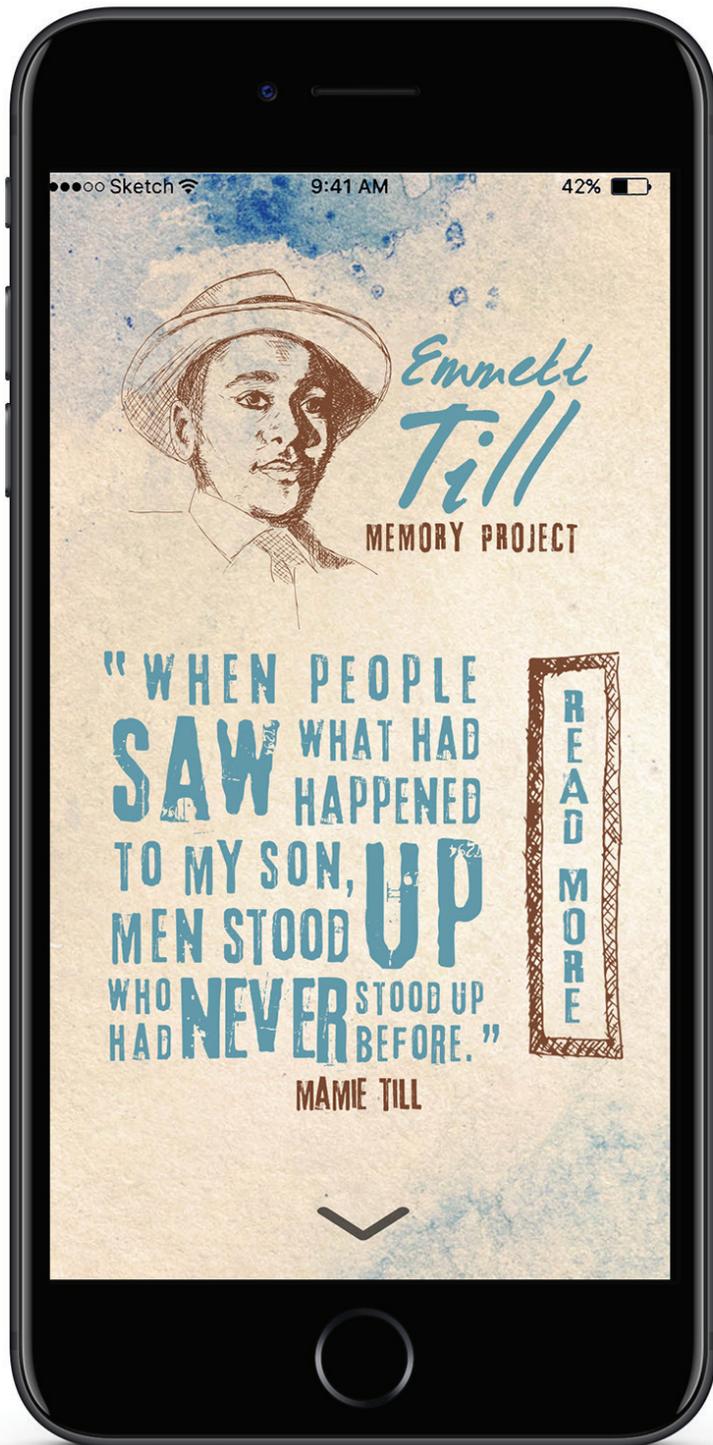
At each of the ten sites, the ETMP provides a range of Till-specific humanities content. As illustrated in the "walk-through" that follows, the ETMP provides two 400-word interpretive narratives for each site: "then" and "since then." The "then" narratives explain what happened at the site in 1955; the "since then" narratives explain how the meaning of the site has changed over time. The two narratives work together; often, the evolution of Till's story recorded in the "since then" narrative determines what is recorded in the "then" narrative. Despite the conceptual interdependence of these categories, we present them as discrete narratives for ease of understanding.

In addition to the interpretive content, the ETMP provides social media check-ins, historical and contemporary photographs for each site, and access to site-specific documents from the Emmett Till Archive, a massive online collection of Till material created by Florida State University libraries for the Digital Public Library of America.

By using each site to tell a different story, the ETMP is designed to provoke analysis and critical engagement rather than recollection or celebration. As a user of our app moves across the Mississippi Delta, the story of Till's murder will shift. And, as the story shifts, the diversity of Till stories and the fragility of memory will become obvious. Through a creative deployment of a common technology, we tell multiple versions of the same story and, in so doing, invite our users to weigh the evidence for themselves and be critically engaged in the process of commemoration.

Some of the ETMP sites have never been commemorated (the kidnapping site, murder site, and the Mound Bayou command center of the black press), others have been plagued by vandalism (the site where Till's body was pulled from the water), and still others have been commemorated incorrectly (Glendora cotton gin). By providing an expert-vetted, family-approved, vandal-proof electronic infrastructure, the ETMP provides everything visitors need in order to critically engage the various stories about what, precisely, happened to Emmett Till.

USER EXPERIENCE AND WALK-THROUGH



The opening screen will feature a powerful quotation from Mamie Till-Mobley that introduces users to the story and how it came to be a seminal event in the civil rights movement.

The arrow at the bottom signals users to scroll down for the main menu, and the "read more" bar takes readers to an overview narrative.

USER EXPERIENCE AND WALK-THROUGH



The main menu options are:

SITES

MAP

ARCHIVE

ABOUT

ACTIVITY

TIMELINE

Samples of the SITES, MAP and TIMELINE pages are outlined on following pages.

The ARCHIVE page links the ETMP to the Emmett Till Archive, an online collection created by Florida State Libraries for the Digital Public Library of America. Florida State's Associate Dean of Libraries for Special Collections and Archives, Kathleen McCormick, will provide URLs to link the ETMP to the Emmett Till Archive.

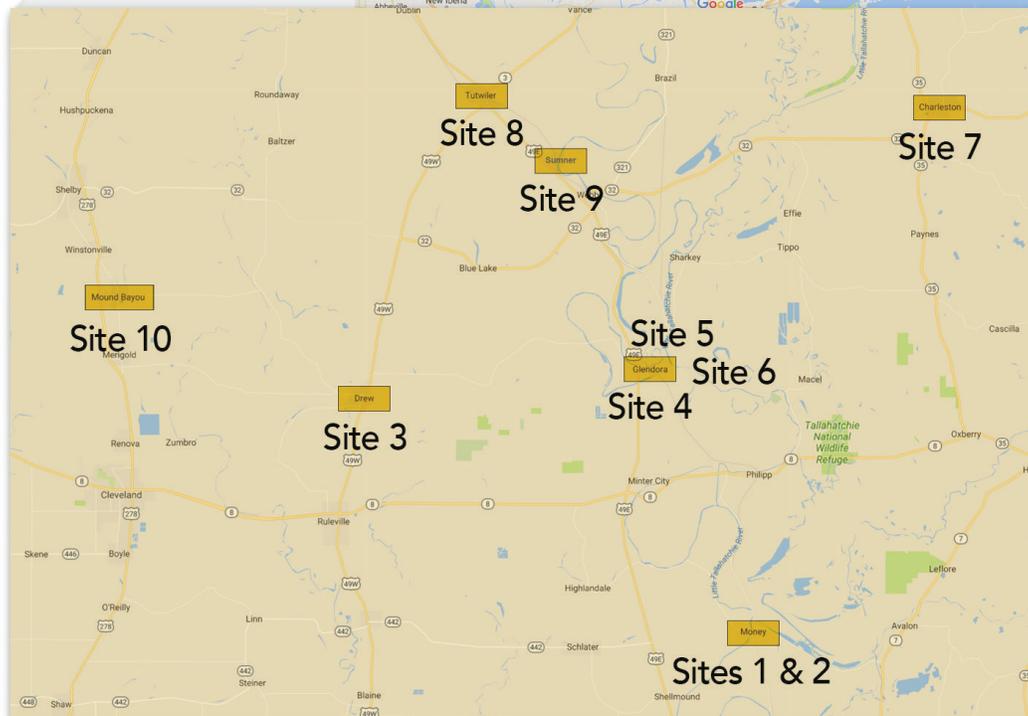
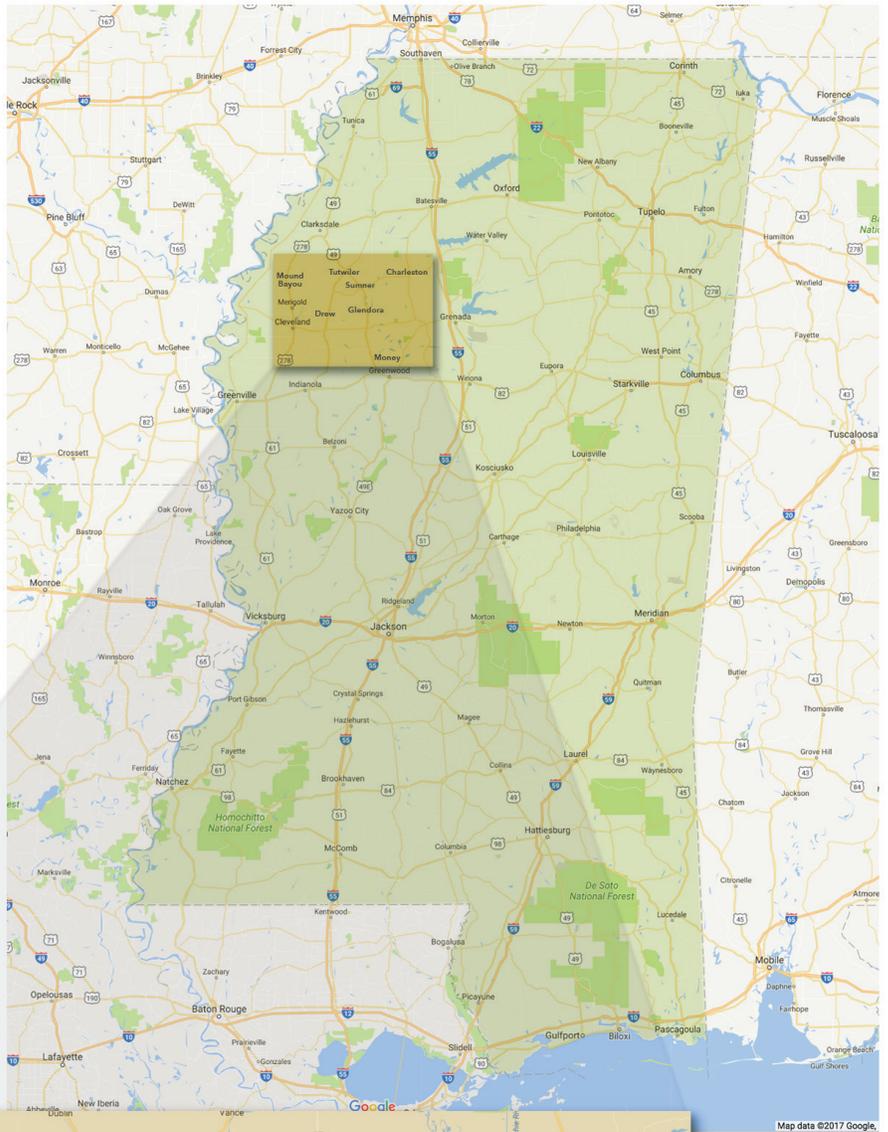
The ABOUT page describes the reason and the team behind the project.

The ACTIVITY page lists additional information and ideas that can be used by educators.

The sites to be interpreted are:

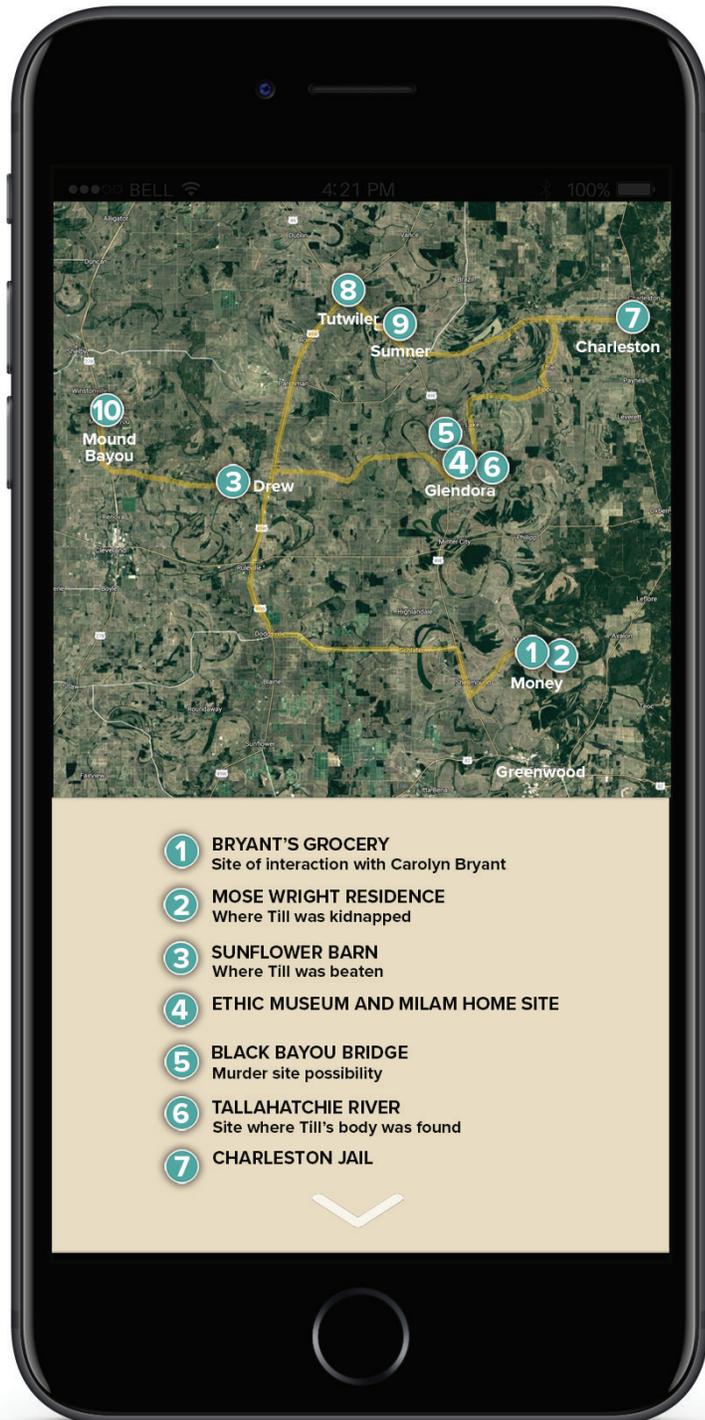
- 1- Bryant's Grocery
- 2- Mose Wright's Home
- 3- Sunflower County Barn
- 4- ETHIC Museum and Milam Homesite
- 5- Black Bayou Bridge
- 6- Tallahatchie River
- 7- Charleston Jail
- 8- Tutwiler Funeral Home
- 9- Sumner Courthouse
- 10- Mound Bayou

This map is not part of the app, but is intended to show the area within the state of Mississippi where the sites are located. Each site is within 30 miles of Glendora.



46 miles

USER EXPERIENCE AND WALK-THROUGH

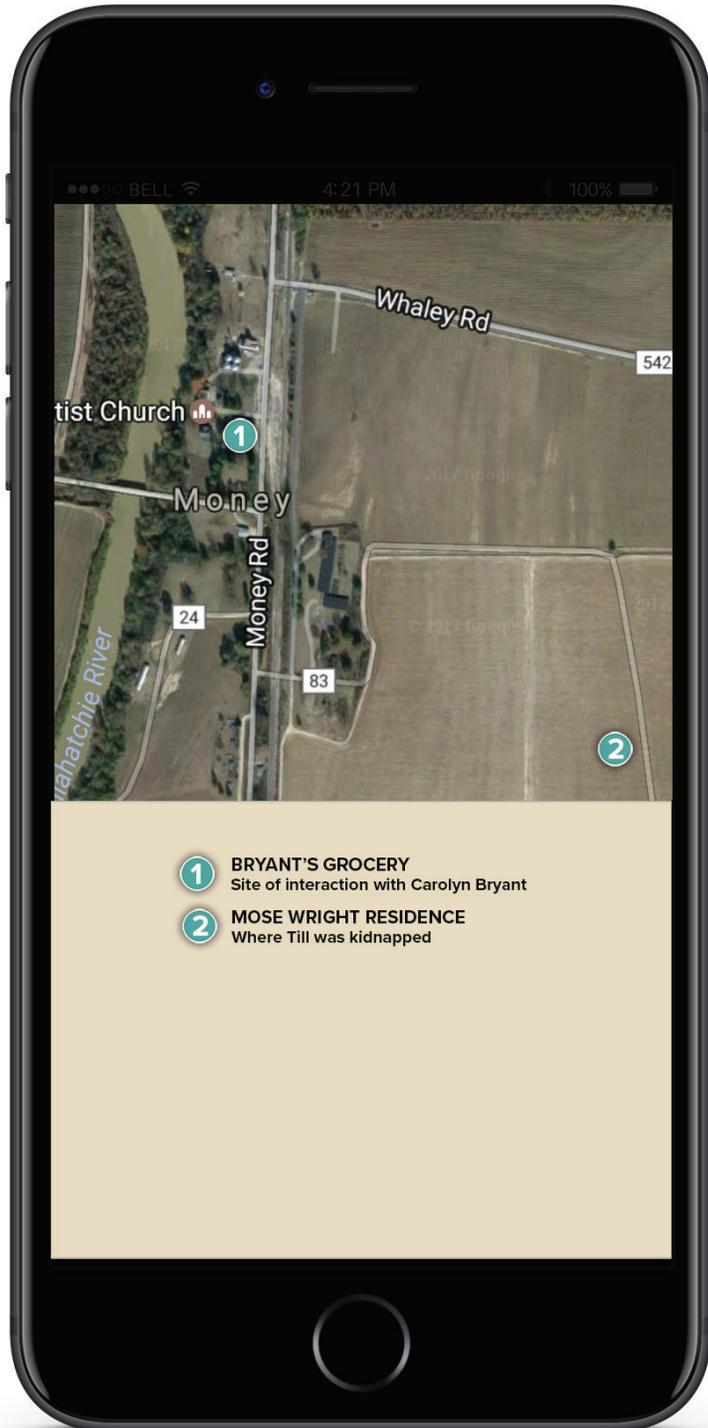


MAP

The default opening screen of the map page shows all ten sites with a route overlay. The bottom section scrolls to show each one. The sites are numbered in chronological order as the events took place, but obviously they do not have to be visited in that order.

Each numbered site can be clicked to open the specific page about that site and to get driving directions to it.

USER EXPERIENCE AND WALK-THROUGH



MAP

This screen on the map page can be pinched out to zoom to street level view.

USER EXPERIENCE AND WALK-THROUGH



SITES

When the users click on the SITE button, they are taken to this page that lists all ten sites, each of which will have individual pages relating to it. The user will scroll to see the entire list.

A menu bar remains in the upper right corner throughout all pages to allow the user to access the overall navigation options at any time.

USER EXPERIENCE AND WALK-THROUGH



SITES - Example 1 Sunflower County Barn

Each of the ten sites will have an individual page with descriptive text and archival images.

The "THEN" section shows what transpired in the time around 1955 and how the sites looked. The "SINCE THEN" section tells what has transpired in the time after the trial.

The images at the bottom of the screen can be clicked to enlarge and show a caption and credit line. When there are more than three images, the user will scroll to see more.

USER EXPERIENCE AND WALK-THROUGH



SITES - Example 1 Sunflower County Barn

This example shows how the screen will appear once an image is clicked on. It will be enlarged with a caption below. An "X" in the top right corner will take the user back to seeing all the thumbnail images and reading the text about the site.

EXAMPLE OF INTERPRETIVE TEXT FOR THE “**THEN**” LINK
FOR THE SUNFLOWER COUNTY BARN SITE:

On the morning of Sunday, August 28, 1955, the eighteen-year-old Willie Reed became an eyewitness—or the closest thing possible—to the murder of Emmett Till. Reed was a farmhand from the adjacent Clint Shurden plantation. Walking across land managed by J.W. Milam’s brother Leslie on his way to a local store, Reed saw J. W. Milam’s 1955 Chevrolet pickup drive onto the plantation with Emmett Till in the back. As he would later testify in court, he saw two black men in the back of the truck with Till, presumably as guards, and four white men in the cab. Although he did not technically see the torture, he heard Till’s screams from inside the plantation’s seed barn.

As he would later put it during the trial, he heard “some licks like somebody was whipping somebody.” He saw J. W. Milam emerge from the shed, gun on his hip, get a drink of water, and re-enter the shed. Reed then retreated to the home of Mandy Bradley (who lived on the Milam-managed farm) where he rendezvoused with farmhand Frank Young. Together, the two of them advanced toward the barn under the pretense of going to the well for water. What they heard left them at a loss for words. Till “was just hollering, ‘Oh.’” Based on the accounts of Reed and Bradley (both of whom testified in trial) and Frank Young’s story, a journalist writing under the pseudonym “Amos Dixon,” reconstructed the scene inside the seed barn: “Emmett fell to the floor, still crying and begging. Their frenzy increased. The blows fell faster. The frenzy mounted higher. The killers kicked and beat their victim. Finally, the cries died down to a moan and then ceased.”

After the murder trial, Reed, his grandfather, and Bradley all fled to Chicago to escape retribution for testifying against white men. Willie Reed later changed his name to Willie Louis. He died at the age of 76 in 2013. In 2006, the FBI concluded that he had, in fact, been telling the truth: Emmett Till was killed in the seed barn on the farm managed by Milam in Sunflower County, a few miles west of the town of Drew.

EXAMPLE OF INTERPRETIVE TEXT FOR THE “SINCE THEN” LINK FOR THE SUNFLOWER COUNTY BARN SITE:

Although stories of the murder in the Sunflower County barn circulated widely for three months following the trial of Till killers J. W. Milam and Roy Bryant, they ended abruptly in January 1956. In that month, journalist William Bradford Huie published what would become one of the most influential versions of Till’s story ever told. Among its many falsehoods, it eliminated the role of the barn near Drew.

In October 1955, two months after the trial, Huie paid murderers J. W. Milam and Roy Bryant \$3,150 and their lawyers \$1,269. In exchange, they told him their version of the story and they signed consent and release forms giving him the right to publish it in *Look* magazine (*Look* refused to print the story unless every named participant signed a waiver). In letters of October 12 and October 18, Huie told his boss that he knew that four men were involved in the murder: he boasted that he could name them all. But by October 23 he had learned that he could only obtain waivers from the two men who had already been tried and were therefore no longer in legal jeopardy. So he wrote his boss another letter: “There were not, after all, four men in the abduction-and-murder party: there were only two.” And thus, because he could only obtain two consent and release forms, the murder party shrank from four people to two people. This, in turn, would move the murder site across county lines.

The FBI concluded in 2006 that Till was killed near the town of Drew in Sunflower County. J. W. Milam’s brother Leslie managed a farm on which there was a barn sufficiently isolated for purposes of the night. Although stories of Sunflower County barn murder were circulating widely at the time, Huie could not tell that story. Leslie Milam had not been tried; he did not sign a release form; and thus he could not be implicated in *Look*. So Huie moved the murder site 16.5 miles east to an abandoned spot of riverbank along the Tallahatchie River in Tallahatchie County. Moving the murder site was the cost of publication: it wrote Leslie Milam (and others) out of the story, eliminated the barn site (and all of Sunflower County), and capped the murder party at two (matching the two signed release forms).

It is difficult to overstate the influence of Huie’s story. *Every single map of the murder published between 1956 and 2005 placed the murder in Tallahatchie County and left Sunflower County off the map entirely.*

USER EXPERIENCE AND WALK-THROUGH

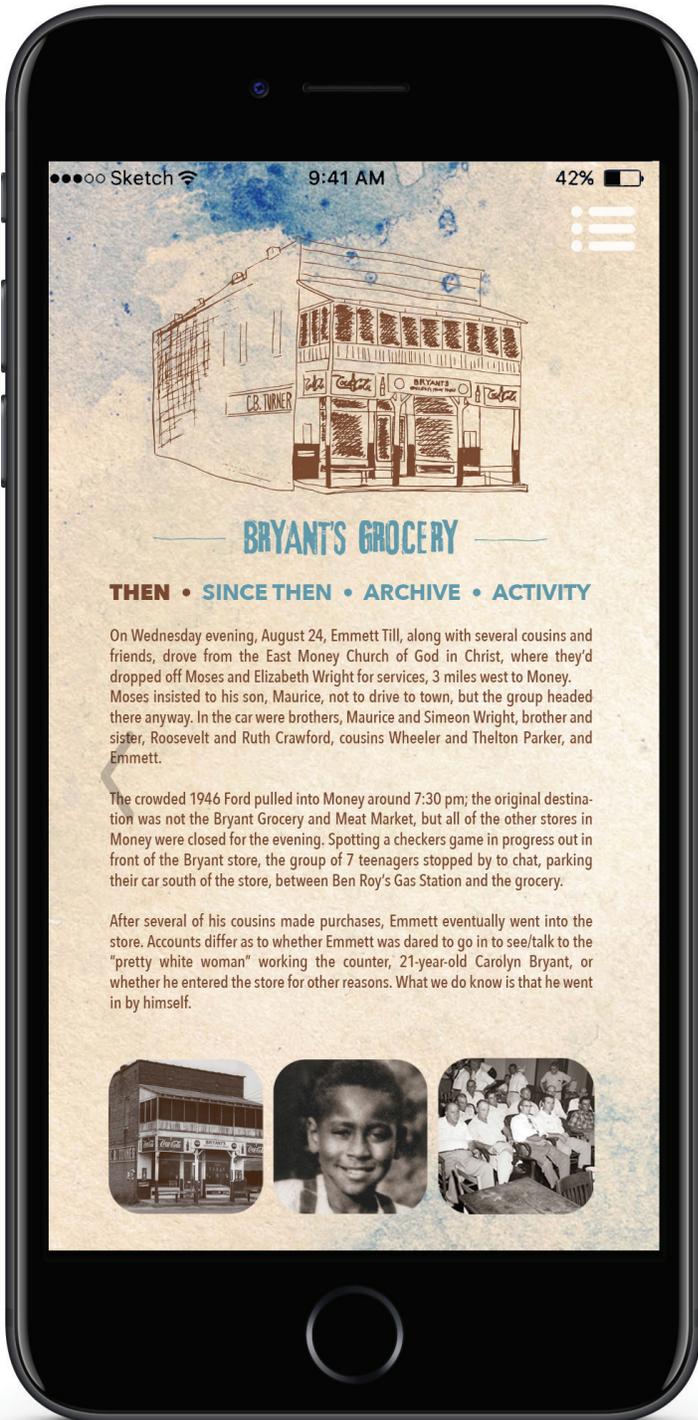


SITES - Example 1 Sunflower County Barn

The ARCHIVE section will have links to documents, interviews, and other relevant information.

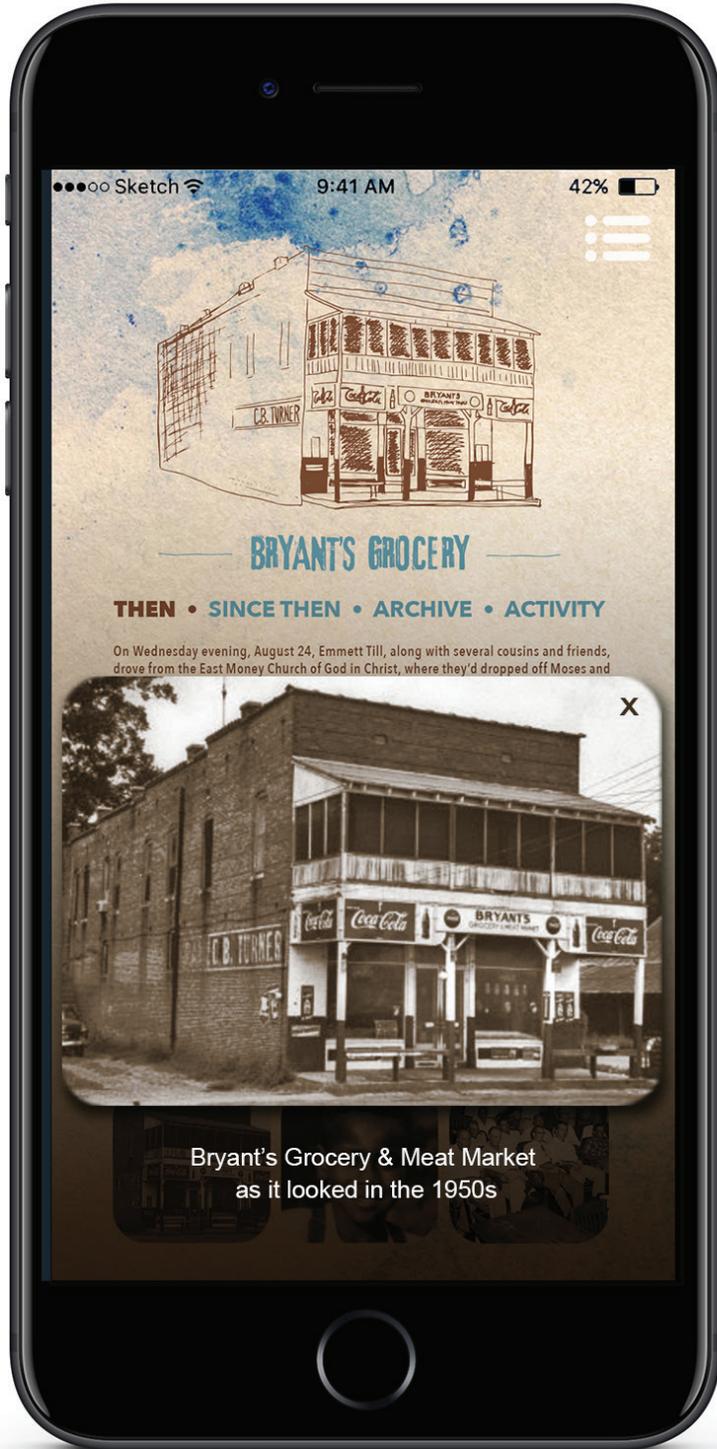
USER EXPERIENCE AND WALK-THROUGH

SITES - Example 2 Bryant's Grocery



USER EXPERIENCE AND WALK-THROUGH

SITES - Example 2 Bryant's Grocery



EXAMPLE OF INTERPRETIVE TEXT FOR THE “**THEN**” LINK FOR THE BRYANT’S GROCERY SITE:

On Wednesday evening, August 24, Emmett Till, along with several cousins and friends, drove from the East Money Church of God in Christ, where they’d dropped off Moses and Elizabeth Wright for services, 3 miles west to Money. In the car were brothers Maurice and Simeon Wright, brother and sister Roosevelt and Ruth Crawford, cousins Wheeler and Thelton Parker, and Emmett.

The crowded 1946 Ford pulled into Money around 7:30 p.m.; the original destination was not the Bryant Grocery and Meat Market, but all of the other stores in Money were closed for the evening. Spotting a checkers game in progress out in front of the Bryant store, the group of 7 teenagers stopped by to chat, parking their car south of the store between Ben Roy’s Service Station and the grocery.

After several of his cousins made purchases, Emmett went into the store and was alone with white shopkeeper Carolyn Bryant for several minutes. No one knows precisely what happened. During the trial, Bryant testified that Till put his “arms around her waist” and propositioned her using words she could not repeat in mixed company.

We know one thing for sure. When Till left the store, Carolyn Bryant followed him out, possibly to retrieve a gun from a nearby car. It was then that Till whistled at her, a loud cat-call-style wolf whistle that was a flagrant violation of Jim Crow protocol.

The teens quickly raced back home and, for a space of three days, thought they had put the incident behind them. In the early morning of August 28, however, Carolyn’s husband Roy Bryant and his half-brother J. W. Milam abducted Emmett Till from his bed. Before they killed him, they needed to be sure that they had the right boy. For this reason, they most likely brought Till back to this spot, to Bryant’s Grocery, to the scene of the whistle. It was the last familiar site he would ever see. Thus is the Bryant store ground zero in the Emmett Till saga.

USER EXPERIENCE AND WALK-THROUGH



SITES - Example 2 Bryant's Grocery

The "SINCE THEN" section functions exactly like the "THEN" section, offering users a description of what has happened to the site since the 1950s along with photographs that can be enlarged.

EXAMPLE OF TEXT FOR THE **"SINCE THEN"** LINK FOR BRYANT'S GROCERY:

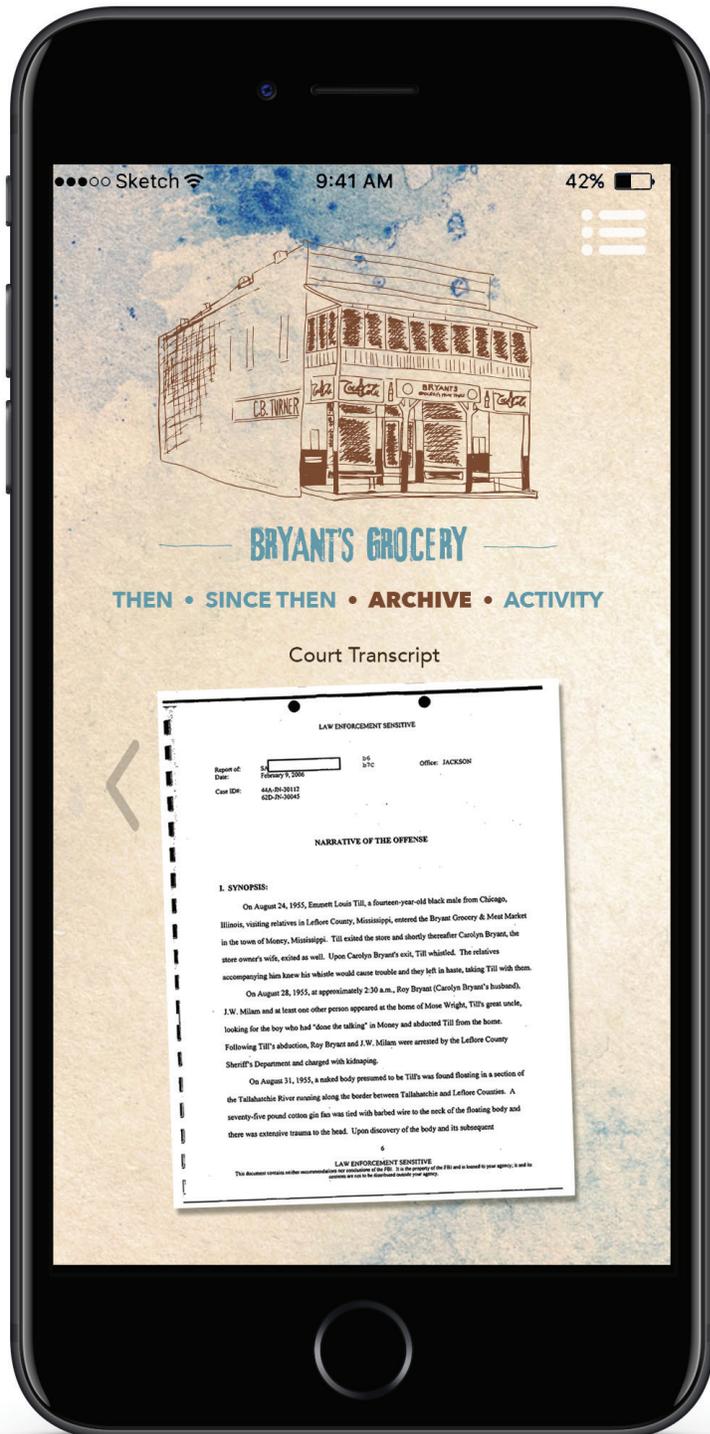
In the years since 1955, Bryant's Grocery and Meat Market has been ignored and the account of what happened inside the store has been substantially revised. In a 2008 interview, Carolyn Bryant confessed to historian Timothy B. Tyson that she lied in court about what happened inside the grocery store. Regarding her claims that Till put his hands on her and propositioned her she said, "That part never happened."

After Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam were acquitted, locals boycotted the grocery store and the Bryants listed it for sale in October of 1955—just two months after the trial. The building housed a succession of small-town groceries (first Wolf's Grocery, then Young's) until the late 1980s. Since that time it has slowly fallen into disrepair, with Hurricane Katrina taking away the roof and a story-sized portion of the north wall.

As Bryant's Grocery has crumbled, however, the gas station sixty-seven feet to its south has been renovated. Ben Roy's Service Station has a long history in Money. During the trial proprietor Ben Roy Kirby went on record stating that no one in the area approved of the murder of Emmett Till.

In 2003 the Tribble family purchased the gas station and, in 2011, pursued funds for its restoration. Because Bryant's Grocery was crumbling, and because Ben Roy's had a covered portico, they argued that the gas station could serve as an "interpretive center" for the crumbling grocery. The state of Mississippi agreed; the Department of Archives and History awarded the Tribbles \$206,360 to restore the gas station. Although the renovated gas station does not contain any signage to mark the history of civil rights, it does serve as a gathering space where civil rights pilgrims gather to contemplate the murder of Emmett Till.

USER EXPERIENCE AND WALK-THROUGH



SITES - Example 1 Bryant's Grocery

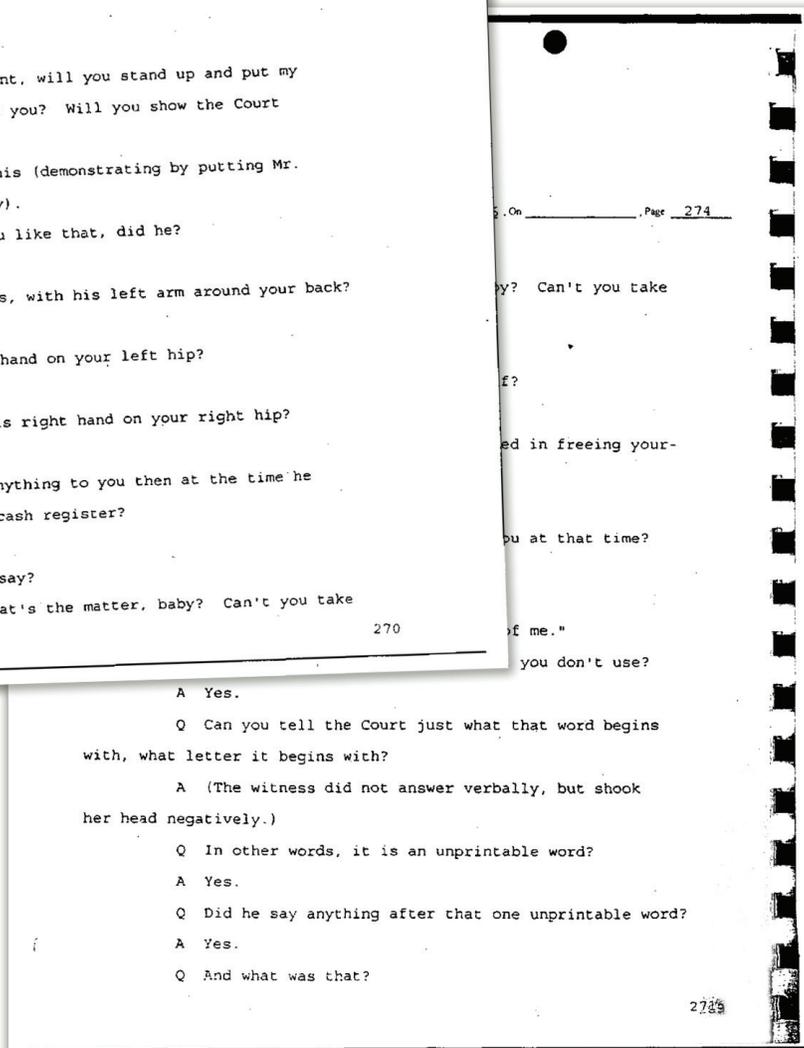
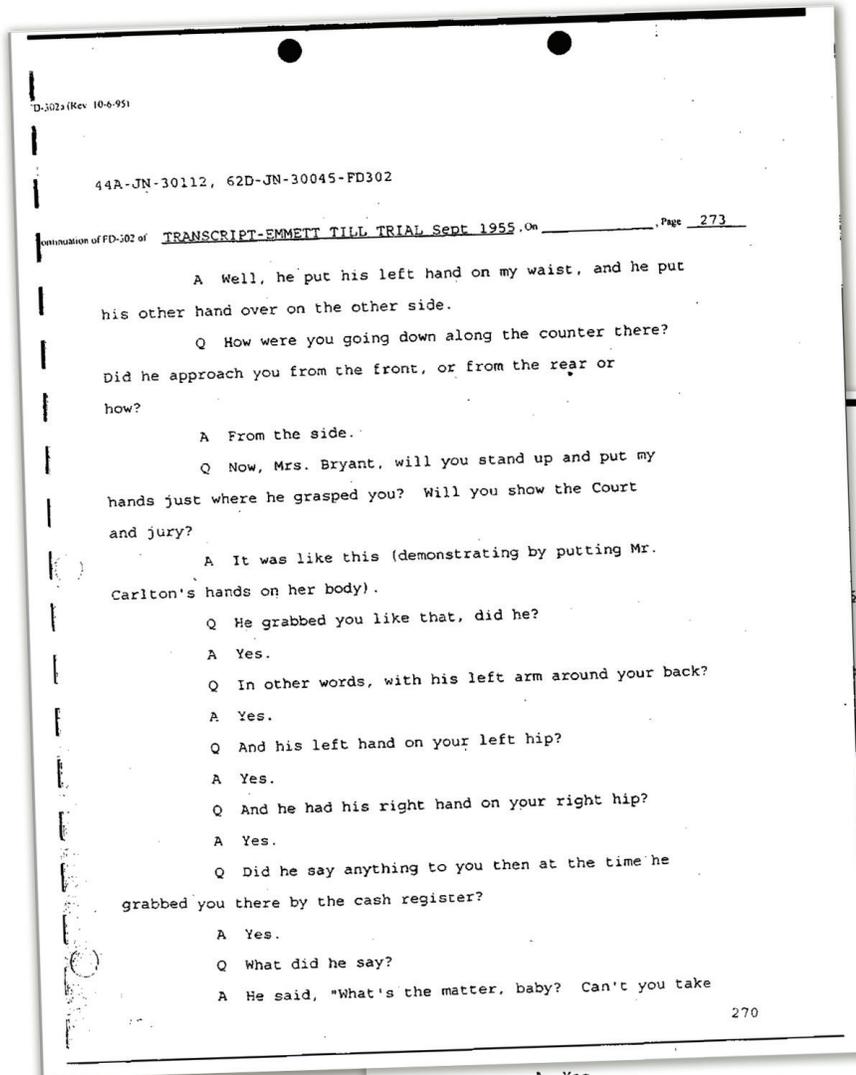
The ARCHIVE section will have a scrollable list of relevant links to open. In this example, a user can click on this image to download a pdf file of the FBI transcript.

Other links may include those to audio interviews, films and vetted articles and papers relating to the Emmett Till murder.

USER EXPERIENCE AND WALK-THROUGH

EXAMPLE OF AN ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT FOR BRYANT'S GROCERY:

What follows are two images of the trial transcript at the point in which Carolyn Bryant claims that Till "put his left hand on my waist, and he put his other hand over on the other side."



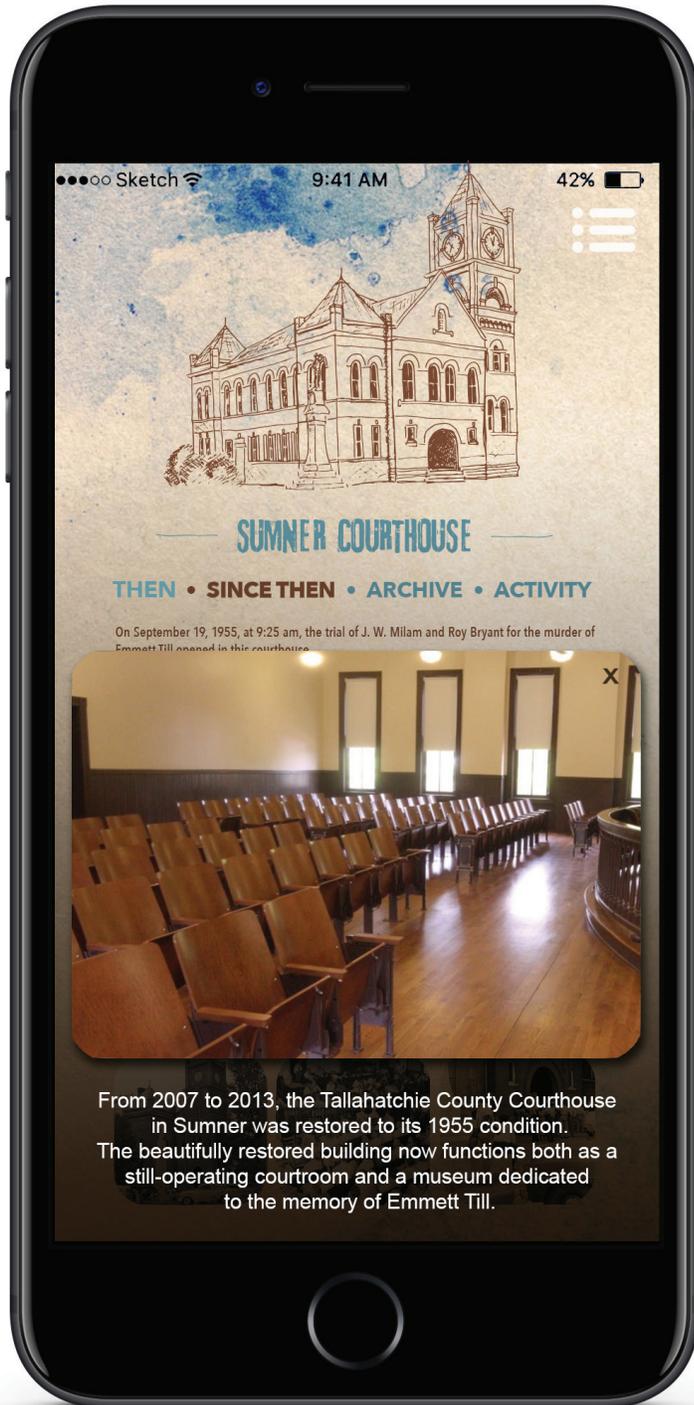
USER EXPERIENCE AND WALK-THROUGH

SITES - Example 3 Sumner Courthouse



USER EXPERIENCE AND WALK-THROUGH

SITES - Example 3 Sumner Courthouse



EXAMPLE OF INTERPRETIVE TEXT FOR THE “**THEN**” LINK ON THE PAGE OF SUMNER COURTHOUSE:

On September 19, 1955, at 9:25 a.m., the trial of J. W. Milam and Roy Bryant for the murder of Emmett Till opened in this courthouse. It was a sensational, five-day trial. For the first time in history, the northern press descended on a Mississippi trial. To this day, locals recall the spectacle that was the Till trial: the microphones, the cameras, the reporters, and the stifling heat of the second-floor courtroom. With approximately 400 people crowded into the small space (sitting in aisles and hanging out of windows), temperatures inside exceeded ninety degrees. For all these reasons, celebrated journalist David Halberstam called the trial “the first great media event of the civil rights movement.”

The trial lasted a scant five days. It would have been even shorter, had the black press not managed to secure an extended recess on the third day of the trial. Afro-American reporter James Hicks and civil rights leader Dr. T. R. M. Howard rounded up five witnesses that claimed (correctly) that Till was beaten (and possibly killed) by J. W. Milam and others in a barn outside of Drew, MS. Drew was 20 miles southwest, in Sunflower County, and, if the witnesses were correct, the trial would have to be moved to the neighboring county. Judge Curtis Swango called a recess to investigate the possibility. In the end, the witnesses were not believed and the trial was not moved.

On Friday, September 23, the all-white jury took only 67 minutes to deliberate before returning a verdict of not guilty. It was widely reported that the only reason it took them as long as it did was that they took some extra time to drink some Cokes in order to make it look as if they were struggling with the decision.

The Cokes notwithstanding, the jury did not struggle. They believed (or at least said they did) the testimony of Sheriff H. C. Strider, who argued that the body could not be positively identified as Emmett Till. The body was so badly decomposed by the time it was retrieved from the Tallahatchie River, Strider argued, that the race of the body could not be determined. This despite the fact that when, on August 31, Strider recovered the body from the river, he immediately had it sent to Chester Miller’s Century Burial Funeral Home—the black funeral home in Greenwood.

EXAMPLE OF INTERPRETIVE TEXT FOR THE “**SINCE THEN**” LINK ON THE PAGE OF SUMNER COURTHOUSE:

From 2007 to 2013, the Tallahatchie County Courthouse in Sumner was restored to its 1955 condition. The beautifully restored building now functions both as a still-operating courtroom and a museum dedicated to the memory of Emmett Till. When locals dedicated the courtroom-turned-museum to Till’s memory, they confessed that the 1955 jury was wrong: Strider lied, the body did belong to Till, and members of their own community had perpetrated a grave injustice. Here is how that remarkable turnabout came to pass.

Tallahatchie County has two courthouses. The original courthouse is in Charleston, on the eastern edge of the county. However, because the flooding of the Tallahatchie River occasionally prevented passage between the two sides of the county, a second courthouse was erected in Sumner in 1902. In 1949, six years before the Till trial, Tallahatchie County built a through-truss bridge on State Highway 32 over the Tallahatchie River. The river was now passable year-round, and there was no longer a compelling rationale for two courthouses. Unsurprisingly, as the economy in the Delta faltered and as their (now redundant) courthouse fell into disrepair, residents of Sumner feared that the legal industry would be consolidated in the larger city of Charleston. If the town of Sumner was going to survive, it had to save its unneeded and ill-repaired courthouse, a high task in times of austerity.

It was in this context that Harvey Henderson found common cause with Jerome Little. In 2005, Henderson was the only still-living attorney who had defended Till killers J. W. Milam and Roy Bryant. Little was the first black county supervisor, a man deeply committed to racial justice.

Although Henderson and Little shared few political convictions, they both wanted to save the Tallahatchie County Courthouse. Saving the courthouse required commemorating Emmett Till. While there was no tax money to repair the courthouse, the memory of Emmett Till could be capitalized on to provide grant money to restore the courthouse to its 1955 condition. Henderson and Little thus pursued the same goal, albeit for different reasons. Henderson wanted to save the legal industry (and his own job), and was willing to commemorate Till’s murder to do it. Little wanted to honor Till’s memory, and was willing to save Sumner to do it.

In late 2005, Little formed the Emmett Till Memorial Commission (ETMC) and gave it the double charge of saving the Sumner Courthouse by commemorating Emmett Till. Racism coursed through the 18-member ETMC. This was hardly surprising given that two of the black members grew up as sharecroppers on plantations owned by two of the white members. For this reason, the commission's double charge (to remember Till and to secure the financial stability of the town) split the ETMC down the middle. The nine black members wanted racial justice; the nine white members wanted the economic benefits of a courthouse. One of them even went on record: "We see this Till thing as a mechanism for saving the courthouse." Despite competing motivations, the project actually worked: a renovated courthouse turned out to be the perfect midpoint between a white desire for revenue and a black desire to see Till's murder commemorated. The results are beautiful and the building now functions as both an operating courthouse and an operating Emmett Till memorial.

On October 2, 2007, the ETMC hosted the Till family for a commemorative ceremony on Sumner square. The white and black co-chairs of the commission took turns reading a public apology. The apology began: "racial reconciliation begins with telling the truth." Since that day, the ETMC has been using the story of Emmett Till to pursue racial justice in Tallahatchie County and the Delta.

USER EXPERIENCE AND WALK-THROUGH

EXAMPLE OF AN ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT FOR THE SUMNER COURTHOUSE:

Here we make available the long-list trial transcript and documents related to the twenty-first century restoration of the courthouse.

02a (Rev 10-6-95)

44A-JN-30112, 62D-JN-30045-FD302

Institution of FD-302 of TRANSCRIPT-EMMETT TILL TRIAL Sept 1955, On _____, Page 3

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI)
TALLAHATCHIE COUNTY)

In the Circuit Court

SEPTEMBER TERM, 1955

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
VS.
J. W. MILAM and ROY BRYANT

INDICTMENT-MURDER

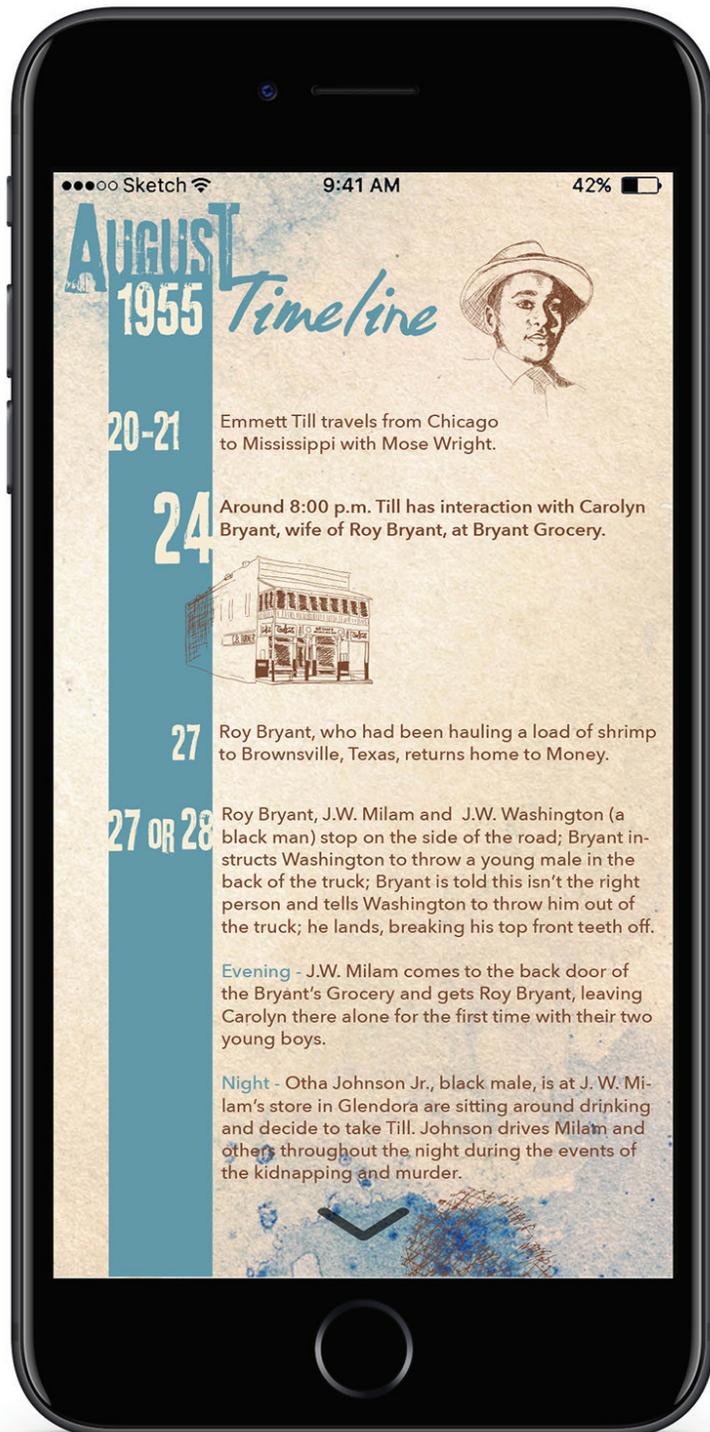
Presiding:
Hon. Curtis M. Swango, Jr., Circuit Judge,
Seventeenth Judicial District of the State.

Appearances:

For the State:
Hon. Gerald Chatham, District Attorney;
Hon. Robert B. Smith, III, Special Assistant
to the District Attorney;
Hon. Hamilton Caldwell, County Attorney.

For the Defendants:
Hon. J. J. Breland, of Sumner, Mississippi;
Hon. C. Sidney Carlton, of Sumner, Mississippi;
Hon. J. W. Kellum, of Sumner, Mississippi;
Hon. John W. Whitten, Jr., of Sumner, Miss.;
Hon. Harvey Henderson, of Sumner, Mississippi.

USER EXPERIENCE AND WALK-THROUGH

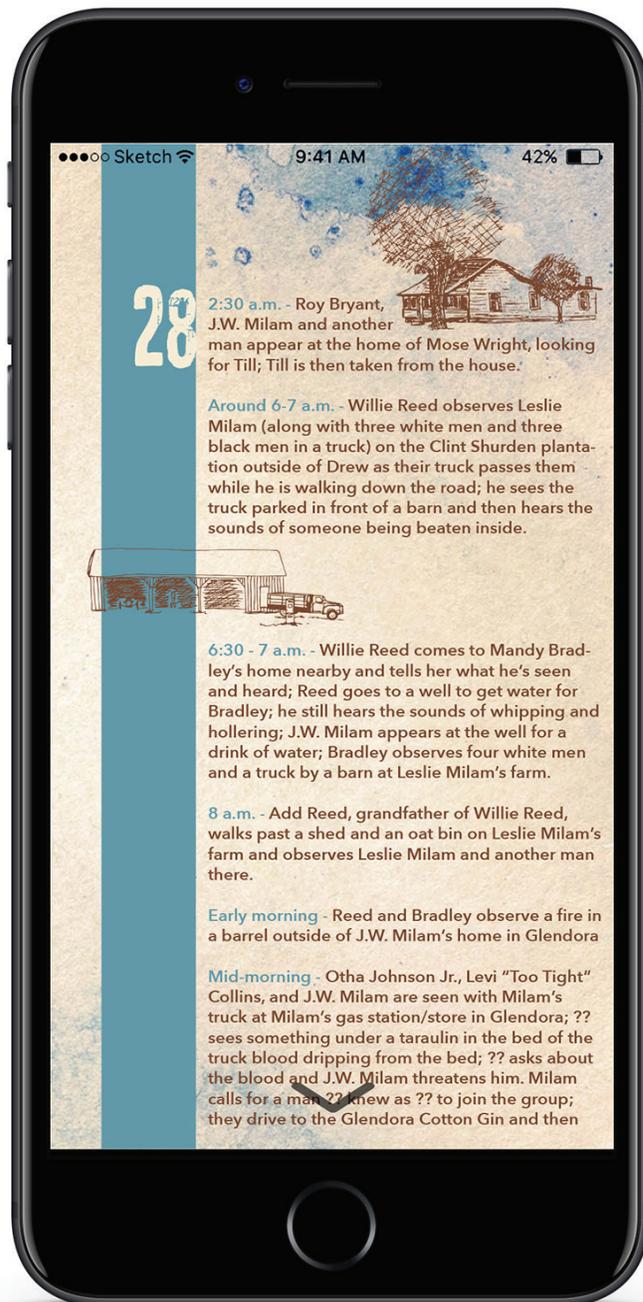


TIMELINE

The timeline feature is a scrolling list of dates that follows the events as they took place. It begins on August 20, 1955, when Emmett Till leaves Chicago bound for Greenwood. It chronicles dates and times of day that are important pieces of the story.

While the main portion of the timeline is very compressed so users can easily see what took place during certain days, it will also show events outside that time period, such as when the *LOOK* magazine article was published, and as recent as 2017 when the news was released that Carolyn Bryant had admitted to lying in her trial testimony.

USER EXPERIENCE AND WALK-THROUGH



TIMELINE

On dates where time of day is crucial to understanding the sequence of events, those are given in more detail.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Because most of the data will be static or rarely have large changes, an SQLite database will be used for data storage and retrieval. The database will be stored natively on the device, and the same database will be used on both iPhone and Android devices as well as the parts of the website where this is relevant. Images within the app will be loaded directly from the web but will be cached on the device after loading to provide faster performance.

There will be no user-generated content in this app.

SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

- Our plan is to focus on the content with the knowledge that technology will certainly change, and we must be prepared to change with it. All the elements—from the text to images—will be housed on the website as well as the app, so if there are upgrades on either the software or hardware delivery systems, users will still be able to access all the information through what would basically be a web-based app while we handle changes for the native app.
- Estimated future costs and maintenance fees for the project:
- This project does not have a limited lifespan, but if technology changes to the point that an app is no longer practical or needed, the content will be archived and made available in some digital fashion, whether it's through the website or another outlet.

COLLATERAL



A 4 x 9" rack card will be produced to have available at Mississippi Welcome Centers and other tourism-related areas. Its purpose is to make visitors aware of this history and encourage them to download the app.

From the kidnapping to the trial and points in between, see the places that sparked the country's outrage and cemented a teenager's civil rights legacy.