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**Press release - Coahoma Community College Public Relations**

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## More than 4,000 Experience Live Theatre Chronicling the Death of Emmett Till



Black History Month celebrated at CCC

THE PINNACLE - More than 4,000 experienced a dynamic chronicle of Emmett Till's death in Tallahatchie County on August 28, 1955 – a landmark date in American civil rights history – transformed into live theatre Monday at Coahoma Community College by playwright/actor Mike Wiley.

Projecting multiple roles ranging from a reporter interviewing Till's accused murderers Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam in "our piece of the Delta – that humid, mosquito-infested piece of Mississippi" to the sometimes bragging, misunderstood, 14-year old stuttering Till himself, Wiley held the large crowd's attention for more than 60 minutes.

Attending were students from West Tallahatchie, John.F. Kennedy, Drew, Clarksdale, Coahoma County, and Aggie High Schools, Jonestown Elementary, and George H. Oliver Elementary.

Wiley's story behind the Chicago teenager's visit to Money, Miss., his whistling at a white woman, Carolyn Bryant inside Bryant's Store, his subsequent kidnapping, beating and death by drowning, and the trial that found his accused murderers not guilty was told from numerous viewpoints.

The playwright as Sheriff H.C. Strider tells the 300-capacity courtroom crowd in Sumner, "We don't mix down here, and we don't intend to start now."

Rapidly changing characterizations, Wiley described small town views of Till as "big for his britches – too big for Mississippi" carrying photos of white actress Heddy Lamar and a white girl in his wallet.

"I knew folks down here were serious about their boundaries," comments Wiley the reporter followed by Milam's accounting: "We were just going to scare him (Till who was known as Bo) real good, but we needed to pistol whip some sense in him."

"I'm going to make an example of you, so folks can know how my folks stand," continues the actor as Milam in a first-person account."

In the finale, Wiley speaks lines from Till's mother: "Bo's death was a lesson in sacrifice; I have become a Wailing Wall for all."

Adding dimension to the presentation were vintage photographs projected on a large screen depicting Till with his mother in Chicago, Bryant Store with its store sign flanked by classic Coke caps, and a headline from Look magazine: "The shocking story of an approved killing in Mississippi."

Besieged by autograph-seekers, Wiley said he was motivated to create the play, so the Emmett Till story would not be forgotten and the incident would not be repeated.

In 2007 a racial reconciliation ceremony took place in Sumner with both black and white citizens participating and pledging to initiate community healing.

The CCC presentation was part of the college's Lyceum series funded by a Title III B grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

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