

`Emmett Till' Probes Brutal Murder; `Baxter' Bombs: Rick Warner

(Review. Rick Warner is the movie critic for Bloomberg News. The opinions expressed are his own.)

By Rick Warner

Aug. 26 (Bloomberg) -- The murder of Emmett Till, a black teenager savagely killed in 1955 for whistling at a white woman in Mississippi, sparked national outrage and galvanized the civil rights movement. What it didn't produce was justice.

After the two men charged with the crime were acquitted by an all-white jury, they brazenly bragged about killing the 14-year-old Chicagoan in a Look magazine article for which they were paid \$4,000. Because of the constitutional protection against double jeopardy, they couldn't be tried again.

The men, J.W. Milam and his half-brother Roy Bryant, are now dead. But the pursuit of others who may have contributed to the murder continues, thanks to an investigative documentary called ``The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till.''

Produced and directed by Keith Beauchamp, a Louisiana native who spent almost a decade investigating the killing, the film has already gotten results. Last year, based largely on Beauchamp's findings, the U.S. Justice Department reopened the case. Till's body was exhumed for an autopsy and authorities are still digging for information that could lead to new indictments.

#### Open Casket

That would come too late for Emmett's courageous mother, Mamie Till Mobley, who died in 2003 without ever seeing anyone punished for beating her son's face beyond recognition, knocking out his eyes and teeth, cutting off his ears, nose and tongue, then shooting him in the head and dumping him in the Tallahatchie River.

Mobley, who was interviewed by Beauchamp before she died, insisted on an open casket to show the world what happened to her son several days after he whistled at Bryant's wife Carolyn outside a grocery store. When photos of Emmett's mutilated body were published in Jet magazine, what started out as a small-town crime became an international story.

While the documentary includes fresh interviews with eyewitnesses to Emmett's abduction from his great-uncle's house and others who heard screaming coming from the barn where he was later beaten, the most powerful voice is Mamie Till Mobley, who remained home in Chicago while her son visited relatives in the Mississippi Delta.

Mrs. Mobley recounts the tragedy in a strong, steady voice, though one that still reflects the searing pain of an event that took place 50 years ago this Sunday.

### Bloody Redemption

Amazingly, she doesn't seem bitter over the virulent racism that led to her son's death, probably because she believed his murder was the catalyst for a social movement that wiped out legal discrimination against Southern blacks. (Three months later, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus, triggering a boycott that ended segregation on the city's public transportation system.)

``Without the shedding of blood, there's no redemption,'' Mrs. Mobley says in the film. ``God chose him for this mission.''

The mission won't be accomplished until the complete story of Emmett Till's murder is known. Based on his interviews and documents he reviewed, Beauchamp concluded that 14 people may have played a role in Emmett's death. Five of them, including Carolyn Bryant and a black man who worked for Milam, are still alive.

``The Untold Story of Emmett Till,'' from ThinkFilm, is playing at the Film Forum in New York. It will open in other U.S. cities in October.

### ``The Baxter'

``The Baxter'' is a flat comedy about a nerdy, middle-aged accountant who's always getting jilted by his girlfriends. Some might describe it as deadpan. I'd call it lifeless.

Elliot Sherman, played by an expressionless Michael Showalter, reads the dictionary for fun, is allergic to everything but air, orders fine wine in a burger joint and uses clap-off lights in his Brooklyn brownstone. Gee, can't figure out why this guy keeps getting dumped.

After a series of romantic disasters, Sherman gets engaged to beautiful magazine editor Caroline Swann (Elizabeth Banks), who hires a gay midget to plan the wedding. But just before the bells chime, her globetrotting, high-school sweetheart (Justin Theroux) shows up and tries to win her back.

### Clueless

As his relationship with his fiancée falls apart, Sherman befriends an office temp and aspiring singer just off the bus from Minnesota. She has the hots for him, but he doesn't have a

clue.

Neither does the movie, which was also written and directed by Showalter. With its stilted acting, corny dialogue and predictable plot, ``The Baxter'' deserves to be left at the altar.

``The Baxter,'' from IFC Films, opens in New York today and in Los Angeles on Sept. 2.

--Editors: Hoelterhoff, Schatz, Todd.

Story illustration: For more on ``The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till,'' visit <http://www.thinkfilmcompany.com>. For more on ``The Baxter,'' visit <http://www.thebaxtermovie.com>. For more cultural news from Bloomberg, see {MUSE <GO>}.

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