

University of Mississippi

eGrove

---

Documents and Files

Alliance for Truth and Racial Reconciliation

---

6-20-2007

## Statements made about HR 923 (The Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act)

John Lewis

*United States. Congress. House*

John G. Brittain

*Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law*

Wade Henderson

*Leadership Conference on Civil Rights*

Nancy Zirkin

Hilary O. Shelton

*National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://egrove.olemiss.edu/atrr\\_docs](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/atrr_docs)

---

### Recommended Citation

Lewis, John; Brittain, John G.; Henderson, Wade; Zirkin, Nancy; and Shelton, Hilary O., "Statements made about HR 923 (The Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act)" (2007). *Documents and Files*. 11. [https://egrove.olemiss.edu/atrr\\_docs/11](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/atrr_docs/11)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Alliance for Truth and Racial Reconciliation at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Documents and Files by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact [egrove@olemiss.edu](mailto:egrove@olemiss.edu).



United States  
of America

# Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE *110<sup>th</sup>* CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

---

---

## *House of Representatives*

June 20, 2007

Mr. LEWIS OF Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my good friend, the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, (Mr. *Conyers*) for those kind words.

Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act is being considered today before the full House of Representatives.

I would like to thank the lead cosponsor of this bill, my good friend, Representative *Kenny Hulshof* from Missouri, and my good friends in the United States Senate, Senator *Chris Dodd* of Connecticut, and Senator *Patrick Leahy* of Vermont for their distinguished support in this effort.

Again, I must thank Chairman *Conyers* for all of his help and for all of his support in bringing this bill before us today. Also, Subcommittee Chairs *Scott* and *Nadler* for coordinating a powerful hearing on this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the time has come for the sake of history, for the sake of justice, for the sake of closure, the 110th Congress must pass this legislation.

On August 28, 1955, almost 52 years ago, a 14-year-old boy from Chicago, a young African American boy, was visiting his uncle in Money, Mississippi. He was pulled from his bed in the darkness of night. He was beaten until he could hardly be recognized. He was shot in the head, and his body was dumped in the Tallahatchie River, all because somebody said he had been fresh with a white woman.

Several years later, an intelligent and dignified NACP leader named Medgar Evers was gunned down in front of his home in Mississippi in June of 1963. Some historians said it was the injustice of these unsolved two murders that began the mass movement in the American South that we call the modern-day civil rights movement.

Who can forget the NAACP leader and his wife, Harry and Harriette Moore, who were killed by a bomb on Christmas night as they celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary in 1951 in Florida? Who can forget the two black couples lynched about 60 miles east of Atlanta in 1946, or the death of Lemuel Penn, a lieutenant colonel in the United States Army Reserve from Washington, D.C., who was a veteran trying to get home from Fort Benning, Georgia for a little rest. He was killed in 1964 as members of the KKK drove by him on a highway.

Who can forget Viola Liuzzo, shot down in Alabama in 1965, from the hometown of our chairman, Chairman *Conyers* from Detroit, trying to bring nonviolent activists back to their home after the Selma-to-Montgomery march?

There are hundreds, maybe even thousands, of these crimes that were never brought to justice. There are murderers who have walked free for decades while the families of victims cry out for justice. Passing this bill is the least we can do. And we must do something to right these wrongs.

I will never forget the three civil rights workers, three young men I knew, Andy Goodman, James Chaney and Mickey Schwerner. They came to Mississippi with a simple mission, to register as many black voters as possible. They were stopped, arrested, taken to jail. Later that night, June 21, 1964, they were taken from jail by the sheriff and his deputy, turned over to the Klan, where they were beaten, shot and killed. They didn't die in Vietnam. They didn't die in Eastern Europe. They died right here in the United States. They died in Philadelphia, Mississippi.

Viola Liuzzo didn't die on a road or some street in Baghdad, she died right there in Alabama on Highway 80. Lemuel Penn, Medgar Evers, Emmett Till and countless others didn't die in the Middle East; they died right here in our own country fighting for simple justice.

Mr. Speaker, we have an obligation, we have a mission, we have a mandate. The blood of hundreds of innocent men and women is calling out to us. Then, no one came to their aid. But today we can help make it right. Let us move to close this dark chapter in our history. Let us try to wash away the stains on our democracy. So I call on all of my colleagues to pass this legislation and pass it today.

- [Begin Insert]

Mr. Speaker, I submit the following letters of support for H.R. 923, the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crimes Act.

LAWYERS' COMMITTEE FOR

CIVIL RIGHTS UNDER LAW,

Washington, DC, June 18, 2007.  
Hon. **NANCY PELOSI**,  
*U.S. House of Representatives,*  
*Washington, DC.*

**DEAR MADAM SPEAKER:** I am writing on behalf of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law to express our strong support for H.R. 923/S. 535, the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act. The bill, sponsored by Congressman John Lewis of Georgia, will give the U.S. Department of Justice the funding and tools necessary to investigate and prosecute civil rights era murders.

Ever since our founding by President John F. Kennedy in 1963, the Lawyers' Committee has sought to attain equal justice under law for all Americans, and the Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act is an important step in continuing that mission.

We are hopeful that the House of Representatives will pass the bill this week, as June 21 represents an incredibly symbolic day in the history of the civil rights movement. On that date in 1964, KKK member Edgar Ray Killen assembled a mob to hunt down three civil rights workers in Mississippi. The victims' names were James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. Those young men sacrificed their lives in pursuit of equal rights for all Americans, yet their killer roamed free for decades until a court finally convicted him on June 21, 2005.

We urge Congress to mark this important anniversary by passing H.R. 923.

The bill assigns offices within the Justice Department the specific responsibility of investigating and prosecuting civil rights murders before 1970. Then, civil rights murder cases that went to trial often ended in hung juries. However, today, different attitudes and improved race relations could result in color-blind justice, and technological advancements could allow prosecutors to present more persuasive evidence at trial.

To this end, H.R. 923 will provide the Justice Department with \$11.5 million in funds to carry out their duties, a sum publicly supported by a D.O.J. representative at a recent House subcommittee hearing.

At that same hearing, Myrlie Evers-Williams, the widow of slain civil rights worker Medgar Evers, spoke in support of the bill. Her husband was assassinated in 1963, and three decades later, a jury convicted 74 year-old Byron de la Beckwith of the murder, proof that justice knows no time limitations.

Although the Lawyers' Committee and Americans-at-large are thankful that the Evers family and others have received some level of closure, we know that countless American families are still waiting to see justice served. Just last week, a federal jury convicted James Ford Seale of two counts of kidnapping in relation to the 1964 murders of two African-American teenagers. Passage of the Emmett Till Unsolved Crimes Act will help

the Justice Department investigate and prosecute cases similar to the Killen, Seale, and De la Beckwith trials.

With your support of this measure, aging murderers who have subverted our legal system for decades could finally face a court of law. The long-grieving families of numerous victims could hope to see closure. Perhaps most importantly, this bill could assist the United States government in upholding justice, no matter how long overdue.

Again, we urge you to mark this important anniversary by scheduling a floor vote on H.R. 923/S. 535 this week. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding this request.

Sincerely,

John G. Brittain,  
*Chief Counsel.*

--

- [End Insert]

#### LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

#### ON CIVIL RIGHTS,

Washington, DC, June 4, 2007.

Hon. **JOHN LEWIS**,  
*Cannon House Office Building,  
Washington, DC.*

Hon. **CHRISTOPHER J. DODD**,  
*Russell Senate Office Building,  
Washington, DC.*

Hon. **KENNY C. HULSHOF**,  
*Cannon House Office Building,  
Washington, DC.*

Hon. **PATRICK J. LEAHY**,  
*Russell Senate Office Building,  
Washington, DC.*

**DEAR COLLEAGUES:** On behalf of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR), the nation's oldest, largest, and most diverse civil and human rights coalition, with nearly 200 member organizations, we urge you to cosponsor and support the bipartisan Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act (S. 535/H.R. 923). LCCR believes that it is imperative to put resources behind investigating and prosecuting those individuals involved with committing the unsolved civil rights era crimes.

The historic conviction of Edgar Ray Killen, for the 1964 deaths of three Mississippi Civil Rights workers, Andrew Goodman, James Chaney, and Michael Schwerner, demonstrates how it is imperative that our nation bring murderers to justice, even if several decades have passed since these heinous crimes were committed. However, time is running out because the witnesses to these crimes are elderly.

S. 535/H.R. 923 will create two new offices to investigate and prosecute unsolved civil rights era murders. The Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Investigative Office, a new FBI office headed by a Chief Investigator, will aggressively investigate pre-1970 murder cases in coordination with state and local law enforcement. The second office will be the Unsolved Crimes Section in the Civil Rights Division of the DOJ, which will focus specifically on prosecuting these cases. If a crime other than murder is discovered during the course of an inquiry, it will be referred to the appropriate law enforcement officials.

The bill authorizes \$11.5 million in annual appropriations: \$5 million for the Unsolved Crimes Section, \$5 million for the Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Investigative Office and \$1.5 million for Community Relations Service of the Department of Justice to work with local communities in identifying these cases.

We hope that you co-sponsor and support the Emmet Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act (S. 535/H.R. 923), which will bring to justice individuals who committed heinous crimes against civil rights activists and individual African Americans.

Sincerely,

Wade Henderson,  
*President & CEO.*  
Nancy Zirkin,  
*Vice President/Director of Public Policy.*

--

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE  
ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE,

Washington, DC, June 5, 2007.  
*Re H.R. 923, the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act.*

Hon. **JOHN LEWIS**,  
*U.S. House of Representatives,*  
*Washington, DC.*  
Hon. **KENNY HULSHOF**,

*U.S. House of Representatives,  
Washington, DC.*

**DEAR CONGRESSMEN LEWIS AND HULSHOF:** On behalf of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), our nation's oldest, largest and most widely-recognized/grassroots civil rights organization, I would like to thank you for your sponsorship of and leadership behind H.R. 923 the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act. It is imperative to bring murderers of early civil rights activists to justice, to show the victims' families, as well as the Nation, that their sacrifices continue to outrage our Nation. The United States' government needs to commit the resources necessary to see that these heinous crimes intended to intimidate are resolved.

Witnesses and evidence to these crimes are aging and time is of the essence. As proven by the historic 2005 conviction of Edgar Ray Killen for the 1964 deaths of three Civil Rights workers, Andrew Goodman, James Chaney, and Michael Schwerner, and the 1994 conviction of Byron De La Beckwith of the murder of Medgar Evers, more than 40 years earlier, there is no time limit on justice.

As you know, this bill creates two new offices within the Department of Justice whose sole purpose is to investigate these crimes. The Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Investigative Office, a new FBI office headed by a Chief Investigator, will aggressively investigate pre-1970 cases in coordination with state and local law enforcement officials that resulted in death and remain unsolved. This office will do everything possible to make certain those who have committed these murders are brought to justice. The Unsolved Crimes Section, a new office within the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, will focus specifically on prosecuting these cases. If a crime other than murder is discovered during the course of an inquiry it will be referred to the appropriate law enforcement officials. Lastly, the bill authorizes \$11.5 million in annual appropriations: \$5 million for the Unsolved Crimes Section, \$5 million for the Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Investigative Office and \$1.5 million for Community Relations Service of the Department of Justice to work with local communities in identifying these cases.

In order for our Nation to fully begin to move beyond these heinous crimes, the federal government needs to resolve these cases. Thank you again for your leadership on this bill; the NAACP deeply appreciates all you are doing on this issue. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or comments on the NAACP position, or if there is any way that I can be helpful to you as we move ahead with this legislation.

Sincerely,

Hilary O. Shelton,  
*Director.*