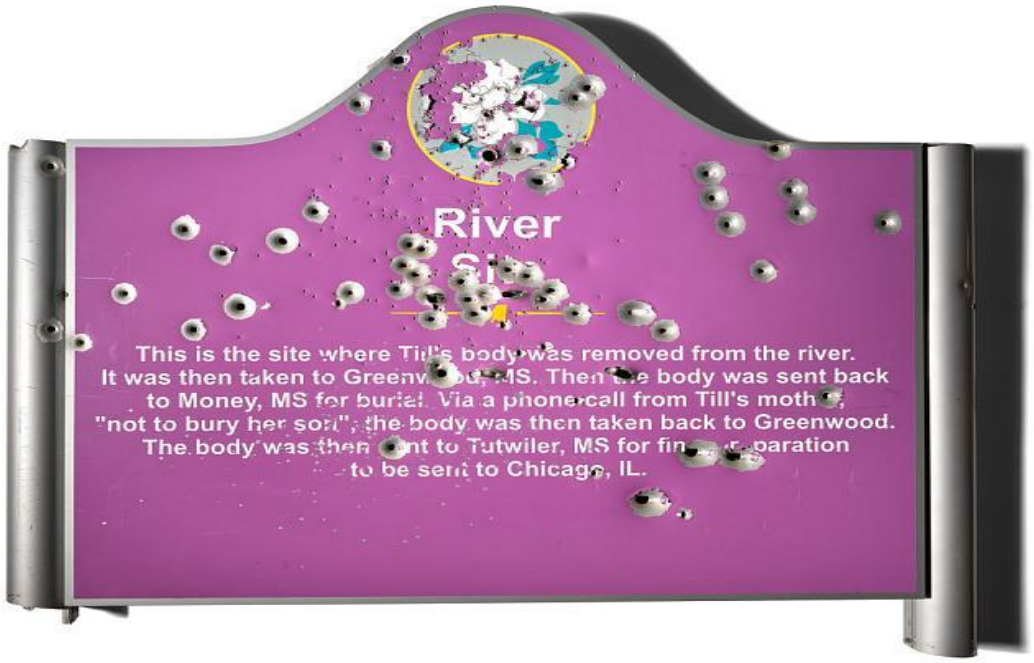
Document 3 – Reckoning with Remembrance: Explore Online
https://americanhistory.si.edu/explore/exhibitions/reckoning-with-remembrance/online

In 1955, 14-year-old Emmett Till was brutally lynched on a trip to visit family near Money, Mississippi. More than 60 years later, the anti-Black racism that led to Emmett's murder continues. Today, historical signs that publicly commemorate Emmett are part of an **ongoing**[1] fight in the United States over which histories are remembered and which are suppressed.



(pic a)

Pic. A: The River Site marker by the Tallahatchie River from which Emmett Till's body was recovered in 1955
Courtesy of Emmett Till Interpretive Center



(pic b)

Pic B : Bullet-riddled River Site marker collected by the National Museum of American History

This historical marker erected by the Emmett Till Memorial Commission is pierced by 317 bullet holes; it is only one of many **defaced** historical markers memorializing sites of Emmett Till's lynching in the Mississippi Delta.

"The vandalism hurts the same as if it were the American flag." *—Jessie Jaynes-Diming, Emmett Till Memorial Commission, June 2021*

The River Site marker stands on the banks of the Tallahatchie River, where Emmett's body was discovered. The Emmett Till Memorial Commission has replaced the River Site marker three times since it was first erected in 2008, due to repeated acts of vandalism; the most recent version is made with bulletproof **steel**[2]**.** The bullet holes represent more

[1] continuing
[2] *acier*

than just random attacks. For many community members, these aggressions are an extension of the violence inflicted on Black people—in 1955 through the present day.

The Power of Collective Action

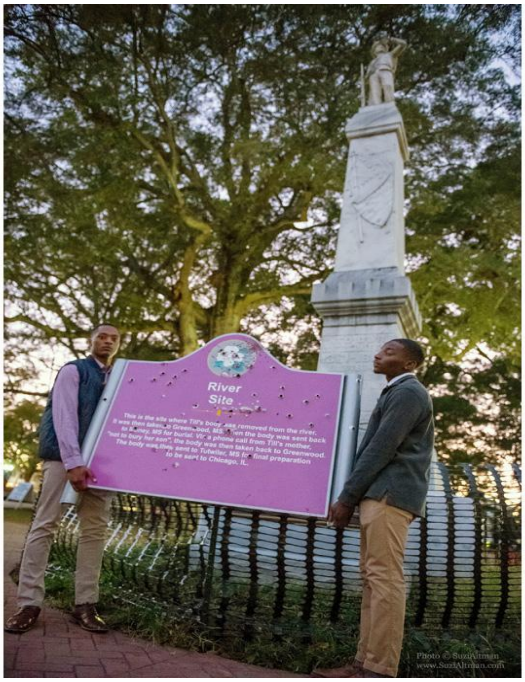
The Emmett Till historical markers represent decades of local activism in Tallahatchie County. Even though the county was and is majority Black, few African American residents held public office until one group of Black men—nicknamed the "Magnificent Seven"—were willing to[3] risk their lives for increased political representation. Starting in 1977, the Magnificent Seven fought for the Black community's access to basic human rights: clean water, fair employment, safe and **affordable** housing, healthcare, voting rights, and education. Their work challenged the same racist structures that led to Emmett's murder and included a strong interest in preserving this history for future generations.

In 2006 a member of the Magnificent Seven, Jerome "G" Little, founded the Emmett Till Memorial Commission to break local silences around Emmett's story in Tallahatchie County. Together, they placed nine historical markers commemorating the events of Emmett's murder throughout the county, saved the local courthouse where Emmett's murderers were acquitted, and issued a formal apology[4] with the citizens of Tallahatchie County for the "miscarriage of justice" in 1955. Yet while the commission made these significant **inroads**[5], the struggle to preserve Black history is ongoing.



(pic c)

Bryant's Grocery in Money, Mississippi, 2015
The **current owners** of Bryant's Grocery, where Emmett encountered his accuser, Carolyn Bryant, received state **funds** to preserve the storefront as a historical site. Instead, they left it **dilapidated** and renovated a historically insignificant gas station.
©Ashleigh Coleman



University of Mississippi, 2019
A new generation of Black organizers highlights the **stark contrast** between the **bullet-riddled** River Site marker and the protected Confederate statue on the University of Mississippi campus.
©Suzi Altman

(pic d)

History is an active battleground. What we choose to remember, memorialize, and preserve as a society determines how we understand our present and imagine our future. When Black history is suppressed or delegitimized, we lose the ability **to reckon with**[6] systemic racism, from one generation to the next.

[3] *Etaient prêts à*
[4] *Des excuses formelles*
[5] progress
[6] *Tenir compte de, faire face à*