



# The Emmitt Till Antilynching Act

The U.S. Congress is no stranger to making history based on the laws it passes. From the [Judiciary Act of 1789](#) to the [Morrill Land Grant College Act of 1862](#) to the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#), the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate continue to pass legislation that is so transformative to American society that it is considered [landmark](#). On March 7, 2022, the U.S. Congress passed such a piece of legislation.

The [Emmett Till Antilynching Act](#) is the first bill to pass that makes [lynching](#) a [federal hate crime](#). When signed by President Biden, the act will allow federal prosecutors to charge perpetrators of hate crimes with lynching if the victim of the crime is hurt or dies.



Historically, state laws address how perpetrators of racially motivated acts of violence are charged and tried by their court systems. However, during the [Jim Crow Era](#) and the [Civil Rights Movement](#), some states chose not to enforce these types of laws, so during the 1960s, under the authority of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the federal government started charging individuals with civil rights violations. Consequently, with the passage of the Emmett Till Antilynching Act, the federal government will have additional power to bring charges against someone who violates the civil rights of others as a matter of federal law, even if a state fails to do so.



Passed in the House by a vote of 422-3 and by [unanimous consent](#) in the Senate, this legislation is named for Emmitt Till. Emmitt's story is tragic. In 1955, at the age of 14, he was visiting his family in Mississippi from Chicago. It was alleged that he whistled at a white woman in a local store. He was kidnapped, beaten, shot in the head, and his body was dumped into a river. To show the world what had happened to her son, Emmitt's mother insisted on an open casket funeral.

[Two white men were accused of lynching Emmitt Till. They were tried in a Mississippi Court and were acquitted by an all white, male jury. Years later, the accused men admitted to perpetrating the crime.](#)

Emmitt's story still resonates with the public at large and highlights the importance of the passage of the anti-lynching act in his name. With the federal government being able to file charges against people who commit racial acts of violence, additional protection is put in place for the victims of these crimes and their families.

**To Think and To Do:** Since 1900, anti-lynching legislation had been introduced in the U.S. Congress more than 200 times. Up to now, each of those attempts failed. Reflect on the passage of the Emmitt Till Antilynching Act. Why is its passage significant? How does its passage help better ensure the protection of civil rights for all Americans? Explain.

## **LEARN MORE**

- [Library of Congress - The Murder of Emmitt Till](#)
- [George Mason University - 1948 Congressional Testimony on Antilynching Legislation](#)

