Tom Jones
Woodville, Mississippi, 1945

Background

On September 8, 1945, David McDonald, a Woodville night officer, shot and killed Tom Jones Jr., a twenty-four-year-old New Orleans longshoreman, at point blank range at a Greyhound bus stop in Woodville, Mississippi. He had been travelling home to visit his family.

Jones had moved away from his hometown of Locust Hill, Mississippi to work in the shipyards of New Orleans, where he had made a name for himself by standing up for the rights of his co-workers. At one point, he organized four fellow black employees to walk off the job in protest of the working conditions.

On the day he was murdered, Jones had arrived in Woodville and was waiting outside the bus for his luggage. The bus driver, Buddy Dawson, asked Jones whether he really had luggage on the bus, to which Jones replied “yeah.” Enraged that Jones had failed to address him with “yes, sir,” Dawson shouted at Jones, “You’re not in New Orleans no more.” He then beat his passenger with a blackjack, and when Jones fought back, Dawson called for the Woodville police. A police officer, McDonald, arrived and grabbed Jones by the collar, declaring “N…r, what do you mean hitting a white man?” McDonald shot Jones three times in the chest from twelve inches away. Jones died with his arms raised.

Legal Status

The New Orleans Branch of the NAACP appealed to Attorney General Tom C. Clark seeking a federal investigation of Jones’ murder. After an eight-month investigation conducted by the FBI and the Department of Justice, the Department of Justice closed the case. Jones’ labor activities had labeled him as a “troubblemaker.” No charges were ever lodged against Dawson or McDonald.