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Emmett Till, History and Memory

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The most remarkable thing about the Emmett Till murder, civil rights leader Aaron Henry once observed, was that people noticed at all. Black boys had been butchered and lynched for decades without anyone—most white people, anyway—much caring.¹

Till's murderers would have agreed. The last thing they expected was that the case would be taken seriously in the courts, or that people across the country and even around the world cared. That Americans, north and south, months after the Till murder, were upset by the killers' post-trial confessions to *Look* magazine shocked them even more. And they would have been dumbstruck that today, three generations later, the name Emmett Till is remembered at all, let alone that his story has become shorthand for white supremacist barbarism, much the way Anne Frank's name is shorthand for the Nazi holocaust.²

Historians know that the devil dwells in the details. Streamlined versions of events have much to teach of course. The Civil War was indeed fought over slavery, the New Deal reshaped the role of the federal government. But when historical studies get closer to the ground, then the unexpected leaps out to reveal life's complexity and irony. Only then does history's strangeness, its unfamiliarity, fully emerge. This was especially true in the Emmett Till case.

From thirty-thousand feet, the story goes like this:

In 1955, a fourteen-year-old African American boy named Emmett Till took the train from his home in Chicago to Mississippi Delta for a two-week summer vacation with his extended family. He stayed with his great uncle, Moses Wright, a sharecropper. One weekday evening just a few days after he got there, Till and his cousins drove to the crossroads town of Money to buy some sweets at the tiny grocery store catering to black farm families. Till was inside by himself for a minute or two, waited on by a young white woman named Carolyn Bryant. She subsequently accused him of whistling at her, making lewd comments, and grabbing her. Till was a would-be rapist.³

The following Saturday night, Bryant's husband and brother-in-law invaded Moses Wright's home, kidnapped Emmett Till at gunpoint, and drove away. Till's badly beaten body floated up on the Tallahatchie River a few days later, his body badly beaten, a bullet through his head and a heavy cotton gin fan tied round his neck with barbed wire. The kidnappers, Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam, admitted to taking Till at gunpoint but told authorities that they later released him.⁴

Till's was shipped back to Chicago for burial. To everyone's surprise, upwards of one-hundred-thousand people came to view the body of the previously unknown lad. More, his mother, Mamie Till Bradley, told the undertaker not to prettify her son, and insisted on a glass cover

over his open coffin. And she let photographers take pictures of his face, capturing for all to see the horror of Emmett's last hours on earth.⁵

On the very day they buried Emmett Till, the Tallahatchie County Grand Jury indicted the brothers for kidnapping and murder, surprising given Mississippi's racial history. Just three weeks after Till's body emerged, despite strong evidence of their guilt, an all-white, all-male jury in Sumner Mississippi deliberated for an hour and found them not guilty.⁶

Nothing really surprises us here: Carolyn Bryant's cliché-ridden accusation, the sickening violence against a mere lad, the old canard about black men and white women, the vigilante killing, the summary justice, the failure of Southern courts. But actually, the story was full of twists and turns and unexpected results, not the least of which was that before the most triumphant phase of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, during what are often thought of as the quiescent 1950s, the quest for black rights was already well underway.⁷

At the trial in Sumner, Moses Wright testified for the prosecution about the men who kidnapped his nephew. He told the courtroom how they came for Emmett in the middle of the night, guns drawn. Asked if he recognized the kidnappers, Wright stood up and pointed to them one at a time, "There he is," for Milam and "there he is," for Bryant. Reporters wrote that this had never happened before, a black man testifying in a murder trial against whites in front of a segregated Mississippi jury. Wright faced a barrage of questions from defense attorneys trying to undermine his credibility, but he held his ground. Summing up the next day in the *New York Post*, Murray Kempton described Wright's time on the witness stand as, "the hardest half hour in the hardest life possible for a human being in these United States."⁸

Life magazine, which gave the trial prominent coverage, quoted Wright as saying, "Thar he," not "There he is," when he stood and pointed to his nephew's kidnappers. Moses Wright was a respected preacher in the Church of God in Christ, a holiness denomination founded by Mississippi blacks late in the 19th century. He owned several suits for church, lived in a six-room house with his family--a building previously occupied by the white man who owned the land Wright farmed--and he spoke carefully and well. Yet in the coverage of the trial, news stories repeatedly referred to his home as a shack and pictured Wright in his overalls. "Thar he" persisted long in popular memory, much to the chagrin of Wright's family, who insisted that their dignified paterfamilias did not speak in "Negro dialect." And it wasn't only Reverend Wright who rose and spoke against the day. Twenty-four hours later, his niece, Mamie Till Bradley took the witness stand, and, with great self-possession, carefully explained how she identified her son's body, again impressing reporters with her grace and intelligence.⁹

Such assertions of their dignity, and more, their rights, were certainly not new for African Americans, but their willingness to insist on them publicly reached unprecedented heights by the middle of the 1950s. Certainly the unanimous 1954 *Brown vs the Board of Education* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court helped. *Brown* undermined the legal basis for "separate but equal" facilities for blacks and whites as set forth in the *Plessy vs Ferguson* decision of 1896, here aimed specifically at segregated public schools. But *Brown* was as much effect as cause of

growing African American resistance. After all, it was Thurgood Marshall and the attorneys of the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund who succeeded in persuading the Court to vote 9-0 to overturn Plessy.¹⁰

Things like personal dignity were very much connected to larger issues of citizenship rights. Emmett Till was kidnapped and murdered in summer, 1955. Earlier that spring, the tiny all-black Delta town of Mound Bayou hosted ten-thousand Afro-Mississippians who came to learn about voting rights. For several days, they attended speeches and workshops on how to work around the county poll tax and literacy test laws that deprived nearly all of them of the franchise. One speaker was the Reverend George Lee, who co-founded the NAACP chapter in Belzoni Mississippi. Lee was also vice-president of the Regional Council of Negro Leadership, whose founder, Dr. T.R.M. Howard, organized the Mound Bayou gathering. Just a few weeks later, hoping to register potential voters back home, Reverend Lee was assassinated. His murderers were never charged.¹¹

Such ferment was part of the backdrop to Emmett Till's visit to Mississippi. Even more tangibly, George Lee's wife Rosebud made a bold decision—her husband died from a shotgun blast to his face, but she refused to have his coffin closed. A thousand people attended the funeral in tiny Belzoni, including Dr. Howard and the new NAACP secretary Roy Wilkins. The mainstream press gave the incident little ink, but black newspapers like the *Chicago Defender* gave it full and bold coverage, including photographs of the body.¹²

The George Lee story echoed in Chicago months later. Having signed a death certificate on the day Till's body emerged, Tallahatchie County Sheriff Clarence Strider ordered a grave dug in a Money Mississippi churchyard. As Emmett's uncle Crosby Smith said, they planned to "spill that boy" into a shallow grave, and Smith vowed to bring the body back to Chicago in his own truck if need be. He didn't have to. With the intercession of South Side Chicago Congressman William Dawson, Mississippi officials shipped Till back home on the Illinois Central Railroad.¹³

Mamie Till Bradley examined the body carefully, and despite its woeful condition, affirmed that it was indeed her son. As a reader of the *Defender*, she knew about what happened in Belzoni months earlier, and she made her decision: "Let the people see what they did to my boy." Emmett Till's funeral was a critical event in the history of Chicago's South Side and more, a shared moment when black America felt a surge of unity engendered by outrage—a moment of "simultaneity," the historian Adam Greene calls it, of group consciousness. No one expected the hundred-thousand—some estimates said two-hundred-thousand—people to show up at the wake. But Emmett Till "belonged to them," a *Defender* reporter wrote of the viewing at the funeral home; "They came to see him, to talk to him, all swore they never would forget him. All day on Saturday the mourners came, and the police finally sent them home at 2 a.m."¹⁴

Images of the funeral itself, of masses of people in the Church of God in Christ on State Street were soon followed by photos of Emmett's destroyed face. *Jet* magazine and black newspapers published them alongside family Christmas pictures from half a year earlier that Mamie Till Bradley gave to the press. For African Americans, the photographs of Emmett Till as a happy

boy, and then of him in his coffin, his face beaten into pulp, quickly became a kind of summing up of the horrors of Jim Crow segregation, photos that induced revulsion, but also fierce determination to resist white supremacy's brutalities. Just a few years later, young activists referred themselves as the "Emmett Till Generation," and later still, people like Muhammad Ali, John Lewis, and Anne Moody wrote in their memoirs of the profound personal impact of the Till lynching.¹⁵

All of that is true, but it elides a large untruth that has grown common in our own day: That people everywhere saw the photos of Emmett Till's face and the scales fell from their eyes, that from that moment the Civil Rights Movement began. In 2003, a television report on CNN declared, "everything changed after the murder of Emmett Till." A *New York Times* headline in 2016 averred that Till's martyrdom "Launched the Civil Rights Movement." A year later, *Time* magazine included the photo of Till's face in the "The Most Influential Images of All Time," because it, "forced the world to reckon with the brutality of American racism," making it one of the hundred most influential images of all time. There is much wishful thinking in all of this. Emmett Till's ruined visage eventually did become iconic, but back in 1955, and for decades longer, it was seen almost exclusively by African Americans, because the mainstream press never printed it. Only with the 1987 documentary *Eyes on the Prize* did white America begin to look at Emmett Till's face; that was the first time the image circulated in the national media.¹⁶

Just three weeks after Till's funeral, the story grew even bigger with the trial in Sumner Mississippi. Several dozen journalists, many of them nationally famous, came in to cover the trial. More, the three major networks sent film crews, and broadcast short nightly reports over the new medium of television. News coverage of the courtroom scene revealed Americans dawning awareness of the volatility of segregation and white supremacy. The efforts of Mississippi journalists, attorneys and citizens to demonize African American activists, especially the NAACP was striking. Many northerners read with dismay unfounded reports from Mississippi sheriffs that armed blacks were heading south from Chicago; that Till was still alive and that enemies of "The Southern Way of Life" feigned his death and planted a corpse in the Tallahatchie River to stir up trouble; that African Americans under segregation were happy when not rabble-roused by communists and the NAACP. All of this was part of the larger turbulence in the wake of the Brown decision, growing black activism, and the rise of the reactionary Citizens' Councils.¹⁷

It worked the other way too. The verdict aside, the Till trial was not the stereotype of "Southern Justice"—that is to say, racial injustice—that many expected. Judge Curtis Swango of Sardis Mississippi was a model jurist, who refused to permit Milam and Bryant's defense attorneys to engage in the race baiting common in Southern courtrooms. Decades after the trial, *New York Post* journalist Murray Kempton said that Judge Swango was the fairest judge he ever covered. The district attorney too, Gerald Chatham, was ardent in his prosecution of the brothers; Chatham was no opponent of Jim Crow, but he believed in the rule of law. Jimmy Hicks, who covered the trial for the black press, called Chatham's closing argument the finest defense of a black man ever heard in a Mississippi courtroom, and Mamie Till Bradley added that Chatham could not have done a better job.¹⁸

None of that mattered. The twelve white men who comprised the jury would not break ranks. In fact, the trial was a classic example of “institutional racism,” in the sense that the law virtually guaranteed an all-white jury, which in turn guaranteed that justice would not be done. Tallahatchie County was nearly two-thirds African American, but not a single one of them could vote, and so not a single one was allowed to serve on a jury. Women too were banned from felony juries.¹⁹

So while white supremacy had long been a source of turbulence in American life, the Till murder and trial were part of a moment at mid-century—along with the Brown decision, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and the integration of the Little Rock public schools—when something fundamental changed, and laid the groundwork for the sixties.²⁰

The Southern press sometimes referred to the Till funeral as “Mamie’s circus,” and even liberals like Hodding Carter, editor of the *Delta Democrat Times*, were disturbed by the raw emotions on display in Chicago. But those days when Emmett’s body lay in the Rayner Funeral Home and in the Church of God in Christ while tens of thousands came to pay their respects started something new. The funeral can be thought of as the first of many Emmett Till demonstrations, a remarkable, even unprecedented series of mass rallies that lasted for months. Alongside the NAACP’s challenges to segregation in court and in the halls of Congress, here were weekly open demonstrations on the streets of American cities.²¹

Just two days after the Sumner jury returned its verdict, ten thousand people gathered at a Harlem church for a protest meeting. Only a third of the crowd fit inside, the rest stood on the sidewalk, listening to loudspeakers, as New York City police cordoned off Seventh Avenue between 130th and 133th streets. Anticipating the trial’s outcome, A. Philip Randolph, a civil rights leader since the First World War and president of the Sleeping Car Porters’ Union, had organized the rally. He called the Sumner trial a national disgrace. “If the United States can send its forces six thousand miles across the sea to Korea,” Randolph said to sustained applause, then “in the interest of world democracy it would appear that the federal government should use its vast powers to stop the lynching of Negro citizens by Mississippi racists.” The NAACP’s young new Executive Secretary, Roy Wilkins, also called for new civil rights legislation. Others noted that Emmett’s father Louis died a soldier in Europe.²²

In all of this, Mamie Till Bradley’s star shone most brightly. Thousands on the street surged forward as she started to speak, breaking police lines just to get a glimpse of her. The *New York Post* described the crowd as “whipped into anger and bitterness by her soft-spoken, dispassionate words at the most emotion-packed rally since the Scottsboro upheaval in 1931.” She was the very emblem of a suffering mother, of a woman bereft by racial violence. That same day, six-thousand attended a rally in Detroit, and another two-thousand in Chicago, where they heard local politicians and organizers slam Mississippi justice. Senator James Eastland, holding a meeting of his Internal Security Committee in Chicago, found himself picketed by CIO Packinghouse workers brandishing signs that read, “Witch hunts in Chicago

Won't Stop Child Lynching in Mississippi," and "Mississippi is the Real Threat to Internal Security," and "Senator Eastland—Who Killed Emmett Till."²³

Roy Wilkins knew an opportunity when he saw one. The vicious murder of a fourteen-year-old and the unwillingness of a jury to convict his killers made the brutal reality lurking behind the cordial façade of Southern segregation palpable. Southern editors and politicians might extol the harmony between the races, but the Till story revealed the violence arising out of the grotesque imbalance of power, status and wealth between black and white. If the slaughter of millions was a statistic but the death of one a tragedy, then the Till story offered the perfect dramatization of segregation's horrors. Southern pundits charged that the NAACP had a hidden agenda beyond finding out who killed Emmett Till and bringing them to justice. They were right, except it wasn't hidden. The Till story was part of the organization's larger mission: Passing civil rights legislation and overturning Jim Crow.²⁴

Public demonstrations for black rights were nothing new, but now they were sustained across time and space. By the end of September, rallies swept cities from Atlanta to San Francisco and from Boston to Mobile Bay. For the next three months, until the Montgomery Bus Boycott took over the headlines, the Till rallies were ubiquitous. Most were held in black neighborhoods and the bulk of participants were African Americans, but white progressives, clergymen, youth leaders, unions, civic and civil rights groups all joined in. A monster rally in New York's garment center sponsored by the NAACP and local unions drew thousands of people in mid-October. Boycotting Mississippi products, helping blacks flee the state, unseating Mississippi Congressmen, all were discussed. Letters, petitions, and resolutions flowed into the federal government demanding new civil rights legislation, though the FBI and the Justice Department mostly refused to get involved. Money too poured into NAACP coffers, aiding future battles.²⁵

In St Louis, Mamie Till Bradley addressed three thousand people in Masonic Hall: "I asked God what I should do. He said to me: 'If you go, I will go with you.' That is why I am here." She added, "I'm not bitter.... I'm rather proud to be the mother of the boy who died to free our bodies.... Each of you own a little bit of Emmett." Six thousand heard her in Des Moines, where she recalled her first glimpse of Emmett's mutilated body: "It just looked as though all the hatred and all the scorn ever had for a negro was taken out on that boy." She knew she must not remain silent. She told her listeners to vote, organize, pressure the politicians: "It is time for us to wake up. We have been asleep for a long time. We have been waiting for someone to come and hand us something—and that is not the way it is going to be." "I lost Emmett, she concluded, but "I have a million children to live for now." A day later in Omaha she added, "Don't feel sorry for my boy or me.... He has done his job and mine has just begun."²⁶

Mamie Till Bradley was on the road for the next several months. The rallies were Christian crusades, as she bore witness to the horrors of racism. Emmett's suffering and her own bereavement gave her moral authority and strength. She took on the prophet's burden and never again shied away from it. Above all, she spoke out as a woman and a mother; the loss of her son became the source of her moral authority and wisdom, the sanction for her right to speak out.²⁷

Perhaps the most salient fact about the Till story, the one that flies in the face of what I've just written, is how quickly it was forgotten, repressed. If the Till saga was not literally the beginning of the Freedom Struggle, it was one of the biggest news stories of the 1950s, the first media event of the Civil Rights Movement as journalist David Halberstam called it. True, the mainstream press never published those photos of Emmett in his coffin, but newspapers across America gave the story front page coverage, especially during the trial. Not only in the US, but overseas, the not guilty verdict was headline news, a major headache for the United States Information Agency trying to put the best face on American race relations during the height of the Cold War and de-colonization movement in Africa and Asia.²⁸

Yet Americans—white Americans—quickly forgot about Emmett Till. Newspaper and magazine articles stopped appearing a few months after his killers' acquittal, and it was a rare publication that noted the tenth or twenty-fifth anniversary of his death. More surprising, early histories of the Civil Rights Movement gave his story very little space. One of the standard texts from that era, used in college classes throughout the 80s and 90s, was Harvard Sitkoff's *The Struggle for Black Equality*. It gave the Till story a single sentence. Searching for a dissertation topic in the mid-1980s, historian Clenora Hudson-Weems, was shocked to find that one of the biggest stories of her childhood had disappeared, that thirty years after his murder, Emmett Till was barely to be found in the history books. What happened?²⁹

Simply put, memory too was segregated. As we have seen, many black activists in the fifties and sixties came to think of themselves as "The Emmett Till generation." But it wasn't only those in the movement. Pollsters have found that when asked to identify several key events in the Freedom Struggle, Till's story was one of the best-remembered among African Americans. Emmett Till's name lived on in oral tradition, as black families passed the story on to their children, part of Jim Crow wisdom, a warning of racism's irrationality and danger.³⁰

But for whites, two events pushed the Till story down the memory hole, making it virtually disappear for decades. Two weeks after the Sumner verdict, *Life* magazine, one of the most popular publications in America at that time, eulogized the dead lad: "Sleep well, Emmett Till; you will be avenged. You will also be remembered, as long as men have tongues to cry against evil." Emmett, *Life* wrote, was a Christian martyr, a child of God: "This is my son, akin to all others, but unlike any one of them. Like each of my children he is unique, irreplaceable, immortal." Ironically, the article noted, Emmett died violently, like his father, "who was killed in France fighting for the proposition that all men are equal."³¹

Referring to *Life's* "'hate Mississippi' propaganda" five days later, *the Jackson Daily News* published the following: "It was learned today that Emmett Till's father had raped two Italian women and murdered a third while serving with the United States Army during World War II." The *Daily News* reported that the Army hanged Private Louis Till on July 2, 1945. The newspaper followed up the next day with a scathing editorial against *Life* magazine and the rest of the northern press for what it called, "rank Negro propaganda".³²

The revelations about Louis Till were widely reprinted and had enormous implications. We cannot know for certain because grand jury deliberations are secret, but it was credibly reported that when the jurors met two weeks later in Greenwood to consider kidnapping charges against Milam and Bryant—the brothers had admitted abducting Emmett Till back in Summer—they voted against indictment. It was assumed that the Louis Till story helped them make up their minds. It wasn't just the grand jury. "Like father, like son," and "the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree," and "birds of a feather fly together," were the common reactions in the southern press. In the north too, the Louis Till story reinforced the old slur about black men and white women. Senators James Eastland and John Stennis had precisely that in mind when they leaked Till's confidential court martial records to the *Jackson Daily News*.³³

But the main reason Emmett Till fell out of the national discourse was a widely-read article in *Look* magazine, "The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi" that appeared in January, 1956, three months after the Louis Till story leaked. Alabama journalist William Bradford Huie specialized in exposes. He described himself as a fearless truth-teller. In Louis Till's execution, Huie saw an opportunity. He persuaded *Look* magazine to commission an insider account of Emmett Till's murder. In addition to his fee, *Look* gave Huie four thousand dollars to pay J.W. Milam and Roy and Carolyn Bryant for their confessions, the most spectacular example of "checkbook journalism" to date in the U.S.³⁴

"Approved Killing" described the lynching from the killers' point of view, including a startling explanation of why they did it: Emmett Till was recalcitrant and unrepentant, declaring that he was as good as Milam and Bryant, boasting that he'd "had" white women, insisting on it with his dying words. Emmett Till, in other words was white supremacy's worst nightmare come to life. They had to kill him; Louis Till's son was living confirmation of racist dogma.³⁵

In retrospect, "Approved Killing" merged ethnic stereotypes with yellow journalism, but it was deeply influential, dominating how a whole generation thought about the Till story. More precisely, it allowed them to stop thinking about it at all. The article's main effect was to make people drop the subject.³⁶

Milam and Bryant's confession rankled the white south. Gallons of editorial ink had reassured readers that a fair trial resulted in a fair verdict, but now southern justice lay exposed, as did the hypocrisy of Jim Crow segregation. But exposed too was the innocence of Emmett Till. As veteran black journalist Roy Otley wrote in the African American *Amsterdam News*, "Approved Killing" split the difference, making it expedient for both sides to do what Southern newspaper editors urged all along and forget about Emmett Till. The Chicago lad was a would-be rapist and black militant, the brothers were murderers and mercenaries. Huie's article was a tissue of lies—that Milam and Bryant acted alone, that Emmett Till grabbed and assaulted Carolyn Bryant, that he bragged about it—but for years it remained the final word on the subject for white America.³⁷

Finally, things changed. “Those of us who covered the trial of Milam and Bryant in the cramped, steamy courtroom,” wrote veteran journalist Bill Minor forty years later, “had really no notion at the time of what the historic impact of the event would be.” White America slowly embraced the Civil Rights Movement as an integral part of American history. The story got told in a sanitized, triumphal fashion—men like Martin Luther King called out injustice, good people saw the error of their ways, and heroic new laws swept away Jim Crow segregation. But slowly the narrative took on more nuance, more emphasis on the limits and costs of change, which came only after harsh struggle and much bloodshed.³⁸

A key milestone came in 1987 with the four part television series about the Civil Rights Movement, *Eyes on the Prize*. Earlier histories of the Movement emphasized Montgomery, or the sit-ins early 60s. But *Eyes on the Prize* began with Emmett Till’s murder, and for the first time, the funeral photos of his face appeared in mainstream media. Within a decade, the flood gates opened, largely because of the work of African American journalists and film-makers. Newspaper articles, books, more documentaries, memorials, remembrances came with increasing frequency. With the Black Lives Matter Movement in the second decade of the twenty-first century, Emmett Till’s story was invoked again and again as a paradigm of innocence violated, justice denied, brutality unpunished. If anything might have shocked J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant had they lived long enough, it would be the fame of Emmett Till decades after they got away with his murder.³⁹

“We’ve known his story forever,” the *New York Times* declared fifty years after Emmett’s lynching. “Maybe that’s because it’s a tale so stark and powerful that it has assumed an air of timelessness, something almost mythical.” The *Times* was wrong. Most of us, white Americans anyway, barely remembered his story for the longest time, so heavy its burden, so dark its shadow.⁴⁰

Notes

1. Elliott Gorn, *Let the People See: The Story of Emmett Till* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018) 290.
2. William Bradford Huie, “The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi,” *Look* January 24, 1956, 46-50.
3. A typical summation can be found in an article published in the *New York Times*, August 28, 2016, “Not Forgotten: Emmett Till, Whose Martyrdom Launched the Civil Rights Movement,” <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/cp/obituaries/archives/emmett-till>
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*

7. The literature is large and growing, but start with John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York, Knopf, 1994).
8. Federal Bureau of Investigation *Prosecutive Report of Investigation Concerning Roy Bryant et. al.*, Transcript—Emmett Till Trial, Sept. 1955, Moses Wright testimony, 4-62, available online at <https://vault.fbi.gov/Emmett%20Till%20/>
9. *Life*, xxxxx; FBI, *Prosecutive Report*, Mamie Till Bradley testimony, 180-209.
10. The literature on Brown is voluminous, but see James T. Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and its Troubled Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
11. Simeon Booker with Carol McCabe Booker, *Shocking the Conscience, A Reporter's Account of the Civil Rights Movement* (Jackson, University of Mississippi Press, 2013) 46-50; David T. Beito and Linda Royster Beito, *Black Maverick: T.R.M. Howard's Fight for Civil Rights and Economic Power* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2009) 106-14.
12. Beito and Beito, 110-20.
13. Mamie Till-Mobley, *The Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime that Changed America*, ed. Christopher Benson (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005) 129-141; Ethel Payne, "Dawson Tells Reason for Aiding Till's Mother," *Daily Chicago Defender*, Oct. 30, 1956, 1; Christopher Manning, *William L. Dawson and the Limits of Black Leadership* (DeKalb, Northern Illinois University Press, 2009) 138-9.
14. The Associated Press and The United Press stories all quoted Mamie Till Bradley as saying, "Let the people see what they did to my boy." In her memoir, written fifty years later, the quote is, "Let the world see what I've seen;" Mobley and Benson, *Death of Innocence*, 139; Robert Elliott, "Thousands at Rites for Till," *Chicago Defender*, Sept. 10, 1955, 1; Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 179-210.
15. *Jet*, Sept xx, 1955, 8-9; Booker, *Shocking the Conscience*, 59-62; Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007) 54-5; Muhammad Ali with Richard Durham, *The Greatest: My Own Story* (New York: Random House, 1975) 34-5; John Lewis and Michael D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) 46-8; Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (New York, Doubleday, 1968) 11.
16. *Time*, "The Most Influential Images of All Time," Nov. 28, 2016, 74-75; CNN, "A Mother's Fight," Jan. 7, 2003, in Library of Congress, Motion Picture Reading Room, Vanderbilt Television News; *New York Times*, "Emmett Till, Whose Martyrdom Launched the Civil Rights Movement," August 28, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/cp/obituaries/archives>
17. The trial is covered in Gorn, *Let the People See*, 69-170.
18. Gorn, *Let the People See*, 124, 169, 183, 274.
19. Gorn, *Let the People See*, 83-91, 175.
20. Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*.
21. On the Till story and the Southern press, see Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York,

- Vintage, 2006); Davis W. Houck and Matthew A. Grindy, *Emmett Till and the Mississippi Press* (Oxford MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010); Gorn, *Let the People See*, 190-95.
22. See, for examples, "10,000 In Harlem Protest Verdict," *New York Times*, Sept. 26, 1955, 10; "20,000 Attend Till Rally in New York," *Kansas City Call*, Oct 1, 1955, 1.
 23. "Mother of Murder Victim Speaks Here," *St Louis Post Dispatch*, Oct. 10, 1955, 1; "33 Cities Slate Till Murder Protest Meetings," *Los Angeles Tribune*, Oct 30, 1955, 3.
 24. On the relationship of Roy Wilkins to Mamie Till Bradley and the Emmett Till case, see Gorn, *Let the People See*, 211-217.
 25. Labor unions were an important source of money and manpower for organizing rallies, petitioning, and letter writing campaigns; see for example Walter Reuther to all UAW-CIO Local Union Presidents, Oct 27, 1955 in Library of Congress, NAACP Papers, Group 2, Box A425, file 1.
 26. "Mother of Murder Victim", *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, 1.
 27. Gorn, *Let the People See*, 195.
 28. David Halberstam, *The Fifties*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1994) 437.
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