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Race and the Politics of Loss: Revisiting the Legacy of Emmett Till

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This paper explores the idea that mourning can help us to bear not only personal but also political losses. It focuses, in particular, on the proposal that legacies of racial loss and violence should be collectively mourned. I argue that Mamie Till Mobley was developing such a proposal in 1955, the year her son Emmett Till was lynched and in which she brought his body before all Americans, calling on them to look at it so that they might, together, say what they had seen. Mobley's proposal challenges what I take to be the leading rival position on the relationship of grief to political life, namely, that it is, at best, a *catalyst* for the achievement of political ends. But as I argue, Mobley's proposal also raises challenges for present-day efforts to articulate a politics of loss, which are quick to assume either that such losses cannot be mourned collectively or that they have always been ours to mourn together. I will argue that these efforts have failed to take into account the insight behind Mobley's invitation. My aim, in clarifying its significance, is to expand philosophical inquiry into the relationship between the emotions and political life and, more specifically, to contribute to an evaluation of the prospects for a mournful politics.

The 2017 exhibition of Dana Schutz's *Open Casket* sparked enormous controversy. One artist, who petitioned for the painting's destruction, described the work quite simply as "a painting of a dead black boy by a white artist" (Greenberger 2017). The "dead black boy" to whom the artist was referring is Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old lynched while visiting relatives in Mississippi in 1955. The circumstances of Emmett Till's life and death came to be known through the actions taken by his mother, Mamie Till Mobley, who insisted on the return of his body to Chicago and who insisted, too—upon seeing its condition—that it be seen by others, holding what would turn out to be a four-day open-casket viewing. Photographs of Till in casket have circulated since and his legacy continues, principally, to reach people through the iconography surrounding his death.

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Schutz's stated intention in painting *Open Casket* was to engage Till's legacy in the context of present-day racial upheavals. She painted it in response, in particular, to the recent slew of highly publicized killings of young men like Emmett Till, killings described by some as modern-day lynchings (Boucher 2017). However, even with this context in place, there remain questions concerning how the painting engages Till's legacy. *Open Casket* doesn't, for example, lend itself to the identification of a specific person, in contrast, critics claim, to the photographs of Till. They have suggested that this renders abstract the concrete violence to which Mobley meant to draw our attention in displaying her son's body and in permitting photographs of it to circulate, raising the concern that *Open Casket* undermines this legacy rather than engaging with it.

I will be challenging the interpretation of this legacy underlying these criticisms. The most provocative feature of *Open Casket*—what critics perceive to be its intrusion into the mourning of others—is its engagement with Mobley's invitation, as I understand it, to mourn her son's legacy as an American one. Critics haven't considered the painting in this light because they understand Mobley's presentation of her son's body as functioning to *expose* white violence. This notion of exposure isn't the familiar one, I argue—a matter, simply, of bringing injustice to light. It relies on an uncritical conception of the power of such presentations of violence to force an acknowledgment (or a refusal of acknowledgment) on the part of those who perpetuate it and to do so without allowing for complex subjective response (the kind typified by mournfulness). Any mournfulness that this iconography is thought to facilitate is assumed to be restricted to those vulnerable to this violence, providing a kind of shelter from it in being a source of "inspiration and warning" (Greenberger 2017). On this understanding of the political work of mourning, Emmett Till's legacy is neither an American one nor to be mourned by all Americans. I will argue that Mobley was articulating a different understanding of the political work of mourning. While she did not assume that the loss of her son was a loss to all, she nonetheless extended an invitation to all Americans to mourn the body brought before them, a fact left out of critical discussions of *Open Casket* and one that must be reckoned with in our assessment of the historical and political significance of this legacy. The functions that have come to be associated with this legacy—to expose, on the one hand, and to shelter, on the other—can perhaps be identified, though in quite different forms as integral aspects of mourning.

Mobley's outlook is also at odds with those who assume that legacies of racial violence and loss have been ours to mourn all along. The approach I will discuss traces back to Danielle Allen's work on democratic politics, which sees democracy as requiring continual sacrifice. A critical assumption guiding this work is that this democratic demand is complicated by the democratic promise of self-rule and that if this tension is not mastered, the burden of sacrifice

may be shifted onto others—a historical reality that manifested in differences in the citizenship of white and black Americans up until the early civil rights period, according to Allen. Those who have borne these losses have made sacrifices for fellow citizens, she claims. The political processes supporting their acknowledgment as such are characterized by Allen and others as mourning processes. I will argue that this approach is too quick to assume that these losses are endemic to democratic practice and, therefore, to be mourned collectively. Mobley's invitation to fellow Americans offered, I claim, a normative reenvisioning of political life; it was not an attempt to bring us to recognize losses that have always been ours to mourn but to reimagine and even refound political community through an invitation to see them as such. In failing to appreciate the need for this reenvisioning, I suggest there is cause to worry that efforts to locate citizens in relation to these losses approximate the work of exposure rather than mourning.

Both of these attempts to articulate a politics of loss reflect recent reevaluations of the place of mourning in political life, but my effort to clarify the political significance of Mobley's gesture will also require a review of the standard historical treatment of it, which developed out of a resistance to any such reevaluation. As I will discuss, it became standard to memorialize Mobley's gesture as a catalyst to the civil rights movement. I will argue that this reflects an understanding of the role of grief and its relation to political life that was being challenged by Mobley. It reflects, in particular, the view of the NAACP, which in 1955, publicly severed ties with Mobley, not because Till's death was without political significance but because it took the position that grief had no place in a political response.[1]

My aim in revisiting Mobley's gesture is, in part, to show its political significance in a fuller light and to make a case for its continuing political relevance. In Section 1, I defend the claim that in inviting all Americans to mourn the loss of her son, Mobley was attempting to refound the American polity and to reframe mourning as a collective political project. I propose, on these grounds, that we place her in the political lineage of Abraham Lincoln. In Section 2, I use the critical response to *Open Casket* to support the claim that this legacy has come to be associated with two polarized functions, to expose and preserve evidence of white violence, on the one hand, and to facilitate mourning among those having suffered or vulnerable to suffering this violence, on the other, and argue that this reception fails to contend with the fact that Mobley invited all Americans to mourn the body brought before them. In Section 3, I trace the defense of a mournful politics that is sketched by Danielle Allen and further developed by David McIvor and argue that it assumes too readily that these legacies of loss

1. See Feldstein (2000) and, most recently, Gorn (2018) for detailed accounts of these events.

are shared legacies, missing the need for a normative reenvisioning that might justify that political claim.

1. Mamie Till Mobley

Mamie Till Mobley's presentation of the body of her son, and the publication of the photographs that followed, are memorialized as events that helped to catalyze the civil rights movement. What, though, is implied by this? First, and deservedly, that these are events of great importance, but also, I suggest, that their importance consists, principally, in what followed them.

One thinks of the political actions of a figure like Rosa Parks who is said to have been thinking of Emmett Till when she refused the demand to give up her seat in the "colored section" of a public bus.[2] Or one thinks of the Emmett Till Generation, black youth marked by his death and moved to action by it, among them, Muhammad Ali whose feelings of rage and helplessness upon seeing photographs of Till—born on the same day and in the same year as himself—were so profound that he derailed a train after seeing them (Muhammad, Durham, & Muhammad 1975: 24–5).[3] One also thinks of the legislative victories associated with the civil rights movement, of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, for example, which banned segregation in public spaces (buses, among others). The NAACP, an organization that provided support to Mobley, including for her legal efforts, focused especially on legislative change. Its position was that public engagement with the Till case could be used to advance their mission even if that mission depended on a clear separation between "atrocities like Emmett Till's murder" and the "larger context that enabled them" (Gorn 2018: 213). The case could, in short, be a catalyst for political change.

Mobley occupied a broader position in public life than is captured, however, in this short history, both in the course of the trial of the men accused of killing her son, but also following their acquittal. It was at that time that she delivered a series of political speeches on behalf of the NAACP. In these speeches, we see Mobley developing a political vision that is rooted in mournfulness. We see her reflecting on the political import of her son's lynching for the country, for black and white citizens alike, both of whom she addresses. It is a vision that weaves together the 'ordinary' and 'political' in ways that challenge assumptions about their clear separation. We see her identifying those conditions that make the country "no true democracy," comparing it to a home that will collapse under

2. The National Museum of African American History and Culture cites Reverend Jesse Jackson as a source for this attribution (Smithsonian 2019).

3. Elizabeth Alexander treats this incident in her poem, *Narrative: Ali*.

the strain of parents who "battle each other constantly" (Mobley 2009). We see her describing the body of her son, telling us that she had wanted to approach it as a forensic doctor but failed, telling us how she was able to look at it as a mother, instead, modeling the reparative effort that should accompany our looking. She tells us what the effects of looking were on her own body and what she hopes the effect of its impact on ours will be. Even the admission with which she begins, namely, that she had expected to rely on her mother to piece together and shoulder the burden of the events that had unfolded in Mississippi has political import; she is telling us that even she had expected the burden of grief to be someone else's.

Mobley's visibility as a political actor was greatly diminished, however, when the NAACP publicly severed ties with her toward the end of 1955.[4] The fundamental issue was that Mobley and her speeches fit "uneasily" with its political outlook and approach (Gorn 2018: 214). Roy Wilkins, NAACP executive secretary, and Thurgood Marshall, Chief Counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, maintained that grief had no place in a political response to Emmett Till's lynching and the acquittal of his killers. Thurgood Marshall stated his opposition rather succinctly when he declared to protesters at a rally in New York that they should "worry about those who are alive" (Feldstein 2000: 102). Wilkins's remarks in public and private communications in this period are similar in spirit. For him, grief is too focused on recovering what is lost to address the larger enabling circumstances that need changing; a rally wouldn't bring Till back and the point was to ensure that there would be no other Tills. In focusing on loss, grief is too immediate (Gorn 2018: 213); it sees only "basic evils" (2018: 214) (e.g., individual perpetrators) and only the moment, with the consequence that it doesn't sustain long-term struggle. An emotional outburst, he concluded, could only do good as a catalyst or, as Wilkins puts it, "ammunition" (2018: 214).

The irony of this history is that Mobley's gesture is memorialized in precisely the terms that Marshall and Wilkins used to criticize it. Her gesture is remembered as a benefit to later generations (the living, not the dead) because it provided a catalyst (ammunition) for the political actions that followed and could themselves sustain long-term struggle. We continue, moreover, to think that there should be a clear separation between the small circumstance and the large, the latter being the proper domain of politics (or at least where its real influence and prestige lie). But grief is made small in this way; it is imagined to

4. Gorn reports that a dozen speaking engagements on the West Coast were abruptly canceled (including an event at a sixteen thousand person venue) and the authorization for future appearances withdrawn. Mose Wright (the relative with whom Emmett stayed in Mississippi) was persuaded to speak in Mobley's place and was cast as the "central hero of the trial" (Gorn 2018: 212).

be tied to the immediate moment, actors, impulses, and "the small players," as Elliott Gorn describes Mamie and Emmett Till, in the "large game" of political struggle (2018: 214). This encourages the thought that Till's lynching exemplifies the evil to be uprooted and Mobley's presentation of his body and the speeches that followed catalyzed the effort to do this work, but that mourning isn't itself a part of that work.

By resisting the idea that there is a clear separation between the 'small' circumstance and the 'large,' we can begin to see how grief might assume a properly political form. I take Claudia Rankine (2015) to be contributing to this effort in describing Mobley's gesture as a refusal of an etiquette; as Rankine understands it, it is a refusal to keep private grief private. She is not, in describing this refusal as the refusal of an *etiquette*, implying that it is not political, but suggesting that the political can be woven into our lives in ways that need not attract our attention.[5]

Danielle Allen (2004) has argued that many of our ordinary habits, including etiquettes that we observe, are habits of citizenship. Allen draws our attention to photographs of the desegregation battles waged in Little Rock, Arkansas—among them, the photograph of Elizabeth Eckford, one of the Little Rock Nine, being pursued and taunted by Hazel Bryan, a white classmate. In looking at these photographs, we see "in a quick instant," Allen claims, the outline of "two different political etiquettes directed together toward the restoration of order" (2004: 10), manifesting, for example, in the "measured spatial distance" between black and white citizens, the way in which the white men "stand guard at the boundary of public space" employing violence to keep order within it while the white women and girls, Bryan among them, "attack the girl [viz., Eckford] with curses and taunts" (2004: 10). These are, Allen claims, political functions rooted in longstanding habits, shaping public space and our interactions with others in it.[6]

Mobley's refusal of such an etiquette—her continued acts of and calls to mourning—may account for the NAACP's concerns regarding her visibility, but this refusal is also, as Rankine points out, connected to the tradition of lynching.

5. Rankine describes Mobley as aiming to "make mourning enter our day to day world" and regards this as a "new kind of logic" (2015). As I understand it, Mobley's political aim can be said to reflect 'a new kind of logic' insofar as it urges a reevaluation of the role of grief in politics and a reconsideration of received ideas concerning the relationship between the 'small' and 'large' circumstance, which, I am claiming, presented a barrier to the reception of these ideas.

6. I would argue that just such an etiquette underwrites judgments concerning 'the distance of reasonable fear,' a phrase used in the documentary film, *Strong Island*, which examines the racial dimensions of self-defense arguments. This etiquette concerns the distance at which it is reasonable to fear injury at another's hands, exercising, in some cases, a much stronger influence in the evaluation of self-defense claims than forensic judgments (concerning, for example, the distance at which a bullet enters a body when that etiquette is breached).

Mobley challenges this tradition when she insists on the return of her son's body (as a grave was being prepared in Mississippi at the direction of a local sheriff [Tyson 2017: 64]), when she breaks the seal of the state of Mississippi in opening his coffin, and finally, when she presents this body for the public to mourn. Rankine's claim is that in refusing this etiquette, Mobley uses the tradition of lynching "against itself" (2015). "The spectacle of the black body, in her hands," she says, "publicized the injustice mapped onto her son's corpse" (2015).

It is correct, I think, to see Mobley as refusing to accept the rites of lynching as rites of mourning, but we should not be quick to assume that the grief she displayed or invited was private, as Rankine's remarks could be taken to imply. We might entertain the possibility that the political significance of Mobley's grief suggests that there cannot be a hard and fast division between the political sphere and those spheres in which we absorb the burdens and losses entrained by it. Allen takes this course in articulating the political significance of Elizabeth Eckford's forbearance in the face of the white mob that surrounded her as she made her solitary walk on the first day of school. She sees in this restraint a discipline for loss—a mastery of what she considers to be the central tension of democratic life, namely, that between one's aspiration to rule and the loss or disempowerment that must be tolerated in ruling alongside others who share this aspiration. But the scene in front of Little Rock Central High School also reveals, according to Allen, that sacrifice came to be expected of some and not others. Photographs of these events exposed, she claims, two modes of citizenship—the citizenship of acquiescence, exhibited by Eckford, and the citizenship of dominance, exhibited by the mob surrounding her, forcing those who saw them to choose between affirming or rejecting this arrangement, a moment of such consequence that Allen describes 1957, the year of the publication of these photographs, as marking the inauguration of "a new constitution" (2004: 8).

Allen's claim is not only that our ordinary etiquettes can be sites of critical political significance, but that their roots reach into the social and psychic realms where the costs of democratic sacrifice are absorbed and retained. The contention that the burdens and losses entrained by ordinary habits of citizenship (or their negotiation) penetrate into our innermost selves raises the possibility that we think of Mobley's presence in public life as revealing, if not private grief, then the depths of her sacrifice. However, the rites of mourning that Mobley attempted to inaugurate would, I claim, be obscured by such an approach, as they are, in my view, by popular descriptions of Mobley as bearing "witness to the sorrows inflicted by racism," which tie her visibility to her standing as an "aggrieved mother" bearing sorrow for others (Gorn 2018: 216). Both suggest that it is critical to think of Mobley's contribution in terms of inner depths and both, I think, point in the direction of understanding her gesture as a sacrifice rooted in these depths. However, we should remember that Mobley called on all

Americans to look with her at the body of her son (Till-Mobley & Benson 2003: 139). They needed to be impacted by the sight of his body as a whole, she adds, so that they might, collectively, be able to put into words what it was that they had seen. Detailed descriptions of the body, which she was herself in a position to offer, would not suffice nor could she alone say what was seen (Till-Mobley & Benson 2003: 139). What there was to see was brought before the public. The work to be done from there was the collective work of saying together what was seen, not the work of certifying Mobley's standing in public through the recognition of her pain.

This is not to say that we cannot or that Mobley did not think of her gesture in terms of sacrifice.[7] In defending her commitment to the mission of the NAACP, Mobley says that she "set out to trade the blood of my child" for the "betterment of my race" (as quoted in Feldstein 2000: 107). She is signaling not that the life of her son was sacrificed by her, of course, but that the meaning of his death was; the meaning of his death would be a collective matter, given over to all Americans, not a matter over which she had special claim. If we are to understand the nature of her sacrifice in political terms, these are the terms in which to do it, I suggest.

That Mobley could engage in this work because the worst event in her life had happened, as she tells us, is not something that I think can be fathomed (or that it is proper to attempt to fathom) in a political context. It is not a foundation on which to rebuild trust, which is Allen's hope in drawing attention to the role of sacrifice in democratic settings and in creating institutions and processes that support its acknowledgment in cases like these. It is sobering, in fact, to consider that the meaning of Mobley's gesture came into question not only among white Southerners, but among communities that had earlier been moved by it but later questioned her motives (Feldstein 2000: 215), including Wilkins who wondered if there might be something to white Southerners' description of the Till rallies as Mamie's Circus (Gorn 2018: 215). It appears that people came to wonder what the spectacle of the black body could mean in her hands. To frame Mobley's

7. Juliet Hooker objects to Allen's position on the grounds that "readings of nonviolent protest as acquiescence or sacrifice obviate the self-understanding of black activists . . . who understood themselves as engaging in acts of defiance" (2016: 450). If Hooker intends this as general characterization (she considers no alternatives), then I would counter that it fails to capture the self-understanding of some of the figures discussed by Allen (see, in particular, Allen's discussion of the account of these events supplied by Daisy Bates, president of the Arkansas State Conference of NAACP branches [2004: 32–35]). This characterization would also fail to account for Mobley's self-understanding, though I grant that there is a basis for recognizing defiance in her actions as well (for seeing her actions as resting, in part, on a refusal—precisely the point stressed by Rankine). I don't, however, see any basis for Hooker's suggestion that Allen (among others whom Hooker describes as subscribing to a romantic narrative of the civil rights movement) represents these African American figures as "seeing themselves as passive victims" rather than as people who "viewed themselves as engaged in defiant resistance" (2016: 461).

claim to the public's attention as resting on her sacrifice as a mother made her vulnerable to suspicion, in part, because this claim was understood to be rooted in these inner depths.

My suggestion, then, is that the grief Mobley made visible through her public presence was meant to be shared by the public through rites of mourning into which Americans might be initiated. As Mobley explains in her autobiographical reflections on these events, this required that they not only be impacted by the body as a whole (rather than through forensic description) but that photographs of Till taken prior to his death also be seen so that, Mobley says, they could see what had been lost to them (Till-Mobley & Benson 2003: 140), a remark that calls for close attention. Was it Mobley's view that Americans would recognize the lynching death of her son as an occasion for public mourning? If not, how else might we understand this sentiment?

I do not think that Mobley was, in appealing to all Americans in this way, suffering the misapprehension that the loss of her black son—a person hardly known outside of his small community in Chicago—would be understood to have been a common one. Rather, I suggest that, in extending an invitation to all Americans to share in grief, she is inviting them to enter into a new understanding of themselves through treating it as such.[8] These are the broad features of what I take to be a reenvisioning of political life, but we can also see this reenvisioning in the details of the conditions of collective mourning that Mobley sets out. In extending this invitation to all Americans, Mobley did not require that people reform themselves beforehand. Mourning would, though, require a kind of self-examination. As she says, "People had to face my son and realize just how twisted, how distorted how terrifying, race hatred could be. How it had menaced my son during his last, tortured hours on earth. How it continued to stalk us all. Which is why people also had to face themselves. They would have to see their own responsibility in pushing for an end to this evil" (Till-Mobley & Benson 2003: 142). We see Mobley framing legacies of racial violence as something that "stalks us all" so that even if a distinction is to be drawn between those who perpetrate this violence and those who suffer it—some such division is implied by her remarks to the NAACP defending her political participation—it is from

8. Charles Taylor (2016) draws attention to what he calls the 'backward performativity' and, more specifically, the 'bootstrapping maneuvers' of founding rituals, which I consider this to be. Taylor offers, as an example, the role of the U. S. Constitution in constituting the collective subject that it also invokes as its author (though see below for a different telling of this history). As he puts it, "The bootstrapping maneuver consisted in presenting the Constitution as though it emanated from an existing people, and then making up the gap retrospectively through the ratification of the states and the consequent functioning of the new institutions" (2016: 278). This feature may help to explain the sense in which such rituals can appear both to affirm and define a normative order and can even appear to encourage certain forms of inattention (what Taylor describes as the "unrecognized alteration" of a ritual's success conditions [2016: 278]).

within an understanding of this legacy as a threat to all. That reenvisioning and its promise, not any presumption that the loss of her son would be experienced as a common loss, accounts for her invitation to all Americans.

So bold is this reenvisioning of the American polity that it could be understood as an attempt to refound it. Martha Nussbaum describes Lincoln's Gettysburg Address in these terms, claiming that Lincoln "recharacterizes the nation to such a degree that he is justly described as refounding it" (2013: 24). In saying this, she is following Gary Wills who claims that in making this compact statement "Lincoln had revolutionized the Revolution, giving people a new past to live with that would change their future indefinitely" (1992: 38). Wills takes Lincoln to have achieved this through his succinct articulation of what came to be the authoritative understanding of the Declaration of Independence. Lincoln had presented it as a founding document of a "single people dedicated to a proposition," (1992: 147) the equality of all, in the light of which the Constitution was to be seen as a provisional document subject to correction in view of its superior wisdom and its supreme principle.[9] Lincoln's position was not a product of the imagination alone; it was based, in part, on legal and constitutional arguments, but its significance as an event of refounding consists principally in its offering, as Wills puts it, a new past and with it a new future. Nussbaum focuses on this feature in describing Lincoln as proposing a different image of the country, of its commitments, than it had. This was, in Nussbaum's view, a "project of breathtaking boldness: nothing less than a refounding of America as a nation dedicated to human equality" (2013: 231).

Lincoln attempted, as did Mobley, to implement a normative vision that was not yet actual. This vision is also breathtaking in its boldness, rooted as it is in a body exhibiting the pathological antagonisms that have marked the history of the country, as if to say, here, too, is the body politic marked by civil war. She too attached abstract ideals to "a concrete occasion of mourning" (Nussbaum 2013: 231) and framed the future of the country against the reality of human vulnerability, the shortness of human life, but also the long time of the dead.[10] The power of this encounter is missed, it seems to me, in the response of contemporaries like Marshall and Wilkins in their objection that mourning nurtures concern for the dead rather than the living or that it is too tied to the immediate moment to sustain long term struggle. But it is understood by Mobley who links

9. For a discussion of Lincoln's view of the Declaration as the founding document of a people, see Wills (1992: ch. 4). For a discussion of Lincoln's view of the Constitution as a provisional document, subject to correction in light of the supreme principle of equality expressed in the Declaration, see Wills (1992: ch. 3).

10. Wills claims that the opening of the Gettysburg Address ("Four score and ten years") is an allusion to Psalm 90, which presents this as the term of a human life (1992: 78). Nussbaum suggests that the audience is reminded in this way "of the brevity of human life and, as well, of the vulnerability of a human nation at a time of enormous uncertainty in the middle of war" (2013: 231).

the task of facing her son with facing ourselves, who expresses the hope in her speeches that those who look at her child will have greater concern for their own children, and who engages other Americans directly in calling on them to "say what they had seen," that is, to write that constitution whose details are, Allen says, still being hammered out, having articulated some of its basic contours. It is 1955 and not 1957, then, that holds particular significance for the attempt to refound the country amid the battles of desegregation.

Perhaps, though, the ordinariness of the circumstances to which Mobley draws our attention, perhaps even her ordinariness (she describes herself and her son, too, as nobodies, meaning *ordinary citizens*) will make us reluctant to see her invitation as an attempt to refound the American polity. Mobley's political vision departed from the NAACP and from aspects of our political culture today, I would add, in that she was principally interested in drawing attention to the "small" circumstance that touches on atrocity. She tells us in her political speeches about the difficulty, for example, of getting a call through to Mississippi (of getting a white landlord on the phone who seems always to be around when the rent is due). She was not principally interested in identifying the "larger" circumstances (structural conditions, we would call them) enabling atrocity or—something quite antithetical to her thinking—in drawing a clear separation between the two. She is not someone who speaks of broad patterns of loss, but rather about the loss of her son. It seems to me that she is urging citizens, in this way, to think of atrocity as being intertwined with ordinary life, an aspect of this political vision that might be counted against it for heightening our sense that we live with atrocity. It could equally be said, however, that Mobley's political vision holds out the hope that we might see atrocity as having something to do with us, our habits of citizenship, among other things, and so as having the intelligibility of those matters that do.

2. Violent Iconography

I have argued that in inviting all Americans to mourn the loss of her son Mobley was attempting to refound political community around an understanding of racial injustices as collective losses and mourning as a practice of citizenship. *Open Casket* is, in my view, a painting that attempts to engage with Mobley's invitation so understood. This is the spirit, I claim, in which Schutz describes Till's image as an American image (Tomkins 2017). But if that is right, why have critics failed to consider that the painting might be a mournful one (or to judge its failure in these terms)? Addressing this critical gap will help us to understand how the rites of mourning Mobley hoped to inaugurate have come to be misunderstood and reveals, I will argue, a split understanding of this legacy—as

functioning to expose white violence, on the one hand, and, on the other, to facilitate mourning among those vulnerable to it.

It is now standard to frame the significance of Mobley's gesture in terms of the preservation and dissemination of evidence. Critics of the painting who address its aesthetic qualities, criticize it for falling short of providing and even of compromising the evidence made available by Mobley. Some draw attention to what the painting fails to show and describe it as lacking detail, as being abstract rather than concrete, as failing, in short, to be realistic. At other times the emphasis is on what the painting does show and then the painting is said to be infused with subjectivity. Some have commented, for example, that the painting looks as though it were dreamt or imagined (by the artist). The criticism is, again, that the painting falls short of providing an objective or impersonal document. There is, moreover, a tendency to link the painting's aesthetic qualities (so described) to the racist violence enacted by the three principal figures in the public account of Till's lynching. It was in this spirit that protesters objecting to a solo exhibition of Schutz's work (excluding *Open Casket*) at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston described it as a culturally sanctioned work of "violent iconography," accusing Schutz of having "tampered" with "the intention of a grieving black mother to humanely show in undeniable detail the brutality endured by her 14 year old adolescent child" (Voon 2017).

These strands of criticism are combined in the following discussion in *The New Republic*, which self-consciously weaves together many of the elements in what the authors characterize as "the case against Dana Schutz":

> The streaks of paint crossing the canvas read like an aggressive rejoinder to Mamie Till Mobley's insistence that he [viz. Till] be photographed. Mobley wanted those photographs to bear witness to the racist brutality inflicted on her son; instead Schutz has disrespected that act of dignity, by defacing them with her own creative way of seeing. Where the photographs stood for a plain and universal photographic truth, Schutz has blurred the reality of Till's death, infusing it with subjectivity. (Livingstone & Gyarkye 2017)

The emphasis on documentation can give the impression that Mobley didn't insist that her son be seen as much as she insisted that he be photographed. The collective mourning that Mobley called for and that is central to understanding her gesture goes unmentioned (even where there is explicit discussion of her grief and the significance of its not being kept "private"). Mobley's role was rather to "define" Till's legacy through "controlling the way that his body looked" and the function of this legacy to preserve and circulate evidence, translated into visual terms as photographic evidence—uncreative, impersonal, documentary.

Schutz is positioned as someone who has tampered with this evidence, smearing Till's face and "making it unrecognizable again." So complete is the rejection of subjectivity that the photos themselves are spoken of as bearing witness.

While it is important not to ignore or understate the importance of Mobley's decision to present the brutalized body of her son, one would misunderstand the significance of her gesture in thinking that she was presenting evidence in the sense in which it is understood in these criticisms. When Mobley first sees her son's body, she examines it, methodically noting the damage done to it, asking even that the body be moved so that she might inspect it further. As she says in her reflections on these events, she herself could describe what she had seen in forensic detail, part by part and inch by inch (Till-Mobley & Benson 2003: 139).

However, her aim was not to enable others to see the body forensically or for photographs to be circulated as part of such a record, but for others to see the body as a whole and to be *impacted* by it so that they might collectively be able to tell what was seen. To assume that the photos of Till's body are meant to show in undeniable detail what happened to him is to miss the need for us collectively to say what we see in them and to miss the wordlessness of Mobley's predicament (that she could not alone say what this was). The reliance on the photographs of Till to do the witnessing for us is so profound that it has seemed natural to claim that Mobley's invitation to others to look and to say what they had seen was necessitated by the incompleteness of the photographic record and, specifically, by the fact that it leaves out critical evidence concerning the chain of causes leading to Till's murder.[11]

There is also something troubling in the claim that Mobley defined Till's legacy and that she did so by controlling how he looked. In presenting Till's body, in inviting Americans to regard his death as a collective loss, Mobley seems to have made the meaning of Till's death a matter of *collective* definition. Though even this may be too strong. Perhaps Mobley offered the loss of her son up to others so that it could, like any profound loss, be the matter from which (collective) life might be made again and again, so that this loss might be renewed in the face of further loss and be drawn on as a source of strength.[12] We might, from this perspective, see Schutz's efforts to return to Till's death as though his is another link in an unbroken chain of violent deaths as an effort of this kind, not an effort to undermine the 'definitive understanding' of Till's legacy. And while we continue to encounter Till's legacy through the photographs that Mobley

11. Shawn Michelle Smith (2015) makes this argument, developing on ideas in Goldsby (2006).

12. The psychoanalytic tradition develops the insight that grief itself can be a source of resilience and, specifically, that what helps with grief is grief—early experiences of loss that, if we have others to care for us and to facilitate our development through these losses, can be of aid in meeting future ones (for discussion in the philosophical tradition, see 'Emotions and Infancy' in Nussbaum [2001] and 'Mourning and Moral Psychology' in Lear [2017]).

allowed to be published and while these photographs suggest a certain framing of his person—he is presented in casket, formally attired, with accompanying photographs—I think it can only be appropriate to regard the suggestion that Mobley controlled how he looked with ambivalence. We should allow that this, too, is a continual source of the difficulty of these images, however variously this difficulty comes to be negotiated.[13]

The idea that the photographs of Till preserve evidence of violence with which we should not "tamper" is part of a highly uncritical rhetoric around this violence. This is evident in the repeated characterizations of Till's lynching as having made him unrecognizable or as having made him into an abstraction, a characterization that is then turned against Schutz, not on account of any suggestion of excessive violence in her painting, but on account of its departure from photo-realistic representation. This rhetoric reinforces the thought that all there is to be seen is violence, a point that is illustrated rather starkly in the following passage, which appears in the context of a discussion focusing explicitly on what the task of recognition comes to in this case. The passage, which I quote in full below, is the author's heavily edited version of Mobley's own recollection of her first contact with Till's corpse:

> When I got to his chin, I saw his tongue resting there. It was huge, I never imagined that a human tongue could be that big . . . From the chin I moved up to his right cheek. There was an eyeball hanging down, resting on that cheek . . . Right away, I looked to the other eye. But it wasn't there . . . Dear God, there were only two [teeth] now, but they were definitely his. I looked at the bridge of his nose . . . It had been chopped . . . From there, I went to one of his ears . . . And that's when I found out that the right ear had been cut almost in half . . . And I don't know what happened to that part of his ear, but it wasn't on the back part of his skull. I did check. And when I did, I saw that someone . . . had taken a hatchet and had cut through the top of his head, from ear to ear. The back of his head was loose from the front part of his face . . . I saw a bullet hole slightly back

13. Schutz grappled with this difficulty in painting *Open Casket*. In a profile in which she reflects on her creative process, she poses the question, "How do you make a painting about this and not have it just be about the grotesque?" (Tomkins 2017). We can easily rephrase this question in more explicitly political terms. Elizabeth Alexander's essay "Can you be BLACK and look at this?" poses this question in the context of thinking about group self-identification. She goes on to ask, "What do black people say to each other to describe their relationship to their racial group, when that relationship is crucially forged by incidents of physical and psychic violence which boil down to the "fact" of abject blackness?" (1994: 78). This set of issues and concerns moves Darby English (2013) to propose that we find a new, even experimental, way of taking up Till's legacy (a proposal I consider at the end of this section).

> from the temple area . . . it was that one bullet hole that finally caused me to speak. (Baker 2006: 113)

These ellipses leave us with forensic description. But Mobley was not a forensic doctor, though she had tried, at first, to have the detachment of one (Till-Mobley & Benson 2003: 135). Throughout, ellipses take the place of remembrances associated with Till's body ("Emmett always had the most beautiful teeth. Even as a little baby his teeth were *very* unusual. And I recall how much I had hoped that his permanent set would be as perfect as his baby teeth were. Oh, and they were. Just beautiful" [Till-Mobley & Benson 2003: 136]), and expressions of intimacy and tenderness ("I had examined every part of him I had ever loved, every part of him I had nurtured and helped to mend" [Till-Mobley & Benson 2003: 136]). The ellipses mask the fact that the task of recognition involves repair, a point to which Mobley calls our attention in her speeches as well as in these reflections as when she tells us that "Step by step, as methodically as the killers had mutilated my baby, I was putting him back together again" (Till-Mobley & Benson 2003: 135).

The two themes that predominate in these discussions—the threat posed by subjectivity and characterization of the evidence of violence as bearing its own witness—are, in my view, related. As we have seen, Mobley's gesture is understood in relation to the tradition of lynching, being understood, as Rankine makes explicit, as an upending of that tradition. If the final stage of lynching, as it exists in our cultural memory, is spectacle, there is a question as to how Mobley's presentation of her son's body relates to this final stage. Understandably, there is resistance to treating Mobley's gesture as having produced a spectacle, despite attempts to qualify its relation to spectacle as in the characterization of her actions as, for example, "orchestrated spectacle" (Baker 2006: 113). My suggestion is that exposure has taken the place of spectacle. The idea is that as violence is exposed, we, too, will be exposed, not admitting of depths or layers of response. And yet, the hope, in connection with this legacy of racial violence, seems to be that this will also force an acknowledgment (or a refusal to acknowledge) this legacy. This is the hope, it seems to me, behind Allen's claim that once the photograph of Elizabeth Eckford was made public—once the citizenship of dominance, on the one hand, and the citizenship of acquiescence, on the other, was exposed—citizens in the rest of the country had "no choice but to reject or affirm" them (Allen 2004: 5).[14] I think it is the hope, too, that lies behind Rankine's

14. This idea surfaces again when Allen says that "Those who are agreeable [or 'acquiescent'] . . . show up violent citizens for what they are, and force witnesses to the spectacle to make a choice about whether to embrace or disavow the violence" (2004: 115). In reconstructing this aspect of Allen's thought, Hooker introduces shame—a notion that isn't invoked by Allen—as an intermediate link, claiming that "Peaceful acquiescence to racial terror is viewed as an exemplary act of

suggestion that those who were "exposed" (2015) to the body of Michael Brown in the street or to images of it lying in the street would be forced to make the choice either to mourn or not to mourn.[15]

These ideas deserve attention in their own right, but within the context of the present discussion, my objection is simply that they do not provide an interpretation of Mobley's gesture that can plausibly be sustained. For one, these ideas diminish Mobley's role in performing this gesture. Why is her presence, her subjectivity, at all relevant in understanding this legacy if it continues through the exposure of the violence done to a body? It is against this background that it can be said that the police officers who allowed Michael Brown's body to remain exposed on the ground "unwittingly picked up where Mobley left off" (Rankine 2015). Only now we can go further and say that the essential work is done by the body itself—that the presentation of it is, therefore, irrelevant. The body speaks for itself. Photographs of the body bear their own witness. Why, if that's true, should we have to speak for them?

Of course, there is a long tradition of treating bodies, the dead, in particular, as exposing the truth of what happened. Inquests and coroner's reports have, for example, played this role, revealing the details of bodily injury, bringing what is internal and hidden—often literally—to light and in such a way that we can piece together causal understandings that then suggest humanitarian intervention and reform. The body of a miner who suffocated in an explosion might, for example, expose the corners cut by a mining company in their design of that mine (reveal that it wasn't the explosion but improper ventilation doors that killed those who would have survived the blast). This genre of human concern is so well developed that we might think that bodies speak for themselves. But even here, subjectivity is present, and when it is said that such a body exposes the truth of what happened, when the details of bodily injury are thought to

citizenship due to the assumed capacity of this act of democratic sacrifice to sway the moral orientations of members of the dominant racial group who, upon observing such naked displays of violence, are shamed into renouncing racial injustice" (2016: 458). Hooker then questions the psychological plausibility of such a claim, adding that it is only on the basis of such a belief that Allen can describe this mode of citizenship as in some respects "healthy" (2016: 458). Hooker fails, in my view, to appreciate how striking it is that in making such claims Allen (and others) do not appeal to shame or any other complex psychological responses. Moreover, it isn't any such claim that provides the basis for Allen's characterization of this mode of citizenship as including "healthy" elements (a suggestion that is, in any case, heavily qualified by Allen's explicit assumption that this mode of citizenship is also pathological), but Allen's view of those aspects of citizenship that are essential to a healthy democracy.

15. Though see Rankine for the claim that "Another option, of course, is that it becomes a spectacle for white pornography: the dead body as an object that satisfies an illicit desire" (2015). For a historical account of the association between spectacle, pain, and pornography, see Halttunen (1995). For a discussion of these issues in the context of aesthetic criticisms of photography, see Reinhardt (2007).

particularize the dead and to facilitate some form of acknowledgment of their continuing claim on us, it is because we have learned what questions to ask of it.[16] Matters may stand otherwise in connection with Till's legacy. There is, in this line of critical response to *Open Casket*, not a tacit acknowledgment of the place of subjective response but a suppression of any subjective element, a wish for bodily injury to truly speak for itself and to speak definitively.

It is, however, important to recognize that this reception of Till's legacy is complemented by another, which reintroduces mourning as one of its functions. It is in this context that the images of Till are said to function as an "inspiration and warning" (Greenberger 2017), communicating the "mournability (to each other, if not to everyone) of people marked as disposable" (Greenberger 2017) who have had "to witness their own murder and defilement" in order to "survive" (Alexander 1994: 90). If the aim of exposure provides a link between the uncritical rhetoric surrounding the violence associated with this legacy and the rejection of complex subjective responses to it, as I suggested above, then that would go some way toward accounting for the fact that we find in this complementary reception quite sophisticated forms of subjective response as well as an appreciation that the iconography surrounding Till's death might also facilitate mourning. In short, it is the subjectivity of the *white* viewer that is of concern; the photographs are meant to expose the viewer who has not yet confronted this violence.

This suggestion also appears to be borne out in the way that intimacy is discussed in relation to Schutz's painting. The perspective of the painting is described as that of someone close to the body, "looming" over it (Livingstone & Gyarkye 2017), implying that the perspective is both intimate and yet threatening. Christina Sharpe, who has brought these issues into focus most sharply, asks us to consider this intimacy. She asks us to consider, in particular, whether it is that of a slave-owner who can describe his runaway slave's face in exact detail or that of Mamie Till Mobley looking at the body of her son. The issue of intimacy appears to be central to the evaluation of the painting because the mourning facilitated by Till's legacy has come to be understood as a relation among intimates—between people vulnerable to white violence, though in a narrower sense, it should be noted, than conceived by Mobley; Schutz appears to Sharpe and others to presume an intimacy to which she has no claim.

The rich context of Mobley's invitation is missed in this way. The perspective in question is not that of a mother looking at the body of her son with the loving and anxious attention that might be given to a newborn (to borrow Mobley's own characterization of her examination [2003: 137]), but neither is that the position, I should think, of anyone who looks on Till's body in response to Mobley's

16. For a detailed discussion of this history and supporting arguments, see (Laqueur 1989).

invitation to do so. Sharpe asks whether the intimacy assumed in the painting is, in broader terms, the intimacy of those who have suffered violence or the intimacy of those who have committed it, options that don't accommodate the normative reenvisioning Mobley proposes. Other possibilities would appear to be foreclosed in Sharpe's asking, rhetorically, "What white people looked into Emmett Till's coffin?" (Mitter 2017). From the fact that the photos of Till that circulated early on were published in newspapers and magazines with a predominantly black readership, and from the fact that they were not seen by large white audiences, Sharpe concludes that "They weren't meant to create empathy or shame or awareness from white viewers" (Mitter 2017). They were meant, she says, "to speak to and to move a Black audience" (Mitter 2017).[17] The fellowship assumed in the perspective taken by the artist, whatever it may be, is taken to fall outside of the meaning of Mobley's gesture.

One might accept these terms of debate, this view of mourning and intimacy, in particular, and argue, as Darby English (2013) does, that interracial intimacy is, in fact, possible in the reception of this legacy. English attends to the encounter between Till and Carolyn Bryant, who accused Till of making sexual advances in the course of their brief exchange at the Bryant family grocery store, an event that precipitated Till's kidnapping and murder. We might, English suggests, "experiment" (English 2013: 87) with the possibility that Till breached racial etiquette in the course of that exchange (perhaps making an entreating remark), but rather than take this as a lesson in the dangers of interracial social intimacy (the lesson that might be encouraged by attending to the horror that followed), we might, instead, English offers, take this as revealing racial distinctions to be purely "theoretical" in character (English 2013: 88).

However, speculation around this exchange seems to me to be an inappropriate basis for understanding how this legacy might speak to the possibility of interracial intimacy. English's account attempts to locate an impulse that will take us out of ourselves without our even realizing it and without our being in a position to help it, an impulse that we might trust more fully, that might be given freer reign (since racial difference can seem, from this perspective, to be an imposition from without). This is an understandable temptation. There is a moment in Mobley's account of the events following Till's death when she describes her thought as wandering. It wandered, Mobley tells us, in the courtroom in which Till's murderers were being tried. It wandered to their children playing on their laps and it wandered from the thought of the grandchildren she would never have to the thought that she might be able to love those playing

17. See Berger (2011: ch. 4) for a discussion of the absence of images of Till in the white press's coverage of his death and for arguments in support of the claim that "white periodicals had every opportunity to publish Till's picture" (2011: 130).

children—that thought wakening her back to attention (Till-Mobley & Benson 2003: 166). It would be tempting to say that the mournful thought that Mobley experiences is what she invites others to as well, even if it carries risk. But what we are tempted by in these suggestions is the idea of wandering away from ourselves and being able to disclaim the responsibility for it. I am inclined to think that Mobley's invitation is extended to the person we waken back to (not a theoretical construct, as English would have it).

If Mobley's invitation engages us at the level at which we may take responsibility for ourselves, then there is no avoiding the concern that there is something improper in mourning losses that some of us may be implicated in, responsible for, or which have not been ours. This is, in my view, the most provocative aspect of *Open Casket* but it is also the central thread linking it to Mobley. In what follows, I will consider an approach, stemming from Danielle Allen's work on democratic sacrifice, that takes the position that these losses are, indeed, collective and sees the work of mourning as uniquely suited to overcoming, among other things, resistance to such an acknowledgment.

3. Mourning Democratic Loss

Though Allen discusses mourning only a few times in the context of her work on democratic sacrifice, it plays a significant role in her theory of democratic politics. The most suggestive of her remarks occurs in the context of her discussion of criteria for distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate forms of democratic sacrifice. That democratic sacrifice be voluntary and that it be honored (as military service is honored) are among the criteria she endorses. According to Allen, however, these criteria not only help to define legitimate sacrifice, but also "establish a framework for mourning processes that can eventually reconstitute trust" (2004: 110). In saying this, Allen is proposing that those sacrifices that have been 'acquiesced to' rather than chosen and that have not been honored as sacrifices finally be acknowledged as sacrifices through being mourned. The hope is that this will restore trust in democracy.

A tacit assumption guiding this discussion is that the losses to be mourned are collective ones. One of the hard truths of democracy, according to Allen, is that some people are always sacrificing for others. Legitimate forms of democratic sacrifice need not be suffered by everyone, but they are, nonetheless, losses that are collective in being suffered by some for the sake of others (for the sake of the stability of the polity). That some people—the same—are always sacrificing for others may be a perversion of this truth, but it is nonetheless treated by Allen as a special instance of it. This is the basis for the claim that these losses are to be acknowledged by fellow citizens and for the hope that this acknowledgment

will address forms of mistrust that arise when democratic sacrifice fails to be acknowledged and goes unreciprocated. It is in this spirit that Allen says, placing emphasis on the point, that "even the dominated have forms of citizenship that contribute to the stability of the polity" (2004: 115). It is in this spirit, too, that she develops the suggestion that "something in the African American experience of sacrifice [. . .] has brought extra knowledge about the nature of democracy," revealing, in particular, the possibility that through exploiting the "fundamentally healthy elements of the citizenship of subordination—the ability to agree, to sacrifice, to bear burdens" (2004: 116) the citizenship of acquiescence can be used against itself. This mode of citizenship may be pathological but it retains elements that are essential to democratic practice.

One may still wonder, however, what the reference to mourning contributes to this proposal. It is clear that democratic sacrifice involves loss and sometimes even death. However, this does not alone justify it—one doesn't speak of mourning military sacrifice but rather of honoring it. Perhaps, though, it is motivated by the assumption that these "Losses do not disappear but are retained in the fabric of society" (2004: 110). Their invisible, lingering presence suggests a certain analogy, I think, between processes of democratic mourning and the mourning of our significant others—efforts through which we come to experience loss and also to bear it. In this setting no less than in the political one, as Allen conceives of it, it can take work to acknowledge loss. My suggestion, then, is that it is in order to restore loss to the life of a democratic community that 'mourning processes' might be invoked in this setting.

This already points to a very different understanding of what it might mean to share in the mourning of legacies of racial violence and loss than considered in the previous section. Mourning is, on this proposal, inherently conflictual. It brings to light not only the conflict between different classes of citizen but also the pathological elements in each of these modes of citizenship (which, one assumes, are to be rehabilitated through mourning).[18] In this way, Allen's proposal avoids the objection that mourning is incompatible with self-examination and, more specifically, the acknowledgment of culpability—a powerful source of pressure against the idea that these legacies might be collectively mourned.

18. Hooker criticizes Allen's approach for setting terms that are too narrow "for what are considered legitimate forms of black politics" (2016: 2016) and recommends political exercises that allow for the "expression of black anger and pain, which is otherwise precluded by expectations of black sacrifice and forgiveness" (2016: 464). Such exercises "[A]llow black citizens to express their pain and make their losses visible to a racial order that demands that they sacrifice both by not expressing anger and grief at said losses, and also by peacefully acquiescing to them" (2016). I don't think the expression of this anger and pain are precluded by Allen's political theory. In fact, I see 'the mourning processes' that she invokes (and attempts to develop a political foundation for) as creating the space for just such a political exercise. This is also a central theme of McIvor's account of these mourning processes.

David McIvor's (2010) work on race and the politics of loss further develops Allen's proposal. McIvor follows Allen in attempting to conceptualize democratic mourning in terms of "public efforts to acknowledge broader patterns of loss and sacrifice inherent to the life of collectivities, in an effort to make those sacrifices [in future] more 'visible, voluntary, and honored' " (2010: 31). In speaking of "inherent" loss rather than of inevitable loss—loss that must be accepted as a central fact of democratic life—we are given to understand that the legacies of loss that are to be mourned are still traceable to that core democratic reality and, therefore, to be seen as internal to democratic practice rather than as "exogenous shocks" (2010: 41). The original basis for treating these losses as collective ones, namely, that this pattern of (racial) loss is a special instance of the basic democratic pattern carries over to McIvor's account. Mourning, McIvor concludes, is something "we need to do as democratic citizens" (2010: 54).

McIvor supplements Allen's proposal with an account of mourning that he takes to offer further support for this proposal. He draws, specifically, on Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic studies of mourning, which depart from Freud's early treatment in two notable respects.[19] First, mourning is no longer the work of forgetting loss, as Freud (1917) had assumed—a stance that is recognizable in Marshall's advice to protesters to think of the living, not the dead.[20] Rather, mourning is a matter of living well with loss and of using loss to shape who one is in ways that enable one to bear one's vulnerability to it.[21] This requires that we meet loss by "letting go of the defenses and fantasies that alleviate our anxiety over this very loss and keep us from the 'splintering and shattering' activity of reflecting and living with trauma" (McIvor 2010).[22] Second, mourning is not the

19. See Segal (1979) for a discussion of Klein's departures from Freud and also Karl Abraham.

20. The assumption that mourning involves work is carried forward by Klein and McIvor (though not the assumption that this work terminates). This assumption has recently been contested, however, in the psychological literature and in the recent philosophical literature on grief (see, for example, Marušić 2018). Theorists associated with the "new science of grief" in the psychology literature (see Konigsberg 2011 and Bonanno 2009) have defined their position through this kind of scepticism. George Bonanno, its most visible expositor, attempts to link 'the work of grief' to two other notions that he finds objectionable: that there are fixed and universal stages of grief and that grief is quite extended in time. Freud's discussion, however, doesn't reveal a commitment to the idea of fixed and universal stages of grief and the assumption that grief work is piecemeal and extensive leaves open how long it takes. Bonanno also objects that Freud's memory work would only intensify grief and that it would, in any case, be self-defeating. But he assumes, in making this objection, that the work of grief aims to "undo or erase" (2009: 17) memory (the criticism being that remembering is a bad way to forget). Freud advocated no such thing; he observed that people engage in a kind of "hyperremembering" (Clewell 2004: 44), which, he assumes, serves the aim of severing one's attachments to a person who cannot support them.

21. See Klein (1935; 1940; 1946/1996) for the development of these views. For an excellent overview of Klein's thought, see Segal (1964).

22. It is the difficulty of this activity that, at least in part, inspires McIvor's modification of the aim of mourning processes proposed by Allen. On his view, they can be expected to increase trust

solitary work that Freud pictured it to be. It is Klein's view that others contribute to this work, both in their internal or psychic presence but also in the provision of supportive contexts for engaging in it. It is the idea of mourning as an effort to overcome defenses against loss through collaboration with others that leads McIvor to propose an extended conception of it as the "inter-subjective task of working through and integrating historical and enduring traumas into our individual and civic identities" (2010: 53). When seen in this light, it is, he claims, an "essential part of democratic life today" (2010: 56).

As with Allen, McIvor challenges the idea of a clear separation between the social/psychic and political realms, taking this to have direct bearing on the prospects for a mournful politics. In this, he draws inspiration from the intellectual tradition with which Klein is associated ('object-relations' psychoanalysis) and the social theory informed by it. He is especially influenced by Gal Gerson's (2004) discussion of the political framework that, in her view, is suggested by this intellectual tradition, which aims to secure conditions for attachment (the need, that is, for relationships, which is taken as irreducible within this framework) (McIvor 2010; 2016). These attachments are thought to radiate out from infancy in ever expanding circles so that "The whole of life," to use an evocative formulation of Ian Suttie's, "comes to fill the void the mother once filled" (Suttie 1933, as cited in Gerson 2004: 778).[23] McIvor places emphasis on one of the central theoretical commitments of this tradition, namely, that there is no final or hard line between private and public life. He takes this point, moreover, to have direct bearing on the work of mourning. "Later in life," he offers, "we are just as dependent on supportive objects and contexts for the working through of our grief, and these contexts are as much public as they are private" (2010: 87).[24]

This line of thought provides us with an explicit defense of the proposal that the mourning of legacies of racial violence and loss be taken up as a collective political effort. Some of the considerations advanced by McIvor draw from Klein's conception of mourning, including the claim that mourning is a matter of navigating, alongside others, our vulnerability to loss in the face of defenses against it. These considerations are quite powerful in their own right. They provide McIvor with resources for diagnosing, as a form of defense, claims to the effect that these legacies are not, in fact, shared. But these considerations

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or at least to "mitigate disintegrative distrust" (2010: 54) rather than to restore trust.

23. For a development of these ideas within a 'eudaimonistic framework,' see Nussbaum (2001).

24. McIvor takes the idea that mourning is by its nature public and even political to be supported by the observation that some losses are not mournable for political reasons (2010: 55) (a theme pursued in Judith Butler's influential work [2004; 2009]). We cannot, knowing this, he urges, restrict the work of mourning to private acts (or one might say, allow these losses to go unmourned). I've recast this claim in terms of the social and political theory that seems to me to play a more substantive role in the development of his account.

seem to me, as I'll discuss, to presuppose rather than to motivate the idea that these legacies of loss are collective. They, therefore, appear to rest on the claim that these losses are inherent or internal to democracy. They may rest, too, on the supplementary suggestion—a looser affinity between Allen's and McIvor's works—that citizens have, in McIvor's words, a shared history and a "shared imaginary" that is "tied to and in many ways reflective of" that history (2010: 55) or, in Allen's words, that "We are always awash in each other's lives," that "shared life" being "recorded as history" (2004: xxii). The implication is that these shared histories yield common objects for intersubjective reflection even if our accounts and responses to this history differ in some respects, with some, for example, seeing it as bearing less weightily on the present.

Despite the power and interest of these considerations, this line of thought is too quick in drawing the conclusion that racial losses are, in fact, shared. The central idea from which it derives, namely, that democratic sacrifice is inevitable, is itself less than obvious. As a claim about our experience of democratic life, it seems an intuitive truth and the requirement that we accept this would seem only natural as a condition on a functioning democracy. But Allen's claim touches on the nature of sovereignty. Her claim is that the reality of sacrifice is not just difficult but troublingly so in democracy. The reason, according to Allen, is that democracy promises full sovereignty or self-rule, where this is understood as a power to "subdue matter to form, so that the world matches our desires" (2004: 21) and where the requirement that we continuously make sacrifice means that we have to accept ourselves as nearly powerless sovereigns and the democratic arrangement as empowering us only to disempower us. This account rests on a picture of sovereignty that fails to take account of the way in which self-rule within a democracy is always already rule with others. The world isn't formless matter; it includes others and is shaped with them. It also fails to account for the way in which democracy transforms our desires (rather than simply limiting their influence), offering a characterization of a political urge that is more autocratic than democratic. This transformation seems to me to be powerfully illustrated by Mobley's appeal to others to say together what they saw upon being impacted by the public presentation of her son's body. She understood that there were powers of speech and memory and feeling that were properly political, going beyond her particular powers of speech, memory, and feeling.

No less pressing are the questions that might be raised about the relationship between the political reality that Allen purports to uncover—that in a democracy, some people are always sacrificing for others—and the historical reality to which she draws our attention—that it is always the same who are. I have already raised two concerns about this approach, one being that it misrepresents the nature of Mobley's sacrifice and the other being that Allen's conception of

sacrifice, rooted as it is in psychological depths, may not be an appropriate foundation on which to build more trusting relationships with fellow citizens. But I want to note a further concern here, which is that this approach may inadvertently obscure the reality of domination. Allen represents Eckford as having "in the face of disagreement" "sought forms of political action," her solitary walk, among them, "that might generate enough political friendship to secure a democratic legal system and convert the distrust rising from political disappointment into trust" (2004: 31). This is an attempt to credit Eckford as a political actor, but it credits her in a way that both strains plausibility and fails to fully register the reality of domination. Would Eckford have seen in the faces of those surrounding her an opportunity to show and to receive gestures of political friendship? Allen's discussion suggests that there is an element of forbearance in sacrifice, a point made explicit in Ralph Ellison's commentary on these events, which guides Allen's own. He describes parents of students such as Eckford as exercising forbearance in refusing "the pleasure of personal retaliation in the interest of the common good" (2004: 29). Did Eckford refuse this pleasure as she struggled to make her way to a bus stop? Did she have to conquer her desire for uncompromised sovereignty or perhaps her desire to express it as those surrounding her did? I don't know that such 'aspirations' would have been nurtured in her by the democracy that she lived in. Allen's interpretation seems to me to approach a level of idealization that requires for its resonance the invocation of the kind of audience that she imagines for the photographs of these events—an audience that sees, in tableau, modes of citizenship personified by figures in a scene.

I am sceptical of the idea that there was such an audience, just as I am sceptical of the idea that these are shared histories of loss. Is Emmett Till's legacy shared, we might ask? Certainly, the public to whom Mobley addressed herself in fashioning it has not come into being. This isn't only because her political opponents proved more powerful and influential or because the nature of her invitation was misunderstood. It is here that we can appreciate the force of Sharpe's question, "What white people looked into Emmett Till's coffin?" The photographs of Till in casket didn't circulate early on in the white press. They weren't seen by a large white audience until thirty years after his lynching (Berger 2011). If we can claim the events surrounding Till's death as memory today—if this can be cited as a historical legacy—it is in no small part because that memory was carried by those most directly affected by this loss and by those who continue to carry these memories under the auspices of mourning, where this is understood not as a matter of intersubjective reflection but survival. These losses do not have a merely lingering presence; they are already being mourned.

It is fair, of course, to point out that something else is meant by mourning in the context of Allen's and McIvor's work. The case for a mournful politics depends in part on the idea that mourning processes can be engaged in

collectively (e.g., as an aspect of democratic practice). McIvor's defense is sensitive to this. He makes the point that his conception of mourning isn't confined to "our natural and limited responses to intimate object loss," the loss, that is, of our significant others (2010: 55). McIvor operates with a very broad conception, in fact, describing mourning as "a means of mitigating cognitive dogmatism and instaurating a capacity for facing history and our selves in a healthier way" (2010: 55). However, this defense of the claim that legacies of racial loss and violence should be mourned collectively rests on the claim that this history is a shared one. In advancing these considerations, McIvor is addressing himself to the objector who wonders why mourning would redound to the public at large rather than being taken up by those most directly affected by loss. But the central issue raised by such an objection isn't, in my view, whether mourning can be conceived of in more general terms than, for example, as the work taken up by those who have been wounded by loss and share in its intimacy. The central issue concerns the basis for the political claim that loss is shared. Those critics of *Open Casket* who view mourning as restricted to those vulnerable to and wounded by such loss have drawn our attention to deep divisions, which raise questions about the justification for that political claim even if one rejects their conception of mourning.

There is, moreover, reason to be worried that division may be mistaken for defense on McIvor's account democratic mourning. In an effort to illustrate how his conception of mourning might work in practice, McIvor points to the unofficial truth and reconciliation commission that was opened in Greensboro in 2004, to revisit the Greensboro Massacre, a violent clash that took place in 1979, between members of the KKK and a coalition consisting of members of the Communist Workers Party and the Greensboro Association for Poor People. One of the key functions of the commission was, as McIvor puts it, 'implicature,' that is, the work of implicating people not simply in this event but in broad patterns of (racial) violence and loss. As McIvor describes it, the work of implicature gave this political body the ability to "reveal broader social patterns and contexts that made traumatic events possible in the first place, and the ability to demonstrate the lingering effects of past violence and discrimination in the present" (2010: 35–6). In places, McIvor describes implicature not only as revealing those social patterns and contexts that made traumatic events possible but also those that made them *intelligible*, casting a very wide net, indeed. However, if the claim that these legacies of loss are shared cannot be defended, my concern is that—in the absence of a reenvisioning that provides the basis for this claim—the work of implicature will come to approximate the work of exposure, implicating people in these legacies who do not have a basis for participation in the intersubjective work of mourning and who would, within this framework, be seen as failing to mourn and perhaps even as deploying defenses against mourning.

The emphasis on the large circumstance—the broader social patterns and contexts that make traumatic events possible and even intelligible—in McIvor's discussion of the political work of this commission, brings us back to the political conflict between Mobley and the NAACP. Wilkins was too quick, in my view, to dismiss mourning for its connection to particulars, but he was correct in assuming that the task of uncovering broad enabling circumstances could be and is standardly pursued without any attention to mourning or the particular kind of reflection that it might facilitate. In the effort to defend political bodies and institutions that reveal how encompassing sociopolitical loss is, that demonstrate that events in which racial conflict culminates in violence and loss are not *just* events, and that there are not particular losses so much as there are broad patterns of loss, the connection to the particular and to ordinary political understanding appears to be lost. The two are meant to be connected by the social theory inspired by Klein's work, the guiding idea being that there is no final line between our early formative losses and 'sociopolitical losses' so that the latter, too, can be brought home to each of us, as it were. But this social theory recapitulates a version of a claim already contested, namely, that we are—as a matter of the creatures we are—implicated in the lives of others. The "reluctance to admit" this may not be a defense (McIvor 2010: 98). It may, instead, alert us to longstanding divisions to which we might respond by, among other things, advocating for a conception of mourning that shelters those most directly impacted by these legacies (a provision that is compatible with this social theory)[25] or by refounding political community so that these legacies can be shared.

4. Conclusion

This paper has focused on the suggestion that mourning can play a robust role in political life. It has examined the proposal, in particular, that legacies of racial violence and loss should be collectively mourned. One of my central claims is that Mamie Till Mobley was articulating just such a proposal and that she attempted to enact these ideas in her invitation to fellow Americans to look at the body of her son and to say together what they had seen. In Section 1 of my paper, I defended the interpretation that this was an attempt to refound the American polity, in part, through offering a normative reenvisioning on which the loss of her son might be seen as a collective loss and mourning an exercise of citizenship.

25. This social theory does not preclude sheltering environments; its conception of sociality includes, as a necessary component, individuality and separateness.

In Section 2, I turned to the critical response to *Open Casket*, which I see as taking up Mobley's invitation to regard Till's legacy as an American one. This critical response reveals a great deal about how Till's legacy has been received outside of broadly sanctioned historical memorializations. I argued that, in the context of this critical reception, mourning is understood more narrowly than it was by Mobley; the mourning that is supposed to be facilitated by Till's legacy is reserved for those who are vulnerable to white violence, though no longer in the sense in which it stalks us all, as Mobley put it in elaborating upon her proposal. I also argued that Till's legacy has come to be associated with a complementary function, namely, to expose white violence. I drew the conclusion that this reception of Till's legacy has failed to reckon with Mobley's appeal to Americans to enter into mourning for her son, though it does raise important challenges for the claim that these legacies are shared.

In Section 3, I examined a line of thought stemming from Danielle Allen's work on democratic sacrifice and developed by David McIvor, which attempts to defend the position that legacies such as Till's must be collectively mourned. I observed that their defense of this claim depends on the assumption that these legacies are themselves collective. I argued against the conception of democratic sacrifice that underpins these views as well as the assumption that these legacies of loss are a special instance of a general pattern of democratic sacrifice. I also raised a worry concerning the application of these ideas to political bodies that would seek to implicate people in these legacies of violence under the auspices of mourning; in doing so, those implicated (where this is, on McIvor's approach, given the broadest possible interpretation) might not be in a position to work through such loss, reproducing, in effect, the aim of exposure.

The aim of exposure isn't simply the aim of bringing racial injustice or evidence of racial injustice to light. It has emerged most clearly, in the context of this discussion, as a counterpart to the rich subjective responses to loss associated with mourning; as an aim, it gives expression both to a desire for acknowledgment (of loss, among other things) but also a desire to bypass the subjective forms of response that would seem to be required for such an acknowledgment. If in mourning we understand ourselves to be responsive to a *claim* so that there cannot simply be an absence of response but a failure or refusal of acknowledgment, this may help to account for the fact that those very symbols that inspire mourning within some communities and traditions are invested with powers of exposure—with powers to produce if not acknowledgment then, at least, a failure of acknowledgment—outside of them.

Bringing these various traditions and ideas into closer contact offers some clarity on this and other matters, but it also raises a number of questions. The traditions of mourning that have been developed around legacies such as Emmett Till's should be of great interest to social and political philosophers but also

to philosophers of mind, particularly those who study the emotions. How is mourning understood in these settings? What connections are there to personal experiences of loss and what resources in navigating loss might be brought to bear in collective settings? To what extent can political communities support the work of mourning when it plays the role of (or a role akin to) sheltering those vulnerable to loss? When these losses are, for example, experienced as formative for some but not others, mourning becomes entrenched as a 'condition of life,' as Rankine (2015) has put it. How does that bear on the question of whether such mournfulness might also be or become a chosen political orientation?

There is also the question of the relevance that Mobley's gesture might have for us today. As I see it, this is inextricably linked with the question of the justification, if any, for the political claim that these legacies are shared. Can we acknowledge the force of Sharpe's question, "What white people looked into Emmett Till's coffin?" without supposing that it settles matters? In Alabama there is now a memorial to lynching victims comprised of 800 steel monuments, one for each county in which a lynching took place of which there is some record. In the park surrounding these monuments are eight hundred identical ones to be claimed by the counties they represent. Perhaps we can think of Mamie Till Mobley's gesture as one to which we can return as mourners, as a pillar of memory that can be claimed today.

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