

## **Old and New Directions in the History of Lynching**

By John Giggie and Emma Jackson Pepperman

**Summary:** The professional study of the history of lynching has evolved significantly since its inception through the work of W.E.B. DuBois and Ida B. Wells in the decades after Reconstruction to the third decade of the twenty-first century. They note an evolving periodization with sharp demarcations identified by the introduction of fresh categories of analysis and moments of dramatic civil rights protests. The first stage was heralded by pioneering research by African American intellectuals and growing black demands for an end to discrimination in the late nineteenth century. Joining them in the early twentieth century was a small group of social scientists who used case studies of lynching to illuminate race relations in a local community or, from a very different vantage, to see them as symptoms of the long-standing depth of violence in American society in general. In the wake of national protests to end racial and gender segregation and the passage of civil rights laws in the 1960s and 1970s, scholars began to review lynchings from new perspectives, including gender, sexuality, religion, memory, and black community formation and resistance. They produced an explosion of work that understood lynching as central to understandings of modern southern history. The late twentieth century saw a comparative turn. Historians evaluated lynching across America to identify common patterns of racial subjugation, on the one hand, but also to see how it was used to punish a wide range of Americans, including Asian Americans, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans. By 2000, the field shifted again, this time toward memorialization and community remembrance. Scholars and lawyers recalculated the total number of lynchings in America and found a large number of unrecorded killings, asked why so little was known about them, and created memorials to the victims. They demanded too that the causes and long-term consequences of the nation's history of racial violence be discussed openly and taught in public schools. This effort is of particular resonance in 2020 as America confronts rising protests over a culture of mass incarceration and police brutality that disproportionately affects men and women of color. Indeed, the historical study of lynching has never been so vital as it is in the early twenty-first century.

**Keywords:** historiography, lynching, lynch, mob violence, race, racial justice, America, black, African American, United States, 19th century, 20th century.

Nothing so profoundly affected the early career trajectory of W.E.B. Du Bois as his experience with lynching in the spring of 1899. A rising star in the field of sociology and the first black Ph.D. from Harvard University, the 31-year old was fresh off two years of postgraduate study in Germany and finishing revisions to his soon-to-be-published first academic book, *The Philadelphia Negro*. The Massachusetts native was already a professor of economics and history at Atlanta University and head of an institute on social research. Looking forward, Du Bois saw only a quiet life as an academic. Then Sam Hose was lynched.<sup>1</sup>

On April 23, 1899, Hose was brutally murdered.<sup>2</sup> Ten days earlier, the 21-year-old black itinerant laborer had been accused of killing his former employee with an ax and raping his wife on their small farm in Palmetto, Georgia, just southwest of Atlanta. Sensational headlines about a rampaging black brute whipped local whites into a frenzy of fear and revenge. Hundreds reinforced law enforcement officers to form one of the largest manhunts in the state's history. When they eventually caught Hose, who was in hiding, they hauled him back to the scene of the crime.

On the day of his death, Hose faced a crowd of over 2,000 cheering whites who had raced by foot, horse, and train to watch him confess and be lynched. They thronged to a field outside of Newnan, Georgia, thirteen miles south of Palmetto and the childhood hometown of the woman he supposedly assaulted. Facing the mob, Hose stayed quiet and refused to admit to any crime even as men stripped him, fastened him to a pine tree with a thickly-braided chain, and stacked dried boughs and limbs at his feet. When others unsheathed their knives and slowly sliced off his ears, his fingers, and genitals and hoisted them into the air like trophies, Hose screamed for them to end his life. He got his last wish when someone struck a match to the funeral pyre. After the flames had died down, souvenir-seekers rushed forward, thrust their fists deep into his charred corpse, and yanked out organs and bones. Those who wanted more stole links from the chain that still bound the body. Others late to the killing chopped down the pine tree and hacked off a piece of wood for a memento.<sup>3</sup>

Du Bois was on his way to save Hose when he learned of his execution. Striding confidently to the office of the *Atlanta Constitution*, wearing white gloves and carrying a walking cane, he held in his pocket an opinion piece arguing for Hose's freedom. The professor fully expected it to be published with the help of the famous white journalist, Joel Chandler Harris, with whom he shared many mutual friends but did not know personally. And Du Bois sincerely believed that his pen held the power to sway the minds of the white public. But hearing from a passerby that Hose had just been barbecued and his blackened knuckles were now on exhibit at a grocery store ahead of him, Du Bois about-faced and returned to Atlanta University. At that moment, "two considerations broke in upon my work," he confided in his autobiography, *Dusk of Dawn*. "First, one could not be a calm, cool, and detached scientist while negroes were lynched, murdered, and starved; and secondly, there was no such definite demand for scientific work of the sort that I

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<sup>1</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1940), 67. Du Bois mentions the Hose lynching in "Of the Black Belt," a chapter in his earlier publication, *The Souls of Black Folks: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1903).

<sup>2</sup> Sam Hose was also known, and referred to in sources, as Sam Holt, Samuel "Thomas" Wilkes, and Tom Wilkes.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Goldstone, *Inherently Unequal: The Betrayal of Equal Rights by the Supreme Court, 1865-1903* (New York: Walker Publishing Company, 2011), 1-8; Phillip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002), 3-7.

was doing.” Du Bois promptly re-centered his scholarly life, focusing on how to counteract lynching and other violent threats to black life.<sup>4</sup>

The study of lynching has developed steadily since the late nineteenth century, when African American scholars like Du Bois and his contemporary, journalist Ida. B. Wells, began investigating and publicly demanding an end to this phenomenon of informal, extralegal killing of men, women, and children for allegedly harming a white person or violating some racialized code of behavior.<sup>5</sup> Until the 1980s, lynching scholarship tended to follow the activism of black leaders in its call for protection and justice for African Americans. By the last decades of the twentieth century, however, historians of community studies, gender, sexuality, and African American studies began to probe the broader causes and significance of lynching in American history. Scholars continued to unpack the cultural meanings of lynching in the twenty-first century, paying particular attention to themes of religion, black resistance, global perspectives, and memory. They also moved beyond focusing strictly on black southerners, the most commonly victimized population, to include blacks from different parts of the country as well as members of other racial and ethnic groups who were lynched. Early 21st century scholars are joining ranks with political leaders to answer the question of how to publicly memorialize victims of racial terror and teach about lynching in their cities and towns.<sup>6</sup>

### **African American Activism and Early Lynching Scholarship**

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<sup>4</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 67; David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868–1919* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), 226-227.

<sup>5</sup> Wells changed her surname to Wells-Barnett in 1895, after marrying Ferdinand Barnett. Significantly, the scholarly meaning of the term “lynching” has shifted subtly over time, as William Carrigan has shown in an important 2017 essay, “The Strange Career of Judge Lynch: Why the Study of Lynching Needs to be Refocused on the Mid-Nineteenth Century.” This essay both builds on and extends his definition of lynching. For Carrigan, a lynching occurred when one of the following conditions must be met. We quote in full: “first, the viewing of the execution by spectators who either stand aside or actively support the actions of the murderers; second, the discovery of a hanged body in a public space; third, the discovery of a mutilated corpse in a public place; fourth, a murder accompanied by a broadly aimed public defense that justifies the killing on the basis of the alleged actions (murder, sexual assault, violation of social mores); fifth, the participation of a large group of people in the killing, such as the shooting of an individual by a group of twenty or more persons; sixth, the failure of local authorities to even investigate the circumstances of the murder; seventh, an individual murdered while in the custody of local authorities, that is, while lodged in jail, after capture by posse, et cetera; and, finally, the public complicity of local authorities in the murder, such as endorsing mob action or aiding and abetting murderers by providing access to prisoners.” To this list, however, we would add the intentional forgetting and erasing of the lynching from subsequent public histories of the locale and region; or the precise opposite – the use of the lynching to publicly celebrate and reify white supremacy in these histories. William E. Carrigan “The Strange Career of Judge Lynch: Why the Study of Lynching Needs to be Refocused on the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, vol. 7 no. 2, 2017, p. 293-312.

<sup>6</sup> The best overall summary of the literature, though slightly dated at this point, is Michael Pfeifer, “At the Hands of Parties Unknown? The State of the Field of Lynching Scholarship,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 101, Issue 3 (December 2014): 832-846. More recent, though with a heavy sociological focus, is Charles Seguin and David Rigby, “National Crimes: A New National Set of Data Set of Lynchings in the United States, 1883 to 1941,” *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, May 6, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2378023119841780>.

Du Bois' anti-lynching writing and activism built on the pioneering work of Ida B. Wells. In March 1892, Wells was already a journalist prominent in the South, well-known for suing the Chesapeake, Ohio, and Southwestern Railroad Company in 1884 after it forced her to sit in a segregated passenger car. That same month three black men were lynched in Memphis, including her close friend Thomas Moss, whose first child was her godchild. They were killed because their grocery store supposedly threatened the viability of a nearby competitor owned by a white man. These deaths shook Wells and moved her to dedicate herself to put an end to lynching. Across the pages of the *Memphis Free Speech and Headlight*, a black weekly that Wells co-owned and edited, and through several pamphlets, she painstakingly documented the history of the lynching of black citizens and decried it as a travesty of justice. Her published works, especially *Southern Horror: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (1892), *The Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States* (1895), and *Mob Rule in New Orleans: Robert Charles and His Fight to Death, The Story of His Life, Burning Human Beings Alive, Other Lynching Statistics* (1900), prefaced modern scholarship on lynching by illuminating the fantastical nature of the crimes that black men were lynched for, especially the raping of a white women.<sup>7</sup>

Supporting Du Bois and Wells were an array of black institutions. Wells herself co-founded the National Association of Colored Women in 1896. It claimed over 100,000 members within a decade and publicly denounced lynching.<sup>8</sup> The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), organized in 1909, reported widely on lynching through its monthly, *The Crisis*, whose first editor was Du Bois. In the June 1916 edition, it famously carried a story about the lynching of Jesse Washington in Waco, Texas, and boldly included graphic images of his execution. To memorialize this and many other lynchings, the NAACP steadily flew a flag outside of its New York City office emblazoned with the message, "A Man Was Lynched Yesterday." It also issued pamphlets, such as *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1869-1918*, and campaigned aggressively but ultimately unsuccessfully for passage of the Dyer Bill, the anti-lynching bill introduced to Congress in 1918.<sup>9</sup> The Anti-Lynching Crusaders, a

<sup>7</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (New York: New York Age Print, 1892); Wells, *The Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States* (Chicago: Donohue & Henneberry, 1895); and Wells, *Mob Rule in New Orleans: Robert Charles and His Fight to Death, The Story of His Life, Burning Human Beings Alive, Other Lynching Statistics* (Chicago: N.P., 1900). For a broad collection of Wells' writings, see *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900*, Jacqueline Jones Royster, ed. (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), 2. For scholarly treatments of Wells' life, see Patricia Schecter, *Ida B. Wells and American Reform, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Paula J. Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions: Ida B. Wells and the Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Harper Collingsns, 2009); James West Davidson, *'They say': Ida B. Wells and the Reconstruction of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) and Angela D. Sims, *Ethical Complications of Lynching: Ida B. Wells's Interrogation of American Terror* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010); and Sarah L. Silkey, *Black Woman Reformer: Ida B. Wells, Lynching, and Transatlantic Activism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Raymond Gavins, "National Association of Colored Women (NACW)," *The Cambridge Guide to African American History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 208-209.

<sup>9</sup>For the specific article about the lynching of Jesse Washington, see [https://www.naacp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/NAACP\\_anti\\_lynch.pdf](https://www.naacp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/NAACP_anti_lynch.pdf) and <https://timeline.com/the-crisis-waco-naacp-anti-lynching-b9d235f11aa2>. See also *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1869-1918* (New York: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1919), <https://archive.org/details/thirtyyearsoflyn00nati/page/n2>. Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980).



scion of the NAACP, run by a group of black women, raised money to combat lynching and telling of its brutality.<sup>10</sup> Bolstering the work of the NAACP and the Anti-Lynching Crusaders was the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, which chronicled lynchings on a state-by-state level. Under the leadership of Monroe Work, who in 1908 founded the Institute's Department of Records and Research, it presented a study of lynching in Alabama to the state's Department of Archives and History in 1921.<sup>11</sup> Work was among the most important compilers of lynching statistics during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> Black newspapers helped keep lynching in the public eye as well. *The Chicago Defender*, founded in 1905, published monthly and sometimes weekly tallies of lynching victims accompanied by editorials demanding protection and justice for black Americans.<sup>13</sup> Joining it was the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Baltimore Afro-American*, and the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*.<sup>14</sup> After observing a triple lynching in Aiken, South Carolina, in 1926, White wrote *Rope and Faggot*, which openly detailed the killing and mocked the notion that black men were raping white women and needed to be lynched to keep white society "pure." The book came out in 1929, the same year White assumed the top post in the NAACP.<sup>15</sup>

Inspired by the work of these black scholars, activists, and institutions was a small wave of social scientists who tended to follow two analytical pathways. First, they treated lynching as a window onto the peculiar construction of southern society and often tied it to problems in local economies. In *The Tragedy of Lynching* (1933), Arthur Franklin Raper headed a national study of 20 lynchings in southern cities and towns. He pointed out that many occurred where economic stress was high, public schooling poor, and law enforcement inadequate.<sup>16</sup> Writing four years later, John Dollard, an American psychologist, closely examined Indianola, Mississippi. In *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, he suggested that southern communities were composed of different classes and castes of people whose social position reflected their race, gender, wealth, and political power. Violence often erupted when individuals challenged these boundaries. When blacks, who almost always were in the lowest caste, challenged their powerlessness by, say, bucking the crop lien system, they risked being lynched. Similarly, whites sometimes turned to lynching as a public means of forcing blacks to accept their lowly status during times of economic downturn.<sup>17</sup> In 1946, Carl Iver Hovland and Robert R. Sears published "Minor Studies of Aggression: VI Correlation of Lynchings with the Economic Indices" in the *Journal of*

<sup>10</sup> Gerda Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972, reprint 1973), 211-12; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 165-66.

<sup>11</sup> The original document is found <http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/ref/collection/voices/id/2516>.

<sup>12</sup> Jessie P. Guzman, "Monroe Nathan Work and his Contributions: Background and Preparation for Life's Career," *Journal of Negro History* 34 (October 1949): 428-61.

<sup>13</sup> James Grossman, "'Blowing the Trumpet': The *Chicago Defender* and Black Migration during World War I," Vol. 78, No. 2, *Illinois Historical Journal* (Summer, 1985): 82-96; and Ethan Michaeli, "Bound for the Promised Land," *The Atlantic Monthly* (January 11, 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/01/chicago-defender/422583/>.

<sup>14</sup> Richard M. Perloff, "The Press and the Lynching of African Americans," *The Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 30, N. 3 (Jan. 2000): 315-330.

<sup>15</sup> Walter White, *Rope and the Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (New York: Knopf, 1929).

<sup>16</sup> Arthur Franklin Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933). See also James Elbert Cutler, *Lynch Law: An Investigation into the History of Lynching in the United States* (New York: Longman, Green, and Company, 1905); and Frank Shay, *Judge Lynch: His First 100 Years* (New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1933, 1969).

<sup>17</sup> John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938).

*Abnormal and Social Psychology*. They tied rises in the number of lynchings in a specific area directly to failing economies. White men, when their livelihood foundered, lost a sense of dignity and control over their local environments. Such men turned to racial violence as a way to reassert their power and rebuild their identity.<sup>18</sup> The second, later pathway was to treat lynching as symptomatic of a psyche of violence deeply embedded in Americans' national character. These scholars, writing in the Vietnam and post-Vietnam era, viewed the prevalence of lynching as one of several powerful reasons helping to explain the white public's historically violent reaction to civil rights change and challenge.<sup>19</sup>

Despite these notable exceptions, the professional study of the New South from the 1890s until the 1970s typically did not concentrate on lynching. Perhaps the best example of this lack of sustained attention is found in the work of C. Vann Woodward, the dean of New South scholarship and advisor to dozens of doctoral students during the mid-twentieth century. He devoted but a few lines to the phenomenon of lynching in his 1951 magisterial work, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*. While Woodward was remarkably sensitive to how tensions of class and capital and, to a lesser extent, racial identity shaped the region, he was little interested in the ways in which racial violence and its legacies also influenced the making of the modern South. Indeed, it was not until the 1980s that modern scholars linked lynching to the development of southern society after the Civil War.<sup>20</sup>

### **Broadening the Study of Lynching**

Building on the work of scholars in the 1930s who studied the communities in which lynchings occurred, historians beginning in the 1980s examined in unprecedented detail the texture of the local social relationships surrounding lynching cases. In his 1982 book, *Anatomy of a Lynching: The Killing of Claude Neal*, James R. McGovern interviewed black and white people who remembered the well-organized mob kidnapping and torturing to death of Claude Neal in Jackson County, Florida, in 1934. He showed that Neal's lynching was a product of an unstable local government, rampant racism, and economic uncertainty.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Howard Smead, in his 1986 book, *Blood Justice: The Lynching of Mack Charles Parker*, patiently reconstructed the 1959 lynching of Mack Charles Parker in Poplarville, Mississippi. He rooted Parker's execution in a toxic brew of racism and xenophobia by whites, especially distrust of the federal government.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Carl Iver Hovland, and Robert R. Sears. "Minor Studies of Aggression: VI Correlation of Lynchings with the Economic Indices," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 41 (1946): 154-65.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973). See also his follow up, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York: Atheneum, 1985); and Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

<sup>20</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951). See also W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Conclusion: Reflections on Lynching Scholarship," in *Lynching Reconsidered: New Perspectives in the Study of Mob Violence*, ed., William D. Carrigan (New York: Routledge, 2008): 208-218.

<sup>21</sup> James R. McGovern, *Anatomy of a Lynching: The Killing of Claude Neal* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> Howard Smead, *Blood Justice: The Lynching of Mack Charles Parker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). See also George Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings"* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990).

In *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (1993), W. Fitzhugh Brundage studied hundreds of local lynchings to show a variety of reasons for the killings. In Virginia, the southern state with the least amount of recorded lynchings (84), the structure of state politics limited public violence. In contrast, Georgia, the state with the second largest number of recorded lynchings (589, to Mississippi, 654), rampant violence was a product of virulent race relations and an economy highly dependent on inexpensive and servile black labor. Brundage reveals that Virginia's white population had much stronger anti-lynching sentiment and believed that lynching would only worsen race relations and undercut law and order. Georgia, on the other hand, saw lynching as a way to offset the poor and ineffective criminal justice system. Whereas Virginia passed an anti-lynching law in 1928, Georgia continued this practice until religious and civil leaders denounced the act as against the laws of God and humanity.<sup>23</sup>

Other historians of this era adopted a regional perspective in their respective analyses of racial violence. Canvassing all of the former Confederate states in his 1986 book, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South*, Edward Ayers revealed that lynchings took place most frequently in rural areas with rapidly increasing numbers of black migrants and an ineffectual police presence. The power of white men to lynch blacks, he argued, was also a tool to reinforce their social position and honor at times of economic uncertainty.<sup>24</sup> Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, in the most comprehensive study of its time, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings* (1995), concluded that lynchings rose as white confidence in the economy dove and had little to do with the quality of law enforcement. Low levels of lynching correlated with a strong local economy and fighting among and between whites for control over local or state politics.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993). On lynching statistics, see also Equal Justice Initiative, "Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror," EJI online, 3d Ed., 2017, <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/report/>.

<sup>24</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>25</sup> E.M. Beck and Stewart E. Tolnay, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995). For other sociological studies of southern lynching, see also E. M. Beck and Stewart E. Tolnay, "The Killing Fields of the Deep South: The Market for Cotton and the Lynching of Blacks, 1882-1930," *American Sociological Review* Vol. 55, No. 4 (1990): 526-39; Sarah A. Soule, "Populism and Black Lynching in Georgia, 1890-1900," *Social Forces* Vol. 71, No. 2 (1992): 431-49; Stewart E. Tolnay, Glenn Deane, and E. M. Beck, "Vicarious Violence: Spatial Effects on Southern Lynchings, 1890-1919," *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 102, No. 3 (1996): 788-815; Katherine Stovel, "Local Sequential Patterns: The Structure of Lynching in the Deep South, 1882-1930," *Social Forces* Vol. 79 No. 3(2001): 843-80; Steven F. Messner, Robert D. Baller, and Matthew P. Zevenbergen, "The Legacy of Lynching and Southern Homicide," *American Sociological Review* Vol. 70, No. 4 (2005): 633-55; Roberto, Franzosi, Gianluca De Fazio, and Stefania Vicari, "Ways of Measuring Agency: An Application of Quantitative Narrative Analysis to Lynchings in Georgia (1875-1930)," *Sociological Methodology* Vol. 42, No. 1(2012): 1-42; Heather A. O'Connell, "The Impact of Slavery on Racial Inequality in Poverty in the Contemporary U.S. South," *Social Forces* Vol. 90 No. 3(2012): 713-34; E. M. Beck, "Judge Lynch Denied: Combating Mob Violence in the American South, 1877-1950," *Southern Cultures* Vol. 21, No. 2 (2015): 117-39; Kinga Makovi, Ryan Hagen, and Peter Bearman, "The Course of Law: State Intervention in Southern Lynch Mob Violence 1882-1930," *Sociological Science* Vol. 3 (2016): 860-88; Mattias Smångs, "Doing Violence, Making Race: Southern Lynching and White Racial Group Formation," *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 121, No. 5 (2016): 1329-74; and Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, "'Racialized Terrorism' in the American South: Do Completed Lynchings Tell an Accurate Story?" *Social Science History* Vol. 42, No. 4 (2018): 677-701.

The late 20th century saw the start of a new type of lynching scholarship that focused heavily on the relationship between gender, sexuality, and violence. It built directly on the observations of earlier writers, especially Ida B. Wells, who almost a century before had pointed out that whites lynched black men out of an absurd apprehension that they were sexual predators lusting after white women.<sup>26</sup> Another foundational scholar was W. J. Cash. In his 1929 book, *The Mind of the South*, he theorized that racial violence in the South after the Civil War reflected a white people's fascination with the "rape complex," or their unbending conviction that black men naturally lusted after white women. As part of the rape complex, lynching was a tool to punish black sexual assailants and deter others who would do the same.<sup>27</sup>

Building on Wells and Cash, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, in her 1979 study of white anti-lynching southern activist Jesse Daniel Ames, *Revolt Against Chivalry*, showed that any rationale for lynching a black man that rested on a charge that he raped a white woman was almost certainly false and reflected an unstable popular alchemy of racism and sexism. Such a justification by white men, she argued, was actually an attempt to police interracial relationships and reinforce their own patriarchy, by which she meant forcing white women to respect their rules of social order.<sup>28</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown expanded on Hall's argument by stressing that white men operated within powerful cultural norms of honor that included striking out at threats to their cultural and sexual control over white women. In *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (1982), he demonstrates how white men would lynch black men suspected of any kind of relationship with white women, sexual or platonic, as a way to preserve their honor.<sup>29</sup> Two years later, Joel Williamson, in *Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*, posited that white men lynched black men as a way to reassert economic dominance over them lost after slavery and during the depression of the 1890s. Suffering as well from an irrational fear of black men's sexual prowess and limitless sexual appetite, they developed the idea of the "black beast rapist" as an acceptable reason to lynch black men and calm their anxieties.<sup>30</sup>

Blending the newer stress on in-depth community studies, on the one hand, with gender, on the other, Glenda Gilmore explored the overlapping and shifting roles of white men, white women, black men, and black women in the fight for equality in North Carolina at the turn of the twentieth century. In her 1996 book, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, she finds that white men were scared of losing political control over the state legislature and local town governments so long as black men

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<sup>26</sup> Wells-Barnett, *Southern Horrors*; Wells-Barnett, *The Red Record*; and Wells-Barnett, *Mob Rule in New Orleans: Robert Charles and His Fight to Death, The Story of His Life, Burning Human Beings Alive, Other Lynching Statistics*, (N.P., 1900). For all three pamphlets collected in one modern volume see Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *On Lynching*, (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Knopf, 1929), 117-118. While Cash sometimes portrayed black people in negative terms that modern scholars would reject, his view on the rape complex was insightful. See also Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 148 (1905), 1733-1735; Frank Tannenbaum, *The Darker Phases of the South* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1924); White, *Rope and the Faggot*; and Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream*, (New York: W.W. Newton & Company, 1949).

<sup>28</sup> Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry*.

<sup>29</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

<sup>30</sup> Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).



could vote. To foment white support to disenfranchise black men, they successfully portrayed black men as creatures of ill-discipline and unrestrained passion who could not be trusted at the ballot box. Specifically, they planted and publicized news stories about black men as perpetually lustful of white women, if not outright rapists of them, which led to their lynching. Gilmore also illuminated how elite black women organized to blunt these attacks on black society, at times finding allies among elite white women intent on eliminating racial violence as part of a broader vision to build a more just and Christian society.<sup>31</sup>

Like Gilmore, Lisa Lindquist Dorr highlighted how lynching culture reflected intricate and often surprising connections between gender and race. In *White Women, Rape, and the Power of Race in Virginia, 1900-1960* (2004), she showed that not every white woman who claimed she was raped was believed. Poorer white women were less likely to be taken seriously. Furthermore, black men accused of raping a white woman sometimes avoided death if they had a trial, and the judge determined a white man had been present at the time of the supposed assault -- believing that no white man would ever permit such an act to occur.<sup>32</sup> Dorr's work reminds us that white supremacy and the politics of lynching differed by locale and often pivoted on prevailing ideas of respectability and gender.<sup>33</sup>

In one of the most original studies of gender and lynching in recent years, Crystal Feimster, in *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (2009), compared how the politics of lynching operated in black and white society simultaneously. She investigated Ida B. Wells, the black anti-lynching advocate, alongside her white contemporary, Rebecca Felton, who exhorted white men to lynch black men accused of raping white women as a means to prove and protect their manhood and honor the white race. Feimster discovered that, despite their profound ideological differences, Wells and Felton framed lynching as a social issue central to accomplishing their goals of greater sexual protection and political empowerment. In the case of Wells, only the eradication of lynching promised the fulfillment of these goals for blacks; for

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<sup>31</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>32</sup> Lisa Lindquist Dorr, *White Women, Rape, and the Power of Race in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> For more studies exploring the links between gender, race, and lynching and gender, see also Robyn Wiegman, "The Anatomy of Lynching," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3 (1993): 445-67; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Mind That Burns in Each Body: Women, Rape, and Racial Violence," in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983): 328-49; Laura Edwards, *Gendered Strife & Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Lisa Cardyn, "Sexualized Racism/Gendered Violence: Outraging the Body Politic in the Reconstruction South," *Michigan Law Review* 100, no. 4 (2002): 675-867; Nell Irvin Painter, *Southern History Across the Color Line* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Laura F. Edwards, "The People's Sovereignty and the Law: Defining Gender, Race, and Class Differences in the Antebellum South," in *Beyond Black and White: Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the US South and Southwest*, eds. Stephanie Cole and Alison Parker (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2004); Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street Black Women, Rape, and Resistance: A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York, NY Vintage Books, 2010); and Kerry Segrave,  *Lynchings of Women in the United State: The Recorded Cases, 1851-1946* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2010).

Felton, it was the opposite -- the safety of white women and extension of their social position depended on maintaining lynching.<sup>34</sup>

Part of the value of Feimster's work is her focus on women themselves. She documents the lynching of about 130 black women and 36 white women between 1880 and 1930. Black women were killed on suspicion of murder of whites, especially by poison. White women faced death if accused of murder of a white person as well, but also for infidelity. These killings make clear that women of either race who challenged white supremacy and white male sexual patriarchy could also be lynched. Feimster further sheds light on the role that white women directly played in establishing the public rituals and meaning of lynching. White women supposedly raped by black men were sometimes permitted to select how the assailant would be punished and often joined in the bloodletting, even shooting and mutilating the bodies. Their actions, far from earning them public scorn, actually garnered acclaim for helping to protect the white race.<sup>35</sup>

While some of the most important recent works on lynching have stressed themes of gender and sexuality, the intersection of racial violence and religion has also been a productive line of inquiry. The powerful role that faith among white Christians played in shoring up public support for the lynching of black Americans was not lost on Walter White, the executive secretary of the NAACP from 1929 to 1955. He opened the third chapter of his 1929 study of lynching, *Rope and the Faggot*, by declaring that "It is doubtful if lynching could possibly exist under any other religion than Christianity."<sup>36</sup> White was among the first to recognize that white churches' cozy embrace of white supremacy and their failure to vigorously oppose lynching gave a moral veneer to racial violence. More specifically, the Baptist, Methodist, Holiness, and Pentecostal embrace of patriarchal gender relations implicitly reinforced the need for white men to aggressively police the social and sexual behavior of their wives and daughters, especially regarding interracial relationships. Their strong sense of the bitter battle between good and evil in the world, moreover, prepared them to act swiftly and violently when they perceived any violation of their moral codes. More recently, Donald Matthews, in *At the Altar of Lynching: Burning Sam Hose in the American South* (2018), has pointed out that white Christian support of lynching reflected their intertwining of religious and racial prescriptions and the creation of a culture of heightened moral surveillance that sanctioned killing those accused of committing grievous sin.<sup>37</sup> To be

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<sup>34</sup> Crystal Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009). See also Julie Buckner Armstrong, *Mary Turner and the Memory of Lynching* (London: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching*.

<sup>36</sup> White, *Rope and the Faggot*, 40.

<sup>37</sup> Donald G. Matthews, *At the Altar of Lynching: Burning Sam Hose in the American South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018). For more on southern Protestants and racial terror, see Robert Moats Miller, "The Protestant Churches and Lynching, 1919-1939," *The Journal of Negro History* 42, no. 2 (1957): 118-31; Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Ida E. Jones, "Contacts without Fellowship: Lynching, the Bible and the Christian Community," *Black History Bulletin* 65/66 (2002): 48-55; Amy Kate Bailey, and Karen A. Snedker, "Practicing What They Preach? Lynching and Religion in the American South, 1890-1929," *American Journal of Sociology* 117, no. 3 (2011): 844-87; Carolyn Renée Dupont, *Mississippi Praying: Southern White Evangelicals and the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1975* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); and Jamelle Bouie, "Christian Soldiers," *Slate*, February 10, 2015, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2015/02/jim-crow-souths-lynching-of-blacks-and-christianity-the-terror-inflicted-by-whites-was-considered-a-religious-ritual.html>.

sure, not every white church refused to speak out against lynching, as Aaron Griffith acknowledges in “‘The Real Victim of Lynch Law Is the Government’: American Protestant Anti-Lynching Advocacy and the Making of Law and Order” (2019). A few took up the charge, while others opposed lynching on the grounds that it promoted greater respect for the rule of law.<sup>38</sup> Yet as late as 1959, less than two dozen of the South’s over 100,000 white churches had any black members.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to spotlighting how the role of white supremacy operating within white Christianity contributed to the lynching of African Americans, White also mentioned, albeit briefly, how it also facilitated the killing of Jews.<sup>40</sup> In the most notorious case of anti-Semitism leading to public execution, Leo Frank, the Jewish superintendent of the National Pencil Company in Atlanta, was lynched on August 8, 1915, for allegedly murdering an employee, thirteen-year-old Mary Phagan. A mob of white men broke Frank out of the state prison in Milledgeville, dragged him to Phagan’s hometown of Marietta, and hanged him. Leonard Dinnerstein, Alan M. Dershowitz, Nancy MacLean, and Steven Oney have painstakingly reconstructed the life and death of Frank, shining a light on the often-overlooked factor of anti-Semitism in lynching history.<sup>41</sup>

While some white Christians could both justify and support lynching, black Christians turned to religion for solace and inspiration during moments of racial violence. As historically been the case, they found in their faith resources to draw meaning from their experience with suffering and oppression.<sup>42</sup> The topic of lynching and black religion, though, has not attracted much scholarship. An important exception is James Cone. In *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (2011), he demonstrates how black clerics refigured the social meaning of the lynching tree. Making it more than merely a site of torture and death for African Americans, Cone instead makes it a symbol of black martyrdom, resurrection, and the promise of salvation. Cone himself drew inspiration from earlier black ministers and artists, who drew close parallels between lynching and the crucifixion of Christ to turn black victims into martyrs for freedom.<sup>43</sup> For example,

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<sup>38</sup> Aaron Griffith, “‘The Real Victim of Lynch Law Is the Government’: American Protestant Anti-Lynching Advocacy and the Making of Law and Order” (2018) *Religions* 2019, 10(2), 116, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10020116>.

<sup>39</sup> Equal Justice Initiative, “Racial Segregation in Church,” EJI online, 2016, <https://eji.org/news/history-racial-injustice-racial-segregation-in-church/>.

<sup>40</sup> White, *Rope and the Faggot*, 46.

<sup>41</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein and Alan M. Dershowitz, *The Leo Frank Case* (Birmingham: Notable Trials Library, 1991); Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Nancy MacLean, “Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Lynching: The Leo Frank Case Revisited,” in *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997); and Steve Oney, *And the Dead Shall Rise: The Murder of Mary Phagan and the Lynching of Leo Frank* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004). More broadly on the theme of antisemitism and racial violence, see Melissa Fay Greene, *The Temple Bombing* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1996).

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South, 1865 – 1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); and John M. Giggie, *After Redemption: Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta, 1877-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>43</sup> James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011). See also Langston Hughes, *The Negro Mother and Other Dramatic Monologues* (New York: Golden Stair Press, 1932); James H. Smylie, “Countee

Countee Cullen, in his 1922 poem, “Christ Recrucified,” argued that the lynched black body was an embodiment of Jesus' body on the cross.

The South is crucifying Christ again  
By all the laws of ancient rote and rule:  
The ribald cries of “Save yourself” and “fool”  
Din in his ear, the thorns grope for his brain,  
And where they bite, swift springing rivers stain  
His gaudy, purple robe of ridicule  
With sullen red; and acid wine to cool  
His thirst is thrust at him, with lurking pain.  
Christ’s awful wrong is that he’s dark of hue,  
The sin for which no blamelessness atones;  
But lest the sameness of the cross should tire,  
They kill him now with famished tongues of fire,  
And while he burns, good men, and women too,  
Shout, battling for black and brittle bones.<sup>44</sup>

Less studied than the links between lynching and religion is the complicated issue of blacks lynching blacks. This phenomenon was historically far less prevalent than the lynching of blacks by whites. E. M. Beck and Stewart E. Tolnay, in their 1997 article, “When Race Didn’t Matter: Black and White Mob Violence Against their Own Color,” embedded the practice of same race lynchings in their understanding of popular justice, or the idea that justice could be served quickly and violently outside the normal boundaries of the law. Beck and Tolnay reveal that blacks sometimes lynched other blacks who were assumed to have harmed the black community in general or committed a heinous crime. Controversial in many black communities and never widespread, black-on-black lynching was quickly abandoned by the turn of the twentieth century as black citizens saw that whites were lynching increasing numbers of blacks and advertising the murders as public statements of racial terror.<sup>45</sup>

Like Beck and Tolnay, Karlos Hill also investigates black-on-black vigilantism. In *Beyond the Rope: The Impact of Lynching on Black Culture and Memory* (2016), he shows that African Americans were responsible for the lynching of up to 148 black people between 1882 and 1930 in the Arkansas and Mississippi Delta regions. They turned to lynching as a tool to police and punish black criminals after growing frustrated that the justice system failed to investigate and penalize them in ways they deemed appropriate. Significantly, most of these black-on-black lynchings were committed before 1890, after which local black leaders roundly denounced the practice out of a fear that it would encourage white-on-black lynchings and support the popular notion among whites that black men deserved to be killed in this manner because of their natural

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Cullen’s ‘The Black Christ,’” *Theology Today*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (July 1981): 160-65; and James E. Andrews, “Burnt Offering,” *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1939): 84.

<sup>44</sup> Countee Cullen, “Christ Recrucified,” *Kelley’s Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (October 1922): 13.

<sup>45</sup> E.M. Beck and Stewart E. Tolnay, “When Race Didn’t Matter: Black and White Mob Violence Against their Own Color” in *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South*, edited by W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1997). On popular justice, see also Samuel Walker, *Popular Justice: A History of American Criminal Justice* (London: Oxford University Press, 1998), and Manfred Berg, *Popular Justice: A History of Lynching in America* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Incorporated, 2015).



criminality. Fueling the reversal as well was a grim realization that the number of white-on-black lynchings was rising steeply.<sup>46</sup>

## Anti-Lynching Activity

African Americans always fought back against lynching, as the lives of Du Bois and Wells as well as the work of the NAACP attest to. Yet as Kidada E. Williams observes, too often contemporary scholars focus too much on the sociological reasons for lynching or tracking down the exact number of victims and neglect to fully explore the human cost to black society or how blacks themselves fought back. Williams, along with Rebecca Hill, Christopher Waldrep, Terrence Finnegan, and Brent Campney, study how black citizens employed a wide range of tactics to combat racial violence. These include organizing, physically protecting themselves against would-be killers, decrying the violence in newspapers, pamphlets, books, and through the media, forming interracial political alliances with sympathetic whites, and advocating for legal changes at the local, state, and federal levels.<sup>47</sup> Blacks often organized peaceful public protests. Anti-lynching activists like Daisy Lampkin were crucial to organizations like the NAACP, fundraising and scheduling marches.<sup>48</sup> In 1917, nearly 10,000 blacks walked without speaking in the New York Silent Protest, a response to race riots and ongoing lynchings in America.<sup>49</sup> In 1934 in Washington, DC, when the Attorney General's National Crime Conference refused to address the issue of lynching in America, 70 Howard University students wore nooses around their necks and silently lined the sidewalk where members walked to meetings. It forced a public resolution which read, "That the conference condemns the use of methods of dealing with industrial conflicts and racial antagonisms which are not in accord with orderly and lawful procedures and urges the administration of all phases of public safety by legally constituted law enforcement agencies only."<sup>50</sup> Not every means of resistance stopped acts of racial terror; however, they collectively portray the steady efforts of blacks to aggressively protect their lives and demand protection and justice -- acts that limited the frequency of lynching and then stopped it.

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<sup>46</sup> Karlos K. Hill, *Beyond the Rope: The Impact of Lynching on Black Culture and Memory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>47</sup> Kidada E. Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Rebecca Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law: Anti-lynching and Labor Defense in U.S. Radical History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Christopher Waldrep, *African Americans Confront Lynching: Strategies of Resistance from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Era* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009); Terrence Finnegan, *A Deed So Accursed: Lynching in Mississippi and South Carolina, 1881-1940* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013); and Brent M. S. Campney, *This Is Not Dixie: Racist Violence in Kansas, 1861-1927* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018).

<sup>48</sup> Casey Nichols, "Daisy Lampkin (1884-1965)," October 2007, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/lampkin-daisy-1884-1964/>. Also see "Anti-Lynching Button Sale Sweeps the Country," *The Crisis* (February 1937), 52.

<sup>49</sup> "Silent Protest Parade Centennial," <https://www.naacp.org/silent-protest-parade-centennial/>.

<sup>50</sup> *Resolution The Proceedings of the Attorney General's Conference on Crime Held December 10-13, 1934 in Memorial Continental Hall Washington D.C.* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Prisons, Department of Justice, 1936), 452. Chad L. Williams, in *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), documents black soldiers demonstrating against lynching during the World War I era. And Eben Miller, in *Born Along the Color Line: The 1933 America Conference and the Rise of a National Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), reveals blacks scheduling antilynching protests during the early 1930s).

The drive to end lynching and to accurately represent its horrors was also a cause taken up by black artists of the day. Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, and Countee Cullen famously penned poems and stories to dramatize the place and cost of lynching in American and African American society. McKay, in this excerpt from his 1922 poem, “The Lynching,” evokes the cost of these murders to black families.

His spirit is smoke ascended to high heaven.  
His father, by the cruelest way of pain,  
Had bidden him to his bosom once again;  
The awful sin remained still unforgiven.  
All night a bright and solitary star  
(Perchance the one that ever guided him,  
Yet gave him up at last to Fate's wild whim)  
Hung pitifully o'er the swinging char.  
Day dawned, and soon the mixed crowds came to view  
The ghastly body swaying in the sun:  
The women thronged to look, but never a one  
Showed sorrow in her eyes of steely blue;  
And little lads, lynchers that were to be,  
Danced round the dreadful thing in fiendish glee.<sup>51</sup>

Jason W. Miller discusses, specifically, the impact of Langston Hughes on the anti-lynching movement in *Langston Hughes and American Lynching Culture* (2011).<sup>52</sup> Taking a broader approach, Koritha Ann Mitchell, in *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (2017), studies the plays and other dramas black Americans invented and performed to cope with racial terror. By staging these cultural acts, they undercut white supremacy by portraying themselves as intelligent, disciplined, and loving human beings and publicly testifying to the evils of racism.<sup>53</sup>

Black poetry, short stories, plays, and dramas, when viewed collectively, present a sustained effort to combat popular memories of lynching circulating within white communities. This fight was particularly pronounced over the use of lynching photographs, as historians have recently discovered. In the *Red Record*, for example, Ida B. Wells included a copy of the gruesome photograph of Ray Porter after he was hanged and riddled with bullets in Clanton, Alabama, on August 21, 1891.<sup>54</sup> Along with other black scholars and the NAACP, she published this and other horrific photos not only to call attention to the depravity of the murders and the humanity of the

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<sup>51</sup> Claude McKay, “The Lynching” in *Harlem Shadows* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1922).

<sup>52</sup> W. Jason Miller, *Langston Hughes and American Lynching Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011). For more studies of literature and lynching, see Trudier Harris, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Sandra Gunning, *Race, Rape, and Lynching: The Red Record of American Literature, 1890-1912* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Bruce E. Baker, “North Carolina Lynching Ballads” in *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

<sup>53</sup> Koritha Ann Mitchell, *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017). See also Hill, *Beyond the Rope*.

<sup>54</sup> Wells, *Red Record*, 125.

victims but also to attempt to counter the widespread reproduction and distribution of them by whites. Indeed, the circulation of photographs of lynching victims by whites was part of the intensely public and “spectacle” nature of the murders themselves. Turning these visuals into coasters, letterheads, and postcards, whites exchanged them as gifts, tchotchkes, and keepsakes and even penned personal notes on them before mailing them to loved ones. As Amy Wood brilliantly argues in *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (2008), whites’ public consumption of these images was another ritual of racial violence intended to enhance their social dominance.<sup>55</sup> Nailing them to the walls of their homes and passing them down to their children and grandchildren, whites memorialized lynchings as symbols of white supremacy that lasted for generations. Following Wood’s lead, Julie Buckner Armstrong and Jacqueline Goldsby stressed how this culture of lynching remembrance burnished racial hierarchy and taught whites about the righteousness of their violence and their freedom from legal recrimination when committing it. At the same time, it bequeathed a legacy of racial terror to blacks.<sup>56</sup>

## Beyond African Americans in the South

At the turn of the twenty-first century, scholars slowly began to study lynching outside of the South and across all of American history.<sup>57</sup> They built on work by Dennis B. Downey and Raymond M. Hyser, who, in *No Crooked Death: Coatesville, Pennsylvania, and the Lynching of*

<sup>55</sup> Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). Wood built on the work of Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob* (London: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2004); and Jonathan Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching: Racial Violence and Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004). On the theme of lynching, photography, and intergenerational memory, see also Sandy Alexandre, *The Properties of Violence: Claims to Ownership in Representations of Lynching* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012); Dora Apel and Shawn Michelle Smith, *Lynching Photographs* (University of California Press, 2007); Matthew H. Bernstein, *Screening a Lynching: The Leo Frank Case on Film and Television* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009); and James Allen, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe: Twin Palms Publishing, 2014).

<sup>56</sup> Armstrong, *Mary Turner and the Memory of Lynching*; and Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>57</sup> See also Equal Justice Initiative’s report on lynching outside the South. “Lynching in America: Outside the South More than 300 racial terror lynchings took place outside the South,”

<https://eji.org/issues/lynching-in-america-outside-the-south/>; Dominic Capeci, *The Lynching of Cleo Wright* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), Yohuru R. Williams, “Permission to Hate: Delaware, Lynching, and the Culture of Violence in America,” *Journal of Black Studies* Vol. 32, No. 1 (2001):3–29, Janice H. Barrow, “Lynching in the Mid-Atlantic, 1882–1940,” *American Nineteenth Century History* Vol. 6, No. 3 (2005):241–71, Patricia Bernstein, *The First Waco Horror: The Lynching of Jesse Washington and the Rise of the NAACP* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005), Brent Campney, “W. B. Townsend and the Struggle against Racist Violence in Leavenworth,” *Kansas History* Vol. 31, No. 4 (2008): 260–73, Robert Tórréz, *Myth of the Hanging Tree: Stories of Crime and Punishment in Territorial New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), Brent Campney, “‘Ever Since the Hanging of Oliphant’: Lynching and the Suppression of Mob Violence in Topeka, Kansas,” *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 33, No. 2 (2013):71–86, Dennis Downey, “The Delaware Horror: Two Ministers, a Lynching, and the Crisis of Democracy,” in *Lynching beyond Dixie: American Mob Violence outside the South*, edited by Pfeifer, M. J. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), Harriet C. Frazier, *Lynchings in Kansas, 1850s–1932* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2015), Monica Muñoz Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), David Rigby and Charles Seguin, “The Racial Position of European Immigrants 1883–1941: Evidence from Lynching in the Midwest,” *Social Currents* Vol. 5, No. 5 (2018): 438–57; and Brent Campney, *Hostile Heartland: Racism, Repression and Resistance in the Midwest* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019).

*Zachariah Walker* (1990), traced the public lynching of a black man, Zachariah Walker, in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, and how it sparked public revulsion that led to the state's 1923 anti-lynching law.<sup>58</sup> In 2002, Phillip Dray published *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, which drew attention to lynching in regions far removed from the South, some of which happened during the antebellum era. He argued for the persistent and powerful place of lynching in all of American history, not just southern history.<sup>59</sup> The same year Christopher Waldrep, in *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch: Extralegal Violence and Punishment in America*, investigated the origins and long history of the term "lynch" across all of American history. Beginning in the colonial era, Waldrep illuminated how, even as the term tended to connote an extralegal killing sanctioned by a community, it also took on different dimensions depending on the era. Civil rights groups and African Americans in the early and mid-twentieth century, for example, strove to define it as unjust murder and a crime of judicial failure.<sup>60</sup>

This expanded geographic focus outside of the South at times produced fresh interpretations of lynching history. In 2004, Michael Pfeifer, in *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1878-1946*, expanded Dray's work by documenting a considerable number of lynchings that occurred in the West and Midwest, but comparatively less so in the Northeast. He then broke new ground by explaining how these lynchings reflected local debates over the proper nature of criminal justice. Only when advocates of due process and state-control over punishment struck a compromise with proponents of extralegal and highly racialized killings did lynchings actually decline. This compromise heralded the development of modern capital punishment, which, while legal and ruled by the state, was still heavily racialized and brutally efficient.<sup>61</sup>

Taking a global turn, Pfeifer followed up in 2011 with *The Roots of Rough Justice: The Origins of American Lynching*, in which he expanded his earlier argument by demonstrating that lynching reflected a long history of local mastery over crime and punishment and, unlike in Europe, a national state that failed to exercise full control over violence or jurisprudence at the state and community levels.<sup>62</sup> Like Pfeifer, Robert W. Thurston, in *Lynching: American Mob Murder in Global Perspective* (2011), sought new viewpoints on America's lynching history by going outside national boundaries. He showed how United States' lynching culture was historically distinctive in that it incorporated ideas and practices of race that consistently marginalized and disempowered black citizens when other nations gradually improved their own conceptions of race which, in turn, led to less violent race relations.<sup>63</sup> Ivan Thomas Evans, in *Cultures of Violence: Racial Violence and the Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (2011), sees broad similarities between American and South Africa when studying the roots of racial violence. White leaders in both countries resorted to racial violence to

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<sup>58</sup> Dennis B. Downey and Raymond M. Hyser, *No Crooked Death: Coatesville, Pennsylvania, and the Lynching of Zachariah Walker* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

<sup>59</sup> Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*.

<sup>60</sup> Christopher Waldrep, in *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch: Extralegal Violence and Punishment in America* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002).

<sup>61</sup> Michael Pfeifer, *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1878-1946* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

<sup>62</sup> Michael J. Pfeiffer, *The Roots of Rough Justice: The Origins of American Lynching* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011). See also Samuel Walker, *Popular Justice: A History of American Criminal Justice* (London: Oxford University Press, 1998) and Berg, *Popular Justice: A History of Lynching in America*.

<sup>63</sup> Robert W. Thurston, *Lynching: American Mob Murder in Global Perspective* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011).



rule black men and women, especially for the purpose of controlling their labor and limiting their political power. But Evans also points out that the United States was distinctive in its history of lynching. South African whites depended on the national government to implement racially discriminatory laws to empower whites and protect them, while whites in the American South mistrusted the federal government and ignored any national calls for lynching reform. In the South, Evans asserts, whites looked to local governments for support in maintaining white supremacy.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, in 2015, Sarah Silkey explores the international pressure put on southern governors to reform lynching practices. In *Black Woman Reformer: Ida B. Wells, Lynching, and Transatlantic Activism*, Silkey reveals how Wells successfully lobbied British manufactures to threaten to withhold capital investment in the South unless lynching was ended. The intervention led to the increased use of police and state militias to investigate lynching cases and became a weapon used by anti-lynching activists.<sup>65</sup>

Developing the story of lynching outside of the South also brought attention to non-black victims. F. Arturo Rosales' *¡Pobre Raza! Violence, Justice, and Mobilization Among México Lindo Immigrants, 1900–1936* (1999) showed how lynching violence and white supremacy was visited upon Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the American Southwest.<sup>66</sup> The reasons for these lynchings echoed those for the lynching of blacks -- to secure control over mobility, establish racial hierarchy, and limit economic and political power. William Carrigan, in his 2004 book, *The Making of Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836–1917*, found that whites living in central Texas widely used lynching as a tool to kill and discipline a range of Americans, including Native Americans, enslaved people, free blacks, and Mexicans

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<sup>64</sup> Ivan Thomas Evans, *Cultures of Violence: Racial Violence and the Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

<sup>65</sup> Sarah Silkey, *Black Woman Reformer: Ida B. Wells, Lynching, & Transatlantic Activism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015). See also Jane M. Pederson, "Gender, Justice, and a Wisconsin Lynching, 1889–1890," *Agricultural History*, Vol. 67 (Spring 1993), 65–82, Stephen J. Leonard, *Lynching in Colorado, 1859–1919* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002), 135–42, Clive Webb, "The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South, 1886–1910," *American Nineteenth Century History*, Vol. 3 (Spring 2002), 45–76, Paul Farmer, "An Anthropology of Structural Violence," *Current Anthropology* Vol. 45 (June 2004), Angelina Snodgrass Godoy, "When 'Justice' Is Criminal: Lynchings in Contemporary Latin America," *Theory and Society*, Vol. 33 (Dec. 2004), 621–51, Christopher Krupa, "Histories in Red: Ways of Seeing Lynching in Ecuador," *American Ethnologist* Vol. 36 (February 2009), Leigh Bindford and Nancy Churchhill, "Lynching and States of Fear in Urban Mexico," *Anthropologica* Vol. 51 (2009), Christopher Krupa, "Histories in Red: Ways of Seeing Lynching in Ecuador," *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 36 (Feb. 2009), 20–39, William D. Carrigan and Christopher Waldrep, *Swift to Wrath: Lynching in Global Historical Perspective*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013), Michael J. Pfeiffer, *Global Lynching and Collective Violence: Volume 1: Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2017), and Michael J Pfeiffer, *Global Lynching and Collective Violence: Volume 2: The Americas and Europe*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

<sup>66</sup> F. Arturo Rosales, *¡Pobre Raza! Violence, Justice, and Mobilization Among México Lindo Immigrants, 1900–1936* (Austin: Austin University of Texas Press, 1999). See also Ken Gonsales-Day, *Lynching in the West, 1850–1935* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); George R. Nielsen, *Vengeance in a Small Town: The Thorndale Lynching of 1911* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, *Forgotten Dead: Mob Violence Against Mexicans in the United States, 1848–1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); and Nicholas Villanueva, *The Lynching of Mexicans at the Texas Borderlands* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2017).

during the antebellum period; emancipated blacks and carpetbaggers during Reconstruction; and African Americans and Mexican Americans during the New South era.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to Mexicans and Mexican Americans, Italians and Italian Americans also confronted lynch mobs on occasion. Most infamously, in New Orleans on March 14, 1891, eleven Italian Americans were shot to death by a rampaging white mob convinced that they had killed the local police chief. One-hundred fifty white men used a battering ram to break into the city jail and seize the suspects shortly after nine of them had been acquitted, or their cases declared mistrials. Parading them outside, they killed them in front of a crowd of thousands. As analyzed by Richard Gambino in his 1998 book, *Vendetta: The True Story of the Largest Lynching in U.S. History*, and Tom Smith in his 2007 study, *The Crescent City Lynchings: The Murder of Chief Hennessy, the New Orleans "Mafia" Trials, and the Parish Prison Mob*, this mass lynching was the product of a rising tide of anti-Italian sentiment and a public hysteria over a powerful Italian-run organized crime ring supposedly preparing to take over the city.<sup>68</sup> Other scholars, especially Patrizia Salvetti in *Rope and Soap: Lynchings of Italians in the United States* (2017), explore Italian lynchings in America as a reflection of broader currents of prejudice and discrimination.<sup>69</sup>

Asians and Asian Americans were also periodically targeted by lynch mobs, especially in the West. As chronicled by Scott Zesch and John Mack Faragher, the Chinese Massacre of 1871 in Los Angeles reflected white racial prejudice and increasing concerns over a loss of local jobs and political power to the surging numbers of Chinese immigrants. A mob of about 500 whites shot and hanged between 17 and 20 Chinese in response to a rumor that a Chinese man had fired a gun at a policeman. No one ever went to jail for the killings, and the race riot laid critical groundwork for the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.<sup>70</sup> On September 2, 1885, in Rock Springs, Wyoming, white miners murdered at least twenty-eight Chinese miners and injured fifteen more. The "Rock Spring Massacre" was also fueled by white racial hatred of the Chinese and fear that they were stealing their jobs.<sup>71</sup> Most recently, Beth Lew-Williams, in *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion and the Making of the Alien in America*, broadly surveys how white Americans in the mid- and late-nineteenth century turned to vigilantism and extralegal acts of

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<sup>67</sup> William Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1917* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

<sup>68</sup> Richard Gambino, *Vendetta: The True Story of the Largest Lynching in U.S. History* (Toronto: Guernica, 1998); and Tom Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings: The Murder of Chief Hennessy, the New Orleans "Mafia" Trials, and the Parish Prison Mob* (Guilford: Lyons Press, 2007).

<sup>69</sup> Patrizia Salvetti, *Rope and Soap: Lynchings of Italians in the United States* (New York: Bordighera Press, 2017). See also, Humbert S. Nelli, *The Business of Crime: Italians and Syndicate Crime in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Enrico Deaglio, *Storia Vera E Terribile Tra Sicilia E America* (Palermo: Sellerio editore, 2015); and Berg, *Popular Justice: A History of Lynching in America*.

<sup>70</sup> Scott Zesch, *The Chinatown War: Chinese Los Angeles and the Massacre of 1871* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); and John Mack Faragher, *Eternity Street: Violence and Justice in Frontier Los Angeles* (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 2016).

<sup>71</sup> Craig Storti, *Incident at Bitter Creek: The Story of the Rock Springs Chinese Massacre* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1991), and Stanford Lyman, "The Chinese Question and American Labor Historians," *New Politics* 4:28 (2000). See also Isaac H. Bromley, *The Chinese Massacre at Rock Springs, Wyoming Territory, September 2, 1885* (Boston: Franklin Press: Rand, Avery & Company, 1886), and Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Execution, and the making of the Alien in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

violence, including lynching, to promote immigrants controls on Chinese that ultimately resulted in a federal policy of exclusion.<sup>72</sup>

## Legacies of Lynching

The most recent turn in the study of lynching literature has focused on the long-term effects of lynching on American society, especially the modern criminal justice system, and its heavily racialized character. Research by the NAACP in 2015, for example, reveals that African Americans are incarcerated five times more than whites. Black women are imprisoned at twice the rate of white women, and black children represent more than half of all juvenile cases waived to criminal court.<sup>73</sup> Ashley Nellis, in her 2016 report, “The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Prisons,” indicates that 38% of all state prisoners across America are black and that in twelve states, the population is over 50 %. In Oklahoma, the state with the highest overall black incarceration rate, 1 of every 15 black men over the age of 18 is behind bars.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, racial bias infects death penalty cases. In the ten years after the reinstatement of the death penalty in 1976, 46 % of those sentenced to die were people of color; from January 2009 to December 2018, it was 60%.<sup>75</sup> Currently, blacks make up nearly 42% of all death row inmates.<sup>76</sup>

Seeking answers to explain the racial disparities among the imprisoned, scholars have looked back to lynching. In 2004, Michael Pfeifer, in *Rough Justice*, made a significant contribution by showing how lynchings strongly reflected local debates over the proper nature of criminal justice. Lynching only declined when advocates of due process and state-control over punishment struck a compromise with supporters of these extralegal and highly racialized killings. This compromise heralded the development of modern capital punishment, which, while legal and ruled by the state, was still heavily racialized and brutal.<sup>77</sup> Margaret Vandiver, in *Lethal Punishment: Lynchings and Legal Executions in the South* (2006), and John D. Bessler, in *Legacy of Violence: Lynch Mobs and Executions in Minnesota* (2006), illuminated in greater detail how lynching culture never completely ended and instead evolved into legal executions conducted by the state.<sup>78</sup> Most famously, Michelle Alexander, in her 2010 book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, embeds lynching and racial violence in

<sup>72</sup> Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.naACP.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/>.

<sup>74</sup> Ashley Nellis, “The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Prisons,” June 2016, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons/#1.%20Qverview>.

<sup>75</sup> Liliana Segura and Jordan Smith, “Counting the Condemned: By Any Measure, the Death Penalty is a Failed Policy, December 3, 2019, *The Intercept*, <https://theintercept.com/2019/12/03/death-penalty-capital-punishment-data/>.

<sup>76</sup> “Race and the Death Penalty by the Numbers,” Death Penalty Information Center,” July 1, 2019, <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/policy-issues/race/race-and-the-death-penalty-by-the-numbers>.

<sup>77</sup> Michael Pfeifer, *Rough Justice*.

<sup>78</sup> Margaret Vandiver, *Lethal Punishment: Lynchings and Legal Executions in the South* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006); and John D. Bessler, *Legacy of Violence: Lynch Mobs and Executions in Minnesota*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). See also David Garland, *Peculiar Institution: America’s Death Penalty in an Age of Abolition* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010); and Charles J. Ogletree and Austin Sarat, *From Lynch Mobs to the Killing State: Race and the Death Penalty in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

a long-running narrative of systematic oppression of people of color. The racist assumptions, fears, and laws that fueled lynching culture persisted long after lynchings themselves declined and manifested themselves throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. She points to the convict lease system, segregation, voter fraud and suppression, and the War of Drugs as forces that steadily led to the widespread imprisonment of people of color.<sup>79</sup> More pointedly, attorney Bryan Stevenson, in his best-selling 2014 memoir of fighting the death penalty, *Just Mercy*, concludes that, “The racial terrorism of lynchings in many ways created the modern death penalty. America’s embrace of speedy executions was, in part, an attempt to redirect the violent energies of lynching while ensuring white southerners that Black men would still pay the ultimate price.”<sup>80</sup> Moreover, most recently, in 2019, Silvan Niedermeier, in *The Color of the Third Degree: Racism, Police Torture, and Civil Rights in the American South, 1930–1955*, demonstrates that a decline in lynching was replaced by a rise in police brutality against blacks. Law enforcement officers exerted illegal force to extort confessions, fabricated or misused evidence, and rigged guilty verdicts that resulted in sweeping numbers of black men being incarcerated.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to probing the links between lynching and mass incarceration in contemporary society, scholars are increasingly asking how lynching should be publicly remembered. To be sure, this is not a new issue: Du Bois and Wells insisted that Americans come to terms with the horrors of lynching and see it for what it was -- evil and racist. Yet in the early twenty-first century, more local communities are recognizing the formative role of racial violence in their past and how it continues to shape the character of daily life. More leaders are asking what their responsibility is to memorialize it, teach about it, and even make amends for it. This surge in popular interest is fueled by swift shifts in technology and political organizing. The growing sophistication of social media and smartphones empowers individual citizens to share personal experiences with racism and violence by making possible the instant recording and immediate sharing of information. It facilitates the growth of modern protest movements like Black Lives Matter, which calls attention to acts of police brutality against people of color, both in 2020 and in the past, and demands public action to stop it. Black Lives Matter’s ability to get its message out, grow, and sustain itself depends strongly on its regular use of social media.

Scholars are part of this contemporary conversation about how to publicly remember lynching. In Sherrilyn A. Ifill’s 2007 book, *On the Courthouse Lawn: Confronting the Legacy of Lynching in the Twenty-First Century*, Ifill traces how communities intentionally forget their violent pasts and pay a steep price for it in the form of poisoned race relations and residential and educational segregation. She offers a series of steps for citizens to confront their histories, including placing markers at the sites of lynchings, creating public memorial spaces, and hosting forums, and making lesson plans for school children.<sup>82</sup> Jemar Tisby, in *The Color of Compromise: The Truth*

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<sup>79</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (London: Penguin Books, 2010).

<sup>80</sup> Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2014), 299.

<sup>81</sup> Silvan Niedermeier, *The Color of the Third Degree: Racism, Police Torture, and Civil Rights in the American South, 1930–1955* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

<sup>82</sup> Sherrilyn A. Ifill, *On the Courthouse Lawn: Confronting the Legacy of Lynching in the Twenty-First Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018). See also Markovitz, *Legacies Of Lynching*; Claude A. Clegg III, *Troubled Ground: A Tale of Murder, Lynching, and Reckoning in the New South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Howard Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice* (New York: Good Books, 2014); Fania Davis, *The Little Book on Race*



*About the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (2019), pushes white Christians to take steps to address their sins of racist violence in the past and memorialize them through public art and forums.<sup>83</sup>

No scholar has been more important in analyzing and promoting the idea of remembrance and memorialization than Bryan Stevenson. As the founder in 1989 of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) in Montgomery, Alabama, he spent his early career representing black men on death row. Believing that the high concentration of African Americans in jails and prisons, particularly young black men, and the uneven quality of legal defense afforded them reflected deeper truths about America's unacknowledged past of racial violence, Stevenson looked to the history of lynching for answers. He came to believe that many of the racist assumptions that historically undergirded lynching culture did not end when lynchings did. Rather, common assumptions about blacks being criminal by nature, over-sexualized, unintelligent, and given to fits of unrestrained passion infected race relations and the criminal justice system for generations. America's failure to study and atone for the sin of lynching and include racial terror as part of the history of local communities, as well as the nation, has produced inaccurate sanitized narratives of racial progress and growth. More disturbingly, it has allowed the policies that treat blacks as second-class citizens to persist in multiple forms, be it through red-lining, voter suppression, or education and residential segregation.

To address the ongoing lack of public understanding about lynching history, Stevenson and EJI published "Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror" and "Reconstruction in America: Racial Violence after the Civil War" in 2015 and 2020, respectively. It documented nearly 6500 lynchings between 1865 and 1950.<sup>84</sup> Stevenson opened The Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery in 2018. The museum illuminates the history of racial oppression and lynching in America, stretching from slavery to the present day. The open-air memorial spreads across six acres on a broad field overlooking the city and records the names of each lynching victim on a series of 800 steel pillars, one for each county that hosted a killing.

Stevenson's efforts to ask the public to confront America's violent history and remember lynching victims has inspired similar projects. *The Red Record*, an effort funded in 2015 by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, seeks to identify lynching victims and sites in North Carolina and eventually all of the former Confederate states. It eventually hopes to provide information about the lives of the victims and host conversations about the legacies of lynchings.<sup>85</sup> The Lynching Sites Project of Memphis, begun in 2016 by Rev. Randall Mullins and Sharon Pavelda, aims to locate and memorialize the sites of every lynching that occurred in Shelby County since the Civil War. It has documented 36 lynching sites and placed markers at

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*and Restorative Justice: Black Lives, Healing, and Social Transformation* (New York: Good Books, 2019); and Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (London: Penguin Books, 2019).

<sup>83</sup> Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 2019).

<sup>84</sup> *Equal Justice Initiative*, "Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror" (3d Ed. 2017). [Updated report] <https://eji.org/reports/lynching-in-america/> and *Equal Justice Initiative*, "Reconstruction in America: Racial Violence after the Civil War" (2020) <https://eji.org/report/reconstruction-in-america/>.

<sup>85</sup> <http://lynching.web.unc.edu/the-map/>.

two of them.<sup>86</sup> Alabama Memory, started in spring 2017 at the University of Alabama, is an ongoing undergraduate and graduate student research project designed to uncover the lives of the lynching victims in the state. The goal here is different than other lynching research projects. It focuses on recovering the texture of lives lost and humanizing the victims as fully as possible. Students spend 1-2 semesters uncovering every aspect of a victim's life to restore a sense of who they were before their murders and whom they left behind afterward. Their work has documented new lynching cases and collectively begun to form a large database of newspaper articles and legal documents about lynching history in Alabama. Students also write about how their lives have been impacted by studying racial violence.<sup>87</sup>

## Looking Forward

The next generation of lynching scholarship is slowly being imagined. It reflects an overlapping series of ambitions and priorities that promises a more expansive and truthful history. First, we continue to need more comprehensive and accurate lynching statistics. Searchable national databases that integrate older studies with new local and regional research are critical to illuminating broader histories of lynchings.<sup>88</sup> Second, we must encourage more historians to push beyond the South as the essential locus for conducting lynching research. Examining non-southern regions and states promises a sharper appreciation for geographic differences between and among the killings. It also deepens our understanding of how other areas historically contributed to the national failure to stop lynchings. Relatedly, viewing lynching from an international perspective reminds us that lynching was not a peculiarly American problem. Comparative studies can shed light on how traditions of racial violence emerged in other world societies and illuminate common points of origin between sustained and state-permitted extralegal racial killings. While the American context is certainly distinctive, it is hardly unique. Fourth, historians should strive to uncover in much greater detail how communities and their citizens responded to lynchings that occurred in their own backyards. Too often, we allow stories of lynchings to end at the point of death; left untold is how the families of the victims struggled to make sense of the murders and sometimes retaliated. Also generally unknown is the closely linked question of how the loved ones and supporters of the perpetrators themselves came to terms with the killings. Critical to these tasks of recovery is to go beyond white newspapers as the major source of primary evidence. Historians need to push into probate and criminal records, local and national black newspapers, county histories, census records,

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<sup>86</sup> <https://lynchingsitesmem.org/>; and David Waters, "Waters: A Couple Says Farewell to Memphis after 'Grueling but Healing' work on the Lynching Sites Project," *Daily Memphian*, October 6, 2019, <https://dailyMemphian.com/article/5301/Waters-A-couple-say-farewell-to-Memphis-after-grueling-but-healing-work-on-the-Lynching-Sites-Project>.

<sup>87</sup> "New UA Class Reveals History of Lynching: Marker for Victims to be Erected," February 2, 2017, *The Crimson White*, <https://www.ua.edu/news/2017/02/new-ua-class-reveals-history-of-local-lynchings-marker-for-victims-to-be-erected> /<https://alabamamemory.as.ua.edu/>

<sup>88</sup> Most recently, see the efforts of Seguin and David Rigby, "National Crimes," published 2019; "Monroe Work," published 2017, <http://www.monroeworktoday.org/explore/>; and Amy Bailey and Steward Tolney, "Lynched: The Victims of Southern Mob Violence," published in 2015, <http://lynching.csde.washington.edu/#/home>. See also Lisa D. Cook, "Converging to a National Lynching Database: Recent Development," *Historical Methods*, No. 45 (April-June 2012): 55-63.

governors' files, published and unpublished memoirs, and the archives of the NAACP.<sup>89</sup> What stands to be gained is a richer narrative of lynching history and how local responses to it shaped the evolution of race relations for generations.

Finally, scholars must continue to lead conversations about how to publicly remember and memorialize lynching victims, especially in the small towns, rural stretches, and counties in which so many of the murders occurred. For too long white Americans have intentionally forgotten their role in acts of racial violence and made the trauma of recalling them the exclusive responsibility and purview of minority citizens, especially black Americans. Understanding why and how these acts of omission occurred heralds a new level of public understanding and respect between Americans of all colors. Equally important, recognizing what role such ignorance of the past plays in fomenting a modern system of mass incarceration and policing that disproportionately affects black and brown Americans can be a critical step towards undoing it and strengthening the fabric of democratic society.

## New Primary Research

The ability to move in these new directions in lynching research has never been easier. Newspaper databases are the modern bedrock for conducting lynching research. The newest and most helpful ones, which canvass thousands of local black and white presses, include *Accessible Archives*, *Newspapers.com*, *Newspaperarchive.com*, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*, and *Chronicling America*.<sup>90</sup> On sites like these, one can search through digitally scanned newspapers as important as *The Chicago Tribune* and *The Crisis*, to local newspapers whose archives would previously have been difficult to travel to and to search through. Other important sources like the archival materials of the NAACP and the National Association of Colored Women's Club can also be found online, most directly through the Library of Congress's website, *loc.gov*.<sup>91</sup> The recorded of the Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching Records can be found in full on *Pro-Quest.com*.<sup>92</sup>

Recent efforts to synthesize older archival collections of lynching data and collect new information has produced a range of fresh opportunities for scholars. Tuskegee University, whose archives have long been a must-visit for any researcher, has recently created an online

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<sup>89</sup> *Accessible Archives* and the Library of Congress, provides a database of exclusively AfricanAmerican newspapers. See *Accessible Archives*, <https://www.accessible-archives.com/collections/african-american-newspapers/> and *Library of Congress*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/newspapers/?state=&ethnicity=African+American&language=>. *ProQuest* provides a list of black newspapers that could help researchers understand black options and responses to lynchings. *Proquest*, <https://www.proquest.com/products-services/film/black-newspapers1.html>. See also Library of Emory's Library and Information Technology's, African American Newspapers Topic Guide. *Emory Library*, <https://guides.libraries.emory.edu/main/african-american-news>.

<sup>90</sup> *Accessible Archives*, <https://www.accessible-archives.com/collections/african-american-newspapers/>, *Newspapers.com*, <https://www.newspapers.com>, *Newspaperarchive.com*, <https://newspaperarchive.com>, *Proquest Historical Newspapers*, <https://www.proquest.com/libraries/academic/news-newspapers/>, and *Chronicling America*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>.

<sup>91</sup> *Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov>.

<sup>92</sup> *ProQuest*, <https://proquest.com>.

database, *Monroe Work today*, which has an interactive map that shows the location, name, and information of thousands of lynching victims of across the United States.<sup>93</sup> Online databases can be a helpful tool for any lynching researcher. Recently Amy Bailey has created a website based on the book she wrote with Stewart E. Tolnay, *Lynching: The Victims of Southern Mob Violence*. Hosted by the Center for Studies in Demography and Ecology [CSDE] at Washington University, the *CSDE Lynching Database* seeks to blend older and fresh lynching research on the American South and functions as a collaborative effort between scholars from around the country.<sup>94</sup> A similar new effort is *Project HAL*, or the Historical American Lynching Data Collection Project, run by Elizabeth Hines and Eliza Steelwater. It aims to gather lynching research from around the nation and share it with the public. It actively seeks public participation in the quest to discover new lynchings and includes on the website an easy-to-use submission form to facilitate the role of individual citizens in the making of new knowledge.<sup>95</sup>

Among the most imaginative and daring research efforts to-date is *Without Sanctuary*. Designed by James Allen and based on his book of the same title, it hosts digital copies of hundreds of photographs and postcards of lynching victims. It seeks to create an online forum to discuss the images and encourage the public to submit their own visual documents about lynching. Allen also created an exhibit of his work that toured cities across America in the early 2000s. It now is permanently on display at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta. The book and exhibit collectively aim to disturb their audiences. Indeed, *Without Sanctuary* serves as an enduring witness to the extreme brutality of lynching and stark reminder of the casual acceptance of racial violence by so many white citizens at the time.<sup>96</sup>

### Further Reading:

W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1940); Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (New York: New York Age Print, 1892); James Elbert Cutler, *Lynch Law: An Investigation into the History of Lynching in the United States* (New York: Longman, Green, and Company, 1905); Walter White, *Rope and the Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (New York: Knopf, 1929); Arthur Franklin Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); E.M. Beck and Stewart E. Tolnay, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings* (Urbana: University of

<sup>93</sup> *Monroe Work today*, <http://www.monroeworktoday.org>.

<sup>94</sup> Amy Kate Bailey and Stewart E. Tolnay, *Lynching: The Victims of Southern Mob Violence* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), and *CDSE Lynching Database*, <http://lynching.csde.washington.edu/#/home>.

<sup>95</sup> *Project HAL*, <http://people.uncw.edu/hinese/HAL/HAL%20Web%20Page.htm>. Other helpful sites include; *The Equal Justice Initiative*, <https://eji.org>, *American Lynching*, <http://www.americanlynchingdata.com>, and *Lynching Sites Project Memphis*, <https://lynchingsitesmem.org/resources>.

<sup>96</sup> Allen, *Without Sanctuary*, and *Without Sanctuary*, <https://withoutsanctuary.org>. See also the Library of Congress for more accessible photographs about lynching, <https://www.loc.gov/photos/?q=lynching>.



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