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**RHETORIC AND CIVIC BELONGING:
LYNCHING AND THE MAKING OF NATIONAL COMMUNITY**

A Dissertation in

English

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ABSTRACT

When members of white society rejected Civil War Amendments that called for a radical revision of social norms and legal provisions, widespread refusal to accept blacks as fellow citizens culminated in the increased lynching of African Americans. The increased activity of lynching during Reconstruction has drawn the attention of scholars across disciplines, all of whom have touched upon the functions, causes, and significances of American lynchings. However, while many of them have implied a connection between lynching and national citizenship, there has yet to be a sustained systematic examination of this argument. In “Rhetoric and Civic Belonging: Lynching and the Making of National Community,” I attend to this gap in the critical literature by examining lynching as rhetorical activity that both has challenged and continues to challenge the civic status of African Americans. Using Kenneth Burke’s notion of rhetorical identification and Kevin Dean’s concept of rhetorical juxtaposition I examine the rhetoric of historical and legislative documents, social practices, and American public discourse before, during, and after Reconstruction and explain how they work together to rhetorically construct American citizenship as a racialized political identity.

“Rhetoric and Civic Belonging: Lynching and the Making of National Community” contributes to projects in the field of Rhetoric that examine diverse modes of civic engagement, how these modes contribute to the construction of national identity, and the role visual and print media play in the maintenance of this identity. At the heart of this study is a consideration of violence’s centrality to the making of the nation; specifically, how official and unofficial campaigns of violence have and continue to contribute to the formation of an American national community.

My analysis yields three general findings. First, that lynching was the violent refutation of African Americans' inclusion into the category of "citizen." Second, that the federal government's refusal to implement anti-lynching legislation lent an air of legitimacy to lynching while simultaneously creating a relationship between its practice and white supremacists notions of American civic identity. Among enclaves of white society lynching became a symbolic act that reaffirmed the racial and civic supremacy of white Americans, a rhetorical performance that symbolically reconstituted white supremacist worldview and confirmed followers' convictions that white Americans, not African Americans, were the sole and rightful heirs to democratic promise and protection. In this sense, lynchers and white supremacist sympathizers read lynching as patriotic duty, as civic action. My third and final finding complicates claims of America's present-day post-racial status. An examination of contemporary instantiations of lynching and the discourse surrounding it indicates that the nation's proclivity to rationalize racialized murder as an expression of civic identity is not a practice that is dead and gone, but instead a practice that is very much a part of the historical present.

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DEDICATION

To Estella Lee Rhodes Stevens

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“He who is not against me, is with me.” Judge Lynch.

During the American Revolution, in an area known today as Lynchburg, Virginia, prominent political leader and American loyalist, Charles Lynch, established a form of rule and regulation that later became the foundation for the violent practice of civic identity.¹ Disturbed by the outbreak of criminal activity, Lynch and several men closest to him set up an unauthorized local court system. If defendants were declared guilty, punishments ranging from lashes to execution were assessed.² Despite not being an official legislative entity, Lynch’s court set a precedent for Americans nationwide. As a putative mechanism of justice, *lynch law*, as it came to be known, became associated with civic personhood; citizens who agreed to be governed by a shared set of principles were in turn endowed with the power to judge and mete out punishment. Thus, lynch law evolved beyond its practical application as a form of community justice to an expression of national loyalty. In short, lynch law facilitated a sense of social collectivism among American patriots. As historian Frank Shay explains, “...in those early days an informer [British loyalist] was invariable in the service of the crown and therefore anathema to all patriots who, when he was unmasked, undertook to flog him and to hold him up to popular exposure and contempt.”³ The British informant was, in the eyes of American patriots, a political enemy, the ‘other’ against which they defined and—through collective violence against him—reinforced their own political identities. The songs sung during these events further illustrate how communal spirit characterized the lynching. When the accused was found guilty, he was sentenced to punishment and continued to suffer until he shouted “Liberty forever!”

While the torture was underway, audience members sung a chorus: “Hurrah for Colonel Lynch, Captain Bob and Callaway! They never turned a Tory lose, Until he cried out ‘Liberty’.”⁴

Lynching’s close relationship to early expressions of American patriotism contributed to its resurgence during the Civil War. However, the political climate of the nation during that time was vastly different from that of seventy-eight years before. Ideological differences dividing the nation provided a new set of conditions that altered the significance of lynching. While it remained an expression of civic identity, its symbolic significance changed. An estimated 4,742 individuals were lynched between 1882 and 1968, 72% of whom were African American.⁵ The frequency of the practice and the racial politics undergirding it shifted simple *lynch law* to *lynching*—in short, lynching was no longer a regular form of identifying traitors and enacting justice, but rather a highly ritualized, highly racialized practice that made African Americans the central targets of white violence.

In “A Rhetoric of Civic Belonging: Lynching and the Making of National Community,” I explore the creation of the racial other with respect to the heightened lynching activity that occurred between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the 1930s. Moreover, I consider how lynching as social and symbolic action served to constitute a political identity grounded in notions of racial and civic superiority and how efforts to address the nation’s silence regarding its racist and violent past affect contemporary performances of civic identity. Much of the literature on lynching in America consists of historical overviews and quantitative studies of lynching in various states, psychosexual analyses of lynching, and interpretations of lynching as a unique cultural practice coinciding with the rise of modernity. Although such work is indispensable, absent from this body of literature is an examination of lynching’s relationship to the making of the nation and the American citizen. Citizenship is commonly thought of as the

active participation of social beings in civic life. Exercising the right to vote, the right to freedom of speech, and the right to assembly are customary performances of civic identity. To enact these rights is to mark oneself a member of a political community that values them and thus an adherent of the ideology that undergirds that community. However, as the legacy of lynching illustrates, there are less urbane modes of citizenship enacted by Americans, and lynch law's rise alongside the rise of American national identity illustrates lynching's centrality to the creation of a national community.

My primary contention is that lynching, as it has developed in America, is the expression of a racialized political identity, a mode of social and political protest that through ritualized murder distinguishes the citizen from a racialized domestic enemy. In other words, lynching is not solely ritual violence; it is civic action. Important to this analysis is Kenneth Burke's concept of identification, which connotes the ability to induce cooperation by aligning attitudes, dispositions, and interests. Identifying sameness enables social actors to develop a sense of shared experience. "Here is perhaps," explains Burke, "the simplest case of persuasion. You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture...attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his."⁶ For Burke, an integral feature of political life is the creation of alliances, and his concept of identification provides insight into the ways in which alliances are formed. Coalitions are forged through a developing sense of sameness. This sensibility can grow out of necessity: the need for sustenance, the need to protect against eradication. Or can be manufactured. Nevertheless, whether the intent is to safeguard a common interest or to galvanize support for action, transforming the relationship among strangers requires rhetors to recognize (or create the illusion of) interests and commonalities shared among a group of individuals.

Identification's role in cultivating a collective employs language that is ironically and inherently divisive. Such language is both creative and destructive: while shaping an "us" it simultaneously shapes a "them." This is inevitably the other half of Burke's dialectic: to identify with one is to disidentify with another. The process of selection enacted during the creation of a social body is simultaneously a process of deselection. There can be no sense of "us" without a sense of what "we" are not, and to determine what "we" are not is in a sense to determine who "they" are.

To be clear, this dissertation project is not the first to declare a relationship between racialized violence and national identity. Prominent figures throughout American history have commented on the relationship. In 1909, anti-lynching crusader Ida B. Wells, combating popular belief that lynchings were a form of spontaneous public outrage, wrote:

Our country's national crime is lynching. It is not the creature of an hour, the sudden outburst of uncontrolled fury, or the unspeakable brutality of an insane mob. It represents the cool, calculating deliberation of intelligent people who openly avow that there is an 'unwritten law' that justifies them in putting human beings to death without complaint under oath, without trial by jury, without opportunity to make defense, and without right to appeal.⁷

In his article "Lynch Law in the South," supporter, friend, and mentor Frederick Douglass echoed Wells' sentiment: "Its [lynching's] presence is either an evidence of governmental depravity, or of a demoralized state of society.... Lynch law violates all of those merciful maxims of law and order which experience has shown to be wise and necessary for the protection of liberty, the security of the citizen, and the maintenance of justice for the whole people"⁸ At the core of these criticisms is recognition of the vast chasm between the nation's professed ideals

and its practice. Together, Wells and Douglass contend that lynching is American inegalitarianism at work.

Six chapters comprise this project. Chapter One provides a theoretical framework for examining lynching as rhetorical activity and outlines the connection between violence and national identity. Chapter Two extends this discussion through an examination of legal historical documents, social behavior, and print media. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first demonstrates how constitutional law and laws of naturalization racially codified American citizenship. The second performs a rhetorical analysis of lynching culture for the purpose of demonstrating how legal code was transformed into social practice. Section three analyzes pro-lynching discourse as it appeared in local and national newspapers. Overall, Chapter Two illustrates how citizenship is constituted through legal language, enacted through practice, and made manifest in everyday discourse.

Chapter Three expands the analysis of lynching as rhetorical activity by outlining the various ways lynching photographs and postcards were used by the pro-lynching public of the early nineteenth century and the anti-lynching public of the early twentieth century. Among white supremacist sympathizers, lynching photographs served as forms of community bonding. These images were sent as postcards to friends and family as a way of communicating one's allegiance to white supremacist ideals. Images of lynching victims were also sent to members of the African American community as warnings and forms of intimidation. However, once in the hands of African Americans, these images became ways to legitimate claims of racial, social, and economic inequality. This chapter concludes with an analysis of how anti-lynching advocates shifted the suasive power of these photographs and how this shift assisted their own political and liberatory agendas.

Chapter Four turns an eye toward more contemporary complexities of lynching, specifically the 1955 lynching of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till and the African American literary response that has ensued. There has been a long tradition of African American writers using historical incidents of lynching in their work. These adaptations have illustrated white attitudes toward blacks, and, in so doing, have provided a method for reading African Americans' place within the nation. Responses to Till's death constitute a significant strand of this tradition. I argue in this chapter that African American writers' use of the Till incident exhibits a form of cultural and political literacy that works to legitimate claims regarding African Americans' status as second-class citizens. Chapter Five extends the discussion of literary and visual depictions with an examination of the traveling photography exhibit *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*. Chapter Five considers how this collection of over 100 lynching photographs and postcards replicates the rhetorical domain in which lynching practices were enacted and how this reproduction illuminates for the contemporary American public lynching's centrality to the making of national identity.

Chapter Six, the concluding one, examines the figurative use of lynching in contemporary public and political discourse, analyzing the responses of pundits and the public to figurative lynchings as they present themselves via national media news. Looking specifically at the Michelle Obama and Bill O'Reilly controversy (2008), the Tiger Woods and Kelly Tilghman ordeal (2008), and the displaying of President Obama in effigy (2008), this final chapter illustrates how contemporary configurations of lynchings are explicitly used to express on behalf of a white majority its need to curtail the expansion of African Americans into spaces previously designated "white."

Scholars of lynching widely describing lynching as a form of social control, often disregard its political contours. Lynching's rise throughout American history correlates with moments of intense dis-ease, turmoil, and political friction. The rhetoric justifying and legitimating its practice provides insight into the uses to which violence has been put and the ways in which it aids in the creation and maintenance of community. Ultimately, "A Rhetoric of Civic Belonging: Lynching and the Making of National Community" is meant as a contribution to both the body of literature that constitutes lynching studies and the camp of rhetorical scholarship that pays particular attention to the intersection of civic engagement, the construction of national identity, and the role visual and print culture play in the maintenance of this identity.

CHAPTER 2: CREATING THE CITIZEN THROUGH LEGAL CODES

The founding documents, legal provisions, social performances, and common language used to articulate American national identity between 1776 and 1870 were directly guided by appeals to sameness. The Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution laid the foundation for a racialized definition of citizenship, and later provisions such as the Naturalization Act of 1790, the Compromise of 1820, the Dred Scott Decision, and the Black Codes of 1866 further solidified this definition. Grounded in myths of civic belonging, these appeals employed narratives of a common past, homogeneity, and religious secularism to 1) foster a sense of collectivism among an otherwise nebulous population, and 2) nurture a definition of civic identity predicated on ideological beliefs in natural right and racial superiority. In this chapter, I discuss how the “us/them” dialectic, to invoke Burke, as manifest in the laws governing U.S. citizenship, the behavior used to enact it, and the language employed by those inscribed by it culminated in the racial codification of the American citizen.

This analysis is advanced by considering the role rhetorical juxtaposition plays in national discourse. Following Burke’s notion of victimage, Kevin Dean contends that the polarity created by antithetical couplings like “friend/enemy” in nationalist discourse has the capacity to “unify an audience by identifying a common villain upon which to blame the evils of society.”⁹ I contend that antithetical pairings like “American/British,” “freedom/slavery,” “citizen/slave” and “citizen/foreigner” outlined attributes of American national identity that contributed to a racialized notion of “us” while simultaneously constructing a racialized notion of “them.” These couplings established a synonymous relationship between political and social categories: “citizen” was made synonymous with “white” as “slave” and “black” were made

synonymous with “foreigner.” Rogers Smith’s concept of “Ascriptive Americanism”—namely, the legal exclusion of non-white, non-male, and even non-Protestant persons from political participation—helps to illumine how legal policy codified white supremacist ideology as national doctrine. Smith’s extensive study of American political and intellectual traditions reveals that restrictions on political participation, specifically the exclusion of raced and sexed “others,” manifested a deep-seated belief that America was a “white nation.”¹⁰

The Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence was one of the first founding documents to employ the method of antithetical couplings that established criteria for inclusion within the nation. While the immediate use of this strategy was intended to legitimate and justify action against Britain, it simultaneously contributed to the description of and formation of the American citizen:

When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for *one people* to dissolve the political bands which have connected them *with another* and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, *a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation....*The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. (emphasis added)¹¹

In this opening passage, rhetorical juxtaposition assists the Declaration’s construction of American nationhood. America is depicted as a collective of reason-driven individuals who, in contrast to the unreasonable and tyrannous King, are guided by a sense of decency, “respect,”

and virtue. This portrayal, which is enhanced by the antithetical coupling of one people/another, Great Britain/these States, natural/unnatural, is purposely dichotomous. Highlighting the differences between Britain and the burgeoning nation allows founders to depict the colonial power as an entity in direct opposition to the systems of belief and lifeways shared among Americans. By highlighting this difference, political leaders not only give voice to a burgeoning national community, but also galvanize support for rebellion against an identified threat.

Juxtaposition also assists the Declaration's rhetorical construction of civic personhood. The coupling of "citizen" and "subject" that appears later in the document creates a dichotomous relationship between "citizen," the newly asserted political status of Americans, and "subject," the past political status of Americans. These moves illustrate an inherent relationship between opposites, namely, that contrasting terms require the definitional opposite or 'other' term to sustain meaning and suasive force.¹² In the Declaration, American citizenship gains definition and suasive power through both its use of the opposite to define American nationhood and its refutation of British subjecthood. Its description of Americans as "one people" as opposed to "British subjects" signifies a break from colonials' past status as subjects of the Crown. In place of this status is a new one, the "citizen," who, opposed to the "subject," has agency, political power, and voice. Colonials' self-designation as "citizens" is thus an explicit refutation of a past political affiliation and the expression of a new, self-actualized political identity. Likewise, the Declaration's description of Americans as a people joined together by a desire to live freely and equally and to defend at all costs against threats to their way of life expresses the existence of a political entity that not only conceives of itself as a politically sovereign body, but also—and perhaps more important—as a collective identifying itself through violent and passionate rejection of subjugation.

Drafters of the Declaration were not the only individuals to use juxtaposition as a way of defining the character of American citizens. Celeste Michelle Condit and John Louis Lucaites' examination of the everyday discourse of pre-Revolution Americans reveals that the rhetoric of the pre-Revolution general public also pivoted on a distinction between freedom and subjugation. In the sermons, pamphlets, and editorials of the time, *freedom* designated agency and autonomy; *slavery*, oppression and servitude. These materials testified to American attitudes towards subjugation and suggested that in a land of liberty-loving pilgrims, enslavement of "the people" was and would not be tolerated. Proponents of secession used this knowledge to galvanize support for independence from Britain and purposely juxtaposed concepts of freedom with images of slavery with the intention of politically motivating the masses. Sermons directing congregates to avoid "the *chains of slavery* for ourselves and our children"¹³ and editorials describing colonials as a "class of freemen"¹⁴ as opposed to a class of enslaved men likened British allegiance to bondage and colonial rebellion to freedom. While these arguments utilized aspects of contrast and juxtaposition to depict Britain as a threat to American ideals, they also intimated that the budding sense of national identity was not just political but also racial given that New World Africans were not included in the general public's vision of liberty. Condit and Lucaites, however, ardently argue that colonials' definition of freedom was empty of racial meaning. They maintain that the eighteenth-century notion of slavery as it related to pre-Revolution politics, was not predicated on a racial understanding of bondage and that white speakers saw no conflict in their portrayal of slavery as the dehumanization of whites by other whites and their own enslavement and dehumanization of Africans. "Colonists," Condit and Lucaites contend, "were incapable of imagining themselves as subject to slavery of the sort experienced by Africans for the same reasons they had originally separated out African slaves

from [white] indentured servants during the formation of these practices in the founding period.”¹⁵ But Condit and Lucaites’ point is misleading. African slaves were not separated from white indentured servants because colonists perceived white bodies “incapable” of permanent servitude but, rather, because of a growing need to curtail competition over land and to soothe tension over stark economic difference with a new system of difference, one that established alliances based on color rather than class.¹⁶

Unlike slavery, indentured servitude was contractual. After serving their allotted time (five to ten years depending upon the colony), black and white servants were freed and given land and weaponry to protect themselves.¹⁷ But restrictions on the amount of land available to settlers created tension between the growing class of black and white freed servants and land-holding elites. This situation along with foreign demand for American exports necessitated a more permanent labor force, one that would not exacerbate the already tense situation over property.¹⁸ Suffice it to say, then, that the distinction between “black slave” and “white servant” cited by Condit and Lucaites developed more so out of economic necessity than a pre-existing notion of white superiority. That conception, although brewing, was not cemented until later.

This is not to say Condit and Lucaites’ argument is entirely wrong, simply that it is limiting. They maintain that the slavery white colonials referred to was *political*, not *social*, the difference being that while political slavery circumscribed the political freedom of individuals, social slavery stripped individuals of subjectivity and transformed them into chattel.¹⁹ Following this rationale, Condit and Lucaites assert that “slavery” as expressed by pre-Revolution speakers “had little or nothing” to do with race.²⁰ But it is difficult to imagine how speakers’ juxtaposition of freedom and slavery only marginally entertained an awareness of the connection between race and liberty.²¹ To begin, over 500,000 slaves resided in pre-Revolution America,²² some of whom

were petitioning and suing for freedom as early as 1773.²³ Second, by 1775, the increase of private manumissions and the implementation of immediate and gradual abolition in colonies throughout the North and the South are evidence of ongoing discussion about slavery and freedom in racial terms.²⁴ Furthermore, activists like James Otis and Benjamin Rush and religious leaders such as Benjamin Coleman, Jonathan Edwards, Jr., Samuel Hopkins, and Lemuel Haynes were advocating abolition during the same time political leaders were advocating revolution.²⁵ These developments demonstrated that discussions regarding the relationship between race and nation were in circulation during the same time that appeals to freedom advanced upon a notion of racial slavery were circulating. Ultimately, what I read in Condit and Lucaites' analysis of American pre-revolutionary rhetoric is that colonials' description of Americans as "freemen" as opposed to "slaves" signified that membership in the nation was an exclusively white and male status.

Many within and outside of the American political tradition have picked up on the correlation between American citizenship and whiteness—Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Toni Morrison, to name a few. But it is historian Rogers Smith's concept of "Ascriptive Americanism" that synthesizes these readings and provides an all-encompassing term for understanding citizenship as a political construct based on profoundly inegalitarian principles.²⁶ In his arduously dense and detailed description of the intellectual and political traditions undergirding American citizenship, Smith demonstrates how the goal to keep America homogeneous led to the creation of legal codes constructed for the explicit purpose of "denying personal liberties and opportunities for political participation to most of the adult population on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, and even religion." Many of these restrictions, particularly those on "immigration, naturalization, and equal citizenship...manifested passionate beliefs that

America was by right a white nation, a Protestant nation, a nation in which true Americans were native-born men with Anglo-Saxon ancestors.”²⁷ Smith’s study of congressional and juridical decisions reveals that the restrictions placed on immigration, naturalization, and equal citizenship belie the myth of American egalitarianism being the sole premise of American civic identity. He contends that laws constituting civic membership express views of American nativism sustained by theories of biological and gender hierarchy, cultural ascendancy, and moral and religious superiority.²⁸ These principles, in essence, made “American” synonymous with “white” and “white” a precondition for “citizen.” This is one of the rhetorical realities on display in The Declaration.

The United States Constitution of 1787, the Naturalization Act of 1790, and Antebellum Judicial Provisions

In addition to debates over regulation, citizenship, and Congressional representation, delegates to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia grappled with the question of taxes. The Articles of Confederation assigned taxes according to land values, but this method was unreliable because states often undervalued their land for the purpose of avoiding heavy taxes. It was later suggested that state taxes be assessed based upon population. That alternative posed serious questions for Northern and Southern delegates. For the South, counting slaves as part of the population would result in greater taxes. It was nonetheless a compromise the region was willing to make. Anti-slavery sentiment in the North had increased after the Revolution and Southern states feared that Northern control of Congress would result in universal abolition.²⁹ Southern elites (many of which were present at the Convention) believed that abolition would devastate the southern economy and the southern way of life. Thus, while the option of counting

slaves as a part of the population meant slaveholding states would be heavily taxed, it also meant they would have greater representation in Congress, a position that satisfied delegates' desire to secure the social, economic, and political aims of the South. Northerners saw the problem. Aware of the possibility of southern political dominance, they argued that only free persons should be counted in the census. Further complicating the problem was the fact that slaves were by definition chattel, not "people."

The situation was, to say the least, paradoxical. Could slaves be counted as part of the national population if chattel slavery—the institutionalized *dehumanization* of blacks—remained in practice? What claims could be made on behalf of slaves if they fully counted as part of the population? But these concerns would have to wait. More pressing was the threat southern delegates presented "if their demands on behalf of the slave interest were not met."³⁰ The possibility of the South's break from the Union and fear of yet another war made opponents of slavery weigh heavily the danger of not conceding to Southern interests. To resolve the situation, delegates from both regions agreed to compromise. Rather than completely conceding to the demands of the South, Northern delegates suggested slaves count as "three-fifths of all *other* [read white] Persons" (emphasis added).³¹ This proposal, known as the Three-Fifths Compromise, was accepted and quickly integrated into the Constitution. However, while the Compromise settled the dispute regarding the political and civic status of the slave, it left that of the free black unclear. Because of this oversight, states willing to extend civic privileges to free blacks retained the sovereign power to do so. As a result, two types of citizenship evolved: *state citizenship*, which was the explicit right of states to bestow citizenship rights upon whomever they chose (this included blacks), and *national citizenship*, which loosely recognized all native-born free persons to be national citizens.

Two years later, in response to the growing influx of foreign workers, Congress drafted the Naturalization Act of 1790. While the primary intent of the statute was to secure the allegiance of foreign workers, its secondary intent was to more clearly define the parameters of civic membership:

...any Alien *being a free white person*, who shall have resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for the term of two years, may be admitted to become a citizen thereof on application to any common law Court of record in any one of the States wherein he shall have resided for the term of one year at least... (emphasis added).³²

The discriminatory language of the Naturalization Act of 1790 was one of the first steps towards narrowing the constitutional loop hole created by the Three-Fifths Compromise. But the conditions laid out in the statute, although clear, still failed to speak to the civic status of free blacks. Built into the Act was an assumption that native-born individuals were already national citizens, and while the Act contributed to the legal codification of national citizenship as a raced political identity, it still left states the power to grant citizenship to free persons of color.³³

Naturalization was, in short, a state prerogative, and numerous irregularities regarding the civic status of free blacks ensued due to the absence of federal legislation regulating state naturalization power. While some states extended partial civic status to blacks, others did not. For instance, in parts of New England where the free black population was low, blacks were given voting rights; in areas of the mid-Atlantic region as far south as Maryland, propertied blacks both voted and served on juries.³⁴ But in states such as Virginia and South Carolina, free blacks held few if any civic privileges. And because state jurisdiction ceased beyond state boundaries, states were under no obligation to recognize or honor the liberties given free blacks

by other states. Discrepancy among states over the liberties of free blacks encouraged many states to deny freepersons entry altogether. This action served several purposes: 1) to stave off debate over black citizenship, 2) to retard the growth of the free population, and 3) to make policing free blacks more manageable. In border states and states with substantial free populations, registration became the common method of tracking and regulating black bodies. Registration papers were proof of freedom and blacks found without their “papers” were subject to penalty as severe as being sold back into slavery.³⁵

Restrictions on movement were not the only limitations placed upon freepersons. They also suffered restrictions on action and speech. As early as 1748, states like Virginia, Mississippi and Florida passed laws prohibiting the use of force and “abusive and provoking language” by a “negro or mulatto, bond or free...*in opposition to any person not being a negro or mulatto*” (emphasis added).³⁶ This made even acts of self-defense and self-respect illegal. And in the case of minor offenses, free blacks were subject to more stringent punishment than that received by white offenders. For instance, in cases such as petty theft and vagrancy, whites received imprisonment while blacks were whipped and imprisoned.³⁷

The growth of stringent laws curtailing black freedom illustrates an underlying anxiety among white Americans. Rhetorical in nature, these measures functioned as a collective statement against the inclusion of blacks within the polity. The growth of the free population posed a direct threat to the state of American slavery and by extension the survival of white supremacy, and while slave revolts in the region had been occurring since Jamestown, the ongoing assault at home and abroad encouraged tighter restrictions. To say the least, revolts like those in Stono, South Carolina (1739) and Richmond, Virginia (1800), and the establishment of the Independent Republic of Haiti (1804), contributed to white fears regarding black intentions.

Coupled with long-held suspicion of free blacks' influence over slaves, these events only heightened Southerners' agitation over the intention of both bound and free blacks.³⁸ As one South Carolinian put it:

Let it never be forgotten, that our Negroes are freely the JACOBINS of the country; that they are the ANARCHISTS and the DOMESTIC ENEMY: the COMMON ENEMY OF CIVILIZED SOCIETY, and the BARBARIANS WHO WOULD, IF THEY COULD, BECOME THE DESTROYERS OF OUR RACE (uppercase original).³⁹

“Jacobin,” a common eighteenth century term denoting a political extremist or rebel, is indicative of the kind of maligning language used to denigrate the character of blacks. Here the term casts American whites as potential victims of the ill intentions of “dark brutes.” The speaker’s use of contrasting terms that evoke classic images of the struggle between good and evil, friend and foe, showcase yet another instance in which the “us/them” distinction is used.

Like the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, this speaker’s statement also makes use of rhetorical juxtaposition. Politically charged terminology like “Jacobins,” “Anarchists,” “domestic enemy,” and “our Negroes” is set against “Our Race” to create a kind of racialized patriotism that marks the “country” and “civilized society” as non-black. To this Southerner, the presence of free blacks is more than menacing; it is a direct threat to white America’s sense of security. The juxtaposition of “civilized society” and “destroyers [read blacks]” only helps to exaggerate this point. These antithetical pairings suggest the viciousness and unpredictability of the black “domestic enemy,” and, as a result, help to justify violence against him. This passage likewise demonstrates how the rhetoric used in everyday discourse mimics or anticipates that used in more “official” efforts towards nation-building. Like the

example above, the rhetoric of nation-building relies heavily on appeals to sameness which, in turn, engender a sense of commonality among a group.

Planned revolts like those of Denmark Vesey (1822) and successful rebellions like those of Nat Turner (1831) provided further impetus for white America's suspicion of free blacks. The laws mentioned above, which were explicitly used for the purpose of curtailing the nominal civic liberties that free blacks enjoyed, became more prevalent as the nation expanded westward. In response to the growing population and movement of free blacks, and mounting antislavery sentiment, Western legislators sought ways to safeguard against threats to white supremacy in the territories.

The case of Missouri's statehood is of particular significance for what it reveals about the rhetorical choices made by legislators and how these choices culminated in further defining full citizenship as the purview of white America. Missouri's admission into the nation was contingent upon its acceptance as a slave state and its constitutional proposal that free blacks be barred from entering the state.⁴⁰ Legislation denying blacks in the West worked hand-in-hand with legislative and military efforts to relocate Native Americans. Together these endeavors reflected a desire to secure the social and economic potential of the West for white exploitation and to box out potential competition. Similarly, legislation like that of Missouri's functioned as a kind of preemptive strike against what many felt was the growing threat of black independence.

The constitutional proposal put forward by Missouri in 1820 reignited the debate between federal and state sovereignty. Jurisdiction to naturalize inhabitants remained a state right, and while some states granted partial citizenship to free blacks, other states denied it. This created particular problems for traveling and migrating freepersons because, unlike the case of whites,

their civic status was not recognized throughout the nation. This was the case with Missouri. When applying for statehood, residents requested that Missouri and lands south of it be included as slave states and that free blacks be prohibited from entrance. State legislators felt that the presence of freepersons in the state would poorly influence slaves and so aggressively argued against their admission. In the minds of Western legislators, the best way to ward against incidents like those in Haiti was to keep slaves and free persons separate.

Opponents of the restriction argued that Missouri's exclusion of free blacks was unconstitutional because it denied blacks "a privilege of entry granted to all other citizens."⁴¹ Federalist in nature, this line of reasoning argued that native birth conferred citizenship upon blacks. However, proponents of the restriction argued that free blacks were not citizens. Using a conservative interpretation of the Naturalization Act of 1790, they contended that free blacks were ineligible for citizenship because the statute excluded them from national enfranchisement. Of course, Missouri legislators, like those of Connecticut, Maine, New York, and New Jersey, were free to interpret and apply the statute as liberally as they chose but they felt no obligation to do so. Their proposal to bar blacks from the state was subsequently accepted.

Restrictions on the civic privileges of blacks enforced a particular vision of race and citizenship, namely, that true American citizens were native-born men with Anglo-Saxon ancestors.⁴² In *Black Trails: Citizenship From the Beginnings of Slavery to the End of Caste*, Mark Weiner echoes this observation regarding American inegalitarianism, stating that "the new nation taking shape in the 1830s wove both strands of the American civic inheritance, liberty and racism, into a simple idea: that *Americans were entitled to liberty not because of abstract ideals of universal human freedom, but rather by virtue of being white*" (emphasis added).⁴³ Ultimately, by explicitly denying the entrance of free black residents to the state, Missouri lawmakers

ensured the safety of white supremacy. By 1835, free blacks were barred from entering most Southern states and laws restricting their congregation, education, and employment were on the rise.

The Dred Scott Decision of 1857 and the Black Codes of 1865-1866

In 1846, Dred Scott sued in both the state court of Missouri and federal court for recognition of his status as an emancipated, native-born black man. Scott had been the slave of John Emerson, a U.S. Army surgeon, and accompanied him on several trips west. In 1833, Emerson and Scott traveled from the slave state of Missouri to two free regions: the free state of Illinois and the free territory of Wisconsin. His first suit was brought in 1846 against Irene Emerson, the widow of John Emerson and inheritor of Scott after the death of her husband. Scott's counsel argued that his two-year residence in the free state of Illinois and four-year residence in the free territory of Wisconsin made him free and that Missouri precedents required that the state recognize such freedom.

In 1850 Scott lost his suit against Irene Emerson. Following the precedent set in *Strader v. Graham*, the Missouri Supreme Court concluded that states were under no obligation to honor the laws of other states.⁴⁴ Contextualizing this ruling was the newly passed Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which nullified the power of non-slaveholding states to grant freedom to blacks. The Act, which was essentially a federal permit that authorized slave masters to pursue and seize runaway slaves even after they had crossed into free territory, forced free states to recognize the jurisdiction of slave states.

In 1853, Scott tried again to gain his freedom by suing Irene Emerson's brother, John Sanford, who had allegedly purchased Scott in 1852. Scott again lost. Following the jurisdiction

laws decided in *Strader v. Graham* (1851) and the precedent set in *Scott v. Emerson*, the U.S. Circuit Court sided with Sanford because Scott's previous and current residence in Missouri made him a slave.

The debate over state jurisdiction was central to the concluding decisions in *Strader v. Graham* (1851), *Scott v. Emerson* (1852), and *Scott v. Sanford* (1857). Jurisdiction determined whether or not Scott—and for that matter all slaves who traveled to free states—was a slave or a free citizen of the state. This was the issue that preoccupied Chief Justice Robert B. Taney when the Supreme Court agreed to hear the case on appeal. Like the courts before, the Supreme Court cited *Strader v. Graham* and Missouri law and concluded that Scott's status as a slave excluded him from citizenship and therefore the ability to sue the state of Missouri in federal court. However, unlike the state courts, the Supreme Court seized the opportunity to tie the issue of state jurisdiction to the ongoing question of black citizenship.

Taney argued that blacks were not and never could be considered national citizens because the “immunities and privileges” clause so often cited as justification for granting blacks state citizenship could not apply to a population for whom the Constitution was not written.⁴⁵ Holding to his conservative interpretation of the Constitution, Taney affirmed that blacks had “no rights the white man was bound to respect.”⁴⁶

At the heart of Taney's argument was a desire to shut down future claims to national citizenship made by freepersons. His treatment of the case was thus rhetorically shrewd. As Smith explains, by treating the case of *Scott v. Sanford* as if it were a claim to national citizenship rather than simply a claim to freedom (or even state citizenship for that matter), Taney relieved a great fear held by Southern whites. If blacks were citizens in any state according to the privileges and immunities clause, and those blacks then visited other states, then

the clause would compel those states to treat them as possessed of all the privileges and immunities they granted to their white citizens.”⁴⁷ National citizenship, Taney concluded, was a federal power, not a state power and, therefore, while some states chose to grant citizenship to blacks, this extension of civic privileges was not recognized by federal laws. As a result, freepersons’ claim to national citizenship under the immunities and privileges clause was invalid.

Where the Constitution and Naturalization Act of 1790 failed in clarifying the distinction between state and national citizenship involving free blacks, the Supreme Court succeeded. National citizenship was the purview of white America.

If the Dred Scott Decision of 1857 was a victory for the Southern way of life, then the Civil War and the first Reconstruction Amendment were the onset of its demise. The legislative measures that accompanied the War further undermined the cultural mores, codes of conduct, and legal provisions set by the South to ensure its social, political, and economic interests. The Thirteenth Amendment (1865) abolished slavery and with it the black “domestic enemy.” The radical course of events gave Southerners cause for concern. As Grace Elizabeth Hale explains:

The old antebellum category of inclusion and power, citizenship...defined most centrally against the figure of the slave, proved a weak identity in a new ‘nation’....What would citizenship mean in a world without slaves? [...] most white Americans had equated blackness with bondage. With freedom, African American identity became unhinged for the first time collectively from the taint of slavery, from its dialectical place as the antithesis of citizenship.⁴⁸

The “us/them” distinction that had once provided the framework for defining American civic identity and, to a large extent, the Southern way of life, had been shattered. The American citizen

was no longer an exclusively white designation. And while this change affected white Americans nationwide, it was white Southerners who stood to lose the most. Their economy depended upon the free labor of black slaves and the authority to compel the deference of free blacks. How would the South ensure its survival if its central source of labor no longer existed? In the midst of this radical shift of circumstances, Southern lawmakers sought means to stabilize what they felt was an attack on Southern culture.

After the War, Southern states responded with a series of rigid regulations meant to curtail—with even greater force than before—mounting black independence. Known as the Black Codes of 1865-1866, these shrewd and discriminatory laws intended to reinstate racial dominance by coercing the labor of free blacks. While the Codes recognized the right of blacks to own property, marry, and sue, it was their constraints on labor contracts that undermined the civic rights of newly-minted citizens.⁴⁹

In Mississippi, blacks were searched each January for proof of employment. Those without a labor contract at the start of the New Year were considered in violation of vagrancy laws and subject to monetary fines and involuntary plantation labor. Vagrancy laws acted as a wide spectrum penicillin for the ailments caused by Congressional Reconstruction. They covered everything from presumed idleness and disrespectful conduct to insulting language and preaching without a license.⁵⁰ It was a catch-all violation meant to coerce black labor by defining any act as an infringement upon the law.

Other codes made it difficult for black laborers to choose the conditions under which they worked. It was not uncommon for employers to abuse black laborers and inflict work regiments similar to slave times. For instance, many of the contracts mandated that laborers work from

sunup to sundown and even compelled all healthy members of the laboring family to assist. Interrupting labor contracts was often an act of self-respect. But in Florida, laborers who interrupted their contracts suffered forfeiture of wages and arrest by any “white citizen.”⁵¹ Black Virginians accused of breaking their labor contracts were whipped, humiliated, and forced to labor for up to a year. Other codes narrowed the occupational choices of blacks. In South Carolina, the only means to avoid labor as a farmer or servant was to pay an annual tax ranging from ten dollars to one hundred.⁵²

Black adults, however, were not the only targets of Black Codes. Orphans and those whose parents were unable to care for them (often because their parents were serving time under vagrancy laws) were contracted out to whites—typically former masters—under apprenticeship laws. However, rather than learning a trade, children subject to this law became servants and field hands. Parental consent was not required, and in many cases parents were completely unaware that the courts had bound their children to white employers.⁵³

There were also restrictions on hunting and fishing. During slavery, blacks were free to hunt. However, in the face of labor demands, whites considered hunting and other forms of subsistence pursued by blacks as a means of avoiding plantation labor. To combat black independence, states such as Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia created trespassing laws, hunting restrictions in counties with large black populations, and imposed taxes on blacks who owned guns or dogs.⁵⁴

Needless to say, the “us/them” distinction that had for so long outlined the confines of American civic inclusion was under pressure. Along with federal statutes such as the Civil Rights Act of 1866, agencies such as the Freedman’s Bureau made it clear to Southerners that Congress meant to expand the civil liberties of blacks. Coercing labor and restricting the

economic opportunities of freemen, then, became a primary means of reinforcing this boundary and relieving white anxiety over black encroachment upon what had been, since the beginning of the Union, an exclusively white status.

Legislators' Response to Black Enfranchisement

State lawmakers were not the only ones that feared the changes brought on by Congressional Reconstruction. White supremacist supporters at the federal level also felt the strain and, like their state counterparts, pushed back with fierce intensity. Citing everything from social Darwinism to strict interpretations of the Constitution, members of Congress (mainly Conservative Democrats) decried the recomposition of the national community. Indiana Senator Thomas Hendricks (D) maintained that “we [black and whites] are so different that we ought not to compose one political community.”⁵⁵ New York Senator John Winthrop Chanler (a man who regularly described the United States as a “White Democracy”) followed suit, claiming that “to include the negro race” as part of “the people” would be to “pervert the intention of the framers of the Constitution.” “The people’ who framed the Constitution of the United States,” Chanler maintained, “were of the white race exclusively... The only consideration given to the negro was as a slave... *To claim for the negro the position of citizen of the United States is to violate the whole spirit of the preamble to the Constitution which made the United States a Nation*” (emphasis added).⁵⁶ Chanler’s reasoning was eerily reminiscent of Chief Justice Taney’s opinion in the *Dred Scott Decision*.

President Johnson shared many of these attitudes and demonstrated as much when he vetoed the Civil Rights Bill.⁵⁷ Granting blacks citizenship gave them access to political offices and opened the door for what Johnson and others referred to as “Negro Rule.” Johnson’s claim

of “Negro Rule” was incendiary rhetoric intended to incite the support of Conservative Democrats and white supremacist sympathizers in the South; motivating his claim was a desire to be re-elected. Having severed ties with Republicans, Johnson now depended upon the support of those below the Mason-Dixon Line if his hopes for a second term were going to come to fruition. Maintaining his racist stance, Johnson argued that a government predominated by blacks was intolerable. “White men alone must manage the South” he declared.⁵⁸ Shortly after his veto, Johnson delivered a wrenching indictment that charged Congressional Republicans with incompetence and with supporting the plot to undermine white supremacy. First, he contended that blacks had neither “asked for the privilege of voting” nor had an understanding of what it meant. According to Johnson, blacks were “so utterly ignorant of public affairs that their voting can consist of nothing more than carrying a ballot to the place where they are directed to deposit it.”⁵⁹ It stood to reason, he continued, that black enfranchisement was a Republican plot to dominate both Congress and local government.⁶⁰

Second, Johnson argued that Republicans failed to “consider the policy or impolicy of Africanizing” the South. In several southern states, black enfranchisement would result in a black-dominant electorate and whites in these areas feared that the black vote would undo white dominance and political interest. Johnson, himself a poor North Carolinian of yeomanry roots, believed that the planter elite and laboring blacks collaborated to thwart the interests of white workers. Pulling from his prejudice against both the planter elite and blacks, Johnson argued that granting blacks the vote would only strengthen this dynamic by placing political power in the hands of former slaves who, following the interest and direction of past masters, would continue to deprive poor whites of fair participation in labor.⁶¹

Third, Johnson maintained that Congress' bill to extend suffrage to blacks was unconstitutional. According to him, the bill ignored the well-known, and universally acknowledged rule of constitutional law which declares that the Federal Government has no jurisdiction, authority, or power to regulate such subjects for any State. To force the right of suffrage out of the hands of the white people and into the hands of the negroes is an arbitrary violation of this principle.⁶²

Johnson's claims were grounded in white supremacist notions that the [imagined] intellectual inferiority of blacks made them unfit for citizenship. Despite his protest, Johnson's declarations and attempts to thwart Congressional Reconstruction failed; his March 27th veto of the Civil Rights Bill was overridden by the Senate on April 6th and the House three days later.

Overall tactics to stall the progress of Congressional Reconstruction continued. Virginia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas all rejected the Fourteenth Amendment when it came up for decision. Congress quickly responded by placing the former Confederate states under military occupation; sovereignty was not returned until each state revised its constitution to reflect the new civic status of blacks and ratified the Fourteenth Amendment.⁶³ Although white anxiety over black elected leadership was prevalent, at no point did blacks ever hold political dominance throughout the region. Among the southern State Conventions of 1867-68, blacks on average constituted no more than twenty-six percent of state legislatures; South Carolina's sixty-one percent black membership and Louisiana's fifty-percent black membership were the only states without a white majority in its Conventions.⁶⁴

Still, Democratic opposition boasting of a Republican plot to "Africanize" the South encouraged hostility against blacks in government. In Georgia, expulsion of black members of

the state legislature came quickly after the removal of federal troops and the states' initial readmission to the Union in 1868.⁶⁵ The *Atlanta Constitution* captured the sentiment of the Georgia legislature in clear and succinct language: "The Negro is unfit to rule the State."⁶⁶ Thirty members in all were removed on bogus charges of personal misconduct, and in September of that same year, the Georgia legislature officially declared blacks ineligible to sit as members of the House. The expelled members and white Republicans took the matter to Governor Bullock who drafted a letter to Congress that argued against the actions of Georgia's Democrat-dominated House. The letter concluded that the legislature formed after the expulsion of the black members had been illegally constituted. Congress' decision to intervene on behalf of the expelled members, however, only occurred after Georgia rejected the Fifteenth Amendment. The state was immediately put under the military purview of General Terry who, after ousting twenty-four Democrats and replacing them with Republicans, reinstated the expelled black members. Georgia remained under military rule until it ratified the Fifteenth Amendment. It was readmitted to the Union for the second time on January 10, 1870.⁶⁷

Despite the fact that Congress restored justice to the expelled legislators, their expulsion as well as the measures taken by Democrats to interrupt progress towards black enfranchisement is a strong indication of the overall anxiety whites experienced over the newly-defined status of African Americans. White conservatives and traditionalists interpreted the Civil War Amendments—particularly the Fourteenth Amendment—as a radical refutation of customary attitudes towards blacks and as a challenge to over two hundred years of tradition and conventions of civic order.

Conclusion

The polarizing rhetoric of American citizenship was both creative and instructive: it forged a new national community and provided guidelines for enacting national identity. Under the Constitution and other founding documents, common concepts of race, place, and nation became law, and citizens' observance of the laws in turn became common practice. And while legislation and judicial provisions that had codified citizenship as the sole purview of whites were revised during Congressional Reconstruction, they were not always enforced. Provided that their states recognized the Civil War Amendments and pledged allegiance to the United States, Southern state leaders were given free rein to establish civil governments of their own. Black Codes prohibiting interracial marriage, regulating migration, and restricting labor opportunities curtailed the civil rights and liberties of freedmen in favor of maintaining the kind of civic and racial supremacy that white Americans had enjoyed before the Civil War.

By marking the limits of black freedom, those statutes, along with already held beliefs regarding the place of blacks in the nation, provided a model for future generations regarding how to enact their identities as American citizens. But anxiety over black progress and growing disregard for the 'old regime' continued to enflame white resentment. As the editor of a local white newspaper explained:

...the chief cause of trouble between the races in the South is the Negro's lack of manners. In the state of slavery he learned politeness from association with white people, who took pains to teach him. Since the emancipation came and the tie of mutual interest and regard between master and servant was broken, the Negro has drifted away in a state which is neither freedom nor bondage. Lacking the proper inspiration of the one and the restraining force of the other he has taken up the idea that boorish insolence is

independence, and the exercise of a decent degree of breeding toward white people is identical with servile submission... *The white people won't stand this sort of thing, and whether they be insulted as individuals [or] as a race, the response will be prompt and effectual* (italics original).⁶⁸

As this editor made clear, the eradication of slavery changed what many described and believed was “the natural order of things.” But the ingenuity of white supremacists prevailed. Deprived of the slave, white supremacists would create a new object and with it a new “other” against which to define the collective “self.” Within the politicized context of postbellum America, then, lynching became a symbolic act that reaffirmed the racial and civic supremacy of white Americans.

CHAPTER 3: CREATING THE CITIZEN THROUGH SOCIAL PRACTICE

As indicated in the previous chapter, citizenship had been, since the founding of the nation, inextricably bound to whiteness. The slave stood as the ontological body against which the white citizenry conceived itself, the “them” against which white America’s “us” was defined. However, in the wake of Congressional Reconstruction, the slave no longer existed. In his place stood the African American, a bona fide member of the national community who shared the same claim on rights, privileges, and protections as whites. Like members of the federal and state legislatures, members of the white lay public found troubling this shift in the civic status of blacks. As one white citizen put it, “To white people, the idea of social equality is repugnant.”⁶⁹ Agents of the Freedman’s Bureau also observed a growing frustration among white Southerners with regard to the new federal mandates: “Southern whites...are quite indignant if they are not treated with the same deference that they were accustomed to.”⁷⁰ Efforts to expel African Americans from the polity became mundane, and the rejection of the Civil War Amendments became visible in numerous cities and towns as a ritualized form of mutilation and celebration in which lynching, the sadistic practice of torture and hanging, replaced legislators’ seemingly more “diplomatic” use of congressional petitions, hearings, and trials.

Therefore, within the context of postbellum America, lynching functioned as a form of political commentary, as a technique of reconstituting the identity, supremacy, and political autonomy of white Americans, and as a method of rescinding the civic personhood of black Americans. In what follows, I unpack the relationships among citizenship, race, and violence by indicating how lynching became an argument against African Americans’ inclusion in the polity and a disturbing mode of demonstrating white society’s conception of American nationhood.

Considering how citizens perform their identities as members of the nation illustrates how legal doctrine is transformed into daily practice.

LYNCHING IN POSTBELLUM AMERICA

The Second Line of Defense

While the Black Codes and various other legislative measures were dehumanizing and violent in their own right, they did not produce the kind of impact that lynchings generated. The frequency of the practice and the reality that even the most trivial of “transgressions” could result in violent death remained an ever-present occupation in the minds of black citizens. As Richard Wright wrote:

The hostility of the whites had become so deeply implanted in my mind and feelings that it had lost direct connection with the daily environment in which I lived....It was as though I was continuously reacting to the threat of some natural force whose hostile behavior could not be predicted. I had never in my life been abused by whites, but I had already become conditioned to their existence as though I had been the victim of a thousand lynchings....The penalty of death awaited me if I made a false move and I wondered if it was worth-while to make any move at all.⁷¹

Wright’s reflection speaks to the disciplining power of lynching culture and demonstrates how knowledge of the practice affected the habits, attitudes, and psychological well-being of members of the black community.

Lynchings were highly stylized performances that usually included one to five victims and could attract over one thousand spectators. Whether small or highly publicized, the lynching event was always held together by three things: 1) the assumed guilt of the victim, 2) the

accoutrements used to torture and kill, and 3) the public display of the body. Over 4,500 individuals were lynched between 1882 and 1968 alone, the vast majority of whom—a recorded 3,414 (over 70%)—were African American.⁷² Long-held beliefs regarding the “inherent” immorality and barbarity of blacks helped to legitimate such violence while simultaneously concealing the various social, economic, and political factors that contributed to its practice. The effects of black enfranchisement such as greater competition over work, the increased economic independence of blacks, black political activism, and the erosion of customary modes of enacting racialized identities only further compounded white resentment.⁷³

These conditions helped to fuse lynching-as-social-control with lynching-as-the-violent expression-of-identity, an identity predicated upon notions of the inherent racial, moral, and civic supremacy of whites over blacks. Lynching, therefore, like the Constitution, Naturalization Act of 1790, and Black Codes, expressed an ideological belief regarding black inferiority, white superiority, and the need not to simply maintain racial hierarchy, but traditional civic order. Lynchings illustrated white America’s blatant disregard for the rights of citizenship bestowed upon African Americans and thus represented a refusal to accept African Americans as fellow and equal members of the polity. Suffice it to say, then, that lynching was a method of expelling blacks from civic community.

Ultimately, lynching became a catch-all means of combating various manifestations of black liberty. Standing up to inequality, voicing opinion, organizing for change, or simply refusing to acquiesce to “white power” were seen as transgressions against the civic supremacy of whites. As a result, individuals suffered the noose for everything from “eccentricity” to failure to show due deference. In 1888, black sharecroppers Tom Smith and John Coleman met their end as a result of what historian William Fitzhugh Brundage calls “insufficient subservience.”⁷⁴

As Brundage explains, Smith and Coleman's decision to take their cotton to their supplier first rather than their employer transgressed codes of racial etiquette that permeated Southern life. It was customary for planters to receive first claims to sharecroppers' harvests. Enraged, the men's employer sought out a warrant for their arrest, but the men refused to be taken. Instead, they went to their supplier, secured weaponry, and resisted the posse that eventually came for them. Despite their efforts, Smith and Coleman were captured and lynched. Rather than rope, the posse tied rocks around their necks and threw the two men into the river.⁷⁵

Expressed condemnation for the unjust treatment of blacks by whites was likewise met with the noose. After the triple lynching of three black men near Leesburg, Georgia, Enoch Daniels, a black resident who had been warned several times for publically denouncing the triple lynching, was taken from his home by a group of white men and hanged.⁷⁶ In 1919, Ernest Glenwood was lynched for "trying to organize black workers to refuse to work for 60 cents a day."⁷⁷

The two most common justifications for lynching, however, were murder and rape. These two accusations alone culminated in the lynching of 3,137 people (33.8% of the total African American men lynched) from 1882-1968.⁷⁸ In Georgia alone, 205 blacks were lynched under the charge of murder; 124 for alleged rape. Of course, the circumstances involved were typically questionable. Frequently, in instances of alleged murder, black men were not outwardly seeking to kill but instead were defending themselves, families, and properties from the malicious objectives of whites. In 1892, Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Henry Stewart were lynched when aggressive action at their Memphis grocery store, the People's Grocery Company, ended in the wounding of three white men. The People's Grocery Company was a black-owned and operated business that served residents of "The Curve," a black neighborhood named for its

location along the sharp bend of the streetcar line. People's Grocery posed a threat to the nearby white-owned Barrett's grocery, which had served the area for some time. Resentment over the businessmen's monopoly over black clientele turned violent when a fight broke out between a black and white boy playing marbles near the two stores. After being beaten, the white boy sought his father, a man named Hurst, who then whipped the black boy in retaliation. When black men in the area heard about the incident, they rallied together and accosted Hurst. Barrett, who was close by, came to Hurst's defense and swore revenge against the men, among whom were the owners of People's Grocery.⁷⁹

On August 11th, Barrett's attempt to make good on his threat was thwarted when armed white men entering the rear of People's Grocery were shot. After the incident, local authorities arrested and charged Moss, McDowell, and Stewart. The three businessmen sat in jail under the watchful eye of fellow black citizens until on the third day, after fear of lynching had subsided, they were left alone. Shortly thereafter, the three were removed from their cells, taken to the outskirts of town, and riddled with bullets.⁸⁰ A similar incident occurred in 1901 when Sterling Thompson, a successful black farmer and political activist living in Campbellton, Georgia, was killed while defending his estate against white moonshiners who not only resented his efforts to shut down their stills, but also his economic prosperity.⁸¹

While institutionalized slavery and the dehumanization of black bodies made the systematic rape of black women acceptable, the rape of white women (whether real or imagined) was deemed deplorable, unpardonable, and punishable by death.⁸² In the racial, political, and social drama that was Post-Reconstruction America, white southern men stood as chivalrous heroes, white southern women as fair maidens, and black men as villainous beasts who would

stop at nothing to defile the “honor” of white southern women. As a result, black men accused of raping white women fell swiftly under full force of summary justice. White supremacist supporters and lynching apologists rationalized lynching as a kind of necessary evil, one committed by a community of citizens who logically sought retribution against black brutality.

For instance, the 1930 lynching of James Irwin of Irwin County, Georgia, was explained by white supremacist supporters as a necessary, just, and rational outcome to the alleged rape of a young white girl. As a result, the incident garnered a decent amount of criticism. Some locals were critical—not about the fate of the lynching victims but about “unfavorable” publicity for Georgia, which had been lynch free for three years.⁸³ Many repudiated this criticism, however, contending that the lynching was an understandable and therefore excusable response to the uncivilized actions of “black brutes.” Several days after the Irwin County lynching, the editor of the *Macon Telegraph* printed this response:

Some of those who have criticised us most severely for the lynching that occurred in our county last Saturday seem to have almost lost sight of the fact that a most heinous crime had been committed the afternoon before by the man who was lynched. They lose sight of the fact that one of our *pure lovely young girls just budding into attractive young womanhood* was attacked and slain by the *wanton brute* who was the victim of the mob’s summary punishment....

It is one thing to sit behind a mahogany desk a hundred miles away when one knows nothing of the persons concerned and write scathing editorials on the abstract subject of lynching and its evils. It is quite another thing when it comes close home to us as did last Friday’s crime. When it is some other man’s daughter or wife, especially if he is far removed from the *moralizer*, it is easy to see what ought not to have been done.

When it is one's own wife or daughter or the wife or daughter of a one's neighbor, it is quite a different matter.

It is unfortunate that the law was not allowed to take its course. There was not a chance that the *brute* would escape prompt conviction and death at the hands of the law if the mob had permitted his trial. But it is to be expected. When this kind of crime [the rape of a white woman] is committed whether it be in Georgia or in Maine, men are going to see that the offender gets his punishment without waiting for the courts. Wrong, of course, but it will nearly always be done. This paper does not condone lynching, but so long as *this crime* is committed, so long can criminals expect mob violence... Let us all hope that there will never be another lynching in Irwin County and that there will be no crime like the one that caused this one (emphasis added).⁸⁴

As with most pro-lynching discourse, this editorial perpetuates the myth of the fair white maiden, victorious white hero, and black beast through a series of contrasting couplings; namely pure/ruthless, lovely/foul. The image of a “pure lovely young gir[l] just budding into attractive young womanhood” is juxtaposed with the image of the black “wanton brute” and the “foul beast.” And while the conventions of still-influential Victorian mores keeps the description from explicitly describing the crime, words like “young” and “budding” that allude to the violation of a ripening sexuality—one that is imagined to be exclusively reserved for white men⁸⁵—play upon cultural beliefs regarding the assumed inherent vulnerability of women, especially young girls. To say the least, the editorial is typical of the kind of response delivered by lynching apologists: it is melodramatic yet tempered; it casts the epic struggle between good and evil as the ongoing battle to protect white purity from the taint of black wickedness; it indicts the alleged hypocrisy of critics while depicting lynchers as moralists; and, lastly, it excuses

lynching's lawlessness by rationalizing it as an "unfortunate" but respectable response to the violation of white purity.

Between 1882 and 1968, 912 individuals were lynched for rape, 288 for attempted rape.⁸⁶ As the above example illustrates, apologists and supremacist sympathizers rationalized lynching as morally just and therefore an excusable act that would end only when the sensibilities of civilized people [read white men] ceased to be offended by the ravenous exploits of black men. Yet, laws that sought to police sexual life belied grand narratives of black hypersexuality and white feminine innocence. For instance, from 1913 to 1948, anti-miscegenation statutes made it illegal for whites and non-whites—particularly blacks—to have sex, cohabit, or marry. But in a survey of 3,131 cases of interracial marriages between 1916 and 1937, four-fifths of the marriages were between black men and white women.⁸⁷ Such statistics show that significant numbers of white women were willing to engage in interracial sexual relationships. What use would there be for a law against interracial coupling if the "nature" of white women compelled them to repel black men? If anything, anti-miscegenation laws upheld insightful observations like those made by Ida B. Wells. Commenting on the "nature" of white women, Wells declared:

Nobody in this section of the country believes the old thread bare lie that Negro men rape white women. If Southern white men are not careful, they will over-reach themselves and public sentiment will have a reaction; a conclusion will then be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women.⁸⁸

Such laws might best be interpreted as strategic attempts to secure the sexuality of white women for white men. To be sure, laws against interracial mixing were more a means of policing the private interactions of *black men* and *white women* than those of blacks and whites in general. As

a result, these laws had little bearing on the sexual exploits of white men who since slavery had enjoyed access to the sexual rights of both black and white women. Anti-miscegenation laws, then, more than anything else, were a means of retaining the reproductive (and property) rights of white women for white men.

The myth of white feminine propriety only aided in this endeavor. It assumed that white women 1) would never entertain the idea of interracial sex and 2) were by nature delicate creatures in need of protection from the licentious and bestial nature of black men. As a result, white women found in violation of these laws were typically cast as helpless victims of black male impropriety rather than willing participants of interracial relations.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, the myth of white femininity was not a definite safeguard against accusations of ill repute and ruin. To bolster their innocence, white women often lied about the nature of their relationships with black men. When an Ohio minister asked his wife why she lied about being raped by a black man, she answered: “I had several reasons for telling you. One was the neighbors saw the fellows here, another was, I was afraid I had contracted a loathsome disease, and still another was that I feared I might give birth to a Negro baby. I hoped to save my reputation by telling you a deliberate lie.”⁹⁰

REAFFIRMING WHITE CITIZENSHIP

Expelling the “Enemy Within”

The above examples demonstrate that lynchings were not merely a violent response to black males’ assault on the “honah of white women.” Nor were they, as historian William Fitzhugh Brundage argues, merely a response to economic competition. Rather, they were the result of a series of interconnected conditions involving both social and economic factors that

originated from one collective event in particular: the passing of the Civil War Amendments. Abolition, enfranchisement, and suffrage granted blacks freedom, political power, and access to resources that had otherwise been denied them. These changes impressed upon white Southerners new ways of interacting with the black constituency that stood in direct opposition to customary ways of performing their identity as Americans. The increased frequency of lynching after the enfranchisement of blacks and the fact that black bodies more than any other were found at the end of lynch ropes speak to the relationships among lynching, American citizenship, and national community. Lynching was the violent refutation of Congressional Reconstruction, the ultimate rejection of black freedom and enfranchisement, and the most ritualistically dramatic means of remarking and reaffirming the political identity and civic superiority of whites over blacks. It was, and continues to be, a performance laden with symbolic and therefore rhetorical power.

Scholars of sociology, performance studies, and literature have affirmed lynching's status as rhetorical activity by discussing its symbolic features. Influenced by the work of cultural anthropologists Victor Turner and Clifford Gertz, Andrew Buckser contends that despite the absence of standard procedures, the recurrent features of Southern lynchings—namely the short sermons delivered by family members of white victims; the use of rope, faggot, and bullets; and the scavenging of bark, rope, and charred remains—suggest that lynchings are more than acts that serve “some goal of social stability or solidarity; they are also expressive occasions which communicate ideas about the meaning of the social and cultural world” and thus reflect “notions of how the world is constructed, how individuals relate to groups, and how groups relate to each other.”⁹¹

However, more current investigations of lynching practices counter Buckser's contention that lynchings fail to exhibit formulaic features. The intensity and regularity with which black men were lynched (52.3 lynchings occurred each year) and the common features of the lynching scene—the use of public confession, rope, faggot, torture, and the like—has led scholars to consider lynching a highly stylized ritual. Sociologist Orlando Patterson's and performance studies scholars Peter Ehrenhasu and A. Susan Owen's examinations of lynching as ritual practice demonstrate how lynching communities adapt aspects of ancient human sacrifice to Southern Christological doctrine.⁹² Taken together, the research done by these scholars situates lynching as a form of ritual performance that rehearses "vital social and cultural functions for Southern postbellum communities."⁹³ As such, it is crucial to the continuance of a social order because it is through lynching that specific understandings of authority, power, right, wrong, and just are reproduced and maintained.⁹⁴ Following this explanation, lynching can be understood as action that not only embodies and simultaneously reflects a particular worldview, but likewise constitutes—through symbolic reenactment of observed behavior and values—that worldview.

Literary scholar Amy Louise Wood's study of lynching culture at the turn of century (nineteenth to twentieth) is particularly noteworthy for the way it succinctly connects the repetitious features of ritual violence to the codification of white identity. "The ritual performance of a lynching...was not so much a reflection of undisputed white solidarity, but an action that displayed and constructed a particular kind of racial solidarity—a racial solidarity that required constant replenishing and constant reenvisioning," namely, the continuance of deadly force against blacks.⁹⁵

Trudier Harris' use of sociological language and concepts also highlights lynching's suasive capacity. Pulling from the work of anthropologist James Frazer, Harris contends that

lynching is a contemporary adaptation to the ancient practice of scapegoating. Natural disasters, plagues, and famine were read by ancient people as the expression of godly dissatisfaction. To cleanse the community of sin and regain the favor of the gods, communities performed a symbolic ritual in which sins were placed onto a goat or person that was then beaten and banished from the community. Projecting the community's evil onto a subject that was then expelled was believed to restore harmony and prosperity to the community.⁹⁶

Expelling evil also served an explicitly social function in that it reaffirmed core values and beliefs shared among a group. Applying the concept of this ancient ritual to lynching practices, Harris concludes that lynching events as performed within the context of postbellum social life were not only a means of expelling blacks from the white community, but also a preventative measure that served to deter "Blacks who might hope to belong to the community."⁹⁷ Such an interpretation is helpful in that it provides a useful framework for understanding lynching's symbolic significance during postbellum America. Before the Civil War Amendments, free and bound blacks existed on the outskirts of civic life. They were the political "other" that posed an ever-constant threat to white supremacy. However, their emancipation and later enfranchisement shifted their status from the "domestic enemy" to the "enemy within." This new designation marked blacks as an affected organism within the civic body and thus, within the realm of the symbolic, necessitated their expulsion from the national community. Ultimately, the lynching ceremony served two important functions, the first of which was to right perceived wrongs and the second of which was to reaffirm communal spirit in the face of perceived threat.

Harris' description of lynching as a response to perceived threat is reminiscent of the interaction between pre-Revolution Americans and their British leaders. This is not to say that

the fight for American independence was the same as white Americans' fight for civic supremacy, nor is it to imply that white Americans' later sense of impending doom was only imagined. It is simply that both groups' sense that their autonomy was being infringed upon led them to similar—violent—action. Composers of the Declaration perceived Britain as a threat to American ideals of liberty, natural right, and equality. In the context of postbellum America, white southerners perceived expressions of black liberty as a threat to white supremacy. In both cases, the violence that followed helped to reaffirm a sense of collective identity.

This line of argument reaches its logical conclusion when we consider further the symbolic aspects of the lynching scene. As Harris mentions, the lynching victim functioned as the scapegoat—the human body upon which the wrongs suffered by the community were righted. In the context of postbellum America, the scapegoat takes the form of the black lynching victim. By sacrificing the lynching victim, the community not only expels evil, gains justice for the violated, and reaffirms community identity, but also cures what ails the community most: the offense created by various expressions of black liberty.

In “The Rhetoric of Hitler’s Battle,” Burke speaks to this process and describes acts entailing the removal or expulsion of an individual or people from a larger social group as a “‘curative’ process...*If one can hand over his infirmities to a vessel, or ‘cause,’ outside the self, one can battle the external enemy instead of battling an enemy within.* And the greater one’s internal inadequacies, the greater the amount of evils one can load upon the back of the ‘the enemy’” (emphasis added).⁹⁸ After Emancipation and ratification of the Civil War Amendments, blacks were no longer “them,” no longer the other by which “the [white] nation” identified itself; they were now “us.” Hence, the delegitimization of the “us/them” distinction did more than revise the definitional boundaries of American citizenship; it disturbed what many white Americans

believed to be the natural order of American civic life: the social and civic dominance of whites over blacks.

The Constitutive Power of Witnessing

In *Rhetorical Landscapes*, Greg Clark demonstrates how spectatorship assists the cultivation and maintenance of collective identity. Focusing specifically on American tourism during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Clark maintains that public experiences such as touring national landscapes “present a collective of people with shared symbols of a common identity and, in doing so, prompt those people to adopt that identity for themselves.”⁹⁹ Whether it be surveying the New York skyline or hiking through Yellowstone National Park, the shared experience of surveying national scenery “constitute[s] in individuals a sense of shared identity that has the power to shape their beliefs and actions in ways that unify them with one community as they divide them from another.”¹⁰⁰ Although surveying of another kind, the shared experience of looking and witnessing the death of the condemned likewise served a constitutive function; the hanging body signified both the community’s acceptance of state power and sanctioning of its use against the condemned. State executions also served a disciplining function: they communicated acceptable codes of conduct, the consequences suffered if such codes were not followed, and exhibited the authority and supremacy of the state and its power to make the ultimate judgment. Such displays of power were intended to deter future offense, encourage conformity, and engender a sense of morality, respectability, and community among citizens. Men, women, and children stood together as members of a group united through their conformity to law (they were not the ones being executed), their choice to observe the execution, and their sanctioning of the state’s decision to expel the criminal and restore community order.¹⁰¹

As adaptations of state-sanctioned executions, lynching spectacles likewise served a constitutive function. Both the act of lynching and the practice of watching were forms of indoctrination that worked to socialize spectators, encouraging them to identify with each other while disidentifying with the condemned. They introduced young boys standing alongside grown men to the practice of white masculinity, communicated to white women and children the extent to which their fathers, brothers, and husbands would go to ensure white feminine virtue, and exhibited for the black community the degree to which white America would go to protect its privileged status.

In the images below, residents of Florida and Texas look on as the bodies of Rubin Stacey and Leigh Daniels hang from a tree. Men, women, and children stand in their Sunday best; shirts are fastidiously tucked; long sleeves are rolled; hair is perfectly arranged; all seems to be in place.



FIGURE 1 Lynching of Rubin Stacey, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. July 19, 1935.
Reprinted from *Without Sanctuary*



FIGURE 2 Lynching of Leigh Daniels, Center, Texas. August 3, 1920.
Reprinted from *Without Sanctuary*

Spectators were encouraged to stand, witness, and revere white racial—and by extension—civic superiority. To participate and watch the lynching and its aftermath was to “besto[w] a particular kind of social authority on the individual” while at the same time connecting him or her “to a larger community of fellows.”¹⁰² Witnessing was so important to the maintenance of white supremacy that announcements of lynchings were often released in advance.

On June 26, 1919, an announcement in *The New Orleans States* advertised the time and place of an Ellenville man’s lynching. The story conveyed additional information. “John

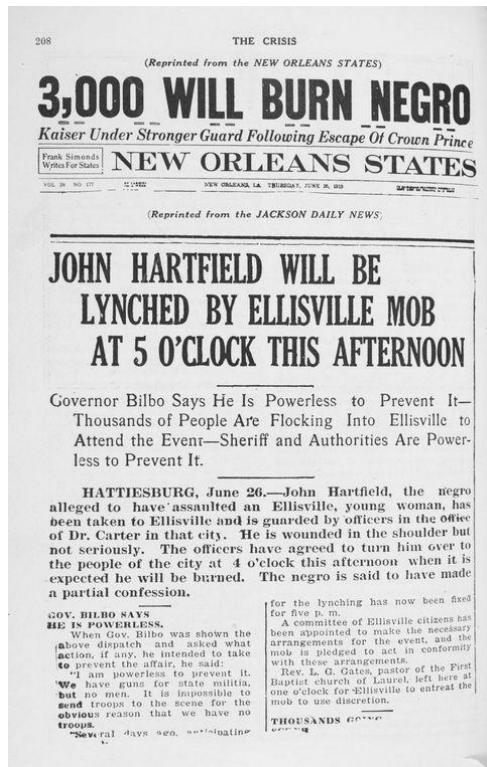


FIGURE 3 “3,000 Will Burn Negro,” *New Orleans States*. June 26, 1919. Courtesy of The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library Digital Gallery

Hartfield, the negro alleged to have assaulted an Ellenville, young woman, has been taken to Ellenville and is guarded by officers in the office of Dr. Carter in that city. He is wounded in the shoulder but not seriously. *The officers have agreed to turn him over to the people of the city at 4 o'clock this afternoon when it is expected he will be burned. The negro is said to have made a partial confession*” (emphasis added).¹⁰³ On such occasions, men of the community typically formed a posse to assist fathers or husbands of the violated woman in their search for the alleged perpetrator. After the accused was tracked down, he was characteristically forced to confess his guilt before a public audience prior to being brutally tortured,

mutilated, and killed. Record of the confession was regularly noted in local newspapers as a way of legitimating the lynching; it stood as proof of the offender's villainous character while at the same time justifying action against him.

In the previously mentioned lynching of James Irwin, white residents followed a similar procedure. After being accused of raping and murdering a local white girl, Irwin was captured and taken back to the site where he had allegedly raped and murdered her. He was "tied to a tree with chains" while attendees "cut off his fingers and toes," pulled his teeth out "with wire pliers," and "jabbed [him] in the mouth with a pointed pole." Before being set ablaze, Irwin was castrated; while he was burning, attendees riddled his body with bullets.¹⁰⁴ Recounting the incident, Arthur Raper notes: "All day his [Irwin's] body, burned past recognition, hung in a tree by the public road. Thousands of white people, including women and children, rode out to see the spectacle."¹⁰⁵ Symbolically, the violation Irwin allegedly enacted against his female victim—and by extension the white community—was revisited upon him by the community with fervor.

Lynching's Discursive Features

Providing spectators with familiar interpretive frameworks was not the only means of legitimating lynching; the language used to describe lynchers and lynching victims was equally important to lynching's interpretation as an acceptable and just practice. The *Ocilla Star*, Irwin County's weekly newspaper, described the Irwin lynching as if all was as it should have been:

Negro burned by Angry Mob for Brutal Crime. James Irwin gets swift justice for assault and murder of sixteen year old girl.

Swift punishment was meted out to James Irwin for the commission of the most dastardly crime ever committed in Irwin County, when a crowd of enraged citizens from this and surrounding counties, early Saturday morning, after binding him with chains to a

tree where he had attacked and murdered a 16 year old girl of the county the afternoon before, burned him to death and later hung him to a black gum tree near the public highway.

After being captured, Irwin confessed to the crime, giving the details substantially as has been related. He also stated that he was an escaped convict serving a ten year term in Pulaski County.

He lived for the last two years at the home of Mrs. J. M. Willis near Mystic, where he had worked about the house. He was caught last year prowling about a house at Ocilla and locked up, but the charge was not pressed against him.

Irwin was carried to the spot where he had committed the most heinous crime in the history of the county and soon a fire snuffed out his life.¹⁰⁶

As the above passage indicates, the pro-lynching rhetoric of white supremacist sympathizers implies that lynchers are respectable, law-abiding citizens who, in performing their duties and identities as members of the state, enact deadly force against those who violate or endanger the civic well being of others.¹⁰⁷

Like the rhetoric of pre-Revolution speakers, pro-lynching rhetoric likewise made use of the “us/them” distinction as a means of legitimating violence against blacks. Contrastive couplings like “leading citizens” and “fiendish brute,” “best citizens” and “black beast” were discursive constructions aimed at portraying blacks as “political enemies” rather than “political friends.” Such juxtapositions helped to give credence to the myth of black criminality while simultaneously depicting whites as civilized and well-adjusted members of society. But the truth of white moral superiority was a fiction. Using the work of George Bernard Shaw, William Brundage illustrates the incongruity between the language of respectability used to describe

lynchers and the cruel, unrespectable nature of their actions: “[W]hen a Negro is dipped in kerosene and set on fire in America at the present time, he is not a good man lynched by ruffians: he is a criminal lynched by crowds of respectable, charitable, and virtuously indignant, high-minded citizens.”¹⁰⁸ Shaw was not the only one to point out the contradiction between claims of white civility and the sadistic nature of lynching. Over eighty years earlier, Ida B. Wells opined: “Brave men do not gather by thousands to torture and murder a single individual, so gagged and bound he cannot make even feeble resistance or defense.”¹⁰⁹

The language describing lynchings also contributed to the air of civility that lynchers assumed. Lynchings were typically referred to as a “picnic,” “barbecue,” or “neck-tie party.” Such festive terms helped to belie the bestiality of the practice by stressing its communal and seemingly benign features.

Efforts to depict lynching as the lawful expression of civic identity likewise included the strategic use of land. Lynchings were usually performed in pastoral surroundings and heavily wooded areas, but their location in central town spaces made the most dramatic impact.



FIGURE 4 Lynching of Joseph Richardson. Leitchfield, Kentucky. September 26, 1913. Reprinted from *Without Sanctuary*



FIGURE 5 Lynching of Unidentified African American male. Gallows, courthouse-jail and windmill in background. Location unknown. Reprinted from *Without Sanctuary*

The selection of highly trafficked, highly public spaces such as courthouse lawns and jailhouse grounds placed lynching spectacles at the center of civic life. These spaces represented both state and federal systems of government and as the backdrop of many lynching spectacles imparted a kind of legislative legitimacy and authority upon lynchers.¹¹⁰ Contributing to this legitimacy was the refusal of the federal government to intervene. Between 1901 and 1934, numerous attempts to pass federal anti-lynching legislation failed because Congress contended that the bills violated states' rights. And while some states created laws against lynching, the communal dynamic present within local towns often kept authorities from enforcing them. While in some communities a culture of silence protected offenders from being prosecuted, in others it was widely known that no harm would come to them.¹¹¹ Even in the face of photographic evidence, eye-witness testimony, and personal confessions, coroners' reports commonly concluded that lynching victims died at the "hands of persons unknown." Such silence not only condoned lynching but also helped to solidify the bonds between culprits, participants, and facilitators and conceal the history of violence against citizens of color.

Conclusion

Failure to enforce state law and pass federal legislation to protect the rights of black citizens has led many to conclude that lynching, as opposed to any other form of violence against citizens, is a crime committed by the nation against its own citizens. Ida B. Wells was the first among many to make this connection: "Our country's national crime is lynching...It represents the cool, calculating deliberation of intelligent people who openly avow that there is an 'unwritten law' that justifies them in putting human beings to death without trial by jury, without opportunity to make defense, and without right of appeal."¹¹² Wells indicts not a few, but the

entire citizenry for its silence and failure to intervene on behalf of African American citizens. Her comment accuses the nation of standing idly by while fellow citizens are brutally and unjustly persecuted.

In postbellum America, lynching became the expression of an attitude, the violent refutation of black civic identity, and a means expelling African Americans from the polity. The dehumanizing acts suffered by lynching victims expressed a blatant disregard for the rights of citizenship bestowed upon African Americans. In short, lynchings were a lesson in civics, and their frequency and regularity throughout the region made them and their signification of anti-black citizenship a “natural” part of the American landscape.

CHAPTER 4: LYNCHING PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE STRUGGLE OVER MEANING

While the lynching spectacle demonstrated the practices of public life and codes of behavior sanctioned by society, the lynching photograph ideologically naturalized them. As such, lynching photographs became a powerful tool of socialization. Unlike the lynched body, the lynching photograph withstood the effects of time, preserving illustrations of the day-to-day interaction of civic life for posterity. Circulated among enclaves of white society, these images operated as pictorial representations of white supremacist ideology and as visual illustrations of the means by which white Southerners reproduced the relations of power and authority that sustained it. Lynching photographs were, thus, a lesson in civics; they communicated to viewers the deep social codes by which white Southerners reproduced their self-ascribed status as reputable and rightful citizens of the nation.

The rhetorical power of the lynching photograph, however, did not simply reside in its ability to disseminate racist ideology, but also in its reproduction of narrative conventions familiar to its audiences. The juxtaposition of whites and blacks in these images reproduced narratives of the white hero and the black brute that resonated with viewers' understanding of the perpetual struggle of good over evil. Conditioned by dominant notions of racial superiority and inferiority, white supremacist sympathizers believed lynching photographs testified to the character of the depicted; they assumed that the gentlemanly visages portrayed in lynching photographs reflected the moral integrity of lynchmen and the moral depravity of the lynched.¹¹³

However, while many white viewers interpreted these images as proof of racial superiority and evidence of black bestiality, the rhetoric of resistance inclined anti-lynching activists to interpret these images differently. Among opponents of lynching, photographs that

depicted the murder of blacks signified the extremes to which enclaves of white society would go to secure their position of dominance. Such viewers interpreted the images of black bodies dangling before proud white faces as evidence of white savagery and the nation's refusal to extend the rights and protections of citizenship to African Americans. Using the backdrop of the First World War, anti-lynching agitators forwarded a powerful counter narrative that utilized reports of European evils—and American outrage concerning those evils—as a way to argue for redress of racial injustice at home. They argued that lynching constituted an “American atrocity” and, as such, warranted the concerted efforts of the nation and the world to stop it. Inverting the significations of lynching photography, anti-lynching activists publicized lynching photographs as blights against white America's character, as evidence that contradicted the projected integrity of the nation and its self-appointed elite.

Anti-lynching advocates shifted the narrative of American moral superiority to a narrative of white savagery, moral corruption, and national hypocrisy by critiquing the conflation of American national identity with monolithic notions of whiteness. This juxtaposition not only disrupted the synonymous coupling of “white” with “citizen,” but also destabilized the traditional viewing practices protecting racist sentiment. Furthermore, it permitted the advancement of new viewing practices representative of the progressive spirit influencing American politics during the early twentieth century. Ultimately, the appropriation of lynching photography by anti-lynching activists challenged the cultural ideology of white supremacy by violating the original representational conventions of those images.

In this chapter, I examine the literate practices guiding white supremacists' interpretations of lynching photography and the tactics anti-lynching activists employed to combat them. I begin by exploring the conventions of representation and reading that guided

turn-of-the-century viewership and the influence those conventions had upon spectators' reception of lynching photography. I then proceed to explore how anti-lynching agitators engineered counternarratives from the very materials meant to oppress or marginalize anti-lynching discourse. In the final analysis, the use of lynching photographs in both pro-lynching propaganda and anti-lynching agitation situated lynching photography as a site of contention between representations of the black body and definitions of the American citizen.

LYNCING PHOTOGRAPHY

*The Original Conventions of Viewing*¹¹⁴

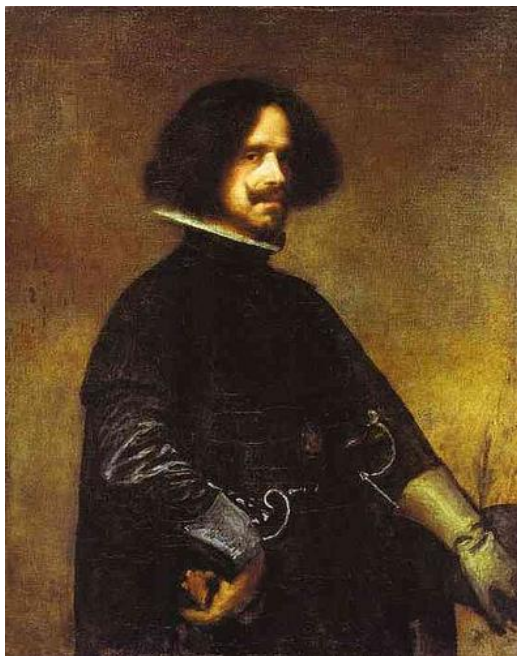


FIGURE 6 Velazquez, Diego (1599-1660)
1643 Self Portrait (Uffizi, Florence).
Reprinted from Flickr Photos



FIGURE 7 Lynching of Will Brown,
Omaha, Nebraska. 1919
Reprinted from Not my Tribe.com

The framed scenes and subject poses typical of lynching photography originated from a tradition of representational art that began with seventeenth-century painted portraiture. Painted portraits were articles of wealth that signified the ideological certainty of the aristocracy's

superiority over the peasantry. As such, painted portraiture delineated the cultured and respectable from the common and served as a tutorial that guided viewers in how to distinguish those of power from those devoid of it. The scenes of piety, gentility, and stateliness typically portrayed in these paintings reproduced in pictorial form the stringent social and economic stratifications that existed within European society. Subjects of these paintings exemplified strength, virtue, purity, and honor, characteristics that demanded veneration and deference from the subjugated. Ultimately, viewers gazing upon these paintings read the codes of class, conduct, and character ascribed in such portrayals as ways of reading their place within the social order.

The conventions of representation and interpretation that guided seventeenth—and eighteenth—century viewing practices likewise guided those of the post-Reconstruction era in America. As Amy Louise Wood explains, photographic portraiture provided:

a relatively inexpensive and accessible means for middle-class Americans to emulate elite portraiture and make evident their respectability...the portrait itself, the presentation of the self it conveyed, served as a sign of social status, while the image within the portrait ideally made the moral worth of the sitter manifest through facial expression and bodily comportment.¹¹⁵

Wood's observation provides insight into the rhetoric of lynching photography. The growth of American industry at the turn of the century provided greater opportunity for class ascendance and thus access to practices like photography that affirmed such status.¹¹⁶ The regal and erudite postures struck in lynching photographs mimicked those of the English king and hunter, the respectable aristocrat and refined gentlemen characteristic of seventeenth and eighteenth century painted portraiture. Emulating images of the aristocrat and the British noble on the foxhunt evoked the sentiments of culture and refinement ascribed to such positions. Such representations

reproduced Victorian notions of masculinity, class, and respectability by portraying dignified white men flanked by tattered black corpses. The gathering of orderly spectators suited in black and adorned with hats only helped to legitimate claims of Southern propriety. Read within the social contexts of early American portraiture and racial politics, lynching photographs were thus attempts to affiliate Southern culture with English aristocracy.¹¹⁷ Amid the climate of post-Reconstruction politics, such an association represented a challenge to Northern criticisms of Southern society. Post-Reconstruction audiences interpreted these images as reflections of Southern gentility. To read these photographs as inferences of lineage among the noble, the cultured English homeland, and the American South served only to further legitimate white society's use of racialized terrorism.

Adhering to past conventions of representation helped to ideologically naturalize lynching as the common practice of whiteness. Theorists of visual culture such as Victor Burgin, Michael Shapiro, Suren Lalvani, and Hariman and Lucaites, have observed that the rhetorical power of the photograph resides in its reproduction of already-in-place structures of power.¹¹⁸ Within the ideological matrix that justified racialized violence against blacks, lynching photography functioned as a kind of nationalist propaganda; it reproduced and reinforced the very discourses of white refinement and respectability that legitimated the white-black hierarchy. Thus, lynching photos, like painted portraiture, were a lesson in civics. They represented and reproduced the "us/them" dialectic that undergirded white supremacy and the racial narrative of the white citizen's struggle over the black domestic enemy.

Other conventions of representation likewise guided audiences' readings. The juxtaposition of white/black, refined/savage depicted in lynching photographs reproduced the good/evil dialectic encoded in classical mythology, European literature, and early American

cultural expression. In *Black Beast, White Hero*, scholar Paul Hoch argues that the construction of whiteness began with the narrative associations Europeans drew to the triumphant heroes of Greek mythology.¹¹⁹ Hoch traces the theme of the hero's triumph over the mythological beast to "medieval Christian theology" in which the Devil and demons "were often depicted as a lascivious black male with cloven hoofs, a tail, and a huge penis capable of super-masculine exertion."¹²⁰ In their quest for power, prosperity, and the fair maiden, the heroes were commonly confronted by dark-hued, half animal-half man beasts. The hero's victory over the black beast was rewarded with riches and the affections of the female captive.

The suasive force of narratives such as the black beast and the fair white maiden were sufficiently entrenched in the cultural imagination so as to render banal the reprehensibly sadistic practice of lynching. Described as the foreign threat that endangered the virtue of not only white society, but also its perpetuator—the fair maiden—the ravenous black villain was justly hunted down by honorable white men who sought to protect their women. The white men depicted in lynching photographs were, thus, revered as heroes of the community. As Hoch explains, white masculine identity is performed through its slaying or enslaving of the mythical black beast.¹²¹ If enslaving the black beast is the classical performance of whiteness, then lynching the black brute is its modern instantiation. The rhetorical import of lynching photographs, therefore, stemmed from their reproduction of concretized narratives of good and evil, formulas by which the notion of racial difference were easily imparted. The image of the white hero and the black beast reproduced in lynching photographs illustrated a common assumption among whites—that blacks were inherently sinister and amoral beings requiring the guidance and righteous judgment of whites. Because lynchers' etiquette and attitudes towards blacks were sanctioned by the community, white supremacist sympathizers read the white men depicted in lynching

photographs as individuals not only who emulated white masculinity, but also American mores. Their honorable stances ascribed characteristics of respectability and virtue that visually sustained the discourse of whiteness and vindicated their practice of violence against blacks as the venerable performance of white citizenship.

The narrative conventions of good and evil also served as deflectors of the political. By following standard storylines of struggle and survival, the narrative framework of the hero and villain helped to strip lynching of its social and economic influences and situate it as a necessary form of protecting whites from those who intended to do them harm. Such narratives made it easy to read blacks as the enemy of white prosperity. As political theorist Carl Schmitt put it, the “enemy” is conceived of as the extinguisher of life, as a collective that requires defeat if “the people” are to endure.¹²² Images depicting African Americans as the ultimate threat to white ways of life justified lynching. Besides, to accept that lynching was performed out of fear of economic competition, civic supremacy, or any other reason would be to undermine the discourse of white masculinity that helped to venerate its practice. Rendering the political mute, therefore, aided in the campaign to legitimate lynching.

Narrative frameworks such as the hero and villain not only worked to secure the social and economic interests of whites over blacks, but also provided a means of identification for lynching practitioners. Comparing classic photos of the hunter with lynchers and their victims, Amy Louise Wood demonstrates how lynching-as-hunting-expedition also helped to depoliticize the ritualized murder of blacks by providing yet another narrative framework that contributed to lynching’s normalization and viewers’ identification with lynching practitioners. Hunting was a customarily masculine practice in American society. The game caught from these expeditions

allowed husbands, fathers, and sons to provide for their families and reaffirm their masculine identities as heroes of white women while simultaneously reasserting their roles as community leaders, protectors, and providers.¹²³ The language, practice, and aesthetics of the hunt were, therefore, easily subsumed under the mission to secure white supremacy. Like the conventions of painted portraiture, the stalking, trapping, and mutilating practices performed on black bodies helped to further normalize lynching as a customary practice of white citizenship.

However, metaphors such as “the hunt” and storylines of the fair white maiden and virtuous white hero weren’t the only narratives that lynching photographs depicted.



FIGURE 8 The lynching of Lint Shaw in Royston, Georgia. April 28, 1936. Reprinted from *Crisis* magazine.

The arrangement of bodies as depicted in this photograph of the Lint Shaw lynching is common: the lynching victim takes center stage while the white bodies, men from various ranks within the

social hierarchy, play the role of supporting cast. The focal points of the photograph capture three men in a diagonal alignment, their bodies creating a white-black-white composition that symbolizes the historic juxtaposition of race and class in the American South.

The angle of the photograph situates Shaw directly between two men whose attire represents different points along the white American socio-economic continuum. The man in front is dressed in working class attire. His well-worn overalls and cotton shirt suggest he is either a farmer or mill worker. He leans against the lynching tree with arms crossed in a decidedly satisfied expression. Ironically, his relaxed posture and relative proximity to Shaw hints at the truth underlying the rhetoric of white supremacy. The institution of slavery created stark economic stratification among whites in the American South. To secure the economic interest of prominent landowners, merchants, and officials, white elites created ordinances that deterred the union of whites and blacks along economic lines. In *Open Wound: The Long History of Race in America*, historian William McKee Evans explains how the campaign to secure the economic interests of the white elite was advanced by forwarding the myth of white solidarity. This fiction worked to circumvent the class differences threatening to undermine social and economic dominance by the Southern oligarchy. By impressing upon common whites the idea that their “shared equality” as individuals of the same skin color made them equal to their white leaders and superior to all non-whites, the white elite secured its privileged status as well as its control of the Southern economy.

Thus, the location of the worker’s body next to that of Shaw’s implies the two are closer than the rhetoric of white supremacy would lead viewers to believe. Nonetheless, this reality is lost upon the worker, as his posture implies not only satisfaction but pride. Peering over his shoulder to catch a glimpse of his handwork, the worker appears pleased. His expression is

mimicked by the white gentlemen standing behind and just to the left of Shaw's body. The gentleman is noticeably shorter than the working-class lyncher in the forefront of the photograph. His clothes are unstained, neatly pressed, and starched, each fiber of his outfit in its proper place. His three-piece suit, tie, and hat suggest he is a professional, perhaps a businessman or lawyer. Like the working-class individual in the forefront, this well-dressed spectator also braces himself against the tree. However, unlike his counterpart, the professional's proximity to Shaw's body is lengthened by an outstretched arm used to prop himself against the tree. The faces of the men in this photograph are stern. Unafraid of persecution, the men deliberately stare at the camera, their glances openly communicating their complicity.

Other conventions common to lynching photography helped to reproduce the image of the cultured white citizen and the black domestic enemy. As Wood observes, lynching photographs neither depicted crowds in the process of hanging nor showed them torturing their victims.¹²⁴ Most lynching photographs, like the photograph of Lint Shaw, portrayed crowds of white men—some gloating, others poised, all nonetheless adorned with various expressions of satisfaction and pride. None of them, however, were depicted in the act itself. After lynchings, bodily relics such as hair and appendages were often collected and distributed as souvenirs. Following the lynching of Sam Hose,¹²⁵ the *Journal* reported the activities of participants as a “mad haste” to pocket anything “that had any bearing on the occasion...even the ashes were picked up in handkerchiefs and carried away in triumph. Men left the scene bearing huge chunks of burned wood, limbs of the trees which was [sic] made the stake, pieces of bone, and revolting and bloody segments of skull.”¹²⁶

These items were highly coveted keepsakes. Displayed in store windows, they testified to white society's triumph over black intrusion upon the assumed superiority of white America. Lynching photographs, however, were devoid of any signs of fighting and bartering among spectators, absent of any evidence of the frenzied joy that white newspapers described befalling the crowd as it participated in the spectacle. To depict such a truth—to portray the crowd in the ravenous, excited, chaotic scrimmage over teeth, rope, and other corporal mementos—would be to undermine the image of white civility, order, and refinement that lynching photographs aimed to construct.

The fact that photographs can be easily mass produced likewise made them a suitable substitute for traditional lynching memorabilia. Lynching photographs functioned as acceptable proxies in the absence of perishable souvenirs. Compared to corporal keepsakes, these relics offered a more expansive reminder of the event and provided supporters of white supremacy an opportunity to relive the spectator moment. Suffice it to say, then, that within white supremacist culture, possessing lynching photographs was socially acceptable. Such relics functioned as visual enthymemes that alluded to their owners' support of and alignment with white supremacist ideology. As a form of cultural currency, lynching photographs not only marked an individual's adherence to the prevailing notions of race and place that permeated the times but also affirmed one's identity as a proper citizen.¹²⁷

Images of lynching, however, were not restricted to photographs alone. The transformation from lynching photograph to lynching postcard reveals the strategic intent to share and pass on the practice of lynching and the ideology that sustained it. As Shawn Michelle Smith explains, the sending of postcards both performed community and “enlarge[d] community in the same act, for these images symbolically expand a community's claim on time and space by

connecting static individuals to distant places.”¹²⁸ The circulation of these images through the U.S. postal system likewise demonstrated how the federal government participated as a member of the imagined community. By facilitating the circulation of lynching postcards, the federal government demonstrated its adherence to the politics that sustained white supremacy. Postcards not only allowed for the easy transport of artifacts that reified white citizenship but also granted senders the opportunity to demonstrate their allegiance to racist ideology. Often imprinted with words of disappointment, postcards characteristically expressed practitioners’ regret for others’ inability to participate in the immediacy of the spectacle. As a result, these items featured dates, comments, and loving messages to family members that narrated the event and the sender’s place in it. For example, in 1916, a young man living in Waco, Texas sent his family a postcard of Jesse Washington’s lynching. On the back he wrote: “This is the barbecue we had last night. My picture is to the left with a cross over it. Your sone [sic] Joe.”¹²⁹

While most lynching postcards were sent as commemorative mementos among white Southerners, others were sent as threats to those who challenged white supremacy. Lynching postcards sent to prominent black leaders or anti-lynching sympathizers were intended as warnings. One such postcard featured several white men standing below the charred remains of a legless and armless body. On the back the following was written: “Warning. The answer of the Anglo-Saxon race to black brutes who would attack the Womanhood of the South.”¹³⁰

The same circulation meant to extend the reach of supremacist ideology inevitably and ironically contributed to lynching practitioners’ inability to control the use to which such images were put. This lack of control over the circulation of lynching photography additionally contributed to the loss of control by white supremacists over the definition of citizen.

Appropriated by anti-lynching activists, lynching photography also became a successful method of galvanizing national support against acts of racialized terror.

ANTI-LYNCHING AGITATION

The Appropriation of Lynching Photographs

The campaign against lynching did not begin with lynching photographs but instead with speeches and news accounts by anti-lynching agitators. Church and community leaders delivered sermons denouncing lynching, rallied opponents to agitate against it, and used black newspapers to criticize white indifference toward racial injustice. However, while these efforts stirred awareness of lynching's antidemocratic features, efforts to suppress racialized violence were stymied due to the inaction of prominent whites and elected officials.¹³¹ More direct means of appealing to the moral conscience of the nation would have to be employed if the campaign against lynching were to succeed.

Investigative journalist and editor of the *Memphis Free Speech*, Ida B. Wells, was the first major anti-lynching advocate to augment her work with lynching photographs. Her publications and lecture tours both home and abroad fostered awareness of lynching and worked to mobilize support against it. *The Red Record* (1895), the second of Wells' three anti-lynching pamphlets, was the first anti-lynching publication to utilize lynching photography. Wells' selection depicted the image of an unidentified man who was lynched in Clanton, Alabama in 1891. Accompanying text to Wells' insert explained the social, economic, racial, and gender factors that legitimated lynching in the minds of racist whites and substantiated the claims of white solidarity.¹³²

Scene of lynching
at Clanton,
Alabama, Aug. 1891.

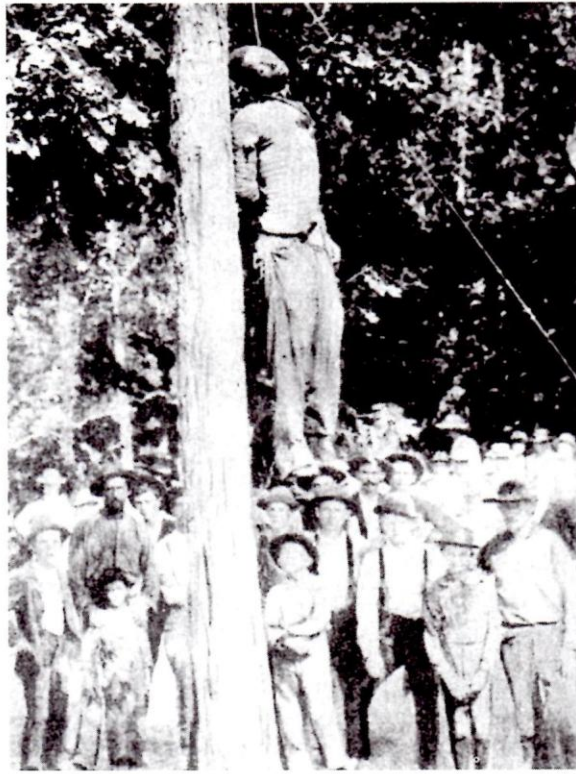


FIGURE 9 Lynching of unidentified black man in Clanton, Alabama. Reprinted from Wells, *Southern Horrors*.

While Wells' juxtaposition of image and text became the standard formulation for agitation, the use of lynching photographs was a practice not as readily open to the national press. Unlike Wells, who was an independent publisher, the national press was restricted from reproducing lynching photographs. Although some photographs did make it to press, the notions of decorum and appropriateness present during the early twentieth century limited newspapers in their ability to portray public displays of the grotesque. In place of lynching photographs, recreations of lynchings produced by political cartoonists were often used. Sketches like this one used by *The Chicago Defender* in 1916 are representative of the ways in which anti-lynching agitators adapted abolitionist rhetoric to twentieth-century progressive politics.¹³³ In the foreground of this drawing stands a tree adorned with the naked posterior of a single black man. In the background dangle four silhouettes. The image of the murdered men

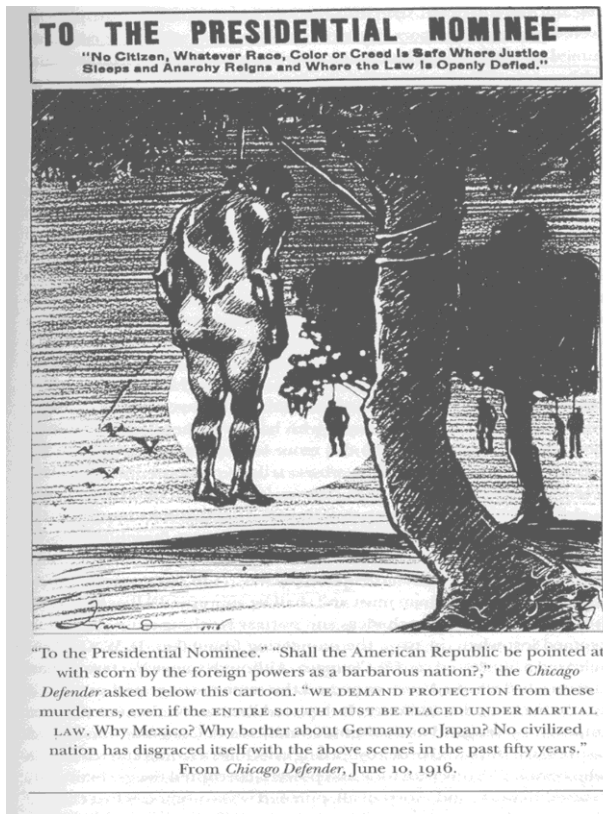


FIGURE 10 “To the Presidential Nominee.”
Reprinted from Jordan, *Black Newspapers*.

merges the *Defender's* call to the Presidential nominee with its appeal for national self-critique. The header and footer read therefore: “TO THE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE—“No Citizen, Whatever Race, Color or Creed Is Safe Where Justice Sleeps and Anarchy Reigns and Where the Law is Openly Defied.” Below the sketch the *Chicago Defender* asked, “Shall the American Republic be pointed at with scorn by the foreign powers as a barbarous nation?”

This grisly depiction of “strange fruit” is typical of the kinds of images editorialists used as stand-ins for lynching photographs. The use of these images just before America’s entrance into WWI indicates a clear attempt by anti-lynching agitators to affect public sentiment. America’s participation in the war was preceded by national outcry against the forced relocation of Armenians from Turkey and reports of murder and mayhem abroad. Mainstream newspapers often printed lengthy criticisms of overseas atrocities. As a result, their attempts to elicit sympathy for European victims were used against them by black editorialists who saw no difference between the persecution of Armenians by the Turkish and the persecution of African Americans by their fellow citizens.¹³⁴

Following this sentiment, black newspapers questioned how American citizens could denounce practices that so clearly mirrored their own. What came of this analysis was a series of editorials, much like the one above, which highlighted the hypocrisy of American democracy and the compromised morality of white citizens. Black editorialists explained that although America's justification for entering the war seemed noble, such explanations nonetheless belied its claims as the arbiter of moral veracity. Agitators proceeded to question how the nation could succeed in making the world "safe for democracy" and a global populace of liberty-loving citizens when it failed to secure the rights, liberties, and freedoms of its own people. America, rebuked James Weldon Johnson, was "a nation of hypocrites,"¹³⁵ and black newspapers reiterated this point time and time again by drawing parallels between the recognized atrocities abroad and the unrecognized mayhem at home. Such critique was intended to redirect the attention of white Americans from the rhetoric of American whiteness to the practice of critical self-reflection.

Ultimately, editorialists forwarded three main critiques during the early twentieth century.¹³⁶ The first critique investigated why Americans chose to disregard the atrocities at home for those occurring in far off lands. This strategy was designed to counter lynching's acceptance as a natural and customary practice by politicizing it as the sadistic murder of black citizens. Second, editorialists rationalized that a country unable to secure democracy within its own borders would be unable to secure democracy beyond them. Lynching, they argued, constituted a direct breach of American citizenship rights and due process of law. It was a national atrocity and consequently warranted the immediate attention of American citizens and the government. Lastly, editorialists argued that lynching stood as a stain on the moral cloak of the nation and the moral superiority of its self-proclaimed heirs. This argument in particular,

which would be reiterated by black writers to come, boldly drew attention to the incompatibility between the persecution of blacks on American soil and the nation's projected image as the capital city of the free world.

While some black periodicals like the *Defender*, *Richmond Planet*, and *Baltimore Afro-American* were restricted to artistic reproductions of lynching images, others, like the *Crisis*, were not. *The Crisis* began its use of lynching photographs in April of 1916 with an editorial titled "The Lynching in Lee County, G.A." The article described the murder of five black men who were taken from a jail cell in Worth County, Georgia (the county adjacent to Lee County), hanged, and then riddled with bullets. Following a description of the incident was an explanation of the economic underpinnings of lynching in the "black belt."¹³⁷ Most interesting, however, was how the image of the five lynching victims was given a full page and how the opening lines of the editorial worked quickly to direct readers' attention to the photograph. The first page of the spread read:

The picture on the opposite page is authentic. It was taken in Lee County, GA where on January 20 five Negroes were taken from Worth County Jail, rushed into the adjoining county in automobiles, hanged and shot. The photograph was taken on the spot and a copy sent to a prominent white man in a neighboring city. His colored servant took it while he was at lunch, handed it to a CRISIS agent, who had it copied.¹³⁸

Although the first, this image of the Lee County lynching pales in comparison to *Crisis*' later use of lynching photography. In the summer of the same year *Crisis* took reportage on lynching to a new level when it premiered an eight-page supplement on the lynching and burning of seventeen-year-old Jesse Washington. A mentally challenged farmhand in the community of

Robinson, Texas, Washington was charged with the rape and murder of Lucy Fryer. After a short trial, Washington was found guilty and sentenced to death. However, despite his sentencing, Wacoans rushed him from the courthouse to the town square and proceeded to perform one of the most elaborate lynching spectacles recorded. After being mutilated, burnt, and riddled with bullets, Washington's body was cut down and dragged through town.¹³⁹

Elizabeth Freeman, a white suffragist commissioned by the NAACP to investigate the Waco lynching, interviewed residents. One of her interviewees, a photographer contracted by the mayor to document the Washington lynching, sold Freeman photographs of the event.¹⁴⁰ Freeman's report of the incident at Waco stirred the nation. When she returned, W. E. B Du Bois adamantly campaigned for an image of Washington's burned corpse to be featured as the magazine's cover. However, detractors forced him to settle on the article beginning on the second page of the journal. Titled "The Waco Horror," the eight-page supplement provoked national condemnation of lynching. Du Bois made sure that some of the most prominent members of white society received a copy: "Seven hundred newspapers, all members of both houses of Congress, five hundred 'prominent' individuals in the arts and political life, as well as *The Crisis's* own forty-two thousand subscribers."¹⁴¹

Freeman's account as orchestrated by the NAACP led the organization's attack on the myth of white civility and galvanized support for the anti-lynching movement. Reports covering Washington's murder struck hard as the character of American whiteness was put on trial. Some mainstream white newspapers worked to recuperate the credibility of American whites by aligning themselves with perspectives commonly expressed by black editorialists.¹⁴² Regional papers described the young man's lynching as an act that tarnished the reputable character of "sovereign voters" of Waco and white citizens nationwide. *The Montgomery Advertiser*

described participants as rogues too uncultured to observe the decorum of civilized people: “No savage was ever more cruel; no stoneman was ever more heartless, no anarchist was ever less thoughtful of the dignity and honor of his State than either of the men who participated in this horrible, almost unbelievable episode. It is sickening to contemplate. It is monstrous.”¹⁴³ Observed in these protests by white newspapers is a turn from the sensational reporting that commonly accompanied news of lynching spectacles to an appeal to moral piety and due process.

After Freeman’s report in 1916, editorials on lynching became standard practice in the *Crisis*. To say that the lynching of Jesse Washington had a particularly strong impact on anti-lynching agitation would be an understatement. Not only did it provoke regional and national condemnation among white citizens, but also ignited efforts to draft and pass the Dyer Anti-lynching Bill, the first form of anti-lynching legislation to make it to Congress. Brought before the House in 1919, the bill aimed to make lynching a felony and mandated specific charges for public and legal officials who failed to protect potential victims.¹⁴⁴ *Crisis* continued its campaign against lynching even after the bill’s defeat.

The Critique of Conventional Viewing

Images like the photos of the “Waco Horror” had previously circulated among Southern whites as visual mementos of the white citizen’s victory over the black domestic enemy. However, in the hands of anti-lynching activists, these photographs signified something different entirely. Adapting the rhetoric of the photo to their own rhetorical agenda, activists transformed the image of the white hero into the image of the uncivil and antiheroic white citizen. Their juxtaposition of lynching photography with anti-lynching rhetoric contested normative notions of

blackness that hindered the agency and liberties of African Americans. These pamphlets, reports, and editorials produced a powerful counternarrative that challenged the myth of black aberrancy to reveal an alternate interpretation of the “real”—that is, the truth that lay behind the statuesque poses of lynching participants.

Crisis continued to use lynching photography as a form of combating racialized violence against blacks. A common appearance in this periodical was the image of lynching victim James Clark.¹⁴⁵ Clark was lynched in Gallie, Florida on July 11, 1926 for reasons still unclear.

Lynching photographs often depicted unclothed, burned, and dismembered corpses sometimes draped with sheets that covered removed genitalia. Unlike many victims of lynching, Clark’s



FIGURE 11 Lynching of James Clark, Galli, Florida. July 11, 1926. Reprinted from *Crisis* magazine.

body was neither burned nor disfigured. His hands and feet remained intact and his body was fully clothed, and his neatly aligned slacks, kept up by the black belt around his waist, suggested that the appendage most coveted by practitioners was still intact. The only sign of restraint was the handcuffs about his wrists. Interesting, however, is how, unlike other lynching photographs used by agitators, the identity of the victim in this image is not disclosed. Only the heading and the footer—statements that frame the body as the ultimate contradiction to the nation’s professed ideals—outline the victim. The absence of the name is no doubt rhetorical. Excluding Clark’s identity enhances the ubiquitous significations constructed through the linking of the photograph, header, and footer. This image was most likely selected by *Crisis* for the way it contradicted

notions of blackness. The image erodes the myth of the black beast. Unlike the attire of other lynching victims, Clark's attire mimics those of white men typically seen standing about lynched bodies. His white shirt is pressed and his tie neatly lined along the middle of his chest. The incongruity between the image and the myth inclines viewers to ask how savage and beastly could this respectably-clothed young man be. Because Clark's well-dressed frame betrays the image of the black savage cultivated by white America, it suggests an alternative rationale, one that imports the political into a representative construction originally meant to empty it.

The lynching photograph of James Clark often appeared alongside opinion pieces that criticized international politics, American foreign policy, and the failure to adhere to democratic ideals. These critiques were further emphasized by the photograph's title. Hovering above the image are the lyrics to a song meant to honor the nation and invoke patriotic sentiment: "My Country, 'Tis of Thee Sweet Land of Liberty—." Like the song that rhetorically frames it, Clark's body is depicted as an ironic tribute to the nation. Ultimately, the editor's choice to juxtapose the dangling corpse of a black man and the lyrics of a patriotic hymn succinctly expresses the contradiction between the egalitarian ideals that frame this country and the deep codes of race and place that constitute the practice of citizenship in America.

In the hands of racist whites, lynching photographs were used to construct a racialized rhetoric of citizenship by reifying deep codes of race and place already in circulation. These images functioned as a form of political rhetoric that helped to legitimate lynching as a necessary means of maintaining racial order. Sharing these images was vital to the political mobilization of whites against blacks. Because the sheer mass of participants sometimes made it difficult for all to partake in the preliminary viewing of lynching spectacles (the greater the attendance the less

proximity attendees had to the body and thus corporal keepsakes), witnessing by way of visual mementos became the most available form of practicing whiteness.

CHAPTER 5: EMMETT TILL AS POLITICAL TROPE

The anti-lynching movement and its attack on the rhetoric of antidemocratic barbarism contributed substantially to the decrease of lynching activity after the 1930s. However, while the material practice of transforming black citizens into visual representations of white civic dissent decreased in frequency, this decrease had little impact on the minds and imaginations of black citizens. Despite its decline, lynching remained an ever-present preoccupation for American blacks, particularly black men. The long tradition of vilifying and scapegoating black men justified such preoccupation, so much so that lynching did not have to be witnessed to have disciplining power; the sheer knowledge of it as a pervasive threat was enough to affect the dispositions of black men..¹⁴⁶

In *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals*, literary scholar Trudier Harris traces the relationship between historical lynchings and African American writers' treatment in fiction of lynching culture and practices. She examines the work of Charles Chesnutt, Sutton Griggs, Paul Laurence Dunbar, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison, among others, and maps how each uses adaptations of actual lynchings to direct readers how to read race in America. As Harris explains, the prevalence of lynching scenes in African American literature marks a tradition within American literature in which:

the ritual becomes an 'expected' way in which the black writer can show white attitudes towards Blacks from historical and cultural points of view and one of the easiest ways in which readers, particularly black readers, can be urged to identify with what those attitudes have meant in terms of destruction for Blacks. As rituals for whites reinforced their solidarity against Blacks, so too in a way do black writers' portrayals of such rituals

consolidate for their black readers the threats that could originate in the white community.¹⁴⁷

Harris maintains that the lynching scene is like the lynching spectacle in that it functions as a mode of Burkean identification. Building from the premise that authors are motive-driven beings, Harris surmises that texts that adapt real-life lynchings to literary works purposely intimate the existence of an analogous relationship between the black reader and the character or characters depicted. In this sense, the lynching scene as depicted in the work of black writers becomes a symbolic means of marking consubstantiality—i.e. sameness.

Additionally, Harris' assertion that the lynching scene functions as a kind of ideological shorthand for communicating a specific set of entrenched beliefs invokes Burke's notion of the *representative anecdote*, which is a summative and concise articulation of a perspective or attitude towards experience that is, according to Burke, a principle facet of rhetorical enterprise. For instance, folk tales like Br'er Rabbit, John Henry, and Stagolee reflect a worldview regarding white supremacy and black ingenuity while simultaneously prescribing methods of how to best navigate such asymmetrical power dynamics.

To say the least, the prevalence of lynching scenes in black literary fiction represents an experiential form reflective of black ways of knowing and being in the world. The collective experience of institutionalized slavery and Jim Crowism equipped black Americans with unique perspectives on race, place, and nation. The repetitious use of the lynching scene is an expression of that collective awareness, one that in reflecting a particular view of reality likewise instructs those addressed how to best negotiate that reality.

While the lynching scene appeared in fiction written by both black women and black men alike, it is its frequent appearance in the work of black men that I am most interested. For black men, the image of the lynching victim denoted the insignificance of black male subjectivity. However, while Harris maintains that the purpose of the lynching scene is to illustrate white attitudes toward blacks, I contend that it functions as a frame for reading race as it affects the lives of African Americans in general and black men in particular. As such, it might be better to consider the lynching scene presented in the work of black men as the expression of a kind of political literacy and therefore a rhetorical apparatus for reflecting a worldview specific to black male experience.

No incident of lynching illustrates this literacy practice –or functions as a representative anecdote - more than that of Emmett Till. On August 31st 1955, Till's body was pulled from the Tallahatchie River in Sumner County, Mississippi. In the absence of rope, a gin fan attached by barbed wire adorned his neck; the young boy had been lynched for reportedly whistling at a white woman. Half-brothers Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam were later arrested on charges of kidnapping and murder and found “not guilty” by an all-white jury. The duo subsequently gave a detailed account of the murder in *Look* magazine. Despite their public confession, Bryant and Milam were protected from further prosecution by laws against double jeopardy. The publicity accompanying the Till murder and the trial has made the murder one of the most frequently rearticulated incidents of the twentieth century. More than 150 literary iterations of the Till incident exist, more attention than has been given to any other lynching by the literary community.

Till's death illustrates the tension between national principles and the actual performance of citizens. In the work of African American writers, particularly black male writers, Till is

configured as a symbol of the chasm between abstract egalitarian ideals and their practice, as a symbol of the status and value of black men in America.

Black male writers' identification with the young Chicagoan is understandable. While Mexican, Eastern European, and Anglo-American men found themselves at the end of the noose, the disproportionately high rate of black male victims situates lynching as a critical cautionary tale for black men. It has figured in the work of African American males since William Wells Brown's *Clotel* and continues to be present in contemporary literature. Such heavy citation of lynching and burning scenes in African American literature reflects the doxa of the African American community and its aims to prepare future generations for the evils of the world.

Within the African American community, the name "Till" signifies racial injustice, sacrifice, dreams deferred, and motherly pain. The number of literary iterations of the Till incident has elevated the incident to the level of metaphor, to what Kenneth Burke calls a "master trope."¹⁴⁸ As a rhetorical form, the Till trope orders meaning and "provides a terminology of thoughts, actions, emotions, and attitudes for codifying patterns of experience."¹⁴⁹ In this chapter, I explore how John Edgar Wideman and Ishmael Reed continue the tradition of illustrating negative attitudes towards blacks by figuring Emmett Till as the organizing symbol that reflects the condition of being black and male in a distinctively American context. Through their various applications of the Till trope, Wideman and Reed urge the nation to recognize how its past transgressions continue to reverberate in the present and to understand the detrimental implications that continued transgressions have for the future.

CONSTRUCTING THE SELF AS TILL

John Edgar Wideman, "Looking at Emmett Till."

The story of the Emmitt Till and the "wolf whistle" heard round the world has in large part functioned within African American public memory as a reminder of racial injustice, civic inequality, and the dangers of interracial coupling. Open to the public and the media, the three-day, open-casket funeral was observed by over 50,000 people. Photographs of Till's body circulated within the public eye; *Jet* magazine, the leading black magazine at the time, with a readership of more than one million, released several photographs of Till's disfigured body. Like many, Wideman's first encounter with the story of Till came while viewing the images posted in *Jet*. Wideman, like Till, was fourteen.

I certainly hadn't been searching for Emmett Till's picture in Jet. It found me. A blurred, grayish something resembling an aerial snapshot of a landscape cratered by bombs or ravaged by natural disaster. As soon as I realized the thing in the photo was a dead black boy's face, I jerked my eyes away. But not quickly enough (italics original).¹⁵⁰

Wideman's account of Till begins with remembrance of nightmare: "A *nightmare* of being chased has plagued my sleep since I was a boy. The monster pursuing me assumes many shapes, but its face is too terrifying for the dream to reveal."¹⁵¹ Wideman's nightmare of a faceless being is powerful; its prominence and influence have prevailed despite time and the changing circumstances of Wideman's "waking life."¹⁵² Wideman suggests that the faceless visage of the dream and the face upon which he cannot gaze—the face he believes is that of Emmett Till—are inextricably bound, connected by a constant recurrence of the dream and Wideman's inability to bear witness to the "crushed, chewed, mutilated" image of the slain boy.¹⁵³

Casting the nightmare as a part of his psyche, Wideman reveals how the dream shares a relationship of interiority with his sense of self. Although a reminder of an account that occurred outside of Wideman's personal experience, the nightmare nonetheless reflects a reality that he believes he shares with Till. The frequency of the dream has permitted it to fuse with Wideman's consciousness, so much so that he is able to draw an associative link between his experiences and those of the murdered boy.¹⁵⁴ In this sense, the pervasiveness of the nightmare imitates the pervasiveness of Till's presence in Wideman's life.

Communicating this pervasiveness to the audience requires Wideman to illustrate the analogous relationship that exists between him and the slain boy. By mapping characteristics of Till onto himself, Wideman demonstrates that he had more in common with Till than simple blackness. In the first paragraph of Wideman's personal essay, Till is made synonymous with the writer through use of the first person: "Emmett Till and *I* were both fourteen the summer they murdered him," . . . "Two years before Emmett Till was beaten and murdered, when both Emmett and *I* were twelve..."¹⁵⁵ Although Till and Wideman were not friends, the array of similarities between them implies the relative ordinariness of black boyhood that not only enhances their connection, but also amplifies their virtual indistinctiveness. In addition to being both young and black, both boys were boastful and quick witted. Likewise, each observed antics typical of male adolescence:

In 1955, the year Emmett Till was murdered, I like him had just graduated from junior high. I'm trying to remember if I, like him, carried pictures of white girls in my wallet... Wanting to feel grown up, manly, I probably stuffed some sort of hand-me-down billfold in my hip pocket, and carrying around a white girl's picture in it would have been ocular proof of sexual prowess, proof that the color of my skin didn't scare white chicks

away or scare me away from them. A sign of power. Proof *I could handle that world, master its opportunities and dangers*. Since actual romances across the color line tended to be rare and clandestine then, a photo served as evidence of things unseen. A ticket to status in my tiny clan of Shadyside boys, a trophy copped in another country I could flaunt in black Homewood¹⁵⁶ (emphasis added).

Underlying Wideman's imaginings is a conscious recognition of the codes of conduct which underscore race relations in America. To Wideman, the significance of possessing the picture of a white female classmate has multi-communicative power. Socially, such an item could stand as evidence of manhood, confirmation of one's break from adolescence and ascent to adulthood. Racially, however, the picture could have communicated something more, something that the "clan of Shadyside boys" of which Wideman was a part would both fear and respect.¹⁵⁷ For his young black friends, such a picture would have represented a radical break from observing the system of power that aims to police black life. Wideman thus imagines Till's boasting as an act of insurgency, a willful refusal to observe racist ideology's construction of black masculinity as undesirable and innately inferior.¹⁵⁸

Despite the distance that separates them, Till is nonetheless familiar to Wideman. His attitude and demeanor, his capacity for sass and boasting, as well as his status as a young black male growing up under staunch laws against racial integration allow Wideman to identify with him and, with relative ease, align Till's motivations with those of his own. This consideration leads Wideman to contemplate his own fate. As he says:

So I may have owned a wallet with pictures of white girlfriends/classmates in it, and if I'd traveled to Promise Land, South Carolina with my grandfather Harry Wideman one of those summers he offered to take me down home where he'd been born and raised, who

knows? Since I was a bit of a smart-aleck like Emmett Till, I might have flashed my snapshots. I like to brag. Take on dares like him. *Okay. Okay, Emmett Till. You so bad. You talking 'bout all those white gals you got up in Chicago. Bet you won't say boo to that white lady in the store.*¹⁵⁹

Wideman makes use of age and adolescent behavior to assist him in merging his identity with Till's. Consequently, the extent to which Till and Wideman are rendered indistinguishable reinforces Wideman's underlying sentiment, namely, that there was nothing unique about Till that led to his death. The only distinguishable characteristics were that he was black and male—or more aptly put, a black boy in the wrong place at the wrong time. As such, Till emerges as a relatively ordinary black boy and, by association, representative of all black boys.

Till as Symbol of Declension

For Wideman, witnessing Till becomes the first step towards confronting his own mortality. It is also, however, the means by which Wideman contends for a revision of civic responsibility and accountability. Wideman reads the murder of Emmett Till as a manifestation of “apartheid mentality,” a perspective that rationalizes the inferiority of African Americans and the superiority of European Americans.¹⁶⁰ The intent of Till's murder, Wideman surmises, “was...to slay an entire generation. Push us backward to the bad old days when our lives seemed not to belong to us...when inferiority and subservience appeared to be our birthright.”¹⁶¹ In other words, Till's murder during a time of growing progressive politics was an attempt to deter African Americans from gaining equal status as citizens. Wideman concludes that beneath the exterior of the Till incident lurks a system of disenfranchisement that is grounded in the country's original sin of slavery and white America's unwillingness to either acknowledge the

advantages gained or surrender the privileges inherited from institutional racism.¹⁶² Slavery, Wideman explains:

...produced enormous profit and imprinted a model for ignoring the moral and ethical implications of financially successful global commerce we continue today. The traffic in human bodies was also fueled by a dream, a utopian dream of escape from the poverty, disease, class, and religious warfare of Europe, a dream of transforming through European enterprise and African slave labor the wilderness across the sea into a garden of wealth and prosperity, with the European colonist cast as the New Adam excising divinely sanctioned domination over all he surveyed...Racism and genocide were the underside of this Edenic dream.¹⁶³

Through Wideman's logic, Till's murder emerges as emblematic of society's refusal to reconcile the rift between its professed ideals and the reality of its achievement.

Symbolic of a willful refusal to extend the promise of liberty and equality to African Americans, Till is situated as the collapse of the oppressive past and profession of its promised future into the present moment.

Emmett Till's dead body, like the body of James Byrd just yesterday in Texas, reminded us that the bad old days are never farther away than the thickness of skin, skin some people still claim the prerogative to burn or but or shoot full of holes if it's dark skin. [...]

Emmett Till's rotting corpse points backward, history and prophecy at once: This is the way things have always been, will always be, the way they're supposed to be.¹⁶⁴

Citing the 1989 lynching of forty-nine-year-old James Byrd, Wideman substantiates his claim that the pervasive logic of racism will remain unbroken as long as society continues to let it go unchecked. For Wideman, it is not simply an apartheid mentality that sustains racial injustice in

America but rather the polity's refusal to acknowledge and "honestly examin[e]...the conditions that ensure and perpetuate it."¹⁶⁵ Consequently, because such action has yet to be taken, "Emmett Till dies again and again."¹⁶⁶

Wideman's reimagining of Till configures the slain boy as the break from national ideals—as the embodiment of the nation's decline from its promise of liberty and equality. Such constructions invoke the resounding indignation featured in the rhetoric of the African American Jeremiad, a political sermon that urgently calls the nation to reform.¹⁶⁷ A variant of the American Jeremiad, the African American Jeremiad is an instantiation of black double-consciousness; at its core is the recognition of African Americans as a collective located within and simultaneously outside of the nation's self-image, promise, and protection.

There are variations of the jeremiad form. Andrew Murphy distinguishes *traditionalist* jeremiads and *progressive* jeremiads based on the reflected interpretations of the American past. The traditionalist form is a "nostalgic narrative" that laments the loss of a virtuous past, interprets contemporary catastrophes as divine punishment, and "offers a vision of the future in which the past serves as a model and a limiting condition, a sort of empirical checklist to guide a political agenda of the future."¹⁶⁸ It is grounded in religious orthodoxy and valorizes the American past as the model for the future. Unlike its progressive counterpart, the traditionalist jeremiad – of which the African American jeremiad is sometimes an example - projects the image of a prodigal nation headed for divine punishment. This image plays on the religious anxieties of the people as a strategy for reformation.

In comparison, the progressive jeremiad sees American values of liberty, freedom, and equality as "principles open to critique and reformulation in new circumstances."¹⁶⁹ The rhetoric

of the progressive variation calls upon the American spirit of liberty and freedom as an effective method of transcending contemporary crises and the differences of ethnicity, language, and belief that hinder progressivist aims. In “Looking at Emmitt Till,” Wideman’s call for social reform cites racial injustice as 1) evidence of the nation’s hypocrisy, and 2) evidence of America’s declension from democratic promise.

As a contemporary jeremiah, Wideman continues the protest tradition of abolitionist and civil rights leaders. However, Wideman does not adhere to the traditionalist form. There is no foreboding prophecy of danger and destruction, no righteous anger present in his jeremiadic renditions. Instead, Wideman configures prophetic doom as perpetual haunting. The haunting is articulated as “the battered face...[that]will poison the middle ground of compromise between so-called ‘whites’ and so called ‘blacks.’ His face unmourned, unburied, unloved, *haunting* the netherworld where incompatible versions of democracy clash (emphasis added).”¹⁷⁰

Towards the end of “Looking,” Wideman forwards a declaration for social change:

Any serious attempt to achieve economic, social, and political equal opportunity in this nation must begin not simply with opening doors to selected minorities. That impulse, that trope, that ideology has failed. The majority must decide to relinquish significant measures of power and privilege if lasting transformations of self and society are to occur. There have always been open doors of sorts for minorities (emancipation, emigration, education, economic success in sports or business, passing as white). What’s missing is an unambiguous, abiding determination *declared in public and private by a majority of the majority to surrender privileges that are the living legacy of slavery.*

Begin now. Today. Give up walls, doors, keys, the dungeons, the booty, the immunity, the false identity apartheid preserves (emphasis added).¹⁷¹

In revealing the logic upon which acts of racialized hatred are conducted and white privilege expressed, Wideman discloses his own way of seeing and ordering the world. For him, Till exists as a testament, a symbol of the prevailing “racism and genocide” that substantiate the Edenic dream that is America.¹⁷² Scene after scene, Wideman paints Till as the image of America’s declension, as an echo of the race-centered injustices upon which the image of America as Promised Land stands.

None more adamantly portray this point as his sequence composite of Till and prominent figures in the African American struggle for equal rights:

Sometimes I think the only way to end this would be with Andy Warhol-like strips of images, the same face, Emmett Till’s face, replicated twelve, twenty-four, forty-eight, ninety-six times on a wall-sized canvas...each version of the face exactly like the other but different names printed below each one. Martin Luther Till, Malcolm Till. Medgar Till. Nat Till. Gabriel Till. Michael Till. Huey Till. Bigger Till. Nelson Till. Mumia Till. Colin Till. Jesse Till. Your daddy, your mama, your sister, brother, aunty, cousin, uncle, niece, nephew Till.¹⁷³

Wideman’s artistic configuration of Till as reiterated in this Warhol-like imagining emphasizes his own codification of the fourteen-year-old boy as a form that expresses a pattern of experience—one particular to African American men but applicable, however, to African Americans in general. This pattern of experience is strengthened by the web of associations constructed around Till. Through the use of his last name, Wideman links the symbolic significance of the Till incident to those names of prominent figures in the advancement of civil rights. In doing so, Wideman creates a new web of associations. As he says, “Emmett Till dies again and again because his murder, the conditions that ensure and perpetuate it, have not been

honestly examined.”¹⁷⁴ These names are familiar to the audience and thus operate as rhetorical commonplaces, points of reference meant to orient the audience historically and emotionally.¹⁷⁵

In “Looking at Emmett Till,” Wideman weaves together Till and the language of American civil religion, as the American jeremiad is sometimes called. Wideman’s memoir continues the political and rhetorical work of situating Till as a sign of civic and racial injustice. In doing so, he makes clear to the audience the deep-seated hypocrisy that sabotages the democratic project of American egalitarianism. In the hands of Wideman, the memory of Till becomes a vehicle for fostering justice, for reconciling the past and the future.

CONSTRUCTING THE SELF AS TILL

Ishmael Reed, Reckless Eyeballing

In 1986, at the height of the gender wars between African American writers, Ishmael Reed published his exceedingly satirical novel *Reckless Eyeballing*. Like many other cultural products of the era, Reed’s work reflected the socio-political climate of the 1980s, specifically public and scholarly irritation with the commercial reception of black women’s “inflammatory” criticism of black men. As a testament to Reed’s frustration with feminist male-bashing, *Reckless*, a narrative sustained by the concerted effort of black and white feminists to conspire against and sully the images of black men, functions partly as a criticism of feminist rehashings of the myth of the black rapist.

More generally, however, *Reckless*, like Wideman’s “Looking at Emmitt Till,” follows the tradition of using Till metonymically as a symbol of racial injustice. Yet Reed’s treatment of the Till trope, which also maps aspects of Till onto the author, is complicated by Reed’s use of

satire rather than memoir. To say the least, Reed's parodic application of the Till trope performs less of a symbolic merging and more of a literal swapping of himself with Till. *Reckless's* exaggeration of historical events is made more complex by numerous layers of meaning, multiple characters who signify the same thing, and Reed's own Neo-Voodoo Aesthetic, which features trickery and inversion as modes of illuminating truth. Ultimately, while Wideman's use of the Till trope marks Till and black men in general as embodiments of declension, Reed's use of the trope serves a more individual purpose. Reed identifies with the slain boy, but rather than configure him as a sign of America's decline from the promise of liberty and equality, Reed uses Till to illustrate black male sentiment towards feminist claims of gender inequality. He argues that white feminists are no different from the unliberated white women of the early nineteenth century because they continue the tradition of scapegoating black men. In the hands of Reed, the Till incident becomes a vessel through which feminist claims of inequality and difference are linked to the hypocrisy of the very white capitalist patriarchy they aim to deconstruct.

Reckless Eyeballing, the Novel and the Play

In Reed's novel *Reckless Eyeballing*, the protagonist Ian Ball (a clear stand in for Ishmael Reed), finds himself at the mercy of black and white feminists who have openly decried his debut play, "Suzanna," for its protagonist's unproblematic acceptance of sexual violence. Motivated to write a play that absolves him of feminist disdain, Ball aims to reform his allegedly sexist and misogynist style with a play "that's guaranteed to please" his female critics.¹⁷⁶ Ball's revisionist play stars protagonist Cora Mae (a model for Carol Bryant), a woman whose political metamorphosis from ordinary white woman to radical white lesbian feminist is the result of a mission to reclaim her dignity and honor as a Southern belle. These "virtues," supposedly stolen

from her during her youth by the *reckless eyeballing* of one, now lynched, Ham Hill are vindicated when Cora Mae gets a court order to exhume the remains of her assailant and put them on trial for “eye rape.”

Ball’s play, which is later taken to Broadway, consists of three acts. In Act I female gravediggers exhume the body of Ham Hill, remove it from the coffin, place it in a patrol car, and take it off to the courthouse. Except for the lone male spectator who in protest against the audience’s applause, shouts that Cora Mae’s exhumation “Looks like a case of dig the nigger up and kill him again,” Act I goes on without issue.¹⁷⁷ In Act II, Ham Hill is put on the witness stand for examination. He is suitless, lifeless, and voiceless. Because Hill cannot speak for himself, his attorney is forced to narrate for the jury Hill’s perception of the incident. While he rests silently on the stand, Hill’s defense attorney problematizes Cora Mae’s accusations of eye-rape, claiming that the young woman “craved attention from men and only complained about Ham Hill when she noticed that [he] wasn’t staring at her in the fateful encounter outside the supermarket...where Ham Hill worked as a packer.”¹⁷⁸ At this moment Ham Hill’s skeleton, as if to punctuate his lawyer’s accusation, begins to slide off the bench and onto the floor. The bailiff is forced to readjust the corpse.

Reed’s juxtaposition of the attorney’s argument and Ham Hill’s physical response out the rhetorical fallacy enacted by Cora Mae’s exhumation and persecution of Ham Hill. Like the straw man, Ham Hill is set up to be knocked down.¹⁷⁹ Symbolically, Hill stands as a prop by which Cora Mae—and by extension, white feminists—aims to erect her agency: He is the sacrificial lamb offered in exchange for Cora Mae’s appeals to liberty from patriarchal domination, and the entity through which feminists establish their innocence and victimhood status. Lifeless and speechless, Ham Hill rests as the ultimate scapegoat. However, like the

mythological black beast, Ham Hill, the reckless eyeballer—i.e. eye rapist—is a falsehood, an aberration conceived by (white society and) Cora Mae to absolve herself of guilt. The myth itself was powerful because it provided a legitimating discourse for lynching and thus helped to cloak the social and political underpinnings of lynching by asserting that it was a response to the black men’s sexual affinity for white women. Thus, despite the evidence to the contrary, white women in the company of black men were never considered to be there willfully because the imagined racial, cultural, and moral superiority of white supremacist ideology depended squarely upon the assumed immorality of African Americans. Accordingly, when such relationships were discovered, white women falsely accused their black lovers of rape as a means of securing their own safety.

It appears, however, that Cora Mae was unable to convict her “attacker.” Because Hill was rushed off to the hanging tree by her “husband and his friends,” Cora Mae was left without the opportunity to clear her good name.¹⁸⁰ She takes it upon herself to exercise the agency she was denied by pressing charges against Ham Hill. Mae’s decision to use legal channels not only rebukes white masculinist discursive practices such as lynching but also legitimates her as a figure of power, as one equal to men. In the play, she testifies that “it took her twenty years to bring charges against Ham Hill... That sex with her husband was no good after the incident...[and] that her social life had been ruined until she took up with her lover and opened the radical lesbian bookstore.”¹⁸¹

Cora Mae’s enthusiasm and extremist pursuit of her alleged attacker despite his death is worth noting for the way it mirrors the excitement expressed by lynching spectators. It suggests that there is an ulterior motive behind Cora Mae’s persistence, one that has nothing to do with gaining “justice” for alleged wrongs. This extremism is doubly noteworthy because it intimates

yet another mode of demonstrating white attitudes, specifically those of white feminists, towards black men. Yet, what is most interesting about Cora Mae's position is that it runs counter to popular depictions of rape victims. Typically, rape victims are depicted as individuals who struggle with bringing their rapist to justice. However, Cora Mae is devoid of anxiety. She is neither worried about facing her attacker nor reliving the trauma of being violated. Perhaps this is because her motivation for resurrecting and trying Ham Hill has nothing to do with justice at all. As the narrator reports, "...it was important to clear her own name. If there was no trial, there'd always been suspicion that she was trying to lure Ham Hill."¹⁸²

For Cora Mae, a guilty verdict would render Hill's lynching a consequence of his own actions, confer upon her the status of white victimhood, and secretly remove any guilt or remorse that she might be harboring for having caused his death. It appears that the greatest comfort for Cora Mae is to have her voice be heard, recognized, and validated. Doing so transforms her from silent victim to active agent, from passive spectator in the lynching of Ham Hill to orchestrator. The irony in all this is that Cora Mae's motivations align her more with the thoughts, behaviors, and actions of white men (as they relate to the lynching scene) than white women. And given that *Reckless* is a novel in which characters stand in for ideological movements, readers are left to conclude that white feminism is no different from white patriarchy.

Reed's use of satire magnifies the incongruities between feminist platforms and feminist practices in much the same way that James Baldwin's provocative reimagining of the Till incident in the 1964 play, *Blues for Mister Charlie*, candidly exposes the rationale behind Southern taboos. In *Blues for Mister Charlie*, Richard Henry (Baldwin's Till proxy) is murdered for assaulting the husband of a white woman and then insulting the man's virility in the presence of his wife. Baldwin's reconfiguration of Till jarred his audiences. "That, of course," remarks to

Christopher Metress, “is the point. [...] Baldwin is writing large for the blind, shouting loud for the hard of hearing, all in attempt to shock white people out of their complacency and into an unease that will, perhaps, save them, but only after they have been disturbed into seeing their own evil and vanity.”¹⁸³

The strategy of “writing large for the blind” is present in Reed’s adaptation but manifests differently. Throughout the trial, Reed’s narrative voice impresses upon the reading audience that Cora Mae’s argument is counterfeit, that it is not justice she seeks but absolution. These intentions are exposed by Hill’s defense later in the trial when, during cross-examination, Cora Mae reveals her past as “rock n roll sex kitten” and questionable lifestyle as a result thereof.¹⁸⁴ Although exaggerated by the parodic structure of the novel, the defense’s attack on Cora Mae’s character is tantamount to Ida B. Wells’ warning regarding the complex truth behind the myth of the black rapist: “Nobody...believes the old thread bare lie that Negro men rape white women.”¹⁸⁵ However, where Victorian decorum attenuated Wells’ language, contemporary etiquette—as performed by Reed—allots for less delicate articulations. Thus, rather than alluding to white women’s sexual desire for black men, Reed, by way of Hill’s attorney, argues forthrightly that Cora Mae desired the affections of a black man and that her treasonous actions could only be defended by invoking racial myth. Needless to say, *Reckless Eyeballing*, like in many of the fictional recounts of the Till incident, repeats history. Despite his attorney’s defense, Ham Hill is once again found guilty of eye rape and Cora Mae is granted the absolution she so desperately seeks. Ham Hill is lynched again, only this time through the active participation of his accuser.

REED, TILL, AND THE CRITIQUE OF SECOND WAVE FEMINISM

Taking White Feminists to Task

Reckless Eyeballing is a parody of what Reed interprets as feminist politics and practice. “My disagreement with some feminists and womanists,” he explains, “is that they have, out of ignorance or design, promoted such myths [as the black beast rapist] in the media, a situation that adds to the problem that black men face in everyday life.”¹⁸⁶ Reed’s work has consistently come under fire by black female writers. Acerbic dialogues between he and Michelle Wallace proliferated in the pages of the *Village Voice* during the late eighties and early nineties.

In 1975, white feminist critic, Susan Brownmiller, published *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. Heralded by the *New York Times* as a work “destined to take its place beside De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, Friedan’s *The Feminist Mystique* and Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics*,”¹⁸⁷ *Against Our Will* was marketed as the most comprehensive study of rape in America. In her work, Brownmiller recalled the case of Emmett Till and maintained that his lynching was a consequence of his own action.

Rarely has one single case exposed so clearly as Till’s the underlying group-male antagonisms over access to women, for what began in Bryant’s store should not be misconstrued as an innocent flirtation. Till’s action was more than a kid’s brash prank and his murder was more than a husband’s revenge....Till was going to show his black buddies that he, and by inference *they*, could get a white woman and Carolyn Bryant was the nearest convenient object. In concrete terms, the accessibility of *all* white women was on review...And what of the wolf whistle, Till’s ‘gesture of adolescent bravado’? We are rightly aghast that a whistle could be cause for murder but we must also accept that Emmett Till and J.W. Milam shared something in common.¹⁸⁸

What Reed critiques in *Reckless* are binaries such as this one posed by Brownmiller. She, like many second wave feminists who hierarchize difference, maintain that gender supersedes race, and ignore how race, class and gender function simultaneously as intersecting forms of oppression.¹⁸⁹ Brownmiller's vision is characteristic of the shortsightedness of white feminists of the 1970s and 1980s, whom black feminists such as bell hooks, Angela Davis, Michelle Wallace, Patricia Williams, and Audre Lorde have taken to task. For Brownmiller, Till's gender supersedes any consequences that may result from his racialized status as a black youth. She sees him solely as a member of the male superstructure and, as such, interprets his actions as a characteristic of patriarchy. According to Brownmiller, Till's actions illustrate his open disregard and, by default, disrespect for another man's property rather than his ignorance or willful refutation to observe racial codes. Ultimately, Brownmiller read's Till's death as a consequence of his infringement upon the property claims of a fellow member of the masculine order.

The argument made by Ham Hill's attorney in *Reckless Eyeballing* functions as Reed's response to Susan Brownmiller's interpretation of the Till incident. In the exchange between Cora Mae and the attorney, we see that not just Susan Brownmiller but, more explicitly, feminist ideology in general is critiqued. Cora Mae's bogus list of grievances: failed sexual stimulation with her husband, a ruined social life, her turn to women, and transformation into the owner of a lesbian bookstore all exemplify the rhetoric of victimhood that Reed associates with second wave feminism.¹⁹⁰ Illuminating for his readers how feminism's pursuit of independence and liberation simultaneously reproduces systems of domination, Reed argues that the rhetoric of victimhood allows feminists to justify their movement's subjugation of people of color. Casting white male dominance in its own image, Reed reasons that the feminist movement does nothing

more than reproduce the very system of oppression it aims to challenge. This interpretation is supported by black female playwright and Alice Walker caricature Tremonisha Smarts' acerbic rebuke of her white producer Betty French: "You white feminists sound more like the white man with each passing day. In fact, the only thing your dipshit movement has produced is more white men."¹⁹¹

In his cross-examination of Cora Mae, Hill's attorney exposes these ideological perversions. He argues that Cora Mae's actions, namely her solicitation of Hill's attention, is no different from "the man who opens his coat and displays his genitals to females in public places." He thus challenges feminism's projected ethos.¹⁹² The syllogism here is that feminism, like the male flasher, is just as crude and delinquent, just as unethical and depraved as white men. Such arguments projected by Reed illustrate his motto of "Writin' Is Fightin'," his use of a discursive method that uses satire and wit to demystify and subvert conventional American texts and genres and illuminate the absurdities of American politics, culture, and tradition.¹⁹³ The conclusions made here are that feminism is no more ethical an ideology than patriarchy and that women are no more virtuous than men. Ultimately, the exchange between Cora Mae and Hill's attorney encapsulates Reed's "chief complaint and disagreement" with feminists, specifically, "their tendency to ascribe criminal sexual offenses committed against women and children by some black men to the *majority* of or *to all* black men" (emphasis added).¹⁹⁴ Likening their depictions of black masculinity to "the propaganda spread by the Ku Klux Klan and American Nazi party," Reed concludes by criticizing feminism's willful refusal to examine how its own ideological pursuit reproduces race and gender oppression.¹⁹⁵

In the introduction to *The Reed Reader*, the author states, "*Reckless Eyeballing* was written in the spirit of Ghede, a descendant of the Yourba Iku, whose task is to show 'each man

his devil.”¹⁹⁶ In this sense, Reed’s parody of the Till incident is meant to reflect back onto feminists the “devil” that dwells within them.

While Cora Mae functions as a caricature of Carol Bryant and white feminism, Betty French, Ball’s producer, is a caricature composite of white feminists Brownmiller and Gloria Steinem. In *Reckless*, French is depicted as a red-hot radical whose hatred for men—specifically black men—inclines her to subject Ball—and by extension Ham Hill—to public torture and humiliation. Reed’s lampooning of Brownmiller does more than reflect onto her the “devil” that resides within. More directly, it is an outright indictment of Brownmiller’s own sexism and racism. Likewise, Reed’s depiction of French—which might be best interpreted as a criticism of the French philosophical influence on Second Wave Feminism—embodies Gloria Joseph’s critique of white feminists. In her review of Angela Davis’ *Women, Race, and Class*, Joseph declares that:

Far too few white feminists realize the extent to which they have internalized racist ideologies or the degree to which their white solipsism operates. Pretentious and incomplete analyses concerning rape and sexism from authors such as Susan Brownmiller perpetuate the dogmatic, unsubstantiated claim that rape is the worst crime perpetrated against women and sexism the ultimate oppression¹⁹⁷ (emphasis added).

Although Reed criticizes white feminists, his argument is actually twofold. While one line of argument addresses the role of white feminists in perpetuating damaging images of black manhood, the other addresses black feminists’ support of and participation in this practice. In Tremonisha Smarts, we see what seems to be the culmination of Reed’s frustration with black women’s support of the racist and sexist undertakings of white feminists like Brownmiller.

Reed was not alone in his frustration. Such grievances within the black community were made public on venues like *The Phil Donahue Show*. Donahue's studio audience, which was typically populated by white female spectators was, during his 1989 segment entitled "Black Women Writers," abundantly populated with black men. Like Reed's *Reckless*, *The Phil Donahue Show* functioned as a stage within a stage, putting on display before the nation the very dirty laundry regarding black sexual politics that Reed himself had been airing.

The *Donahue* exchange was fraught with tension. Showcasing Alice Walker, Michele Wallace, Ntozake Shange, Angela Davis, and Maya Angelou, *Donahue* helped to perpetuate not only stereotypical images of black masculinity but also reinforce public sentiment regarding the pathology of African American culture. A precursor to the *Jenny Jones*, *Ricki Lake*, and *Jerry Springer* shows, daytime America watched as black men and women sparred on national television. At the center of the controversy was Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*. Picked up several years later by Steven Spielberg, the movie adaptation of the novel was interpreted by many as yet another public decree of Walker's disdain for black men. For Reed, Walker's depiction of black masculinity was seen as an unequivocal declaration of her alignment with the "interest of white feminists."¹⁹⁸ Understandable now is why Reed makes Smarts' play, *Wrong Headed-Man*, a gross exaggeration of Walker's *The Color Purple*: "By the end of *Wrong Headed-Man*, the lead villain has screwed his children, sodomized his missionary wife, put his mother-in-law in bondage, [and] performed bestial acts with pets."¹⁹⁹

As Reed contends, *Reckless Eyeballing* is in the spirit of Ghede. And like all whose evil is reflected back upon them, the truth of Smarts' (Walker's) alignment is eventually brought to bear. Smarts' evil is revisited upon her when producer Betty French is placed in charge of Ball's

play. Under French's direction, Ball's play is relocated from the upper theater to the lower theater, given a smaller budget, and rewritten. However, rather than rewrite the play herself, French enlists Smarts for the task. But Smarts refuses to remain a cog in the white feminist machine. An attack on her by the Flower Phantom—the mysterious figure whose retribution against ill-intentioned feminists is attained by shaving their heads—only solidifies her choice to abandon the movement. Smarts' embodiment of this new position is articulated in her open rebuff of French: "You're going to change the entire meaning of the play. You hell hussy. Everything you touch you corrupt."²⁰⁰ When French retorts that her reasons for changing the play have to do with maintaining certain "standards," Smarts scoldingly replies:

It's not standards. You're worried about the monologue. It's political, isn't it? You don't like the monologue, you bitch admit it.... Why do you always feel the need to castrate the black man?²⁰¹

This last statement, however, fails to produce the effect that Smarts intends. "How can you say that? You're the one they picketed."²⁰² French's pointed retort implicates Smarts as a willing participant. Trumped by her own complicity and guilt over having created division between her and other playwrights of color, Smarts remains quiet.

The string of responses that later follow exhibit Smarts' coming to terms with having placed herself opposite black men and therefore—as Reed implies—against her own socio-political interests. French and Smarts' dialogue reflects argument common among white feminists and feminists of color. Reed's purpose for including the dialogue is simple: it is intended to both make the reader privy to the long-standing antagonism between white feminists and feminists of color and to bolster his point regarding some black feminists' treatment of black men.

In *Reckless*, Smarts is configured as a woman torn between political views, a woman unsure as to where her allegiances should lie, and a woman who at the last minute realizes the error of her ways attempts to make amends. This shift in political stance comes after her confrontation with French regarding edits to Ball's play. After the exchange, Smarts notifies Ball that French wants to remove sections of the play that cast Ham Hill and Cora Mae as victims of the same system of oppression: French "wants to drop Cora Mae's line about their [she and Ham Hill] being in the same boat... She's saying that Ham Hill's staring at Cora was tantamount to a violent act."²⁰³ Nonetheless, Smarts' attempt at racial solidarity with Ball comes too late. When she storms out of French's office and looks for Ball's support, she is decidedly left hanging. Rather than follow Smarts, Ball walks into the office with Betty French and closes the door.

While in his meeting with French the narrator depicts Ball's meditation on the tortured history of black and white female relationships. At the end, Ball concludes that he has no place within the relationship and, therefore, rather than work towards solidarity with either group of women should instead remain an opportunist of their unstable relationship:

There was something going on here that made him, a man, an outsider, a spectator, like someone who'd stumbled into a country where people talked in sign language and he didn't know the signs... Ball stood there... what did this argument between these women have to do with him? Hadn't the black ones said that the only thing that had happened since Martin Luther King, Jr., was the black woman, and weren't the white ones telling themselves that they had come a long way baby? What did a quarrel between these *sisters*, hugging each other one minute and scratching out each other's eyes the next have to do with him? (emphasis added).²⁰⁴

In this passage, Reed depicts Ian Ball as a man not simply caught in women's rivalry for power and domination, but more important, as a witness to the nature of feminist debate. Like Reed, Ian Ball *I-balls* the transaction between Smarts and French and sees the hypocrisy and contradiction of feminism: that it is not a movement for women's liberation but instead for women's tyranny in the place of men. However, as male insiders, neither Ian nor Reed is permitted to share the truth of their knowledge. Both character and author realize that within this dispute there is 1) no space for white women to see how they, like black men, are affected by the same power structure, and 2) no opportunity for black women to see how they have yet to interrupt the dynamic of Maid and Mistress which has plagued them since slavery.

Looking, Looking, Looking

Resonating throughout Reed's *Reckless Eyeballing* is the question of "Who's eyeballing whom?" The text functions as a stage for spectacle, a space where readers observe an audience observing—in this case—the double persecution of Emmett Till. This act of looking-in-upon-looking-in or meta gazing exaggerates the already gross congruities between Ian Ball's play *Reckless Eyeballing* and the novel's title of the same name.

Problematizing the agent of "eyeballing" is at the center of Reed's meta-gazing paradigm. The meta-narrative, meta-gazing structure of the novel forces multiple moments of looking-in-on and spectacularizing acts of human indecency, atrocity, and inappropriateness. *Reckless* is filled with "telling eye exchanges": "Ham Hill's defense lawyer was glaring with contempt at the plaintiff." "Cora Mae's lawyer...remained expressionless during the entire scene."²⁰⁵ The "Eyes," explains Ball, "reveal a person's true intentions. They are, as Rousseau said, the soul's mirror."²⁰⁶ All of these moments, however, go undetected by Cora Mae. She is

neither aware of the lawyer's full disdain for her nor her lawyer's lack of response to the scene. Cora Mae's ignorance of the attention she's actually drawn is an inversion of the attention she was denied during Ham Hill's lynching. Readers come to recognize the parallels between accusations brought against Ham Hill and accusations brought against Ian Ball. Rather than be sex-listed (read as the literary form of lynching) for having *visually* objectified women in previous plays, Ian Ball is sex-listed for what feminists viewers *imagine* is his misogynist treatment of women.

Reed's parody of the Till incident permits readers to perform the very action of which Till himself was accused and the very action which Mamie Till-Mobley appropriated for her own political purposes, that is, to "look." Readers gaze upon Ball who in turn gazes upon women who in turn fix their eyes on a play that features the persecution of a man who is convicted once again for having performed the very deed of which they themselves are guilty. Interestingly enough, neither Reed nor Ball has to elicit either audience's participation. To look comes naturally. For both author and playwright, the audience is turned into spectator from the moment characters step on stage and into the field of view. Ultimately, the rhetorical intent of Reed's parodic resurrection of Till is to illumine for feminists and the American public the strategies by which appeals to liberty and equality are made by dehumanizing and objectifying others. *Reckless Eyeballing* takes us beyond domains of the sensible and appropriate, beyond the suitable and correct so as to make visible to perpetrators the gravity of their injustices.

Conclusion

Tropes, such as the Till trope, are drawn from the lived experiences of a public. They serve a constitutive value for a historically situated group and represent, in a condensed form, the

systems of belief to which a public adheres. In the hands of Wideman and Reed, Till functions as a commonplace that does the work of communicating a worldview that troubles dominant images of America as an Edenic paradise of freedom and equality. Important to note, however, is that while these works are unified by their identification with Till they are distinguished by the various rhetorical strategies they employ to illustrate this relationship. In “Looking at Emmett Till,” elements of the American jeremiad resound throughout. Till is configured as the lament over the decline of the American democratic system and as a sign of civic and racial injustice. He exemplifies the cost of the nation’s willful refusal to comply with its own governing doctrine. Till becomes a lingering warning against future injustices to come if the nation does not address racial prejudice in a timely manner.

While “Looking at Emmett Till” is a serious and self-reflective memoir, *Reckless Eyeballing* is a parody of the Till incident that disrupts the linearity of time by placing historical actors from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s on stage with one another. Reed’s outrage at feminists scapegoating black men leads him to depict feminists as inheritors and perpetrators of the very ideology they set out to reform: patriarchy. Consequently, Reed’s intent in deploying the Till trope is twofold: it is meant to draw an association between feminism and white male patriarchy and an association between Till and himself. However, while the first association is convincing, the second is not. Reed adapts the largely accepted interpretation of Emmett Till as “sacrificial lamb” to assist his critique of second wave feminism, specifically how some of its proponents resurrect the myth of the black beast rapist as means of establishing the movement’s legitimacy.²⁰⁷ This aspect of his work is sound. But the other argument is not. Reed’s attempt to depict himself as the “sacrificial lamb” of the feminist movement falls apart. While Reed maintains that “middlepersons” have affected the reception of his work, he, unlike Till, does not

rely upon the living to spread his message. He is not suitless, voiceless, or lifeless. Equipped with voice and pen, Reed is able to defend himself and thus avoids being made the subject upon which feminism—or white supremacy for that matter—obtains dominance. He, unlike his depiction, is not the sacrificial lamb of the feminist movement.

Despite the ways in which Wideman and Reed are individuated by creative license and argument, they are simultaneously united by the Till trope. Indeed, Reed's reactive assertion that the fear of the noose is, in fact, a "justifiable paranoia" for black men is made clear through both his and Wideman's resurrection of the Till incident. Characterized by a conscious awareness of how race, politics, and gender intersect and consequently trouble the liberty of black men, this paranoia appears as one of many factors that constitute the worldview of black men and imbues the memory of Till with tropological and ideographic power. As demonstrated in their work, Till emerges as black-male paranoia codified, his experience becoming their own frame of reference for critiquing the hypocrisy of American practice. Through them, Till becomes an argument for civic duty and accountability, a way of appealing for reform and self-reflection.

Yet, placing Till in relation to the self does more than illustrate the process by which writers contest and make new knowledge. More than show how writers enact civic engagement, it also demonstrates how personal narrative combined with race consciousness can function as a method for arguing political theory. Till as configured by these writers has the potential to become a rich pedagogical tool. His reception in literature and history creates a place from which a theory and practice of civic engagement can be expounded. As I have tried to demonstrate, the works of Wideman and Reed are echoes of the Till incident that portray a larger picture of institutionalized injustice. Partly through their work, Till emerges as a trope within the political vocabulary of black men, as symbol of their awareness of America's declension and their place

as subjects both inside and outside the domain of American citizenship. Resonant is the cautionary tone of Wideman's central contention: "As long as racialized thinking continues to legitimate one group's life-and-death power over another, the battered face of Emmett Till will poison the middle ground of compromise between so-called 'whites' and so-called 'blacks'."²⁰⁸

CHAPTER 6: MAKING USE OF THE UNUSABLE:

WITHOUT SANCTUARY AND AMERICAN NATIONAL MEMORY

In addition to illustrating black ways of reading race and place, the practice of remembering and recalling seminal events of black experience such as the lynching of Emmett Till also contributes to the cultivation and maintenance of black *cultural memory*. Cultural memory is understood as distinctly different from *history*, which is considered by many as a state-sanctioned, formalized, and widely circulated selection of recollections. Cultural memory is commonly defined as colloquial or unsanctioned recollections of the past that have not been, as Maria Sturken explains, “valorized by institutional frameworks or publishing enterprises.”²⁰⁹ For instance, the history of lynching in America is not a part of grade-school curriculums; while students may get a cursory glimpse of the practice through a reading of *Huck Finn*, there is no systematic discussion of racial violence in state-authorized textbooks. Unlike history, which is made formal through institutional frameworks, cultural memory is unofficial; it exists outside formal historical discourse—i.e. government archives, national monuments, and other official organs of memory.²¹⁰

In *Lynching in the New South*, historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage remarks on the relative absence of lynching from American national consciousness: “Perhaps nothing about the history of mob violence in the United States is more surprising than how quickly an understanding of the full horror of lynchings has receded from the nation’s historical memory.”²¹¹ Brundage’s observation is both a meditation on the formation of American national identity and an indictment of institutionally sanctioned organs of memory which fail to present the pluralistic nature of American national history, specifically, aspects of national history that counter tidy

narratives of regarding the construction of American identity. Nations recall their pasts in the form of civic myths, stories, texts, museums and memorials as a way sustaining a sense of collective identity. Versions of the past that are retained in this way thus illustrate for posterity what's worth remembering and what's worth forgetting—i.e. what parts of the past are “usable” as interpretative frameworks for understanding the present and what parts are not. The utility of this remembered past is vital to perpetuation of national identity in that it teaches citizens about their national heritage, communicates attitudes and perspectives indicative of the national culture, and functions as a lens for interpreting the world and citizens' places within it.

Lynching, like other horrid crimes, falls outside the realm of the “usable past.”

While the general consensus has been that lynching is a part of a past better left forgotten and a past that has no bearing on the present, the reality is that its depiction of inegalitarianism at work presents unique problems for official organs of memory that aim to present a tidy and relatively undisturbing image of American national history. An increase in what is colloquially referred to as “modern-day lynchings”—a phrase that invokes the racial and sexual politics undergirding lynching practices of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—and the metaphorical use of lynching in contemporary political discourse have helped to trouble sanitized versions of American history.

In the past ten years, an array of critical responses to the removal and systematic forgetting of lynching culture from national record has occurred. These rejoinders, which incidentally coincide with increased symbolism of the noose in contemporary American culture, have been advanced by various local communities. Activists in regions previously devastated by incidents of lynching and the mentality that sustains it have taken it upon themselves to break the

relative silence regarding this aspect of America's violent past. Roadside markers, murals, and stone edifices like those of the Moore's Ford Lynching Marker (MFLM) in Georgia (1999) and the Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial (CJMM) in Minnesota (2003) provide contemporary citizens with a historical trajectory that illustrates how the nation remains tethered to what many continue to argue is a long-ago past. Such efforts reveal the trajectory of state sanctioned violence against citizens of color and provide present-day citizens with a historical context for deeper understanding of the issues undergirding modern-day lynchings.

The move among local communities to restore the historical record in the absence of state action not only illustrates a disconnect between cultural memory and state-sanctioned memory—i.e. national history—but also a willful refusal on the part of the nation to acknowledge the legacy of racialized violence permeating contemporary American culture today. Attempts to bring the memories of such communities to the national stage have been few and far between. However, one attempt has had recent success. James Allen and John Littlefield's *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photographs in America*, a traveling collection of over 100 lynching photographs, postcards, and artifacts, depicts men and women, blacks, Jews, and Mexicans lynched, burned, and surrounded by crowds of smiling white onlookers. The collection is disturbing: photographs are professionally imprinted with studio names and addresses while postcards are inscribed with chilling commentary on the state of race relations during the early twentieth century. Since its debut in 2000, *Without Sanctuary* has traveled across the nation. It is one of the earliest efforts to integrate local memory on lynching with that of national history and in so doing, contributes to contemporary efforts to combat national amnesia about lynching.

Although scholars of literature, art, and history have attended to the various critical aspects of *Without Sanctuary*, aside from Wendy Wolter's investigation of how the collection

reproduces the very narrative and representation of violence it aims to undo,²¹² there has been little attention given to the collection by scholars of rhetoric. This is surprising given the various layers of suasive activity that comprise the collection. Exhibitors' conscious decisions regarding arrangement, lighting, music, paneling, and other aspects of what John Pedro Schwartz refers to as the "exhibition apparatus" provided an interpretive framework that instructed patrons how to interpret and experience the collection. Moreover, patrons' collective response to *Without Sanctuary* provided interesting insights regarding the significance of recalling historical atrocity and collectively remembering the supposedly "unusable" past.

What kind of recuperative work does the merger of cultural memory and national history produce? How might reconsideration of the "unusable" past serve a contemporary public audience? In this chapter, I consider these questions by examining *Without Sanctuary* as a multilayered rhetorical performance. I begin first with an analysis of the exigencies that legitimated the collection's arrival in New York, Pittsburgh, and Atlanta and then continue with an examination of *Without Sanctuary's* rhetoric as an interactive, multimodal memorial site. I conclude by considering how the collection has functioned as a formal challenge to state-sanctioned memory and the implications this challenge has for a national community.

FRAMING *WITHOUT SANCTUARY*

New York, Pittsburgh, and Atlanta

Without Sanctuary's arrival in New York, Pittsburgh, and Atlanta did not come out of a morbid enthusiasm for the grotesque. In each case, racially motivated violence (historical and contemporary) created exigent moments which then established an occasion and purpose for the collection's installation. Incidents such as the murder of James Byrd (1998), Amadou Diallo

(1999), and Patrick Dorismond (2000), suggested to community organizers, museum exhibitors, and cultural center curators the need for an open and public discussion of local race relations. In each city, curators used the collection to contextualize contemporary incidents of racial profiling, police brutality, and racially motivated murder as a way to stimulate dialogue among historically divided groups.

New York: The New-York Historical Society (N-YHS)

Without Sanctuary's arrival at the N-YHS came out of a conscious effort to generate healthy dialogue between New York's citizens of color and the Giuliani administration. Fresh on the minds of residents in 2000 was the killing of Guinean immigrant Amadou Diallou,²¹³ who was gunned down in February 1999 by four plain-clothed officers who were later acquitted of all charges. The twenty-three year old, who was unarmed at the time of his death, had been shot while reaching for identification. Officers supposedly misidentified Diallou as a serial rapist who had long been in police custody at the time of the shooting.

For many, the Diallo incident was another occurrence in a long history of police brutality and racial profiling by New York City police. N-YHS Director of Public Affairs and Public Programs (DPAPP), Stewart Desmond, explained that N-YHS's interest to show *Without Sanctuary* stemmed from a consideration of "how a historical perspective [on race relations in America] might inform this controversy and allow an interracial dialogue that reached beyond [criticism]" and finger pointing.²¹⁴ Lynching is "something we should know about and remember," said N-YHS President, Betsy Gotbaum, "especially in the context of black distrust of the New York City police."²¹⁵

The composition of the N-YHS exhibition was interactive and multimodal. It included information panels that described lynching photographs, memorabilia from the era, artifacts from the anti-lynching movement, digital media, discussion panels, and online journaling stations. While the materials helped temper and contextualize the collection for *Without Sanctuary* attendees, the discussion panels and online journaling stations provided attendees an opportunity to reflect both collectively and individually upon their experience with the collection. As one attendee admitted:

the presentation has has [sic] left me without words that can adequately express my deep innermost feelings. I have never had any illusions about the white supremacist [sic] culture of American society, but the images presented has made [sic] me realize the very depths of the condition and pervasiveness of white supremacy in American [sic]. What does this say about the soul of a people when racial violence and hate is as natural as breathing air. America must never forget its demonic holocaust [sic] against Africans-a holocaust [sic] that is still waged against people of color, but in a manner that is more politically tolerable.²¹⁶

One of the central goals of the N-YHS exhibition explained Desmond “was to provoke a conversation about history and race relations today.”²¹⁷ The N-YHS worked closely with co-owner James Allen to bring this goal to fruition. During our phone interview in Atlanta, Allen clarified that the purpose of exhibiting *Without Sanctuary* was to cultivate among attendees an honest and unmitigated sense of American racial history. The nation, he explained, was wholly ignorant of its past, so these images were meant to function as a kind of “visual vocabulary” that illustrated for contemporary citizens past practices of American identity while at the same time providing a framework for interpreting contemporary instances of racialized terror.²¹⁸

Both N-YHS administrators and Allen agreed that the first step in provoking conversation about racial violence was to present a holistic and well contextualized exhibit, one that would provide a historical framework in which attendees could deduce the relationship between violent practices of the past and those of the present. Allen worked alongside curator Lauren Hutton to provide such contextualization. Images of Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mary Terrell, W. E. B. Du Bois and photographs of other black leaders on loan from the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture were interspersed with items from the Allen-Littlefield collection. Photographs and postcards were matted and framed; information on the anti-lynching efforts of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC), and the Association for Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL) was provided. Featured presentations were made by scholars of African American history and culture, and artifacts of the anti-lynching crusade as well as the work of African American artists and writers all helped to provide a historical context for the exhibition.

Allen and Hutton's decision to place these images and artifacts within the context of human rights discourse demonstrates their understanding of reading conventions, visual communication, and the rhetoric of display. Exhibitions are visual compositions which, like written and spoken discourse, transit messages through a negotiation of space, time, place, rhetor and audience. Bettina Carbonell's remark concerning the overall composition of the N-YHS's installation of *Without Sanctuary*—specifically, how the installation juxtaposed horrid imagery with information regarding efforts to combat racialized violence—reveals how one viewer interpreted the exhibition. In her critical analysis of *Without Sanctuary*, Carbonell wrote: “the N-

YHS exhibition emphasized both the lawlessness of lynching...and the dedicated, well-organized crusade against lynching.”²¹⁹

In addition to their decision to use images from the Schomburg, Allen and Hutton’s choice of arrangement as well as strategic use of lighting, paneling, and music helped to further contextualize the collection for viewers. As Desmond explains, these features were meant “to provide interpretive tools for the audience to understand a collection of challenging documents in American history...”²²⁰ In “Object Lessons: Teaching Multiliteracies through the Museum,” John Pedro Schwartz discusses the rhetorical import of museum displays and argues that the conscious choices made by exhibitors create a lens for reading and interpreting museum objects. As he says: “Objects do not present a series of ‘lessons’...Instead, they combine with the exhibition apparatus [brochures, wall texts, video, audio, sequence, lighting] to produce a ‘narrative’ that unfolds within a broader social and material context. In short, through their ordered display, objects make arguments.”²²¹

Providing a historical framework that created a more comprehensive narrative for viewers was only one step in provoking discussion. Administrators’ awareness that N-YHS personnel would play a fundamental role in the exhibition’s reception demanded that special measures be taken. The Allen-Littlefield collection is disturbing. It is filled with images of maimed bodies, enthusiastic onlookers, and dangling corpses. Unlike N-YHS administration, staff and security would be around the disturbing images for an extended—and for some, daily—basis. Therefore, it was vital to the collection’s reception that those closest to it be given an opportunity to prepare as well as instruction on how to deal with viewer reception.

Director of Education L.J. Krizner requested that N-YHS staff and security participate in pre-display discussion.²²² As Krizner notes, this discussion had an added benefit; it not only

allowed personnel to express their concern regarding how to interact with patrons viewing the exhibition, but also gave curators a sense of the kind of response the collection would receive. Taking cues from his staff, Krizner had a sign placed at the entrance of the gallery directing visitors to speak in hushed tones.²²³ The sign worked rhetorically on two additional levels: it set the tone for the experience about to be had and alerted potential viewers to the kind of sensitivity N-YHS wished them to exercise. Other wall texts functioned as warnings that encouraged maturity and composure among those who intended to view: “The photographs in this exhibition are painful to see.”²²⁴

The final step the N-YHS took to direct the energies of *Without Sanctuary* attendees was creating spaces for reflection. Directors and curators learned from N-YHS personnel that viewers would need a space to work through their anxiety, confusion, and anger with regard to the exhibit. The society worked with the national educational organization Facing History and Ourselves to help design this segment of the exhibition. The format decided upon resulted in an unguided tour of *Without Sanctuary* followed by a facilitator-mediated discussion forum.²²⁵ Facilitators mediating the discussion were not there to dictate attendees’ interpretations of the collection, only to arbitrate patron discussion, provide historical background when necessary, and help viewers grasp the meaning of the photographs.²²⁶ In addition to discussion forums, the N-YHS also provided an online space where attendees could reflect on their experience with *Without Sanctuary*. This interactive addendum to the collection offered viewers a space to integrate their viewing experience with contemporary understandings of race, history, and the nation.

Responses varied from expressions of confusion and frustration, to outright anger and indictment. Anne McGiven had this to say:

MY body is unsure whether to wretch or sob. My heart lays confused between compassion and hatred. My mind eerily sees Matthew Sheppard tied to a fence post: a new age symbol of the ‘politically correct’ lynching. My history holds no respect for these secrets, but of course, that’s what secret [sic] do, create shame. Thank you for disturbing my sense of complacency so thoroughly.²²⁷

Another participant, LNJ, responded in a manner reminiscent of John Edgar Wideman’s reflections in “Looking at Emmett Till.” In his memoir, Wideman writes, “Refusing to look, lacking the power to look at Emmett Till’s face, shames me to this day.”²²⁸ In the online form, LNJ expresses similar difficulty: “The photographs were very difficult to look at, [sic] sometimes I had to look away. Everytime [sic] I wanted to stop the movie, I thought of the young man in NY who was brutally killed.”²²⁹ The attendee’s mention of the “young man in NY” is a reference to Amadou Diallou who was riddled with 41 bullets by New York City police. The reference illustrates how *Without Sanctuary* functioned for one viewer as a framework for understanding Diallou’s murder. Like Wideman, this viewer synthesizes past images of lynching with contemporary moments and illustrates that the N-YHS’s efforts to provoke discussion and thought regarding racial violence in America was, on some level, achieved.

Pittsburgh: The Andy Warhol Museum

In September 2001, *Without Sanctuary* opened at the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Like the N-YHS, the Warhol used *Without Sanctuary* as a springboard to initiate public dialogue about past and present instances of racial inequity in the city. The

collection's arrival came just months after a high-profile, racially motivated spree of violence that left five people dead and a sixth victim paralyzed. On April 28, 2000, Richard Baumhammers killed Anita Gordon, his 63 year-old Jewish next-door neighbor; Anil Thakur, an Indian immigrant; Ji-ye Sun, a Chinese American; Theo Pham, a Vietnamese American; and Garry Lee, an African American. Indian American store manager, Sandeep Patel, was the victim who was paralyzed. He died seven years later.²³⁰

In the shadow of the Baumhammer killings, less than two weeks prior to opening day, the nation fell victim to a series of coordinated terrorist attacks. Along with Baumhammers' killing spree, Al-Queda's attack on New York and the Pentagon provided ample exigence for an exhibition that asked patrons to contemplate the relationship between racialized terror and national identity.

The Warhol Museum announcements of the exhibition's opening placed *Without Sanctuary* squarely within the museum's mission to stand as "a forum for dialogue around contemporary issues." Warhol directors believed that "[t]he visceral nature of the images in



Without Sanctuary speaks to a horrible chapter in America's past and its problematic present regarding race. Such an exhibition is an opportunity to galvanize diverse groups and individuals and energize civic

FIGURE 12 *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photographs in America* at The Andy Warhol Museum, Gallery. Reprinted from Gogan, "The Warhol Museum."

dialogue around important issues.”²³¹ The museum dedicated an entire floor to *Without Sanctuary*. Sectioning the collection off from other exhibits communicated to attendees the level of significance the collection was meant to hold for not only the museum, but patrons as well. In the main gallery, photographs were encased in simple black frames and arranged in chronological order. To help viewers focus on the history behind lynching, photographs were accompanied by text that provided information about the various incidents depicted. On the other side of the gallery was a 40-foot illustrated timeline chronicling lynching and its history from 1895-1995.

In addition to the timeline, this installation of *Without Sanctuary* presented information on the anti-lynching movement, the history of the composition and impact of Billie Holiday’s song “Strange Fruit,” and the history of the *Pittsburgh Courier*—a black newspaper that contributed to the anti-lynching movement in Pittsburgh.²³² The exhibition was also accompanied by an artist’s collection that depicted a pastiche of local and national hate crimes.²³³ Together these historical and contemporary artifacts provided national and local context for Pittsburgh viewers. It gave them a sense of how lynching had affected the Pittsburgh community as well as the nation as a whole.

However, unlike the N-YHS, the Warhol’s efforts to contextualize *Without Sanctuary*’s arrival in Pittsburgh went beyond the display of photographs, artifacts, and information. The participation of religious and political leaders of Pittsburgh’s African American community demonstrated a conscious effort to build bridges between the cultural memory of the black community and the institutionalized—albeit avant-garde—memory of the Warhol Museum. The National Conference for Community Justice (NCCJ) and local chapters of the Urban League and

NAACP worked alongside Warhol exhibitors to organize various educational programs for *Without Sanctuary* attendees.²³⁴ Opening-day ceremonies consisted of a choir concert, a talk delivered by collection co-owner, James Allen, educational films on Ida B. Wells and the anti-lynching movement, academic lectures, interfaith prayer services, and public discussion forums.

While it is clear that the Warhol exhibition of *Without Sanctuary* expanded upon aspects of the N-YHS exhibition, it is also clear that it mirrored them. Like the N-YHS exhibition, attendees of the Warhol installation were also given space to reflect upon their experience with regard to *Without Sanctuary*.

The Warhol's "Postcard to Tolerance" featured

notes written by exhibition attendees that were posted to a board. The exercise is interesting for the way it mimics the strategies of anti-lynching activists. Many of the lynching photographs and postcards that circulated among white supremacist sympathizers were marked on the back with messages that either warned blacks of the danger of transgressing racial codes or demonstrated owners' support of racial violence. In the hands of anti-lynching activists, such pro-lynching propaganda was transformed into anti-lynching agitation that recast the narrative of white civility and black savagery as white barbarity and black victimization. The "Postcard to Tolerance" exercise at the Warhol adapted this latter strategy as a way of allowing attendees to both write back to white supremacist sympathizers. In the case of eighteen-year-old Lucy, the activity

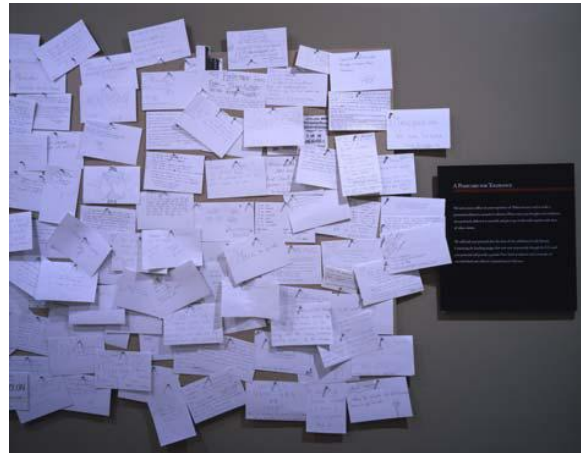


FIGURE 13 "A Postcard of Tolerance," "The Andy Warhol Museum. Reprinted from Gogan, "The Warhol Museum."

became an opportunity to both indict the American school system for its silence on the history of racial violence and pledge to change it:

Today you were angry because of how unprepared you felt. Angry because you have had 18 years of school and never once were you shown the truth about this country. You were angry because authors and teachers picked and chose what they wanted to include in their histories. You vowed not to let your children feel that way.²³⁵

In addition to the “Postcard to Tolerance” exercise, the Warhol also provided comment books in which attendees could communicate their feelings in a less public forum. As Assistant Director for Education and Interpretation at the Warhol explained:

[V]isitors who may not have been comfortable or drawn to comment themselves could engage with others by reading or listening to different points of view, testing their perspective and responses with those of others. This kind of internal dialogue and responsive understanding is possible through the museum taking an active role in encouraging an articulation of the viewing experience, and foregrounding the diverse nature of that experience. Given the low percentage of visitors who participated in organized forms of dialogue, these private and informal opportunities may be the most important kind of ‘dialogue’ to offer.²³⁶

Atlanta: The Martin Luther King Center

In 2000, while portions of *Without Sanctuary* were still in New York, members of Atlanta’s academic and historical-preservation communities contacted Emory University to see if an exhibition of *Without Sanctuary* would be possible. Since 1998 the collection had been on loan at Emory University; however, the school had yet to exhibit it.²³⁷ Preoccupation over the

kind of reception the collection would generate kept Emory from advertising its new holdings. This infuriated James Allen, who placed the collection in Emory's care because he felt its presence in the South would have the greatest impact on generating a national discussion about racial violence. What Allen wanted most was for Emory to encourage researchers to explore and investigate the collection. However, this never occurred. Emory was hesitant to move forward with exhibiting the collection because it feared being the site of racial conflict.²³⁸ Atlanta's long history of racial violence made it a particularly sensitive location for the showing of *Without Sanctuary*, and Emory was attuned to this. University administrators believed that the nature of the photographs would stir negative sentiment among both whites and blacks and so decided that the collection was better left untouched.

Despite Emory's resistance, some Atlanta residents pressed Emory's President, Bill Chace, who later decided that the best way to assess the institution's potential involvement with a local exhibition would be to commission an advisory committee, which was directed to investigate the issue and determine whether or not Emory should participate in the Atlanta exhibition of *Without Sanctuary*. Members of the committee included Assistant Professor of English, Natasha Barnes; I.T. Cohen Professor of International Law and Human Rights, John van der Vyver; Professor of English, Mark Bauerlein; and Randall Burkett, Curator of African American Collections at Emory's Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBL).

For some committee members, Emory as an exhibition site was problematic. For years the university had been plagued by various instances of racism, the latest of which occurred in 2000 when members of a fraternity decided to dress in blackface. After hearing about the incident and Emory's poor response to it, Grace Killens, widow of African American novelist and activist John Oliver Killens, "suspended talks" about Emory's acquisition of her husband's

papers.²³⁹ This was just one of several consequences suffered due to Emory's inability to address properly issues of racial difference, and it was for these reasons that many were concerned about the university's ability to showcase properly the collection. Advisory committee member van der Vyver acknowledged Emory's image as a bastion of white elitism.²⁴⁰

The second step in determining what Emory's role could be in an Atlanta exhibition was to survey community response. Surveys were distributed to Emory students and faculty as well as members of the general public. In addition to the survey, the advisory committee held six discussion forums—three open to the public and three by invitation. These forums were dedicated to open dialogue about *Without Sanctuary*'s coming to Atlanta and provided a preliminary assessment of the city's response to the collection.

At a public forum held at the Auburn Avenue Research Library, Atlanta residents expressed their anger, confusion, and anxiety over the collection. Although apprehensive, many residents nonetheless agreed that *Without Sanctuary* was an important and necessary historical and educational contribution to the city of Atlanta. Forum attendee Maria Rhodes said that despite the difficulties of viewing these images, residents had to be made aware:

[I]t might be disturbing images and it might be hard for us to see—you know, blacks and whites—because today we have blinders on...[but] we have to made aware...And the only way is for [us] to investigate the information; to see it, to take it to heart, to understand it, and [...] comment. We have to see these things because if not, it's just a wound that's been covered up. A wound that's covered up cannot be healed. It festers. And so we have to uncover it, bring it out in the open, and allow healing to begin.²⁴¹

After listening to several attendees, Wendell Roan, a transplanted resident from Washington, D.C., cautioned Emory faculty:

... the pictures can only reflect what truly happened. However, those pictures cannot reflect the pain that's still going on, and the pain is not of present-day pain, but this pain is a pain that's been around for a very long time. My only suggestion would be when you do, if in fact Emory approves this to come to their campus, please, please be conscious of the minds and the conscious[...] that you're going to show this to.... If you show them this, please give them some guidance when you show it to them.²⁴²

Roan's words were echoed by members of the historical society who likewise feared the consequences that a decontextualized and poorly executed exhibition would bring. In a letter to Emory Curator Randall Burkett, Atlanta Historical Society Executive Director Rick Beard made no qualms about the implications surrounding a Southern exhibition of the collection:

Atlanta is not New York...I think we make a mistake if we assume that the display of this material would automatically receive the same sort of reception here that it has in New York. [...] Based on my experience here for the past eight years, I think that the display of [Without Sanctuary] [...] without a great deal of preparatory work in and with the community would generate misunderstanding and thoughtless reaction rather than the sort of informed dialogue that we seek.²⁴³

Although an immigrant to the South, Beard was aware of Southerners' propensity to hold on to, and unproblematically valorize, their past. Narratives memorializing the "Lost Cause," commemorative spaces celebrating antebellum life,²⁴⁴ and ongoing performances such as Confederate Pageants illustrate a deep desire to project the region as a socially, politically, and ethically unproblematic space.²⁴⁵

After much research and deliberation, the decision to accept the exhibition was made, with the King Center as a more appropriate venue for the exhibition. So Emory joined ranks with

the center and other local organizations to sponsor the Atlanta exhibition of *Without Sanctuary*,²⁴⁶ which opened March 1, 2002 and closed January 2003. It was preceded by a weekly film series that, like the advertisements and media statements circulated by the N-YHS and the Warhol Museum, functioned as an interpretive framework for *Without Sanctuary*'s appearance in Atlanta.

The Atlanta exhibition shared many similarities with those in New York and Pittsburgh. Like the sign that hung before the N-YHS installation, the King Center also provided a sign that set the tone and mood for viewing the collection. Resting just outside the entrance were words from King's 1968 speech "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution": "It is no longer a choice, my friends, between violence and nonviolence. It is either nonviolence or nonexistence."²⁴⁷ The statement calcified the stakes at play in lynching; namely, that lynching—unlike other acts of intimidation—does not simply damage life; it eradicates it. The King Center also made use of music from Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit."

In 1936, after viewing photographs of Thomas Shipp's and Abram Smith's lynchings in Marion, Indiana, Jewish high school teacher Abel Meeropol wrote the poem "Strange Fruit."²⁴⁸

*Southern trees bear strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.*

*Pastoral scene of the gallant South,
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh!*

*Here is fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.*

Though the poem circulated in both print and audio forms (often performed by Meeropol and his wife, Laura Duncan), it did not garner widespread attention until Billie Holiday performed it and later recorded it in 1939. Holiday's rendition personified black sorrow and signified a sadness and anguish that was quintessentially black. A haunting evocation of black mourning, "Strange Fruit" later became the anthem of the anti-lynching movement. Like the practice itself, the song left an indelible impression upon black cultural memory and has become a common touchstone for writers, singers, and playwrights alike.

"Strange Fruit" was chosen by exhibitors for the way it condemned lynching and simultaneously expressed the black community's sorrow. As Grace Elizabeth Hale describes, the disturbing resonance of the clarinet and Holiday's voice was intended to produce a particular attitude among attendees: "The music hushes the crowd, reinforcing a tone of quiet, respectable reflection that posted signs suggest is appropriate."²⁴⁹

Other features of the Atlanta exhibition mimicked those of the exhibitions in New York and Pittsburgh. Like the N-YHS and the Warhol, the King Center installation showcased the Allen-Littlefield collection within a historical framework that included both an explanation for American lynchings as well as domestic and international responses to the practice; it offered comment books and open discussion forums as spaces for dialogue and reflection; it used artifacts from anti-lynching campaigns orchestrated by Ida B. Wells, the NAACP, and the ASWPL; provided a space for discussion and reflection in which attendees could process their experience with regard to *Without Sanctuary*; and supplemented the collection with various educational and spiritual initiatives, the most elaborate of which included a memorial service at the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church. At the memorial service, the family of Murray Burton, who was lynched in Georgia and Mr. Winfred Rombert, who escaped being lynched in Georgia,

were introduced to the public²⁵⁰; libations to the ancestors were poured, and a benediction was given that named those involved in lynching: “the victims, their families and communities, the lynchers, their families, the bystanders, those who kept quiet, the photographers and postcard artists, printers, and mongers.”²⁵¹

Over the course of three years, *Without Sanctuary* progressed from a single gallery showroom to a full curatorial exhibition. In each city, exhibitors were sure to place the collection in the context of anti-lynching discourse and the contemporary historical moment; strides were made to include local leaders, social activists, and educators in the construction and preparation of each installation; and efforts to encourage viewers to dialogue about past and present forms of racial violence were employed. Exhibitors’ and administrators’ careful consideration of audience, context, and delivery depicts only a fraction of the deliberative and meaning-making work that comprised *Without Sanctuary*. In addition to being a venue for educating the public about America’s violent history, *Without Sanctuary* was also a space in which contemporary viewers were directed to reflect upon their relationship as members of a national community and collectively remember those who had been denied inclusion.

REMEMBERING A FORGOTTEN CONSTITUENCY

Without Sanctuary as Memorial Site

Without Sanctuary depicts a part of the nation’s forgotten past and, as such, represents an effort to correct national forgetting by asking members of the constituency to make forgotten truths a part of its collective memory. In “Lynching’s Legacy in American Culture,” Amy Louise Wood and Susan Donaldson support this interpretation of the collection, asserting that *Without*

Sanctuary (and the critical conversations surrounding it) signifies an effort “to create a new kind of popular consciousness about America’s racist and violent past in the face of what has been a profound mis-remembering of lynching.”²⁵² As such, it is more than a museum exhibition; it is a memorial site that creates an occasion for the nation to reconstitute itself through collective recollection.

Memorials play a key role in the construction and maintenance of collective identity: they concretize events of the past and, in doing so, reflect for posterity values, ideals, and attributes worthy of emulation and remembrance. However, *Without Sanctuary* is a particularly unique memorial because while it depicts a past worthy of remembrance it does not reflect attributes worthy of emulation. Instead, this recirculation of lynching postcards and photographs reflects components of American civic life worth decrying. As *Without Sanctuary* attendee Jennifer McCabe wrote:

How people did such things to each other is unbelievable to me. How this history is explained to the youth of today is puzzling. I hope this exhibit and others like it—that uncover the atrocities of societies—will prevent future hateful acts against cultures.

Besides the Holocaust Museum, this is the only other exhibit of its kind that I have seen.

It was disturbing, terrifying and numbing all at the same time. I hope it helps to bring peace to us all.²⁵³

Fayth Parks expressed similar sentiment. Drawing a parallel between the images depicted in *Without Sanctuary* and present-day expressions of Southern pride, Parks said, “I am currently residing in the state of South Carolina. This photo exhibit reminds us all of why flying the confederate flag on the State House dome is such an affront to the progress we’ve tried to make

in this country. These photos are the subtext of the ‘proud heritage’ story being used to defend flying that thing. Thank you for having the courage to tell the TRUTH!”²⁵⁴

Other responses illustrate attendees’ ability to draw correlations between past incidents of lynching and present forms of racialized violence: “Such things still happen. Some take different forms and come from different directions, but still boast ‘popular’ approval.”²⁵⁵ Chris Easley said: “Modern day lynch mobs don’t use ropes now, they use guns (check your police departments in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles).”²⁵⁶ Quincy was even more succinct: “They have gone from strange fruit to just shoot.”²⁵⁷ Ayesha Grice’s comment, however, provides the most detailed example of attendees’ ability to read the past in the present:

Four police officers were acquitted of any charges after shooting an unarmed man to death. The Mayor says the verdict was just, and that there was no reason to change police policies. In other words its alright to kill an unarmed man as long as he is Black. We also are faced with the fact that the death penalty is legal and that many innocent Black people have died in state sanctioned murders. I wish I could say that things are better now, but maybe what my daughter said was true. They’ve traded in their ropes for guns and a badge and a hypodermic needle. The fact remains the same. Innocent people of one race are still being murdered by the descendants of the people in your photographs. God have mercy on us all.²⁵⁸

Taken together, Parks’, Easley’s and Grice’s comments illustrate that for some patrons, *Without Sanctuary* functioned as a space in which citizens bear witness to the chasm between the nation’s professed ideals and its practice.

Vast in scope, witnessing studies span various disciplines and often focus specifically on incidents of violence and historical atrocity and the recuperative work that active

acknowledgement of such events has for a national community. Within this body of literature, witnessing is understood as looking put in the service of political mobilization. Such interpretations pull from religious and juridical traditions that connect active looking to the sharing of evidentiary statements, that is, to the act of testifying.²⁵⁹ The testimony of a witness is meant to confirm the veracity of a given event and to spread beyond the immediate witness the perceived truth of the affair in question. This act of acknowledgment and testimony—specifically, the spreading of “truth” through written or spoken discourse—is meant to expand the witnessing eye. Thus, bearing witness not only authorizes what has been seen as truth, but organizes strangers along a shared experience of viewing that has the capacity to transform individual spectatorship into collective action.²⁶⁰ As Wood explains:

A spectator or a bystander becomes a witness when his or her spectatorship bears a legal, spiritual, or social consequence; when it can establish the true course or meaning of an event or action; *or when it can confer significance or value on the event. To act as a witness is thus to play a public role, one that bestows a particular kind of social authority on the individual, at the same time that it connects that individual to a larger community of fellow witnesses* (emphasis added).²⁶¹

At *Without Sanctuary*, members of the nation are called to stand and bear witness to the denial of due process to citizens of color, to acknowledge violence’s centrality to the making of the nation, and to discern the pervasiveness of the past in the present. However, the call to witness and remember is complicated by the main act patrons are asked to perform: to look. Like Wideman’s struggle to “look” at the face of Emmett Till, attendees of *Without Sanctuary* likewise find difficulty in peering at images of distorted and mutilated bodies. Speaking to a reporter for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Chicago resident and King Center visitor, Doria Johnson, said, “I

could hardly look at the pictures, but I'm glad I did it. You have to pay your respects."²⁶² Yet other reflections on looking were less inspiring. Jene R. Peel from Atlanta, Georgia expressed similar difficulty: "These images are so very difficult to see. It's like the Holocaust Museum, except that there it was 'them'—here it is us. How far we have come—Yet how far we still must go."²⁶³

In "Bearing Witness: Bearing Whiteness," Wendy Wolters further complicates the notion of looking. She argues that *Without Sanctuary* fails as a memorial site because "rather than interrupt, the power relations of (black) lynching victim and (white) lynching spectator," the collection reproduces it.²⁶⁴ Combining Saidiya Hartmen's theory of empathy and Burke's notion of rhetorical identification, Wolters contends that *Without Sanctuary* fails in its attempt to employ empathy as a means of facilitating identification because rather than behold black suffering, the impulse to empathize and identify with the victim—to place the self in the position of the 'other'—prevents the viewer from truly witnessing. As she says, looking at lynching photographs "both invites and precludes identification. Our 'good intentions' in looking, our intent to identify with the black suffering body, 'increases the difficulty of beholding black suffering since the endeavor to bring pain close exploits the spectacle of the body in pain and oddly confirms the spectral character of suffering and the inability to witness the captive's pain'"²⁶⁵ In sum, Wolters' contends that *Without Sanctuary*'s attempt to create witnesses inadvertently reproduces the original scene of the lynching spectacle: although "we understand ourselves as different from the lynchers...the empathy that constructs our gaze prevents us from identifying with the lynched victims."²⁶⁶ Wolters' criticism asserts that *Without Sanctuary* reproduces racial lines of looking. By reproducing the lynching scene, *Without Sanctuary* reproduces whiteness and the power of looking that accompanies it.

Wolters was not the only critic to assert that *Without Sanctuary* was a reproduction of the same. Grace Elizabeth Hale, author of *Making Whiteness*, agreed that the collection failed to disrupt the white gaze: Rather than “foreground violence as a defining characteristic of whiteness,” the collection foregrounds “victimization as the defining characteristic of blackness.”²⁶⁷ In a review of the collection’s New York exhibition and the book of photographs that later followed, Michael Eric Dyson exclaimed similarly, “To commercialize the suffering of black people is to do the ultimate disservice to black people.”²⁶⁸ Contending there was little, if any, difference between contemporary viewers and viewing publics of the past, critics like Wolters, Dyson, and Hale maintain that rather than critical reflection *Without Sanctuary* does nothing more than produce contemporary voyeurs of black victimization.²⁶⁹

To dismiss the complications of looking with regard to the recirculation and re-viewing of lynching photographs would be critically irresponsible. However, excluded from much of this criticism is a consideration of the exigence that brought *Without Sanctuary* into being, the function of the exhibition apparatus, and recognition of how both exigence and contextualization work together to disrupt the white gaze. We cannot discount how phenomena that give rise to rhetorical occasions and communicative strategies used to press non-discursive phenomenon into speech contribute to the way that contemporary audiences read and interpret—in a word, *see*—images of lynching. At *Without Sanctuary*, viewers neither celebrated nor condoned lynching and the ideology that supported it; instead, they denounced it. Contextualization created a discursive interpretive framework for contemporary viewers of these images that prompted them to interpret victims of lynching as fellow citizens denied due process of law rather than as enemies of the state as was the habit of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century viewers. Ultimately, while such interpretive frames may not altogether shatter the white gaze, attendees’

response to *Without Sanctuary*, as illustrated above, demonstrate that such framing can, in significant ways, contribute to its disruption.

Without Sanctuary and the Making of A Mourning Public

In the face of avid forgetting, *Without Sanctuary* asks the nation to acknowledge, remember, and, through both acts, reconstitute its sense of collective identity. The public's reception of *Without Sanctuary*, particularly individuals' expressions of frustration over the truth of America's violent history, mourning of the dead, and praise for institutions' decision to address national forgetting of lynching has rhetorical qualities similar to that of eulogy. Eulogies direct a living audience to recall the dead, to lament over their absence, and to praise them. There are different types of eulogies, those of the more classical variety, which praise particularly significant individuals such as national heroes, political leaders, and cultural icons, and those of the more vernacular variety, which praise everyday citizens. Eulogies presume the existence of community and as such, are an occasion on which the community—whether members of a self-acknowledged community or simply a group of strangers brought together by the death of a common friend—can reconstitute itself through active mourning of the dead. According to Kathleen Jamieson and Karyln Kohrs Campbell, eulogies are delivered when a community is in need of healing. It is a rhetorical form used to “reknit the community” in the absence of the deceased and can aid in efforts to create new policies for social and political life.²⁷⁰

Without Sanctuary functions much the same way as other national eulogies in that it directs a collection of people to recall, remember, and reconstitute itself through the shared experience of witnessing and remembering the past. The comment books, chat spaces, and public

discussion forums further assist this aim. To begin, these forums transform the semi-private experience of viewing *Without Sanctuary* into a publicly shared act that is interactive and therapeutic. Second, they provide a structured forum to decompress from the burden of witnessing. And third, they grant viewers the opportunity to share their condolences with the dead, to lament over the loss of fellow citizens, and begin making the transition from anguished sorrow to consoled self. In short, *Without Sanctuary* encourages attendees to participate in the communal act of remembering victims of lynching. The power of collective remembering transforms viewers into a *mourning public* unified not only by their relative knowledge of the deceased, but also and more important, by their public identity constituted through shared acknowledgment of the absence of the dead.

Taken together, exigent moments, technologies of display, public discussion forms, and the epidictic features of the exhibition imbue *Without Sanctuary* with constitutive power. Although a part of a social collective, citizens rarely acknowledge or harness their collective power until called to do so. Until then, they remain strangers, individuated by the grind of daily life.

A hallmark of *publics* is the use of a common text in the mediation of relationships.²⁷¹ While attendees of *Without Sanctuary* are relatively unaware of each other at the start of the exhibition, their participation as an audience addressed by the same discourse—and more directly, an audience encouraged to interact with one another through features of the exhibition apparatus—shifts their relational standing. Relative strangers are reimagined as neighbors and thus fellow members of a national public called into existence for the purpose of remembering, and laying to rest, unjustly persecuted members of the constituency. As a result, the semi-private experience of viewing *Without Sanctuary* is transformed into a publically shared communal act

of remembering and mourning victims of lynching. *Without Sanctuary* stands as a vivid reminder of how a large portion of the American constituency was cast out and violently denied rights and protections that were *inherently* theirs. By calling the nation to acknowledge this forgotten history, *Without Sanctuary* encourages a contemporary public to reincorporate victims of lynching back into the citizenry through collective remembering and mourning.

CHAPTER 7: FROM PASTORAL GREENS TO WHITE HOUSE GARDENS:

TIGER WOODS AND THE OBAMA FAMILY

In contemporary society, lynching is invoked in two particular ways: as metaphor and as dramatic re-enactment. The former, as indicated in previous chapters, has a long history in American discursive circles; the latter—the creation of makeshift representations or replicas of lynched bodies—is fairly new. Theoretical insight into both practices can be found in Burke. Language, he explains, develops through a process of “metaphorical extension” in which “words from the realm of the corporeal, visible, [and] tangible” become “incorporeal, invisible, intangible.” Analogy facilitates this translation from the material to the immaterial and “[i]n the course of time, the original corporeal reference is forgotten, and only the incorporeal, metaphorical extension” remains. However, this process of translation is not unilateral. Just as the corporeal can be made incorporeal, so too can the incorporeal or metaphorical be made real.²⁷² In what follows, I review three contemporary incidents in which lynching as metaphor or lynching as dramatic re-enactment have been used as a means of attempting to curtail black accomplishment in spaces traditionally designated white. I argue that the metaphorical and dramatic applications of lynching today demonstrate that despite lynching’s relative inactivity, Americans still recognize the relationship among lynching, race, and civics.

LYNCHING TO EVEN OUT THE PLAYING FIELD

The Case of Tiger Woods and Kelly Tilghman

In the field of sports, no space is more “white” than that of golf. During a telecast on January 4, 2008, Golf Channel anchors Kelly Tilghman and Nick Faldo contemplated strategies

for young golfers attempting to challenge the world's then top player, Tiger Woods.²⁷³ Faldo, a British citizen, laughingly suggested that the best way to "take Tiger on" would be to "just gang up on him for awhile," to which Tilghman, an American, added unhesitatingly, "lynch him in a back alley." She neither paused after her interjection nor apologized. Instead, she glanced at the camera and completed her commentary all the while grinning with what seemed to be an air of witty self-satisfaction. Faldo seemed neither taken aback nor regretful.

Quickly thereafter, Reverend Al Sharpton called for Tilghman's immediate dismissal from the Golf Channel. On Mike Galanos' CNN broadcast "Get to the Point," Sharpton likened Tilghman's comments to those of Don Imus who just a few months prior was suspended from the air after describing the 2007 Rutgers University women's basketball team as a group of "nappy-headed hos." (After pressure from high-ranking political figures, civil rights activists, and angry listeners, radio executives finally canceled Imus' morning talk show.) Sharpton explained that Tilghman's comment, like Imus', was not simply an insult to the immediate character of the individual named, but to all blacks. "Lynching" contended Sharpton, "is not murder in general, is not assault in general. It is a specific racial term that this woman should be held accountable for."²⁷⁴ Accountability, in Sharpton's eyes, meant Tilghman's immediate dismissal from the Golf Channel.

Sharpton's demands were made after Tilghman's personal apology to Woods and Woods' release of a statement forgiving and dismissing the incident. "Tiger and Kelly are friends," explained Woods' agent, "and Tiger has a great deal of respect for Kelly. Regardless of the choice of words used, we know unequivocally that there was no ill intent in her comments."²⁷⁵ Nevertheless, in response to media backlash and Sharpton's CNN interview, the Golf Channel suspended Tilghman on January 9 and issued the following statement: "While we

believe that Kelly's choice of words was inadvertent and that she did not intend them in an offensive manner, the words were hurtful and grossly inappropriate. Consequently, we have decided to suspend Kelly for two weeks, effective immediately."²⁷⁶

The exchange between Tilghman and co-analyst Nick Faldo reveals that neither saw anything even marginally wrong with their comments, at least, not wrong enough to offer a quick disclaimer while still on air. Additionally, producers' failure to temporarily interrupt the broadcast or issue a retraction makes the network ethically negligent and thus equally culpable. To some degree, network officials' failure to respond properly suggests that racially disparaging remarks are commonplace within the golf world. Yet, perhaps what was most troubling about Tilghman's attempt at witty humor was that it demonstrated a clear understanding of the racial politics in professional golf, a sport that has been historically a bastion of racial discrimination. Unlike baseball, basketball, and football, American golf has remained a stronghold of white elitism and black exclusion. .

Even after the PGA's acceptance of black players during the early 1960s, overt discrimination continued to operate institutionally within golf. Racist strongholds like Alabama's Shoal Creek Country Club still refused to grant blacks membership well into the late 1980s. Shortly before Shoal Creek was to host the 1990 PGA Championship, founder Hall Thompson remarked in an interview, "We don't discriminate in every other area except the blacks."²⁷⁷

The backlash was immediate. More than two million dollars in corporate advertising was pulled from the 1990 PGA Championship telecast. In addition to the loss of revenue, the threat of civil rights activists picketing a nationally-televised event encouraged the PGA to quickly revise its policy for hosting. In less than a week, it amended its guidelines to state that only clubs with non-discriminatory policies would be eligible to host PGA events.

Shoal Creek likewise acted quickly. Damage control by way of inducting its first black member helped the club retain its hosting privileges. (Within a week Louis J. Willie was admitted as an honorary member of Shoal Creek and the club began taking steps towards granting full membership to another black player.) While the prospect of losing PGA revenue encouraged other clubs to follow suit, some of the more “prestigious” clubs nevertheless refused. Prominent clubs like Cypress Point (California), Butler National (Illinois), and Aronimink (Pennsylvania) decided to withdraw their bids as host sites rather than compromise their long held traditions of “white-only” exclusivity.²⁷⁸

This history and tradition of racial elitism would not have been lost on a woman like Kelly Tilghman who was brought up in the industry and was herself an accomplished golfer. Tilghman’s father was a wealthy southern real estate developer who owned and operated his golf club for twenty-two years. The greens of the Gator Hole Golf Club were the very grounds on which Tilghman developed her love for the game. A budding star, Tilghman went on to play golf for Duke University’s women’s golf team. She won the 1990’s Lady Paladin Invitational and shortly after graduating turned pro. She toured professionally for several years before accepting a position with the Golf Channel in 1996, the same year that Tiger Woods turned professional and the same year their fourteen-year friendship began.²⁷⁹

It would not be far-fetch to assume that Tilghman watched as Fuzzy Zoeller, commenting on Tiger’s 1997 Masters win, told reporters that the “little boy” was “doing everything it takes to win” and that folks should be sure to “pat him on the back and say congratulations and enjoy it and tell him not to serve fried chicken next year...or collard greens or whatever the hell they serve.”²⁸⁰ It is hard to imagine that the correlation between black excellence in spaces traditionally marked “white” and Zoller’s open condescension in reminding both Woods and

the American public that the sport of golf has no place for markers of blackness—whether those markers be the skin color of a player or the food he chooses to serve at the subsequent champions’ dinner—were lost on Tighman, a Political Science and History major. Zoeller never apologized to Woods. Rather, he issued a statement saying that it was a shame that something meant in jest was taken so far out of context.²⁸¹

While Tilghman’s personal apology to Woods and public apology to golf enthusiasts indicated a sense of integrity and social responsibility, her statement nonetheless connects her to the long tradition of racial exclusivity practiced among members of the golfing community. As politically inappropriate as her analogy was, it was nonetheless perfectly placed. What more fitting plan of action to suggest in response to Faldo’s call for white collectivism against Woods than a lynching? Woods is after all an individual of African descent and the pastoral landscapes of the golf greens are comparable to those of the countrified backdrops against which many lynching spectacles took place. And Tilghman’s status as a white female golf analyst in what has been, and very much continues to be, a white-male dominated profession only heightened the relative appropriateness of her invocation of lynching.²⁸²



FIGURE 14 Lakeview Golf Course,
Harrisonburg, Virginia



FIGURE 15 Unidentified African American
man lynched from a tree, 1925.



FIGURE 16 The Lynching of four unidentified African Americans, location unknown. Circa 1900. Reprinted from *Without Sanctuary*.

However, while the circumstances of the Tilghman-Woods incident echoed those of past lynching events, it also transgressed them. Most ironic about the incident is the way it inverted the roles and agency of the players traditionally associated with this kind of racial drama. Traditionally, it was a white woman's accusations of black male misconduct that ignited the lynching event and a white crowd of spectators and participants that finished it. Yet, while a white woman led this charge, it was a black man (a multiethnic athlete marked "black" within an American racial context) who extinguished it. Woods' statement concerning Tilghman's comment exonerated her and without a doubt played a major role in the network's decision to retain her.

Despite Woods' attempt to minimize the incident, the Tilghman controversy continued to circulate in the media. *Golfweek* magazine's equally disturbing January-issue cover, which featured a noose and the caption "Caught in a Noose, Tilghman slips up and Golf Channel can't wriggle free," helped to keep the conversation alive for a few weeks until it was dwarfed by more high-profile invocations of lynching.²⁸³

LYNCHING THE PRESIDENTIAL FAMILY

The Lynching of Michelle Obama and the Presidential Candidate

On February 18, 2008, while campaigning for her husband, Michelle Obama stated, “For the first time in my adult lifetime I’m really proud of my country, and not just because Barack has done well but because I think people are hungry for change.”²⁸⁴ Opponents of the Obama camp took Michelle Obama’s speech as an opportunity to question both her and her husband’s character. Already circulating among the media were allegations that the candidate for president was neither a U.S. born citizen nor a Christian. Michelle Obama’s statement only exacerbated this situation. Critics argued that her words were not just offensive but, moreover, reflective of she and her husband’s underlying anti-Americanism. Barack Obama’s racial status and his perceived anti-Americanism—fueled by the suggestive collapsing of his full name, Barack Hussein Obama, with those of enemies Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein—made him too “foreign” or to “other” for some detractors.

The next day, syndicated columnist and political commentator Bill O’Reilly discussed Mrs. Obama’s comments on his nationally syndicated show, “The Radio Factor.” A caller—Mary-Ann from Woodbury, Connecticut—claiming to have secondhand knowledge of Mrs. Obama’s poor temperament, described the Princeton and Harvard educated mother of two as a “very angry...militant woman.” O’Reilly, working to maintain his integrity and the integrity of his show, explained to the caller that her comment was hearsay and therefore,

not fair to Michelle Obama...because we don’t know who you are and we don’t know who your friend is. But we wanna know, we wanna know...we would like to talk to your friend and then whatever your friend tells us we would like to track it down. We’ll do it in a fair and balanced and methodical way...I don’t want to go on a lynching party

against Michelle Obama *unless* there's evidence, hard facts, that say this is how the woman really feels (emphasis added).²⁸⁵

Several days after his remark outlining “just” conditions for lynching Michelle Obama, O'Reilly publicly apologized. He clarified that his reference to lynching was an allusion to Clarence Thomas' description of his own public persecution as a “high tech lynching.” “I'm sorry if my statement offended anybody,” O'Reilly said. “That, of course, was not the intention. Context is everything.”²⁸⁶

Indeed, context is everything. O'Reilly's analogy—meant as a critique of individuals like Mary-Ann whose windmill gossip often results in devastating effects—was rightly placed. Support for lynchings was often generated by the circulation of half-truths or fully fabricated stories about the culpability of innocent people. However, O'Reilly's intended defense of Michelle Obama failed when it shifted from a pointed critique of socially irresponsible individuals to a clear declaration of just measures for lynching. O'Reilly's “unless” clause functions as a lyncher's checklist. It appears that only after adequate evidence of Obama's militancy and anti-Americanism is provided will O'Reilly participate in her lynching. The incident illustrates how the lynching as trope continues to resonate as a means of re-marking traditionally white spaces as the exclusive purview of American whites and as a means of removing supposed non-Americans from civic life.

As Obama's campaign for the presidency gained momentum, more egregious invocations of lynching as a method of curtailing black advancement in traditionally white spaces surfaced. At George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon, a life-size cardboard effigy of Obama was hung from a tree with a sign reading “Act Six Reject” taped to its front. George Fox is a devoutly

religious university whose mission is to produce students who are both academically and spiritually prepared to perform their professional lives with passion and integrity.²⁸⁷ The Act Six Project, which is an annual program that offers full scholarships to ten individuals from underrepresented groups, was instituted by George Fox officials to increase campus diversity. All but one of the members of the 2008 Act Six cohort were members of a minority group.²⁸⁸

This incident, which occurred in September 2008, came just months after Obama became the first African American to receive a major party's nomination for president. For many, Obama's nomination signified the advent of a new chapter in American racial and political progressivism, one that would reflect greater inclusion and participation by citizens in all areas of government. Thus, against the backdrop of such historic developments, the "Act Six Reject" sign functioned as more than a crude parody of historic moments. The Obama effigy on the Christian campus was an eerie reiteration of the religiosity underlying lynching spectacles. As Wood explains, lynchers often asserted that the brutal aggression exhibited in lynchings was consecrated by God. As such, lynchers were doing the God's work, "summoning all the tortures of hell for the black 'fiends' and 'devils' in their midst" and brining upon them God's Final Judgment.²⁸⁹ Although this contemporary invocation of lynching utilized an inanimate object, it nonetheless mirrored past efforts to restrict black advancement, particularly black movement into historically white universities and spaces—like the presidency—traditionally marked "white."

In October 2008, three more Obama effigies appeared. On October 18th, Ohio resident Mike Lunsford hung a white-sheeted ghost from the tree of his front lawn. The ghost hung from a noose above Lunsford's 'McCain-Palin' sign. Attached upside down to the front of the effigy was a Barack Obama sign on which the Democratic presidential nominee's middle name "Hussein" was spray painted and misspelled. Lunsford spoke to a Cincinnati news reporter off



FIGURE 17 Obama effigy in Fairfield, Ohio, 2008. Reprinted from Huffington Post.com

camera for fear that his views would hurt his employees. He told the reporter that he was against the idea of an “African American running the country,” that Obama was not a “full-blooded American,” and that he believed that America was a “white Christian nation and that only white Christians should be in power.”²⁹⁰

Lunsford’s statement reinforces the practice of lynching as an appropriate plan of action in efforts to secure the nation from “foreign” threat. His overall claim, however, suggests that he is either a member or sympathizer of the Skin Head or Neo-Nazi movement which utilizes Protestant religiosity to support its arguments for white nationalist supremacy.

Many within the Fairfield area found Lunsford’s effigy both frightening and racially offensive. In Clarksville, Indiana, Kirk Deddo similarly offended neighbors when he hung an inflatable doll favoring Obama from a tree in his front lawn. Deddo’s expression of racism was, however, a bit more coded than Lunsford’s. Deddo maintained that his life-size Halloween decoration was not racial, but political, explaining that he couldn’t think of anything more scary than the prospect of Obama leading the country.²⁹¹



FIGURE 18 Obama effigy in Kentucky, 2008. Reprinted from Indiananewscenter.com

In the case of the Obama effigies, makeshift representations of the nation’s first African American presidential candidate have been created for the purpose of re-enacting the lynching scene. Despite the absence of a faggot, volleys of bullets, a dismembered body, or even a raging

crowd (although the media frenzy that these incidents created is tantamount to such an audience), the symbolic lynching of a black man who has been seen, in some way, shape, or form, as one who has transgressed a boundary suggests that lynching today continues to retain its cultural importance as a practice of American (read ‘white’) civic identity.

Like lynching victims, Obama effigies became a part of the political landscape; their heightened presence as the possibility of Obama’s triumph grew harkens back to a time when white America’s objection to the full-out inclusion of blacks in civic life produced a “strange and bitter fruit.” As a candidate of mixed-race heritage, Obama stood as the epitome of white American fears. He, the product of an open and public interracial union—specifically, the union of a white woman and African man—had, in the eyes of racist whites, come to lay claim to what had been since the nation’s inception the political birthright of whites. To lynch him, then, symbolically would be to reclaim rhetorically the highest position of power for white America.

To be President is to be the ultimate citizen, the supreme constituent of the nation. On Tuesday, January 20, 2009, Barack Hussein Obama ascended to that status. The inauguration of America’s first black president set a record attendance for any event held in the nation’s capital and was among the most observed events by a global audience; it was a spectacular moment. For many, Obama’s ascent to the presidency signaled the arrival of a “post-racial” America, an America that had moved beyond racial division. Analysts first brought the phrase into fashion after Obama’s success in Iowa and New Hampshire during the January primaries. *The Economist* referred to Obama’s candidacy as a “post-racial triumph.”²⁹² Later, Peter Boyd of the *New Yorker* used the term to distinguish between black leaders of the civil rights movement and black leaders of today. For these pundits, post-racial signaled the end of racial division and the coming

of a new age, one that rendered the struggles of civil rights activists obsolete. But what “race” have we transcended? The phrase post-racial seems to arise when analysts assess black bodies as they appear in spaces that have traditionally been marked white. Essentially, the “race” that “post-racial” suggests America is moving beyond is the race that has disturbed white America for centuries: black. The term intended to signal the end of American racial division in actuality signals a move to eradicate blackness. From this observation alone it appears that America, despite its successes and incremental forward motion, nonetheless continues to take steps backwards.

The goal should not be for the country to be post-racial but post-racist. In claiming a post-racial society, pundits suggest that racism no longer exists, that deep-seated historically situated and perpetuated difference does not divide, and that America has finally put its governing ideal of equality for all into practice. It suggests that struggle for civil rights and equality has been achieved. The symbolic enactment of Obama’s lynching indicates that in this nation the proclivity to commit racially motivated murder is still far from rare.

NOTES

¹ Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black Americana*, 116; Shay, *Judge Lynch*, 18-22.

² *Ibid.*, 116.

³ Shay, 18-19.

⁴ Shay, 23.

⁵ This figure which appears in Patterson's in *Rituals of Blood* was taken from Daniel T. Williams' "The Lynching Records at Tuskegee Institute," in *Eight Negro Bibliographies* (New York: Kraus, 1970).

⁶ Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 55.

⁷ Wells, "Lynch Law in America," 15-25.

⁸ Douglass, "Lynch Law in the South," 17-24.

⁹ Dean, " 'We Seek Peace' ," 537.

¹⁰ Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 3.

¹¹ Jefferson, et. al, *The Declaration of Independence* (1776).

¹² Glenn, *Unequal Freedom*, 20; Dean, 532.

¹³ Tucker, "A[n] Election Sermon," 58.

¹⁴ Qtd in Condit and Lucaites, *Crafting Equality*, 36.

¹⁵ Condit and Lucaites, 37.

¹⁶ Morgan, *American Slavery*, 215-21.

¹⁷ Geiser, *Redemptioners and Indentured Servants*, 72.

¹⁸ Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 25-9; Jordan, *White Over Black*.

¹⁹ Condit and Lucaites, 37.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

²¹ Roediger, 27-40.

²² "First Census of the United States 1790."

²³ In 1773, slaves from Massachusetts petitioned for their freedom on the basis that black slaves shared a common right to be as free as white citizens. Similar petitions were presented to colonial governors between 1773 and 1777. See *Petition for freedom to Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson, His Majesty's Council, and the House of Representatives, June 1773; Petition for freedom to Massachusetts Governor Thomas Gage, His Majesty's Council, and the House of Representatives, June 1774; Petition for freedom to Massachusetts Governor Thomas Gage, His Majesty's Council, and the House of Representatives, 25 May 1774; Petition for freedom to Massachusetts Council and the House of Representatives [13] January 1777.*
<http://www.masshist.org/endofslavery/?queryID=55>.

²⁴ Wilson, *Black Codes*, 15.

²⁵“Abolition Movement: Early Antislavery Efforts, Early Efforts of Blacks, Revolutionary Era Abolitionism, Northern Abolitionism,” *Net Industries and its Licensors*, <http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/articles/pages/5913/Abolition-Movement.html>

²⁶ Smith, 14-25.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14-25.

²⁹ By 1780, antislavery sentiment had grown. Following Pennsylvania’s 1780 Act of Gradual Abolition, every state in New England except Massachusetts implemented gradual abolition. Slavery was instantly abolished in 1783 after the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled the institution illegal. Accompanying legislative reforms was a growing antislavery movement. Thus, despite later restrictions on assemblage, migration, employment, and initiatives to relocate free blacks to Africa, Northerners generally held to their indictment of slavery.

³⁰ West, *Vindicating the Founders*, 15.

³¹ U.S. Const. art. I, § 2.

³² Naturalization Act of 1790, 1 Stat. 103-104 (1790).

³³ Smith, 119.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 105-6.

³⁵ Wilson, 38.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 154.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁹ Qtd in Franklin, *The Militant South*, 76.

⁴⁰ Missouri was not the first state to make this provision. In 1793 Virginia forbid the migration of free blacks into the state offering a penalty of enslavement or the need for a note of special permission to remain. Mississippi, Arkansas had similar conditions. For more see Wilson, *Black Codes*, 16.

⁴¹ Smith, 175.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 177.

⁴³ Weiner, *Black Trails*, 94.

⁴⁴ Scott v. Emerson, 15 Mo. 576, 585-86 (1852); Fehrenbacher, 264-65 (1978).

⁴⁵ Dred Scott v. Sanford, 19 How. 403, 416-17, 421-23 (1857).

⁴⁶ Qtd in Weiner, 172.

⁴⁷ Smith, 265.

⁴⁸ Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 5 and 15.

⁴⁹ Franklin, *Reconstruction after the Civil War*, 47-8.

⁵⁰ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 200. For more detailed information on the Black Codes of 1866 see Wilson, *Black Codes*, 96-115.

⁵¹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 199-200; Wilson, *Black Codes*, 99.

⁵² Foner, *Reconstruction*, 199-200.

⁵³ Wilson, *Black Codes*, 39; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 201.

⁵⁴ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 203.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁵⁶ Cong. Globe, 39th Cong., 1st Sess. (1866).

⁵⁷ The Freemen's Bureau bill, which was a response to the Black Codes of 1866 sought to extend the Bureau's jurisdictional power so as to protect freemen from social, political, and legal abuses. After Johnson's veto of Bureau's bill Congress submitted the Civil Rights bill. The Civil Rights Act was the second attempt by Congress to secure black freedom and enfranchisement. It was considered the first Reconstruction Act and later became the Fourteenth Amendment.

⁵⁸ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 180.

⁵⁹ Franklin, *Reconstruction after the Civil War*, 74.

⁶⁰ Cong. Globe, 39th Cong. 2nd Sess. 1 (1867).

⁶¹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 180-181; Franklin, *Reconstruction after the Civil War*, 74; Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 23-7.

⁶² Cong. Globe, 39th Cong., 2nd Session 1. (1867).

⁶³ Franklin, *Reconstruction after the Civil War*, 67-71 and 129-30. While the North did not outright refuse to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment, several states either procrastinated or went through serious debate over the measure. Also see 67-8 and 73.

⁶⁴ This average of data provided by Franklin, *Reconstruction after the Civil War*, 101-2. Also see "Negro Rule," *The Troy Weekly Times*, August 31, 1867. While blacks constituted a majority in these state legislators, they failed to grasp the governorship and other significant local offices. For more the duration of black legislative majority see Franklin, 132-7 and Foner, *Reconstruction*, 351-8.

⁶⁵ Although Georgia was readmitted to the Union in 1868, it was quickly expelled a year later because legislators refused to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment. Once ratified in 1870 the state was readmitted.

⁶⁶ Cobb, *On the Road to Freedom*, 157.

⁶⁷ Franklin, *Reconstruction after the Civil War*, 130-2.

⁶⁸ Wells, *Southern Horrors*, 64.

⁶⁹ Mrs. Jefferson Davis, "The White Man's Problem," 3.

⁷⁰ Qtd. in Foner, 120.

⁷¹ Wright, *Black Boy*, 84.

⁷² This tally was taken from Daniel T. Williams' "The Lynching Records at Tuskegee Institute," in *Eight Negro Bibliographies*. New York: Kraus, 1970. In *Lynching in the New South*, Brundage estimates a total 3,220 blacks lynched between 1880 and 1930. For more see Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 8.

⁷³ For more on economic factors contributing to lynching, see Cox, "Lynching and the Status Quo"; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 119-76; , *Lynching in the New South*, 23-8.

⁷⁴ Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 55.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁷⁸ Patterson, "Table 2.1 Alleged Reasons for Lynching, 1882-1968," *Rituals of Blood*, 175. Patterson's information is taken from the Tuskegee Institute's national report on lynching which recorded a sum total of 4,723 lynching victims between 1882 and 1968.

⁷⁹ There are conflicting accounts of the Memphis lynching. Ida B. Wells, friend and godmother to the daughter of Thomas Moss, was the first to relay the account. In her autobiography, *Crusade for Justice*, Wells recalls that the men at the Curve beat the white men. However, in Patricia A Schechter's research on the incident, she suggests that there was no fight but rather a verbal confrontation. And while Wells recalls that the black men received nominal fines for their actions, Schechter reports that a warrant for the arrest of Thomas Moss on charges of assault and battery was issued. For more see Schechter, *Ida B. Wells and American Reform*, 77; Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 47-52; Wells, *Southern Horrors*, 64-65.

⁸⁰ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 47-52; Schechter. 75-78.

⁸¹ Brundage. *Lynching in the New South*, 24.

⁸² Well, *Southern Horrors*, 58-9; Carby, *Reconstruction Womanhood*; Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.

⁸³ Raper, 144.

⁸⁴ Qtd from the Macon *Telegraph* in Raper's *The Tragedy of Lynching*, 147-8.

⁸⁵ Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood"; Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*; Ware, *Beyond the Pale*, 167-244.

⁸⁶ Patterson, *Rituals of Blood*, 175.

⁸⁷ Browning, "Anti-Miscegenation Laws in the United States." Also see Barron, *People Who Intermarry*, 117-18.

⁸⁸ Wells, *Southern Horrors*, 52.

⁸⁹ Miscegenation laws were intended more as a means of restricting the sexual liberties of white women than those of white men who, since slavery, enjoyed free and unregulated sexual access to both black and white

women. For more on the gender politics of miscegenation laws and the construction of white womanhood see Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood"; Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 64-7, 69-71; Wells, *Southern Horrors*, 53-61; Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*; Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 97.

⁹⁰ Wells, *Southern Horrors*, 54.

⁹¹ Buckser, "Lynching as Ritual, 17, 21, 23.

⁹² Patterson, *Rituals of Blood*, 188-232; Ehrenhaus and Owen, "Race, Lynching, and Christian Evangelicalism."

⁹³ Patterson, *Rituals of Blood*, 175.

⁹⁴ Schilbrack, *Thinking Through Rituals*, 15.

⁹⁵ Wood, "Lynching Photography and the "black beast rapist," 199.

⁹⁶ Harris, *Exorcising Blackness*, 13-19.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹⁸ Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 202-3.

⁹⁹ Clark, *Rhetorical Landscapes*, 4.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰¹ Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 24.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰³ "3,000 Will Burn Negro," *New Orleans States*, June 26, 1919.

¹⁰⁴ Raper, 143-4.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁰⁷ Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 34.

¹⁰⁸ Shaw, *Man and Superman*, 214.

¹⁰⁹ Wells, "Lynch Law in America," 18.

¹¹⁰ For more on lynching and space see Ifill, *On the Courthouse Lawn*.

¹¹¹ Madison, *Lynching in the Heartland*; Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*; Car, *Our Town*.

¹¹² Wells. "Lynch Law in America," 15-42.

¹¹³ Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 84-94. Also see Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs* and Michael Shapiro, *The Politics of Representation: Writing Practices in Biography, Photography, and Policy Analysis* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 124-93.

¹¹⁴ Velazquez, Diego (1599-1660) - 1643 Self Portrait (Uffizi, Florence) <http://www.flickr.com/photos/32357038@N08/3383309879/> and Photograph of 1919 Lynching of Will Brown in Omaha, Nebraska. <http://notmytribe.com/2010/nebraskan-elders-around-a-bonfire-814483.html>

¹¹⁵ Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 88. Also see Michael Harris *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) for more on representations of blackness in American paintings.

¹¹⁶ Suren Lalvani, *Photography, Vision, and the Production of Modern Bodies* (Albany: State University of New York, 1996), 44.

¹¹⁷ Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 99; Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*; Shapiro, *The Politics of Representation*.

¹¹⁸ Lalvani, *Photography, Vision, and the Production*; Shapiro, *The Politics of Representation*, 124-178; Hariman and Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed*, 1-18.

¹¹⁹ Although Hoch specifically talks about white masculinity, his analysis of this white masculinity provides a gendered explanation for the construction of whiteness.

¹²⁰ Hoch, *Black Beast, White Hero*, 44.

¹²¹ Ibid. 44-56.

¹²² Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 46.

¹²³ Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 86.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 87-8.

¹²⁵ Sam Hose was lynched in Newman, Georgia in 1899.

¹²⁶ Qtd. in Hale's *Making Whiteness*, 214.

¹²⁷ For more on the use of lynching photographs in the dissemination of racist ideology see Apel and Smith *Lynching Photographs*. For lynching photographs and its role in the construction of whiteness see Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*, 118-146.

¹²⁸ Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*, 122.

¹²⁹ Allen, *Without Sanctuary*, 26.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 59- 60.

¹³¹ Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 166.

¹³² Wells, *Southern Horrors*, 118-19. The image used in this pamphlet is marked as "Scene of lynching at Clanton, Alabama, Aug. 1891." The photograph was turned into a postcard by traveling photographer, W.R. Martin. Wells reprinted both the front and back of the postcard as proof for her claims.

¹³³ "To the Presidential Nominee," *Chicago Defender*, June 10, 1916. Also see William Jordan's *Black Newspapers*, 47.

¹³⁴ Jordan, *Black Newspapers*, 41-3.

¹³⁵ James Weldon Johnson, "Is This Civilization?" *New York Age*, January 21, 1915.

¹³⁶ Jordan, *Black Newspapers*, 44-5.

¹³⁷ "The Lynching in Lee County, G.A.," *Crisis*, April 1916.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 303.

¹³⁹ Hale, *The Making of Whiteness*, 215-22.

¹⁴⁰ Freeman had to haggle for photographs. The "bad publicity" sparked by the incident kept town officials from wanting to circulate anymore evidence of the incident. They feared that in the wrong hands the photos would be misinterpreted. However, after her agreeing to pay five times the original price, Gildersleeve sold Freeman the photos. For more on the lynching of Jesse Washington see Hale's, *The Making of Whiteness*, 215-22.

¹⁴¹ Dray, *At The Hands of Persons Unknown*, 219.

¹⁴² William Jordan, *Black Newspapers*, 46.

¹⁴³ "The Lone Star is Covered with Blackness," *The Montgomery Advertiser*, May 16, 1916.

¹⁴⁴ The bill struggled under the weight of Senate Democrats who eventually killed it in 1922.

¹⁴⁵ *Crisis* 1936, 1937; Allen, 58.

¹⁴⁶ Wright, 190.

¹⁴⁷ Harris, 69-70.

¹⁴⁸ Burke, "The Four Master Tropes."

¹⁴⁹ Burke, *Counterstatements*, 154.

¹⁵⁰ Wideman, "Looking at Emmett Till, 25.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 24-48

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 24 and 29.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁵⁸ Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 247.

¹⁵⁹ Wideman, 29.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁶² Ibid., 32.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 32.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 31.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 33.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 33.

¹⁶⁷ Adopted by abolitionists, the African American jeremiad is a form of the American Jeremiad. It is a lament over the current state of affairs that urgently calls for social reform in the face of impending doom. It is distinguished from other variants by its call for racial equality.

¹⁶⁸ Murphy, *Prodigal Nation*, 111.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 169.

¹⁷⁰ Wideman, 34-5.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 34.

¹⁷² Ibid., 32.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 43-44.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 33.

¹⁷⁵ In “Inventing the University,” David Bartholomae describes a commonplace as a “culturally or institutionally authorized concept or statement that carries with it its own necessary elaboration. We all use commonplaces to orient ourselves in the world; they provide a point of reference and a set of ‘prearticulated’ explanations that are readily available to organize and interpret experience,” from *When a Writer Can Write*, 138.

¹⁷⁶ Reed, *Reckless Eyeballing*, 3.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 94

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 95

¹⁷⁹ This is not to say that Reed’s caricature of feminists fails to function similarly. Jeffery Melnick points out in “What you Lookin’ At?” that “the appearance of a number of straw-womanists makes it clear that [Reed] has a least one other major ax to grind as well” (300). For more criticism on Reed see Melnick’s, “ ‘What you Lookin’ At?’”, 298-311.

¹⁸⁰ Reed, *Reckless*, 96.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 96.

¹⁸² Ibid., 96.

¹⁸³ Metress, “Emmett Till in African American Literature,” 94.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 96

¹⁸⁵ Wells, *Southern Horrors*, 52.

¹⁸⁶ Reed, *Writin' Is Fightin'*, 145.

¹⁸⁷ "Editor's Choice 1975," *New York Times Book Review*, December 28, 1975.

¹⁸⁸ Brownmiller, 247.

¹⁸⁹ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, hooks, *Ain't I A Woman*; hooks, *Talking Back*.

¹⁹⁰ A rhetorical strategy that Reed sees used by second wave feminists who work to redirect blame and accountability for their dissatisfaction upon men.

¹⁹¹ Reed, *Reckless*, 75.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 95

¹⁹³ Melnick, 300.

¹⁹⁴ Reed, *The Reed Reader*, xxxii.

¹⁹⁵ Reed, *Writin' is Fightin'*, 154.

¹⁹⁶ Reed, *Reader*, xxiii.

¹⁹⁷ Joseph, 134.

¹⁹⁸ Schwenk, "Lynching and Rape," 318.

¹⁹⁹ Reed, *Reckless*, 51-2.

²⁰⁰ Reed, *Reckless*, 75.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁰⁷ *Reckless* comes on the heels of the women's movement and the politics of race and class that complicated attempts at interracial coalitions among feminists of the late 1960s and 1970s. Along with the movement came a resurgence of women's writing which depicted their attitudes towards race and gender discrimination. Black women contributed to this bed of literature. Their conscious choice to speak out against black male chauvinism experienced in private and public settings such as the home and those of the civil rights, student, and Black Power movements received the heaviest backlash. Writers like ntozake shange, Alice Walker, Michelle Wallace, Toni Morrison and others were accused of "airing dirty laundry." The mission against American racism depended upon an ethics of unity and community. Many African American men felt that black women's desire for gender equality came at the cost of their own safety. They retorted, proclaiming that the depiction of black men in

these texts rehashed myths of black male brutality and the black beast rapist—myths which had caused black men their lives.

²⁰⁸ Wideman, “Looking,” 34.

²⁰⁹ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 4.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

²¹¹ Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 258.

²¹² Wolters, “Without Sanctuary.”

²¹³ Desmond, “Risk and The Story of ‘Without Sanctuary,’” 44. Emory University Archives Series 060, Folder 2, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

²¹⁵ Qtd in Desmond, 44.

²¹⁶ “Without Sanctuary Project Files,” March 7, 2000, Emory University Archives Series 060, Box 5 Folder 1 Without Sanctuary Forum Electronic. Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library.

²¹⁷ Desmond, 42.

²¹⁸ James Allen and Jonathan Littlefield, telephone interview by Ersula J. Ore, March 18, 2010.

²¹⁹ Carbonell, “The Afterlife of Lynching,” 201.

²²⁰ Qtd in Carbonell, 202.

²²¹ Schwartz, “Object Lessons,” 28.

²²² Desmond, 4.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 45

²²⁴ Qtd in Carbonell, 201.

²²⁵ Facilitators for the exhibition consisted of docent, educators, and Society personnel who trained specifically to be facilitators of the collection.

²²⁶ Desmond, 46.

²²⁷ “Without Sanctuary Project Files,” Emory University Archives Series 060, Box 5, Folder 1 Emory University Archives Series 060, Folder 2. Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library.

²²⁸ Wideman, “Looking,” 25.

²²⁹ “Without Sanctuary Project Files,” March 5, 2000, Emory University Archives Series 060, Box 5. Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library. Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library.

²³⁰ Rittmeyer, “Baumhammer’s shootin-sprees victim at peace.”

²³¹ “Warhol Announcement,” Emory University Archives Series 060, Box 5, Folder 3. Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library.

²³² Gogan, “The Warhol,” 6.

²³³ Abels, “Lynching Photos an Exhibit certain to stir emotions,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, September 9, 2001. Emory University Archives Series 060, Box 5 Folder 3. Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

²³⁵ Qtd in Gogan’s “The Warhol,” 13.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

²³⁷ “The Academic Exchange,” n.d., http://www.emory.edu/ACAD_EXCHANGE/2001/aprmay/horror.html.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ Amos N. Jones, email message to Randal Burkett, Emory University Archives Series 060, Box 5 Folder 2. Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library.

²⁴⁰ “The Academic Exchange,” n.d., http://www.emory.edu/ACAD_EXCHANGE/2001/aprmay/horror.html.

²⁴¹ “Without Sanctuary Project Files,” Emory University Archives Series 060, Box 1, Folder 15. Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ Personal correspondence to Randall Burkett April 6, 2000. See Nia Woods Haydel’s, “Dissertation: Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America. A Case Study of Higher Education Partnership for Social Justice Education” (PhD diss., Georgia State University, 2007), 17.

²⁴⁴ Brundage, *The Southern Past*,” 41-43.

²⁴⁵ Hoelscher, “Making Race,” 669-670.

²⁴⁶ Haydel, 5 and 128. Emory University was the first academic institution to house the collection. After its showing in New York, Allen and Littlefield had asked other universities if they would be interested in showcasing the collection but each of them declined. For more see Hale, “Exhibition Review.”

²⁴⁷ Hale, “Exhibition Review,” 3.

²⁴⁸ Margolick, *Strange Fruit*.

²⁴⁹ Hale, “Exhibition Review,” 3.

²⁵⁰ White, “Review,” 125.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

²⁵² Wood and Donaldson, “Lynching’s Legacy,” 13.

²⁵³ “Without Sanctuary Project Files,” May 4, 2002, Attendee Jennifer McCabe. Emory University Archives Series 060 Viewer Response 2002-Book 11, Box 3 Folder 2. Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library.

²⁵⁴ “Without Sanctuary Forum: February 2000, Week 4,” February 28 2000, Attendee Fayth Parks. Emory University Archive Series 060, Files Box 5 Folder 1: New York Historical Society exhibition Without Sanctuary Electronic Forum. Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library.

²⁵⁵ “Without Sanctuary Forum: February 2000, Week 4,” February 14, 2000, Attendee Doug. Emory University Archive Series 060 Without Sanctuary Project Files Box 5 Folder 1: New York Historical Society Exhibition Without Sanctuary Electronic Forum. Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library.

²⁵⁶ “Without Sanctuary Forum: February 2000, Week 4” February 22, 2000, Attendee Chris Easley. Emory University Archive Series 060, Files Box 5 Folder 1: New York Historical Society exhibition Without Sanctuary Electronic Forum. Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library.

²⁵⁷ “Without Sanctuary Forum: February 2000, Week 4” February 2, 2000, Attendee Quincy. Emory University Archive Series 060, Files Box 5 Folder 1: New York Historical Society exhibition Without Sanctuary Electronic Forum. Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library.

²⁵⁸ Without Sanctuary Forum: February 2000, Week 4” February 5, 2000, Attendee Aeysha Grice. Emory University Archive Series 060, Files Box 5 Folder 1: New York Historical Society exhibition Without Sanctuary Electronic Forum. Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library.

²⁵⁹ James Polchi, “Not Looking at Lynching Photographs,” in *The Images and the Witness: Trauma, Memory, and Visual Culture* eds. Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas (New York: Wallflower Press, 2007): 207-222.

²⁶⁰ Cara Finnegan (2003), Deluca (1999), and Hairman and Lucaites (2003, 2007) have all provided examples of how visual images influence audiences. The rhetorical import of the visual.

²⁶¹ Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 4.

²⁶² Fox, “Record Crowds see Lynching Photo Exhibit.”

²⁶³ Without Sanctuary Project Files, May 1, 2002, Attendee Jene R. Peel M.D. Emory University Archive Series 060 Viewer Response, 2002-Book 10 Box 3Folder 1. Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library.

²⁶⁴ Wolters, 402.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 410.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 410.

²⁶⁷ Hale “Exhibition Review.”

²⁶⁸ Qtd in Snyder’s, “Without Sanctuary,” 167-8.

²⁶⁹ Hale, “Review,” 5; Wolters, “Without Sanctuary”; Qtd. in Snyder, “Without Sanctuary.”

²⁷⁰ Jamieson and Campbell, “Rhetorical Hybrids,” 147.

²⁷¹ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*.

²⁷² Burke, “The Four Master Tropes,” 425.

²⁷³ Woods missed several weeks of the 2008 PGA Tour due to knee surgery. As a result, he neither played The Open Championship nor the PGA Championship.

²⁷⁴ Elliott McLaughlin, "Tiger OK with 'Lynch' remark, but Sharpton Ready for Battle," *CNN U.S.*, January 10, 2008, http://articles.cnn.com/2008-01-10/us/tilghman.woods_1_national-action-network-sharpton-remark?_s=PM:US.

²⁷⁵ Golf.com. "Golf Channel anchor Kelly Tilghman Suspended for 'Lynch' Remark about Tiger Woods," January 14, 2008, http://www.golf.com/golf/tours_news/article/0,28136,1701417,00.html.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Jaime Diaz, "Golf Top Achievers and a Turning Point," *New York Times*, December 31, 1990.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 40.

²⁷⁹ Beth Ann Baldry, "Duke Family Defends Tilghman," *Golfweek Magazine*, February 26, 2002. <http://www.golfweek.com/news/2002/feb/26/duke-family-defends-tilghman/>; "Golf Channel Anchor Kelly Tilghman Suspended for 'Lynch' Remark about Tiger Woods," *Golf.com.*, January 14, 2008. http://www.golf.com/golf/tours_news/article/0,28136,1701417,00.html.

²⁸⁰ "Golfer Says Comments about Woods 'Misconstrued,'" *CNN Interactive CNN.com.*, April 21, 1997. <http://edition.cnn.com/US/9704/21/fuzzy/>. Accessed 27 Dec 2010.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² "The lynching of four unidentified African Americans. Circa 1900, location unknown. Lynching of an unidentified African American male. Date and location unknown. Tinted lithographed postcard. 5H x 3H". (<http://withoutsanctuary.org/main.html>)

²⁸³ The response to *GolfWeek's* January issue was overwhelmingly negative. Numerous subscribers wrote in expressing their discontent with the magazine and calling for the removal of editor Dave Seanor. Seanor was let go shortly after. For more see <http://www.golfweek.com/news/2002/feb/26/issues-apology/> and <http://www.golfweek.com/news/2002/feb/26/readers-react-to-jan-19-issue/>

²⁸⁴ "Obama Campaign Event." *C-SPAN Video Library*. February 18, 2008, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/ObamaCampaignEvent26> Accessed December 28, 2010.

²⁸⁵ "O'Reilly: 'I don't want to go on a lynching party against Michelle Obama unless there's evidence, hard facts, that say this is how the woman really feels,'" *Media Matters for America*, audio recording of Billy O'Reilly Fox News Radio show, "The Radio Factor, February 20, 2008. http://mediamatters.org/research/200802200001?f=h_latest. Accessed 28 Dec 2010.

²⁸⁶ "Bill O'Reilly Apologizes for Michelle Obama 'Lynching' Remark," *The Huffington Post*, February 22, 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/02/22/bill-oreilly-apologizes-f_n_87949.html. Accessed 28 Dec 2010.

²⁸⁷ "About Our Christian University," http://www.georgefox.edu/about/mission_vision_values/index.html. Accessed 28 Dec 2010.

²⁸⁸ "Obama effigy found hanging from campus tree," *MSNBC.com*, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26872774/ns/us_news-life. Accessed 28 Dec 2010; "Ore. School Says Students Confess to Hanging Obama Effigy From Tree," *MSNBC.com*, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26872774/ns/us_news-life. Accessed December 28, 2010.

²⁸⁹ Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 48. Also see Ehrenhaus and Owen, “Race Lynching and Christian Evangelicalism.”

²⁹⁰ “Racist Obama Effigy Hung in Ohio (Video),” http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/10/19/racist-obama-effigy-hung_n_135971.html. Accessed February 10 2009; “Scary Obama Ghost Hangs from Tree Racist,” YouTube video, 2:24, from a news broadcasting televised by WKRC Cincinnati on October 2008, posted by “lizhartzman,” October 18, 2008, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSFfEj3uFY&feature=youtube_gdata_player. Accessed February 12, 2009; “Ohio Neighbors Upset Over Anti-Obama Ghost,” *Current.com*, http://current.com/entertainment/wtf/89419260_ohio-neighbors-upset-over-anti-obama-ghost.htm. Accessed December 28, 2010.

²⁹¹ Peter Ambrose, “Man Hangs Effigy of Barack Obama on Tree,” *INC Now 24/7 News Source*. <http://www.indianasnewscenter.com/news/local/33566224.html>. Accessed December 28, 2010.

²⁹² “The Cooks Spoil Obama’s Broth: An Ethnic Split in the Democratic Race Hurts Both Leading Candidates—Perhaps to the Advantage of Republicans Come November.” http://www.economist.com/node/10566696?story_id=10566696.

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PUBLICATIONS

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"Touch the Body Up?" Reparations and the Resurrection of Emmett Louis Till." *Rhetoric Society of America Conference* Seattle, WA. May 2008.

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