

LYNCHING IN AMERICA: SOME CONTEXT AND A FEW COMMENTS

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The numbers are not exact, but by the best counts of recorded lynchings, at least 3,500 lynchings occurred between 1865 and 1920, mostly in the South during the period of black disfranchisement and the enactment and initial implementation of Jim Crow laws. The numbers are numbing—so much so that outside of areas and people directly affected, they hardly seem real. And so barbaric is the grisly business that we too easily discount it as from another time and place and absolve ourselves of any responsibility for the conditions, causes, and consequences of the violent acts. In truth, lynchings were not something that only “bad” people did somewhere else. As recent scholarship has demonstrated, and as documentary filmmakers such as Stephen Labovsky have shown, the geography of lynching included the mid-Atlantic region. They also point to the endorsement, if not the direct participation, of the “upstanding” members of the white community as essential to the ritual and meaning of public lynchings. Labovsky’s film reminds us that racial lynching was, and is, an American story. Labovsky’s

In the Dead Fire's Ashes gives a human face to the numbers to make real the almost unimaginable in a so-called civilized society and democracy. This is no mean accomplishment when we consider how silent and blind we as a people have been to the facts and legacy of lynching in America. It is also a call to action, as citizens and scholars, to understand the history of lynching so that it will not happen again.

Lynching has a long history in America, stretching back to the colonial period and persisting well into the twentieth century. Curiously, until recently, few historians had much to say on the subject. Rather, journalists and sociologists had claimed the field by reporting individual accounts of lynching and charting, surveying, and assaying the patterns of collective violence. In doing so, they fixed the sociological model of the case study as the principal method of examination and explication. Latecomers to the subject, historians not surprisingly borrowed much from the methods and mappings in the sociological and journalistic literature. With few exceptions, most historical writing on lynching has been a case study of a particular lynching, with an eye to the setting and historical context of each episode. Dennis Downey's important morphologies of lynchings in Pennsylvania and Delaware are cases in point. Yet, too, the work of historians and social scientists in the 1970s studying crowd behavior in Europe also began to inform American historians' interest in collective violence. Especially important in that regard was the recognition that collective action—as in the anti-Stamp Tax mobbings during the American Revolution, draft riots during the American Civil War, labor strikes in the railroad yards and coal fields, to name several examples—was not irrational; rather, it reflected normal means of popular protest and came from the marrow of community identity. Students of lynching followed such leads.¹

As to evidence, critics of lynching marked the way. Anti-lynching advocates beginning with Ida B. Wells-Barnett a century ago assembled and used eyewitness reportage and photographic evidence of lynchings—especially the startling displays of charred bodies hanging from trees, “strange fruit,” with men, women, and children admiring their handiwork—to chronicle the facts of public complicity in the murders and to stir social conscience. The long trail of photographic and oral testimony kept by Tuskegee Institute (now University), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and other systematic collectors of lynching accounts increasingly came into public view and opened for research in the 1970s and after. Over the past several years, collectors of postcards of lynching photographs, souvenirs

from lynchings, and the folklore and oral histories of lynchings displayed and published such materials, to much public shock that such events occurred. The January 2000 exhibit, in New York City, of James Allen's large collection of lynching postcards drew huge crowds and much media attention. The evidence cried out for historians to make sense of it. Then, too, television documentaries on particular lynchings and mob violence, as, for example, the case of Emmett Till and incidents from the civil rights struggle of the 1950s and 1960s, quickened public interest and invited scholarly inquiry. In 2002 Emory University hosted a major conference, "Lynching and Racial Violence in America: Histories and Legacies," which brought together historians, sociologists, journalists, government officials, and others to take stock of the interest and suggest future lines of inquiry. This was the largest symposium devoted to the issue since an NAACP-sponsored conference in 1940, and was distinguished from the 1940 gathering by the diversity of disciplines represented and the abundant and eager participation of whites. From such interest has come a rich harvest of papers, dissertations, and published work. Indeed, the field has grown so fast that it is now almost a full-time job simply to catalog the many case studies of lynching events.²

Much of the scholarly focus has been on lynching in the American South, and rightly so for the overwhelming number of documented lynchings occurred there. As historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage observes, lynching and mob violence were so pervasive and chronic in the South as to "define southern distinctiveness every bit as much as the Mason-Dixon line marked the boundary of the region."³ Also, for almost half a century beginning in the late 1880s, ritualized and oft-recorded public lynchings in the South informed the manner and meaning of defining and defending white communal identity and interests there and elsewhere. But the story of lynching does not begin and end with the southern experience alone.

Of late, historians have widened the lens to reveal lynching as a common practice in many places outside of Dixie. The trans-Mississippi West and midwestern areas undergoing rapid social, racial, demographic, and economic change during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries proved especially fertile ground for lynchings and mob violence. During the heyday of lynchings in the United States from the 1890s through the 1920s, numerous lynchings occurred in such places as Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Kansas; even Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Delaware combined had several.⁴ Lynching was portable. It traveled with people heading north, west, wherever, and, indeed, in newly settled areas lacking structured legal

authority, it served as vigilante “rough justice” and even preemptive “law” against claim jumpers, cattle rustlers, charlatans, harlots, and all manner of social outcasts, outsiders, and “others” whom the dominant groups deemed unwelcome.⁵

Significantly, however, lynchings did not happen everywhere, and they acquired particular power as community organizing and “racial” control mechanisms in some places but not others. In the South, for example, Virginians lynched less readily than did Georgians. Between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth century, Louisiana had more lynchings than any other state, but within Louisiana, whites in the Mississippi delta region were less likely to lynch blacks than were whites in the state’s cotton belt. In New England lynching disappeared altogether during the nineteenth century.⁶ Why, one wonders, did some places have a proclivity for lynching while others relied on other means to assert community norms and maintain “law and order”? Why did Pennsylvania, for example, have few lynchings though many instances of mob violence against blacks, immigrant/ethnic groups, and Catholics?

At the same time, as the recent scholarship on lynching makes clear, virtually all places and people involved in lynching shared several common characteristics. More than any other factor, concerns about maintaining racial or ethnic “purity” and social control moved lynch mobs to action. Most victims of lynchings were black men, invariably accused of violating white women in some way. But other “others”—racialized outcasts such as the Chinese, Mexicans, Native Americans, and Sicilians—also suffered in significant numbers. Their “crimes” were not so readily related to alleged assaults on white women so much as their being labeled as social contaminants, the breeders of lawlessness, corruption, and disruption. Indeed, the largest mass lynching in United States history was the 1891 murder of eleven Sicilian immigrants in New Orleans for allegedly assassinating the Irish-American police chief in Mafia fashion. Also significant, scholars note, is that lynchings happened in places caught in social flux and to newcomers who lacked ties to the local community.⁷ Such was the case with George White, the itinerant farm worker charged with sexually assaulting and murdering Helen Bishop in Wilmington in 1903.

There were different kinds of lynching. The most frequent variety was the one we know the least about, indeed might never know about. These are the countless hangings, garrotings, burnings, shootings, or other means of murdering people away from public view. We might discover the body but rarely

learn about when, why, and by whom the lynching happened. Rather than conduct their terror in public view, the lynch mob concealed its identity. Such private affairs became more common as public lynchings became less "respectable" after World War II and as political intimidation rather than "rough justice" for some alleged trespass of racial lines was the principal reason for the violence. The murders of civil rights workers and blacks seeking their political rights in the South fall into this category of private acts with a public purpose.

During the late nineteenth century and into the 1930s, the "spectacle lynching" held sway as central to racial and social control. The spectacle lynchings were massive public events, often advertised in newspapers (giving details on time and location) and attracting thousands of spectators, some arriving in excursion trains specially scheduled for the execution. At the lynching the victim was killed in a carefully staged ritual of retribution. The performance sought to impress on whites and blacks alike the power of white supremacy. The 1903 lynching of George White was such an event. In Wilmington in 1903, as elsewhere, the spectacle lynching was not the work of a mob run amok; rather, it was organized, purposeful, and "orderly," with participants following prescribed rules as to the proper way to prepare the altar of sacrifice and exact from the victim a confession of sin. In the spectacle lynching witnesses played their part by respecting the proceedings and remembering it in oral accounts, and even by collecting and proudly displaying "souvenirs" such as body parts cut from the victim and remains of faggots from the fire or rope from the hanging. Where and how people in Wilmington acquired the requisite knowledge of the forms and etiquette of a "proper" lynching we do not know, but by 1903 the well-recorded lynchings from southern places, as well as Delaware's many southern cultural and social ties, no doubt made such information common parlance there. By all accounts, whites in Wilmington knew what to do with the very black, and ironically named, White in lynching him.⁸

Critical to the spectacle lynching was the open participation of the community's public leaders, the "best men" as to office and station, in the action and its aftermath, even if only as interested observers. In doing so, they reaffirmed their own authority by respecting and acceding to the will of the people demanding the death of the accused. Such involvement required giving up the victim to the crowd. The common understandings as to the proper way to conduct a lynching allowed the elected official and head of the police to appeal to the crowd to respect the written law and let a court decide the

issue, with the promise that such a process would bring the inevitable conviction and execution of the accused, who was assumed guilty by all. But in the end, if the crowd insisted on having the body, the leader(s) must yield to the people in good grace. After the crowd had taken the victim from the official holding place, the community leaders validated the action by refusing to condemn the subsequent lynching or to prosecute anyone for engaging in it. Such leaders also must defend the lynching against any criticism by pointing to the heinous crime the accused had committed and to the need to defend the honor of the white community. Their actions, if not also their public declamations, thus endorsed the result. So it was in Wilmington in June 1903 when the town strung up and burned alive George White after the Reverend Robert Elwood, among others, had called on the coroners' jury to act or let the people have their way.⁹

In thinking about what the spectacle lynching of George White might teach us about matters of race, collective behavior, community identity, and law, among several topics, in the region, consider first the role of rhetoric in defining actions and interests. As Christopher Waldrep has argued in the most comprehensive study of lynching in the U.S. to date, making sense of lynching must begin with the etymology and use of the term "lynching" as a political weapon to support or condemn particular kinds of collective violence. He asserts that because "newspapers were virtually the only source available for lynchings," modern scholars have been straight-jacketed in defining the term beyond the terms already set by those reporting it. Notwithstanding the fact that oral history, photographic evidence, and material culture provide other ample evidence for lynchings, though not necessarily full narratives of them, Waldrep's observation bears note. From early on, Waldrep argues, the term lynching meant a community's legitimate use of extralegal violence to uphold community norms and protect it from dangerous men. The term was initially confined to Virginia, but during Reconstruction it gained southern-wide usage to denote necessary communal actions against freedpeople and Republicans who supposedly "abused" their power (simply by having any political power) and threatened traditional racial hierarchies. Contrariwise, Republicans abjured describing the violence as lynchings, preferring instead to label it as "outrages." A unified lynching narrative did not congeal until the late 1870s. Newspapers played the critical role in the process by reporting, in sequence, a horrible crime, the local community's almost mad insistence on immediate justice (read vengeance), the inability of the local courts to administer the swift punishment the community demanded, and the coming together of all elements of the

white community to do by lynching what the law could not do through normal legal processes. Blacks such as Ida Wells-Barnett and then the NAACP began to change the rhetoric of lynching, among northerners at least, by depicting it as racial mob violence against untried and, usually, wrongly accused blacks. Differences as to how narrow to define an act as "lynching" divided civil rights and anti-lynching advocates—all to the confusion of later scholars trying to sort out the meaning of the term and the acts. Still, by the 1960s, changing racial attitudes, popular media exposure of southern violence, and the civil rights movement combined to fix lynching in the national public vocabulary as an illegal and cowardly act.¹⁰

Waldrep's emphasis on the rhetorical environment in which lynching happened invites close consideration for the mid-Atlantic region both in terms of investigating lynching events and explaining their limited number. It is likely significant that by 1903, when the anti-lynching campaign of Ida B. Wells-Barnett and others was in gear, lynching was on the rhetorical defensive in northeastern urban areas, and that by the time of the "last" lynching in Pennsylvania, in Coatesville in 1911, the act was in disrepute throughout much of the North. In the case of George White, Wilmington had to face the critics. Contemporary northern newspaper editorials almost unanimously castigated the city for the collapse of law and morality there for having allowed and then condoned a lynching. The condemnations from Philadelphia dailies, which equated lynching with barbarism, especially brought home to Wilmington's city fathers that lynching might be bad for business. For the Wilmington business and social elite eager for investment and respect from northern capital, the White incident thus threatened to become a costly economic and social embarrassment.¹¹

Understanding the effects of such criticism on subsequent thinking about race and legal processes, in Wilmington and elsewhere where leaders saw connections between law and order and economic development, will help make sense of the move toward Progressive management that followed the incident. It also might explain the rarity of lynchings in the northeastern and mid-Atlantic states where capitalist transformation had taken place or was well underway. Then, too, adapting the studies on the rhetoric of lynching to examine the rhetoric of mob violence against non-black minorities, immigrants, and non-Protestant religious groups would make the question of lynching immediately and more fully relevant to the mid-Atlantic experience. How contested in the region were the meanings of extra-legal violence against any "other"?



THE NEW RELIGION

"The New Religion." *Philadelphia Telegraph*, June 24, 1903. Courtesy of Stephen Labovsky.

In explaining why Elwood and others demanded a public retribution for Helen Bishop's death, Dennis Downey makes a strong case for the lack of civic leadership and instruments for prompt resolution of the case. The law was slow, and the public panted for retribution. This is a keen insight that points to larger interpretive possibilities in trying to explain the dynamics of

lynching, and mobbing, in America. The extent to which formal institutions of due process were in place, working, and respected is likely a good indicator of the extent to which extra-legal violence was regarded as a necessary instrument of social control or a danger to law and order.¹²

Class identities and interests also loom large in any consideration of where, when, and why lynchings happened. Michael Pfeifer, in his comparative study of lynchings in western, midwestern, southern, and mid-Atlantic states, recently has shown that attitudes toward lynching hinged significantly on social categories. Rural and working-class whites were suspicious of formal legal proceedings, with their complicated and time-consuming pleadings and appeals, and preferred the more efficient and sure personal retribution that "rough justice" provided. Middle-class reformers favored formal legal processes that were "rational" and prescribed. Urban Progressives especially emphasized informed management of social behavior and respect for the law as the best way to bring order and moral uplift, while also strengthening the claims to authority of the educated elite. Lynching reeked of savagery and a loss of control.¹³ Indeed, even among southern proponents of a New South, a principal argument for instituting Jim Crow laws was to shape and manage the physical and social environment so as to regulate behavior in predictable ways; once instituted and observed, Jim Crow laws would thus make extra-legal collective violence unnecessary. The "best men" worked to establish court systems and remove "justice" from the people acting out of doors, and too often as the pawns of demagogues, to venues where trained judges and lawyers would decide the result. In such circumstances, lynching gradually lost its efficacy as a rational instrument of civic order.¹⁴ Yet, as Leon Litwack suggests in his study of life under Jim Crow, it was just that strategy of emphasizing segregation laws rather than relying on collective violence that gave white supremacy its force, for it made white supremacy respectable and reasonable. Lynching alone could never do that.¹⁵ Such is an insight worth carrying to studies of restrictive legislation in mid-Atlantic states as part of any efforts by reformers and town fathers to secure racial and social categories.

In trying to account for the decline of "rough justice" in northern states, Michael Pfeifer tracks a corresponding rise of legal executions. The ready application of the death penalty supposedly bought off the advocates of "rough justice" by ensuring retribution while it also provided at least the appearance of due process and civic order. Even as public officials moved executions indoors and regularized procedures in carrying out the death penalty, they retained the principal purpose of the spectacle lynching—namely, "that

the guilt, innocence, or humanity of an executed person matter less than the collective vengeance satisfied by the ritualized taking of life."¹⁶ Did such a compromise between two kinds of justice—replacing lynching with the death penalty—account for the absence of lynchings in modern Pennsylvania, Delaware, and anywhere northward?

Complicating questions of rhetoric, instruments of due process, and civic authority is the matter of sex. In particular social contexts, one wonders what codes of retributive justice governed whites' expected responses to any black male's violation of white racial and sexual purity. That Helen Bishop embodied white virtue—a virginal schoolgirl and the daughter of a minister—magnified the crimes against her. George White's violations were beyond redemption and cried out for the whole community's action. White racial supremacy demanded no less than a harsh public punishment for the black man's assault on all that Bishop represented. Linking ideas about due process to class and cultural beliefs regarding the sanctity of white women, on the one hand, to ideas about civic authority and community, on the other, is necessary for any understanding of the incidence and character of lynching.

So, too, is factoring in white women's thoughts on the rationale for lynching. By asserting an honor-bound duty to punish any threat to the sanctity of a white woman's body, white men also were laying a proprietary claim to white women's bodies that went beyond law and complicated contested issues of women's place in the changing public sphere. In a world ruled by a lynching culture, for example, white women were expected to accede to male authority and limit their movements in the public sphere, including any interest in getting the vote. Racial lynching not only marked, even created, the boundaries of whiteness, but also of masculinity and citizenry. Understanding this, white women anti-lynching crusaders challenged the culture of lynching in part because it kept respectable women from the ballot-box and, thus, prevented them from cleaning up politics and closing down the saloons, gaming dens, and other places where bad company bred bad habits and crime.¹⁷ How white women viewed and responded to the violent events in Wilmington in 1903, or Coatesville in 1911, or anywhere in the region remains an open question.

Not so much appreciated in the accounts of the 1903 Wilmington lynching is the extent to which the religious press took up Elwood's responsibility for the action and condemned the immoral act of hanging, burning, and mutilating a man without benefit of due process. As Dennis Downey has shown, Elwood escaped formal censure from his church and later enjoyed a

modest reputation as an inspiring preacher despite, and for some perhaps because of, his role in the White lynching. Still, Elwood had to answer accusations from other clergy and an indictment from the New Castle Presbytery, following a recommendation from the Baltimore Synod that his provocative sermon had abused his trust as a community leader and pastor by exhibiting and encouraging "unchristian" conduct. Elwood ignored the criticism from black clergy in Wilmington, but he could not wholly dismiss that coming from his own denomination and a national religious journal. At his church trial in 1904 he was convicted on three of six counts, but let off with an admonition thereafter to be "judicious" in his speeches.¹⁸ The criticisms of Elwood for his part in the White lynching, and of lynchings elsewhere, in the northern religious press no doubt put other clergy and religious leaders on notice that their sermons and civic addresses should preach restraint rather than revenge lest they lose their standing among their peers. The ways in which religious institutions affected the rhetorical and moral environment in dealing with race, or any category of "otherness," is a necessary inquiry for any student of lynching, or any kind of collective violence.

Collective racial violence defined not only whiteness but blackness. The 1903 lynching in Wilmington did so for the black community. Recent work on African-American community formation in Atlanta and other New South cities is relevant in thinking about how organized violence against blacks heightened their sense of the unbridgeable gulf of race and reinforced their need to organize against violence (thus, the anti-lynching efforts), build their own institutions to minimize encounters with and dependence on whites, and learn to think like whites in ways that would protect them from white violence. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many African-American leaders sought participation in the economic development and civic life of the New South cities. They believed that their own contributions of building and running churches, schools, mutual aid associations, and other institutions of social betterment entitled them to respect and participation in councils of authority. They had underwritten home purchases and started up businesses, and they spoke the language of civic reform and business growth. But anti-black riots and spectacle lynchings made clear in Atlanta and elsewhere that racial hatred rather than civic responsibility decided blacks' place in the larger community. The effect was to turn blacks further inward toward black solidarity.¹⁹

Led by the Reverend Montrose Thornton of Wilmington's Bethel A. M. E. Church, blacks in the city protested the lynching of George White with a

rally in the downtown that almost exploded into a race riot when white toughs attacked the marchers. The black leadership made clear that they regarded the murder of Bishop as despicable, but they insisted on respect for the law. The lynching and subsequent attacks on black protesters galvanized Thornton in his conviction that blacks must get the vote and write the laws. In 1904 he made such a case at a black state political convention in Dover. Thornton's thunderous denunciations of the lynching and white oppression did not sit well with other black clergy who worried that Thornton's style might alienate potential white allies, but he continued to insist that anything less than vigorous condemnation of white violence and vigorous assertions of their own political power would be "unmanly" and encourage further outrages against them. A study of the 1911 Coatesville lynching also suggests blacks there responded to the violence by realizing they had to rely on themselves for progress and protection. They understood that rather than being an aberration, the lynching reflected a pattern of racial violence. In Delaware and Pennsylvania, as elsewhere, the rhetoric of white business leaders and Progressive reformers did not match the realities of racism.²⁰ One wonders how, in the mid-Atlantic region, violence pushed other "outsiders" toward or away from civic engagement and intensified their feelings of isolation and their efforts to build group cohesion.

Finally, as the recent work by William Carrigan and others has reminded us, any understanding of lynching demands considerations of the ways historical memory informed and directed the dynamics of lynching, race relations, and community formation. Southern whites' glorification of Ku Klux Klan violence as God-sent and cleansing is but the most egregious example of the ways that one historical memory of Reconstruction shaped the later culture and language of lynching in the South, and for a time even in the northern mind as attested by the box-office success of and cheering for D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915), with its final scenes of the white-robed KKK rescuing the white South from Republican misrule and black bestiality.²¹

However much lynching became part of America's collective memory—imprinted in the popular culture, discussed in national circles, and invoked as the metaphor for racial violence—many particular lynchings were "lost" in local history(ies). The ways people remember—or forget—racial violence reveals much about their interests and identity. The folklore and memory of lynching divides most obviously along racial lines. Gary McDonogh's comparative study of white and black Catholics in Savannah makes the point; he shows that after fifty years, in recalling KKK violence against them in the

1920s, black Catholics framed their memory almost wholly in racial terms while white Catholics did so only in religious ones.²² Closer to home, the 1911 lynching of Zachariah Walker in Coatesville had continued as a topic of conversation among African Americans for eighty years after the event, while in 1991 the city manager complained that the publication of a book on the lynching might be useful in “the context of learning from the mistakes of the past” but dredging up such a memory served “no purpose” in his day.²³

How any people, any community, grapples with its own history of lynching, or any kind of racial violence and hatred, is a constant question. A Chamber of Commerce trying to promote its town’s good reputation hardly wants memorials to past victims of extra-legal collective violence. African-American leaders insist we dare not forget such a past, and in places as varied as Duluth, Minnesota, and Tulsa, Oklahoma, they have joined with white scholars and community leaders to press for public discussion and representation of racial violence in the past, all as part of a healing and reconciliation process. The people in Duluth, in cooperation with the Minnesota Historical Society, even set up a digital archive gathering over two thousand documents on the 1920 lynching of three young black circus workers, so that teachers and students will not forget what happened there.²⁴ They are not alone. Stephen Labovsky in his film and Dennis Downey in his writings will not let us forget what happened at our doorstep.

Surely it is ironic that the cruel theater of the George White lynching in Wilmington, which its authors and actors intended to be witnessed and remembered by many in their day and after, should have been forgotten for so long. Such amnesia on the White lynching, like so many others, speaks volumes on the history of race and racial violence in America. We must now look “in the dead fire’s ashes” to recover the histories of racial violence, and to see ourselves in making such violence at one time, or at any time, acceptable and then to understand the ways the memory of such terrors has fostered distrust of the American legal system and even of history by those for whom lynching was never an abstraction. In 1997 W. Fitzhugh Brundage surveyed the state of the field of lynching studies and noted that “recent work provides scholars with many of the materials needed for a nuanced portrait of the history of lynching in the South.”²⁵ What scholars then needed to do, he continued, was move to the “hard work” of differentiating sub-regional complexities. He might have added, and we now know, that such hard work must extend to inter-regional analyses and non-southern places. Students of the mid-Atlantic experience(s) now have their own charge. We can apply the

histories of lynchings elsewhere to examinations of the character and content of racial, ethnic, and religious violence here.

NOTES

1. The literature on lynching has grown significantly over the past several years. For the patterns in writing on lynching, see especially W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Introduction," in Brundage, ed., *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 6–20; and Christopher Waldrep, "Lynching Query," Sept. 7, 2004, H-NET List for Southern History (*H-SOUTH@H-NET.MSU.EDU*). For a good compendium of arguments and data on collective violence, see Richard Brown, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of Violence and Vigilantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975). For a revealing reflection on the "discovery" of lynching as a historical topic, and ruminations on the use of the term "lynching" in light of the Clarence Thomas hearings, see Joel Williamson, "Wounds Not Scars: Lynching, the National Conscience, and the American Historian," *Journal of American History* 83 (1997): 1221–53 (especially, pp. 1242–53, on historians' recent interest in lynching), and the responses by seven prominent historians, pp. 1254–67, all part of a forum on "What We See and Can't See in the Past: A Round Table." For Downey's works on two Pennsylvania and Delaware lynchings, see Dennis B. Downey and Raymond M. Hyser, *No Crooked Death: Coatesville, Pennsylvania and the Lynching of Zachariah Walker* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); and Downey, "'Mercy Master, Mercy!': Racial Politics and the Lynching of George White," *Delaware History* 30 (2003): 189–210.
2. On the visual evidence, see, for example, James Allen, Hilton Als, et al., *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms, 2000), which prints lynching postcards and includes trenchant observations by Leon Litwack and others on such documents. For online and downloadable samples from the collection, see "withoutsanctuary.org," which includes 81 images and supporting material. No mid-Atlantic lynchings are represented in the grisly collection, but ones from West Virginia, Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, Kansas, and Nebraska suggest the geographical range outside the former Confederacy. On constructing documentary narratives of lynchings, a model is Christopher Metress, ed., *The Lynching of Emmett Till: A Documentary Narrative* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), which includes contemporary newspaper and news magazine reports and editorials, images, literary and poetic accounts, and memoirs; for a good video production, see, for example, *Strange Fruit: The Story of a Song on Video* (San Francisco: California Newsreel/Resolution, Inc., 2002), which focuses on the Billie Holiday song and the place of lynching in American culture. Such works not only provide materials to study lynching but also suggest ways students of lynching in the mid-Atlantic region might collect and present primary source materials. For a useful bibliography on lynching, with numerous citations to contemporary responses to lynchings, see Norton H. Moses, comp., *Lynching and Vigilantism in the United States: An Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997).
3. Brundage, "Introduction," in Brundage, *Under Sentence of Death*, 4.
4. Counting lynchings can be tricky business, given varying definitions of the term over time and even at the same time. For a standard tabulation and explanation of lynchings before the NAACP,

anti-lynching crusaders, and the Tuskegee Institute began their systematic and comprehensive collecting of lynching data, see James E. Cutler, *Lynch-Law: An Investigation into the History of Lynching in the United States* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1905; rpt. ed., Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1969), 180–83, who found seven lynchings in Pennsylvania between 1882 and 1903 (the last in 1899), of whom two victims were white and five were black. For the same period, Culbert counted only one lynching in Delaware (the George White lynching in 1903, which Culbert [pp. 260–61] attributed to the community's impatience with the delays of and uncertainty about the result from formal criminal proceedings), one in New Jersey (in 1886), and two in New York (one each in 1892 and 1896). For the NAACP's review of lynchings during this period, see *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889–1918* (New York: NAACP, 1919). On particular lynchings in northern places, see, for example, Roger Lane, *William Dorsey's Philadelphia & Ours: On the Past and Future of the Black City in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 46–56 (which includes a tight assessment of the effect of the White lynching on Philadelphia's black community); Dennis B. Downey, "A Many Headed Monster": The 1903 Lynching of David Wyatt," *Journal of Illinois History* 2 (1999): 2–16; James H. Madison, *A Lynching in the Heartland: Race and Memory in America* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), on a lynching in Marion, Indiana, in 1930; and Michael Fedo, *The Lynching in Duluth* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2000).

5. An excellent comparative study of lynching in different regions is Michael J. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874–1947* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).
6. On lynching patterns, see Phillip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002), a longitudinal view of lynching that offers more comparative perspective than its title implies; Pfeifer, *Rough Justice*, passim; Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 155–59; George C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865–1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings"* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990); and Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909–1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980).
7. On the patterns, see notes 5 and 6 above. On anti-Sicilian violence, see Richard Gambino, *Vendetta* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1977); and John V. Baiamonte, Jr., *Spirit of Vengeance: Nativism and Louisiana Justice, 1921–1924* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 1–17. Regarding whites as victims of lynching, W. Fitzhugh Brundage notes that in the Midwest, between 1880 and 1931, the majority of victims were white (181 whites and 79 blacks), during a time of social and economic transformation: Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 8. Probably the most famous lynching was that of Leo Frank, in 1915, in Marietta, Georgia. Frank, a Jewish factory owner in Atlanta, was abducted from jail after being convicted (wrongly most scholars agree) of killing a thirteen-year-old factory girl, Mary Phagan. Anti-Semitism, class differences, and anti-urban attitudes all figured in the rush to lynch Frank. National outrage over the lynching led to public hearings and appeals to the Supreme Court to rule against lynching. See Leonard Dinnerstein, *The Leo Frank Case* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968); and Nancy MacLean,

- "The Leo Frank Case Reconsidered: Gender and Sexual Politics in the Making of Reactionary Populism," *Journal of American History* 78 (1991): 917-48.
8. Of the various descriptions and analyses of spectacle lynchings, see especially Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 280-312, on the structure, dynamics, and purpose of such acts of public terror; Donald G. Mathews, "The Southern Rite of Human Sacrifice," *Journal of Southern Religion* (2000) <<http://jsr.as.wvu.edu/mathews.edu>>, on the religious meanings; and Amy Louise Wood, "Spectacles of Suffering: Witnessing Lynching in the New South, 1880-1930" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2002).
 9. On the role of Elwood and others in the context of a spectacle lynching, and a description of the spectacle lynching, see Downey, "Mercy Master, Mercy," 195-98, 201-4, and passim.
 10. Christopher Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch: Extralegal Violence and Punishment in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). For a related analysis of lynching as metaphor, see Jonathan Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching: Racial Violence and Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).
 11. On national reactions to the White lynching, see especially Downey, "Mercy Master, Mercy," 201-3; but see also the comments in national magazines, such as the widely read *The Literary Digest* 27 (July 4, 1903): 4-5; and the speeches on the White lynching and other northern lynchings from the 1903 Chautauqua conference on "The Mob Spirit in America," as collected in *The Mob Spirit in America* (Springfield, OH: Chautauqua Press, 1903) and "The Mob Spirit," *The Chautauquan* 38 (September 1903): 11-13. For Philadelphia newspaper reactions, see, for example, editorials and letters to the editor in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 24, 1903; *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, June 27, 30, 1903; *Philadelphia Record*, June 30, 1903; and *Philadelphia Telegraph*, June 24, 1903.
 12. Downey, "Mercy Master, Mercy," 208-11. The White lynching occasioned comment and criticism by judges, lawyers, and law officers as to Wilmington's lack of law and order. See, for example, "Contagion of Mob Violence: Vengeance of the Mob as a Check upon Crime," "Blaming the Courts for Lynching," and "The Cure for Mobs," *Case and Comment* 10 (July 1903): 13-15; and *Law Notes* 7 (August 1903): 81, 82.
 13. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice*, passim.
 14. Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 145-46.
 15. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 217-79.
 16. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice*, 153.
 17. On white women, racial and sexual purity, and racial violence, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall set the terms for discussion, as she summarized recently in stating, "the racism that caused white men to lynch black men cannot be understood apart from the sexism that informed their policing of white women and their exploitation of black women." See Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jesse Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (rev. ed., New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), xx (quotation) and passim; and Hall, "'The Mind that Burns in Each Body': Women, Rape, and Racial Violence," in Ann Snitow et al., eds., *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 328-49. See also Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon, 1998), 198-239; Diane Miller Sommerville, *Rape and Race in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North*

- Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Lisa Lindquist Dorr, *White Women, Rape, and the Power of Race in Virginia, 1900–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Mary Jane Brown, *Eradicating This Evil: Women in the American Anti-Lynching Movement 1892–1940* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), especially chapter 2; and Jacquelyn Jones Royster, “Introduction: Equity and Justice for All,” in Royster, ed., *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892–1900* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), 1–41. The rapidly developing field of “whiteness” studies also applies, though it, too, has not much reached mid-Atlantic places with their own peculiar, and often tangled, ethnic, racial, and religious identities in flux. For an overview, see Peter Kolchin, “Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America,” *Journal of American History* 89 (2002): 154–73.
18. For Elwood’s troubles, see Dennis B. Downey, “The Lord’s Messenger: Racial Lynching and the Church Trial of Robert Elwood,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 79 (2001): 135–49. See also “Wilmington Ministers Denounce Lynching,” *Philadelphia Telegraph*, June 24, 1903; and “Echo of a Questionable Sermon,” *The Christian Advocate* 78 (Nov. 26, 1903): 1903.
 19. See, for example, Allison Dorsey, *To Build Our Lives Together: Community Formation in Black Atlanta, 1875–1906* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); and Gregory Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), especially 38–49 and 116–27.
 20. Downey, “Mercy Master, Mercy,” 204–8. On reverberations among blacks in Philadelphia, some of whom blamed the degradation of their own race for the violence against them and reproved Thornton for his call to militant protest, see Lane, *William Dorsey’s Philadelphia & Ours*, 51–56. On Coatesville, see Downey and Hyser, *No Crooked Death*, chapters 2 and 5 especially.
 21. On memory and lynching, see, for example, William D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836–1916* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), which treats lynchings of Mexicans, whites, and blacks; and Bruce E. Baker, “Under the Rope: Lynching and Memory in Laurens County, South Carolina,” in W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 319–45. On the literary uses of lynching memory, see, for example, Trudier Harris, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
 22. Gary Wray McDonogh, *Black and Catholic in Savannah, Georgia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993).
 23. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Feb. 19, 1991, 1–B, 3–B (quotation). See also Downey and Hyser, *No Crooked Death*, 158–60.
 24. On the many layerings of recalling, collecting, and presenting the Duluth lynching, for example, see Tim Walker, “It Happened Here: Duluth Residents Face the Painful Lessons of a 1920 Lynching,” *Teaching Tolerance Magazine* 24 (Fall 2003): 49–55; *The Duluth Lynchings Online Resource: Historical Documents Relating to the Tragic Events of June 15, 1920* < <http://collections.mnhs.org/duluthlynchings/>>; and Fedo, *Lynching in Duluth*.
 25. Brundage, “Introduction,” in Brundage, *Under Sentence of Death*, 13.