

## ABSTRACT

“A Novelty in the Line of Lynching”: Female Victims of Lynching in the United States, 1882-1902

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Following an overview of the study in Chapter One, the second and third chapters include accounts of the lynchings of thirteen white and twenty-eight black women who were killed by mobs from 1882 to 1902. In some aspects of these lynchings, the experiences of white and black women were similar while other differences separated them. Of the women who died at the hands of mobs, the noted offenses of the white and black women fit within common categories for members of each race, but there were some racial distinctions that separate these cases. An examination of the similarities and differences in the motivations contributing to, the methods employed in, and the reaction to the lynching of white and black women provides a better picture of the complexities involved in the interaction between gender, race, and public violence at the close of the nineteenth century.

“A Novelty in the Line of Lynching”: Female Victims of Lynching in the United States,  
1882-1902

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of History

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Following the lynching of Ella Watson on July 21, 1889 near Sweetwater, Wyoming, a Pittsburgh newspaper noted how uncommon reported lynchings of women were. “The other day a woman was lynched for stealing cattle. This is a novelty in the lynching line. The Judge [Lynch] has heretofore confined his attention to the male sex.”<sup>1</sup> This contemporary assessment is supported by the available data on lynching victims.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, more African Americans than members of other races were lynched in the United States. W. Fitzhugh Brundage provides estimates of the regional distribution of lynching cases between 1880 and 1930 in the United States. During the period, mobs in the Northeast were only responsible for the deaths of two whites and seven blacks, but in the Midwest, 181 whites and 79 blacks were victims of mob violence. The deaths in the Far West included 447 whites and 38 blacks, but the numbers of mob victims in these three regions were surpassed by the recorded cases in the South with 723 whites and 3,220 blacks reportedly lynched.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, more men than women died at the hands of mobs with the race distribution among male victims reflected among the female victims. According to Kerry Segrave’s count of female lynching victims between 1851 and 1946, of the 115 women who died at the hands of mobs, 90 were black women, 19 were white, and 6 were

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Kerry Segrave, *Lynchings of Women in the United States: The Recorded Cases, 1851-1946* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2010), 9.

<sup>2</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 8.

identified as Hispanic, mixed race, or of uncertain racial background.<sup>3</sup> These statistics highlight the numeric disparity between male and female and black and white lynching victims.

Contemporary newspaper articles provide records for researching the lynching of women in the United States. The reports were printed in a variety of newspapers throughout the country. Between 1830 and 1890, the expanding newspaper industry was aided by advances in technological improvements in printing, the development and spread of the telegraph, the expansion of the railroad system, and the reduction of postage rates. In an 1884 federally conducted study of the history and evaluation of the private press, the industry's rapid growth "seemed hardly paralleled by that of any other phase of industrial development in the United States."<sup>4</sup> Some of the newspapers were produced in urban areas like New York, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Richmond. While the publications in these cities were producing multiple editions by the late nineteenth century, smaller cities also produced dailies and weeklies that circulated in many rural areas of the country.

Of the extant newspapers, many have been digitized and are accessible through various databases. The Library of Congress and the National Endowment for the Humanities sponsor *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. The database contains more than four and a half million pages from newspapers printed between 1836 and 1922, and these images are accessible through an effective search engine. Additional databases like *Access Newspaper Archive* and specific newspaper

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<sup>3</sup> Segrave, 18.

<sup>4</sup> U. S. Department of the Interior Census Office, *History and Present Condition of the Newspaper and Periodical Press of the United States, with a Catalogue of the Publications of the Census Year*, by S. N. D. North, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1884), 51.

archives like those of the *New York Times* were also consulted. The digitization of these nineteenth-century newspapers allows the extant text of newspapers throughout the country to be searched. With the variety of newspaper accounts available, multiple accounts were consulted to understand better the events of each lynching and to provide a comparison of different publications' perspectives.

Even though newspaper accounts are the richest known resources for researching women's lynchings, the sources do have limitations. Not only is it almost impossible to discover experiences from the perspective of female victims, it is also a challenge to find records from observers. Instead, these accounts are mediated through newspapers. The reports are affected by a general bias that comes from all source materials because they are a product of an individual's or multiple individuals' point of view. Some biases also reveal conclusions based on blatantly racist, class-based, and gender-based assumptions.

In determining the validity of reported lynchings, there are no definitive means to confirm a lynching incident occurred. Consulting several accounts helps to verify that multiple publications at least reported it. Even in some of the more questionable cases, the treatment of mob violence in the accounts and the contemporary response to the lynching of a woman is still evident in the thoughts and language of the articles.

Some of this confusion does not arise only from present-day questions because a number of the cases are contested within the contemporary record. Following the lynching of several of members of the Alabama gang of Bob Sims, some newspapers reported that Laura and Beatrice Sims were lynched with other male outlaws in the final days of 1891. In response to these claims, the sheriff of Wayne County denied that any women or men were lynched near Womack Hill, Alabama. The same newspaper edition



that printed the sheriff's denial of the lynching contained more information about the episode. "The verification of this horrible story is impossible at this time, but those who know the section where the terrible tragedy is said to have occurred and the intense feeling which existed against the Sims gang do not hesitate to avow their belief that the story is true."<sup>5</sup> Even though the sheriff denied that the women or men were lynched there, the local residents believed that it was very possible that a secret lynching had occurred and the sheriff was merely trying to remove the stigma of lynching women from the community.

There are also no means to determine how many lynchings occurred that were never reported. If a mob acted in secrecy, effectively hid or destroyed evidence of a lynching, and did not speak of the incident in a wider context, there might be little to indicate a lynching was committed. It is also difficult to ascertain how consistently and accurately lynching reports were recorded. Despite these limitations, it does not diminish the value of exploring the available lynching reports and attempting to learn more about gendered mob violence.

Despite the frequent appearance of the term lynching in scholarly literature and public discourse, a standard definition of lynching does not exist. In the United States, the meaning of the term has evolved. The eighteenth-century lynchings were usually limited to nonlethal corporal extralegal punishments carried out by mobs. In the middle of the nineteenth century, mob violence began to shift from primarily corporal punishment to murder.<sup>6</sup> In the antebellum South, whites who deviated from community

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<sup>5</sup> *Sacramento Record-Union*, January 8, 1892, morning edition, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Norton H. Moses, ed., *Lynching and Vigilantism in the United States: An Annotated Bibliography* (Wesport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), xi.

mores were more often the targets of mobs than blacks, but in the second half of the century and the twentieth century, black victims of lynching far outnumbered their white counterparts.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the shift from corporal to lethal punishments, newspapers began to use the term lynching only as a description of a group murder. In 1882, the *Chicago Tribune* began reporting lynching statistics and exclusively included mob fatalities. Although a common late nineteenth-century understanding of lynching included extralegal and public murder by a group, there still was not a specific definition of lynching.<sup>8</sup>

At a 1940 meeting, leaders of anti-lynching organizations in the United States assembled in Tuskegee, Alabama to articulate a common definition of lynching. The gathered representatives agreed that lynching was a killing outside the bounds of law committed by a group, usually of three or more individuals, acting “under the pretext of service to justice, race, or tradition.”<sup>9</sup> As the study of lynching evolves and expands, the concept of lynching will continue to be examined critically, but the definition that emerged from the Tuskegee meeting will serve as the working definition for this study. It is also important to note that the method used to murder individuals is not restricted to

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<sup>7</sup> Brundage, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Moses, xi; Christopher Waldrep, ed., *Lynching in America: A History in Documents* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), xvii.

<sup>9</sup> Robert W. Thurston, *Lynching: American Mob Murder in Global Perspective* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 25; For more details of the debates at the Tuskegee meeting see Christopher Waldrep, “War of Words: The Controversy over the Definition of Lynching, 1889-1940,” *Journal of Southern History* 66, no. 1 (February 2000): 75-100.

hanging to be considered a lynching. Instead, the murder also could occur through beating, shooting, burning alive, or an explosion.<sup>10</sup>

The writings of Ida B. Wells, an antilynching and women's rights activist, defined the earliest period of lynching research. She devoted much of her energy to understanding the connection between the lynching of black men and accusations that these men raped white women. Although Wells supported protecting womanhood, she identified inconsistencies in white southerners' defense of lynchings. Wells argued, "nobody in this section of the country believes the old threadbare lie that Negro men rape white women."<sup>11</sup> Instead, she believed this was used in attempts to justify lynching black men. In *A Red Record On Lynching*, she challenged the prominent rhetoric white southerners employed to defend lynchings. Even though the majority of lynchings of black men were claimed to be punishment for a black man raping a white woman, Wells contended that black men were frequently not guilty of the accusations and were targeted by mob violence for other reasons.<sup>12</sup>

The research methods of the social sciences also influenced several early twentieth-century lynching studies. A notable early example is James Elbert Cutler's *Lynch-Law: An Investigation into the History of Lynching in the United States*. As the first systematic consideration of lynching, the work followed the history of lynching in the United States from its antebellum roots through Reconstruction. Cutler examined lynchings from 1882 until 1903, considering why lynchings were so common in the

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<sup>10</sup> Moses, xiv.

<sup>11</sup> *Free Speech*, May 21, 1892.

<sup>12</sup> Ida B. Wells, "A Red Record On Lynching," 1895, in *On Lynchings: Ida B. Wells-Barnett* (New York: Humanity Books, 2002), 60.

period, what social conditions fostered an environment for lynching, and the validity of common justifications of lynchings.<sup>13</sup> In *The Tragedy of Lynching*, Arthur F. Raper investigated a variety of social factors that influenced twenty-one lynchings in 1930. The opening chapters provide an overview of general features of lynchings like mob composition, responses to lynchings, and the economic influence on and of lynchings. The remainder of the book is filled with regional lynching case studies that provide the details of lynchings and information on the community's social background.<sup>14</sup> Aside from books like these, lynching scholarship did not make significant advances until the last decades of the twentieth century.

The new phase of lynching scholarship was marked by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching*, published in 1979. Exploring the methods of southern white female antilynching activists, Hall shapes the narrative of activism around the life of Jessie Daniel Ames, a prominent leader in the movement. She highlighted the interface between lynchings and the antilynching activism in one chapter, considering the implications of stories concerning black rapists. These commonly circulated reports of black rapists being lynched "reinforced social boundaries" for blacks, and among white women, fears of the threat of rape by black men also regulated white women's behavior.<sup>15</sup> Not only was this an influential work in the general body of research on

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<sup>13</sup> James Elbert Cutler, *Lynch-Law: An Investigation into the History of Lynching in the United States* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1905).

<sup>14</sup> Arthur F. Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933).

<sup>15</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 149-153.

lynching, it was a leader in gendered investigations of mob violence, examining women in connection to lynchings.

With the scholarship on mob violence expanding, noteworthy lynching studies in the 1990s were common. Although *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* is not a full-length lynching study, Martha Hodes devotes a chapter to the relationship between white women, black men, and lynching. She explores the role of white women's agency, suggesting the possibility that women who transgressed the established mores of their families may have presented themselves as victims of sexual assault as a form of personal protection. Hodes also considers other alternative accounts, like consensual relationships, as explanations for sexual encounters between white women and black men.<sup>16</sup>

In the post-Reconstruction South, the concept of white female purity was closely guarded and vilifying black women and men aided in the portrayal of innocent white women. Many white southerners drew on notions of immoral black women as a contrast to the purity of white womanhood. Reliance on these perceptions fortified the divergent conceptions of black and white womanhood. The theory of depraved black women also bolstered claims that black men were sexually aggressive because black women were charged with negatively influencing their husbands and sons. "According to Philip Alexander Bruce, whose father had owned hundreds of slaves in Virginia, a black man was 'so accustomed to the wantonness of the women of his own race' that it was no wonder he was 'unable to gauge the terrible character of this offense against the integrity

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<sup>16</sup> Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 179-208.

of virtuous womanhood.’<sup>17</sup> These notions of degenerate black men and women strengthened the concept of morally pure white women and helped create a platform in the cultural dialogue to accept the often exaggerated tales of black men raping white women. Even though murder was more commonly cited as the reason for lynching black men, Hodes argues that the stories of white women being sexually assaulted by black men “continued to serve [white people] best in their postwar quest for racial supremacy.”<sup>18</sup>

In *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930*, Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck draw on large-scale statistical analysis to compare the validity of the prominent lynching discourse with the reality of lynching practice. Utilizing lynching records throughout the South, they examined the variety of allegations against black victims of lynch mobs. Their investigation suggests that the primary reason given for lynching African Americans was not rape, as some of the contemporary defenders of lynching claimed. Instead, murder was the most frequent charge leveled against black men and women who died at the hands of mobs. According to their findings, approximately 34 percent of victims were accused of some form of sexual norm violation, a little over 47 percent were suspected of murders or assaults. This evidence not only supports the claims of contemporary lynching opponents like Ida B. Wells that rape was not the most common motivator behind lynchings, but it also undermines the validity of claims that lynchings were a protection of white womanhood.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Hodes, 198.

<sup>18</sup> Hodes, 206.

<sup>19</sup> Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 46-50.

Not only is W. Fitzhugh Brundage's 1993 study, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930*, critical to the general scholarship on lynching, but it also examines the connection between women and lynching. Unlike studies that focused on women's responses to lynching, Brundage included analysis of women as lynching participants and victims. He noted that fewer women than men were lynched in Georgia, and "women lynching victims, with few exceptions, were accused of murder or complicity in other violent crimes and were lynched along with the men charged with committing the crimes."<sup>20</sup> Additionally, he considered the different treatment of black men and women, concluding, "black women did not pose the same threats to white women that whites believed black men did, and therefore whites tolerated blatant protests by black women that would have drawn very severe penalties had they been made by black men."<sup>21</sup> Although his treatment of female lynching victims was brief, the inclusion of any analysis of female victims of lynching distinguishes his study from the majority of the works on lynching in the 1990s.

Two dissertations, finished early in the twenty-first century, consider several connections between women and lynching. Crystal N. Feimster completed the first dissertation in 2000, and it served as the basis of her book, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching*, published in 2009. The study explores Rebecca Latimer Felton's and Ida B. Wells' campaigns against rape and for women's rights in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and how the period's lynchings informed their efforts. The book's sixth chapter focuses on the lynching of white and black

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<sup>20</sup> Brundage, 80.

<sup>21</sup> Brundage, 80-81.

women, and Feimster includes some accounts of women who were lynched as representative cases.<sup>22</sup>

Feimster's interpretation of the connection between white women, black men, and lynching echoes the conclusions of Jacquelyn Dowd Hall in *Revolt Against Chivalry*. Combined with the fear of sexual assault by black men, white women faced threats of lynching if they transgressed social boundaries. This was as another "means of keeping southern white women in their places."<sup>23</sup> Feimster linked the propagation of stories of black men violating white women with the reality of white men raping white women. She believed the allegations of black men's rape of white women were utilized to "[divert] attention from the crimes of white men and [deepen] the silence about white men's abuse of women of their own race."<sup>24</sup> Through her analysis, Feimster argues that white men subordinated white women with publicized threats of sexual assault at the hands of black men, the real but unaddressed potential of rape by white men, and the possibility of becoming a lynching victim.

Feimster also examined some cases of black women who were lynched. She concludes that white communities vilified black women, allowing them to be lynched if they were accused of certain crimes as a protection of white womanhood. In the case of a white woman's murder, a white mob killed all three of the suspected murderers, two black men, Vance Brandt and Joe Barnes, and a black woman, Julia Brandt. Feimster notes, "even though black women could not rape white women, their lynchings were

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<sup>22</sup> Crystal N. Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 1-6, 158-85.

<sup>23</sup> Feimster, 175.

<sup>24</sup> Feimster, 175.



often portrayed as a means of protecting white womanhood.”<sup>25</sup> In this case, Julia Brandt allegedly participated in the murder of a white woman, and the white press described her as a “fiend” in accounts of the lynching. This instance supports the main elements Feimster highlights in her consideration of black female lynching victims. The white community suspected the black woman of murdering a white woman, perceived her as a threat to white women, and vilified her in an attempt to justify the mob killing. Feimster understood the lynching of black and white women to be further evidence of southern white men’s attempts to subordinate women in the social structure. She incorporates this into her overarching argument that women chose to resist these restrictions in their fight for economic, political, and social justice.

The second dissertation, “ ‘Stranger Fruit’ : The Lynching of Balck [sic] Women, The Cases of Rosa Richardson and Marie Scott,” was completed in 2006 by Maria DeLongoria. This study differs from Feimster’s because DeLongoria is concerned with the sexual and racial dynamics that contributed to the lynching of black women, making them the victims of both rape and lynching. She particularly explores the circumstances surrounding the twentieth-century lynchings of Rosa Richardson and Marie Scott.<sup>26</sup> After exploring the stereotypes of Mammy and Jezebel for black women, DeLongoria argues these socially constructed interpretations of black women created a “threatening black female figure deserving to be lynched” and “justified white male sexual

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<sup>25</sup> Feimster, 161.

<sup>26</sup> Maria DeLongoria, “ ‘Stranger Fruit’ : The Lynching of Balck [sic] Women, The Cases of Rosa Richardson and Marie Scott” (PhD dissertation, University of Missouri-Columbia, 2006), 21-24.

aggression.” If African American women departed from their “ascribed social positions” within these two stereotyped roles, they faced lynching and often rape.<sup>27</sup>

Kerry Segrave’s *Lynchings of Women in the United States: The Recorded Cases, 1851-1946* differs from the previous secondary works because he only provides summaries of some of the newspaper articles related to female victims of lynching he found in searching periodical databases. These short narratives of the lynchings of white and black women are organized in chronological order with a few cited articles. He consulted the work of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People on lynching along with a website, “The Lynching Calendar: African Americans who died in racial violence in the United States during 1865-1965.” This inventory provides basic data about lynchings, but it does not include further details or sources. If he was unable to locate additional authentication for a lynching beyond these sources, he would include it with a note that it had no further confirmation.<sup>28</sup>

Beyond some basic analysis of the sources and general contextualization and statistical comparisons, Segrave does not interpret the material he presents. He does not define a working lynching definition, and instead, he only includes cases that have been classified within the contemporary sources as a lynching. Rather than a systematic analysis of female lynching victims, he provides the general details from newspaper sources reporting the lynchings of women.

With the focus of Feimster’s, DeLongoria’s, and Segrave’s studies on female victims of lynching throughout the United States, the information included in their works

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<sup>27</sup> DeLongoria, 158.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.autopsis.org/foot/lynch.html> as cited in Segrave, 23, 96.

about women who died at the hands of mobs provides valuable assistance in locating records of lynchings. Feimster's appendix, "List of Female Victims of Lynching," includes the date the lynching occurred, the name of the victim, the location of the lynching, and the crime the victim allegedly committed. The entries span from 1837 to 1965, and the cases are confined to territory of the present-day United States.<sup>29</sup>

DeLongoria's first appendix is titled "Recorded Cases of Black Female Lynching Victims, 1886-1957" and consists of comparable information found in Feimster's appendix. DeLongoria notes parallels in their data because they utilized similar sources but acknowledges some variations in the information.<sup>30</sup> Although the tables provide helpful entries, Feimster and DeLongoria do not supply citations for the information included in their appendices.

Combining the basic information gathered from these inventories with additional searches of newspaper databases, it is evident that the majority of the known lynchings of white women were committed between 1882 and 1902 with several years separating any preceding or subsequent lynchings. Although there are more records of women, particularly black women, who were lynched outside of these time considerations, this study focuses on the cases that occurred within the twenty-year period to allow comparison between the lynching cases and the response to the incidents. The first

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<sup>29</sup> Feimster, 235-39.

<sup>30</sup> DeLongoria, 160-64. Some of the listings contain slight variations because the records of the lynchings are so imprecise. This is especially evident in dates that differ by a few days and different name spellings in the inventories. After searching newspaper databases, it was discovered that some of the names that are included in these lists of female victims were actually men who were lynched. Searching with key terms, additional records of women who were lynched were discovered that had not been included in any of the previous registers. In response to these potential inconsistencies, if additional records could not be found to support a basic entry in a lynching list, it was not included within this study. The absence of a standard definition for lynching and the inclusion of lynching cases that did not involve female victims makes it even more important to examine the primary sources for the lynching of women.

parameters for limiting the lynching victims in the study was gender, and after that, the chronological bounds of 1882 to 1902 restrict the study to the time period with the highest concentration of white female lynching victims. The cases of thirteen white women and twenty-eight black women who were lynched during these two decades are central to this research.

The focus on women in connection with lynching separates this study from the majority of the scholarship on lynching. Even in the cases that do center on a connection between women and lynching, the concentration is usually on antilynching activism like the works of Hall and Wells or the relationship between white women and rape at the hands of black or white men like the books of Hodes and Feimster. Unlike the majority of these gendered lynching studies, the emphasis in this study is on female victims of lynching. Scholars who do consider the circumstances of female lynching victims often dismiss the topic with little information, as is the case in Brundage's treatment of women lynched in Georgia.

Another perspective that separates this study from other works dealing with women and lynching is the reduced focus on women threatened by sexual assault and as victims of rape. Although female victims of lynching were killed in a sexually charged atmosphere, the cases examined in this period and the available reports from these sources do not provide much evidence that the female lynching victims were often raped before mobs killed the women. The larger connection between women and sexual assault beyond the realm of female lynching victims is not considered in this study, separating it from the works that examine the discourse connecting black men's lynchings to

accusations of black men raping white women and the potential that more black female victims of lynching were raped in the twentieth century.

Of the studies that consider women who died at the hands of mobs, there has been limited examination of the lynchings. Some of the cases detailed in this study have not been included in any published analysis of female lynching victims. Not only does this add to the historical record, it also contributes new aspects of mob violence, important to the investigation of female lynchings.

A defining characteristic of this analysis is the comparison between the lynchings of white and black women. The majority of nineteenth-century white society maintained distinct notions of white and black womanhood. The inclusion of cases of white and black female victims of lynching allows for a comparison between the circumstances surrounding the lynchings.

Of the studies that focus on female victims of lynchings, none include analysis comparing the experiences of white and black women who died at the hands of mobs. DeLongoria only considers the lynching of black women. While Segrave includes white and black women in his lynching summaries, he does not provide any analysis of the impact of race in the lynchings beyond a general statement that more black women were lynched than white women. Feimster does contextualize and interpret cases of white and black female lynching victims, but she does not include any examination of the continuities or discontinuities between the circumstances surrounding the lynching of white and black women.

This comparison between the lynchings of white and black women is unique among the current scholarship on mob violence. The greatest departure is moving away

from the study of male lynching victims. Within a gendered study of lynching, this study also does not center on the connection between accusations of male rape and the link between women and the lynching of black males. Similarly, it does not consider the antilynching activism of women. Although there is a contemplation of the sexual aspects of these women's lynchings that emerges in the sources, the link between female lynching victims and the rape of these same women is not a central theme of this study. The examination of white and black female lynching victims between 1882 and 1902 allows new findings to emerge in the comparison between the events surrounding the lynchings of the women.

In some aspects of these lynchings, the treatment of white and black women was alike despite their different racial identities. Even though some correspondences are evident, the events surrounding the lynching of white and black women also differed along racial boundaries. An examination of the similarities and differences in the motivations contributing to, the methods employed in, and the reaction to the lynching of white and black women provides a better picture of the complexities involved in the interaction between gender, race, and public violence at the close of the nineteenth century.

## CHAPTER TWO

### White Female Victims of Lynching

Although the general rhetoric surrounding white southerners' defense of lynchings included claims that it was a means of protecting white women from the sexual assaults of black men, contemporary investigations and later scholarship have challenged these claims, arguing that murder was the most frequently cited offense involved in the lynching of black men. The lynching of white women also challenged the declarations that lynching was a justified means of protecting white womanhood.

Members of the very group that was claimed to be sheltered through the practice of lynching fell victim to vigilante justice. Women who lived on the borders of respectable society faced community retribution, and their sex did not always protect them from lynching. While the general goal of late nineteenth-century U.S. society was to protect women and maintain their elevated moral position, it did not always protect individual women from communal punishment.

Women could be beaten, whipped, tarred and feathered, forced to leave a community, or lynched. White women were lynched less frequently than their male and/or black counterparts were after the Civil War but threats and lynchings did occur. Even when they were not lynched, some white women were reminded that lynchings were possible if they did not conform to communal expectations.

In the early months of 1916, Elisabeth Freeman was traveling throughout Texas on behalf of the Texas Women's Suffrage Association, promoting women's suffrage. When the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People heard of Jesse

Washington's lynching in Waco, Texas, the organization asked Freeman to investigate the incident. She was still in Dallas covering the suffrage convention and could travel to Waco under the cover of her suffrage work. Following Washington's trial for the murder and rape of a white woman, a large mob tortured and lynched the young black man in Waco's town square on May 15, 1916. After a week interviewing a variety of individuals in the Waco area, Freeman had compiled a great deal of information for the NAACP.<sup>1</sup>

In Freeman's report, she described an instance when a white woman received a chilling threat. After the mob dragged Washington's body through Waco's streets, they placed pieces of Washington's scorched body on the porch of a "disrespectable" woman's house in the reservation district.<sup>2</sup> The reservation district was the local name for Waco's red light district.<sup>3</sup> Even though prostitution was legal within the boundaries of the reservation district, this woman was described as a "disrespectable" woman in the accounts Freeman included in her report. Placing parts of Washington's mangled and charred corpse on her stoop was a warning that she could meet a similar fate. Many social missteps could result in a late night visit by a mob for members of a community, and white women were not exempt from the threat.

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Bernstein, *The First Waco Horror: The Lynching of Jesse Washington and the Rise of the NAACP* (College Station: Texas A & M Press, 2005), 137-40.

<sup>2</sup> Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 234.

<sup>3</sup> Bernstein, 13. Within the specified boundaries, prostitution was legal in the city between 1889 and 1917. Even though the reservation district was closed one year after Washington's 1916 lynching, it was not due to intense local pressure. Instead, the action was a response to Secretary of War Newton Baker's order for cities with military bases to shut down red light districts to protect the health of U.S. service members. With the opportunity to open Camp MacArthur in Waco in 1917, Waco officials closed the reservation to meet the federal guidelines. For more information, consult Amy Balderach, "A Different Kind of Reservation: Waco's Red Light District Revisited" (master's thesis, Baylor University, 2005).



Communal punishment could have been conceived as an effort to protect the rest of the community and women from the corrupting influence of individual women through a means of social control. However, not all of the motivations behind the lynching of women in the United States were driven by these goals. Some women died as retribution for their families' or companions' actions. In the rhetoric connected to the lynchings, white women were lynched because of allegations of unspecified crimes, sexual immorality, association with accused murderers, conspiracy to murder, and murder. The lynchings of thirteen white women from 1882 to 1902 are examined in this study. Despite the numerical inequalities in the number of white female victims of lynching and their male or minority female counterparts, the unique motivations and circumstances surrounding white female victims of lynching in the United States make them critical to a broader understanding of lynching.

#### *Allegations of Unspecified Crimes*

In the circumstances surrounding these lynchings, the victims are involved or are connected to someone implicated in activities that transverse the dominant social values. A group of men took John Puckett and his wife, who were reputed to be half white and half Cherokee, from their cabin by Lyon Creek in Indian Territory of present-day Oklahoma. On February 15, 1889, the couple was hanged, and Puckett's stepson was beaten and left tied to a tree for two days before he was discovered. After the Pucketts were charged with several crimes, they failed to leave the area as they had been ordered to several months before they were lynched.<sup>4</sup> The reports did not provide more details

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<sup>4</sup> *Milwaukee Weekly Wisconsin*, February 23, 1889, 1.

about their illegal activities, but they were both believed to be responsible for criminal offenses.

### *Allegations of Sexual Immorality*

Cassie Boan possibly had Native American heritage, but she was often described as white without any reference to an Indian background. Most of the newspaper accounts note that Boan was white, but others gave varying amounts of Indian heritage including half or a quarter.<sup>5</sup> In either case, it does not seem that she was ostracized because of her racial background. Instead, she was quite popular in her community, and they expressed a great deal of outrage at her murder. On March 20, 1900, Cassie Boan's "burned, lacerated and blistered body" was discovered in the woods near Jefferson, South Carolina.<sup>6</sup>

Living with her father, Boan was about nineteen years old and described as a "comely country girl." She had "many admirers among the young farmers" and was "much talked about in the community."<sup>7</sup> The Sunday before Boan was killed she went driving with Sam Woodward in the afternoon. They stopped at Vince Melton's home, and Boan left with James Jackson and Tom Steen to go home in the early evening, but she never arrived at her home.

On Sunday night, several men took Cassie Boan into a wooded area and held her until Monday night when her screams brought men into the forest to investigate. While searching for the distressed individual, the men found her running through the woods

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<sup>5</sup> *Waterloo (IA) Daily Reporter*, April 13, 1900, 2; *Washington (D. C.) Times*, March 23, 1900, 4; *Bradford County (FL) Telegraph*, April 20, 1900; *Atlanta (GA) Constitution*, April 10, 1900, 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Waterloo (IA) Daily Reporter*, April 13, 1900, 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Washington (D. C.) Times*, March 23, 1900, 4.

with her clothing on fire. Her body was covered with gashes, and her flesh was burned after the flames had consumed her clothing. With the shallow knife wounds, the men believed the cuts had been inflicted only for torture and not in a desire to quickly kill Boan. Following the trail of blood Boan left as she ran through the woods, the investigating men arrived at the site where she had been held for over a day before she escaped. With the numerous injuries she sustained, Boan died shortly after the men found her in the woods.<sup>8</sup>

Evidently, Boan had many admirers in the community, and she spent time with several of them. Whereas the calling system was built on adult supervision of courtship activities, dates that occurred outside the home with the man as the host were not always chaperoned.<sup>9</sup> In 1900, Boan was leaving her home to meet men without an older adult present. This practice was becoming more popular, but at this time, the community was still uncertain about Boan's moral choices. They do not openly suggest that she was sexually promiscuous, but it is clear that the community was unsure about her actions and choices because they questioned her purity. Florida's *Bradford County Telegraph* noted that "her reputation was questionable" within her neighborhood.<sup>10</sup>

Shortly after Boan was found, three of the Jackson brothers and Tom Steen were arrested, but Steen provided state evidence. The solicitor also gathered evidence against several other men and planned to prosecute them for their part in the lynching of Boan.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Bradford County (FL) Telegraph*, April 20, 1900.

<sup>9</sup> Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), 13-20.

<sup>10</sup> *Bradford County (FL) Telegraph*, April 20, 1900.

<sup>11</sup> *Washington (D.C.) Times*, March 23, 1900, 4; *Bradford County (FL) Telegraph*, April 20, 1900.

The case against two of the men went to trial on April 9, 1900 and continued with a great deal of interest from the community during the next three days.<sup>12</sup> Following nine hours of deliberation, the jury announced its verdict of guilty with a recommendation of mercy early Thursday morning. Instead of capital punishment, the Jackson brothers were sentenced to “life imprisonments at hard labor.”<sup>13</sup>

In response to this, the *Bradford County Telegraph* predicted newspapers would “scourge the jury for recommending mercy in such a case.”<sup>14</sup> The prediction was accurate in the response of the *Anderson Intelligencer*: “the most outrageous outrage ever perpetrated upon justice seems now to be the inexplicable verdict of that Chesterfield jury in the case of the Jacksons for the murder of Cassie Boan, a young white woman. How they could be deserving of the mercy of the Court and at the same time guilty of rape, butchery and murder by burning is past all finding out.”<sup>15</sup> Despite Boan’s questionable reputation, there was still a great deal of outrage at the brutality of the murder and the outcome of the trial. Only one of the other twelve cases examined here rivaled the response in the newspaper articles. The language of these accounts conveys the contempt and disgust at the actions of the lynchers. Additionally, the length of the articles, the larger headlines, and the volume of published accounts highlight the reaction because of the amount of print the newspapers dedicated to the case.

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<sup>12</sup> *Atlanta (GA) Constitution*, April 11, 1900, 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Atlanta (GA) Constitution*, April 13, 1900, 8.

<sup>14</sup> *Bradford County (FL) Telegraph*, April 20, 1900.

<sup>15</sup> *Anderson (SC) Intelligencer*, April 18, 1900, 4.

Members of the community believed the Jacksons resented Boan favoring Sam Woodward.<sup>16</sup> During the trial, Tom Munn testified that he and Sam Woodward were walking with Boan the Saturday night before she was abducted, and someone fired on them five times. After returning fire, Munn recognized the voice of Harvey Jackson when he cursed. Woodward corroborated his testimony, and several other men testified that they had heard Harvey Jackson threaten to gather a crowd to whip Cassie Boan.<sup>17</sup> These men were responding to Boan spending time with so many men, particularly if the instigator of the mob felt Boan was not properly responding to his overtures and spending too much time with other men.

Peb Falls' position in society was very different from Cassie Boan's. While people may have speculated about Boan's reputation, Falls was denounced for general immorality, including sexual depravity which was viewed as the lowest level of female immorality in the nineteenth century. Hunters discovered the body of Falls hanging from a tree on September 29, 1897 in the Massanutten Mountains, six miles from the Cowan station in Virginia.<sup>18</sup> Even though Falls was married, newspapers like the *Kansas City Journal* alluded to her moral degeneracy.<sup>19</sup> She was described as an "extremely good-looking woman, but absolutely without moral character" throughout her "hideously depraved" life.<sup>20</sup> Falls' moral descent was perceived to have progressed from "bad to the very worst" with aide by "the worst [white men] of their kind." After Falls "fell still

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<sup>16</sup> *Washington (D. C.) Times*, March 23, 1900, 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Atlanta (GA) Constitution*, April 10, 1900, 8.

<sup>18</sup> *New York Sun*, September 30, 1897, 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Kansas City Journal*, September 30, 1897, 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Syracuse Sunday Herald*, October 3, 1897, 2.

lower” and associated with the “low negroes,” white men were shocked by this white woman’s behavior, tarring and feathering Falls several years before her death. Driven into the mountains, Falls lived in the woods and sometimes among blacks who provided her with food and shelter.<sup>21</sup>

With the identity of the lynchers unknown, white and black members of the community theorized about who was responsible for hanging Falls. Having been isolated from her race for years, many supposed a group of blacks who grew weary of her immorality probably lynched her.<sup>22</sup> If white men comprised the lynch mob, this may have been just a theory to protect white men from any anger from the community because a white woman was lynched, or they could have legitimately believed African Americans lynched Falls. Another theory the “negroes and respectable whites” held was their belief the same group of men who had tarred and feathered Falls most likely lynched her.<sup>23</sup>

Governor Charles Triplett O’Ferrall did not view Falls’ “wickedness as an excuse for her murder” and determined to punish her lynchers if they could be found, without regard to their race.<sup>24</sup> Even though Falls was believed to be depraved, there was a considerable amount of indignation expressed at her lynching because she was still a white woman. Describing the earlier episode of tarring and feathering, one report even directly stated that the men could not kill her because she was a white woman. When she was lynched, the situation was complicated by the rumors that blacks had lynched Falls.

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<sup>21</sup> *Syracuse Sunday Herald*, October 3, 1897, 2.

<sup>22</sup> *New York Sun*, September 30, 1897, 5; *Kansas City Journal*, September 30, 1897, 1; *Syracuse Sunday Herald*, October 3, 1897, 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Syracuse Sunday Herald*, October 3, 1897, 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Syracuse Sunday Herald*, October 3, 1897, 2.

There seemed to be more outrage that a white woman was believed to have been lynched by blacks than the actual death of Peb Falls. Despite general condemnations for the action, it was suggested that many members of the community were glad that Falls had been killed even if they would never openly admit it.<sup>25</sup>

Sexual immorality was a prominent motivation behind Rachel Powell's lynching. Living in the mountains of Oconee County in South Carolina, Wesley and Rachel Powell were under investigation for adultery when a group of white men from the community attacked their home and family. Rachel was fifty years old, and the couple had five children living with them.

When the group of men arrived late at night on November 24, 1901, they began to destroy the home with the family of seven inside. Wesley went outside to confront the attackers, and he hit a member of the gang with a plank. When Rachel came to the door of the house purportedly to "plead for mercy," she was shot and died quickly. Even though the crowd fled following the shooting, Wesley recognized most of the men in the moonlight, and despite their efforts to flee the area or state, several were captured shortly after the attack. By November 27, it was reported that "ten young white men, mostly well connected" were already in jail and warrants were being issued for further arrests.<sup>26</sup>

No other wrongdoing was suggested in the account, making it seem that adultery was the central issue to the community regulators. Wesley and Rachel were both in the house, and Wesley even confronted the mob only armed with a plank. Rachel was killed, but Wesley was spared. Clearly, Rachel's sex did not protect her from mob violence, and

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<sup>25</sup> *Syracuse Sunday Herald*, October 3, 1897, 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Atlanta (GA) Constitution*, November 27, 1901, 5; *New York World*, November 27, 1901; *Delphos (OH) Daily Herald*, November 27, 1901, evening edition, 1.

the vigilantes appear to have intentionally excluded her husband from the lynching. It seems unlikely that the crowd did not know Rachel was a woman. If the moonlight was bright enough for Wesley to discern the identity of several different men in the throng, it suggests there was enough light to differentiate between a man and a woman. Regardless of the ability or failure to determine Rachel's identity or sex, they had a clear opportunity to shoot Wesley and chose not to kill him.

Outrage at adultery and a response to a shooting prompted the formation of the lynch mob in another case. The night of December 28, 1895 a mob lynched Mrs. Thomas West and William Devers near Lebanon, Kentucky.<sup>27</sup> Devers, who was approximately thirty-five years old, moved to Marion County from Knoxville, Tennessee with his wife and children in 1893 and settled on a farm near the West's property. He was described as a "dashing, handsome sort of fellow," and Mrs. West was similarly noted to be "an attractive woman" in her late twenties. Their attraction grew to "infatuation," and "their conduct was so notorious" Thomas West filed for divorce, citing Mrs. West's adultery.

West announced his intention to kill Devers if given the opportunity. A chance encounter at a neighbor's home set the stage for the confrontation. Taking aim at Devers, West attempted to discharge his weapon, but the gun misfired. Devers responded by shooting and killing West on December 7, 1895.<sup>28</sup> Following a preliminary hearing, Devers was released because the killing was ruled as justifiable homicide on the grounds of self-defense.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Galveston (TX) Daily News*, December 30, 1895, 1.

<sup>28</sup> *New York World*, December 30, 1895, 14; *Boston Daily Globe*, December 30, 1895, 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Syracuse Daily Standard*, December 30, 1895, 1.



He moved into Mrs. West's home and "scandalized the neighborhood," living with West "to the neglect of his own family."<sup>30</sup> The youngest of Mrs. West's daughters<sup>31</sup> lived with them, and "the flagrant conduct of the pair, and the thought of the degradation of which the child was forced to be a witness so incensed the neighbors," motivating them to visit Mrs. West's home on December 28, 1895.<sup>32</sup> The mob was estimated to be comprised of seventy-five to one hundred individuals. The group's representative called for West and Devers to exit the house, but when they refused to leave, the members of the crowd started to shoot at the residence and warned that they would torch the building if West and Devers did not emerge.

Despite the appeals of Mrs. West for mercy, with references to her current pregnancy, the throng followed through with the threat to set fire to the house. Mrs. West never emerged from the building and was burned alive, and after sustaining severe burns, Devers was shot and killed when he ran from the inferno. Mrs. West's daughter was traumatized by the events but was not physically harmed because she was sent outside of the house before it was set on fire. The community hoped she was able to see enough of the men's unmasked features in the moonlight to recognize some of them later.<sup>33</sup>

On Monday, December 30, 1895, an estimated crowd of five hundred to one thousand citizens gathered at the courthouse, denouncing the lynching of West and Devers. Reportedly, the "sense of the meeting was decidedly opposed to the manner in

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<sup>30</sup> *Boston Daily Globe*, December 30, 1895, 5; *Galveston (TX) Daily News*, December 30, 1895, 1.

<sup>31</sup> The girl was probably Mrs. West's daughter, but some accounts identify her as Devers' daughter.

<sup>32</sup> *New York World*, December 30, 1895, 14.

<sup>33</sup> *Boston Daily Globe*, December 30, 1895, 5; *Galveston (TX) Daily News*, December 30, 1895, 1; *Syracuse Daily Standard*, December 30, 1895, 1.

which Devers and Mrs. West had conducted themselves, but did not approve of the methods pursued by the mob to punish them.”<sup>34</sup> Devers disregarded the disapproval of the community when he was living with West. Though these circumstances created ill will toward the couple, the death of Thomas West was the catalyst for the lynching. The shooting was officially labeled self-defense, but some family and friends of West desired revenge, and it was at this time that Devers moved in with Mrs. West.<sup>35</sup> Not only was Mrs. West not spared on account of her sex, but she was also known to be pregnant, and the mob still burned her alive. This lynching incident generated the most outrage and garnered the most press coverage of the thirteen cases.

#### *Association with Accused Murderer*

Another sexually promiscuous woman, Molly Smith, was lynched in 1895 because of her connection with a murderer. Recently released from the penitentiary, Abithal Colston was believed to be searching for men who witnessed some of his crimes. After shooting John Rhodes near Higgins Landing in Trigg County, Kentucky, Colston discovered Chat Hammond bringing water to Rhodes, and Colston shot and killed Hammond, leaving Rhodes to die later that night, May 29, 1895. Colston went to the house of his mistress, Molly Smith, a “woman of ill repute,” but their night of “drunken carousal” was interrupted by a lynch party. Allegedly, Colston fired on the group but no one in the lynch party was injured. Both Colston and Smith were killed, and the next morning their bodies were found filled with buckshot and left in the road.<sup>36</sup> The

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<sup>34</sup> *Logansport (IN) Reporter*, December 31, 1895, afternoon edition, 1; *Logansport (IN) Daily Pharos*, December 31, 1895, evening edition, 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Dubuque (IA) Daily Herald*, December 31, 1895, 1.

<sup>36</sup> *New York Sun*, July 2, 1895, 1; *Sacramento Record-Union*, July 2, 1895, morning edition, 1.

community did not hold a high opinion of Smith's morality, but even though she was not implicated in the murders, her connection with Colston made her vulnerable to the mob's actions.

### *Allegations of Conspiracy to Murder*

The remainder of the white female lynching victims were believed to be directly involved or complicit in a murder. After Deputy United States Marshall Liggett returned from his four-month search for moonshiners in the northern part of Arkansas, he shared an account of Mrs. Peter Baker's lynching. The story was printed in several newspapers, but the earliest column found was dated January 18, 1892. Several months before the lynching, Mrs. Baker and a man only identified as Johnson disappeared from the area, and Peter Baker, Mrs. Baker's husband and a farmer near Fort Smith, was discovered murdered in his home. A few days before the lynching, Mrs. Baker and Johnson returned to the community and lived in the house where Baker had been murdered.<sup>37</sup>

Suspecting them of killing Baker, a group of neighbors visited the house one night and asked the man and woman to explain their actions. Johnson fired at the party, wounding a member of the group, and the mob attacked the house and captured the couple. The crowd removed the couples' clothing and tied the naked man and woman back to back before the mob hanged them "on the same limb with the same rope until they were dead." Even though most accounts link Mrs. Baker and Johnson together, most do not label their relationship, but the title of the *Los Angeles Herald* defined the

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<sup>37</sup> *Los Angeles Herald*, January 19, 1892, morning edition, 2; *Waco (TX) Daily News*, January 21, 1892, 4.

couple as lovers: “A Woman and Her Paramour Hanged for Murdering.”<sup>38</sup> Even though there were not specific details of the murder plot, the woman was believed to have been directly involved or at the very least, complicit in the murder of Peter Baker. Mrs. Baker and Johnson’s relationship would have intensified the community’s disapproval.

In the lynching of Jane Wade, as a prostitute, she was already on the edge of socially prescribed morality, but her involvement in a murder placed her at the center of a mob’s quest for retribution. Following an argument between J. R. Dorsey and Mr. Davis, Dorsey was outraged that his wife had visited the Davis home against his wishes, and he threatened to kill Mr. and Mrs. Davis. During the evening of October 6, 1884, Dorsey and Jane Wade were seen drinking in Alpine, Georgia and later observed near the Davis residence. Mr. Davis was away from his home that evening, and C. C. Jones was staying as a guest. Mrs. Davis was shot when she came to her doorway and Jones was shot when he came to assist her.

J. R. Dorsey, postmaster at Alpine, was seventy-five years old, and Jane Wade, a prostitute who was older than sixty, were arrested for the murder of Dorsey’s niece and Jones, who Dorsey mistook for her husband.<sup>39</sup> One account declared the murder “one of the most atrocious ever committed in that section.” With “excitement so high” near Alpine, the couple was taken to Centre, Alabama for safety, but “popular indignation broke forth again.” Both were taken from the jail in Centre during the night of October 20, 1884 and hanged “from the same limb and by the same rope.”<sup>40</sup> Even though Wade

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<sup>38</sup> *Los Angeles Herald*, January 19, 1892, morning edition, 2; *Waco (TX) Daily News*, January 21, 1892, 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Wichita (KS) Eagle*, October 22, 1884, 1.

<sup>40</sup> *New York Times*, October 22, 1884.

was a prostitute, many other female prostitutes were not lynched, and her connection to Dorsey and her complicity in the murder made her a target of the vigilantes.

In the next lynching account, the party conspired to murder and steal from an elderly parent. The name of the woman who was lynched in Tiptonville, Tennessee was not mentioned in these newspaper accounts, and there are contradictory versions of the events.<sup>41</sup> Following the marriage of the daughter of a widow, Mrs. J. F. Atcheson, to a young man, the couple and the young man's father developed a plan to murder the widow to steal the three or four hundred dollars she possessed.<sup>42</sup> The widow was murdered on Christmas Eve 1888.<sup>43</sup> When the neighbors learned about the plan, believing the husband, wife, and the husband's father to be responsible for the widow's death, they hanged all three in January 1889.<sup>44</sup> In this circumstance, the trio victimized one of the people they should have been protecting. By executing a plot to murder and steal from their elderly parent, the couple and man outraged the community to the point of lynching.

In the case of another family murder plot, Eliza Taylor and her brother were accused of conspiring and encouraging Taylor's sons to commit murder. Early in the morning of March 16, 1885, a mob of approximately fifty masked men lynched Eliza Taylor and Thomas Jones, her brother, near Spring Ranch in Clay County, Nebraska. In the previous January, Taylor's sons fatally shot a neighboring homesteader, Robert Roberts, and were jailed. Members of the community supposed Taylor and Jones were

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<sup>41</sup>The other account reported that the widow's son, his wife, and her father were the murderers.

<sup>42</sup> *Maysville (KY) Evening Bulletin*, January 21, 1889, 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Los Angeles Daily Herald*, January 20, 1889, morning edition, 8.

<sup>44</sup> *Maysville (KY) Evening Bulletin*, January 21, 1889, 1.

responsible for encouraging the boys to murder Roberts, but Taylor and Jones did not heed the order to leave the county.<sup>45</sup>

When the crowd arrived at the home of Jones, there were seven people in the house, Jones, Taylor, four men, and Taylor's five-year-old daughter. The group barricaded the door when the mob called for Taylor and Jones, but they did not fire on the throng. Hearing threats of dynamite from the crowd, Jones and Taylor crawled through a window unarmed and with their hands raised. The remaining four men in the home were bound and guarded until the morning when they were told to leave the county. Taylor and Jones were hanged from a bridge and their bodies were left hanging until the middle of the afternoon. The reports do not include information about what happened to Taylor's five-year-old daughter.<sup>46</sup>

Despite or in light of the substantial size of the mob, the *New York Times* reported "public sentiment in Fairfield, the county seat, is against lynching."<sup>47</sup> Lynching may not have been universally supported, but there was enough support for a lynching to motivate a core group to lynch the man and woman and gather a sizable crowd for the event. The verdict of the inquest was "death at the hand of parties unknown."<sup>48</sup> This verdict ensured that no one would be prosecuted for their roles in the murder of Taylor and Jones even though not all their identities could have been a mystery to the authorities. The case also did not garner much press attention or a great deal of outrage from the community. In this case, Taylor and Jones were not believed to have been involved in committing the

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<sup>45</sup> *New York Times*, March 17, 1885; *National Police Gazette*, April 4, 1885, 6.

<sup>46</sup> *New York Times*, March 17, 1885; *National Police Gazette*, April 4, 1885, 6.

<sup>47</sup> *New York Times*, March 17, 1885.

<sup>48</sup> *National Police Gazette*, April 4, 1885, 6.

murder, but their alleged involvement in hatching the plot motivated the lynch party that the majority of their community seemed to support.

### *Allegations of Murder*

Unlike the preceding lynching cases in which the women may have not been directly involved in a murder, the remaining women were believed to have played a large role or have been responsible for killing someone. In the Cuddihee incident, the neighbors' indignation was grounded in suspicions of several months of child abuse. On January 12, 1884, a hunter alerted Mike Cuddihee<sup>49</sup> that Rose Matthews, the ten-year-old child Cuddihee and his wife recently adopted from a local orphanage, was huddled by a haystack in poor physical condition. Even though Cuddihee came and collected the child, she died quickly and was buried by Cuddihee at their ranch outside Ouray, a small mining town in southern Colorado. Learning of the girl's sudden death, neighbors were suspicious of the circumstances because they claimed the Cuddihees had habitually abused the child. When the coroner exhumed and examined the girl's body, he believed her wounds pointed to her murder.<sup>50</sup>

Cuddihee, his wife, and her brother-in-law were arrested the next day, but on the night of Saturday, January 19, vigilantes took the prisoners from officers' custody and hanged Cuddihee and his wife outside of town.<sup>51</sup> Even if Mrs. Cuddihee was not directly involved in beating the child and murdering her, her presence at the house and complicity was enough for the crowd to lynch her. They released her brother-in-law because he was

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<sup>49</sup> Caddigan and Cuddigan were common alternate spellings.

<sup>50</sup> *New York Times*, January 20, 1884; *Helena (MT) Independent*, January 20, 1884, 1.

<sup>51</sup> *New York Times*, January 20, 1884; *Helena (MT) Independent*, January 20, 1884, 1.

able to convince them that he was not at the house when Mr. and Mrs. Cuddihee were mistreating the girl.<sup>52</sup> However, Mrs. Cuddihee was clearly believed to have been a perpetrator of the abuse or at least aware it was occurring. This was seen as a violation of her role as a mother and protector, and she died at the hands of the mob.

With the Crocker family, the root of the community's disapproval was unknown, but it was clear that the neighbors wanted the Crockers to leave the area. After the delayed discovery of the murder of the Crocker family, the local authorities searched for the bodies in the area near Wharton, Texas. On May 26, 1895, they discovered the three bullet-riddled bodies of Mr. Crocker, Mrs. Crocker, and their son on the open prairie several miles from where they were killed.<sup>53</sup>

Two years prior to their murder, the Crocker's home had been burned. In the previous winter, Mrs. Crocker killed a man; on the same day, an assailant shot at her husband, and he returned fire, killing his attacker. Additionally, the Crockers' son killed a member of a mob that had gathered to threaten the family. After discovering the bodies, ten men were arrested, and one was reported to have confessed to the events. Even without knowing the original root of the neighbors' hostility toward the family, it was clear that they were not welcomed in the area. These feelings would have been intensified by the killings each member of the family committed. Mrs. Crocker was not involved in a murder conspiracy; she was directly responsible for the death of a man. Though the accounts suggest the family was targeted by vigilante actions previously but had managed to survive the encounters, they met their end in the mob's actions in 1895.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *New York Times*, January 20, 1884.

<sup>53</sup> *Brownsville (TX) Daily Herald*, May 27, 1895, 1.

<sup>54</sup> *San Francisco Call*, May 26, 1895, 3; *Omaha (NE) Daily Bee*, May 26, 1895, 5.



Unlike Molly Smith who was mainly associated with Abithal Colston as his mistress, Mary Sullivan was a key component of the Sullivan-Campbell gang that lived and operated in Caldwell County, Kentucky during the 1870s and 1880s until the community determined to take action in 1882. In the published account, a man who had lived in the area for several years and was familiar with Mary Sullivan shared that she was a woman in her early thirties who had a past “checkered with sin upon sin.”<sup>55</sup>

She was described as physically strong, rivaling the strength of men for miles, a sharpshooter, “a perfect lioness” in hand to hand fights, and a skilled horse rider who rode as a man with little concern that “her limbs were exposed” in the process. She also had reputedly “lost all sense of girlish delicacy and half the young men of the neighborhood openly boasted that she had bestowed favors on them.”<sup>56</sup> The interviewed man confided that “ ‘she was a terror in the neighborhood, and I tell you, if I didn’t know she was in the ground I wouldn’t be telling you this.’ ”<sup>57</sup>

Even though Mary, her brother, and the Campbell boys were known to be reckless and daring, with the outbreak of a string of robberies, members of the community began to accuse the Campbells and Sullivans of committing the thefts, but they faced threats and reprisals from the gang. After one man claimed to have recognized Mary Sullivan as a member of the group that broke into his smoke house, she appeared at his house and confronted him about the reports of the Campbell gang stealing from him, “at the same time pulling out a big navy revolver and shoving it under his nose. The old man

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<sup>55</sup> *Decatur (IL) Daily Republican*, October 11, 1882.

<sup>56</sup> *Decatur (IL) Daily Republican*, October 11, 1882; *National Police Gazette*, November 11, 1882, 10.

<sup>57</sup> *Decatur (IL) Daily Republican*, October 11, 1882.

stammered out an apology and was never afterward heard to say a word against the Campbells.”<sup>58</sup> Another time, Tom Sullivan and Reilly Campbell had severely beaten an elderly man and his wife because the man was publicly denouncing the actions of the gang. In response to this incident, a mob was organized, but following an intense exchange of gunfire, the mob was forced to disband with only Tom Sullivan wounded. A few years later, the community started another effort to confront the gang and in September 1882, another shoot out ended in the deaths of Reilly and Bud Campbell.<sup>59</sup>

In the years prior to the latest mob actions, Mary had rescued Crockett Jenkins from a swollen stream, and the couple began to live together. When Mary later discovered that Jenkins was living with another woman as well, “the Amazon nearly strangled him and when friends interfered and saved his life he fled from the band and went over to the enemy – the body of the citizens.”<sup>60</sup> When the body of Crockett Jenkins was found dangling in a tree a few days later, the community was convinced Mary Sullivan with the aid of her mother and sister were behind the hanging. Arrested for the crime, they were shortly discharged because of a lack of conclusive evidence, and despite the community’s hostility to her, she continued to live in the area.

On September 29, Mary stopped at a neighbor’s home to request lodging for herself and her five-year-old daughter. That night, someone called for her to leave the house. Unlike her recent practice, she left the house unarmed and was taken by a group of men to join an assembled mob. They rode to where Jenkins had been hanged the week before and lynched Mary from the same tree. In an observer’s opinion, she died without

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<sup>58</sup> *National Police Gazette*, November 11, 1882, 10.

<sup>59</sup> *National Police Gazette*, November 11, 1882, 10.

<sup>60</sup> *National Police Gazette*, November 11, 1882, 10.

pleading for mercy or showing any fear.<sup>61</sup> The community targeted Mary Sullivan because she was suspected of murdering Jenkins with the aid of her mother and sister. She also was directly involved and participated in the stealing and general disorder committed by the Sullivan-Campbell gang. Even as she lived her life unlike other women, she died without any pleas for mercy. She did not expect to be spared lynching because she was a woman.

Though the circumstances of these thirteen female lynchings were varied, they shared the same fates: death at the hands of a mob. These victims were not shielded from lynchings because of their sex. With the allegations these women faced, their local communities often believed their lynchings were justified because they had transgressed the mores. In some cases, the community's disapproval was linked with more recent events. Relatively little time elapsed between Mrs. West leaving her husband for another man and their lynching a month later. Most of the women like Peb Falls had already been excluded from any consideration as a proper white woman at the time of her lynching because of her extended moral descent. Several of the women had developed negative reputations in their communities because they were prostitutes or mistresses of notorious men. Even when they were connected to murders, they may not have been recent cases like Mrs. Crocker, who had earned a reputation for killing a man many months before she was lynched.

These women were no longer considered to be true examples of white womanhood. Either this perspective was revoked on account of events over several years or more sudden occurrences. Regardless of the time involved in the transition, by the

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<sup>61</sup> *National Police Gazette*, November 11, 1882, 10.

date the women were lynched the mobs believed they were justified in killing the women because these women no longer could claim the protections of a true white woman. With the accusations charged against these women, they were subject to community punishment because the mobs chose to act independently of the legal system.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Black Female Victims of Lynching

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, African Americans were subject to many forms of violence for a variety of reasons. Beyond beatings, whippings, rape, and various other bodily tortures, lynchings were a public spectacle that instilled fear beyond the area of the incident. With the aid of the telegraph, lynchings were reported throughout the country, and one did not have to live within the bounds of a local community to be affected by the threat of lynching.

This study examines the lynchings of twenty-eight black female victims between 1882 and 1902. A variety of circumstances surrounded the events of the lynchings. Some of the women were believed to be directly responsible for crimes, while others were lynched because they were suspected of being involved in plotting a crime or having knowledge that it occurred. Some of the mobs chose to lynch a woman by herself, but family members or friends joined other female victims as recipients of a mob's wrath. In response to the lynchings, some community leaders and newspapers challenged the justification of a particular lynching, but other lynchings received relatively little attention in the press or were viewed as vindicated killings and approved.

Despite these and other differences among the lynchings, the incidents were linked by commonly cited mob motivations. According to the rhetoric surrounding the lynchings, these black women were lynched for violating laws against miscegenation, theft, arson, being family of accused murderers, conspiracy to murder, murder, and poisoning. These women were already not viewed as "ladies," but when they were

suspected of connections with these crimes, they were stripped of any of the minimal protection their sex had provided them.

### *Allegations of Miscegenation*

In researching lynching victims, it is difficult to obtain reports from the perspective of those who were targeted. The reality of lynching makes it impossible for victims to provide first-hand accounts of the events after their deaths. Even though Patrick and Charlotte Morris were both killed by a mob, their son, Pat Morris, was present at the attack and survived. Survivors of lynch mobs did occur in other cases within this study, but this situation is unusual because a newspaper published an interview with Pat Morris about the incident. When people did survive attacks, they usually were afraid to discuss the lynching, or no media outlets published their perspectives. In this case, Pat Morris calls into question the community's justification of the lynching.

Patrick Morris, a fifty-year-old, white, Irish railroad hand, and Charlotte Morris, his wife who was black, lived on a flatboat near the Westwego Wharf of the Texas and Pacific Railway Company, located a few miles above New Orleans on the bank of the Mississippi River. Late at night on January 11, 1896, a group of men set fire to the couple's boat. When the Morrises attempted to abandon the boat, the men shot them. Even though the woman was killed instantly, and the bullets only initially injured her husband, their bodies were both engulfed by the flames on the boat.<sup>1</sup>

Two motivations for the lynching were commonly reported. The first was their "difference in color" causing "[indignation] at the open violation of the miscegenation

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<sup>1</sup> *Princeton (MN) Union*, January 23, 1896.

law.”<sup>2</sup> Prior to the Civil War, southern whites feared the threat sexual relationships between blacks and whites posed to maintaining a distinctive two-class racial system, but the period’s “antimiscegenation laws sought not so much to eliminate interracial sexual contacts as to channel them.” The goal was mainly to discourage relationships between white women and black men, but the legal system was “relatively tolerant” of sexual associations between white men and black women if the “liaison was kept casual and discreet.”<sup>3</sup> The enforcement of the antimiscegenation laws in the early nineteenth century established a double standard between the behavior expected of white women and white men. While relationships between white women and black men were categorically discouraged, if white men avoided overtly public sexual relationships with black women, white men did not face many legal consequences.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, several southern states did not have laws against miscegenation during Radical Reconstruction. At the end of the power of Radical Republicans, newly elected white supremacists in the South reinstated or created new legal codes against miscegenation. In some states, it was a crime to provide an interracial couple a marriage license or perform their marriage ceremony. Most of the laws invalidated interracial marriages, allowing prosecution for violating laws against fornication and cohabitation. If an interracial couple was able to marry in the South, under the antimiscegenation codes of the late nineteenth century, any existing unions

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<sup>2</sup> *Princeton (MN) Union*, January 23, 1896; *Nebraska Advertiser*, January 17, 1896.

<sup>3</sup> Peter W. Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex, and the Law in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 49.

between two individuals with different racial backgrounds would be summarily invalidated.<sup>4</sup>

According to Pat Morris, their eleven-year-old son, his parents were married in Houston, Texas eighteen years before the attack in 1896.<sup>5</sup> Their marriage would have occurred during the transition from Radical Reconstruction, but under the antimiscegenation laws of 1896, even if they had been legally married before, their interracial marriage would be invalid. Regardless of the legal status or potential ramification of their interracial relationship, the couple had been living together for almost two decades in southern states. The fact that the relationship was between a working-class white man and working-class black woman probably aided their ability to live together; a white woman was not involved in an open sexual relationship with a black man, and their relationship did not challenge class boundaries.

It was also claimed that they “kept a disorderly place,” causing “a growing sentiment against them.”<sup>6</sup> The report of “the citizens in the vicinity” claimed the place kept by the Morrises “was a nuisance and that the couple had been run away from several places.”<sup>7</sup> The reports are not clear about the activities that allegedly occurred in the “disorderly house,” but the term could have referred to a place with prostitution, gambling, or other similar vices.

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<sup>4</sup> Bardaglio, 180.

<sup>5</sup> *Richmond Planet*, January 25, 1896.

<sup>6</sup> *Iola (KS) Register*, January 17, 1896, 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Los Angeles Herald*, January 13, 1896, morning edition, 1.



The couple's child believed a "business rivalry" between his mother and a local saloonkeeper led to the death of his parents.<sup>8</sup> The *Richmond Planet*, an African-American-operated newspaper, condemned the attack and published an interview with the boy, elaborating on his perception of the antagonism. His mother started "to sell cakes and coffee and lunch to the men who worked with [his father], and as Johnnie Gassener only sold whiskey and beer, and a little other stuff," Pat Morris supposed, "[Gassener] got mad with [his mother]."<sup>9</sup> In the eyes of Charlotte Morris' son, when she began providing more variety in food to the men who worked with her husband, Gassener resented the economic competition of her business with the workers.

While the officers in Jefferson Parish declared they could not discover the identity of the murderers, the son of the couple claimed to have recognized several members of the mob, composed of all white men. The majority of the newspaper accounts did not name any of the members of the crowd, but in the boy's interview in the *Richmond Planet*, he identified two of the men as Gassener, the man who operated the competing saloon, and Officer Jerome.<sup>10</sup> Although the true motivations of the men who murdered the couple are unknown, the rest of the local community supported dealing with what they perceived to be a long-term problem. The economic threat of Charlotte Morris' business may have been the primary motivation for Gassener to attack the Morris family, but their neighbors claimed that the lynching was a response to their open sexual relationship and shared household between a white man and black woman and fostering illegal or immoral activity in the community.

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<sup>8</sup> *Los Angeles Herald*, January 13, 1896, morning edition, 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Richmond Planet*, January 25, 1896.

<sup>10</sup> *Richmond Planet*, January 25, 1896.

Reflecting the community's support of the lynching, the local law enforcement officers were not concerned with apprehending any of the shooters, but there was external condemnation of this response. The commentary from the *Richmond Planet* harshly condemned the actions of the mob. The story labeled the lynching a "damnable outrage" and headlined the article with these questions: "Will the Nation Hear – A Crime that is the Blackest Yet – What will be Done About It – Christendom Appealed To."<sup>11</sup> As a newspaper operated by African Americans, the response to the lynching was particularly vehement.

The *Galveston Daily News* was a mainstream white-owned newspaper in Texas, but its report also criticized these actions, recognizing that it would guarantee the "re-election of said heroic authorities and the safety of the murderers. . . . The most alarming feature about such conspiracies and crimes is that they are committed openly, yet 'the authorities claim that they can not discover the perpetrators,' even before the blood and the ashes of the victims are cold."<sup>12</sup> In sharp contrast to the publicized response to the lynching in New Orleans, other newspapers challenged the protection the murderers received from the legal authorities.

#### *Allegations of Theft*

Beyond the general accusations against Pat and Charlotte Morris, African Americans in the late nineteenth-century South also faced community reprisals for theft

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<sup>11</sup>*Richmond Planet*, January 25, 1896.

<sup>12</sup>*Galveston (TX) Daily News*, January 15, 1896, 4.

allegations. On May 5, 1887, a mob hanged Richard Goodwin and Grace Blanton, who were both black and accused of robbing a local store, in Floyd, West Carroll, Louisiana.<sup>13</sup>

Earlier in the year, a mob in West Carroll Parish burned the store of Simon Witkowski and drove him from the town. Witkowski was a Polish Jew, and at the time of the community reprisal, he owned thousands of acres and a number of local stores. The reports of the incident described him as a “ ‘renegade Jew’ ” and “ ‘one of Governor McEnergy’s satraps.’ ” In the midst of this racial tension, Witkowski was identified as a sympathizer with blacks.<sup>14</sup>

Not only was Witkowski targeted as a prosperous Jew in a community of frustrated agrarian whites, he was also linked to the Republican Reconstruction governments and believed to be supportive of African Americans who comprised the majority of the parish population.<sup>15</sup> That these factors contributed to being forced to leave town connects his experiences to those of Blanton and Goodwin. The violent actions of the white minority in the parish in both of these cases point to the fears they held and the racial tension in the community.

Considering the actions of mobs in the parish within the span of a few months, the *Wichita Eagle* printed an account highlighting the contradictions in the community response:

It is said that while mob violence is deprecated by the people, the action of this particular mob is condoned because, as a local correspondent naively says, there

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<sup>13</sup> *Wichita (KS) Eagle*, May 10, 1887, morning edition, 1; *Abilene (KS) Reflector*, May 12, 1887; *Omaha (NE) Daily Bee*, May 10, 1887, morning edition, 1.

<sup>14</sup> William Ivy Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest: Louisiana Politics, 1887-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 158.

<sup>15</sup> Work Projects Administration Writer’s Program, *Louisiana: A Guide to the State* (New York: Hastings House, 1941), 589-90.

is no doubt of the guilt of the accused persons, the woman having confessed and the goods having been found in possession of the victims. It is not stated that they were confirmed criminals or that the people became exasperated at their continued depredations; they simply robbed a store and were hanged.<sup>16</sup>

The account questions the community's justification of the lynching, because Goodwin's and Blanton's cases had not progressed through the legal system. Moreover, there was no evidence that they were suspected of multiple crimes. Without a legal conviction or a longer history of causing problems in the community, the author did not agree with the Louisiana community that the lynching was warranted.

Not all lynchings of black women evoked commentary condemning the actions in newspaper accounts. Unlike the response to Charlotte Morris' and Grace Blanton's lynchings, Ballie Crutchfield's lynching garnered little press attention. On March 16, 1901, the *New York Times* reported the death of Crutchfield, a black woman, near Rome, Smith County, Tennessee. After taking her from her cabin, the mob bound and fatally shot her and threw her body in the creek. The woman was accused of discovering and not returning a lost purse that contained one hundred twenty dollars.<sup>17</sup> Retribution for the suspected theft made Crutchfield the target and victim of the mob's reprisal.

Mary Motlow was also accused of theft, but she was additionally suspected of arson, and four men in her family were connected to various crimes throughout the community. On November 5, 1893, a stagecoach driver found the bodies of Ned Waggoner, his son, William Waggoner, his daughter, Mary Motlow<sup>18</sup>, and her husband, Samuel Motlow, hanging in a tree by the farm of Jack Daniels outside Lynchburg,

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<sup>16</sup> *Wichita (KS) Eagle*, May 10, 1887, 1.

<sup>17</sup> *New York Times*, March 17, 1901.

<sup>18</sup> Also identified as Elizabeth Motlow.

Tennessee. All four of the victims were black and had bad reputations in the community, charged with house and barn burning. The accounts described the Waggoners and Motlows as “desperate characters.”<sup>19</sup> In 1892, Ed Waggoner, another member of the family, was convicted and sentenced to the penitentiary for stealing wheat from a local farmer. During the same year, Motlow’s wife, Mary, was accused of robbing Mr. Hobbs’ house and then burning it. Shortly before the lynching, Motlow reportedly attempted to kill the son of a “prominent” white man.<sup>20</sup> Charged with the burning of several barns throughout 1893, the “mob made sure of their guilt, some of its members having overheard them making plans to burn barns and houses.”<sup>21</sup> Providing an inventory of the family’s aggregate crimes and reports of arson plans was a way for the community and the reporters to justify lynching the men and woman.

When the mob arrived at Waggoner’s home, others were present and escaped lynching. Ned Waggoner’s wife was severely whipped and given three days to leave the county with threats of death. Henry Motlow and Jeff Wise, a twelve-year-old boy, were at the home, but out of fear, they stated that they were unable to identify any of the two hundred participants in the lynching. Even though only a part of the mob was masked, no one who testified to the inquest jury aided in identifying any of the lynching party.<sup>22</sup> The local residents’ silence protected members of the mob from prosecution out of fear of personal reprisals or solidarity in favor of the lynching. Even though Mary Motlow was

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<sup>19</sup> *Racine (WI) Daily Journal*, November 4, 1893, afternoon edition, 1; *Anaconda (MT) Standard*, November 5, 1893, morning edition, 8; *Salt Lake Sunday Herald*, November 5, 1893, 1; *San Francisco Morning Call*, November 5, 1893, 1; *Saint Paul Daily Globe*, November 6, 1893, morning edition, 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Maysville (KY) Evening Bulletin*, November 6, 1893.

<sup>21</sup> *Los Angeles Herald*, November 5, 1893, morning edition, 1.

<sup>22</sup> *New York Sun*, November 5, 1893, 8; *Maysville (KY) Daily Public Ledger*, November 8, 1893, 3; *New York Daily Tribune*, November 8, 1893, 10; *New York Sun*, November 8, 1893, 5.

connected to other suspected male criminals, she was also accused of committing theft and arson personally.

### *Allegations of Arson*

Several other female lynching victims in the period were accused of involvement in arson. On July 31, 1891, the home of William Davis, a prominent farmer in Henry County, Alabama, was burned, and the family almost died in the blaze. The authorities arrested Ella Williams, a black employee of Davis, and she confessed to soaking the house with oil and setting it on fire out of retribution following an argument with Davis. Her admission of guilt incriminated William Williams, Willis Lowe, and Eliza Lowe, who were all black, and all four were arrested. On August 6, a mob confronted the officers and took the four prisoners, shooting the men and women to death and throwing the bodies in a nearby river. The next day two of the bodies were found near the river, confirming the story.<sup>23</sup> The headline of the article in the *St. Paul Daily Globe* reported: “Firebugs Killed: Alabama Farmers Meet Out Quick Justice.”<sup>24</sup> Not only did the news accounts of this lynching not condemn the actions of the mob, this description identifies the mob’s actions as justice despite their circumvention of the legal proceedings.

This case of arson was not a random act. Instead, the buildings of Davis were targeted as some measure of revenge against him. In the accounts, Ella Williams was only referenced as an employee of Davis, but she probably was a domestic servant and closely connected to their household. There are also no details included about the nature

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<sup>23</sup> *Pittsburg Dispatch*, August 8, 1891, 7; *Richmond Times*, August 6, 1891, 4; *St. Paul Daily Globe*, August 8, 1891, morning edition, 1; *Maysville (KY) Evening Bulletin*, August 8, 1891, 1.

<sup>24</sup> *St. Paul Daily Globe*, August 8, 1891.

of the disagreement or the offense. It may have been work related, or Williams could have felt she suffered a personal injustice.

The date Isaac and Puss Kirkpatrick, a black married couple, were lynched was not recorded, but the incident was reported on April 19, 1888. A group of men took them from their cabin five miles outside of Gallatin, Tennessee, hanged Puss, and fatally shot Isaac through his head. The community suspected Puss of burning John Kerby's home and all its contents, but they did not believe Isaac was involved in the arson. The neighbors theorized that Isaac probably recognized some of the men in the mob when they came to the Kirkpatrick's cabin, and in order to avoid identification, they killed him as well.<sup>25</sup>

There were not many details of their lynching included in the report, but it directly linked the woman to the suspected arson and suggested that Isaac was not implicated in the crime. Even though her husband was also killed, it is notable that his murder was committed through different means. The mob hanged Puss, but shot Isaac. This situation reverses the common link between female victims of lynchings and men who are killed with them. In many cases, the man is accused of a crime, but through a woman's connection to the man, she may be lynched with him even if she was not implicated in the wrongdoing. In this circumstance, however, the woman was killed on suspicions of arson and her husband died despite being regarded as innocent.

After J. E. Woods' cotton mill and gin burned early in September 1893, Paul Archer, William Archer, Polk Hill, Edward Guyton, and Ellen Fant,<sup>26</sup> who were all black,

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<sup>25</sup> *Portland Morning Oregonian*, April 20, 1888, 1.

<sup>26</sup> A *New York Times* account identifies the woman as Emma Fair, but all the other consulted articles refer to her as Ellen Fant.

were held in the Carrollton, Alabama jail in connection to the fire. The authorities had started the investigation, but the prisoners' attorney was making appeals based on *habeas corpus* to have the inmates released if they were not to be charged with arson. However, the men and woman remained in their cells on September 14 when a group of men appeared at the jail that night.

They called the sheriff from the building, notifying him that they held a captive they wished to turn over to legal custody. Once the sheriff opened the door, he discovered the crowd had fabricated the story to lure the sheriff outside, and the masked men demanded access to the five arson suspects' cells. The mob forced its way to the prisoners, and through the bars of the holding cell, the men fired on the five individuals, who quickly died. This lynching followed a few weeks after the extralegal hanging of Joe Floyd, a black man accused of murdering a white farmer in the same county.<sup>27</sup>

Headlining their column "Brutal Butchery in Alabama. Mob Overpowers a Sheriff and Shoots Five Colored Prisoners. Carrollton, in Pickens County, is the Scene of the Cowardly Deed," the *Roanoke Times* included commentary that was critical of the lynching. The paper's criticism suggested the lynching was not justified by the crimes because the legal system was not allowed to handle the case. Even in the eyes of individuals who would sometimes approve lynching as an appropriate punishment, this lynching was not executed in an honorable manner.

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<sup>27</sup> *New York Times*, September 16, 1893; *Anderson (SC) Intelligencer*, September 20, 1893; *Evening Herald Shenandoah (PA)*, September 16, 1893, third edition; *Hickman (KY) Courier*, September 22, 1893, 1; *Highland (VA) Recorder*, September 22, 1893; *Los Angeles Herald*, September 16, 1893, morning edition, 1; *Maysville (KY) Evening Bulletin*, September 16, 1893, 1; *New York Sun*, September 16, 1893, 1; *San Francisco Call*, September 16, 1893, morning edition, 1; *Roanoke (VA) Times*, September 16, 1893, 1.



In these four cases of female African American lynching victims, the women were all suspected of connections to arson. Beyond these reports, it is impossible to verify if the women actually committed the crimes. In all of these cases, the women involved were directly linked to committing the acts of arson even if others were implicated in the matter. Perhaps this was a crime that was commonly committed by black women in the late nineteenth-century South as a means of retribution or other purpose, but this could be an indicator of a common fear of arson that southern whites held in connection to black women and men.

#### *Family of Accused Murderers*

In two cases in the 1890s, a black man was blamed for the murder of a white man, and in the community's reprisal, other members of the black man's family died at the hands of persons unknown. Early in 1895, a dispute between Abe Phillips, a black farmer, and Phil Arnold, a white farmer, ended with Arnold fatally shooting Phillips in Mart, Texas, located approximately twenty miles east of Waco. In response to the murder of his father, Abe Phillips, Jr. killed Arnold. Following this retaliation, the Phillips family received numerous threats from Arnold's friends, and the Phillips believed their food was poisoned.

Early during the morning of July 20, 1895, a dynamite explosion destroyed Mrs. Phillips' house. At the time of the blast, the house was occupied by Mrs. Phillips, her five children, and three black men who worked as farm hands. Mrs. Phillips, Hannah, twelve, Abe, Jr., seventeen, Willie, fifteen, and Ed, thirteen were all killed in the explosion or fire, and two of the men, Kid Taylor and Benjamin Johnson, were fatally wounded. The other Phillips child and male worker who were at the house were

wounded but expected to recover. Sheriffs from several counties traveled to Mart to investigate the incident, but no arrests were made when the accounts were published.<sup>28</sup> Of the nine individuals in the home, seven died in the explosion. Abe, Jr. was the only person in the home who was directly connected to the murder of Arnold, and beyond him, the other residents were women, children, or farm hands not related to the family. A mob's retaliation for a white man's murder placed all of the people in the house in jeopardy despite their tenuous connection to the earlier death.

Unlike the lynching of the Phillips family, John Hastings, who was charged with murder, was not even in the same state as his daughter when she was lynched. John Hastings, a black man, was jailed in Natchez, Mississippi on Saturday, October 29, 1892 for the murder of Zip Norment, a white man, of Catahoula Parish, Louisiana. When Hastings was apprehended, one of his sons was killed "while resisting arrest."<sup>29</sup>

Despite having no connection to the Norment murder, Hastings' daughter and another son were hanged in Louisiana while their father was held in custody in Mississippi.<sup>30</sup> Hastings was held in the Natchez jail from Saturday to Wednesday when he was transferred to the custody of Louisiana officers. They moved him to Jonesville, Louisiana in Catahoula Parish where the original murder was committed. Law

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<sup>28</sup> *Fort Worth (TX) Gazette*, July 21, 1895, 2; *Iola (KS) Register*, July 26, 1895; *Omaha (NE) Daily Bee*, July 21, 1895, 6; *Roanoke (VA) Times*, July 21, 1895, 4; *Salt Lake Herald*, July 21, 1895, 1; *Stanford (KY) Semi-Weekly Interior Journal*, July 23, 1895; *Saint Paul Daily Globe*, July 21, 1895, morning edition, 7; *Washington (D.C.) Times*, July 21, 1895, morning edition, 1.

<sup>29</sup> *Salt Lake Herald*, November 3, 1892, 2.

<sup>30</sup> *Salt Lake Herald*, November 3, 1892, 2; *Great Salt Lake City Deseret Evening News*, November 2, 1892, last edition, 8; *Maysville (KY) Evening Bulletin*, November 3, 1892, 1.

enforcement officials continued to guard Hastings through the night, but in the early morning, a mob of masked men hanged Hastings near Jonesville.<sup>31</sup>

This is an unusual circumstance of a woman's lynching because of her connection to another individual believed to be guilty of various crimes. The fact that Hastings' son and daughter were killed based on their relationship to their father is not uncommon, but in situations like this, the other victims were generally physically near the accused criminal at the time of their lynchings. In this scenario, Hastings was sitting in a jail in Mississippi when a mob went to the Hastings' home in Louisiana and lynched his son and daughter who were not implicated in the murder of Norment.

#### *Allegations of Conspiracy to Murder*

The majority of the lynchings of black women examined in this study were connected to suspicions of murder. In some cases, they were believed to be accessories in the crime or were actually accused of committing murder or of attempted murder. Although Lorilla Weaver was not directly responsible for the death of her employer, she was lynched because of the role she played in the murder scheme. After returning home at the end of church choir practice on July 30, 1898, John T. Orr, a young hardware dealer in Clarendon, Arkansas, was shot and died soon after. The authorities were initially uncertain who committed the crime, and despite the aid of bloodhounds, they did not discover any leads.

After two days of investigation, the coroner's jury determined that the conspiracy included seven local men and women. Mrs. Mabel Orr was deemed the leader of the

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<sup>31</sup> *Hickman (KY) Courier*, November 11, 1892, 1; *Hillsboro (OH) News-Herald*, November 10, 1892, 6; *Salt Lake Herald*, November 6, 1892, 2.

murder plot, and Miss Rachel Morris was believed to be a fellow conspirator. In addition to the two white women, five black men and women were suspected of complicity in the murder: Lorilla Weaver, the Orrs' cook, Susie Jacobs, the Orrs' household servant, Manse Castle, the man who initially committed to shooting Orr, Will Sanders, the man who fired the shot to kill Orr and was also Weaver's son, and Dennis Ricard, a local conjurer who attempted to poison Orr.<sup>32</sup>

While John Orr was a theater manager in Wisconsin, he met Mabel Barker Orr, and they were secretly married in 1890, against her parents' wishes. A few years prior to 1898, they settled in Clarendon where he began his successful hardware business. Reportedly, both had quick tempers and quarreled frequently, and Mabel claimed John struck her once. In a fit of anger and confiding in Weaver, Mabel Orr admitted that she wanted her husband killed and was willing to pay two hundred dollars to have the deed accomplished, but she claimed she was guilty of no criminal intent because she was not seriously contemplating murder.

During their investigation, the local authorities discovered Mrs. Orr's correspondence with several men, containing her plan to remain in Clarendon to collect her husband's five thousand dollar insurance payment and then travel to New York with Rachel Morris to create a theatrical group with two men. After her partial confession and an emotional breakdown in jail, Mrs. Orr ingested poison with the intention of committing suicide.

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<sup>32</sup> *New York Times*, August 11, 1898; *Daily Kentuckian*, August 10, 1898, afternoon edition, 1; *Hartford (KY) Herald*, August 17, 1898, 1; *Newport (VA) Daily Press*, August 11, 1898, 1; *Sacramento Record-Union*, August 10, 1898, 8; *Richmond Dispatch*, August 11, 1898, 3; *Salt Lake Herald*, August 11, 1898, 6; *Wichita (KS) Daily Eagle*, August 11, 1898, morning edition, 6.

Prior to her death, crowds had gathered in Clarendon three times with concerns about the prosecution of the conspirators. Each time they were dispersed with reassurances that the investigation, trial, and execution would be conducted locally and quickly, with a legal execution promised by the end of the week. With the news of Mrs. Orr's death, a mob of several hundred removed Sanders, Ricard, Castle, and Weaver from the jail by force and lynched them on the elevated tramway at the sawmill close to the jail. A card was attached to their hanging bodies that warned, "This is the penalty for murder and rape."<sup>33</sup> Even though rape was not connected to this case, the members of the lynching party who placed the card at the lynching believed it was a just punishment in the cases of murder and rape. Therefore, in their eyes, the lynching of the suspected murderers was justified.

Morris and Jacobs had both left the area before they were implicated in the plot, but if they would have been held in the jail, a local source believed they would have been lynched as well.<sup>34</sup> All the published accounts believed that the lynching victims were guilty and deserved their end.<sup>35</sup> Instead of condemning the mob's action, the newspaper reports stressed the orderly nature of the mob, reflecting support for the execution of the lynching.

Lou Stevenson was also involved in a murder plot, and she played an important role in the execution of the plan. On the night of September 26, 1891, Stevenson, a

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<sup>33</sup> *Hartford (KY) Herald*, August 17, 1898, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Some accounts include Susie Jacobs in the lynching victims, but it seems likely that she was not one of the victims because the later accounts exclude her from their lists.

<sup>35</sup> *New York Times*, August 11, 1898; *Daily Kentuckian*, August 10, 1898, afternoon edition, 1; *Hartford (KY) Herald*, August 17, 1898, 1; *Newport (VA) Daily Press*, August 11, 1898, 1; *Sacramento Record-Union*, August 10, 1898, 8; *Richmond Dispatch*, August 11, 1898, 3; *Salt Lake Herald*, August 11, 1898, 6; *Wichita (KS) Daily Eagle*, August 11, 1898, morning edition, 6.

quadroon woman, called John Davis, a white bartender, outside of his saloon in Hollandale, Mississippi. While they talked outside, Grant White, a black man, fatally shot Davis, reportedly “without provocation.”<sup>36</sup> White fled the town, but he was captured and brought back. A mob had also detained Stevenson, who was believed to have conspired with White to murder Davis, and “the infuriated populace” hanged White and Stevenson to a railroad bridge near Hollandale Monday morning.<sup>37</sup>

The role of Jerry Finch’s wife in the following murders was not specified, but she was included in the lynching victims. In 1883, unknown assailants used an axe to murder Mr. Gunter, an elderly white farmer, his wife, and his wife’s sister in their home near Pittsboro in Chatham County, North Carolina. The identity of the killers was not determined at the time of the crime, but in 1885, a similar murder was committed in the same area.<sup>38</sup> In the second case, Mr. Finch, a seventy-nine-year-old white farmer, his eighty-one-year-old sister, and a sixteen-year-old male black servant were found July 5, 1885 with signs of injuries from an axe and all their throats cut.<sup>39</sup>

Several black individuals were detained in connection to the murders. The arrest of Jerry Finch and his wife was followed by Lee Tyson’s capture, and, finally, John Pattishall was held in relation to the Gunter murder and a possible connection to the Finch murder as well. During the time that the men were held, members of the local law enforcement establishment worked to protect the prisoners from lynching attempts. Once

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<sup>36</sup> *Wichita (KS) Daily Eagle*, September 29, 1891, morning edition, 2.

<sup>37</sup> *Decatur (IL) Morning Review*, September 30, 1891, 1; *Los Angeles Herald*, September 29, 1891, morning edition, 1; *Perrysburg (OH) Journal*, October 3, 1891; *Salt Lake Herald*, September 29, 1891, 2; *Wichita (KS) Daily Eagle*, August 11, 1898, morning edition, 6.

<sup>38</sup> *Richmond Dispatch*, September 9, 1885, morning edition.

<sup>39</sup> *Salt Lake Herald*, September 30, 1885, 2; *Wichita (KS) Eagle*, October 2, 1885.

the coroner's jury's report was issued, it condemned the men, and it was reported that the majority of the community believed the men were guilty of both sets of murders. On September 28, Jerry Finch, his wife, Lee Tyson, and John Pattishall were taken from the jail and lynched a mile from Pittsboro, and their bodies were found the next morning hanging from the trees near the public road.<sup>40</sup>

The lynching of the Finches, Tyson, and Pattishall was not condemned in the newspaper records because their guilt had been established through the coroner's jury. In contrast, the legal investigation determined the McCray family had not actually committed the murders of Mr. and Mrs. Taliaferro on July 30, 1901 and were only guilty of aiding in the crime. While the murders were investigated, Betsy McCray, Belfield McCray, her son, and Ida McCray, her daughter, were held at the jail in Carrollton, Mississippi. Suspecting the investigation was being delayed and fearing the black prisoners would be taken away without a public investigation, a crowd of anxious men gathered on August 1 and prepared to take the suspects from the jail. Judge W. F. Stevens, District Attorney W. S. Hill, Senator J. Z. George, and Louis M. Southworth assured the gathered multitude that the public investigation was continuing in Carrollton. To aid in averting a lynching, Governor Andrew H. Longino departed Jackson on a train bound for Carrollton.

The prisoner interviews, especially the statement of Ida, led the investigators to conclude Betsy and Belfield participated in planning the murder, but with their alibis, they were not the individuals who committed the murder. Despite this news and the "earnest appeals to . . . law and order" by the leaders of the county, a mob of about five

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<sup>40</sup> *Salt Lake Herald*, September 30, 1885, 2; *Wichita (KS) Eagle*, October 2, 1885.

hundred white citizens of Carroll County took the three prisoners from the jail and bound their hands. The mob carried the two women and man outside the town, hanged them to a tree, and fired hundreds of shots into their hanging bodies.<sup>41</sup>

Governor Longino arrived shortly after the lynching, and he addressed the crowd gathered at the courthouse, “impressing upon them the duty of their citizenship to obey the law.”<sup>42</sup> In later analysis, one of Kentucky’s weeklies, the *Berea Citizen*, observed that the “Mob Couldn’t Wait: Turned a Deaf Ear to Reason and Wreaked Its Vengeance.”<sup>43</sup> Condemnation after a lynching was not standard, but the urging of local leaders in attempts to prevent a lynching was even more uncommon. In several instances, more guards than usual were assigned to protect prisoners from mob violence, but exchanges of this nature between an assembled mob and prominent members of the community were not recorded in any other case in this study. Despite the reasoning and appeals by these men to allow the legal system to determine the fate of the accused men and women and the findings of the coroner’s jury, the mob took the prisoners from the jail in the middle of the day and lynched them.

### *Allegations of Murder*

Some of the women who were involved in conspiracies to murder became victims of lynching in the period even if they were not the individuals who committed the

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<sup>41</sup> *Richmond Dispatch*, August 2, 1901, 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Houston Daily Post*, August 2, 1901, mailable morning edition, 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Houston Daily Post*, August 2, 1901, mailable morning edition, 3; *Berea (KY) Citizen*, August 8, 1901; *Sumter (SC) Watchman and Southron*, August 7, 1901; *Phoenix Arizona Republican*, August 9, 1901, morning edition, 1; *Monterey (VA) Highland Recorder*, August 9, 1901, 1; *Logan (OH) Hocking Sentinel*, August 8, 1901; *Minneapolis Journal*, August 2, 1901, evening edition, 16; *Richmond Times*, August 4, 1901, 1.



murder. Women who were believed to be directly involved in committing a murder were also vulnerable to mob actions. In a case of a female lynching victim connected to murder, a woman was lynched with four African American men who were connected to the murder of a well-known white man in their community.

During a search for the missing Watts Murphy, the nephew of Alabama's former Governor Thomas Watts, John Rattler confessed to the murder and revealed the location where he and five others had burned Murphy's body. One of the black men who was implicated in the murder escaped but the other five black men and women, John Rattler, Zeb Calley, Martha Greene, Alice Greene, and Mary Deane, were arrested near Butler Springs, Alabama. Late Saturday, April 20, 1895, a posse of armed men began the sixteen-mile ride to move the five prisoners from Butler Springs to the jail in Greenville.<sup>44</sup>

At three in the morning, about one hundred armed men surrounded the posse and took the prisoners. The mob tied the hands of the two men and women and hanged each one to a different tree by the road. Their bodies were found the next morning. The news accounts supported the lynching through their portrayal of the situation. Murphy was reported to be "a splendid young man of prominence" who suffered a "most brutal" murder.<sup>45</sup> In an evaluation of the lynching, the *Columbus Journal* printed that "there was no doubt whatever of the guilt of all of the victims of the lynching."<sup>46</sup> These aspects

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<sup>44</sup> *Columbus (NE) Journal*, April 24, 1895; *Warren (MN) Sheaf*, April 25, 1895; *Richmond Planet*, April 27, 1895; *Crittenden (KY) Press*, April 25, 1895, 1.

<sup>45</sup> *Crittenden (KY) Press*, April 25, 1895, 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Columbus (NE) Journal*, April 24, 1895.

suggest approval for the lynching because it was avenging the brutal murder of an upstanding citizen at the hands of guilty parties.

Most lynching reports highlight a confirmation of the victim's culpability, but when Wideman and his wife were lynched, the mob was uncertain which one of the couple had committed the murder. Returning to his residence on Friday, December 26, 1902, William K. Jay, described as a well-known, young farmer outside of Troy, South Carolina, heard the noises of a fight coming from the cabin of a black couple who lived on his property and near his home. Jay ordered Oliver Wideman and his wife to remain quieter if they wanted to remain on his land.

Shortly after this encounter, Mrs. Jay heard gunshots and saw the Widemans flee the property. Calling and searching for her husband, Mrs. Jay found him dead in their yard. The news of Jay's death spread quickly, and many in the neighborhood joined the search for the black couple, believed to be the murderers. A member of the search party detained the Widemans when he encountered them on a road headed southeast of Troy. In response to questions about Jay's death, the man accused his wife of murdering Jay, and she implicated her husband in the act. The constable began the trip to the jail with Mr. and Mrs. Wideman in his custody, but an angry crowd of Jay's friends and neighbors stopped him at the Winterseat bridge around midnight. Both the man and woman were thrown over the bridge with nooses tied around their necks, and members of the mob fired on their hanging bodies.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Anadarko (OK) Daily Democrat*, December 29, 1902; *Anderson (SC) Intelligencer*, December 31, 1902, 1; *Houston Daily Post*, December 28, 1902, mailable edition; *Richmond Dispatch*, December 28, 1902, 24; *Sumter (SC) Watchman and Southron*, December 31, 1902; *New York Times*, December 28, 1902; *New York Tribune*, December 28, 1902, 1.

In the case of an unusual crime, the mob chose an unusual method of lynching for women in this period as punishment for Mary Hollenbeck. Having to travel to work at a turpentine still in a neighboring county, Samuel Frick, a black man who lived in Tattnall County, Georgia, left his four-year-old daughter in the care of his black female neighbor, Mary Hollenbeck.<sup>48</sup> The girl was left with Hollenbeck, and a week later, Frick had returned in search of his daughter on July 26, 1886.

Frick was unable to find his child, and Hollenbeck could not explain the girl's absence to him. Several neighbors joined Frick in a search of Hollenbeck's home. By the time it ended, there was a group of fifteen or twenty members of the local black community present. Attention was drawn to a salt pork barrel that reeked of decay because the pickling agents were not strong enough to prevent decomposition. Half of the child's body had been packed into the barrel.<sup>49</sup>

Upon this discovery, Hollenbeck pleaded for mercy and offered a full confession if her life would be spared. She had been commissioned to prepare a meal at a picnic for local black residents. The picnic was two days after the child came to stay with Hollenbeck, and she did not have any meat to serve at the event. Afraid of not being paid for her food if she did not serve some meat, the woman determined to murder the child and cook her flesh. She admitted to "being somewhat under the influence of liquor," allowing "the fiendishness of the idea [to have] no horrors for her."<sup>50</sup> She killed the

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<sup>48</sup> Name is also reported as Mary Hallenbeck.

<sup>49</sup> *Fort Worth (TX) Gazette*, July 28, 1886, 6; *Washington (D.C.) National Tribune*, August 5, 1886, 8; *Orangeburg (SC) Times and Democrat*, August 5, 1886, 1.

<sup>50</sup> *Orangeburg (SC) Times and Democrat*, August 5, 1886, 1.

young girl with an axe, and after dismembering the body, she boiled the limbs as a part of a stew with a variety of vegetables.

At the picnic, “negroes remarked upon the peculiarity of its flavor, but nevertheless ate heartily. Several of the negroes [later alleged] that they were nauseated by the mess, but none of them were made seriously ill.”<sup>51</sup> When Hollenbeck finished “the revolting recital the fury of the hearers was ungovernable, and it was quickly decided to burn her alive at the stake.”<sup>52</sup> A mob of African Americans chained her to a post, surrounded by pine that had been doused in kerosene, and fifteen minutes after the fire was lit, she fell into the blaze and nothing remained of her body. When the report was made, there had been no attempt to arrest those who were involved in her lynching, but a local investigation was anticipated.<sup>53</sup> In light of the unusual events, one account included a note authenticating the story.<sup>54</sup> The news reports reflected horror at the crime of Hollenbeck, and some noted the “terrible vengeance” she received.<sup>55</sup>

#### *Allegations of Poisoning*

Among the African American women lynched in the late nineteenth century who were accused of murder, the most frequently cited method of murder on the part of the black women and men was poison. When Africans were first transported to the New World as part of the slave trade, they carried the art of poisoning with them and

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<sup>51</sup> *Orangeburg (SC) Times and Democrat*, August 5, 1886, 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Orangeburg (SC) Times and Democrat*, August 5, 1886, 1.

<sup>53</sup> *Orangeburg (SC) Times and Democrat*, August 5, 1886, 1; *Washington (D.C.) National Tribune*, August 5, 1886, 8; *Ft Worth (TX) Gazette*, July 28, 1886, 6.

<sup>54</sup> *Fort Worth (TX) Gazette*, July 28, 1886, 6.

<sup>55</sup> *Fort Worth (TX) Gazette*, July 28, 1886, 6; *Washington (D.C.) National Tribune*, August 5, 1886, 8; *Orangeburg (SC) Times and Democrat*, August 5, 1886, 1.

continued to practice it through the eighteenth century. Historian Eugene Genovese noted the decline in reported cases of poisoning in the nineteenth century, but suggested it “recurred often enough to suggest a pervasive nervousness.”<sup>56</sup>

The connection between Wesley Lee’s mother and her involvement in the crime was not detailed in the reports of the lynchings of Lee and his conspirators, but Mrs. Lee’s son implicated her during his confession. Despite the link not being clear, the mob believed she was close enough to the plot to find her and lynch her after the other four male conspirators had been killed.

The details of the lynching in Lowndes County, Mississippi of John Barrentine, Wesley Lee, Monroe Walters, and Wesley Lee’s mother, who were all black, were not published in newspapers for more than a week after the incident but were reported May 9, 1891.<sup>57</sup> Wesley Lee and John Barrentine were charged with an attempt to poison Captain Henry Barrentine in the middle of April 1891 in Columbus, Mississippi. Not only did they confess to the crime, they also admitted to poisoning Mr. Harry A. West, a prominent and wealthy farmer, who died two years earlier. In the case of the Barrentine poisoning, the poison was discovered before anyone in the family drank the tainted water.<sup>58</sup>

Following their initial hearing, Barrentine and Lee were never placed in jail because a mob of armed men hanged them near Caledonia, Mississippi. Before the two

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<sup>56</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 616.

<sup>57</sup> *New York Times*, May 10, 1891.

<sup>58</sup> *Bradford (PA) Era*, April 30, 1891, 1; *Washington (D.C.) Critic-Record*, April 30, 1891, evening edition.

men were lynched, they implicated Monroe Walters and Wesley Lee's mother.<sup>59</sup> When Monroe Walters was being transported from Birmingham, Alabama to Columbus, Mississippi to be tried for his part in the poisoning plans, twenty men boarded the train at Hudson station and took the prisoner from the officers and led Walters into the woods.<sup>60</sup> It was later reported that he was found hanging from a tree in the woods. On May 4, the mother of Wesley Lee was hanged from the same tree limb from which her son had been suspended about eight miles from Columbus.<sup>61</sup> The role of Wesley Lee's mother in the poisoning was never revealed in the press, but her son's implication of her involvement made her another target of the mob. She was not taken by the mob when her son or the other murder conspirators were taken, and the mob searched for her to hang her in a separate lynching from the first three men.

In early September 1893, Thomas Woodruff and five children became very ill in Monroe County, Mississippi near Quincy. Two of the children died, and after two weeks, the others were not expected to recover. While neighbors were caring for the ill, they were also becoming sick. After examining the well, they discovered three packages of "Rough on Rats" had been placed in the well.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Chillicothe (MO) Constitution*, May 12, 1891, evening edition, 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Richmond Dispatch*, May 3, 1891, 3; *Waukesha (WI) Journal*, May 9, 1891; *Wichita (KS) Daily Eagle*, May 3, 1891, morning edition, 6; *Omaha (NE) Sunday Bee*, May 3, 1891, morning edition, 1.

<sup>61</sup> *New York Times*, May 10, 1891.

<sup>62</sup> Ephraim S. Wells, a New Jersey druggist, developed "Rough on Rats" and began to market the product in 1881 with a great deal of advertising throughout the decade. His extensive advertising included trading cards, newspaper advertisements, and even a song extolling the benefits of "Rough on Rats." In his advertising, Wells claimed the product would combat almost all household pests. These may seem like extensive claims for a rodenticide, but "Rough on Rats" was almost entirely composed of arsenic, making it an effective poison for most circumstances. Not only was "Rough on Rats" a potentially lethal poison for humans, it was easily available. Regardless of whether these lynched women and men who were accused of using "Rough on Rats" to poison other individuals actually did use it or did not, it would have been an effective poison and finding it in a household was often seen as incriminating. *New York Times*, September 27, 1888. Library of Congress American Memory Collection; American 19th-century sheet music.

Ben Jackson's neighbors suspected him of placing "Rough on Rats" in the well. The previous fall, Jackson and Woodruff had an argument and when Jackson entered Woodruff's house "violently," his wife, "who was delicate from child-birth," was "so excited" she died a few hours later.<sup>63</sup> Jackson was required to appear before the circuit court that was in session with Woodruff testifying against him. This was believed to be Jackson's motivation for the poisoning.

After his arrest, Ben Jackson appeared before the inquest jury, but a group of masked men took him from the officers and hanged Jackson. The next day Mehaley Jackson, Ben's wife, and Lou Carter, Mehaley's mother, testified to the jury that they knew of Ben's plan to use the "Rough on Rats" to poison the well and implicated Rufus Broyles in the scheme. After the jury dismissed them, a mob hanged Jackson and Carter as members of the plot.<sup>64</sup>

Broyles had been accused of purchasing the three boxes of "Rough on Rats," but he had disappeared after the first lynching. He was found September 13 a few miles from the site of the poisoning, and the next morning his body was found hanging from a limb. The two men and two women who were lynched were all black, and although no arrests had been made by September 14, Judge Cayce, of the Circuit Court, "gave the Grand Jury a forcible and peremptory charge to ferret out the lynchers and return indictments against them."<sup>65</sup>

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Copyright deposits, 1870-1885; Repository: Library of Congress. Music Division; *New York Times*, May 24, 1887; Hagley Library of Wilmington, Delaware.

<sup>63</sup> *Laurens (SC) Advertiser*, September 19, 1893, 1.

<sup>64</sup> *Laurens (SC) Advertiser*, September 19, 1893, 1; *New York Sun*, September 15, 1893, 1

<sup>65</sup> *New York Sun*, September 15, 1893, 1. Despite the judge's desire to send members of the mob to trial, the outcome of his charge and efforts were not found in the newspaper reports.

In some poisoning cases, the women were only believed to be a member of a murder plot and not the ones who committed the murder, but among the following poisoning cases, the women were believed to be directly linked to the poisoning attempts. Historian Jacqueline Jones described the situation of working women in the late nineteenth-century South. “While white women of the laboring classes began to find work in textile factories, and unmarried white women of the middle classes took jobs in the emerging clerical sector, black women remained confined to traditional forms of task-oriented labor— agriculture work and domestic service.”<sup>66</sup> Evidence in Tera W. Hunter’s study of urban black female workers supported the situation Jones described, with “at least ninety-eight percent of all black female wage-earners in Atlanta” employed as domestics by 1880.<sup>67</sup> The nature of the work intimately linked black women to the workings of white households. With black women accountable for domestic tasks, fears of poisoning would easily be connected to the women responsible for preparing the food.

In February 1897, Joshua Kelly, who lived in Jeff, Madison County, Alabama, died following a meal and was believed to be a victim of poisoning, and in early May 1897, several other members of his family were poisoned but all recovered.<sup>68</sup> After a search of the Kelly home on May 8, a box of “Rough on Rats,” deemed “incriminating

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<sup>66</sup> Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 78.

<sup>67</sup> Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 50.

<sup>68</sup> There are several variations of his name in the accounts. Joshua Kelly is the most common, but his name was also printed as Joseph Kelly, Joseph O’Kelly, Joshua O. Kelly, or Joshua Kelley.



evidence, was found under the kitchen, and the poison was believed to have been added to the biscuits, which all of the six whites and eight blacks who were affected ate.”<sup>69</sup>

Suspicion rested on the black household servants. On May 11, Mollie Smith was captured as she was crossing the Tennessee border while Amanda Franks<sup>70</sup> was taken from her home. It was reported that Franks made a confession, and in the early morning of May 12, the two black women were lynched by a mob of twenty neighbors who suspected them of poisoning the Madison County family. Their bodies were found hanging by the road between Jeff and Huntsville.<sup>71</sup>

A sharp contrast was evident in the news accounts of the lynching. When a lynching was denounced, it was usually amid other newspaper columns that give a simple report of the events or portrayed the mob as orderly and confirmed the guilt of the suspected criminals. One of the *Sacramento Record-Union* stories reported that “the wretched girls were loud in their protestations of innocence, and their screams and prayers for mercy made the night one which their hardened tormentors will not soon forget.”<sup>72</sup> Another version of the events, had suggested Franks had made a confession, but in the *Record-Union*’s portrayal, the women were begging for clemency and claimed blamelessness. The title for the *Sumter Watchman and Southron*’s column identified the women as “Negro Girl Fiends.”<sup>73</sup> This villainization of the women extended beyond the standard assurance of culpability, defending the mob’s actions.

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<sup>69</sup> *Sacramento Record-Union*, May 13, 1897, morning edition, 1.

<sup>70</sup> Also identified as Mandy Franks in some accounts.

<sup>71</sup> *Saint Paul Globe*, May 13, 1897, morning edition, 1; *Paris (KY) Bourbon News*, May 14, 1897, 2; *New York Tribune*, May 13, 1897, 1; *North Platte (NE) Semi-Weekly Tribune*, May 14, 1897.

<sup>72</sup> *Sacramento Record-Union*, May 13, 1897, morning edition, 1.

<sup>73</sup> *Sumter [SC] Watchman and Southron*, May 19, 1897, 1.

Like the poisoning of the Kelly family, several individuals were affected by poisoned coffee in the Helmer household when a fifteen-year-old female black servant of W. R. Helmer, who lived twenty miles from Rayville, Louisiana, poisoned the family's coffee in March 1892. Even though several people drank the poisoned brew, she targeted a black man who also worked at the residence because she "became offended at [his] action." A desire for "revenge" led her to put "Rough on Rats" in his coffee, and the girl admitted she wanted to kill the man who had offended her, but she did not care about the effects the others would suffer. Approximately nine other individuals drank the poisoned coffee, and though they came close to death, all were expected to recover. While she was being brought to the jail at Rayville during the night of Friday, March 11, "a masked party" took the girl and hanged her by the road where she was found Saturday morning.<sup>74</sup>

In another case of poisoning, Eliza Woods was held responsible for the death of her white employer. On August 18, 1886, a mob removed Eliza Woods, a fifty-seven-year-old black woman, from the jail in Jackson, Tennessee where she was held on charges of poisoning Mrs. Jessie Wooten, her white employer, a few days before with "Rough on Rats."<sup>75</sup> Hearing the news that Wooten's stomach contained traces of arsenic, the main poison in "Rough on Rats," a search revealed a box of the rat poison and stolen jewelry and dresses at Woods' house.<sup>76</sup>

The mob stripped Woods, placed a noose around her neck, and demanded a confession. Two accounts reported that Woods "had a bad reputation in the

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<sup>74</sup> *Indiana County Gazette*, March 16, 1892, 8.

<sup>75</sup> *New York Times*, August 20, 1886; *Defiance (OH) Democrat*, August 26, 1886, 1.

<sup>76</sup> *Maysville (KY) Daily Evening Bulletin*, August 21, 1886, 1.

community.”<sup>77</sup> In light of her silence, another writer mused “either she had nothing to confess or was paralyzed with fear,” revealing this writer’s perspective that the reasons for the lynching were likely unfounded. Woods remained silent as the angry crowd pulled her naked body through the streets to a tree where she was hanged. While she was hanging, the mob pierced her body with bullets.<sup>78</sup>

*Saint Paul Globe*’s article headline noted that her “Sex Didn’t Save Her.”<sup>79</sup> The *Defiance Democrat* account claimed this was an “unusual sight for even a lynch-ruled section of a woman hanged by ‘unknown persons.’ ” Although it was rare to see women, even black women, lynched, it was believed that “the sentiment of this community is in sympathy with the act.”<sup>80</sup> A report suggested “a notable feature was the large number of negroes present, including a number of women. All of them indorsed the action of the mob. All of them feared her.” She was believed to have a “regular mania for poisoning people,” including children, her own children and others in the community.<sup>81</sup>

Two newspaper reports commented on the unusual nature of a woman being lynched. This was even connected to black female victims, noting the rarity with which they were lynched. Despite this, the majority of the local neighborhood supported the lynching, and the majority of the reports throughout the country echoed their rationalizations. Between 1882 and 1902, the lynching of these female African Americans was usually seen as a justified killing because mobs demanded a punishment

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<sup>77</sup> *Fort Worth (TX) Gazette*, August 20, 1886, 6.

<sup>78</sup> *Defiance (OH) Democrat*, August 26, 1886, 1.

<sup>79</sup> *Saint Paul Globe*, August 20, 1886, 1.

<sup>80</sup> *Defiance (OH) Democrat*, August 26, 1886, 1.

<sup>81</sup> *Maysville (KY) Daily Evening Bulletin*, August 21, 1886, 1; *Saint Paul Globe*, August 20, 1886, 1.

for crimes the women were suspected of committing. When viewed in connection to crimes of theft, arson, and murder, the communities did not see any reason to forgo lynching on account of a woman's sex because with any relation to such crimes, she would have already departed from the nature of her gender.

Even in the twenty-year period of this study, black female victims of mobs outnumbered the number of white women who were lynched by more than twice the number of victims. The majority of white women were connected to crimes or sexual immorality that reduced their estimation in the eyes of their communities, but black women were not beginning from the same perceived standard of womanhood. Instead, African American females, considered separately from white women, were not given the distinction of true women or ladies.<sup>82</sup>

Without the same initial levels of respect for black women rooted in racially motivated judgments, white mobs required less justification to lynch black women. Holding preconceived notions of the general immorality of black women, mobs might quickly suspect black women when they were searching for the parties responsible for a crime. Additionally, if a black woman had committed a crime, with the influence of these racial ideals, community members would have less motivation to refrain from mob action and allow the legal system to process the case.

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<sup>82</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I A Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), 27-61; Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 198-199; Jones, 78.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusion

When men or women in the late nineteenth-century United States committed crimes or did not abide by community mores, they could become targets of community correction. People could choose to participate in a variety of responses to maintain power distribution or enforce community values. Beyond interpersonal actions or legal reprisals, some neighbors would resort to mob violence. Much like beatings, tarring and feathering, and warnings to leave town, lynchings could be employed as a means of regulating the community. If they challenged the perceived social values, men or women could become targets of mob violence for alleged crimes, community-defined immorality, economic competition, or a variety of other unspoken motivators like racism.

The white and black women who became lynching victims in the last decades of the nineteenth century are the focus here. In some aspects of these lynchings, the experiences of white and black women were similar while some differences separated them. An examination of the similarities and differences in the motivations contributing to, the methods employed in, and the reaction to the lynchings highlights the variety of factors that influenced the complex interaction between gender, race, and public violence at the close of the nineteenth century.

Women who challenged the boundaries of their area's social norms faced potential reprisals. Many different women pushed against the commonly accepted gender roles or committed crimes that defied the established legal authorities, but within the unique circumstances of each community at a particular time, some women became

targets of mob violence. The most common explanation for the lynching of women was their connection to a murder, but within the contemporary records, other factors were cited that contributed to the lynching of these women. Of the women who died at the hands of mobs, the noted offenses of the white and black women fit within a few common categories for members of each race, but there was a distinction between the motivations for lynching white and black women.

In the cases of white women who were lynched in this period, the women were usually accused of murder or connected to someone who had committed murder. Of the experiences of the thirteen white women included in chapter two, only four of the women were not connected with a murder plot in some manner. A few women were suspected of committing a variety of crimes, and charges of general crimes were all one woman and her husband faced. Eight of the thirteen women were connected to some form of sexual immorality. They were either considered promiscuous, accused of adultery, or classified as prostitutes. Therefore, the majority of white women who were lynched were targets of mob violence because they were connected to a murder and/or were viewed as sexually immoral.

The justifications for the lynching of black women resemble those given for the lynching of white women. The majority of black women were believed to be connected to an attempted murder or murder. Of the twenty-eight black female lynching victims, fifteen were reportedly killed for their role in a murder plot. Four of the women were accused of arson, and three were charged with theft. One case does not fit neatly into any of these categories because the white community claimed she was lynched because of violating antimiscegenation laws and running a disreputable house while her son believed

removing economic competition motivated the lynching. This is the only case that might be connected to a black woman's sexual immorality because she was sharing a household with a white man. Otherwise, the rest of the black female lynching victims were connected to murder, arson, or theft.

The comparison of the motivations behind white and black women's lynchings reveals some similarities but also notable differences. The majority of the victims among both races were connected to murders, but whereas many white women who were lynched were perceived as sexually immoral, only one black woman's sexual behavior was noted in the lynching account. This highlights the different perceptions of and responses to black and white women's behavior more than speaking to a difference in sexual practices. While the white male community was concerned with regulating the sexual choices of white women, they were not concerned with similar things in connection with black women.

In general, white society already believed black women to be sexually immoral and did not expect them to conform to the sexual standards that were anticipated of white women.<sup>1</sup> The case of Charlotte Morris indicates where an exception to this pattern might emerge. Despite a different sexual standard for white men and women discouraging interracial sexual relationships, if a white man had sexual contact with a black woman, he was expected to not publicize the relationship. With Charlotte and Patrick Morris living together as husband and wife (regardless of the legality of their union), they challenged the standard behavior connected to interracial relationships. Based on this public

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I A Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), 27-61; Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 198-199; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 78.

interracial relationship, this case was the only one in this study in which the sexual behavior of a black woman was a noted factor.

Although white communities generally did not feel threatened by the sexual choices of black women, they did fear criminal actions like murder and arson. There was a particular paranoia connected to black men and women using poison. Although the lynchings that were connected to suspected poisoning cases do not confirm that African Americans more frequently utilized poison than members of other races did, there was a perception that black men and women were uniquely linked to poisoning.<sup>2</sup>

In the rhetoric connected to the lynchings, these criminal allegations were cited as the motivation for mob actions. Members of the community believed their use of mob violence could address specific issues with a just punishment. Mobs were often convinced that the accused parties were actually guilty, supporting their actions despite uncertain allegations. From an outsider's perspective some of the contemporary accounts challenged the mob's conclusions of guilt. Some of the evidence related to the crime did not extend beyond circumstantial factors. This was evident in cases where merely discovering a box of "Rough on Rats," a common pest solution, was enough to determine a black woman was guilty of poisoning a family. There may have been such outrage at an offense that the mob was desperate to avenge that they could act without certainty and definitely beyond the legal parameters.

Despite such inconsistencies in the mob's rationale and the unjust and illegal nature of their actions, if the reports from the mob participants and other local residents are believed, the members of the mob actually thought they were penalizing women who

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<sup>2</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 616.



were guilty of crimes or social offenses with justifiable punishments. This was illustrated in the cards that some of the mobs attached to the bodies of the lynching victims, warning, “this is the penalty for murder and rape.”<sup>3</sup> This message reveals that the lynchers believed lynching was a just punishment for the individuals and a way to prevent them from committing similar offenses.

Some of the mobs not only believed they were meting out justice in an appropriate manner, but they feared if they did not act, the cases of the accused criminals could be dismissed in the legal system. Even as the local law was becoming more reliable in the period, mobs continued to use this as a justification for lynching.<sup>4</sup> Some of the mobs reportedly believed the women would be freed from punishment by some technicality in the legal system. The incident surrounding the lynching of the McCray family was unique in revealing the interaction between mobs and the local authorities.

Believing that the legal investigation was being deliberately delayed so the three black prisoners could be taken to another location for a trial, a mob formed protesting what they believed to be an unnecessarily prolonged investigation. In response to the reassurances by several local leaders that the legal proceedings would continue in Carrollton, Mississippi, the crowd was temporarily placated. When it was determined that the women and man were not directly responsible for the murder, the crowd ignored the news and pleadings of the community leaders and lynched all three of the prisoners.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Hartford (KY) Herald*, August 17, 1898, 1

<sup>4</sup> William D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 132-133.

<sup>5</sup> *Houston Daily Post*, August 2, 1901, mailable morning edition, 3; *Berea (KY) Citizen*, August 8, 1901; *Sumter (SC) Watchman and Southron*, August 7, 1901; *Phoenix Arizona Republican*, August 9, 1901, morning edition, 1; *Monterey (VA) Highland Recorder*, August 9, 1901, 1; *Logan (OH) Hocking Sentinel*,

Despite the findings of the legal investigation, the mob was convinced that the three individuals deserved punishment for their role in the murder.

Lorilla Weaver's lynching provides another perspective of the interaction between the legal system and the lynch mob. Crowds gathered several times because they feared Weaver and her fellow conspirators might be moved to another location. After assuring the gathered citizens that there were no plans to move the prisoner, the authorities even promised a legal execution within the week. Despite the efforts of the local authorities, the mob chose not to wait for the execution to occur and lynched all the prisoners.<sup>6</sup>

It is possible that the mob's participants believed they were punishing guilty parties and distrusted the decision of the legal system. However, other mobs extended these feelings beyond correcting the wrongs of the trial system to mete out punishment before a verdict was ever determined in courts. An observer in the case of Grace Blanton criticized this practice because Blanton was lynched without a history of repeated crimes or any substantial evidence verifying her guilt.<sup>7</sup> Despite the lack of universal support for the actions, it was clear from the accounts that the mob's actors believed they were justified in their punishments.

In addition to reflecting a sense of fair dealing with the victims, the pinned cards also served as a notice for other individuals. If other men or women committed these crimes, they might meet a similar fate. With the reporting of the lynchings throughout the nation, the warning would extend beyond men and women who viewed the bodies

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August 8, 1901; *Minneapolis Journal*, August 2, 1901, evening edition, 16; *Richmond Times*, August 4, 1901, 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Hartford (KY) Herald*, August 17, 1898, 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Wichita (KS) Eagle*, May 10, 1887, morning edition, 1.

and heard accounts of the recent local lynching. Columns were also printed and circulated throughout many other communities in the nation, alerting other men and women of the potential dangers of mob violence.

The reports of lynchings throughout the country also allowed residents of other communities to read about the actions of the mobs. From these accounts, people were able to learn common components of lynchings that they could implement in future lynchings. In the lynching of the women in this period, there were similarities in the lynching methods for victims of both races. Of the thirteen cases of white female lynching victims, eight were hanged, three were shot, and two were burned. Among the twenty-eight black women lynched in this period, twenty were hanged, five were shot, two died in an explosion, and one was burned at the stake.

Between both the white and black victims, the majority of the women were hanged by mobs. The other killings still qualify as lynchings, but it appears that the participants in the mobs chose to follow the common methods of lynching. Hanging is the method that is most closely associated with lynching, and the mobs wanted to conform to the lynching ritual. This method of killing helped to identify the killing as a lynching, linking it in the eyes of the mob to a justified killing and a warning for others that this was an acceptable punishment in the eyes of many.

Beyond the patterns reflected in the composite experiences of these women, the case of the Kirkpatrick lynching emphasized the meaning mobs could attach to the techniques used to kill men and women. When a mob removed Puss and Isaac Kirkpatrick from their home, it was widely believed that Puss was the only one of the couple responsible for recent acts of arson. Even though the mob killed Isaac as well,

they shot him in the head and hanged Puss. It was theorized the mob killed Isaac to avoid detection, but regardless of the reason the mob chose to kill both of them, the decision to kill them in different ways reveals the importance attached to the lynching method. The mob wanted to punish Puss because they believed she was an arsonist. To convey this message and classify the killing as a lynching, they hanged her, and even though they killed Isaac, the different choice in method separated him from the goal of punishing the acts of arson.

In another case, the mob still viewed the killing as a lynching and a punishment for a woman's actions, but they chose to depart from the standard method of hanging. Instead of separating her from the crime, the difference in method reflected the mob's perception of the woman's crime. After Mary Hollenbeck was accused of murdering a young child and serving portions of her flesh at a local picnic, her neighbors considered the crime to be particularly heinous and decided to choose a tortuous method of death for Hollenbeck's lynching. They chained her to a stake and burned her alive because they believed the agony of her death should match the brutality of her crime.

The majority of lynching scholarship considers the actions of mobs comprised of white men attacking black men. In cases of larger mobs, there were often women and children who were present and participated in the lynchings to varying degrees. In the cases of these women's lynchings, the presence of African Americans and women was sometimes noted when women were lynched. The newspapers wanted their presence at the site to convey wider support for the lynching in the community, particularly if members of the same race and sex of the victim were present at the killing.

The case of Hollenbeck's lynching departs from the norm. The newspaper reports were not highlighting a few representative members of the community who were present at the lynching. Instead, Hollenbeck was a black woman who was lynched by a mob of her African American neighbors. The reports include no indication that white men or women were involved in the events. This case presents an atypical instance of mob violence in the late nineteenth-century South because a mob of African Americans lynched a black woman.

Among the other aspects of lynchings, rape has been linked frequently with the lynching of women in scholarship. In one of the earliest scholarly examinations of lynching, Frank Shay observed that sexual elements of the ritual surrounding the lynchings of women differed depending on the victim's race: "white women who have been lynched were not degraded before or after death. Negro women who attract the attention of lynchers are, regardless of age, invariably mob-raped before being executed."<sup>8</sup> He did not include support for his conclusion that black women were always raped as a part of the lynching ritual while their white counterparts were not.

Shay's observation was quoted within Crystal N. Feimster's book and Maria DeLongoria's dissertation, but neither author provided evidence that this occurred beyond a few cases.<sup>9</sup> The cases DeLongoria cited were beyond the chronological scope of this study, but within this period, the pattern does not withstand. There is little indication within these sources that women of either race were often raped as a part of

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<sup>8</sup> Frank Shay, *Judge Lynch: His First Hundred Years* (New York: Ives Washburn, 1938), 98.

<sup>9</sup> Crystal N. Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Maria DeLongoria, "'Stranger Fruit': The Lynching of Balck [sic] Women, The Cases of Rosa Richardson and Marie Scott" (PhD dissertation, University of Missouri-Columbia, 2006).

mob violence. This does not mean that rape or sexual assault did not occur, but the sources do not suggest that it took place frequently.

One case linked the white lynching victim with rape. During their trials, Cassie Boan's attackers were charged with her rape.<sup>10</sup> Her case is the only one of the thirty-four examined in this two-decade period that the newspaper accounts link to rape. Other sexual elements were identified in other lynchings. In these accounts, one black woman and one white woman were stripped by mobs. In 1886, a mob seized Eliza Woods because they believed she was responsible for fatally poisoning her white employer. After the mob stripped Woods of her clothing, they pulled her through Jackson, Tennessee until she was hanged.<sup>11</sup> When Mrs. Baker and her lover were lynched on suspicions that they were responsible for the death of Peter Baker, her husband, in 1892 near Fort Smith, Arkansas, they were both stripped and tied back to back before they were hanged.<sup>12</sup> The scarcity of evidence for sexual assaults in these cases challenges Shay's interpretation. Within the lynching accounts of thirty-four women, there is no indication in these sources that the black female victims were raped, and when there were sexual elements involved, it spanned the racial boundary and included both white and black women as targets.

Another theme in the literature concerning female lynching victims is explaining the lynching of women as a consequence of the actions of their male family members or

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<sup>10</sup> *Anderson (SC) Intelligencer*, April 18, 1900, 4

<sup>11</sup> *New York Times*, August 20, 1886; *Defiance (OH) Democrat*, August 26, 1886, 1; *Fort Worth (TX) Gazette*, August 20, 1886, 6.

<sup>12</sup> *Los Angeles Herald*, January 19, 1892, morning edition, 2; *Waco (TX) Daily News*, January 21, 1892, 4.

companions.<sup>13</sup> After a male family member had committed a crime, women were sometimes lynched only based on their connections to the male offenders. Of the thirty-four cases of female lynchings studied here, the majority were lynched with men. Four white women were the solitary victims of mobs, and six black women were lynched without men. However, these numbers do not reveal all that was involved in the lynchings.

Even though the majority of the women were lynched with males, the cases did not all involve women who were not linked to the crime and only killed because they were present when the men were lynched. Some of the female lynching victims were directly involved in the alleged crimes. Mrs. Crocker, a white woman, was lynched with her husband and son, but she had killed a man in their neighborhood. Black women like Ella Williams, Lorilla Weaver, and Lou Stevenson were also held responsible for arson and participation in murder plots. Although these women were lynched with men, they were not without their own share of alleged wrongdoing.

In the cases of Isaac and Puss Kirkpatrick and Patrick and Charlotte Morris, the women were the primary community offenders and attracted the interest of the lynch mob. As a result, both of their husbands were killed with them, reversing the commonly cited trend of women being lynched because of the wrongs of men. In other cases like those of John Hastings' daughter, Wesley Lee's mother, and Maheley Jackson and Lou Carter, these black women were lynched separately from the men who were primarily responsible for the crimes. Even though they were related to the men and may have not

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<sup>13</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 80; Kerry Segrave, *Lynchings of Women in the United States: The Recorded Cases, 1851-1946* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2010), 19.

had any involvement in the murders, mobs sought these women separately from men and lynched them on other days. The men may have been the impetus for generating the lynching fervor, but these four women were lynched on different days than the men to which they were connected.

In an additional category of scenarios, other individuals, including men, were present when the mob gathered their victims, but the mob chose to spare some men or women while lynching other female victims they believed had been involved in the alleged offenses. These cases included the lynching of Rachel Powell and Mrs. Cuddihee, both white women, and Mary Motlow, who was black. Rachel Powell and her husband, Wesley Powell, were under investigation for adultery, and while they were both outside their home, members of the mob shot Rachel and did not kill Wesley, even though he was able to identify several members of the mob in the bright moonlight, suggesting the mob was able to differentiate between Rachel and Wesley.

When the Cuddihees were picked up by a mob, Mrs. Cuddihee's brother-in-law was present and taken to the lynching site. However, the mob released him because he was able to convince them that he had not been aware that they were abusing the young girl the Cuddihees had recently adopted. The mob only lynched Mr. and Mrs. Cuddihee because they were both held responsible for the child abuse, unlike Mrs. Cuddihee's brother-in-law who they did not believe was guilty.

In the situation of Mary Motlow, she was suspected of theft and arson and was lynched with other members of her family who were accused of crimes. The mob refrained from lynching two of the family members who were present at the house when



they took Motlow and her family. Despite being present and connected to the family of suspected criminals, these individuals were spared death at the hand of the mob.

In all of these cases, the mobs showed a conscious choice to lynch women and not lynch other men who were nearby and related to the lynching victims. Although these events do not challenge the conclusion that women were primarily lynched with men, further analysis of the details surrounding the cases suggests that other factors complicated the interaction between the men, women, and mob actions. In some cases, women were targeted by mobs on suspicions of the women's actions which sometimes led to other men being lynched, or in a reversal of the norm, men were pardoned by the mob while women were lynched.

Mirroring these complexities, the reactions to the lynching of women varied greatly. Sometimes the general responses to the lynchings were based on the fact that a woman was lynched, but other critiques responded to the general practice of lynching without as much concern for the sex of the victims. Choices made by the mobs suggest how they anticipated the community to respond. Some men tried to conceal their identity with masks and avoided witnesses. Several other mobs chose to function without masks or other efforts to protect their identities. With lynch parties acting within local communities, it is hard to imagine that no one could have been identified within the mobs.

The local authorities usually dismissed the cases of these lynchings, and there was little chance of prosecuting the participants in the mob. The most common ruling was death at the hands of persons unknown, leading to no further legal efforts to discover who was responsible for the lynching. In a few instances, there was a challenge to discover

the lynchings like those issued after the lynchings of Peb Falls and the McCray family. There were no further reports on these cases, leading to an assumption that members of the mob were never prosecuted. Following Rachel Powell's lynching, her husband identified several members of the mob, and they were arrested, but reports were not found of the outcome of the trials. Even rarer were the cases when individuals were actually tried for the lynchings. When some of the men charged with Cassie Boan's killing were tried, they were pronounced guilty with a recommendation for mercy, reducing their sentence from capital punishment to life sentences of hard labor. Some of the press responses were outraged at the leniency in the punishment.<sup>14</sup>

Within the newspaper accounts, there were mixed reactions with each case. Some expressed a great deal of outrage at the lynchings and others provided little commentary on the events. The response was not uniform along regional lines. Some southern papers would present a lynching as a justified punishment for a fiendish crime, but other newspapers in the South would critique the actions of the lynchers and mourn the failure of true justice. Similar diverse responses were evident in northern newspaper accounts. Additionally, the same newspaper might respond differently depending on the lynching case. Even within a two-decade period, the same publication might view a lynching as honorable and see the mob as acting responsibly at one point and a few years later condemn a similar lynching. Accounts that supported lynching actions would include assurances that the mob had determined the guilt of the lynching victims, had acted in an orderly manner, and had not enjoyed the burden they had shouldered. Contrasting reports identified the actions of the lynching parties as cowardly, lacking just cause, and a

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<sup>14</sup> *Atlanta (GA) Constitution*, April 13, 1900, 8; *Anderson (SC) Intelligencer*, April 18, 1900, 4.

tragedy. Newspapers operated by African Americans often contained outspoken reports against the practice of lynching like those in the *Richmond Planet*. The variety of responses highlights the lack of universal support for the practice of lynching.

These distinct perspectives of the contemporary newspaper articles provide a great deal of information about the lynching of women in the late nineteenth century. Returning to the original records of the lynchings allowed new cases of female victims of lynchings to be involved in the study, expanding the understanding of the interaction between sex, race, and mob violence during the period. In some aspects of these lynchings, the treatments of white and black women were alike despite their different racial identities. The majority of victims from both races were hanged, accused of or connected to someone who was suspected of murder, and the lynchings of white and black women were met with mixed responses in the local communities and press.

Despite the presence of some correspondences, the events surrounding the lynching of white and black women also differed along racial boundaries. With the deaths of more black women than white women at the hands of mobs, an evident racial component was involved in the lynchings that made black women more likely to become victims of mob violence than white women. Black women also were charged with arson and poisoning while these allegations were never attached to white victims. Some of the lynchings of white women occurred outside of southern states, but all the black victims were killed in the South. Although many of these white women were considered to be sexually immoral, sexual conduct was only connected to one black woman because she was involved in an interracial relationship. These similarities and differences in the motivations contributing to, the methods employed in, and the reaction to the lynching of

white and black women contribute to the complex portrait of the interaction between gender, race, and public violence at the close of the nineteenth century.

## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Table A.1. White and Black Female Lynching Victims, 1882-1902

Date	First Name	Last Name	Race	State	Allegation
09/29/1882	Mary	Sullivan	W	KY	Murder
01/18/1884	Mrs. Mike	Cuddihee	W	CO	Murder
10/20/1884	Jane	Wade	W	AL	Conspiracy to murder
03/16/1885	Eliza	Taylor	W	NE	Conspiracy to murder
09/28/1885	Mrs. Jerry	Finch	B	NC	Conspiracy to murder
08/18/1886	Eliza	Woods	B	TN	Poisoning
07/26/1886	Mary	Hollenbeck	B	GA	Murder
05/05/1887	Grace	Blanton	B	LA	Theft
04/19/1888	Puss	Kirkpatrick	B	TN	Arson
01/??/1889	Unidentified		W	TN	Conspiracy to murder
02/15/1889	Mrs. John	Puckett	W; NA	OK	Unspecified crimes
05/09/1891	Mother of Wesley	Lee	B	MS	Poisoning
08/06/1891	Ella	Williams	B	AL	Arson
08/06/1891	Eliza	Lowe	B	AL	Arson
09/27/1891	Lou	Stevenson	B	MS	Conspiracy to murder
01/18/1892	Mrs. Peter	Baker	W	AR	Conspiracy to murder
03/11/1892	Unidentified		B	LA	Poisoning
10/??/1892	Daughter of John	Hastings	B	LA	Family of accused murderer
09/??/1893	Mehaley	Jackson	B	MS	Poisoning
09/??/1893	Lou	Carter	B	MS	Poisoning
09/14/1893	Ellen	Fant	B	AL	Arson
11/04/1893	Mary	Motlow	B	TN	Theft
04/20/1895	Martha	Greene	B	AL	Murder
04/20/1895	Alice	Greene	B	AL	Murder

*(Table A.1 continued)*

Date	First Name	Last Name	Race	State	Allegation
04/20/1895	Mary	Deane	B	AL	Murder
05/25/1895	Mrs. John	Crocker	W	TX	Murder
05/29/1895	Molly	Smith	W	KY	Association with accused murderer
07/20/1895	Mrs. Abe	Phillips	B	TX	Family of accused murderer
07/20/1895	Hannah	Phillips	B	TX	Family of accused murderer
12/28/1895	Mrs. Thomas	West	W	KY	Sexual immorality
07/20/1895	Charlotte	Morris	B	LA	Miscegenation
07/20/1895	Amanda	Franks	B	AL	Poisoning
05/12/1897	Mollie	Smith	B	AL	Poisoning
09/29/1897	Peb	Falls	W	VA	Sexual immorality
08/??/1898	Lorilla	Weaver	B	AR	Conspiracy to murder
03/20/1900	Cassie	Boan	W	SC	Sexual immorality
03/16/1901	Ballie	Crutchfield	B	TN	Theft
08/01/1901	Betsy	McCray	B	MS	Conspiracy to murder
08/01/1901	Ida	McCray	B	MS	Conspiracy to murder
11/24/1901	Rachel	Powell	W	SC	Sexual immorality
12/26/1902	Mrs. Oliver	Wideman	B	SC	Murder

W indicates victim was white.

B indicates the victim was black.

NA indicates the victim was Native American.

APPENDIX B

Table B.1. White Female Lynching Victims, 1882-1902

Date	First Name	Last Name	Race	State	Allegation
09/29/1882	Mary	Sullivan	W	KY	Murder
01/18/1884	Mrs. Mike	Cuddihee	W	CO	Murder
10/20/1884	Jane	Wade	W	AL	Conspiracy to murder
03/16/1885	Eliza	Taylor	W	NE	Conspiracy to murder
01/??/1889	Unidentified		W	TN	Conspiracy to murder
02/15/1889	Mrs. John	Puckett	W; NA	OK	Unspecified crimes
01/18/1892	Mrs. Peter	Baker	W	AR	Conspiracy to murder
05/25/1895	Mrs. John	Crocker	W	TX	Murder
05/29/1895	Molly	Smith	W	KY	Association with accused murderer
12/28/1895	Mrs. Thomas	West	W	KY	Sexual immorality
09/29/1897	Peb	Falls	W	VA	Sexual immorality
03/20/1900	Cassie	Boan	W	SC	Sexual immorality
11/24/1901	Rachel	Powell	W	SC	Sexual immorality

W indicates victim was white.

NA indicates the victim was of Native American descent.



APPENDIX C

Table C.1. Black Female Lynching Victims, 1882-1902

Date	First Name	Last Name	Race	State	Allegation
09/28/1885	Mrs. Jerry	Finch	B	NC	Conspiracy to murder
08/18/1886	Eliza	Woods	B	TN	Poisoning
07/26/1886	Mary	Hollenbeck	B	GA	Murder
05/05/1887	Grace	Blanton	B	LA	Theft
04/19/1888	Puss	Kirkpatrick	B	TN	Arson
05/09/1891	Mother of Wesley	Lee	B	MS	Poisoning
08/06/1891	Ella	Williams	B	AL	Arson
08/06/1891	Eliza	Lowe	B	AL	Arson
09/27/1891	Lou	Stevenson	B	MS	Conspiracy to murder
03/11/1892	Unidentified		B	LA	Poisoning
10/??/1892	Daughter of John	Hastings	B	LA	Family of accused murderer
09/??/1893	Mehaley	Jackson	B	MS	Poisoning
09/??/1893	Lou	Carter	B	MS	Poisoning
09/14/1893	Ellen	Fant	B	AL	Arson
11/04/1893	Mary	Motlow	B	TN	Theft
04/20/1895	Martha	Greene	B	AL	Murder
04/20/1895	Alice	Greene	B	AL	Murder
04/20/1895	Mary	Deane	B	AL	Murder
07/20/1895	Mrs. Abe	Phillips	B	TX	Family of accused murderer
07/20/1895	Hannah	Phillips	B	TX	Family of accused murderer
07/20/1895	Charlotte	Morris	B	LA	Miscegenation
07/20/1895	Amanda	Franks	B	AL	Poisoning
05/12/1897	Mollie	Smith	B	AL	Poisoning
08/??/1898	Lorilla	Weaver	B	AR	Conspiracy to murder
03/16/1901	Ballie	Crutchfield	B	TN	Theft

*(Table C.1 continued)*

Date	First Name	Last Name	Race	State	Allegation
08/01/1901	Betsy	McCray	B	MS	Conspiracy to murder
08/01/1901	Ida	McCray	B	MS	Conspiracy to murder
12/26/1902	Mrs. Oliver	Wideman	B	SC	Murder

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