DANGEROUS MEMORIES: LYNCHING AND THE U.S. LITERARY IMAGINATION

by

ANNE P. RICE

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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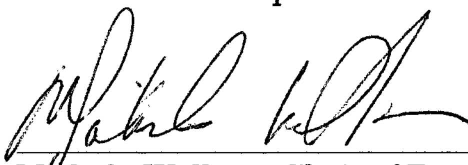
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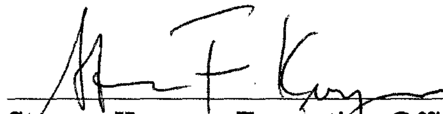
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Abstract

DANGEROUS MEMORIES: LYNCHING AND THE U.S. LITERARY IMAGINATION

by

Anne P. Rice

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The terrorization of African Americans through lynching was a national cultural trauma producing a struggle over the meaning of suffering, victimization and moral responsibility. The lesson you were meant to learn from white supremacy and terror powerfully affected how you remembered lynching. My dissertation asks who remembered (and did not remember) what about lynching and how these habits of memory influenced literary and visual representations. I consider the impact of race, gender, class, and sexuality on how lynching was textualized and performed, avoided and blocked. While much recent scholarship has concentrated on the visual technologies of lynching, lynching was also marked by concealment and silence, by strategic forgetting and disappearing of the bodies of the dead.

Memories of lynching were dangerous. Violent memories threatened white subjectivity, producing a structure of denial and disavowal that endangered African American lives. My dissertation considers the work of writers and filmmakers deeply touched by lynching or mob terror. Each representation (what we are used to thinking of as "fictional") was based

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upon or inspired by actual encounters with lynching—through personal witnessing or through membership in a targeted group deeply affected by a notorious event. They used their narratives to control and make sense of such memories, which often could be traced to things seen and heard in childhood. They seek control through a range of mechanisms, from the narratives of evasion, omission and racial myopia of Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren to the militant protest and mourning of Angelina Weld Grimke. Writers like William Faulkner return compulsively to lynching seeking to rehabilitate it. Other writers such as Erskine Caldwell and Lillian Smith demand public recognition of these memories in search of atonement and change. Fritz Lang's cinematic representation of a lynching in *Fury* shines a searchlight on a town's collective decision to forget, convinced that there will be no repercussions. Each of these representations offers insight into how we continue to live race here in the United States and in our relations with the world.

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Chapter One: How We Remember Lynching

> The pictures from Abu Ghraib are trophy shots. The American soldiers included in them look exactly as if they were standing next to a gutted buck or a 10-foot marlin. That incongruity is not the least striking aspect of the pictures. The first shot I saw, of Specialist Charles A. Graner and Pfc. Lynndie R. England flashing thumbs up behind a pile of their naked victims was so jarring that for a few seconds I took it for a montage. When I registered what I was seeing, I was reminded of something. There was something familiar about that jaunty insouciance, that unabashed triumph at having inflicted misery upon other humans. And then I remembered: the last time I had seen that conjunction of elements was in the photographs of lynchings.
>
> Luc Sante, "Tourists and Torturers" (2004)

> If there is something comparable to what these pictures show it would be some of the photographs of black victims of lynching taken between the 1880's and 1930's, which show Americans grinning beneath the naked mutilated body of a black man or woman hanging behind them from a tree. The lynching photographs were souvenirs of a collective action whose participants felt perfectly justified in what they had done. So are the pictures from Abu Ghraib.
>
> Susan Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others" (2004)

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How We Remember

In his recent book, *Legacies of Lynching*, Jonathan Markowitz explores the way lynching continues to pervade our collective memory, evolving from concrete and literal spectacles of white supremacist violence to one of the most vivid symbols of race oppression and a continuing metaphor for racial relations in the United States. In his study, for instance, Markowitz refers to Clarence Thomas's use of lynching as a metaphor for a contemporary political drama. Similarly Markowitz cites the cases of Susan Smith and Charles Stuart who manipulated racial stereotypes used to justify lynchings in the past to invoke racist hysteria as a screen for their own killing of family members. [1] On the other hand, the link Sontag and Sante draw between the two groups of photographs is less symbolic than structural. They see the photographs as partaking in the same action, the unabashed exhibitionism of racially motivated torture, in the latter instance translated to an international setting. The lynching photos and the Abu Ghraib photos, in capturing the joy of wielding absolute power over abject and dehumanized victims, reveal something we are not meant to see about ourselves as U.S. citizens—and as

[1] In 1989, Stuart provoked a media frenzy with his story of a black man jumping into his car in a racially mixed Boston neighborhood, then shooting him and killing his wife and unborn child. Three months later, after his brother admitted helping stage the crime as an insurance scam, Stuart jumped to his death in Boston Harbor. In 1994, Smith ignited a national manhunt for a black male in the carjacking, kidnapping and subsequent drowning of her two boys in Union, South Carolina. Nine days later Smith confessed to the crime, for which she received life imprisonment. The media's acceptance "at face value the claim that the black man was the culprit" shows the persistence of lynching's narrative legacy (85).

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human beings. As Sontag points out, "the horror of what is shown in the photographs cannot be separated from the horror that the photographs were taken—with the perpetrators posing, gloating, over their helpless captives" (25).

The dialectic between memory and forgetting that characterizes public commemoration of the past has been especially fraught when it comes to the U.S. lynching habit. One reason they were immediately invoked in relation to the Abu Ghraib images is that the lynching photographs reemerged into the cultural imaginary with force just a few years earlier, in a widely-publicized exhibit that toured the country. This exhibit served to unsettle the narrative of American innocence and progress that dominant U.S. culture prefers to tell about itself. The torture photographs from Abu Ghraib emerged with even greater force—atavistic, terrible, almost unbelievable. As Sontag says, "people do these things to other people." Rape, murder, humiliation, and torture are practices as old as love. Like others who do these things, U.S. soldiers hurt people they identify as deserving of humiliation and suffering or as belonging to "an inferior race or religion" (25). These men and women—as with the mobs in the lynching photographs--betray no sense of doing anything wrong, seem, rather, to enjoy what they are doing, to enjoy being photographed and to enjoy circulating the photographs among friends.

Scholars have paid a great deal of attention recently to the collection of lynching photography displayed by James Allen in his exhibit at New York's Roth Horowitz Gallery in December 2000 and the accompanying book entitled

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Without Sanctuary.[2] The viewing of such photography raises questions about the ethics of looking and the danger of voyeurism, of reproducing the original pleasures of the visual consumption of the black body in pain. Yet it also raises the ethics of not looking, of choosing not to acknowledge or take responsibility for what is plainly before one's eyes. Shawn Michele Smith argues that these "photographs present a spectacle of whiteness," representing "a gruesome ritual of white identification that many white scholars, like myself, would, perhaps, rather not see." Given white power's historic "invisibility," however, Smith insists that "*looking* at whiteness, making bodies bear the burden of the gaze" constitutes "an important critical task" (118).[3] In her chapter on lynching photography in *Photography on the Color Line*, Smith therefore illustrates her text with cropped close-ups of the pictures and detailed analyses that force her reader to focus intently on these images of white bodies committing torture.

Smith's intervention represents a kind of mourning, a movement toward recognition of white depravity that is the baseline for working through

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[2] The exhibit subsequently moved to the New York Historical Society, where it stayed for a number of months. After a tour around the country, it was housed in Atlanta at Emory University, where a conference on lynching drawing scholars from around the country was held October 2002. Allen has since removed the exhibit from its home at Emory. At time of writing it is currently on display in Detroit.

[3] In the Summer 2002 issue of *Emory Magazine*, Paige P. Parvin explains that "one oft-cited reason from mounting the 'Without Sanctuary' exhibition" at Emory University in Atlanta was that "much like the Nazi Holocaust documentation, the lynching photographs provide a visual record of wrongs that cannot be denied" 15 Apr. 2005. <http://www.emory.edu/EMORY_ MAGAZINE/summer2002/without_sanctuary.html>.

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the national trauma of lynching. Yet the question lingers: in using these photographs as evidence, what exactly does Smith's reading produce? In her discussion of one of the collection's most arresting artifacts—a photograph of a group of men posing with the charred corpse of Jesse Washington that bears a handwritten message reading "This is the barbecue we had last night. My picture is to the left with a cross over it. Your son [e] Joe"—Smith assumes that Joe addresses himself to his mother, marking his presence in the image for her to see.[4] But where is the textual evidence for this? Would it not be equally plausible for the young man to send this image of white masculine solidarity home to his father? Does Smith, as a white female scholar, establish a guilty identification by imagining herself as consumer, producing a reading that may obscure the gender dynamics of this long ago transaction?

Cultural historian Marita Sturken invites us to see camera images "as technologies of memory, mechanisms through which we can construct the past and situate it in the present. Such images have the capacity to create, interfere with, and trouble the memories we hold as individuals and as a nation. They can lend shape to historical and personal stories, often providing material 'evidence' on which claims are based" ("Reenactment"

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[4] Smith writes: "By sending the postcard, Joe perhaps demonstrates to his mother how he participates in upholding the mythology of pure white womanhood that fueled so many lynchings; he 'protects' white womanhood, he 'defends' his mother. . . . Joe looks directly out at the camera, perhaps anticipating the eyes of his mother" (122). Smith continues, "As his mother looks at Joe, the corpse will hang between them. . . . The gap of space and time that separates white mother and son will be sutured over the dead body of an African American man; sentimental white familial bonds will be reinforced through black death" (125).

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66). Clearly, these photographs and the events they record work as sites of white identification (and as Elizabeth Alexander argues, of black identification as well), but does mere scrutiny get us past Smith's own—or any viewer's—anguished investment in them today to a greater understanding of racial formation during the Jim Crow era and its pernicious and continuing influence on contemporary racial attitudes? At what point does a gaze linger too long and lose its focus?

In "Looking at War," Sontag insists "the problem is not that people remember through photographs, but that they remember only the photographs," eclipsing other forms "of understanding—and remembering. The concentration camps—that is, the photographs taken when the camps were liberated, in 1945—are most of what people associate with Nazism and the miseries of the Second World War. Hideous deaths (by genocide, starvation, and epidemic) are most of what people retain of the clutch of iniquities and failures that have taken place in postcolonial Africa." Although "harrowing photographs" retain "their power to shock," they "don't help us much to understand. Narratives can make us understand" (94).[5] Perhaps this is one reason the Bush administration, which had redefined "torture" at the war's outset insisted that this word not be applied to what we see in the photographs emerging from Abu Ghraib, insisted in the subsequent trials of

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[5] "Looking at War" appeared in the *New Yorker* in 2001 and was incorporated into Sontag's book-length consideration of the issue: *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2002).

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these soldiers on a narrative of individual aberration rather than institutional perversions.

Words matter. History—of the losers as well as the victors—matters. Is it fair or even valid to compare the cultures behind the photographs at Abu Ghraib and behind photographs of lynching? The geopolitical "War on Terror" of the twenty-first century is separated by vast differences in time and space from domestic terrorization of African Americans at the dawn of the last century. As David Kazanjian and David Eng remind us, however, "reliving an era is to bring the past to memory. It is to induce actively a tension between the past and the present, between the dead and the living. In this manner, [one] establishes a continuing dialogue with loss and its remains—a flash of emergence, an instant of emergency, and most important a moment of production" (1).[6] The flash of emergence of the lynching photograph in these images from Abu Ghraib has much to tell us of what remains within collective memory from these earlier losses and crimes.

This dissertation grows from my own engagement with the Without Sanctuary exhibit, which I stood in line for almost four hours to see on a cold winter's day in New York City in 2000. Once I entered, I was struck by the way the largely white crowd seemed to be consuming these images—a few with voyeuristic relish, some inattentively chatting of other things, others thronging the collector and asking for his signature on the flyleaf of their

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[6] Kazanjian and Eng refer, of course, to Walter Benjamin's famous pronouncement in "Theses on the Philosophy of History" that "to articulate the past historically…means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (255).

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books. Little context was offered (although this was rectified when the exhibit moved to its next venue, The New York Historical Society), and the placement of the images in an art gallery seemed to invite this kind of disturbing response. I thought that these images of silencing and abjection could not be all that remained of these events, that people must have been writing narratives and poetry and testimony and protest—supplying words for the people in the images.

Of course, I knew already from taking Michele Wallace's course at the C.U.N.Y. Graduate Center (entitled "Passing, Lynching, and Jim Crow") about the work of W.E.B. DuBois and Ida B. Wells and Walter White. I knew about modern-day evocations of lynching by authors such as Bebe Moore Campbell and John Edgar Wideman and filmmakers such as John Singleton in *Rosewood*. As I put my mind to it, I realized that most African American authors I admired had written about lynching—a fact confirmed by Trudier Harris's groundbreaking study, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynchings and Burning Rituals* (1984). Still, I suspected that this might be the tip of the iceberg. My journey to the archive in search of words about lynching convinced me that lynching's cultural impact, reaching far beyond the actual recorded number of victims, cannot be overestimated. During the lynching era, U.S. culture was literally saturated with narratives and representations of lynching. People—both black and white—wrote constantly, often compulsively about lynching. If as literary and cultural historians Grace Hale, Jackie Goldsby, and Amy Wood argue, changing visual technologies had an

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enormous influence on what the editors of the *Crisis* termed "the lynching industry," it is in words—in the stories and poetry and journalism—that memories of these changing practices were forged and encoded.[7]

In the anthology that flowed from my research, *Witnessing Lynching: American Writers Respond*, I gathered together anti-lynching poetry, journalism and fiction that told a story very different from the narrative of white mastery and domination the lynching photographs would suggest. From the beginning, African American writers used words as weapons in their war to end lynching. They used words to commemorate their losses, to insist on the presence of African American suffering and survival in the life of the nation. They used words to console each other and to provoke shame in those who ignored their plight. They used words above all to proclaim their resistance to oppression, to insist on their refusal to be silenced, to combat the words of white supremacist propaganda that threatened to drown them out and to extinguish their subjectivity.[8]

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[7] See Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940.* New York: Pantheon, 1998: Jacqueline Goldsby, "The High Tech and Low Tech of It: The Meaning of Lynching and the Death of Emmett Till," *The Yale Journal of Criticism.* 9.2 (1996): 245-282; and Amy Wood, *Spectacles of Suffering: Witnessing Lynching in the New South, 1880-1930.* Diss. Emory University, 2002.

[8] This is, of course, not to imply that African American response to lynching was confined solely to the word. Consideration of the rich range of responses in music, visual arts, and material culture lies beyond the scope of this dissertation. See Apel, *Imagery of Lynching*; Michele Wallace, Foreword. *Witnessing Lynching* (xv); *Alone in a Crowd: Prints of the 1930s-40s by African American Artists.* American Federation of the Arts: 1993; and Adam Gussow,

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Lynching was a national cultural trauma. It produced a struggle over meaning in literature in which characterizations of suffering, victimization, and moral responsibility were debated. These literary representations also participated in a larger crisis of memory in the post-Reconstruction United States. The cultural historian Grace Hale views lynching as central to the formation of U.S. post-Reconstruction national identity. North and South unified around a definition of "whiteness" that was founded in a plantation mythology of slavery as a benevolent institution and that was bolstered by scientific racism's narrative of racial degeneration following emancipation. While propaganda and nostalgia in the press and popular culture screened slavery's traumatic past and rationalized its brutal after-effects, the struggle against lynching operated as a form of counter-memory testifying to African American suffering and drawing on centuries of resistance to white violence. Thus, says sociologist Ron Eyerman, a "distinct gap emerged between the collective memory of a reconstructed minority group and the equally reconstructed dominant group" that "controlled the resources and had the power to fashion public memory" (17). The cross-racial wounding and memory disturbances produced by lynching can only be understood in light of this gap.

As Markowitz points out, "collective memory is a tricky thing to pin down. It is re-generated and re-created constantly" (xxix). If "collective memories of lynching have played an important role in a process of national

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Seems Like Murder in Here: Southern Violence and the Blues Tradition. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002.

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racial formation," it is important to identify the different collectivities from which these memories flow, to understand that the culture of segregation produced very different technologies of memory depending on the lesson you were meant to learn from white supremacy and terror (Markowitz xix-xx). Perhaps the most striking lesson I learned on my journeys through the archives was how many of the literary and poetic (what we are used to thinking of as "fictional") representations of lynching were based upon or inspired by actual encounters with lynching—through personal witnessing or through membership in a targeted group deeply affected by a notorious event. I realized the extent to which literature was being used to control and make sense of these dangerous memories—and how often these memories could be traced to things seen and heard in the formative and vulnerable years of childhood.

In her pathbreaking essay, "Can You Be BLACK and Look at This? Reading the Rodney King Video(s)," Elizabeth Alexander poses the question of what "black people say to each other to describe their relationship to their racial group when that relationship is crucially forged by incidents of physical and psychic violence [aimed at producing] the 'fact' of abject blackness?" (91). From slavery, through lynching, and on to the beating of Rodney King, Alexander maintains, African American survival and group affiliation has often depended on witnessing unbearable sights and finding a way to articulate the unspeakable to each other—to engage productively, in other words, with what remains. I would like to turn Alexander's question around to consider

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what white people say and leave unsaid about their relationship to a racial group defined by mastery, often through physical and psychic violence against others. If blackness requires looking at and talking about such violence, what habits of seeing and not seeing, of remembering and forgetting, of speaking and remaining silent does whiteness require? This is not to say, of course, that an essential "whiteness" exists any more than an essential "blackness" does. What interests me are the strategies, reflexes, and habits of mind through which one learns to identify as "white" at certain historical moments and in specific settings and that structure the way one views and remembers the world.

Whereas my anthology concentrated on the making of a counternarrative about lynching, in this dissertation I probe the ways in which representations of lynching were used to control and to screen dangerous memories of lynching—to forge collective strategies of denial and narratives of evasion and disavowal that "look" at lynching, then deny it, or turn aside. In defining a "politics of mourning," Eng and Kazanjian impute to loss a creative rather than negative quality: "We might say that as soon as the question 'What is lost?' is posed, it invariably slips into the question 'What remains?' That is, loss is inseparable from what remains, for what is lost is known only by what remains of it, by how these remains are produced, read and sustained" (2). Building on the important work of Hale, Goldsby, Wood, and Markowitz on the ways in which the spectacle of lynching worked to consolidate the structure of segregation and the meanings of "whiteness," I

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argue that what remains to us includes the many ways in which we refuse to look at lynching and to begin the work of mourning this part of our past.

As a technology of terror, lynching drew much of its power from its visibility. Recent scholarship has paid a great deal of attention to lynching as a visual phenomenon, an object lesson in white power witnessed firsthand by thousands and experienced vicariously by many thousands more who viewed such photographs and saw lynching come to life on the screen in *Birth of a Nation*.[9] Spectacle lynchings proclaimed white power over southern space through the torture and display of African American bodies, which murderers often left hanging for days. Choosing their "execution sites for explicitly symbolic reasons," mass mobs usually killed the victim at the scene of the alleged crime, but when this was not feasible looked for a site "that conveyed their rage unambiguously," such as a tree "used in previous lynchings" or a place near a black church or in a black neighborhood. "Whenever possible," notes Fitzhugh Brundage, "an easily accessible and highly visible location was chosen" (*Lynching* 41).[10] Characterizing mass spectacle lynchings as human sacrifice, Orlando Patterson describes the selection of the site as "a decision loaded with religio-political symbolism" (205). By far the most

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[9] See for example, Shawn Michele Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B DuBois, Race and Visual Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2004; Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness*; Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2004.

[10] The mob that murdered Henry Davis in Cuthbert, Georgia, on August 9, 1885, for example, selected a bridge over a railroad track to serve as a gallows so that the dangling body would attract the attention of passengers each time a train stopped to swing the body out of the way (Brundage, *Lynching* 41).

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popular site was a tree, calling to mind the cross of Christ for both oppressors and victims. Other popular sites included bridges, "crossroads, railroad crossings, the border between two states, and rivers and ponds," each a "symbol of transition, of crossing from one state, period, or form to another, and hence a site for the most sacred and powerful rituals" (206, 207).

Despite this obsession with visibility and place, however, lynching as material practice and historical event was also marked by absences, concealment and silence, by strategic forgetting and disappearing of the bodies of the dead. Both Patterson and Brundage are careful to note, of course, that most lynchings were not mass-attended spectacular sacrificial rituals. Certainly, as lynching declined in public esteem, mobs chose the site of lynchings in far-off, clandestine places. Even when most visually dramatic and culturally visible, as in the widely publicized spectacles, lynching paradoxically worked to deny the power of the visual. Concurrent with the mob's power to obliterate the black body was its power to erase all official memory of its crimes. For this reason, Bruce Baker calls lynching "a self-effacing event. First it silenced an alleged offender; then the anonymity of the mob and silence of local public discourse muted any attempt to name the lynching as a crime and to exact justice." This "effect was amplified" when "whites exercised nearly complete control over public discourse for several decades after the lynchings" (335-336).

Even when the lynching itself was officially recorded, the murderers overwhelmingly remained "persons unknown," and rare public inquiries and

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even rarer trials became theatrical performances designed to assuage northern opinion while reasserting southern defiance and control. On a national level, Congress's repeated repudiation of anti-lynching measures (often through filibusters of southern lawmakers that constituted yet another form of silencing) signaled its unwillingness to protect potential victims and its official refusal to acknowledge and commemorate those who died. Across the country, the U.S. landscape mirrored this denial of lynching: at the same time that states that did not even participate in the Civil War had monuments to confederate soldiers not a single monument arose to commemorate the many victims of white supremacist terror (Loewen 102-105).[11] When mentioned at all, lynching entered mainstream histories of the U.S. as a curiosity rather than a key technology of segregation. Lynching victims disappeared from the cultural imaginary as well, with Hollywood films portraying lynchings as

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[11] In describing such a monument erected in 1916 by the United Daughters of the Confederacy in Helena, Montana, Loewen writes: "Fifty years earlier most Northerners and many Southerners saw the Confederacy as a failed attempt to break up the United States and perpetuate slavery—which it was. By 1916, this monument declares implicitly that the Confederacy was somehow patriotic and that whites agreed, even this far north, to honor it nostalgically. Thus this monument also reflects the time when it was erected—the nadir of race relations in the United States, from 1890 to 1920, when segregation gripped the nation and lynchings reached their peak. . . . Most Confederate memorials went up during these years" (*Lies Across America* 103). 1923 saw the UDC's infamous petition to Congress to erect a "mammy" memorial in the Washington DC to honor the black women who had nursed southern whites before and after the war. Others suggested erecting a statue to honor "the faithful old slaves who remained loyal and true" during and after the war and to express "the inextinguishable gratitude" still "smoldering in the souls of those who owned them." In North Carolina, whites put up a monument to Uncle Tom, "whose northern abolitionist origins were forgotten in praise of the 'old Negro's' loyalty, patient suffering, and love" (Hale 60). Subordination of African Americans was thus written across the landscape through this imagined past.

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western outbreaks of white-on-white violence produced by a vacuum of legal authority. Bruce Baker explains that "historical memory of lynchings became the object of an unequal contest between those who could forget and those who could not, or could not afford to forget. By controlling public discourse—the newspapers, the courts, the books, and, to a somewhat lesser degree, the schools—whites had the luxury of remembering and forgetting the past as they chose" (336).

Literature plays a crucial role in the mourning of catastrophic events particularly when there has been a radical forgetting in other areas of communication and in the preservation of history. The national trauma of lynching was characterized by "enduring effects" related to events that could not "be easily dismissed," that "played over again and again in the national consciousness," becoming ingrained, but also buried in collective memories (Neale 2). Writing at a moment of extreme danger to their lives and to the survival of their communities, African American writers used literature to protest, to mourn the dead and to work through the trauma of lynchings witnessed or narrowly avoided. Traumatic memories of lynching also posed a danger to identity in perpetrators and witnesses from the white community. While white writers such as Erskine Caldwell and Lillian Smith presented searing indictments of lynching in their journalism, fiction, and poetry, for many others the trauma of lynching played over and over again in their writing through displacement, obfuscation and denial.

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In my dissertation I explore who remembered (or did not remember) what about lynching and to ask how these habits of memory affected literary and visual representations. I examine the influences of race, gender, class and sexuality on how this cultural trauma was textualized and performed, avoided and blocked. I hope this examination will help to explain how and why lynching has remained so long absent from official public discourse while simultaneously "hidden in plain view" in African American writing, art, and historiography. I hope also to illuminate how the continued repression of this trauma affects the way Americans continue to live race in the United States and in the world beyond.

Chapter Two, "Anguished Returns and Narratives of Evasion: Lynching and White Children," explores the astonishing degree to which children were implicated in lynching, as both witnesses and participants. Newspaper reports as well as literary representations show that lynching operated as an initiation rite and object lesson in white supremacy for young white boys and girls as well as for African American children—a disturbing ritual for some, but apparently not for others. Reactions varied from the joyful children Walter White met on their way from seeing a lynching's aftermath, to the boy in Marion, Indiana, who vomited all over the sidewalk. The second part of the chapter explores the ways in which lynching became covered up through narratives of evasion. As Oliver Cox points out, one of the best cures for lynching was the solidification of the Jim Crow regime. As lynching became less necessary, and as public opinion turned against it, parents carefully

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schooled their children in lessons of disavowal. Adults who had seen lynchings passed on narratives of evasion about what they had witnessed in their own childhood. This denial of lynching was also one of segregation's most important tools. I consider the habits of mind that made widespread disavowal of lynching possible, not only during the lynching era, but in the decades that followed. The literary silences of New Critics Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren and the racial myopia of mainstream historiographer Joel Williamson correspond to the blank spaces on the commemorative landscape, where these crimes remained unmarked and unacknowledged, helping to expunge the bodies of the lynching victims from public memory. For many men, in particular, their shame and fear of rejection and punishment for failing to meet a violent, masculinist ideal resonated at the deepest level of their identification as white men, fueling their refusal to acknowledge the reality of lynching and white supremacy. I consider how seeing can also be a way of not seeing and how remembering can also be a way of forgetting. I ask whether these memories of lynching that surfaced during the Civil Rights era were ever truly repressed by these writers?

Chapter Three: "Dangerous Visions: Lynching in *Intruder in the Dust*, Novel and Film," looks at one of southern literature's most famous narratives of evasion—*Intruder in the Dust*. I argue that William Faulkner's representation of a lynching prevented by a white child can only be understood in light of a brutal lynching that happened in his own town when he was a child that plays over and over again in his fiction. In *Intruder in the*

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Dust, Faulkner's last attempt to deal seriously with the legacy of his slaveholding ancestors, Faulkner re-stages the lynching of Nelse Patton only to redeem it. Instead of participating in the lynching, a white boy bands with his black friend to prevent it, and along with an old woman who acts out of bonds of love for a black woman, manages to convince the adults to behave and to refrain from lynching an innocent man. Faulkner answers those who would desegregate the South by proposing instead a gradualistic, in-house approach. Clarence Brown's film version, on the other hand, takes a much more aggressive civil rights position, yet it also ultimately participates in a fantasy of rehabilitation.

Chapter Four, "'A White Man's Country': Erskine Caldwell and the Shame of Lynching," considers the texts of Erskine Caldwell, once touted as the world's best selling author, but now rarely studied or read. Caldwell's journalism, his 1935 short story, "Kneel to the Rising Sun," and his 1940 novel *Trouble in July* offer striking analyses of the complex of misogyny, sadism, racism, resentment and fear that fueled the lynching epidemic; each focuses, further, on the degradation of morality and human connection demanded by the white supremacist regime. Caldwell looks unflinchingly at the way in which an otherwise reasonably moral person can evolve into passive agent or even willing executioner. His own history, and the lessons of masculinity imparted by his father, point to the possibility of a different response to white supremacy. For Caldwell, shame has the potential—if openly acknowledged and dealt with--to be a catalyst for anti-lynching reform. Reevaluating

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Caldwell's work leads us to a different understanding of the visibility of lynching among white modernist writers. Were whiteness and its operations as invisible as some theorists today would imagine? [12] How much of the invisibility of whiteness is actually retrospective?

Chapter Five, entitled "Returning the Gaze: Lynching and Photography in Fritz Lang's *Fury,"* examines lynching narrative and photographic conventions in relation to *Fury* (1936), a remarkable film by German émigré Fritz Lang, in which the white victim of a lynching manages to escape and to engineer the trial of his attackers, who are unaware, as is the prosecution, of his survival. Lang's depiction of lynching starkly differs from the narrative conventions popularized by newspaper reportage and D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, and his use of the newsreel and stop-actions provides an interesting contrast to the convention of the lynching photograph. In their trial, we witness the lynchers' deep shame and anguish at seeing their loss of control and animalistic behavior. Written during a time of great national turmoil over the meaning of citizenship and the function of state-sponsored violence, *Fury* explores how race, violence, and national identity were visualized and erased in the U.S. imaginary, both transgressing and revealing the limits of Hollywood's ability to screen race. Caldwell's journalism and fiction and Lang's film reveal the degree to which people in the United States and throughout the world were aware of lynching as a human rights issue, and the extent to which it was being discussed and argued about as well as censored.

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[12] See, e.g., Richard Dyer, *White*. New York and London: Routledge, 1997.

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The courts were occupied with lynching, and it entered filmic representations even as it was censored. Lang's film calls attention to this censorship at the same time that it participates in it.

In the last chapter, "White Islands of Safety and Engulfing Blackness: Lynching and Landscape in Angelina Weld Grimke's 'Blackness' and 'Goldie,'" I examine the tension between white censorship and the urgent speech of African Americans protesting a wave of violence against men, women and children during and after the First World War. I read Angelina Weld Grimke's story "Goldie," and an earlier version she could not get published entitled "Blackness," in the context of African American women's mourning for the murders of women and children in East Saint Louis in 1917 and for the murder of Mary Turner and her unborn child in 1918. In her fictional recreations of Turner's lynching, Grimke enacts a ritual of mourning that functions as a powerful critique of lynching's landscape. Segregation was above all a spatial regime that depended in large part on a fantasy cherished by whites that it was possible to separate their own privileged lives from the violence necessary to maintain that privilege. In "Blackness" and "Goldie," Grimke describes a white community willfully deaf and blind to the trauma surrounding them, leaving them poised on the brink of an apocalypse of their own design.

In *Black Dog of Fate*, his memoir of the familial legacy of the Armenian genocide, Peter Balakian calls "denial. . . the final stage of genocide; the first killing followed by a killing of the memory of the killing. The perpetrator's

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quest for impunity by denying continues to abuse the victim group by preventing the process of healing for the survivors and the inheritors of the survivors" (278). The growing interest in the topic of lynching has produced books, documentaries, websites, conferences and exhibitions that would have been unthinkable a generation ago. Individual communities have begun to come to terms with their lynching legacies through memorials and commemorative ceremonies from Moore's Ford, Georgia, to Duluth, Minnesota, to Tulsa, Oklahoma. The process of building memorials and writing histories represents the first tentative step toward acknowledging the sites on our haunted landscapes where so many people, both individually and collectively, have been harmed. Yet alongside the movement toward reconciliation and reparation exists the impulse to ignore past injustice and violence. When Laura Wexler began her investigation into lynchings in Moore's Ford, Georgia, that would later result in the book, *Fire in a Canebrake*, for example, one white man told her, "This lynching is like a pile of dog crap. The best thing to do is bury it and go on" (Auchmutey, "Lynchings" 1E). To bury lynching and racial violence in our collective memory requires us to kill once again the memory of the killing, to violate the victims anew by acting as if their pain never happened and their lives didn't matter. "Commemoration," Balakian explains, "publicly legitimizes the victim culture's grief. The burden of bereavement can be alleviated if shared and witnessed to by a larger community" (279). By examining the tools we have inherited to keep dangerous memories at bay, the stories and lies we

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have told to ourselves about ourselves, this dissertation hopes to contribute to that act of witnessing.

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Chapter Two: Anguished Returns and Narratives of Evasion: Lynching and White Children

> This haunted childhood belongs to every southerner of my age. We ran away from it but we came back like a hurt animal to its wound, or a murderer to the scene of his sin. The human heart dares not stay away too long from that which hurt it most. This is a return journey to anguish that few of us are released from making.
>
> Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream* (1949)

> To name that whiteness in the black imagination is often a representation of terror, one must face a palimpsest of written histories that erase or deny, that reinvent the past to make the present vision of racial harmony and pluralism more plausible. To bear the burden of memory, one must willingly journey to places long uninhabited, searching the debris of history for traces of the unforgettable, all knowledge of which has been long suppressed.
>
> bell hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination"

Between 1880 and 1935, thousands of African Americans were lynched in the United States. In addition to the torture inflicted on individuals, lynching tortured entire communities through the psychological terrorism that

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defined southern race relations in the Jim Crow era. As spectacle, lynching was intended to serve as a symbol of white supremacy and warning for the African American community. This chapter looks at representations of lynching in which childhood is central. It explores how writers work through and deny their own childhood traumas in such narratives and asks what these stories can tell about the role of collective violence in the formation of racial identity. I first consider the astonishing degree to which young white children were involved in lynching—as both witnesses and participants. I then consider the implications for the formation and continuation of the culture of disavowal and concealment at the heart of segregation. This chapter examines the ways in which whiteness constitutes itself through histories—both personal and written—that, as hooks puts it, "erase, deny" and "reinvent the past" (46). To what degree do traces of whiteness as terror remain in the white imagination? What can this tell us about the denial and disavowal necessary to pose a seemingly coherent and stable "white" identity?

It is important to situate lynching in terms of cross-generational wounding produced by racial violence that begins with the Middle Passage. Historian Peter H. Wood charges in a recent essay on early American slave labor camps that "for all our openness to controversy and our fascination with violence," Americans "are still unable"—or perhaps unwilling—"to grasp the huge collective wound that predated the country's founding and that haunted its infant and adolescent years." Heightened awareness of the implications

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and repercussions of child abuse within families "has not yet been matched by an increased awareness of the collective long-term trauma represented by race slavery" (17). Historians today are beginning to reinvestigate this link. As Nell Painter explains,

> owning as well as owned families paid a high psychological and physical cost for the child and sexual abuse that was so integral to slavery. First, despite what black and white scholars assume about the rigidity of the color bar, attachment and loss often transcended the barriers of race and class and flowed in both directions. The abuse of slaves pained and damaged non-slaves, particularly children, and forced those witnessing slave abuse to identify with the victim or the perpetrator. ("Shoah" 32).

The screams of African Americans being punished in a workhouse near her school helped make Angelina Grimke a lifelong advocate of abolition and enfranchisement, but not all children retained such sympathy into adulthood. Virginian John M. Nelson wrote in 1839 that his slaveholding father's severe and repeated rebukes left him so "so blunted" he no longer tried to intervene to stop the beating of his closest childhood friends, finding himself now able to "not only witness their stripes with composure, but *myself* inflict them, and that without remorse" (qtd. Painter 35).

Lynching's earliest opponents certainly recognized the practice as slavery's bitter aftermath. In 1904, Mary Church Terrell declared that "it is as impossible to comprehend the cause of the ferocity and barbarity which

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attend the average lynching-bee without taking into account the brutalizing effect of slavery upon the [white] people of the section where most of the lynchings occur, as it is to investigate the essence and nature of fire without considering the gases which cause the flames to ignite" (100). One of slavery's most enduring legacies was the callousness inculcated in children from the earliest age.

The first chapter in Walter White's 1929 study of lynching, *Rope and Faggot*, entitled "The Mind of the Lyncher," begins with his memory of meeting "three shining-eyed, healthy, cleanly children, headed for school" in a lovely Florida town where days earlier whites had torched the "Negro section" and lynched several people after an African American pharmacist tried to vote in a national election. "As I neared them," White recalls, "the eldest, a ruddy-cheeked girl of nine or ten, asked if I was going to the place where 'the niggers' had been killed. I told her I might stop and see the spot. Animatedly, almost joyously, as though the memory were of Christmas morning or the circus, she told me, her slightly younger companions interjecting a word here or there or nodding vigorous assent, of 'the fun we had burning the niggers.'" White concluded that "one need not be a sentimentalist to feel that such warping of the minds of Southern children is by far the worst aspect of lynching" (3).

What did it mean for children to grow up in communities where race hatred and paranoia frequently erupted in deadly violence? As Nell Painter remarks, Jim Crow racism was not an "individual, personal flaw" but "a way of

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life," a deeply rooted ideology founded in violence. As among ordinary people living under Nazism, "white supremacy found its own willing executioners" who openly and shamelessly slaughtered African Americans, "convinced that they were doing the right thing" ("Shoah" 308-309). Jim Crow segregation required the entire white population to police and oppress their African American neighbors, if only through their silent acquiescence to the status quo. Children coming of age in such a society were forced to identify themselves while very young as belonging to one group or to the other.

A comprehensive study of lynching's effect on children of both races has yet to be done, but even a brief survey of newspaper archives, eyewitness accounts, and lynching photography reveals that young white children were involved in lynchings—as witnesses and as participants—to an appalling extent. As with "little Mary Phagan," girls elevated to the sacred status of victim occupied the symbolic center of lynchings carried out in their names. [13]

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[13] One of the most notorious Southern lynchings involved Leo Frank, a Jewish factory manager in Atlanta, who in 1913 was accused of raping and murdering his thirteen-year-old employee, Mary Phagan, even though evidence suggested an African American handyman as the culprit. Newspapers portrayed Frank as a pervert and sex fiend, intent on ruining the purity of the idealized white child. Walter White recalls that "because of Frank's religion and place of birth the case developed into a clash of prejudice in which anti-Northern and anti-Semitic hatred had been whipped to such a frenzy that the usual anti-Negro prejudice was almost forgotten" (*Man Called White* 25). In 1915, Frank was abducted and lynched by the Klu Klux Klan while he was serving a life sentence for the crime, which he strenuously denied committing. Frank would not be officially pardoned by the state of Georgia until 1986. See Steve Oney, *And the Dead Shall Rise: The Murder of Mary Phagan and the Lynching of Leo Frank*. As Ida B. Wells-Barnett found, newspaper reports frequently exaggerated the youth of rape victims. Her investigation found that one eight-year-old "victim" of a supposedly brutal attack was the eighteen-year-old daughter of a Mississippi sheriff who had

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If the reported victim remained alive, the child would routinely be asked to identify her attackers. Often, her male family members might lead the lynching party, knot the rope, or ignite the first flame. Photographs and eyewitness accounts document the frequent presence of young girls and boys at lynchings—as spectators and collectors of "souvenirs."

In the headnote to her poem, "I Met a Little Blue Eyed Girl," which appeared in the *Crisis* in 1912, white suffragist and child advocate Bertha Johnston explains, "A certain element in the South takes pains to rear the children of the family faithfully in the doctrines of Blease and Vardaman." Known as the "White Chief," Vardaman served as governor of Mississippi from 1904-1908, during which time he called for an end to Negro education and an intensification of Jim Crow segregation, proclaiming: "If it is necessary every Negro in the state will be lynched; it will be done to maintain white supremacy." While in the U.S. Senate from 1913-19, Vardaman lobbied to rescind the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments guaranteeing civil rights to African Americans. Senator Cole Blease of South Carolina shared Vardaman's view of such legal protections, announcing that "whenever the Constitution comes between me and the virtue of the white women of the South, I say to hell with the Constitution" (Rice 121).

Johnston goes on to recount the disgust of a visitor from the North at the at the perversion of childhood innocence by a southern lynching carnival: "'A

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discovered his daughter's consensual relationship with an African American servant when he found them together in the man's room (39). The man was subsequently lynched for this "offense."

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Negro had been lynched in the neighborhood,' said a recently returned traveler, 'and crowds went out to see what was left of his body. The people I was staying with went with the rest and took their children, all but one, who had been naughty and was kept home as a punishment'" (121). The poem's speaker describes meeting a little five-year-old blue-eyed, fair-haired girl who carries in her locket "the tooth of a colored man/My father helped to lynch." The "fair-haired child" confides in the traveler that though the mob had "made a mistake," they "had their fun just the same." In her poem, Johnston contrasts the angelic appearance of the girl with the gruesome relic she keeps close to her heart. In Esther Popel's "Flag Salute" (1934) African American children listen to the horrific details of a lynching, including the hanging of the victim's teeth as chivalric trophies on the necks of women and girls, then must begin their day with a pledge of allegiance. This disturbing poem ironically contrasts the two rites of allegiance: that of African American children who must pledge loyalty to the flag of a country that refuses to protect them and that of the young white girls who consecrate themselves to the southern order through these grisly relics.

Boys as young as five or six often acted as apprentice lynchers, assisting members of the mob with such tasks as collecting and piling firewood.[14] In one incident, oilfield workers in Houston, Texas in 1917 "forced

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[14] In an 1899 lynching in which the victim was reported to be twenty, but may have been as young as fourteen, the mob tortured him, throwing cayenne pepper in his eyes and slowly burning him. "Long after most of the mob went away little children from 6 to 10 years of age carried dried grass and kindling wood and kept the fire burning all during the night (Ginzberg 28-30).

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a ten-year-old white lad who carried water around the camp to take a large butcher knife and unsex" Bert Smith for the crime of striking white men who had raped his sister (Ginzberg 114). Other white boys participated willingly and enthusiastically. In a special supplement to the July 1916 *Crisis*, investigator Elizabeth Freeman described children's contributions to the lynching of seventeen-year-old Jesse Washington in Waco, Texas: "Women and children saw the lynching. One man held up his little boy so that he could see, and a little boy was in the top of the very tree to which the colored boy was hung, where he stayed until the fire became too hot" (146). Crowds of young boys danced in attendance while the mob dragged his charred and dismembered corpse through the streets of Waco, and after the teenager's head was left "on the stoop of a disreputable woman," his teeth were pulled out by "some little boys" who sold them for five dollars a piece (148).

From their earliest years, white girls and boys watched white men and women harassing and humiliating African American people for fun. Lynching was the culmination of such behavior. As Oliver C. Cox points out, "as a means of schooling white children in the Southern principles of race relations, there could hardly be a more effective method" than taking them to watch a lynching (585). Giving at least implicit sanction to this community ritual, schools often delayed opening or shut their doors entirely for the day. Even when parents disapproved of the practice, children would sneak off to join the fun. In "The Blaze," from the novel *The Hindered Hand*, Sutton Griggs

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portrays nine-year-old Melville Brant's frantic struggle to convince his widowed mother to let him attend the lynching of a local couple. "Ben Stringer is always a crowing over me," he tells her. "He has seen a whole lots of lynchings. His Dad takes him" (107). This character may have been based on one nine-year old who returned from a lynching with an appetite newly whetted. "I have seen a man hanged," he told his mother; "now I wish I could see one burned" (Litwack 14).

Of course, for other children in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, witnessing a lynching would have presumably been a terrifying introduction to their local cultural heritage. [15] Among the photographs and postcards collected in James Allen's *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, a little girl who turns a rapturous gaze on the suspended corpse of Rubin Stacey seems exhilarated and entertained. Yet this child also holds her arms in front of her body, her hands crossed as if bound at the wrist, mimicking the mob's placement of Stacey's hands to shield his mutilated genitals from the camera's gaze.[16] Another little girl in this same photograph looks up nervously, arms crossed, one hand digging into her skin as if to displace the pain of what she is seeing. The boys at an unidentified lynching

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[15] Such behavior on the part of crowds of adults and children was not unheard of in earlier times. On the use of human sacrifice and the practice of scapegoating, see Alain Corbin, *The Village of Cannibals: Rage and Murder in France, 1870*; Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* and *The Scapegoat*,; and Orlando Patterson, *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries*.

[16] As Amy Wood points out, photographers almost always covered the genitals of victims, whether intact or mutilated.

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(circa 1920) stand frozen in the photographer's flash, their faces twisted with confusion and alarm, the sight of their elders (possibly their fathers) torturing another human to death promising perhaps a life-long traumatic impact. Like most lynching photographs, this shot appears carefully staged, but the expressions of shock and anxiety on the boy's faces are hopelessly transparent. Even for those who did not witness the actual killing, a glimpse of the body might produce lingering, intrusive memories.[17] New York Times reporter Joyce Wadler reported a conversation with the comedian, Soupy Sales, on his seventy-fifth birthday in which he discussed growing up in the small town of Franklinton, North Carolina: "His father ran a dry goods store where the Klu Klux Klan bought sheets. The Klan, he says, was rampant. Once on his way to school, he saw the body of a black man who had been lynched. He still has nightmares about it" (B2).

During the lynching era it was commonplace for children to repetitively act out violent lynchings. In *The Rooster's Egg*, Patricia Williams describes a photograph found during archival research by Harvard University psychologist Jessica Daniels of a turn-of-the-century lynching in a small southern town where among the spectators can be seen "a little white girl,

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[17] Recent studies about children and trauma, based on children's experience in Kosovo and September 11 suggest that one of the most important factors in whether children develop post-traumatic stress syndrome is how the parent handles the stressor. As I will discuss later, Robert Penn Warren and Allen Tate's childhood memories of lynching were tightly bound to their masculine identity and fears of appearing weak. The normalization of lynching as well as the actual witnessing of it appears to have had a powerful effect on these authors.

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clutching a doll with a noose around its neck" (186). Also around 1900, an Alabama black woman who worked for a white family reported: "I have seen very small white children hang their black dolls. It is not the child's fault, he is simply an apt pupil" (Litwack 288). Such child's play constituted symbolic incorporation of adult violence. It may have also served to heighten traditional forms of bullying against younger siblings and children seen as weak or different. [18]

Recent studies of children traumatized by terrorism show that there is a wider circle of victims than previously supposed, including children impacted by media coverage of the event. How did white children react to media coverage of such events? We know that sensational news of lynchings disturbed even children living far from the communities where they took place. [19] On August 10, 1906, just ten days after one of the largest multiple lynchings in U.S. history occurred in Salisbury, North Carolina, eleven-year-

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[18] Games of "cowboys and Injuns" played by generations of U.S. children express cultural memory of genocide against indigenous people, but for most children, who remain unaware of this history, the violence of such games holds little meaning. In the same way, not every game of lynching can automatically be interpreted as traumatic acting-out, even on a societal level. In communities directly affected by lynching or racial tensions resulting from Jim Crow segregation or urban violence, however, the chance that such play expresses emotional and psychological disturbances is far greater.

[19] Reactions to lynching among African American children more closely approximate descriptions of children enduring terrorism in other geopolitical contexts, as described by Richard Wright in his memoir Black Boy and in the memories of African Americans of their reaction to the lynching of Emmett Till. See Christopher Metress. *The Lynching of Emmett Till: A Documentary Narrative*, particularly the essay by John Edgar Wideman. See *Helping Children Cope with Disasters and Terrorism.* Ed. Annette LaGreca.

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old Jack McClay appeared before a judge over one-hundred miles away in Asheville, charged with "looping a rope around his young white playmate's neck, flinging it over a beam, and leaving the playmate hanging" with only his toes touching the floor. The six-year-old victim struggled free with only a few welts on his neck, but the judge found McClay guilty in spite of the boys' protests that they had only been playing a game—a game they called "Salisbury" (Gilmore 146).[20] A Raleigh newspaper covering the story under the headline "Play of Lynching: The Leaven Works Among Our Children" reported that the defendant's mother "was excited and showed some feeling" when she refused to reprimand her son (Litwack 288).

African American missionary Sara J. Duncan, on the other hand, admonished young southern mothers of the lethal consequences of such "games": "The boys that are allowed to play in the back yard that they are having a lynching-bee with the dog or cat and sometimes another child, as the criminal, will indeed make first-class lynchers when they get a little older. Crime formed in young children can not be reformed out of them" (28). In Alice French's 1903 story "Beyond the Limit," the aftermath of a lynching in an Arkansas town culminates in the suicide of a member of the lynching party after he finds children trying to burn a cat to death as "punishment." The clandestine burning of a mentally disabled African American man leaves the

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[20] Although the lynchings in Salisbury were clearly the catalyst for this episode, Asheville had had several bloody lynchings at the turn of the century. The children were apparently not the only members of the community infected with lynching fever in August 1906. Asheville would have its own lynching by November.

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entire community "crueler and wickeder" in a way that will take generations to resolve (86).

Lynchings were often chaotic, uncontrollable, and terrifying events with long-term repercussions. In *A Lynching in the Heartland*, James Madison describes a thirteen-year-old boy vomiting "down on his knees on the sidewalk" after the 1930 hanging of Tom Shipp, 19, and Abe Smith, 18 in Marion, Indiana.[21] Around him "several adults, men and women, cried in anguish, dumbfounded and enraged at what their fellow citizens had done" (10).[22] Within a year, NAACP investigator William Pickens found anxiety and paranoia escalating among whites: "seven months after the savage lynching, many white people frown or growl when they see the face of a colored person; friendly greetings are rarer, suspicion quicker" (36). Threatening phone calls, the firing of shots, and gunning of automobiles outside African

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[21] A third youth, 16-year-old James Cameron, was miraculously spared by the crowd. He later became an outspoken advocate against lynching , opening the American Holocaust Museum in Detroit. For a full accounting of his ordeal, see James Cameron. *A Time of Terror: A Survivor's Story*. Baltimore: Black Classic P, 1994.

[22] Police arriving from around the state a few hours later, however, "reported a scene of peace and remarkable good humor" as spectators, including the youth group from a local Methodist church, milled about all night to gaze at Smith and Shipp (Madison 10). A young boy helped to position their bodies at just the right angle so that a local photographer, Lawrence Bietler could shoot their faces, creating perhaps the most famous photograph of a lynching, in which crowds clustered beneath the dead men smile into the camera and a man sporting a Hitler mustache points with upraised tattooed arm to the dangling bodies. Two women looking at us in the crowd are noticeably pregnant—one rests her hand protectively across her belly. The lynching would haunt the community for the next seventy-three years, an entire life-span for the child she carries.

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American homes revealed "how disastrous mob-action is to civilized society in the community. Perhaps this whole generation of Marion inhabitants can never recover from the relapse which they suffered on that one night" (37). In 1998, a mixed-race panel of Marion's citizens confirmed this dire prognosis when they found that after nearly seventy years, "the lynching still holds us back" (Madison 149).

For white males particularly, putting away "childish things" and becoming adult often meant the rupturing and abandonment of deep emotional ties with blacks. Despite segregation, few white children grew up without interracial contact and many continued to have friends across racial lines. What did it mean to these children to take on racial identity at a time when African Americans—including children—were not safe from the violence of white adults? In *Trouble in Mind*, Leon Litwack remarks on how suddenly Jim Crow era relationships between black and white children ended. Both black and white parents often broke up the friendship, which would usually fail, anyway, around adolescence when "the shared play stopped." Sometimes even before parents intervened, "white youths might seize upon a disagreement to turn unexpectedly on their black playmates" (8).

The white writer Lillian Smith recalls an incident from her Georgia childhood, "a private production of a little script that is written on the lives of most southern children." Her mother took a little "white" girl to live with the family only to reject the child three weeks later upon discovering that she was

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"black": "I knew that my mother who was so good to children did not believe in her heart that she was being good to this child," writes Smith, who herself felt overcome with guilt. "There was not a word in my mind that said it but my body knew and my glands, and I was filled with anxiety." It is no accident that during the civil rights era, so many activists and writers examined racism through the lens of childhood, the site of primary wounding in a system "cruelly shaping and crippling the personality" of everyone struggling through it to adulthood (Smith 38).

Writing in 1949, Smith was quick to point out that "even now we live in the South as if none of this happened" (43). In a remarkable passage, Smith describes a structure of disavowal, the things white children remembered and forgot, that made segregation possible:

> You shut the bad away and remembered only the pleasant . . . It is so easy to see the old scuppernong vine you used to climb in the the summer . . . So hard to see Something swinging from a limb—because you never saw it. You only heard the whispers, saw the horror of it in dark faces you loved. Once I heard the thin cracking shots of a drunken farmer on Saturday, killing a Negro who had sassed him. Sometimes, suddenly those shots ring through my ears as if it had happened a moment ago. But not often. There is too much that made me love the place where I was born, that makes me even now want to remember only the good things. . . . (71)

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Smith's description of what she never "saw" refers as much to moral witnessing as to literal vision.

What were the habits of mind required to assume a "white" identity in an apartheid regime? "In the segregated South," historian Glenda Gilmore explains, "whites invented a past for posterity by making up on a daily basis a multitude of justifications and rationalizations for racial oppression" (xvi). Of her own upbringing, Gilmore writes: "I lived that fiction. The subsequent separation of self from lies consumed much of my postadolescent, post-civil rights movement life, as I painfully peeled away tissues of falsehoods and cut through many connections to my upbringing in the segregated South. . . . Fiction in the archives? What else?" (xvi).

In an essay entitled "Wounds Not Scars" that appeared in the *Journal of American History* in 1997, noted historian Joel Williamson describes finding out about lynching "by accident" in the mid-1960s during archival research into the origins of segregation (1229). "Arguably, southern whites lynching blacks in the turn-of-the-century South while northern whites looked on is as close as America has ever come to experiencing our own holocaust. And that too is a wound that will not heal, a wound, in fact that we whites recurrently feel but prefer not to see" (1232). He diagnoses his own lack of awareness as partaking of a national syndrome. Within a decade after the number of lynchings began to decline, he explains, "white America seemed . . . to lose . . . conscious recall of ritualistic racial lynching and the race riots. . . . At the

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same time we lost the memory of slavery as an exceedingly cruel institution"(1238).

Williamson's language is striking for the way in which it empties out agency and reconstructs white Americans as amnesiac victims of a loss. Williamson grew up during the depression in a South Carolina community that had lynched an African American. His father told him that the oak tree still stood where the man had been lynched, somewhere on the fairgrounds near his hometown.[23] But he also told him it had been an unimportant, redneck affair, unlikely to happen again. "I never bothered to find the tree," Williamson tells us. "Much more fascinating to me was the stark image of the straight-backed, stiff-armed electric chair in the state penitentiary in Columbia where all legal executions then occurred, each county previously having done its own by hanging." Williamson then devotes a lengthy paragraph to describing in almost obsessive detail the yard of the county jail, where his father attended "one of the last legal hangings" (1229). Its most distinguishing feature was the "unusually high, solid, unpainted wood fence"

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[23] In an email correspondence with me dated 8 July 2001, Williamson explained: "My memory was that the man was lynched from an oak tree at the fairgrounds. So it was in Anderson [South Carolina]. I knew very well, of course, where the fairgrounds were and I knew where the trees were on the fairgrounds. I think it was in the 1930s that my father mentioned it. 'Mentioned' is the right word. I suspect it was another lynching that did not get picked up by the press. I had a student who did an honors thesis on NC in 1898 and found many more lynchings than those included in the NAACP book—he said, I think, about three times more—just taking NC in 1898. Memory does fade, but I think I imaged an oak tree on the fairgrounds when my father mentioned it and then filed the thing away. It came back decades later when I was researching *The Crucible"* [referring to his book, *The Crucible of Race*].

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that shielded "executions from the unwitting sight of those who happened to pass along the nearby streets," even though "anyone—man, woman, or child—could enter the courtyard to witness a hanging." Williamson speculates that "also, perhaps, the fence contained the event and lent some sense of control—of law and order and propriety—to a terrible proceeding" (1229).

In both text and memory, does the jail act as site of forgetting or anti-memory, screening knowledge of the community's sanction for other forms of violence? The fetish, as Peter Stallybrass reminds us, is not a thing, but a system of displacement, symbolizing not a presence, but an absence. David Garland explains that scholarship on the U.S. death penalty "makes much" of the "increasingly 'privatized'" nature of executions beginning in the 1830s, "when states began to move them into jail yards and behind high prison walls, away from the gaze of the public. After 1888, many states adopted the more 'modern', 'humane' method of electrocution," necessitating "a specialized state facility, closed to the general public, and usually located far from the community in which the crime occurred." Yet "the hundreds of public torture lynchings" during the last decade of the nineteenth and first three decades of the twentieth century "suggest a very different story" (9). Such lynchings were "not wild outbursts of spontaneous violence," but were instead "staged public events with a conventionally understood form, a recurring sequence of actions and an accompanying normative discourse." Nor, according to Garland, were they "arbitrary or unmotivated." Supporters and critics alike

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represented them "as summary criminal punishments" for alleged serious offenses. "Public torture lynchings were a preferred alternative to official justice, not a necessary substitute for it. To think about them as 'vigilantism' is to miss much of their character" (10). Lynching functioned as a "transitional institution, a stop-gap measure that used blood and mobs to proclaim white power until a more reliable system of control could be put into place" (67). The success of disfranchisement and Jim Crow segregation offered, therefore, "the most powerful 'cure' for lynching, its crude and terrifying message becoming increasingly inessential once race control had been put on a more efficient and more 'modern' footing" (71).

This "more reliable" system of race control refused to acknowledge openly its origin in terror and violence at the same time it drew its strength from the persistence of cultural memory of this violence. The choice of a fairground for the unrecorded lynching suggests that the event Williamson's father so casually mentioned may have been far from an "unimportant" occasion in the town of Anderson, South Carolina.[24] African American fathers undoubtedly passed down a very different assessment of the event to their sons. With no record and a silent generation of older white men, however, Williamson insists the meaning of the event remained unavailable to him, that

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[24] Although the lynching to which Williamson refers was apparently not recorded, a lynching that took place on October 11, 1911 in Anderson County, South Carolina (of which the town of Anderson is the county seat), was clearly a community matter, led by "State Legislator Joshua Ashley and the editor of the local newspaper. The target of that mob was one Willis Jackson who was accused of attacking a white child. He was hung from a tree upside down and shot numerous times" (Tolnay and Beck 26).

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his knowledge of lynching came primarily from viewing *The Oxbow Incident* as a child, and that this knowledge did not change significantly during his training as an historian. Despite all of the archival evidence available, including, as historians David Levering Lewis and Robin D.G. Kelley point out, the flood of congressional testimony scholarship by leftist and African American historians, and writing by white southerners such as Smith, Williamson did not include lynching and race riots in his analysis of southern history until a discovery that he characterizes as both shocking and accidental. [25]

For many, the lessons of southern manhood included a silence and myopia about racial violence that translated into an epistemology and aesthetics of denial.[26] As Grace Hale points out, lynching was central to the

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[25] Kelley and Lewis took part in the peer review printed immediately following the article. Asking how Williamson could "discover lynching after his first book was published in 1965," Robin D.G. Kelley charges that Williamson acts as if "African American historians don't exist or are tangential," illustrating the deeper problem of segregation within the historical profession: "'Nothing in my living experience as a Southerner and an American,' [Williamson] writes, 'nothing in my training and practice as a historian and professor had prepared me for [lynching].' John Hope Franklin's *From Slavery to Freedom* (1947) might have, so could Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, Aptheker's *Documentary History of the Negro People* (1951), or Rayford Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir* (1954), Ida B. Wells' autobiography, or Ralph Ginzberg's *100 Years of Lynching*" (1260).

[26] According to Dora Appel, in his remarks regarding a photograph of young girls staring up at the lynched corpse of Rubin Stacy, James Allen suggests that what this photograph demonstrates is the art of teaching children not to see, not to apprehend or reflect on what they witness, and not to take it too seriously. The photographs themselves were passed on, but were not really objects for serious viewing. Similarly, he suggests the indoctrination into looking but not seeing began at the lynching site as a way of domesticating

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formation of post-Reconstruction national identity, as North and South unified around a nostalgic definition of "whiteness" that recuperated white masculine anxieties by reclaiming space through segregation and inscribing ownership upon it through signs, monuments and memorials. While white writers such as Lillian Smith and Erskine Caldwell produced searing indictments of lynching in their journalism, fiction, and poetry, for others the textual absence of lynching corresponded to the blank spaces on the landscape, screening the foundational violence of white identity. As Toni Morrison writes in "Unspeakable Things Unspoken":

> We can agree, I think, that invisible things are not necessarily "not-there"; that a void may be empty, but is not a vacuum. In addition, certain absences are so stressed, so planned, they call attention to themselves; arrest us with intentionality and purpose, like neighborhoods that are defined by the population held away from them. Looking at the scope of American literature, I can't help thinking that the question should never have been "Why am I, an Afro-American, absent from it?" It is not a particularly interesting query anyway. The spectacularly interesting question is "What intellectual feats had to be performed by the author or his critic to erase me from a society seething with my presence, and what effect has that

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terror, normalizing it, and producing a numbing effect that allowed it perpetuation (41-42). In this sense the white gaze that became part of the discourse of lynching is complicated by its own filters to meaning, blocking emotional affect and normalizing circumstances of extremity.

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performance had on the work?" What are the strategies of escape from knowledge? Of willful oblivion? (2306-2307)

In Allen Tate's most famous poem, "Ode to the Confederate Dead," a modern Southerner tries to connect with the glory and heroism of the past by standing at the gates of a Confederate cemetery. He gazes upon "the plot of a thousand acres, where these memories grow/From the inexhaustible bodies that are not/Dead, but feed the grass, row after rich row" (11-13). For Tate's speaker, the "inexhaustible" bodies of the Confederate dead keep the past alive in a way that its intimately tied to place, to a "landscape imbued" with a "limitless southern (white) memory" (Brundage, *Memories* 2). At the emotional climax of the poem, the alienated speaker laments the passage of the South's glorious traditions and rituals specifically in terms of the memory of the dead: "What shall we say of the bones, unclean,/ Whose verdurous anonymity will grow?" (65-66). In Tate's poem, death has given birth to a retrospectively imagined Confederate nation and to the collective memory of a regional community. Locating that memory in a Confederate cemetery makes clear which bodies matter on the southern landscape, consciously excluding African Americans and barring them from history and the production of meaning.[27]

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[27] On the creation of the Myth of the Lost Cause, see Hale, *Making Whiteness*; James J. Lelouis, *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self and Society in North Caroline, 1880-1920.* Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P., 1995. Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913,* Athens, GA, 1980; Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking.* New York, 1970; At the same time Tate wrote "Ode to the Confederate Dead," he began work on what was to be

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During the Civil Rights era, however, when he turned from the historical to the autobiographical, Tate presented a markedly different portrait of his white lineage. In his 1953 poem "The Swimmers," the literal and symbolic center of a trilogy Jeffrey Folks calls Tate's "poetic autobiography," the poet describes witnessing the aftermath of a lynching on a hot dusty July day in 1911 when he was eleven years old (51). As the poet heads with four friends to a swimming hole outside town, a posse of horsemen passes, scaring the boys from the road down onto a hog track beside the creek. The horsemen return, with one man missing. When the boys reach the water, they see the sheriff, who slouches against a sycamore tree picking his teeth and contemplating the blood-soaked body of an African American man. With the poet following, the sheriff and a stranger tie the man up by his heels and drag him into town, where they dump his mutilated body in the courthouse square. Tate ends his poem: "The faceless head lay still. I could not run/Or walk, but stood. Alone in the public clearing/This private thing was owned by all the town,/ Though never claimed by us within my hearing" (82-84). An ardent traditionalist, Tate wrote quite frankly in support of lynching and white supremacy, constructing the Jim Crow South as endangered and

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a trilogy of biographies of Stonewall Jackson, Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee (only the first two were published, and Tate was unsuccessful in convincing Robert Penn Warren, among others, to complete work on the third). In a letter to Donald Davidson, Tate explained that the poem presented his "quest for the past," one acutely felt, "for since the Civil War my family has scattered to the four winds and no longer exists as a social unit" (12 April 1928).

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victimized by Negroes and northern industrialism.[28] For forty-two years this unreconstructed defender of white supremacy remained silent about his formative lesson in white manhood. Marita Sturken suggests we read such repression of memory as strategic: "Forgetting is not a threat to subjectivity, but rather a highly constitutive element of identity; indeed it is a primary means through which subjectivity is shaped and produced" ("Narratives" 243).

"The Swimmers" is part of what some critics identify as "The Maimed Man" trilogy, in which each of the three poems (originally conceived of as a single, longer poem) chart the speaker's immersion in the past. In the first poem, "The Maimed Man," the young poet is captivated by a scarecrow by the side of the road who has only a "purple stump" where his head should be—the similarities between this headless figure and the mutilated faceless man of "The Swimmers" are obvious. Both mesmerized and disturbed, he wonders of his identification with the maimed man: "What could save one's manly honor with the football coach/ . . . were I his known slave?" (43-45). Forty years later the problem of how he might "know this friend without reproach" leaves the speaker "still questing in the poor boy's curse,/Witching for water in a waste of shame" (50-51). In the final poem, "The Buried Lake," the confession of a dream of beheading a female lover

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[28] In his 1936 essay," A View of the Whole South," Tate made the link between "tradition" and violence explicit: "I argue it this way: the white race seems determined to rule the Negro race in its midst; I belong to the white race; therefore I intend to support white rule. Lynching . . . . will disappear when the white race is satisfied that its supremacy will not be questioned in social crises" (Bingham and Underwood 295).

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moves him toward resolving adult shame at his failed marriage, thwarted ambitions, and lost youth, charting his "torturous progress toward knowledge of 'enduring love' through reconciliation with a feminine principle" (Havird 334). The containment of formal technique and the diffusion of castration anxiety and masculine shame across the three poems and three episodes allows Tate to manage the rupture to identity posed by the memory of the lynching at the center of the trilogy.

Anthony Szczesiul maintains that for the New Critics, modernist poetics and conservative politics were intimately linked as part of the same discourse system. Tate's fellow New Critic Robert Penn Warren shared Tate's high modernist aesthetic in his early writing, but by the 1950s, integration had become "both a political solution and an aesthetic pattern," reflected in his attempts to revisit his southern legacy of racism and lynching ("Conservative" 234). Warren's Kentucky childhood included a near-lynching, which he described to biographer Floyd Watkins:

> Once some older and bigger boys got me in a deserted building, maybe a barn, and put a rope around my neck, and started pulling on it. They said they'd teach me about grade-making. They lifted me off my toes two or three times, to scare me. Then one of them, suddenly, got ashamed, or sick of what they were doing, and made them quit. Later one or two of them tried to apologize and I said, 'Go to hell.' . . . I was lucky—I seriously

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considered shooting the ringleader to death, then thought of the family trouble. (42-43)

At least two recorded lynchings took place in Warren's hometown of Guthrie around the time he was growing up, and there were almost certainly others. Townspeople told Watkins of a man who "lived on the edge of town for a while" and "did most of the hangings," but remained silent about who or how many had been hanged (76).[29] Well into middle-age Warren's peers remembered the near-hanging of the boy. In fact, some insisted, though Warren called it a lie, that there were multiple incidents of persecution including a hanging down a well interrupted only when an adult heard the child's screams.

In his 1965 book, *Who Speaks for the Negro*, Warren interrupts an apology for "The Briar Patch," an early essay supporting segregation to describe an oak tree in his hometown where a lynching took place: "When I was a child I scarcely ever passed down that street . . without some peculiar, cold flicker of a feeling. The image of that tree which I still carry in my head has a rotten and raveled length of rope hanging from a bare bough . . . In actuality it is most improbable that I ever saw a length of rope hanging from that tree, for the lynching had taken place long before my birth. "[30]

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[29] This anonymous personage is apparently the inspiration for Warren's "Ballad of Mister Dutcher and the Last Lynching in Gupton County."

[30] "The Briar Patch" was Warren's contribution to the 1930 Agrarian manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand*. Thirty-five years later, in telling the story of the oak tree, Warren attempted to explain his own inability to see that segregation "was not humane" (*Who Speaks* 11)

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Explaining that he heard about the lynching when very young, probably from an older boy, Warren specifically links knowledge about racial violence with masculinity: "I got the idea that this was something men might do, might mysteriously have to do, put a rope around a man's neck and pull him up and watch him struggle; and I knew, in shame and inferiority, that I wouldn't ever be man enough to do that" (11-12).[31] Only after identifying the foundation of segregation in racial violence and masculine anxiety can Warren explain his own support for it. It is not surprising, then, that in *Segregation: The Inner Conflict of the South* Warren used female figures—an old woman and a young girl—to speak of forbidden racial knowledge, of the bodies haunting the physical and psychic landscape. Warren describes his journey thus: "I was going back to look at the landscapes and streets I had known—Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana—to look at the faces, to hear the voices, to hear, in fact, the voices in my own blood. A girl from Mississippi had said to me: 'I feel it's all happening inside of me, every bit of it. It's all there.' I know what she meant" (3). *Segregation* ends with an "interview" with a divided southerner, whom Warren later identifies as himself, in which he tells the story of :

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[31] Warren then goes on to tell how when he returned to the South in 1939, he saw a man take off his belt and begin to "lay it on" the "bum" of an African American boy of "about fourteen" for sneaking into a movie theatre. Although his initial reaction was to help the boy, Warren hesitated, aware of "being totally outside my community" (13). Luckily for the child, another white man intervened to stop the beating.

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> an old lady who grew up in a black county . . . where relations had been, as they say, good. . . . when she got old she sort of retired from the world. The hottest summer weather and she would lock all the doors and windows at night, and lie there in the airless dark. But sometimes she'd telephone to town in the middle of the night. . . that somebody was burning the Negroes out there on her place. She could hear their screams. Something was going on in her old head which in another place and time would not have been going on in her old head. (63-64).

The violated bodies that appear in the old woman's nightmares speak of a collective guilt and haunting over racial violence.[32] Warren's increasing engagement with this guilt can be seen in two poems inspired by the 1926 lynching of Primus Kirby in Warren's hometown of Guthrie Kentucky for allegedly killing his wife, wounding his aunt, and shooting a deputy sheriff. Local "law men" were clearly involved in the lynching, having "agreed with local citizens" on the route for Kirby's journey to the county seat in Elkton and even arranging the exact spot where they planned to have "car trouble" (Watkins 71-72). Shortly after the sheriff's car "stalled," four more cars full of men arrived. They put a rope around Kirby's neck, hung him and then filled him full of bullets. (One childhood friend of Warren's who was there

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[32] Patricia Yaeger describes the landscape of southern women's fiction as crowded with throwaway bodies, murdered, grotesque or displaced persons and suggests that we read these bodies not as metaphors but as real. "'And Every Baby . . . Was Floating Round in the Water, Drowned': Throwaway Bodies in Southern Fiction." *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women's Writing, 1930-1990.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000: 61-87.

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remembered bullets rolling out of Kirby's clothes when they took him down.) In 1982, nearly sixty years after it happened, Floyd Watkins noted that the event continued to resonate among the people of Guthrie:

> Primus Kirby was lynched in Guthrie in the middle of June, 1926. His death left little record in the annals of history, but it is still indelibly written on the memories of those who live in Guthrie and who can remember events as long ago as 1926. All of them differ on a few details and forget a few, but all of them remember. Primus Kirby did not quietly approach his death or gently pass away. (71)

Some of those Watkins interviewed expressed little sympathy for the victim. One woman referred to Kirby as "that old nigger" when relating how he tried to hide behind her husband to avoid getting shot. Watkins described another interviewee coolly affirming his own participation:

> A half-century later when I was talking with one of Warren's contemporaries, he wept in a tender elderly way about his mother's one-hundredth birthday party. But he remembered the lynching without apparent emotion. . . . The sentimental old gentleman still remembers how they shot Kirby so many times that blood ran over the tops of his shoes. Later, when I had put away the tape cassette and the note paper, he said, "I was in this hanging. I had my hand on the rope. I didn't believe in the shooting." (72)

As this man's account illustrates, it would be a mistake to assume that everyone who witnessed a lynching was haunted by the memory or even

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allowed himself to experience guilt or shame. It is impossible to characterize this man's inner life, but his account clearly illustrates his public belief that there was nothing shameful in a hanging that's done right. In his recent study of trauma, Harvard psychologist Richard McNally points out that the "toxic" emotions triggering post traumatic stress disorder include guilt and shame as well as terror (85), and cites "reports on Vietnam veterans" indicating that "perpetrators of atrocities–deliberate harming and killing of noncombatants—can suffer post-traumatic symptoms, haunted by the memories of their misdeeds" (85).[33] McNally cautions, however, that "acts of violence that are not interpreted as violating one's moral code will not produce PTSD regardless of how horrific they may seem to others" (87). A study of former soldiers from Greece "who served time for torturing suspected Communists during the military regime" found that

> none of these men felt any guilt for what they had done, but neither were any of them sadists—individuals who experience pleasure by inflicting pain. . . . All of them had been tortured themselves as part of their police training, and all were ideologically committed to do whatever was necessary to extirpate Communism in their nation. In

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[33] McNally cites the example described by Franz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* of the French torturer, who suffered from nightmares, extreme irritability, and intolerance for noise. Fanon writes: "he asked me without beating around the bush to help him to go on torturing Algerian patriots without any prickings of conscience, without any behavior problems, and with complete equanimity" (*Wretched* 269-271). Emphasizing the "moral complexity of trauma," McNally explains that "some scholars, such as the psychiatrist John March (1993), have . . . interpret[ed] the commission of atrocities as a high-magnitude stressor <u>for the perpetrator</u>. But this gambit reverses the roles of victim and perpetrator, obscuring important issues" (85).

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their view, torturing others was a noble, patriotic duty, not an atrocity (87).

Clearly, the people Watkins interviewed did not consider Kirby's killing an atrocity in 1926 and continued to view it with a large measure of equanimity in 1982. In his conversations with Watkins, Warren maintained that while he heard something about the events in Guthrie, he "never tried to 'track down' the lynching because it was not his actual subject" when he used the lynching as inspiration for a poem shortly after Kirby's death (78). In "Pondy Woods," Warren describes the fear of "Big Jim Todd," a "slick black buck," as he cowers in the mud listening for "hoofs on the corduroy road/ Or for the foul and sucking sound/ A man's foot makes on the marshy ground" (7, 15-17). A vulture hovering over him warns "a buzzard can smell the thing you've done; /The posse will get you—run, nigger, run—" (26-27). The bird then contrasts Todd's energy, "more passionate/Than strong" to his own breed's patient alliance with Time, pedantically compares Todd to Christ, and even quotes Horace—"Non omnis moriar" (not all of me shall die)—and we are told "Jim understood" (39-40, 52, 55). The man eventually leaves his hiding place as the sun rises and the dogs can be heard tracking him down. The poem assumes Jim Todd's inherent guilt and portrays his death as an inexorable aspect of inscrutable fate, lessons easily imparted without ever looking at the posse or the material reality of the lynching.[34]

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[34] See Henry Louis Gates, jr. *Figures in Black*, New York: Oxford UP, 1990, xix, and *Signifying Monkey*, New York: Oxford UP, 1989, chapter 3.

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In "The Ballad of Mr. Dutcher and the Last Lynching in Gupton" included in the collection *Or Else-Poem/Poems, 1968-1974*, Warren revisits the killing of Primus Kirby, this time describing the complicity and enjoyment of the white community in the spectacle. His focus has shifted from the guilt of victim to that of the victimizer. The victim here remains nameless except as "some fool/ nigger" who shot up a liquor store, wounded a clerk, and "still broke," headed for Gupton on a freight in "happy/ignorance that the telephone/had ever been invented" (47-48, 51, 52-53). When a posse intercepts the train, the victim shoots one of the men, prompting the constable to drive "mighty slow" with him back to the jail (61). Stopping to investigate some mysterious car trouble, the constable is overpowered by a lynch mob, who proceed to hang the prisoner. The lynching turns into ghastly theatre, in which "the main performer" scrambles desperately to save his life and is only partially suffocated (104). One onlooker vomits, while another man calmly fires six bullets into the victim. Thirty years later, the speaker muses on the ephemeral legacy of a local man whose singular talent lay in tying a perfect noose for a lynching:

> I'm the one man left
> Who has any reason at all
> To remember his name. . .
> sometime going back
> I might try to locate the stone

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it's on if grass and ragweed aren't too high

I might even try to locate

where that black man got buried, though

that would, of course be somewhat difficult. (126-135)

The speaker's difficulty here is not, of course, simply logistical. Jeffrey Alexander theorizes cultural trauma as socially constructed through a process of naming the victims, the perpetrators and the nature of the pain. A crucial step in this process involves identification between the wider audience for the trauma representation and the victims of suffering, culminating in rituals and memorials. The danger to white subjectivity posed by the public memory of the lynching explains the repetitive refusal to allow public mourning for its victims. Finding out where Mr. Dutcher's victim has been buried would require excavating an entire structure of disavowal, undermining and disturbing a system of domination and violence to memory as well as to identity. Examining what he calls the writer's own "bad faith" or disavowal about racial issues, Forrest Robinson characterizes Warren's most famous novel, *All the Kings Men*, as a "rehearsal of unfinished cultural business." Seeking to have it "both ways with race-slavery," the novel "betrays simultaneous impulses to see and to turn away and thus leaves the problem unresolved" (521). This leaves the novel's protagonist, Jack Burden, with "his consciousness . . . suspended between what he cannot bear to remember and what he cannot quite

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forget," making "his way through life in a willful half-sleep of bad faith" (522). The legacy of slavery and segregation for a generation of white children growing up in the shadow of the lynching tree included lessons in how to see without seeing and to forget while remembering, thus guaranteeing the perpetuation of the system.

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Chapter Three: Dangerous Visions: Lynching in *Intruder in the Dust*, Novel and Film

Born in 1897 in Oxford, Mississippi, William Faulkner spent his life surrounded by lynchings. There were over three hundred lynchings in Mississippi around the turn of the century, including several notorious incidents in Oxford, setting the precedent for Oxford's infamous Civil -Rights-era white riots.[35] When Faulkner was eleven years old, Nelse Patton, an African American inmate from the county jail who, as a "trusty," moved freely about the town on errands, visited Mattie McMillan with a message from her husband, a white inmate. According to the newspaper reports, an inebriated Patton made sexual advances toward McMillan. When she tried to retrieve a pistol from her dresser, the story goes, Patton grabbed her, cutting her throat with a straight-edge razor and "almost severing her head from her body" (Williamson Faulkner 158).[36] Two teenage boys, sons of sheriff's deputy, Linburn Cullen, and brothers of Faulkner's classmate Hal, arrested Patton's flight by wounding him with squirrel shot. The boys then held him at gunpoint until the sheriff arrived to return him to jail.

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[35] The most notorious of these is the rioting that accompanied the enrollment of James Meredith at the University of Mississippi in Oxford in the fall of 1962.

[36] These same accounts maintain that the "nearly decapitated" woman then ran "screaming" from the house—a remarkable achievement for someone whose vocal cords presumably would have been severed. As Grace Hale reminds us, we study not lynchings, but representations of lynchings, and in Patton's case, the details of both his crime and punishment vary widely depending on their source (360).

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That night around the jail and courthouse gathered a crowd of people that would eventually swell to a mob of 2,000—"the entire population of the city and half the county of Lafayette" (Williamson, *Faulkner* 158). It is hard to imagine anyone staying home when an event of this magnitude took place in a small town, but even if the Falkners had stayed in, their home lay within a thousand yards of both the jail and the square. At the very least, young William would have heard much of what transpired. Although a judge and several ministers begged the crowd from the porch of the jail to "let justice take its course," their appeals were ignored (Blotner 113). Leaping onto the porch, William V. Sullivan, a prominent attorney and former United States Senator, demanded that the lynching begin at once. The crowd rushed forward, but the sheriff refused to disclose where he had hidden the keys to the jail. John B. Cullen, the fifteen year old who had fired the first shot at Patton, described his memory of that night:

> My father was deputized to guard the jail. Had he the slightest doubt of Nelse's guilt, he would have talked to the mob. If this had not proved successful, they would have entered the jail over his dead body. After Senator Sullivan's speech, the mob began pitching us boys through the jail windows, and no guard in that jail would have dared shoot one of us. Soon a mob was inside. My brother and I held my father, and the sons of the other guards held theirs. They weren't hard to hold anyway. (91)

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Whether they were hammering at the large steel entrance doors (as some tell it) or at the door of Patton's cell (as others maintain), by all accounts the mob spent over three hours battering the jail with sledgehammers, crowbars and pickaxes until they reached the prisoner and shot him to death.

The mob castrated Patton and hung his naked mutilated body for public viewing in the square. According to some reports, the mob took a pickaxe to Patton's head and then pulled the skin of his scalp "down over his face" (Taylor 84). As Blotner points out, Faulkner and the other "fifth grade boys at the Oxford Graded School" could participate vicariously in the lynching without seeing the body or reading the newspaper accounts because they had "as an actual classmate the brother of the boy who had first shot Nelse Patton, then helped bring him in, had leaped through a jail window, watched the mob crash in, and seen the mutilated body suspended from a tree" (114).[37] As a good friend of Hal Cullen, Faulkner undoubtedly heard from him the story of his older brother's "heroism"--so clearly patterned on the behavior of prominent adults.[38] Although the coroner's jury delivered the standard

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[37] John B. Cullen writes in great detail of seeing the mutilation, although he insists that he can't remember who carried it out. Before morning, Cullen reports, his father had purchased a new pair of overalls to cover the dead man's nakedness and mutilation. In Cullen's reminiscences he takes pains to put his father in the best light, to show him as doing the most reasonable and humane thing given the set of circumstances, modeling, in other words, how to be a "decent" white man under Jim Crow (92).

[38] Children growing up in Oxford at the time were inundated with white supremacist propaganda. Two weeks after the September 8, 1908 lynching of Nelse Patton, a play based on Thomas Dixon's bestselling novel *The Clansman* (which also provided the inspiration for D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*) opened in Oxford at the Opera House owned by Faulkner's

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verdict that Patton's death resulted from "gunshot or pistol wounds inflicted to us by parties unknown," Senator Sullivan boasted to an Associated Press reporter the day after the lynching that he "led the mob which lynched Nelse Patton," was "proud of it," and ready to do it again "any time" (Blotner 114).[39]

In his 1990 discussion of the filming in Oxford of Faulkner's novel *Intruder in the Dust* (1949), local memoirist Herman E. Taylor takes offense "at the implication that leading citizens of Oxford would have participated directly, or indirectly in a lynching" (83). Within a few lines, Taylor does recall that "Oxford was Mr. Billy's hometown too" and that "lynchings had occurred in Oxford in 1908 and during the 1930s." He then tells the story of the Patton lynching based on "the Mississippi Department of Archives and History and eyewitnesses," but leaves out Senator Sullivan's role entirely. Such revisionism routinely appears in personal as well as public histories. Faulkner's own writing about race is notoriously conflicted and ambiguous. Around 1930, according to Taylor, a "few miles from what would later become Mr. Billy's farm," a "Negro accused of raping a white woman" was "tortured and emasculated, then burned to death while a huge crowd looked on" (84).

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grandfather. Historian Joel Williamson relates that Faulkner and his brothers probably "had their usual choice of seats from which to view this spectacular production," which toured throughout the country and was seen by four million people (*Faulkner* 162).

[39] That Sullivan could boast with impunity underlines the extent of the entire nation's vicarious participation in these spectacles. What Sullivan neglected to tell reporters, however, was that Patton, who ran a flourishing business bootlegging liquor, had been a regular client of his legal practice. In fact, Sullivan had defended Patton against the charges of selling liquor for which he had been doing time when the murder occurred.

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Around this time, Faulkner published "Dry September," his moving story of the lynching of an innocent man for the imagined violation of a white woman. Yet in reaction to the founding of an anti-lynching organization of white women in Mississippi, Faulkner wrote to the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* that he had "yet to hear, outside of a novel or a story, of a man of color with a record beyond reproach, suffering violation at the hands of men who knew him." Admitting that some men "will die on cross-ties soaked with gasoline to make a holiday," Faulkner emphasized "one curious thing about mobs. Like our juries they have a way of being right" (qtd. McMillen and Polk 4). While his fictional writing about race grew more nuanced during the next decade, Faulkner's "knowledge" at a public, "official" level continued to deny the affective truth found in his novels.

The first of Faulkner's books to be both critically and commercially well-received (he would receive the Nobel Prize in 1949), *Intruder in the Dust* represents Faulkner's last serious effort to deal with the moral legacy of his slaveholding ancestors.[40] Unfolding through the consciousness of a young boy, Intruder tries to accommodate a murder mystery with a rite of passage story that includes a prevented lynching and several disquisitions on the Negro Problem. Vinson Gowrie, a white man from the hardscrabble hills of Beat Four near Jefferson, Mississippi, has been discovered with a bullet in his

[40] During the 1950s, Faulkner's fiction took a nostalgic turn, celebrating the virtues of white southern paternalism and criticizing the efforts of civil rights organizations, particularly the NAACP.

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back. Strong circumstantial evidence leads to the arrest of Lucas Beauchamp, a black man notorious for refusing to "act like a nigger." As a lynch mob gathers outside, Gavin Stevens, the white lawyer Lucas has summoned to the jail, makes clear his own belief in Lucas's guilt. Lucas's hope for justice now rests with Chick Mallison, Gavin Stevens' sixteen-year-old nephew, with whom he has exchanged a series of gifts after rescuing the boy from a creek four years earlier. Following instructions Lucas whispers to him at the jail, Chick joins with Aleck Sander, son of the Mallison's cook, and Miss Habersham, an elderly white spinster who grew up with Lucas's wife, to travel that night to a Beat Four cemetery where they attempt to exhume Vinson's body. Inside the grave, they find instead the corpse of a local bootlegger, Jake Montgomery. Chick convinces his Uncle Gavin and Sheriff Hampton to return the next day with a detail of prisoners, who dig up the grave once more only to find that it now lies empty. The sheriff and his men discover Jake Montgomery's body in a shallow grave nearby and Vinson's corpse submerged in quicksand under a bridge. With some help from Lucas, the sheriff realizes that Vinson's brother, Crawford, murdered him before he could discover Crawford's theft from a sawmill they owned together. Montgomery knew about the stolen timber's origins, so Crawford killed him too, hiding the body in Vinson's grave, then hastily removing it when the substitution was discovered.

Returning to town, Sheriff Hampton saves Lucas's life by revealing the true identity of the killer. As the chastened mob disperses, Gavin lectures his

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troubled nephew about the white southerner's privilege and responsibility for bringing justice to "Sambo," a process that will not happen tomorrow or the day after, but will take place eventually, in time—aided by the Negro's greatest virtue: patience. Blacks and whites live in separate worlds, Stevens explains, the "homogeneity" and integrity of which must be preserved from the empty modernity of the North. Chick begins to understand and accept his responsibility as a white man of conscience for the future of the South. After his capture, Crawford Gowrie commits suicide in jail, sparing the county and his family the shame of a trial. The novel ends with Lucas Beauchamp refusing to accept the gift of Stevens's services, paying him in pennies, and demanding a receipt.

On one level, Eric Sundquist is right to assess *Intruder* as "generally a ludicrous novel and depressing social document" (149). The novel appeared during a time of mounting agitation for racial integration, with Truman promising to desegregate the army, and civil rights workers organizing throughout the South. Opposing both Jim Crow segregation and federal intervention to end it, Faulkner's ambivalence placed him at the center of controversy. While southern readers denounced Intruder as the work of a "nigger lover," many northern reviewers dismissed the novel as propaganda, reading Gavin Stevens' segregationist apologia as Faulkner's own.[41]

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[41] See Peavey, *Go Slow Now: Faulkner and the Race Question* for a detailed chronology of Faulkner's statements on race. Charles D. Peavey shows that Faulkner publicly echoed almost all of Gavin Stevens' pronouncements in the years that followed the novel's publication. Yet when discussing the novel at a conference in Nagano, Japan, Faulkner defined action as the moral choice

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Faulkner's own childhood experience, however, suggests a deeper tension in the novel.

Because *Intruder* brings up to date a strand of the community created in Faulkner's wider fiction, it is important to trace the lineage of Lucas Beauchamp and Gavin Stevens, the black and white authority figures who vie for Chick Mallison's allegiance. In *Go Down Moses* (1942), Faulkner deconstructs plantation mythology by tracing the genealogy of both the black and white descendents of Carothers McCaslin, with Lucas Beauchamp by the end of the text the only surviving male descendent from McCaslin's "shadow family." A novel made from a series of previously published short stories, Go Down Moses provides multiple, shifting perspectives of the consequences of generational guilt, which Faulkner often figures as a literal debt to be paid. In "The Bear," Carother's white grandson, Isaac, discovers half-recorded in a ledger a story of violent commerce in black bodies repressed in his official family history. These entries reveal his grandfather's sexual exploitation of a young girl, Tomasina, who was most likely his own daughter. When Tomasina dies in childbirth on Christmas day, her mother Eunice commits suicide in an icy creek. Carothers leaves a "thousand dollar legacy" to the son of the "unmarried slave girl, to be paid only at the child's coming of age," thus

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when confronted with evil—"even if it took a little boy and a frightened old woman" to bring about justice (*Nagano* 97). Faulkner also suggested that "if the problem of black and white existed only among children, there'd be no problem" (*Nagano* 76).

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"penalizing his sons" by "charging them a forfeit on their own paternity" (258).

Although Tomasina's son, Terrel, declines the money, his son (Carothers' black grandson), Lucas Beauchamp, demands payment on his twenty-first birthday. Carothers' white grandson Isaac denounces his own inheritance, allowing it to pass to his nephew Zach Edmonds, yet he lives off his brother's exploitation of black sharecroppers, and the sins of the father continue to rebound through the generations.[42] "The Fire and the Hearth" tells how a few months after Lucas's wife Molly gives birth to their son, Henry, Zach Edmonds' wife dies in childbirth. Molly, who had acted as midwife, stays behind to nurse the child, a boy named Roth, but Lucas suspects that Zach, with whom he has grown up like a brother, is using Molly sexually. After six months, Lucas can stand it no longer. He goes with a razor to slit Zach's throat in the night, but decides to allow him to defend himself because of their shared McCaslin blood. The two struggle over Zach's pistol, locked as if in an embrace, and Lucas pulls the trigger, only to have the gun misfire. Although he had planned to commit suicide after killing Zach, Lucas thinks later as he handles the spent bullet, "I would have paid. I would have waited for the rope, even the coal oil. . . . Old Carothers," he muses. "I needed him

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[42] This novel Faulkner dedicated to his Mammy, Caroline Barr, for her "fidelity without stint or calculation or recompense," frankly describes the uses white men make of black women's bodies and attempts to expiate for them. The uses white men make of black men's bodies are evident in the lynching and near-lynching scenarios threaded through these stories.

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and he spoke for me" (57). Unlynchable because of his white blood and his identification with the patriarch, Lucas leads a charmed life in Faulkner's fiction. As if unable to continue without the ritual lynching, however, the narrative turns next to "Pantaloon in Black," a story contemporary with the novel's publication. In this tale, Ryder, a millhand stricken with grief over the death of his wife, slits the throat of a cardshark who has been cheating black workers at the sawmill, riots in jail, and is taken off by his victim's relatives to be lynched.

In the title story, "Go Down Moses," Gavin Stevens, at the urging of Miss Worsham—a character nearly identical to Miss Habersham in *Intruder*—brings home the body of Molly's grandson Butch from Chicago after his execution for shooting a policeman in the back, an event roughly contemporaneous with Ryder's lynching on the McCaslin plantation. In Faulkner's description, the boy's "expensive coiffure" and "fine Hollywood clothes," fruits of a criminal career up North, signal that Butch was one Mississippi Negro who did not know his place. But Molly tells a different story: Roth Edmonds, whom Molly had raised like her own son, expelled the boy from his home with Molly and Lucas for breaking into his commissary store (an establishment itself devoted to robbing tenants), threatening him with "something broader, quicker in scope" than the sheriff or police if he ever tried to return. Butch's execution under an alias, moreover, leaves open the possibility that he may have been the victim of a legal lynching. Although Gavin Stevens paternalistically assumes that the lavish funeral provided by

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the townspeople will satisfy Molly, she demands that a white newspaperman write the truth about his death. Calling to offer condolences, Gavin finds Miss Worsham, Molly, and Molly's brother Hamp grieving together as family, then flees, claustrophobic and panic-stricken by such overt, cross-racial bonds of love. [43]

In the opening pages of *Intruder* the names of Roth Edmonds, Gavin Stevens, and Lucas Beauchamp reappear, signifying the simultaneous inscription and erasure of the prior text. By revising (and at times omitting) this earlier family history, Faulkner depicts racial tensions as matters best solved within a southern family headed by white men. *Intruder's* young hero, Chick Mallison, first meets Lucas Beauchamp when he is twelve and falls into an icy creek on the McCaslin plantation. This fall through the ice that Ralph Ellison reads as a metaphor for breaking through the shell of racism can also be read as Chick's baptism into the McCaslin clan. (That this may very well be the creek where a distraught mother committed suicide after the death of her violated daughter also signifies Chick's immersion in the collective guilt for the past.) He rises from the water to behold Lucas, whom he instantly identifies with his own grandfather. After Lucas takes him to his cabin, dries him, and feeds him, Chick attempts to pay Molly for Lucas's hospitality. When

[43] This story is not the first instance in which Gavin Stevens responds poorly to or misjudges a situation. In an infamous passage in *Light in August* (1932), Stevens offers the incredibly racist explanation for the death of the mulatto Joe Christmas as the revolt of his "black" blood over his "white" blood. In *Intruder*, the hero-worshipping Chick recognizes the insincerity of his uncle's "abnegant and rhetorical self-lacerating" (131).

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Lucas refuses the money, the boy throws the coins on the floor in a paroxysm of shame and rage and demands that Lucas pick them up. Lucas calmly directs the black boys with whom Chick has been hunting to gather the coins and give them back to him. There follows a series of gifts exchanged between the two, intended by Chick to make Lucas finally acknowledge the boy's superiority and his own indebtedness to Chick.

Chick's encounters with Lucas are key battles in his oedipal struggle to become a white man. He feels Lucas's advantage in their exchanges as an affront to "not merely his manhood but to his whole race too" (21). He tells himself repeatedly that satisfaction rests with restoring racial equilibrium by getting Lucas to "act like a nigger." Yet underlying this struggle for mastery is a deep history of loss. The cabin scene in *Intruder* repeats an earlier scene in *Go Down Moses* in which Roth is made to eat alone at the cabin after he repudiates Lucas and Molly's son Henry. "So he entered his heritage. He ate its bitter fruit," writes Faulkner (110). The bitter fruit of Roth Edmond's inheritance as a white man is unremitting grief and shame towards this boy to whom he is related and with whom he has played like a brother. In adulthood, Roth's estrangement has hardened into the hatred that expels Henry's son upon pain of lynching should he ever return.

In *The Melancholy of Race*, Anne Cheng explores the dynamic by which both the dominant and marginalized secure their racial identity in the U.S., using Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia. Mourning is viewed as the healthy response to loss in which substitution for the lost object

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will eventually take place. Melancholia entails a pathological fixation on and identification with the abandoned object. The melancholic remains forever stuck in the process of grieving, "retaining a denigrated but sustaining loss that resonates most acutely against the mechanisms of the racial imaginary as they have been fashioned in this country" (10). Racism, particularly of the type impacted by lynching, does not violently reject, so much as seek to contain the other. Under segregation, then, the "racial question is an issue of *place* (the literalization of Freudian melancholic suspension) rather than of full relinquishment. Segregation and colonialism are internally fraught institutions not because they have eliminated the other but because they need the very thing they hate or fear" (12). *Intruder* dramatizes the collision between the perception of Chick, a young boy who has yet to fully suffer racial loss, and the overbearing logic of an adult, Gavin Stevens, whose gradualism seeks forever to sustain that racial loss.

In fleshing out the dynamics of racial melancholia, Cheng cites a moment in *The Bluest Eye* when Toni Morrison describes a white store owner who cannot see the little black girl standing in front of him as having been "blunted by a permanent awareness of loss." For Cheng, this "subtly turned phrase" locates

> the precise and peculiar nature of 'loss' in white racial melancholia: teetering between the known and the unknown, the seen and the deliberately unseen, the racial other constitutes an oversight that is consciously made unconscious— naturalized over time as absence, as

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> complementary negative space. It is precisely this slippery distance between loss and exclusion that racial myopia effects. (16)

Chick's desire that Lucas "act like a nigger" refers less to Lucas's behavior than to his own inability to change the way he views him—to move Lucas into the realm of the "suspended other." From the beginning of their relationship, then, Chick experiences their power struggle as a contest of gazes. When he first looks up from the creek, he sees Lucas "watching him without pity commiseration, or anything else, not even surprise." (7). When Chick attempts to put Lucas in his "place" by paying for his hospitality, the elderly man does not even glance at the proffered coins, calmly "looking at nothing" as he instructs the boys to return Chick's money—and his insult (15).

Chick wants above all for Lucas to see him *not* seeing Lucas, yet it is ultimately up to Lucas to break the gaze. Chick thinks he is free after their paths cross and Lucas looks through him. When he learns Molly has just died, however, Chick realizes "with a kind of amazement: *He was grieving. You don't have to not be a nigger in order to grieve*" (26). This double-negative construction echoes an earlier description of Chick's first sight of Lucas. At the creek, the person he sees looking out at him from "inside a Negro's skin," eludes Jim Crow binaries, having "no pigment at all, not even a white man's lack of it" (7). This double lack establishes Lucas as an uneasy presence, a vector for anxiety reflected in Chick's obsessive search, "waiting, haunting the Square" for a glimpse of Lucas "for two then three then four months." When Chick finally sees him, Lucas looks "straight into his eyes for perhaps a

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quarter of a minute then away" and walks "straight on." Chick tells himself he is "free," because "the man who for three years had obsessed his life waking and sleeping too had walked out of it." (26). Of course, Lucas has done no such thing. Although Lucas doesn't even appear to see Chick in the crowd that heckles him after his arrest, he knows exactly where the boy is, turning to look straight at him and ordering him to send his uncle to see him in jail. During Gavin's cursory and hostile visit, Chick exchanges a glance with Lucas so intense that "he thought for a second Lucas had spoken aloud" and finds himself compelled to return to discover what Gavin refused to see (64). He "alone of all the white people" at the jail can "hear the mute unhoping urgency of [Lucas's] eyes" (69).

One of *Intruder*'s key themes is the loss of vision and understanding inherent in white manhood. As Miss Habersham explains to Chick, Lucas can't communicate with Gavin because "your uncle is a white man." Aleck Sander's grandfather, Ephraim, advises Chick when "something outside the common run" needs to be done, not to waste time "on the menfolks," who work on "the rules and the cases. Get the womens and the children at it; they works on the circumstances" (110-111). Unlike white males, whose broken childhood bonds litter Faulkner's fiction, Miss Habersham has preserved her ties to Molly and to Molly's kin. Therefore when she hears Lucas's defense, she can immediately see beyond the "fact" of his blackness to grasp the circumstance of his innocence--it is she rather than Gavin who "knows" Lucas Beauchamp. It is the clarity of vision shared by Miss Habersham, Chick, and

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Aleck Sander that helps Lucas prove his innocence and that Gavin begs his nephew not to lose. Yet even after admitting that his own blindness nearly cost Lucas his life, Gavin Stevens refuses to see Lucas as an individual with rights, collapsing him into "Lucas:Sambo," then merely "Sambo" as he teaches Chick the finer point of his white man's burden.

A necessary transition to adulthood in an apartheid regime is this loss of vision. While the first part of the narrative consists of Chick's attempts to decode visual signs and cues, the events of the second are drowned in a barrage of words as Chick is incorporated into the law of the Father and the epistemology of segregation. Chick's encounters with Lucas contain powerful lessons about his own racism, but once the boy undertakes his journey to Beat Four with Gavin and Sheriff Hampton (leaving Miss Habersham and Aleck Sander behind), he begins to think like a white man, realizing that "as he himself became more and more a man" much of what his uncle had told him "he had found to be true," including Gavin's assertion of the eternal presence of the past:

> For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it's still not yet two o'clock on that July afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the rail fence, the guns are laid and ready in the woods and the furled flags are already loosened to break out and Pickett himself with his long oiled ringlets and his hat in one hand probably and his sword in the other looking up the hill waiting for Longstreet to give the word and it's all in the

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balance, . . . there is still time for it not to begin against that position and those circumstances . . . . (190).

Employing the "timeless eternal" tense,[44] Gavin's language enables him to hold the past in suspension, to ignore or somehow recuperate the defeat of the South, to speak sentimentally and without a trace of irony of being responsible for freeing African Americans who are *already* free: "the injustice is the South's, we must expiate and abolish it ourselves alone . . . We owe that to Lucas whether he wants it or not" (199). Chick internalizes the myth of the lost innocence of the Confederate South, in which white violence against black is "subsumed under the tearful memory of persecuted ideals and lost grandeur" (Sundquist 58). As he drives toward Beat Four with the lawyer and the lawman, Chick looks for the first time at the land with the eyes of a colonizer, noting with approval the monumental figure of an African American tilling the soil.

This detective story aspires to be about the excavation of terrible secrets by a young boy. It seems to Chick that "he was responsible for having brought into the light and glare of day something shocking and shameful out of the whole white foundation of the county which he himself must partake of too since he too was bred of it" (135). But exactly what terrible secrets has Chick unearthed? In her groundbreaking study of childhood trauma, Lenore Terr discovered the traces of childhood wounding haunting the work of major artists and authors in the form of "specific repetitions—the dreams, play,

[44] I am borrowing this term from Edward Said's discussion of Orientalism.

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reenactments, and visualizations" of the original event (279). In such dreams and play, the wounded child (or child turned adult) essentially tells the same story over and over again despite changes in register or embellishment. Can we find such an impulse in Faulkner's writing about lynching? Details of Nelse Patton's lynching appear throughout Faulkner's fiction: the murdered woman, the knife, the slit throat, the struggle between black and white men, the castration.[45] In *Light in August* (1932) the racially ambiguous Joe Christmas is castrated for murdering his white lover Joanna Burden, whom he nearly decapitates with a straight razor. The similarities to Patton's lynching are obvious, down to Christmas's profession as a bootlegger, yet Faulkner refigures the murder and mutilation of Christmas as his apotheosis. In Faulkner's stylized description, the castration leads to an almost serene seeping of blood at once erotic and cathartic, "an astonishing psychological transfer," in which Faulkner buries "the horror of the actual event with a kind of magical poetry," diluting and rendering it "less harmful while making

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[45] Blotner and others have identified the 1935 lynching in Oxford of Elwood Higginbotham as a probable inspiration for the storyline in *Intruder*. Higginbotham had confessed to shooting one of a mob of white who had surrounded his home and threatened his life for organizing sharecroppers. During his trial, while the jury remained out, seventy-five armed men broke into the jail, took Higginbotham out, and hanged him. Faulkner may well have been inspired by the story of a man who was lynched for acting in self-defense, but the role of children in *Intruder* and the lynching scenarios surrounding Lucas in *Go Down Moses* suggest the lingering influence of Patton.

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Faulkner both innocent and apparently honest in the telling of it" (Kinney 273). [46]

> He just lay there, with his eyes open and empty of everything save consciousness, and with something, a shadow, about his mouth. For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes. Then his face, body, all seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out the slashed garments about his hips and loins the pent black blood seemed to rush like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. They are not to lose it, in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in the mirroring faces of whatever children they will contemplate old disasters and newer hopes. It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading, and not particularly threatful, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant. (464-465)

Edouard Glissant diagnoses a "metaphysics of confusion" in Faulkner's writing, "deferring and at the same time revealing what torments the consciousness of Whites in the county" (70). If we have here beautiful

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[46] In *Light in August*, Percy Grimm's bloodletting is, in fact, described as a kind of collective transfiguration, a catharsis for the entire community: "It was as if all their individual five senses had become one organ of looking, like an apotheosis, the words that flew among them wind- or air-gendered" (291).

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masochism replacing sadistic pain, Faulkner nevertheless pinpoints the foundational nature of this violence for the white community, in which the image of the bleeding, castrated black man will be written in the "mirroring faces " of the children of these men. Faulkner's poetic description exemplifies what Geoffrey Hartmann terms anti-memory—where a representation of the past has all the flavors of memory but actually acts as a screen for preventing its occurrence. The overproduction of images of peace and serenity nevertheless gestures towards the violent trauma at collective memory's core.

Whereas traumatic memory is sublimated and transformed in *Light in August,* in *Intruder*, Faulkner creates an elaborate scenario to avoid it. Anxiety about lynching, as in *Go Down Moses*, concentrates itself on the figure of Lucas Beauchamp. Few pages pass by in *Intruder* without a reference to the possibility of Lucas being strung up or burned (or both). When he learns of Lucas's capture, Chick rushes to the jail "not to see Lucas but so that Lucas could see him again if he so wished, to look back at him not just from the edge of mere uniqueless death but from the gasoline-roar of apotheosis." (41). But the young boy does not see this "apotheosis"—Lucas does not look at him as Joe Christmas did, with "unfathomable and unbearable" eyes, and the terrible event does not sear itself upon his memory. The story represents almost an exact reversal of the outlines of the Nelse Patton lynching: instead of aiding in a jailbreak, adolescent boys prevent it by aligning themselves with women and neutralizing the violence of white supremacist males so that the town

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emerges without blood on its hands. In Faulkner's rehabilitation of the lynching scenario, an innocent man's life and a young boy's innocence are spared. The actual experience of lynching is left a gap in the text. To imagine a generation of children capable of changing the South, Faulkner must fashion a scenario where they are prevented from being implicated in or even witnessing racial violence.

When Tennessean Clarence Brown read the film galleys for *Intruder*, he immediately decided to film the novel. According to Regina Fadiman, the director's interest in the project came from his traumatic witnessing of a lynching during race riots in Atlanta. Although Fadiman gives the date as 1916, the events he remembers seem to be those of a decade earlier, during the notorious Atlanta riot of 1906:

> From that day to the present, he has never forgotten it. He said that the riot began because of an alleged rape. As the Negroes came into town with their market baskets to shop on Saturday, they were grabbed up almost before they could leave the streetcar. As Brown remembers it, fifteen Negroes were slaughtered that one night: one hundred and fifty in a fortnight. In addition, there was one rape per night. Although Brown's memory of the date and the figures may not be precise after more than fifty years, the horror in his voice as he told the story was in no way diminished. The trauma of that experience lasted a lifetime. (27-28)

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These experiences clearly represented a staggering rupture in Brown's southern white identity. It is obvious why the story of a lynching averted and innocence preserved would have such a strong appeal to Brown.[47] (Born in 1890, Brown would have been the same age as Faulkner's protagonist during the 1906 riots.) After the war and the horrors of the Holocaust, the United States found its position as leader in the world jeopardized by its own violent racism, and in 1949 Hollywood responded. The four racial "problem" films--*Pinky*, *Home of the Brave*, *Lost Boundaries*, and *Intruder*--each tackled a "problem" in white attitudes towards blacks. Among these films, *Intruder* appears strikingly progressive, perhaps because of the techniques Brown borrowed from Italian neo-realism, including his decision to film entirely on location in Oxford. The screenplay was written by leftist writer Ben Maddow. Except for an explanation of how Lucas came to "own" the land (in the novel he merely enjoys lifetime "use" of it), Maddow removed all kinship references from the screenplay, including Miss Habersham's reason for intervening. In the film, she appears at Lawyer Stevens' house for advice about a rooster she has run over rather than to discuss how to save the life of her dearest friend's husband and the father of her own godchild. Her stance

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[47] In 1919, when he was fourteen, the actor Henry Fonda watched from the window of his father's shop in Omaha, Nebraska as a crowd of at least 5,000, hung, shot, and then burned Will Brown. Calling it "the most horrendous sight I'd ever seen," Fonda told years later of his trauma at the sight. In two of Fonda's movies, *Young Mister Lincoln* and *The Oxbow Incident*, lynchings were central to the plot.

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against the mob in the film resembles civil rights activism far more than noblesse oblige toward a cherished family retainer.

Despite critical acclaim, Brown's film did not do well at the box office. One reason may be that the studios tried to sell it as a continuation of the Lost Cause narratives audiences had come to expect. An advertisement in the *New York Times* on November 21, 1949, for instance, proclaimed: "*The Birth of a Nation* created a sensation in 1915; *Gone with the Wind* did the same in 1939; *Intruder in the Dust* gives the answer in 1949" (qtd Hannon 282). U.S. audiences do not appear to have been ready even for the question. Rather than opening with words extolling a gentle civilization "gone with the wind"—the story rung in by enslaved children gently rocking a bell that announces "quittin' time" to the contented workers--*Intruders* begins with the church bell calling the white community to join in a hymn that will be interrupted by the wail of the sheriff's siren. Except for the jazzy music blaring from loudspeakers as the crowd gathers for the lynching carnival, this will be the last music we hear.

A bird's eye view of the town square reveals it to be eerily empty. A man's question: "Where they all at? I ain't seen one darky on the road since yesterday" emphasizes that the blacks have all gone into hiding until the holocaust is over. In the aftermath of World War II and revelations of the Holocaust, the removal of an entire population has a chilling resonance. This connection is reinforced by repeated references to cleansing rituals. When the sheriff's car pulls up, one man looks out from the town baths. Another

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unsuccessfully brushes shampoo lather from his hair before clamping on his hat and rushing from the barber shop to view the spectacle. When Chick's father learns that his son has been at the jail, he admonishes him to "stay home until this thing is cleaned-up, over, finished, done with. It's happened before, and it's bound to happen again. Nothing to get excited about."[48]

Brown photographed for six weeks in Oxford, "using the exterior and interior of the ninety-year old Lafayette County Jail"—the same jail thousands of men surrounded and broke into when Faulkner was a child. (Fadiman 31). When Chick and his uncle go to visit Lucas in the film, we see what lies inside. Whereas in the novel, the African American men lie sleeping as if embalmed, Brown confronts us with their presence. The men we see huddled on their bunks look up in terror—their eyes meeting ours—when the jailer Mr. Tubbs opens the door to the common cell. "They ain't asleep, not a one," says Tubbs, adding cheerfully "I don't blame them when a mob of white men are gonna bust in here with pistols and cans of gasoline. Well it won't be the first time that all black cats look alike." When he opens the door to Lucas' cell, Tubbs explains to Gavin that this protective measure was not his idea: "I don't know what the next white man who figures he can't rest good till he kills somebody is gonna think about it. I've taken the blankets off the cot, though."

Charles Hannon detects an "obsession in Brown's film with the power of whites to remove the black presence," particularly in the scenes inserted into the film as Chick, Aleck and Miss Habersham drive to Caledonia Chapel to

[48] This dialogue was added to the screenplay.

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exhume Vinson Gowrie's body. Unlike Faulkner's novel in which Chick remains satisfied that the black population is still there (interesting in light of Cheng's analysis), however, these scenes reveal Brown's concern with the experience of those in hiding. For an audience used to the imagery of civilians at war, the predicament of these people huddling in the darkness would be very clear. As their car approaches, a young mother hides her children under a quilt. Another man peers cautiously out of the door of his cabin. No one in these cabins will be asleep tonight. In a repetition of the horizontal bars of light and darkness that fall on the face of the Mallison's maid, Paralee, as she peers at Miss Habersham through the blinds, we see a family up drinking coffee wince as stripes of light from an approaching car bleed into the cabin. The echo of this pattern in the bright white and black stripes on the trousers of the convicts at the cemetery the next afternoon reinforces the imprisoning effect of life in the Jim Crow South. Slavery has not ended, and the Jim Crow South resembles a giant penal colony for African Americans. As with our inside view of the jail, Brown uses these shots to draw us into the experience of a terrorized population.

Ralph Ellison maintains that the role of Lucas, stunningly played by Juano Hernandez in *Intruder,* "makes explicit the nature of Hollywood's changed attitude towards Negroes" (277). Brown's film borrows from the iconography of the Western to establish Lucas as an American type—the rugged individualist of the American frontier. In his cabin Brown substitutes for a static portrait of Pocohontas a forward moving stagecoach. Instead of the

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old beaver hat of Faulkner's novel, Lucas' headgear, with its slightly widened brim and heightened crown, has a decidedly Western flavor. The first time we see him, he looms above the creek, an axe crossed over his shoulder like Paul Bunyan. (Lucas is often filmed from below, emphasizing his giant and mythic stature.) He strides across his ten acres, set not in a wilderness, but smack in the middle of a white man's plantation. Chick's voice-over emphasizes that the pride of ownership—"his house, his land"—is marked out in every step he takes. Leaving the store after an altercation with Vinson Gowrie, Lucas steps into the light, a mythic figure framed in the doorway for an instant before advancing down the road, his long coat furling behind him in the breeze, independent, alone, afraid of no man.[49] Lucas's dignity is marked off by a stereotypical performance of eye-stretching and one-liners from Elzie Emanuel, who plays Aleck Sander, Chick's teenage friend and the only other significant black presence in the film. Brown had to resort to all sorts of contretemps to get Emanuel to comply with his directions, underlining his determination that there could be only one exception to racial stereotypes in the film—as there is, indeed, only one exception in Faulkner's novel.

Along with replicating these racist stereotypes, the film also participates in the fiction that lynching is essentially a lower-class activity. Although clearly a product of his environment, the attorney Stevens remains

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[49] Hernandez's performance was so successful that even Louis B. Mayer got the point, complaining at the preview that Lucas had no respect for white people, refused to remove his hat and say "not, sir" and was "just too independent" (Fadiman 37).

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above the whole lynching business and Maddow's elimination of his most inflammatory rhetoric reduces his implication in the system of segregation that produces lynchings. In another scene inserted into the film, after a woman holding a baby mocks the true murderer for his inaction in avenging his brother, Crawford Gowrie strides to the jail, his stomach ridiculously butting out ahead, gasoline spurting from the overfilled can onto his shoes. He pours a bit of gas on the floor allowing it to pool towards the rocking chair where Miss Habersham sits watch. When he strikes a match, Miss Habersham looks up with equanimity and asks him to step out of the light so she can thread her needle. Gowrie is defeated; he blows out the match and steps aside, as she goes to the door and exhorts the waiting crowd of men to "Go home. You ought to be ashamed." They turn silently aside in embarrassment, and begin to shuffle away.

Faulkner's vilification as a "nigger lover" by fellow southerners after Intruder's publication testifies to the fate of those making even the most tepid attempts to cross the color line in Mississippi in 1948. The lynch mob that battered the jail in Oxford to get to Nelse Patton in 1908 and the death squads Brown observed in Atlanta in 1906 would have blown through Miss Habersham as if she were a piece of tissue. Would mob psychology have changed much in the intervening years? We know that during the 1930s and 1940s, the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching counseled indirect intervention, realizing that jailhouse confrontations would expose them at the very least to taunts and threats from the mob. As if

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fulfilling the fantasy of a child in a dysfunctional family that by sheer force of their desire the grown-ups will stop acting like themselves and behave for once, Brown nevertheless turns the men away from their grisly mission through the authority of an elderly lady who sells chickens for a living. Even in the event that a more truthful depiction would have made it to the screen in 1949, it would have placed Brown outside of the southern family. The unpopularity of the film, now considered a classic, shows that Brown nevertheless came too close for comfort.

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Chapter Four: "A White Man's Country": Erskine Caldwell and the Shame of Lynching

> It was difficult for him to make up his mind. First he would tell himself that he was a white man. Then he would gaze at Sonny's black face. After that he would stare down upon the fields in the flatlands and wonder what would happen after it was all over. The men in the hunt-hungry mob would slap him on the back and praise him for having captured the Negro single-handed. But after the boy had been lynched, he knew that he would probably hate himself as long as he lived. He wished he had stayed at home.
>
> Erskine Caldwell, *Trouble in July* (1940)

Around the same time writers like Warren and Tate were nostalgically reconstructing a pastoral South through their poetry, fiction, and lives of Confederate heroes, Erskine Caldwell mounted a blistering attack on the region as "a worn out agricultural empire," plagued by peonage, racial violence, crushing poverty, and political corruption (*YHSTF* 2). Caldwell angered critics by refusing to blame the South's ills on its defeat by and subordination to the industrial North.[50] In his short stories, novels, journalism

[50] According to Dan Miller, "self-proclaimed 'Agrarians' like Donald Davidson and Allen Tate took issue with Caldwell's vicious fictional landscape. . . . These regional patriots had no patience for [Caldwell's] unremitting condemnation of Southern mores" ("New Life" 113). See Sylvia Jenkins Cook on Agrarian Criticism of Caldwell. See also Donald Davidson's review of *You*

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and photo-essays Caldwell instead shone a searchlight on the material and moral costs of white supremacy, revealing what a "white man's country" looked and felt like for the poor—both black and white. If shame was the hidden subtext of white supremacist masculinity for many southern writers, Caldwell saw shame instead as an urgent precondition for reform and sought to mortify his readers into ending these dreadful conditions. Caldwell was a member of the Writer's League Against Lynching, co-author with Sherwood Anderson of the foreword for the exhibition catalogue of "An Art Commentary on Lynching," and writer of anti-lynching fiction and journalistic exposes. Ending lynching was central to his activism and his art.[51]

Although some of his titles have recently been reprinted, today Caldwell remains little read and seldom studied, his work often missing from anthologies of southern literature. Yet it is impossible to understand the history of anti-lynching activism and the development of southern writing without serious study of Caldwell's contribution. His descent into obscurity owes much to the sheer volume of his work—over sixty titles—and the poor

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Have Seen Their Faces entitled "Erskine Caldwell's Picture Book" in Scott MacDonald, ed. *Critical Essays on Caldwell*, 59-66.

[51] The exhibition was held in 1935 at New York City's Arthur U. Newton Galleries. Caldwell wrote: "an exhibition of this nature serves two paramount causes. It brings to the attention of a large number of persons the fact that lynching is an existing condition, and it raises the question of what is to be done to outlaw it" (qtd. Salinger et al 24). As a member of the Writers' League Against Lynching, Caldwell actively supported passage of anti-lynching legislation. See "Ask President to Aid Anti-Lynching Bill." *New York Times* 30 Dec. 1934: 4.

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quality of his later fiction.[52] By 1951, Granville Hicks wrote in *College Fiction* that Caldwell, "has succeeded in digging his literary grave . . .. Each of the novels he has published in the past decade has sold hundreds of thousands of copies in paper covered editions, but the critics, without exception, have found nothing good to say about them." Yet as Hicks conceded, the quality of his earlier work, dealing with the racist and impoverished South, could not be disputed. It was this early work that led William Faulkner in 1946 to name Caldwell as one of America's five greatest novelists.[53] Indeed, as late as 1960, Caldwell was "under serious consideration for the Nobel Prize in literature" (Miller 112-113). [54] Scholars generally agree, moreover, that his return to issues of southern racism in the 1960s produced a revitalization of his talent.

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[52] Due to the large number of paperbacks sold, by the mid-1940s, Caldwell had sold more books than any previous U.S. writer; his books remained wildly popular so that by 1960, his sales had passed the seventy-million copy mark, and his publicists touted him as "The World's Best Selling Author." The University of Georgia's Brown Thrasher Press has brought some of Caldwell's best texts back into circulation in recent years. In 2003 when a group of academics and local history boosters gathered at the small Erskine Caldwell Museum and Birthplace in Moreland, Georgia to celebrate the writer's 100th birthday, Caldwell's widow and son lamented his descent into obscurity. Cameron Mc Whirter. "Returning Tobacco Road to a Place of Respectability." *Atlanta Journal Constitution* 14 Dec. 2003, 3M.

[53] Faulkner included himself among the five. In 1957, he remarked that though Caldwell seemed "to have written himself out years ago," nevertheless "I think that the first books, God's Little Acre and the short stories, that's enough for any man." Other Caldwell admirers include Fitzgerald, Anderson, Wright, Ellison, Camus, Sartre, Pound, Bellow, Dickey, Vonnegut, and Updike. (Arnold 853).

[54] Another reason for Caldwell's notoriety came from the public outcry against his work as obscene or pornographic. He won a landmark case against the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, which had removed copies of *God's Little Acre* from New York City bookshelves. See "Sumner Defeated in

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As one of the most-widely read US authors in history (his popularity happily coinciding with the rise of paperback novels), Caldwell's version was the South in the eyes of many American and European readers. Not surprisingly, this appalled some southerners—Caldwell received threats against his life on several of his trips back home. Southerners like Richard Wright and Sterling Brown, on the other hand, praised Caldwell's honesty and accuracy, and reviews of his anti-lynching novel, *Trouble in July* (1940), reveal the existence of "a number of thoughtful, articulate southerners who perceived not only the skill of Caldwell's art but the worth of his social goal" (Mixon 71).[55] Caldwell's popularity, moreover, extended across class lines. Edwin T. Arnold recalls on his summer job at the local cotton mill in Georgia seeing "paperback copies of Caldwell stuffed in the back pockets of overalls or folded broken-spined in the rough hands of men coming in and out of toilet stalls or sitting on radiators in the washroom, the only place passing for a lounge in the mill." The men urged the young college student to read

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Fight on a Book: Magistrate Greenspan Finds Novel by Erskine Caldwell is Not Obscene." *New York Times* 24 May 1933. The lurid covers on later paperback editions of his novels testify to his enduring reputation as a "dirty" novelist.

[55] Brown in his famous essay, "Negro Characters as Seen By White Authors" attacks "modern neo-confederates" such as the authors of I'll Take My Stand for their position that "freedom has proved a perilous state for the Negro" at the same time praising Caldwell, Milburn, Faulkner and Wolfe for their willingness to show that "what have been considered Negro characteristics, such as dialect, sexual looseness, violence, etc., are to be found as frequently among poor whites. When they do show Negro characters they frequently show them to be burdened by economic pressure, the playthings of Southern justice, and the catspaw for sadistic 'superiors'" (86)

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Caldwell, giving him a copy of *God's Little Acre* as a going away present. "It was the humor and the honesty that spoke to them . . .. Caldwell made them laugh, but he also got it right. He understood the world they lived in, the limited options and inherent unfairness and occasional meanness and unexpected craziness. They pushed his books on me, telling me I would learn something from reading them" (855). Yet if Caldwell was their greatest champion, he could also be the harshest critic of poor southern whites, refusing to sentimentalize or excuse their racism and propensity for violence.

Caldwell's Journalism: A Context for Lynching

Like Allen Tate, William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, and countless other southern children of what Grace Hale calls the "generation of 1900," Caldwell grew up in a culture saturated with lynching. Many white children raised in the South absorbed their parent's ambivalence, guilt and injunctions to silence about the violence surrounding them. Caldwell's father, Ira Sylvester, on the other hand, taught him to see segregation and its violent enforcement as a shameful heritage that he was morally obligated to try to change. A minister in the American Reformed Presbyterian church, Ira S. Caldwell's own struggle for justice combined practical aid to the poor—ministering to both black and white families—with insistence on a moral code that led him to bring his ministry to chain gangs and back alleys and to denounce from the pulpit a local sheriff who failed to stop a lynching. He took his son with him on his visits to poor farmers of both races, teaching him to treat all of them with equal respect. If other southerners reacted to

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violence with obfuscation and silence, Ira publicly broadcast his displeasure. Readers wrote in to the *Augusta Chronicle* to protest a piece by Ira entitled "Civilization is Only Skin Deep," in which he described a lynching in graphic terms. When the Klan threatened to run Ira out of town for his "outspoken liberalism," Ira simply ignored their threats (Miller 264).

In an article for the *New York Times* Sunday Magazine in 1965 entitled "The Deep South's Other Venerable Tradition," Caldwell described witnessing "for the first time in my life the premeditated and cruel beating of an adult Negro by a white man" while visiting the office of a "45-year-old landowner who rarely missed attending a Sunday service in my father's church, had inherited a plantation of more than 500 acres of corn and cotton sharecropping land" and lived in an "imposing" mansion in the town (SM11). As the young boy and his father watched in horror, the "flush-faced landowner," cigar clamped tightly in the corner of his mouth, took down a strap and began to whip an African American sharecropper for buying a cow and putting up a fence on plantation land without permission. Recognizing that intervening would be useless and that leaving was the most effective way to express his displeasure, "my father pushed me out of the room" and "into the bright sunlight of the street. The vicious 'wupping' of the strap and the moaning of the Negro were the only sounds we could hear in the quite afternoon of the town." With tears in his eyes and his lower lip trembling, Ira told his son: "There will be that kind of cruelty in our part of the world, until people like that man in the plantation office become enlightened enough to

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be ashamed of their meanness. But maybe a younger generation will try to put a stop to it sooner than that" (SM18).

In "The End of Christy Tucker," a short story appearing in *The Nation* in 1940, Caldwell reenacted the event, this time imagining the consequences if the sharecropper had resisted. Newly arrived from Alabama, Christy Tucker has angered his new landlord, Lee Crossman, by not purchasing his radio from the company store and by putting up a fence without permission. After Tucker refuses Crossman's order to remove his shirt and pants and take a punishment whipping, Crossman shoots him three times. Explaining to his office staff that Tucker was "just a biggity nigger," the boss opens the back door to let the other tenants see what could happen to them, but "there was not a Negro in sight. The only living thing out there was the mule on which Christy Tucker had ridden to town" (268).

In his writing about the Deep South, Caldwell's journalism and fiction formed twin prongs in his battle against racism. Like his father, Caldwell found it impossible to witness violence without speaking out against it.[56] In late 1933, while Caldwell and his wife Helen were visiting his parents at their home in Wrens, Georgia, he learned of the widespread terrorization of

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[56] Caldwell's anger at lynching is evident in his earliest writing. A lynching took place in Abbeville County, South Carolina while he was a student nearby at Erskine College. Waylaid by four men while trying to leave town after his acquittal for a crime, the victim, Mark Smith was later pulled from the Savannah River. His body had been "hacked almost to pieces, with the head and legs cut off." After transferring to the University of Virginia, Caldwell memorialized Smith in a poem entitled "The Face Beneath the Sky": "they fought . . . in anger for his ears/His blood they drew with gruesome pride/And took away his hands for souvenirs" (qtd. Mixon 33).

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African Americans in the nearby town of Bartow, including at least three lynchings and the burning of fourteen homes. Caldwell investigated and filed dispatches of his results in the *New Masses* magazine in New York. His second report, which the *New Masses* published on January 23, 1934, describes a Georgia riddled with the bodies of the dead, including "an unidentified man about thirty-five years of age" who was "shot in the head and breast about six times and, apparently because he did not die quickly enough, his head was almost severed from his body with a knife." During an interview with a man in protective custody who had seen a white mob beat five people with lead pipes, Caldwell wrote, "while you sit there looking at Sam and listening to him, you cannot keep from feeling uncomfortable; because your skin is white, and Sam Outler is an accusing finger pointing at the white men of your country who butcher hogs with more humaneness than they kill Negroes" (137). After leaving the jail, Caldwell pauses in front of a drug store window in which a poster "displaying three naked girls and the name of a perfume manufacturer" is crowded up against signs reading "Drink Coca-Cola." Caldwell moves on "before the aromatic drug store smell" overwhelms him, and he turns away only to receive yet another confirmation of the terror produced by whiteness: "While waiting at the end of the bridge, a Negro boy comes out of the darkness and dodges you. When you speak to him, he darts into the swamp beside the road." The innocent boy's fear to move through public space is juxtaposed with the movement of the local murderers who "walk the streets with heroic strides" while a town seems undisturbed (139).

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Caldwell reports: "The number of other Negroes who have been killed in the vicinity of Bartow during the past twelve months, as well as the number killed during the past three decades—is unknown. One man's guess is apparently as good as another's. A farmer living three miles from town will tell you that "there must have been ten or twenty put to death last year." A Negro living on the edge of the Ogeechee swamp near Bartow will say: 'White folks—only the devil himself knows how many'" (139). It is a given in scholarship on lynching that the number of people who were disappeared during Jim Crow makes an accurate body count impossible. Caldwell did his best to change the calculus of which bodies mattered in the Deep South. [57] The national publicity he secured led to an influx of reporters and independent investigation led by Arthur Draper of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation supporting Caldwell's claim that a "reign of terror" existed in Bartow, with African Americans "living in a state of fear," afraid even to go to school or church, because "these tragedies so far have gone unchallenged by the courts and the white citizenship" (Mixon 96).[58]

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[57] Even when debt slaves were murdered on one of the notorious farms, rumors swirled in the surrounding communities. For instance, in 1906 federal agents investigating charges that the Oliver Brothers Construction Company was "using forced labor in a Tennessee railroad camp and killing some of the peons," stopped to chat with a local resident downriver from the camp, asking him idly if the local fishing were any good. The agent later recalled: "The man said yes, but no one around there would eat the fish now. I asked him why and he said the river was full of dead negroes" (Freeman 30). See Freeman, *Lay This Body Down: the 1921 Murders of Eleven Plantation Slaves.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999.

[58] See "Inquiry Demanded in Race Murders: Georgia Commission Tells of Reign of Fear Among Negro Residents." *New York Times* 31 Jan. 1934: 19.

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The next year, Caldwell traveled south once again to collect stories for the *New York Post*. In a 1921 American Civil Liberties pamphlet, William Pickens had described southern debt slavery as "cunningly contrived . . . to give the appearance of civilization and the sanction of law. A debt of a few hundred dollars may tie a black man and his family of ten as securely in bondage to a great white planter as if he had purchased their bodies." Pickens blamed this system "for all of the massacres of colored people and for nearly all of the horrible lynchings and burnings of individual Negroes that have lately taken place in this region," with "even the most complicated, of these 'race' troubles": traceable to some dispute "about wages or work or property" (211-212). This grim exploitation had only worsened in a rural South devastated by the Great Depression. As one African American tenant told Caldwell, "the last time I tried to move off, the landlord said he's going to beat me with a stick if I ever mention it again. I don't owe him a single dollar, and he won't say why he's keeping me here." The white tenant farmer's poverty proved to be equally abject, his intimidation and exploitation nearly as dire.

These articles led to widespread condemnation of Caldwell as a traitor to the South. After a tour with Ira Caldwell through the area his son had visited to collect information for his first *Post* article, the *Augusta Chronicle* concluded that the poor were "victims of their own shiftlessness and ignorance" ("Investigation" 19). Caldwell responded to the *Chronicle*'s

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charge of exaggeration by insisting that his *Post* articles had actually *underestimated* the problem: "I could tell of families thrown out of their homes, plodding along public highways in Georgia and dragging their possessions on the ground behind them. I could tell of men, with tears in their eyes, begging fruitlessly while their children starved. I could tell of teen-age girls, without job or home, offering 'french dates' for a quarter on the streets of the editor's home city . . .. I could tell of these and many more, and to illustrate the point I can take pictures with a camera that will drive the nail home" (qtd. Mixon 100).

The second four-part article appearing in the *Post* featured photographs taken by Caldwell. He and Ira traveled through Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia "gathering material to confirm the picture that he had drawn in the initial series." Mixon reports that "he and Ira were chased out of a county in Alabama, and in Georgia, Erskine had to restrain a knife-toting man who was angered by reports in the *Chronicle* while his father 'talked him down'" (101). In Mississippi, Caldwell found that the plight of the black tenant had progressively degenerated in the previous decades, from sharecropping, to renting, to day labor for an average of ten dollars a month. In Alabama, a state "whose human beings are among the most exploited of any in America," Erskine and Ira found illiteracy, peonage, and landlord brutality. They found children, black and white, who had never attended even a day of school. They found an African American tenant who had not been paid for his labor in 1934. Caldwell insisted, "by any fair accounting means, this Negro tenant

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should have received not less than $150 in cash." In Macon County, Alabama, home of Tuskegee University, they heard reports of tenants beaten or killed just for asking for better treatment from their landlords ("Negroes" 4). In Georgia, Caldwell found conditions even worse than Mississippi and Alabama. "It is astonishing to find in this Jim Crow State," Caldwell wrote, "that the economic condition of this class of white tenant is lower than that of the Negro" ("Georgia Tenants" 4).

In 1937, Erskine Caldwell teamed up with photographer Margaret Bourke-White to produce a photo-essay based on their tour amongst the people of the Deep South. The title—*You Have Seen Their Faces*—says it all: Caldwell's text and Bourke-White's photographs provided evidence of southern poverty and racial oppression and challenged readers to act upon what they had seen. The written text is divided into six sections, illustrated by Bourke-White's seventy-five black-and-white photographs. In the appendix to the book, Bourke-White described carefully staging her photographs, waiting while Caldwell talked to the tenants until they produced exactly the expression she was looking for. In the front matter, Caldwell admitted that the captions and monologues accompanying the pictures did not "pretend to reproduce the actual sentiments" of the people in the photographs. Both text and photographs have been unfavorably compared to Walker Evans' and

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James Agee's *Now Let Us Praise Famous Men* (1941), which exhibited a self-consciousness and diffidence about intruding into the lives of their subjects.[59]

The careful staging of images and impressionistic rendering of the subjects' "thoughts" should be seen, however, in the context of 1930s documentary conventions. "Most of Caldwell's non-fiction of the 1930s," says Sylvia Jenkins Cook, "was propaganda . . . the genre is almost inseparably linked to it; but it is propaganda of the highest artistic quality" (236). Similarly Mixon points out, "that Caldwell was not a dispassionate investigator but a propagandist does not detract from the worth of his accounts. The name recognition that the play Tobacco Road had provided insured a wide audience for his work. No other champion of the South's rural poor was as well known, and few were as impassioned, as Caldwell" (117). In contrast, Agee's and Evans' text would remain relatively unknown until the 1960s.

Through their words and images, Caldwell and Bourke-White dramatize white supremacy's role in keeping the poor of both races on the knife-edge of starvation, divided from each other and mired in hopelessness. Taking pains to balance the number of photographs of whites and blacks, they show how blacks and whites share common poverty, struggles with depleted soil, ill-use by landlords and need for help. If the situation of the African American is exponentially more dire, if the poor white, with the complicity of

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[59] See, however, Dale Maharidge and Michael Williamson, *And Their Children After Them: The Legacy of* Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*: James Agee, Walker Evans, and the Rise and Fall of Cotton in the South*. which traces the lives of Agee's and Evans' documentary subjects, some of whom reported their feeling of having been used and then abandoned by the pair (139-140).

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the law and the southern elite, reaps a meager benefit from the misery of his African American neighbor, this makes change even more imperative. Unlike Richard Wright's *12 Million Black Voices*, Caldwell's book contains no photograph of a lynching, yet he describes it as an omnipresent possibility in a black sharecropper's life: [60]

> The Negro tenant farmer is the descendent of the slave. For generations he has lived in mortal fear of the white boss in the cotton country. He has seen his women violated and his children humiliated. He himself has been discriminated against, cheated, whipped, and held forcibly in an inferior position. Every white face he sees is a reminder of his brother's mutilation, burning and death at the stake. He has no recourse at law because he is denied the right of trial before his peers. The Negro tenant farmer on a plantation is still a slave. (11)

Starvation, physical abuse and psychological trauma marked the degraded position of the African American tenant farmer, but the white tenant farmer's hopeless situation also encompassed his own moral perversion, released in repetitive acts of sadistic behavior:

> In a land that has long gloried in the supremacy of the white race, [the white tenant farmer] directed his resentment against the black man. His normal instincts became perverted. He became wasteful and careless. He became bestial. He released his pent-up emotions by

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[60] See Farah Griffin's discussion of the lynching photograph in Wright's text in *Who Set You Flowin': The African –American Migration Narrative*. New York: Oxford UP, 1995. 34-36.

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> lynching the black man in order to witness the mental and physical suffering of another human being. . . . He released his energy from day to day by beating mules and dogs, by whipping and kicking an animal into insensibility or to death. When his own suffering was more than he could stand, he could live only by witnessing the suffering of others. (19-20)

In his final chapter, Caldwell proposes "two means of bringing about a change: one method is collective action by tenant farmers themselves, the other method is government control of cotton farming." While substantial relief would be decades away, Caldwell's proposal, written at a time of coalition building between civil rights and labor and high hopes for New Deal economic reform, is not mere utopianism, but a call for specific, concrete change .[61] "Ten million persons on Southern tenant farms are living in degradation and defeat," Caldwell reminded his readers, but "they are still people, they are human beings. They have life" (48).

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[61] For more on civil rights, see Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1996. John Egerton. *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South*. Chapel Hill, 1994; Adam Fairclough. *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972.* Athens, GA, 1995. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall. *Revolt Againstt Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching*. New York, 1979.
On southern black labor radicalism, see Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression.* Chapel Hill and London, 1990, and Nell Irvin Painter, *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson: His Life as a Negro Communist in the South*. Cambridge, MA, 1979.

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The Wages of Whiteness: "Kneel to the Rising Sun"

As sociologists Tolnay and Beck observe, the white elite employed racial violence to "maintain a sharp cleavage between black and white labor. As long as workers remained rigidly divided by the caste line," planters and employers could use "the presence of black labor to maximize profits and hold down the wages of whites. A perennial threat to the white elite, however was the potential for the caste line to weaken" and for workers to organize across racial lines (72). In "Kneel to the Rising Sun," the title story of a collection published in 1935, Caldwell probes the psychological mechanisms necessary to keep this caste line firmly in place.[62] In his review in the *New York Times*, Harold Strauss praised the volume as "Caldwell's most powerful work," proclaiming it proof that "there is a point in literary achievement at which propaganda becomes art" (BR6).

The story begins as a white sharecropper, Lonnie, goes to the company store to ask his employer for food for his family, who have literally been starving on short rations. The employer, Arch Gunnard, a consummate white supremacist, intimidates everyone, white men included, except for one of his black sharecroppers, Clem Henry. Clem tries to teach Lonnie, who seems simple-minded as well as ignorant, that the source of his troubles is his exploitation by Arch, whose favorite pastime is cutting off the tails of dogs,

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[62] It is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine the large body of Caldwell's fiction dealing with racial inequality and oppression. Recent book-length studies that do so include Wayne Mixon, The People's Writer: Erskine Caldwell and the South and Sylvia Jenkins Cook, Erskine Caldwell and the Fiction of Poverty.

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which Caldwell establishes as barely displaced castration when Arch wishes "niggers had tails" because "there'd be more to cut, for one thing" (290). We learn that "Arch Gunnard had a trunk full of dogs' tails at home. He had been cutting off dog's tails ever since anyone could remember, and during all those years had accumulated a collection of which he was so proud that he kept the trunk locked and the key tied around his neck" (289). The tails are like lynching souvenirs, invested with sacred significance, opened only when the preacher visits or the crowds of his neighbors gather on his porch, and Arch ritually recites the history of each symbolic emasculation.

When Arch Gunnard lops off the tail of Lonnie's dog, Lonnie remains silent and acquiescent. Clem alone takes this insult "like a man," as his fellow black tenants must hold him back from reacting to this treatment of another man's pet. Lonnie returns from his visit with Arch with a mutilated dog and nothing to eat. On the verge of starvation, Lonnie's old deaf father sneaks off in the middle of the night to look for food. Lonnie wakes up Clem and the two head off in search of the old man, discovering to their horror that he has fallen into the pen of Arch Gunnard's fattening hogs, who have devoured his face, stomach, and throat. Outraged, Clem demands that Arch come out to see what his short rationing has done, and an equally angry Gunnard decides to lynch his employee for daring to talk back to him with his hat on. Although Lonnie admires, trusts, and depends on his friend—indeed has gotten him into this situation—he becomes confused and then terrified by the prospect of subverting the racial order. "He knew he could not take sides with a Negro,

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in the open, even if Clem had helped him, and especially after Clem had talked to Arch in the way he wished he could himself. He was a white man, and to save his life, he could not think of turning against Arch, no matter what happened" (297).

Feckless and timid though he may be, Lonnie's decision to side with Arch deeply accords with the logic of white supremacy. As Nell Painter points out, under Jim Crow, "poor whites thought they had something to lose by being treated equally with blacks, because they did have something to lose—political standing and wages, not to mention other little perquisites of whiteness such as knowing there is someone who is considered your inferior. . . . Poor whites who banded together with rich whites against blacks were not simply victims of a false consciousness, at least not in the short run" (Southern 115). In the end, as Harold Strauss observes, "economic forces determine the moral question" (BR6).

Although he easily might have lied, Lonnie, "who could not figure out how a Negro could be braver than he was," tells the lynching party where Clem is hiding. Experiencing emotions veering from terror to joy in the hunt, Lonnie joins the lynching party, prowling after his friend like a dog. When the mob reaches the tree, Lonnie can see "everybody with guns raised, and far into the sky the sharply outlined face of Clem Henry gleamed in the rising sun. His body was hugging the slender top of the pine" (302). Disoriented, Lonnie finds "himself running from tree to tree, clutching at the rough pine bark, stumbling wildly towards the cleared ground." The sky turns from gray

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to red "and the sun appears in a scene of death and transfiguration" (Devlin 125-127).[63] Trying to keep his eyes on his home, Lonnie falls and stumbles on the hard clods of the field:

> Once he fell and found it was almost impossible to rise again to his feet. He struggled to his knees, facing the round red sun. The warmth gave him strength to rise to his feet, and he muttered unintelligibly to himself. He tried to say things he had never thought to say before. (302)

Yet Lonnie's epiphany is short-lived, having participated in the murder of the only man who could have helped him to rise and become a man. He returns home, dejected, to a starving wife and a day's exhausting toil. Under white supremacy, race consciousness defeats class consciousness. In "Kneel to the Rising Sun," Caldwell has "posited the revolutionary ideal of solidarity squarely in the rural South and examined its failure with both sympathy and irony" (Cook 73).

The Shame of a Community: Trouble in July

Part of Caldwell's ten novel "Southern cyclorama"—intended to be a grand sweep of Southern life, and that included *Tobacco Road* (1932) and *God's Little Acre* (1933)--*Trouble in July* (1940) represents Caldwell's most

[63] James Devlin remarks on the Christian symbolism: "Clem is a black Christ who walks country roads teaching his disciple Lonnie a religion of social justice. But Lonnie, a composite of Judas and Peter, denies his black master just before dawn and betrays him to armed men, the leader of whom is Arch Gunnard, whose name hints at his . . . function in the story" (125).

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nuanced and powerful condemnation of lynching.[64] Walter White called it "the most revealing picture" he had "ever seen of the effect of lynching on the whole racial attitude, the mentality and morality of the South." In fact, few months after the novel's publication, White wrote Caldwell that he continued "to serve as an unofficial press agent for *Trouble in July*" (qtd. Simon xxi). The novel chronicles thirty-six hours in a Georgia community bent on lynching an innocent boy on an accusation of rape that virtually no one believes. It's a familiar script to students of lynching: Sonny Clark, an eighteen-year-old sharecropper who is well-liked and has never been in trouble, is intercepted on his way home by a troubled fifteen-year-old white girl, Katy Barlow, who gropes him on the road as she whispers her promise to keep their encounter a secret. As Sonny struggles to disengage himself, a car screeches to a halt. Out step Preacher Felts and Narcissa Calhoun, a bible saleswoman who has been circulating a petition to send Negroes back to Africa because the sales of a mail-order bible from Chicago picturing Jesus as a black man have undercut her own efforts to peddle the story of Christ as a used-car salesman.[65] Though Katy says nothing about being raped, Felts and Calhoun

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[64] Charles Poole's review in the *New York Times* proclaimed that novel "shows Mr. Caldwell at the top of his ability as a novelist" (18). Caldwell's sweeping indictment of society garnered swift condemnation from many southerners. The *Gainsville Georgia News*, for instance, entitled its March 20, 1940 review of the book, "Erskine Caldwell is the Personification of an Earthworm."

[65] Caldwell is undoubtedly taking a dig at Bruce Barton's 1924 *The Man Nobody Knows* in which the advertising executive and Tennessee native portrayed Jesus as a salesman and an ad man. The conjunction of religion and capitalism has a decidedly seamier side in Caldwell's telling. See Caldwell's *Deep South* in which he differentiates between the white and the black church

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stage a spectacle designed to advance themselves politically. They allow Sonny to escape, wring a "confession" from Katy, and spread the rumor of rape.

In *Trouble in July*, Caldwell portrays the lynching as a political conspiracy based on an accusation of rape that virtually no one believes. When he hears of the charge, Sheriff Jeff McCurtain says, "some of those folks up there in those sandhills beyond Flowery Branch raise girls that have never drawn the color line. It's not an easy thing to say about brother whites, but it has always looked to me like them folks up there never was particular enough about the color line" (18). Neither, it turns out, is Sheriff Jeff (for Jefferson) McCurtain or his deputies, Bert and Jim, who have a fondness for bringing black women to the jail for sex. Jeff tells them, "if you can't stick to white girls, you've got to go somewhere else to do your laying-out with the nigger ones" (8). Jeff's wife, Corra, lectures him repeatedly on the subject, insisting she'd "die of humiliation" if she caught him. To which he retorts, "you know I ain't touched a colored girl since that last time" (113).

Jeff's greatest desire is to keep the lynching "politically clean." A three-hundred-pound political hack, Jeff fears losing his livelihood, which includes copious nap time, and rent-free accommodation above a jail that is warm in the winter and cool in the summer. McCurtain spends most of his

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in the South. In his review of *Trouble*, Richard Wright advises his readers not to "accept as good Caldwellian fun Narcissa Calhoun's idea of shipping the Negroes back to Africa. Caldwell was serious, no matter how fantastic it sounds, for such notions are being aired in the halls of the senate today" (352).

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time locking up African Americans charged with petty crimes, his friend Sam Brinson in particular. Though he hates going fishing, it is his "only means . . . of escaping from a controversial matter," and he has spent as much time during his eleven years as sheriff carrying a rod and reel as a rifle. He has nothing personal against Sonny and even hates "to think of the boy's life being taken away from him, but now that the situation was threatening his own political existence he knew he would have to safeguard his future at any cost" (99).

Much to his dismay, however, Judge Allen—who bends with the political winds—insists that given the uncertainty introduced by the Calhoun petition, Jeff go out to Flowery Branch and "move around in the act of trying to catch that nigger, at the same time dropping a hint that if you do catch him, he can be taken away from you if enough citizens demand that" (70). He's not to take actual action until he gets further orders from the judge. Fearful of being killed for interfering with the mob, Jeff decides to stay out of their way. Under cover of darkness, he sneaks into jail, locks himself in and throws away the key, intent on claiming that he'd been abducted and thrown into a cell. His plan is ruined by the arrival of a mob pursuing Sonny. When they turn the lights on, Jeff realizes that a "mulatto girl" is also locked in the cage. Jeff tries to explain that he is not actually guilty of miscegenation, until the leader of the mob cuts him off: "Nobody cares about that" (102).

The mob decides to kidnap Sam Brinson "in case that other one don't turn up." Sam is a "colored man" of whom Jeff is very fond. He calls him a

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"special friend" and locks him up much as the deputies lock up their women—to provide company and serve his emotional needs. The once-timid Jeff now resolutely ignores the threats of the mob and does what he refused to do for Sonny: relentlessly pursues them in order to prevent a lynching. "I ain't going to budge myself back to town till I find out what in the world became of that darky," Jeff tells his bewildered deputy, insisting that his hunt for Sam is not political, but "personal" (169). Although he has been dithering about Narcissa's petition, waiting to see which way the political winds blow, he turns on her after Sam is abducted:

> Maybe some colored people do have mean traits, but there are brother whites in this country a heap meaner than any nigger I ever saw. Now you take Sam Brinson, the colored man. He's a no account scoundrel . . . but aside from that he's as companionable a fellow as you'll find in either race. I'd hate not to have him around. I'd feel lost if Sam wasn't here no more. (125)

A mob member, who had just been waxing eloquent on how seeing an African American man with money convinced him it was time for another lynching, also disapproves of the petition: "String one of them up ever so often. That'll make all of them keep their place. Hell if there wasn't no more niggers in the country, I'd feel lost without them. Besides, who'd do all the work, if the niggers was sent away?" (191). This underlines the deep immorality of paternalism, of separating the "good niggers" from the "bad," of sentimentalizing those who know their "place." What McCurtain hopes will

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differentiate Sam's survival from Sonny's is his patronage. Yet ultimately the exchange takes place only because of another white man's refusal to act according to his conscience and to save Sonny, whom he clearly places in the category of "good" or at least innocent.

In "Lynching and the Status Quo," Arthur C. Cox identifies a recognizable lynching cycle, which includes: "a growing belief among whites" that the "Negroes are getting out of hand—in wealth, in racial independence, in attitudes of self-assertion, especially as workers; or in reliance upon the law"; a building of racial antagonism and tension through "continual critical discussion about Negroes among whites" ; and a "rumored or actual occurrence of some outrage committed by a Negro upon some white person or persons." Cox adds that "if the tension is very high, whites will purposely seek an incident with the Negroes." (577). This is followed by the lynching itself. Cox posits the terrorization of the African American population as an integral part of the lynching cycle. He notes that "many put themselves completely at the mercy of the non-militant 'white friends' by cowering in the latter's homes, and pleading for protection from the enraged mob." When about two or three days after lynching, the mob "achieves its emotional catharsis," there is a ritual of denunciation among the "best white people," although no justice will ever come of it. Following a lynching, "there is a new interracial adjustment. Negroes become exceedingly circumspect in their dealing with whites, for they are now thoroughly frightened. Many are obligated to their 'white friends' for having saved their

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lives; and few will dare even to disagree with white persons on any count whatever. The man who does so is not considered a hero by the majority of Negroes" (578).

This is the ugly face of paternalism, fully unmasked in Sheriff Jeff. Jeff has an affection for Sam, both homoerotic and deep—in one scene, he tenderly strokes a car that Sam has been fixing up—but this does not make him less of a racist. When Judge Allen tears up Narcissa's petition and sends word for Sonny to be brought back to the jail unharmed, it's too late. Jeff callously decides to substitute Sam's life for Sonny's. "If Judge Ben Allen wants a dead nigger, I'll get him. But if he wants a live one, he'll just have to wait till I find out about Sam first." (198).

If "Kneel to the Rising Sun" represented Caldwell's indictment of the political machinations and economic oppression used to divide workers, in *Trouble*, Caldwell forcefully points the finger of blame at the depravity and cruelty of the white mob. Their lives may be ruled by the price of cotton and they may feel each African American advance as their own diminishment, but this can neither adequately explain nor justify their violent rampages. Many members of the mob view the lynching as recreation and are delighted to be getting out on a "nigger hunt." For the deputy sheriff Jim, "the two joys of his life were hunting possums between midnight and dawn and tracking down runaway Negroes." (32). Their gathering resembles "the beginning of one of the regular weekly possum hunts that nearly everybody in that part of the country took part in" (75). The hunting party includes some particularly

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sadistic members, including Oscar Dent, who "had often boasted that he had killed so many Negroes that he had lost count. During the past winter he shot one to death at his lumber camp and killed another with his crowbar." There is DeLoach, the town barber, who lives to take part in lynchings and will travel halfway across the state to find one. And Katy's father, Shep Barlow, is a tough customer who slit a man's throat just for taking a drink of water in his yard, then watched him slowly bleeding to death over several hours. A tenant, like Sonny, on Bob Watson's plantation, Shep neglects his land, and the lynching will not only enhance his status in the community, it will provide a welcome diversion from his grass-choked plot, its cotton stunted and starved. "Shep had hoped to find Sonny single-handed. He wanted to be the one to catch him because he wished to have the satisfaction of tying a rope around the Negro boy's neck and dragging him behind his car before turning him over to the crowd" (132).

The hunt pauses for a sadistic festival of sexual abuse and humiliation of African American women and their terrorized husbands, as the mob breaks into the homes where they have been fearfully hiding. The mob tortures Luke Bottomly and his wife, tearing off his nightshirt and beating him on the buttocks and back with a board. They push his naked wife around the bed with the point of a gun, and then as her husband helplessly watches, she is "forced to stretch out on her back and then [a] bottle of turpentine" is "emptied over her stomach." The men stand and watch as she trembles nervously, then screams in pain as the fluid begins to burn her, finally tearing

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at her skin until it bleeds. In another cabin, white men discover the seventeen-year-old wife of Amos Green, who is away working his job at a saw mill. They tear off her nightgown and poke their guns at her naked body. When the mob rushes out after someone sets fire to a chicken coop, two men take advantage of the diversion to steal back into the cabin to rape her. Caldwell's damning expose of the white rape complex intensifies further when Bob Watson arrives to chase the marauding rapists from his property and these same men defend their actions by saying, "a white girl's been raped, Mr. Bob. We can't let the niggers overrun the country like that" (192).

As Ida B. Wells-Barnett proved conclusively a half-century earlier, many such accusations were false or the result of consensual relations that had inadvertently been made public. Nor was the scenario in which a white woman enhances her class status or her sexual desirability through accusations of lynching uncommon. In Faulkner's "Dry September," for instance, the false accusations of a middle-aged spinster provoke the lynching of an African American man. Miss Cooper, who is in the "dry" autumn of her sexual life, receives renewed attention after news hits town: "the young men lounging in the doorway tipped their hats, followed with their eyes the motion of her hips and legs when she passed" (170). McClendon, an aging war hero whose life has also become "dry," returns home from killing a man in the name of white women's honor to berate and strike his wife. In the most famous case of false accusations of rape, two white women, Victoria Price and Ruby Bates, framed nine young African American boys in Scottsboro,

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Alabama, by saying they were raped on a train to avoid charges of vagrancy and prostitution.

According to biographer Dan Miller, "during the research for *You Have Seen Their Faces,* Caldwell and Bourke-White passed through the town of Kelley, Georgia, and witnessed an angry mob searching for a black man accused of raping a white prostitute. Caldwell did not discuss the incident in the book, but he did not forget it; he already knew that it would serve as the centerpiece for the novel he was getting ready to write" (269). An earlier episode may also have contributed to his depiction of Katy Barlow in *Trouble*. In 1965 memoir, *In Search of Bisco*, Caldwell explains that in September, 1917, when he was fourteen and in the eighth grade in Tipton County, Tennessee, there were "frequent rumors" and "occasional newspaper reports" of "lynchings along the Mississippi River" (10). Walking home from school one afternoon, he encountered a group of "about a dozen white farmers and timber cutters" gossiping that "a young Negro boy named Sonny Brown had been accused of raping a twenty-year-old white girl" notorious for trading "gumdrops or chocolate candy" for sex. Along with several other men, the girl's father and brother had gone to the lumber mill where he worked, "strung Sonny from the limb of a tree, and blasted his life away with shotguns" (8-9). Some men argued that Sonny should not have been lynched because the girl had lied, but others insisted that "no Negro who had had sexual intercourse with a white girl, even a whore, out to be allowed to stay alive" (10). For "a long time afterward," the boy would wonder "how a

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Negro boy anywhere would have a chance to prove, before he was lynched, that he was not guilty of raping a white girl" (10-11).

Caldwell complicates this scenario in *Trouble* with his compassionate portrayal of Sonny's accuser. Like Sonny Brown and Sonny Clark, Katy Barlow is a throw-away person, whose feelings, desires and future are treated with contempt. After her mother drowned in the family well, her father reacted with rage, throwing in the entire woodpile on top of her lifeless body, prefiguring Katy's own fate. The grieving child of thirteen ran off into the woods for days, and for months was afraid to sleep in her own house at night. Shep doesn't believe Katy's been raped, taunting her, "that woman who sells the tracts and you made up that tale" (134). When her grandfather voices his opposition to the lynching ("I don't like for Annie's girl to be mixed up in a shameful lynching"), Shep retaliates by brutalizing his daughter. "Before she could get out of the way, her father had grabbed her with his left hand and had struck her with his right. His fist struck her on the side of her head, sending her crashing against the wall" (138). Terrorized and abused her entire life, it is little wonder she submits to Narcissa's demands. In truth, she has a diminished capacity for any other choice.

At the urging of her supposed protector and moral champion, Katy displays herself to the lynch mob in a dress "ripped" by her attacker. The men ogle her and greet her with cries like "Hi, Katy! How about it?" (86). They drink whiskey and leer, while a man named Milo boasts of a sexual adventure the previous fall (when she would have been fourteen), in which

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the love-starved child seemed unable to separate sexual satisfaction from cruelty and pain. During sex, he says, she drew blood on his shoulder with her teeth while he beat her with his fists. Today, Milo insists, she's "got that same look" of excitement as she stands smiling on the step. Justified as revenge for assaults against morality, lynchings and the preparation for lynchings often carried a potent sexual charge. As Jacqueline Dowd Hall explains, "Rape and rumors of rape became the folk pornography of the Bible Belt. As stories spread, the violation of the white woman was described in progressively embellished detail, a public fantasy that implied group participation in the rape that was as toxic as the subsequent lynching. The lynch victim, literally, and the alleged rape victim, figuratively, became objects of voyeuristic fantasy." (*Revolt Against Chivalry* xx).

We see a different side of Katy when we learn that she has been secretly making a wedding dress, hidden in a box along with "six napkins she'd cut and hemmed and two towels she'd embroidered." When her boyfriend, Leroy Liggett hears of the rape accusation against Sonny and of her behavior on the front porch, he calls her a "cotton field slut" and tells her: "Females like you ought to be beaten till you can't see straight." Leroy drops Katy, destroying her wedding plans and her future.

> She had never felt so lonely before. She sobbed, wishing her mother were alive so she could go to her. She felt if she could lose herself in her mother's arms she would be able to endure the pain that was so intense she could not keep from screaming. For a long time, she cried

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> brokenly, hugging herself with her arms, and tried to keep from thinking of the things she had made and kept in the scarlet colored box under her bed. (155)

In his review of *Trouble*, Richard Wright identified fear as "the pivot of the story" (352). After Leroy rejects her, Katy can see no escape from her situation. She takes off into the woods, running for her life. "No matter how fast she was able to run, she could not get away from the fear that gripped her" (156).

Like his accuser, Sonny Clark spends the night wandering in terror through the woods. A young boy of eighteen, a virgin who lives with his grandmother, Sonny Clark, has never even been over the ridge surrounding the plantation. The frightened teenager despairs of having to leave home and wishes he could "go back and work for Bob Watson in the cotton" (52). [66] Before heading off into the woods, he begs for cornbread—as well as kindness from his petrified friend, Henry—then remembers his rabbits. "Mammy was old and she forgot things easily. It hurt him to think of his rabbits shut up in the hutch and dying of starvation." (57). He steals back to the hutch to feed the rabbits and we see his youth and gentleness: "The two does sat where they were and let him rub their ears back and run his fingers through their fur" (57). Putting one of the littlest rabbits in his shirt for company, he hurries "along a path to Earnshaw Ridge, holding his elbows

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[66] A common reason for capture in lynching representations comes from the victim's desire to go home. To bid farewell forever to their loved ones. See Dreiser's "Nigger Jeff"and Wright's "Big Boy Leaves Home," for example.

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close to his sides so the motions of his body would not jolt and frighten the animal" (59). When he is captured, the rabbit hops out and the white men blow it to bits with their shotguns.

It is a white farmer, Harvey Glenn, who has "captured" Sonny after accidentally finding him in the brush. Glen knows the teenager is innocent, yet he turns him over to the killers, mourning yet never questioning his obligation to do so. He explains awkwardly to Sonny that he can't risk being called a nigger lover, not even at the cost of his conscience: "this is a white man's country. Niggers has always had to put up with it. . . .It's just the way it is, I guess." This explanation echoes Judge Allen's sonorous pronouncement to Jeff: "*consuetude loci observeranda est*" (the custom of the place is to be observed). When Sonny realizes that Glenn has decided to give him up, he begs him to shoot him first. Harvey "shook his head form side to side, every muscle in his neck aching painfully. . . . 'I ain't got a gun to do it with,' he said, stumbling over the ground'" (226). [67] In his review of the novel, Richard Wright observed that "some of the most laughable, human, and terrifying pages Caldwell has ever written deal with Sonny trotting with doglike obedience at the heels of Glenn, who is trying to decide what to do with him" (73).[68] Neither of the two appears able to think outside of the terrible system to which they are thrall. Every person who could have acted to save Sonny considered his life expendable, including, in the end, Sonny himself.

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[68] Like Lonnie in "Kneel to the Rising Sun," the decision to betray an innocent man leads Glenn to a condition of blindness and disorientation in which he literally stumbles across familiar ground.

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Sylvia Jenkins Cook maintains that Caldwell draws "careful parallels" between Sonny and Katy "that were largely ignored by those critics and reviewers who felt Caldwell was merely rehearsing a formulaic southern myth in his novel." (148) After Katy confronts the lynch mob with the injustice of their act, she is ritually punished with an Old Testament stoning. The bodies of victim and accuser are "juxtaposed in death, Katy's on the ground by the river and Sonny's slowly turning at the end of a rope on the tree above. Katy's complicity in Sonny's death, followed by her own subsequent sacrifice," says Cook, "aligns her symbolically on both sides of the conflict between white men's oppression and their victims" (148). Katy Barlow's murder complicates the idea that lynching ever accorded lower-class white women the mantle of purity and ladyhood.[69] The code of white supremacist masculinity regards

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[69] Compare this also with *To Kill a Mockingbird*, in which Mayella Ewell brings the rape accusation out of her deep shame that even Tom didn't want her. Although as Donaldson and Jones point out, "the dominant southern and national stories' dichotomous logic" has traditionally viewed gender in the South as "even more constrictively defined and polarized than elsewhere in American culture." (6). Yet recent scholarship traces such "time-honored stories of white cavaliers and belles, of black Jezebels and Nat Turners" to "general unease with the sometimes intense and always unending negotiations defining gender within the region. Such stories may have appeared all the more reassuring in a region where manhood and womanhood seemed so difficult to control" (6). For more on the intersection of southern gender and racial dynamics see Martha Elizabeth Hodes. *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth Century South*. Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*. Routledge, 1997; Sandra Gunning, *Race, Rape and Lynching: The Red Record of American Literature, 1890-1912*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996; Jacqueline Dowd-Hall, "The Mind that Burns in Each Body" and *Revolt Against Chivalry*.

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blacks and women as less than fully human and, therefore, expendable if they should violate their code.

In Remembering Trauma, Richard McNally observes that:

> unlike fear, which can be experienced by rats, guilt and shame are complex emotions emergent only in animals possessing a sense of self. As Jerome Kagan . . . has observed, it is impossible to 'model' guilt in the animal conditioning laboratory without distorting the meaning of the concept beyond recognition. Only human beings, who can conceptualize themselves as objects worthy of praise or censure, can experience these emotions. In humans, moral threats often loom larger than mortal ones. . . . . Soldiers have murdered civilians and POWs, fearing charges of cowardice should they fail to do so. (86)

For this reason, shame and guilt exist alongside terror as triggers for post-traumatic stress. As McNally points out, and as Caldwell clearly understands, shame also operates to produce a moral conscience. [70] In the worst of circumstances, as in his description of the tenant farmer in *You Have Seen Their Faces*, shame was clearly projected as aggression against others in a continual cycle of loathing and humiliation. There are others, however, like the serial murderers in the mob that kills Sonny, who feel neither shame nor remorse. Even the most horrific acts of violence perpetrated by human beings who otherwise function normally, McNally found, "failed to produce

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[70] See e.g., J. Brooks Bouson, *Quiet as It's Kept: Shame, Trauma, and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison*. Albany, State University of New York P, 2000, in which Bouson theorizes shame simply as a toxic emotion triggering feelings of inferiority, an obstacle to be overcome.

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psychological disturbances if they were interpreted as not violating one's moral code" (87).

The character of Sheriff Jeff, who loves Sam Brinson yet devalues the life of Sonny Carson, who is sentimental and kind to his wife, shows how deeply evil had become normalized in the Jim Crow South. More than thirty-five years after *Trouble in July* was first published, Caldwell explained "that part of its purpose was to show 'that human kindness is struggling to prevail'" (Mixon 80). It is not the first time that he has arrived "too late" to a lynching, but as Jeff regards the terrible tableau of murdered children, he draws "his hand over his face, rubbing his burning eyes"—as if wounded by the vision (240). "It ought to put an end to lynching the colored for all time," he says, reminding himself that he had forgotten "to perform" his duty as he saw it, "without fear or favor" (241). It remains to be seen whether Jeff can sustain this change of heart, but he has at least begun to reevaluate the code which led him to make a travesty of justice. In his 1987 autobiography, *With All My Might*, Caldwell wrote about his reasons for becoming a writer: "Even though I lived in the midst of the people and scenes I was to write about, I knew I would never be able to accept and tolerate the existing poverty and ignorance and cruelty. . . . I was motivated by the urge to write about the economic and social plight of the disadvantaged in such away that readers would be moved to react with sympathy and even assistance for the creatures of subhuman world" (62). In Trouble in July, Caldwell aims to convince his readers that the shame of lynching is the responsibility of us all.

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Chapter Five: Returning the Gaze: Lynching and Photography in Fritz Lang's *Fury*.

> In the intersecting arenas of personal memory, cultural memory, and history, in which shared memories and memory objects can move from one realm to another, shifting meaning and context, the camera image—photograph, film, and video/television—plays a very particular role. . . . On the one hand, camera images can embody and create memories; on the other hand, they have the capacity through the power of their presence to obliterate other, unphotographed memories. As technologies of memory, they actively produce both memory and forgetting.
>
> Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories*.

Lynch law depended above all on community cohesion and silence, aided and abetted by acquiescent local and state authorities and a federal government unwilling to intervene with protective legislation.[71] Even when, as in public torture or spectacle lynchings, the fact of the murder itself entered wider public discourse, it usually did so as a one sided-account, with the dead victim unable to speak in his own defense and his relatives too fearful for their own lives to insist on a formal reckoning.[72] A remarkable

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[71] See "A Story That Got Lost," *New Masses.*_ 16 January 1934, and Erskine Caldwell, "Parties Unknown in Georgia," *New Masses* 23 January 1934.

[72] Well-known activists such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett, James Weldon Johnson, and Walter White routinely challenged "official," quasi-official and popular

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film, *Fury*, directed by Austrian émigré Fritz Lang in 1936, dramatizes what might happen if a lynching victim returned from the dead to confront his murderers in court with photographic evidence of their crime. Based on the infamous 1933 San Jose lynching of two men accused of kidnapping and murdering a department store heir, *Fury* stays on the right side of the Hays Code and the studio system by depicting a white mob's apparent lynching of a white man for a crime against a white girl. This lynching turns out to have accidentally been prevented, and the ensuing revenge plot eventually fizzles.[73] Yet Fury differs from other narratives of prevented lynchings such as those in *Intruder* and *Mockingbird* in that Lang presents what the audience takes to be the representation of a lynching, through the perspective of both victim and mob. In scripting the revenge of the intended victim, moreover,

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versions of lynchings, as did many family members of murdered people. The terrible death of Mary Turner for attempting to bring her husband's killers to justice and the NAACP field workers' frequent brushes with death illustrate the intense risks and high costs involved in taking these positions. White activists were also subject to violence. While investigating a 1919 lynching, for instance, NAACP executive secretary John Shilladay received a severe beating from which he never recovered psychologically (Dray 248-251).

[73] The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 (Hays Code) prohibited the presentation of crime that promoted sympathy with the crime or for the criminal. It also decreed that "the courts of the land should not be presented as unjust" in such a way to cast aspersion on the "court system of the country." "No picture shall be produced that will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence, the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin." Finally, the code insisted that "revenge in modern times shall not be justified." The studio system would never have risked alienating a large segment of their public by depicting the lynching of a black man.

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the film subverts the conventions of lynching narratives and photography, while at the same time calling into question the truth-quality of the photographic image. Lang's film thereby both reenacts and recuperates the trauma of lynching, producing simultaneously a powerful indictment against lynching and a troubling catharsis.

To understand how *Fury* actively produces "both memory and forgetting," we must appreciate the impact of the 1933 San Jose lynching upon a nation already in crisis. As Philip Dray puts it, "the late fall of 1933 did seem like one of those disquieting moments when the moorings of civilization have shaken loose. Lynching dominated the headlines as at no other time in American history" (335). Though lynching declined in the 1920s, economic and social instability in the 1930s produced a spike in lynchings in the South, the resurgence of the Klu Klux Klan, and the rise of vigilante murders by fascist mobs such as the Black Legion in Detroit.[74] Rising crime rates brought fears of impending social chaos that intensified with the 1932 kidnapping and murder of Charles and Anne Morrow Lindbergh's infant son from their well-fortified country estate.

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[74] Malcolm X believed his father was lynched by the Black Legion, who reviled him "as an 'uppity nigger' for wanting to own a store, for living outside the Lansing Negro district, for spreading dissension and unrest among 'the good niggers'"(3). See *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as told to Alex Haley*. New York: Ballentine, 1999, 10 for a description of the incident. Combining nativism with fascism, the Black Legion targeted welfare recipients, social workers, and labor organizers as well as immigrants, Catholics, Jews and African Americans. Along with increases in lynchings and vigilante mob murders, the 1930s also saw highly publicized legal lynchings such as the trials in Scottsboro, Alabama.

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A crime associated with the automobile and the rootlessness and anonymity of modern life, kidnapping proliferated during the 1920s and 1930s, with eight high-profile kidnappings in 1933 alone, including the June abduction of William Hamm, president of the Hamm Brewing Company in St. Paul, Minnesota. Hamm was freed unharmed upon transfer of a $100,000 ransom, but Brooke Hart, the twenty-two-year-old heir of a prominent San Jose department store family, who was kidnapped on November 9, would not be so lucky. Ambushed by two men in a downtown parking lot, Hart was forced to drive out of the city, where the men transferred him to another car. The kidnappers drove out to the San Mateo-Hayward Bridge, where they battered Hart repeatedly about the head with a brick, then bound his hands and feet and threw him in the water. They then drove back to San Diego and phoned the Hart family demanding a ransom of $40,000. The kidnapping of this wealthy, blond-haired, blue-eyed youth riveted a national reading public still devouring sensationalist accounts of the Lindbergh kidnapping, which papers had dubbed "the crime of the century" a year before.

A massive and nationally-publicized manhunt led authorities to Thomas H. Thurmond and Jack Holmes, local men who confessed to the crime under police interrogation.[75] When Hart's body was eventually recovered, evidence indicated he had struggled for some time after entering the water.

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[75] Holmes protested his innocence to the end, though Thurmond begged for forgiveness, prompting mob members to pause to allow Thurmond to pray for his soul before dragging him out to his death. See the chapter in Harry Farrell's *Swift Justice: Murder and Vengeance in a California Town* entitled "Lingering Doubts," for more on the question of Holmes' alibi and possible innocence (281-292).

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This news raised an outcry for lynching that the media whipped up into a frenzy. San Jose's 500 watt radio station, KQW, "aired bulletin after frantic bulletin: THE CROWD IS GATHERING! . . . LYNCHING! . . . TONIGHT IN ST. JAMES PARK! Other stations took up the cry, and late in the day traffic thickened on all highways as people piled into their cars and headed for jail." People came "from San Francisco and Oakland . . . Gilroy . . . Morgan Hill . . . Salinas, [and] from Santa Cruz on the coast. These were not the purposeful vengeance seekers of the vigilance committee. These were ruffians and red necks, the curious and the thrill seekers, the sadistic, bullies who relished the rare opportunity to kill with impunity" (Farrell 20).

The mob gathered outside the San Jose jail, and despite being repeatedly repulsed by tear gas bombs, finally battered down the jailhouse door and seized the men. The keys to the cells were taken from the deputy in charge, and he was beaten as he attempted to resist. "With wild whoops which drew thousands of onlookers homeward bound from nearby theaters, the mob raced with their two prisoners to St. James Park across the street from the county court house which stands directly in front of the county jail" ("Batter Down Jail Door" 1).[76] Among the mob could be seen Brooke Hart's friend from Santa Clara University, the child actor Jackie Coogan, who reportedly coiled the rope that hung Jack Holmes (Farrell 233). Automobile

[76] This was not the first instance of mob violence in St. James Park. In 1918, a secret organization calling itself the Knights of Liberty of San Jose and Oakland tarred and feathered George Koetzer, a local worker suspected of pro-German sympathies, then chained him to the brass cannon at the base of the McKinley statue.

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headlights lit up the scene. The New York Times reported that "the hanging was witnessed by a crowd of 6,000," who cheered as Thurmond's body "drew up into the beams of flashlights." It took longer to hang Holmes, who weighed over two-hundred pounds, and fought furiously, wrestling his hands free and grabbing the rope above his head. Stripped naked and beaten nearly insensible, he too "was hauled above the heads of the howling mob into the beams of the flashlight." Thousands of persons attracted by the yelling of the mob continued to throng downtown streets leading to the jail and the scene of the hanging. Several women reportedly fainted as they watched the execution. On-lookers helped them out of the park ("Batter Down Jail Door" 3). As the bodies hung before the crowd, a group of men lit a bonfire below Thurmond's corpse, momentarily setting fire to it. A woman who said she was Thurmond's mother rushed up and begged them for her son's body. When one of the men tending the fire pushed her roughly aside, she ran off screaming (Farrell 235).

California Governor Rolph shocked many Americans by applauding the mob's behavior as evidence of "the pioneer blood in their veins" and as "a fine lesson to the whole nation." In a statement to reporters in Sacramento, Rolph opined that "they'll learn they can't kidnap in this State," promising to pardon anyone "arrested for the good job." Rolph added, moreover, that he would like to release all San Quentin and Folsom prison inmates convicted of kidnapping into the hands of "those fine patriotic San Jose citizens who know how to handle such a situation" and even had both prisons checked to

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determine the number of inmates doing time for kidnapping ("Gov. Rolph Backs San Jose Lynching" 1). It was later revealed that Rolph had canceled plans to attend a conference of western governors in Idaho to make sure the National Guard was not sent to San Jose and had flatly rejected the sheriff's pleas for help in thwarting the lynching. Lawmakers and prominent clergymen from across the country praised Rolph's actions. His behavior also drew widespread condemnation, such as public statements and telegrams sent from the ASWPL and the Writers' League Against Lynching, formed by Walter White in response to the events at San Jose. The Writers' League also telegrammed President Roosevelt asking him to issue a statement against "the wave of lynchings and mob violence now sweeping the country."[77] Roosevelt responded with a carefully worded statement before the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America condemning lynching as a "vile form of collective murder [and] a deliberate and definite disobedience of the commandment, 'Thou Shalt Not Kill.'" Although he did not mention Rolph by name, the president pointedly remarked: "We do not excuse those in high places or low who condone lynch law" (Farrell 277). The *New York Times* quoted the response of Bishop John A. Gregg of the Kansas City's A.M.E.

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[77] "Gov. Rolph Backs San Jose Lynching as Kidnap Warning." *New York Times* Nov. 28, 1933, 1, 3; "Harvard Crimson Praises Rolph." *New York Times* Nov. 29, 1933. 3. "Work of Years Undone: Effort of South to Prevent Lynching Gets a Setback: Association of 15,000 Women Sends Western Governor Telegram of Protest." *New York Times* Dec. 3, 1933. E6. See also "Writers Appeal to Roosevelt" in *New York Times* dated Dec. 5, 1933, which states that the petition was signed by "eighty authors, newspaper men, editors and publishers." The literary critic Harry Hansen was named chairman of the new organization, with Suzanne La Follette as secretary, Nella Larsen as assistant secretary and Lenore Marshall as treasurer.

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church: "Every Negro in America lifted up his head this morning and thanked God for the statement of President Roosevelt on lynching last night" ("Churches" 27).[78]

The intervention of the American Civil Liberties Union dispelled the notion that the lynching was going to recede into oblivion, as ACLU attorneys pressured authorities to bring mob members to trial. Prominent California Republicans, including former President Hoover, broke party ranks to issue statements condemning Rolph. The community of San Jose, including Sheriff Emig, who had been struck unconscious by the mob, however, closed ranks in a conspiracy of silence. Only one person, a teenager named Anthony Cataldi, was brought before a grand jury based on his own statements to newspapers in which he bragged about his role.[79] Although more than twenty witnesses testified for the prosecution in a closed session, a San Jose grand jury failed to bring an indictment against the youth. (A subsequent attempt on February 15, 1934 to prosecute him on additional charges ended in a dismissal.) The San Jose lynching continued to make news for much of the time that Lang was developing his script, in large part because the NAACP made it a cornerstone of their drive to enact anti-lynching legislation at the

[78] Roosevelt unfortunately would not follow through by actively speaking out in favor of anti-lynching legislation. The Wagner-VanNuys Bill, drafted by NAACP lawyers, was introduced into the Senate in 1934, only to be defeated by the filibuster of southern lawmakers in 1935. The Costigan-Wagner Bill was similarly defeated in 1936, after FDR refused to intervene in support of the bill. See David Kennedy. "How FDR lost the Struggle to Enact an Antilynching Bill." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*. 25 (Autumn, 1999): 120-121.

[79] The fact that the case even went to trial indicates a toughening attitude toward lynch-law during the 1930s.

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federal level. The events at San Jose especially troubled anti-lynching activists because the state had cooperated in the lynching and the media had helped to advertise and to promote it, but also because of the divided reaction it provoked across the nation.

Although some scholars have faulted Lang for portraying an instance of white-on-white violence in a western setting as perpetuating myths about lynching as justifiable frontier justice, this is to miss the significance of the political and ideological struggle over the events in California in 1933.[80] Oliver C. Cox observed in 1945 that "the lynching attitude" was "to be found everywhere among whites in the United States," a widespread acceptance firmly rooted in California vigilantism (577). Although slavery's tendency towards vigilantism had previously been used as a compelling argument for abolition, the lawlessness accompanying the California Gold Rush and the endorsement of the national press led Americans to accept lynching as

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[80] See for example, Barbara Mennel, "White Law and the Missing Black Body in Fritz Lang's *Fury* (1936)" and Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women and the Mob*. Mennel argues that Lang's film perpetuates the myth of lynching as a necessary step in the conquering of the frontier. In noting the defeat of the Costigan-Warner bill in 1936, Appel charges that Hollywood followed Roosevelt's lead in refusing to support the anti-lynching movement by producing "two lynching movies about *whites: Fury* in 1936 and *They Won't Forget* in 1937" (102). Yet Apel also singles out the San Jose lynching as particularly disturbing to African American artist John Steuart Curry, whose representations of lynching she analyzes at length. The fact that the NAACP launched anti-lynching protests in front of theatres showing *They Won't Forget* suggests that contemporary activists may not have taken as dim a view of the films. Interestingly, shortly before the San Jose Lynching, Paramount Pictures had changed the ending of a film entitled *Adela Rogers St. John*, in which men who had kidnapped and murdered an actress's child were taken from a train by a mob and hung because studio executives concluded that "such a thing would never happen in California." See "Lynching Cut from Movie As a Slur on California" *New York Times* 28 Nov. 1933: 3.

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legitimate when local courts were non-existent, weak, or corrupt—or when the mob claimed this to be so. This turn toward lynching as justifiable not only undermined the abolitionist argument, it flavored the Southern defense of lynching during Reconstruction and throughout the Jim Crow era, which depicted the South in the grip of lawlessness as acute as anything found on the frontier (Waldrep 49-66). To undermine support for the lynching of white men by a California mob would be to strike a blow at the heart of US lynching mythology.

It would be a mistake, however, to read the San Jose lynching, as suggested by Governor Rolph, to be a throwback to the days of the vigilance committees. The lynching of Holmes and Thurmond instead shared all the hallmarks of what David Garland identifies as the southern "public torture lynching": "Public torture lynchings were conflictual, aggressive events, undertaken in the context of ongoing struggles over power and meaning" (34). Garland points out that "these were not occasions on which an established and broadly accepted faith was simply put on display and reaffirmed in a routine, predictable manner—as would have occurred had the case gone to court," but instead were attempts "to wield a form of power and invoke a set of principles that might or might not produce community support and approval. Their deliberate adoption of the ritual forms of the old public executions was an appeal for legitimacy that invited collective recognition"

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(35).[81] Garland cautions, moreover, against dismissing these lynchings as premodern: "we tend to under-estimate the extent to which socially adjusted 'normal' people can be indifferent to, or take a vicarious pleasure in, the suffering of others with whom they do not identify—particularly where racist ideologies play a part in socialization and day-to-day experience" (72). For Garland, "public torture lynchings in the New South, many of them directly sponsored by local elites" provide "a glimpse at the frailty of [civilized] sensibilities in situations where dominant groups feel threatened and insecure, or believe their interests to be closely tied to those of lower class whites who do feel so threatened. Fear and insecurity and hatred are powerful solvents in which refined sensibilities may easily dissolve. Picture postcards of lynchings are evidence enough of that" (73).

Although he had won office handily on an anti-Prohibition platform in 1931, by 1933, Rolph "found himself under attack from every side. His straitlaced lieutenant governor, Frank Merriam, was undercutting him; the unions were up in arms because he would not pardon labor martyr Tom Mooney; a legislative committee was investigating corruption charges and the Grange was mounting a recall-Rolph campaign" (Farrell 18). Rolph's need to win back popular support, the urgency of the threat to public order posed by

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[81] This is not to suggest, of course, that early California vigilantism was not highly political in nature. In the San Jose lynchings, however, the supposed corruption or inefficiency of legal process did not even come into play. The cooperation of elected officials, moreover, suggests a deeper affinity with southern lynch law and its particular pleasures. Perhaps this is why the mob reportedly issued "a shrill, gloating rebel yell" as the doors of the jail caved in (Farrell 221)

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kidnapping, and the fears of a restless populace in a moment of social and economic crisis—all of these factors coalesced in the lynching in San Jose. Anti-lynching activists, moreover, insisted on the connection between this lynching and a surge in racial violence across the country. According to Farrell, two nights after the hanging of Holmes and Thurmond, Lloyd Warner, a nineteen-year-old black man accused of raping and beating a white girl in St. Joseph, Missouri, was lynched in "an eerie replay of the San Jose events: A mob of some 5,000 persons, using an iron pipe battering ram, broke into the Buchanan County Jail after a three-and-a-half hour tear gas battle. They grabbed Warner, beat and stabbed him to death, and then strung up his body and set it on fire" (274-275). The same day, a thousand rioters battled with Maryland National Guardsmen armed with tear gas and bayonets to free four men arrested in connection with the brutal lynching of George Armwood in Princess Anne, Maryland, three weeks before the Hart kidnapping. When a judge released the accused men the next day, "the citizens of Princess Anne" sent a telegram to Governor Rolph congratulating him for his encouragement of lynching: "When you run for president you will have 100 per cent support from the Eastern Shore of Maryland." Among those who "charged Rolph with inciting both the Missouri lynching and the Maryland uprising," was NAACP head Walter White, who renewed his calls for federal anti-lynching legislation (Farrell 275-276).

The San Jose lynching was at the heart of struggles over the meaning of justice and citizenship in the Depression-era United States. *Fury* was the first

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of a cluster of anti-lynching films that emerged in the 1930s in answer to fears that fascism and mob rule in Europe threatened to undermine U.S. democracy.[82] Other films included Charles Coleman's *Legion of Terror* (1936) and Archie Mayo's *Black Legion* (1937), based on vigilante murders by the Black Legion, so named because it adopted black robes after its expulsion from the Klu Klux Kan; Mervyn Le Roy's *They Won't Forget* (1937), based on the 1915 lynching of Leo Frank in Georgia; and John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939) in which the future president singlehandedly prevents a lynching. Henry Fonda, whose father took him to see a lynching when he was a young boy, starred as the young Lincoln. Fonda would also star in *The Oxbow Incident* (1942), which dramatizes the lynching of a Mexican in the Southwest. In keeping with the production code, which restricted the showing of bodily contact between black and white, either through sex or violence, and the influence of southern theatre-goers, these films screened lynching primarily as a white-on-white affair, with a Jewish or Mexican victim the closest the industry could come to addressing the wave of violence against African Americans. It would not be until 1949, with Clarence Brown's *Intruder in the*

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[82] For more on the neglected topic of the lynching of Mexicans in the US see William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, "The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States, 1848 to 1928." *Journal of Social History* 37.2 (2003): 411-438. See also Lawrence Levine. "Hollywood's Washington: Film Images of National Politics During the Great Depression." *Prospects* 10 (1985): 169-195. Levine points out that while "films from the first half of the 1930s such as *Gabriel Over the White House* and King Vidor's *Our Daily Bread* reflected both the fear and the appeal of fascism," the later films "attacked vigilantism and authoritarianism."

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Dust, that Hollywood would show an African American as the target of lynching, even one that is ultimately prevented.

Although he had only recently arrived in the country as an exile from Nazi Germany, Lang was Joseph Mankiewicz's first choice to direct the film, initially entitled "Mob Rule" after Norman Krasna's ten page treatment. [83] The Vienna-born filmmaker had a background eminently suited to the topic. Having fought in the trenches in the Great War, Lang went on to achieve spectacular fame in Germany for films like *Metropolis* and *M* that probed the dark aspects of mob behavior and human nature. The conjunction of Lang's fascination with mob psychology, so evident in his German films, his passion for reading newspapers, and his continuing obsession with visual technologies, produce in *Fury* a remarkable critique of the U.S. appetite for lynching. Europeans had always been keenly aware of U.S. lynching—the Germans had used it as anti-US propaganda in the first world war, dropping leaflets reminding African American soldiers that they had little reason for allegiance to a country that sanctioned their torture and slaughter, and Hitler would also invoke lynching in his propaganda war against the U.S.[84]

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[83] While Norman Krasna received official credit for authoring the screenplay, Bartlett Cormack, with Lang's input, wrote most of the dialogue.

[84] Noting that the rise of fascism in Europe exerted a "profound influence on America's view of the lynching evil," Dray points out that "the Nazis themselves did not hesitate to exploit the hypocrisy that lynching illustrated in a land where 'all men are created equal,'" publishing and disseminating throughout Europe the "infamous pictures of Jesse Washington's charred body in Waco," and the equally infamous image of young girls gazing upward at Rubin Stacy's body after his 1935 lynching in Florida.

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Moreover, every filmmaker in the world would have been well acquainted with D.W. Griffith's endorsement of lynching—along with his technical innovations—in his 1914 epic *Birth of a Nation*, and none more so than Lang, who rivaled Griffith's virtuosity and skill.[85] Unlike Griffith, however, Lang's view of mob violence was far from celebratory. After fleeing Germany, while filming *Lilliom* (1934) in France, Lang saw mob psychology at work one day in a Paris street when a crowd started a riot after seeing a man break a display window with his cane. "Masses lose conscience when they are together; they become a mob and they have no personal conscience any more," he told Peter Bogdanovich, recalling the disturbing scene (31). [86]

Lang's first U.S. film offers a searing indictment of mob rule and stars Spencer Tracy in his first major role alongside Sylvia Sidney. The film opens as Katherine (Sidney) leaves her fiancé, Joe Wilson (Tracy), behind in Chicago while she travels west to find a job. Joe, meanwhile, labors on at home, eventually saving enough money to open the filling station that will provide the income they need to wed. While driving through the small town of Strand on his way to get married, Joe is stopped at a roadblock by a

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[85] Between 1897 and 1905, in the early years of motion pictures, a number of short, one-reel films depicting lynching and other forms of execution were released in the U.S., though it is unclear how many were distributed overseas.

[86] In a 1946 interview, a reporter for the *New York Times* asked Fritz Lang how in his first U.S. film, he, a European, "happened to hit upon such a thoroughly American topic as lynching." Lang corrected his interviewer: "*Fury* is the story of mob action. People the world over respond in the same way. I've been through four revolutions and have made an intimate study of how people act" (June 14, 1946,).

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deputy-sheriff waving a gun. The deputy suspects him of being part of a kidnapper's gang, and circumstantial evidence leads to his being held for investigation. As Joe sits behind bars, the deputy's bragging in the barber shop leads one of the men to phone his wife, who then runs to spread news of the capture. As they whisper excitedly in the general store, one woman asks another: "are you sure he's not innocent?" To which her informant replies imperiously, "My dear young woman, in this country, people don't land in jail unless they're guilty." A man standing in the street proclaims, "If all of us people had the courage of our convictions, these vermin would vanish like spit on a hot stove." The scene shifts to a bar densely packed with white men in the middle of the day, gossiping as garrulously as the women. Rumors circulate wildly, building the tension to an unbearable pitch that demands release in some kind of action.

In his study of the prolonged torture and burning alive of a young noble in Hautefaye, France in 1870 before a mob of 300 to 800 people who boasted afterwards of having burned a "Prussian," historian Alain Corbin insists that rumor holds the key to "the logic of mass behavior," revealing the "social tensions that divide those who spread it. More than any other means of disseminating information, rumor gives voice to desires and anxieties," thus freeing and exacerbating once repressed emotions. For this reason, Corbin cautions, "we must treat rumor as a source of disturbing pleasures—pleasures of expression and understanding." Rumor consummates social relations and reinforces social bonds. It "carries an emotional charge as it gives expression

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to a group's latent social mythology; so does an act like the Hautefaye murder. Between the two there is a difference of degree, not kind" (7-8).[87]

What determines the outlet such an emotional charge will seek depends on the crowd's feeling of operating with a certain degree of impunity. In the Hautefaye murder, the peasants felt they were acting to purify the nation of a dangerous enemy and "were therefore aghast when it was later treated as a crime of common law" (Corbin 79). In *Fury*, the rhetoric used by the mob in their confrontations with authority underline their feeling that their actions also enjoy a certain amount of public sanction. In order for lynching fever to escalate there has to be a feeling that such behavior lies within the bounds of permissibility for at least some powerful segments of society. When a self-appointed committee of concerned citizens—consisting of members of the Chamber of Commerce and Kirby Dawson, the town hoodlum—visits the sheriff to demand action on these rumors, we see the emerging pattern of leadership. Dawson tells the sheriff menacingly, "An

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[87] Of the mob murder at Hautefaye, Republican journalist Charles Ponsac, wrote: "Never in the annals of crime has there been so dreadful a murder. Imagine! It happened in broad daylight, in the midst of merrymaking before a crowd of thousands [sic]! Think of it! This revolting crime lacked even the cover of darkness for an excuse! Dante is right to say that man sometimes exhibits a lust more hideous than concupiscience: the lust for blood." He also maintains that "the crime of Hautefaye is in a sense a wholly political act" (qtd. Corbin 1). Note that the gulf between the people of Hautefaye and the great majority of French citizens "who no longer tolerated violence as a viable form of political expression" led to an immediate inquiry and the guillotining of the mob's ringleaders at the scene of the crime. The difference between this and the lynchings Garland talks about is that the public torture lynching in the South was institutionalized and, ultimately, sanctioned by most white US citizens. The French case tends to support the narrative of civilizing progress, in which such behavior was aberrant and premodern, that Garland questions in his examination of U.S. lynchings.

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attack on a girl hits us ordinary people where we live, and we're going to see that politics don't cut any ice." This feeling of license that exceeds the imperatives of the law enables the crowd to maintain the cohesion necessary to carry out the crime against a threatening Other.

Ironically, it is another outsider, a strikebreaker just passing through, who stirs the men in the bar to a fever pitch by impugning their manhood. Lang captures the emotional charge of the accelerating hysteria as the men, women, and children of Strand pour into the street and begin their march to the jail. The camera tracks the mob's progress, first with overhead shots, and then at the level of the crowd, with close-ups of their jubilant faces, sweeping along from their perspective to the accompaniment of martial music. When the crowd comes to a halt in front of the sheriff, the point of view positions the film audience as part of the crowd facing the jail steps. Lang cuts between the hungry faces of the crowd as they heckle the sheriff and pelt him with a tomato, to the abject bewilderment of Joe looking back at the crowd from the window of the jail. The sheriff addresses the ringleaders individually: "Garret, Durkin, Walker, Johnson, Lopez. You're going to wind up being sorry for this. Think of your families." With this, a blond woman holding a baby rushes up to a sheriff's deputy, her husband, and reasserts the authority of the group: "You stick in with this kidnapper, Milt Grimes, and you'd better not come home."

The tension mounts, the mob rushes the jail with a battering ram, and we see the door vibrating from the inside. Once the door gives way, the mob

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realizes in frustration that they cannot get the keys to Joe's cell, so they set the building on fire, ignoring the prisoner's panic-stricken cries. Meanwhile, Katherine, who has heard the news of the lynching at a diner in a nearby town, arrives in Strand and rushes frantically through the streets. Her flight is arrested by a profound silence, and we do not realize at first that she has come to the burning jail. Here we see enacted the release of the pent-up pleasures of the mob. The camera pans the crowd of onlookers, who are transfixed by the crackling flames. Some bear looks of sexual excitement, while others reveal deep, almost post-coital tranquility. A man munches contentedly on an apple. A woman smiles as she lifts her infant up to see. [88] Lang also captures the fear and anguish of witnesses who do not take pleasure from the sight. One old woman drops to her knees and begins to pray: "I am the Resurrection and the Light." As Katherine watches in horror, Joe cries for mercy behind the flame-licked bars of his cell. Men and women answer him with taunts and hurl stones at the window to drive him back into the fire. Overcome, Katherine swoons and falls to the ground, where she is discovered

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[88] This scene bears an uncanny resemblance to Reginald Marsh's famous *New Yorker* cover on September 8, 1934, in which a white woman holds a small girl aloft, explaining to another female onlooker, "This is her first lynching." The illustration was later featured in the NAACP's anti-lynching exhibit in 1935. Se Winsten Archer. "Art Goes Educational on Decorous East Fifty-seventh, Near Fifth," *New York Post*, 02/19/1935 and "Lynching Art Show Lauded: Bad for Persons with Weak Hearts—One Woman Fainted." *The New York Amsterdam News*. 02/23/1935. For more recent analysis of the show see Langa, Helen. "Two Anti-Lynching Art Exhibitions," *American Art*. 13.1 (Spring 1999): 10-40 and Park, Marlene. "Lynching and Anti-Lynching: Art and Politics in the 1930s." *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies*. 18 (1993): 311-365. Farrell also reports that in the San Jose Lynching, "some parents held small children aloft for a better view" (233).

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by members of the crowd who help her to safety after a stick of dynamite, hurled in anticipation of the arrival of the militia, turns the building into a fireball.

The blast blows off the side of the building, and Joe barely manages to escape by sliding down a drainpipe. He is unseen by the crowd. Within hours, news of his death and of the capture of the real criminal circles the country, and the governor, who had delayed sending the militia for fear of losing votes, realizes that he must now explain his part in lynching an innocent man. The scene shifts to the Chicago apartment where Joe's brothers huddle together discussing their dreams of vengeance. Suddenly, Joe bursts in looking like a demented corpse. He explains that he has spent the day watching himself being lynched on the newsreels: "I watched it ten times, twenty maybe, over and over, I don't know how much. . . . The place was packed. They liked it; they get a big kick out of watching a man burning to death." Joe has been horribly changed by his trauma. His side is badly injured, and he recalls: "I could smell myself burn," an eerie reminder of the sensations other lynching victims must have endured. Worst of all, Joe has undergone a moral death, and now lives only for the voyeuristic pleasures of revenge, for a chance to see his tormenters sentenced to die.

Lang's film can be divided into two parts: the lynching and the revenge plot that follows, in which the perpetrators find their fury returned by their victim. The break comes not at the fade out from the burning jail, but at the moment Joe bursts in upon his brothers, identifying himself as "a dead man,"

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then launching into a bitter tirade against those responsible for burning the prison and, except for the technicality of his survival, murdering him. As he speaks, Joe stares menacingly into the camera. The spectator is thus "inscribed into the diegesis as occupying the place of Joe's brothers, and, more especially, the absent lynch mob" (Humphries 37). If in the first half of the film, she is swept up with the crowd and pulled into the rapidly escalating events, in the second half, the viewer endures the scrutiny of Joe's recriminating stare and the bitter aftertaste that remains from the pleasures of consuming violence. The after-effect of the lynching on the perpetrators thus becomes a major theme of the film.

Joe convinces his brothers to help him to put his would-be murderers on trial by hiding the truth of his survival from everyone, including Katherine. With the testimony of Katherine, who believes that she witnessed Joe's death, the trial proceeds toward a sure conviction (helped along by Joe's fabrication of circumstantial evidence to prove his demise) of twenty-two citizens of Strand. Although initially Katherine had wanted other women to suffer as she had from the loss of Joe, she rejects his turn toward depravity when she discovers that he has survived. After a dramatic scene in which the smug and hypocritical defendants must face visual proof of their crimes, Joe, who realizes that he has alienated everyone he loves and entered the moral universe of the lynchers, resurrects himself with a spectacular court appearance, in which he confronts his attackers, saves their lives, and delivers an impassioned speech against the perils of mob rule.

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Lang biographer Lotte Eisner remarks that from the moment he began working on the picture, he began to add newspaper "clippings about comparable incidents to his already growing American collection"(161). According to Patrick McGilligan, moreover, "MGM's research department" provided the director with "materials chronicling several notorious lynchings of blacks, including the lynching of Henry Argo in Grady County, Oklahoma on May 31, 1930, which prompted the indictment of some twenty-three people" (227).[89] Other commentators have seen similarities in Lang's film to the lynching of Willie Earle. By including details from other well-known racially motivated lynchings in a film he himself characterized as a "semi-documentary," Lang's film contributes to the larger discourse with which his audience would have been undoubtedly familiar.

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[89] In addition to the prosecution of the mob, the story of Argo's lynching (for allegedly attacking a white woman) bears striking similarities to the plot of *Fury*, including the burning of the jail, which the mob attempted to set alight by soaking mattresses with gasoline, the cutting of fire hoses by the mob, and the mistaken identification of a live man as dead. According the *Times*, after being critically injured by the mob, Argo "was placed in an ambulance . . . and taken to the University Hospital in Oklahoma City. Reports that the Negro was dead were circulated to give officers a chance to get him out of town". Although Argo died hours later in the University of Oklahoma hospital, the removal of a lynching victim from the clutches of the mob was highly unusual. In contrast to Governor Rolph's behavior, moreover, Governor Holloway directed the attorney general to seek immediate prosecution , so "law and order might be upheld." Chickasha's mayor and prosecuting attorney aggressively worked to bring the murderers to trial, even if they were ultimately unsuccessful in securing a verdict. See Robert Bagnall, NAACP report. "Mob of 100 Breaks Way into Oklahoma Jail." *New York Times* 31 May 1930: 2; "Start Inquiry into Mob Killing: Oklahoma Attorney General, Under Governor's Direction, Promises Prosecution of Rioters." *New York Times* 2 June 1930: 2.

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In several key scenes in Fury, moreover, Lang reminds us of the suppressed subject of the film—the lynching of African Americans. In one scene, as Katherine reads a letter from Joe, she turns off the radio and a voice floats in from outside. Going to the window, Katherine looks out upon an African American woman who sings: "Oh! carry me 'long;/Der's no more trouble for me;/I's gwine to roam/In a happy home/Where all de darkies am free." Despite its pronounced stereotyping—she sings a Stephen Foster minstrel song as the other happy workers look on approvingly—the scene is an important reminder of segregation in Anytown, USA as well as in the film. Katherine remains spatially separate from the people in the yard, and must literally interrupt the film in order to accommodate the woman's song. In another scene, the camera cuts from an interior shot of the crowded bar where the men discuss forming a mob, to exterior where an African American man listens at the door. The door suddenly bursts open, and he leaps behind it to safety as the mob storms out toward the jail, the man in the lead cracking a whip.

As Anton Kaes points out, it was not a secret that most victims of lynching were African American, and these visual markers would have been impossible to ignore as would the racial implications of the numbers cited in the District Attorney's opening speech: "In the last forty-nine years, mobs have lynched 6,010 human beings by hanging, burning, cutting in this proud land of ours: a lynching about every three days. And of the many thousands that comprised these mobs only 765 were ever brought to trial because their

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supposedly civilized communities have refused to identify them before trial, thus becoming as responsible, before God at any rate, as the lynchers themselves."[90] This indictment of the judicial process would also have resonated with the major news story of ongoing appeals for justice for the young African American defendants in Scottsboro, Alabama throughout the decade.

The district attorney instructs the jury that "American democracy and its system of fairplay for the rights of individuals under the law is on trial" and jurors therefore should be "guided not just by your common sense but by your patriotism." The entire nation, the D.A. assures them, is watching this trial. And yet, what the nation is allowed to see, Lang's clues notwithstanding, is a debate about the extension of citizenship and fairplay that is an in-house conversation among white people. Substituting images of white-on-white violence for racially motivated lynching, then allowing the crime to turn out not to have happened at all, preserves a sense of white identity that has flirted with lynch law but seen the possibility of redemption. Barbara Mennel feels that "Joe's higher moral ground, which he achieves at the end of the film allows white viewers to identify with him and his moral position of forgiveness

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[90] During the prosecutor's speech, the scene shifts from the courtroom to successive tableaus of its radio audience. Although the original treatment called for one of the scenes to feature African American workers listening on the car radio (Lang told Bogdanovich that he actually shot one scene with African Americans –a young family and an old man nodding his assent), this scene was cut (Bogdanovich 32). In the end, the district attorney's speech is intercut with scenes of white people attending thoughtfully to the speech: men in a country store, a group of office workers, and a stunning blond lit to perfection sitting at her dressing table.

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for the mob, which undermines the political claims of the anti-lynching movement" to bring lynch mobs to justice (216). Lang himself told Peter Bogdanovich, "if a picture is to be made about lynching, one should have a white woman raped by a colored man, and with this as a basis still prove that it is wrong. Not make a lynching picture about a kidnapping that never happened, about an innocent man"(32).

Given the realities of US racism and the studio system, no film could have been made in 1936 with an African American victim.[91] Nevertheless, Lang insists, he "saw the possibility of saying something against lynching—even if it was not as it should be been done" (32). The San Jose lynching—and Lang's filmic representation—participated in the struggle over how much of the truth about lynching the US public could bear to see, a struggle that centered around the meaning and uses of the photographic image. A recent dissertation by Amy Wood invites us to rethink the function of lynching photographs, which "mainstream newspapers rarely published" before the 1920s. Wood cites a number of instances, including the lynching of Leo Frank, when papers had access to photographs, the technology to reproduce them, but chose not to do so.

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[91] Although James Baldwin found Fury an "indignant, sincere, and inept" study of mob violence, he praised the director's efforts in You Only Live Once (1937), acknowledging the suppressed racial dimensions of Lang's obsession with the societal outcast: "In the American context, there being no way for him to get to the *nigger*, he could only use that other American prototype, the criminal, *le gangster*" "The Devil Finds Work." Collected Essays New York: Library of America, 1998: 495

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In fact, mass-circulation of these images occurred primarily as part of the anti-lynching campaign.[92] Mobs wanted control of publicity and frequently attacked uninvited photographers who tried to capture them at work. As Wood explains, control of the photographing "not only allowed them to govern what images could be recorded and remembered, but it also ensured that the photographing was integrated within the ritual ceremony of the lynching itself" (147-148). This explains why in the San Jose lynching, "once the two men were strung up, the mob lost its bitter feeling toward cameramen, several of whom had their equipment destroyed, and they shouted approvingly a[s] the flash guns flared about their hanging bodies" ("Batter" 3).

Less than a day after the hanging of Thurmond and Holmes, along with other lynching souvenirs such as the rope, shreds of clothing and bits of the hanging trees, "postcards depicting the lynching showed up for sale all over town, as well as a series of 'official photographs' in a mail-out folder." (Farrell 249). Chief of Police Black declared the pictures obscene because of Holmes' nudity and threatened to arrest those caught selling them. "One widely sold

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[92] Wood writes: "Although anti-lynching publications, like the *Chicago Defender* or the *Crisis*, printed photographs they obtained through various means as early as 1911, more mainstream media only began publishing photographs in the 1920s and 1930s, often within the context of anti-lynching arguments. Before this period, lynching photographs do not appear in newspapers, even though large, urban newspapers had the technology to do so beginning in the 1890s." (Smaller newspapers did not have the means to print photographs until the 1920s.) See Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene: A Social History, 1839-1889.* New York: Macmillan Co., 1942. 446-447.

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postcard, a crude paste-up job in which both kidnappers seemed to hang from the same tree, showed Holmes in three-quarter front view. It appeared to have been retouched to endow him with an elongated penis, semi-erect" (250).[93] Authorities seized copies of the *Oakland Post-Enquirer* showing the bodies of the two men, and the lynching photos were also banned in San Francisco. Editorials in the San Jose *News* exhibited what Farrell identifies as a "curious disparity of values: Lynching was acceptable; pictures of it were not" (251).

Noting that "much of what shocked and outraged the nation in the San Jose lynching case, . . . such as stripping the hanged bodies and selling photographs as postcards, was part and parcel" of the lynching ritual carried out against African Americans, Barbara Mennel suggests that the national attention "resulted, at least in part, from the fact that the victims were white" (208-209). While the victims' race undoubtedly affected the degree of public interest, what shocked the nation about the picture of Holmes was not its conformity to but deviation from the conventions of lynching photography developed and refined in racially motivated lynchings. According to Wood, "photographs of lynching almost never reveal the black man's genitalia, whether dismembered or not. Indeed, in some instances, it is clear that the

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[93] Public humiliation of the bodies centered on their genitalia was not confined to the postcards. According to Farrell, drunken mob members discussed castrating the bodies of the men, but were prevented by the police. For more on the sexual dynamics of public torture lynchings, as applied specifically to racialized lynchings, see Robyn Weigman, "The Anatomy of Lynching" in *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender*, 81-113; and Trudier Harris, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals*.

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lynching victim has been re-covered for the photograph—burlap sacks tied around their waists, pants clumsily pulled up" (172). [94] Nor are genitalia revealed in the photographs of white victims contained in Allen's collection. In fact, the controversy over a newsreel reconstruction of the lynching distributed overseas centered around the inclusion of this photograph rather than the filmic representation of the lynching itself.[95]

In the days and weeks following the lynching, as the will to prosecute mob members grew among lynching opponents, photography of the event emerged as a key point of anxiety and struggle. The perpetrators believed that photographs could not lie, and they dreaded their introduction as evidence in court. While most of the photographs that had been published

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[94] As John Cullen recalls, his father put a pair of pants on the castrated body of Nelse Patton to preserve decorum as it hung in the town square. *Old Times in Faulkner Country* (92). In the lynching in Marion, Indiana, "the clothes of one victim, Abe Smith, were torn off as he was dragged around town, and at one point his genitalia were visible. Yet for the photograph, a towel and feed sack were tied around his waist" (Wood 172).

[95] The *New York Times* reported on Dec. 2, 1933: "An American newsreel showing a re-enactment of the Brooke Hart kidnapping and murder was to have been attacked in the House of Commons Monday, but when the distributors learned of the objections they took out the scenes which had aroused opposition. The reconstruction of the crime on the screen was followed by a still shot wirelessed from the United States, showing the body of John M. Holmes dangling above the mob after the San Jose lynching. The picture had been reproduced in tabloid newspapers here but other newspapers, notably The Times, urged prohibition of the film as a spectacle too horrible for British movie patrons. Newsreels are not subject to censorship, but the film trade fears a censorship will be imposed if sensational scenes continue to be presented"(9). Home Secretary John Gilmour's announcement of the distributor's decision drew cheers in the House of Commons (Farrell 278). A showing of the film at New York's Globe Theatre led to a disorderly conduct charge against two women for expressing their approval of the lynching. "Girls Freed in Theater Row." *New York Times* Dec. 6, 1933. 28.

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were too blurred to permit positive identification, and the "few clear pictures that had been published . . .were so obviously retouched as to be inadmissible in court," members of the mob feared the surfacing of photographs taken by spectators and freelance photographers. This is why thieves broke into the studio of a Peter Pavley, one such freelance photographer, a few days after the lynching, taking only his St. James Park file (Farrell 266).

In Lang's film, on the other hand, the defendants find themselves blind-sided by photographic evidence. Like the adults in Alan Tate's poem, "The Swimmers," the town of Strand refuses to own its lynching, wiping all memory of it from their speech. A group of women gather together to discuss the coming trial, and one whispers: "My husband says it'd be a blessing if the community would forget what happened. It just leaves a bad taste and reminds everybody of what as the minister said, would be best forgotten." Another assures the group that "Nobody's going to talk. The responsible businessmen have decided it's a Community, not an Individual thing. So everybody's got to stick together."

At the trial, every one of the lynchers offers an airtight alibi. Even the sheriff, who was badly wounded by the mob, refuses to identify anyone from the community, speculating that the men must have been from out of town. But the district attorney has surprise evidence to offer. A crew of newsreel photographers has captured the lynching, showing the defendants behaving like crazed animals. We see the ringleader, Dawson, at the head of the crowd

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storming the prison building, and once inside, pouring petrol on matchwood beneath a window. A stop action freezes the hatred on his face. We see in the newsreel a woman, who claimed to have been twenty miles away on her fiance's farm, throwing the burning rag that starts the fire. A freeze frame of her infuriated face, is contrasted with a close-up of her fearful countenance in the court-room. A respectable businessman, Garret, whose wife's best friend has just perjured herself on his behalf, stares in disbelief as he watches himself outside the jail furiously hacking at the fire hoses with an axe. The newsreel pauses to reveal his wanton pleasure in the destruction.

The newsreel wrenches control of representation of the lynching from the mob as it breaks them down into individual actors who are no longer "persons unknown," thus breaching the limits of permissible representation. The illusion of mastery and control produced by their unified front enabled communities to absorb and contain their own violence. Lang's freeze frames upset this careful self-presentation. Each of these stills provides a stunning counterpoint to the carefully arranged tableaus we see in the lynching photography. In *Fury* we see mob members seeing themselves being seen in a way they cannot control. As the camera stops to show yet another perpetrator, one woman cries out hysterically, "No. no." If as much recent trauma theory holds, to witness means to construct a narrative, the silence before this moment meant that what the town had seen had not yet been fully witnessed.

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As the newsreel flickers on, another woman faints. Gunning ties this fainting scene to Katherine's swoon at the burning jail, with the town in the aftermath of the lynching "seeking the sort of oblivion it might appear was granted to Katherine when she fainted" (223). Because "Katherine sees too much truth to be able to bear it," she functions as "a stand-in for a white audience for whom the truth is too much to see" (Mennell 221). Yet even as it conceals the lynching of African Americans behind a white-on-white crime that turns out to be an illusion, Fury nevertheless reveals onscreen the mechanisms of denial by which white Americans forge a collective sense of identity—and thus comments ironically on its own system of meaning.

British photojournalist John Taylor reminds us that the presence of imagery and reports about atrocities "means that forgetting about them or refusing to see them becomes a deliberate choice, a conscious act of citizenship . . . There is a big difference between never finding out and choosing to forget" (195). As journalist Harry Farrell reports in his book length study of the lynching, the murders of Thurmond and Holmes have resonated for three generations in the collective memory of the citizens of San Jose, despite the city fathers' intention to let it remain unpunished and forgotten. For Farrell himself, who was nine at the time of the lynching "a lifetime of close-range fascination with the Hart case" lay behind his investigation and his book. "Virtually everyone in the city, population then 60,000, knew either the Harts, the Holmes, or all three, and my family was no exception" (x). San Jose native Michael Azzarello, reconstructed the lynching

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in 2004 short film entitled *Night Without Justice* to explore "his grandfather's recollection of the executions he attended as a young boy on his father's shoulders" (Brady). Part of the horror of lynching was the mob's ability to make it disappear, an ability that depended on leaving it unspoken, denying what had been seen, and, by failing to bear witness, guaranteeing its repetition in memory and keeping alive the threat of its reenactment.

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Chapter Six: White Islands of Safety and Engulfing Blackness: Lynching, Memory, and Landscape in Angelina Weld Grimke's "Blackness" and "Goldie"

> America became white—the people who, as they claim, "settled" the country became white—because of the necessity of denying the Black presence, and justifying the Black subjugation. No community can be based on such a principle—or in other words, no community can be established on so genocidal a lie. White men—from Norway, for example, where they were *Norwegians*—became white: by slaughtering the cattle, poisoning the wells, torching the houses, massacring Native Americans, raping Black women.
>
> James Baldwin, "On Being 'White' . . . and Other Lies" (1984)

> We with our blood have watered these fields
> And they belong to us.
>
> Margaret Walker, "Delta" (1942)

Jim Crow apartheid and northern segregation alike operated through the racialization of space, dividing it, like Fanon's colonial world, into unequal and opposed compartments. "Racial difference," as Radhikah Mohanram reminds us, "is also spatial difference," as "the inequitable power relations between races" become expressed through "inequitable power relationships between various spaces and places" (3). Memory turns space into place, and a sense of place is "central to the formation of racial identity. The category of 'black body' can only come into being when the body is perceived as being

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out of place, either from its natural environment or its national boundaries" (ix). Segregation was all about place, the ownership of physical space conferred by memory, tradition, and the law, but also the elaborate social and symbolic code that signified such ownership. Knowing one's "place" for an African American required giving up all rights to physical space, including freedom of movement within and inscription of one's presence upon the landscape. Particularly prohibited, in the North as well as the South, were public monuments commemorating and celebrating the African American experience. The spatial environment thus normalized the silences and erasures of racial apartheid (as well as visual spectacles such as public lynching), making them seem indigenous to the land. [96]

What does it mean to commemorate and to mourn your losses on a landscape designed to erase all traces of your presence? After catastrophe, memorials provide the "foci of the rituals, rhetoric, and ceremonies of bereavement," underlining the crucial importance of returning to the place of loss, or at least having a place that embodies that loss and allows collective mourning" (Winter 78). In the case of those displaced or traumatized by lynchings and race riots, what forms of commemoration are possible when there is no place to return to? Craig Barton explains that the intersection of space and race produced "separate, though sometimes parallel, overlapping or even superimposed cultural landscapes for black and white Americans,"

[96] See James Loewen's *Lies Across America* on the dearth of monuments dedicated to African American achievements and losses. See Orlando Patterson, Rituals of Blood on the importance of spectacle lynchings for the white supremacist sacralization of space.

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resulting in a "complex social and cultural geography in which black Americans occupied and often continue to occupy distinct and frequently marginalized cultural landscapes' (xv). Barton insists, moreover, that the presence of "larger cultural landscapes, defined by custom and events as much as by specific buildings, and represented in text, image, and music" provides "invaluable insights into the memory of a place" (xvi). When the physical landscape remains mute, stories, images and songs carry the burden of memory.

In this chapter, I examine mourning and memory, motherhood and citizenship, body and land in Angelina Weld Grimke's 1920 short story, "Goldie," and its earlier unpublished version "Blackness," which were based on the 1918 lynching in Valdosta, Georgia, of an eight-months-pregnant woman named Mary Turner—an event that I believe constituted a primal trauma for the African American community. I place Grimke's text in the context of other African American women writing at the end of the First World War, particularly in reaction to the violence against women and children epitomized by the East Saint Louis Riot of 1917, and continuing on into the "Red Summer" of 1919. At the crest of this wave of violence, the killing of Mary Turner and her child because she protested her husband's lynching raised profound questions about how it could be possible to live in an America that had become a "sorrow home."[97] For Grimke, witnessing and

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[97] I am borrowing this phrase from Margaret Walker's "Sorrow Home," her 1942 lament over her displacement from her southern homeland. "O Southland, sorrow home, melody beating in my bone/and blood! How long

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mourning demanded breaking through violently maintained boundaries of "blackness" and "whiteness," those lines of force constructing the U.S. landscape as always raced white and gendered male. Grimke uses landscape images—the lynching tree, "white islands of safety" on segregation's road, and an unguarded house in the clearing—to represent the violence done to Turner, her husband, and her child, to critique the censorship of the white press, and to highlight white vulnerability in the face of certain retribution.

Official history has yet to acknowledge the profound significance of lynching in African American memory of the First World War. While African American soldiers were off fighting for democracy in France, urban labor struggles and rural racial tensions flared at home, placing families under siege as never before. Scholars have scrutinized the violent backlash against returning veterans for demanding their rights, yet critical work remains to be done on the effect of homefront violence against African American women. Through their exploration of wartime lynching and mob violence, African American women's texts remind us that post-war disillusionment extended beyond anger over the lynching of veterans to include maternal grief for atrocities committed at home. [98] These texts give us new insight into the

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will the Klan of hate, the hounds and/the chain gangs keep me from my own?" This is My Century: New and Collected Poems. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1989: 12.

[98] Toni Morrison's Jazz (1992) links maternal grief over race riots and lynching during the first two decades of the twentieth century to earlier maternal grief during slavery and post-Reconstruction dispossession. See Claudia Tate and Ericka Miller for similar analyses, in which the authors situate Grimke's

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depth of black hostility to and defiance over worsening race relations during and after the war.

Two wartime atrocities on the U.S. homefront particularly resonated with African American women writers: the July 1917 race riots in East Saint Louis, Illinois, and the May 1918 lynching of Mary Turner and her unborn child in Valdosta, Georgia. During the war, cities across the U.S. erupted into racial violence against African Americans, but East Saint Louis was by far the worst. In a carefully planned rampage, mobs of white workers, incensed about black employment in factories holding government contracts, roved the streets attacking and murdering African Americans, including women and children. They set entire residential areas alight, leaving residents the choice of being burned in their homes or risking death outside. Witnesses described police and soldiers helping these uncontrolled gangs, which included among them white women and children. In a special report in the September 1917 *Crisis*, twenty-four-year-old Lula Suggs recalls hiding in a cellar with "about one-hundred women and children" while "the School for Negroes on Winstanly Avenue was burned to the ground. When there was a big fire the rioters would stop to amuse themselves, and at such time I would peep out and actually saw children thrown into the fire" (DuBois 231). Beatrice Deshong, age 26, reported seeing "men, small boys, and women and little girls all . . . trying to do something to injure the Negroes. . . . I saw the mob chasing a

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evocation of maternal grief and lynching in the female slave narrative tradition.

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colored man who had a baby in his arms."[99] Newspapers put the death toll at 200, but Congress gave a low estimate of forty blacks and eight whites killed, with six thousand people displaced at least temporarily. On July 28th, when the NAACP staged a silent parade down Fifth Avenue to protest the riots, marchers pointedly did not carry the US flag. The silent men, women, and children streaming down the center of Manhattan instead carried signs reading: "Mother, Do Lynchers Go to Heaven?"; "Pray for the Lady Macbeths of East St. Louis"; "Mr. President, Why Not Make America Safe for Democracy?"; and "Give Us a Chance to Live." Spurred in part by German attempts to exploit the event as propaganda, Woodrow Wilson, who had famously praised D.W. Griffith's canonization of Klan violence in *Birth of a Nation* as "history written with lightning," issued a call to end lynching and mobbism. His words would have little effect.

Alice Dunbar-Nelson, in her tour of the South organizing African American relief efforts for the government, saw firsthand the demoralizing effect of mob violence, noting dryly in a report to her supervisor that what undermined the war effort was not German, but American propaganda inciting terror. In Vicksburg, Mississippi, after a mob tarred and feathered the wife of a soldier who was fighting in France, the city's African American band refused to serenade departing troops, claiming there was nothing to celebrate (Breen 425-426). As George Schulyer observed after the war, "it is

[99] Testimony repeatedly emphasizes the eagerness with which women and young girls participated in the mayhem. Irish-American poet Lola Ridge would memorialize this in her 1923 poem, "Lullaby."

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generally known that large numbers of Negroes, though they openly whooped it up for Uncle Sam, would have shed no tears in 1917-1918 if the armies of the Kaiser had by some miracle suddenly swooped down upon such fair cities as Memphis, Tenn., Waycross, Ga., or Meridian, Miss." Many African Americans felt that it "made no difference to them who won the war, since the Germans could hardly treat them worse than the Nordics of the U.S.A., and might treat them a lot better. Any number of intelligent Negroes expressed the opinion under the breath that a good beating would be an excellent thing for the soul of America" (73).

Nelson's own struggle to sustain her patriotism is evident in her play, "Mine Eyes Have Seen, " published in the *Crisis* in 1918. The play dramatizes the plight of Chris, an African American who supports his family after a lynch mob kills his father and an industrial accident maims his brother.[100] When drafted, Chris agonizes over where his duty lies—to his family or to "the nation that let [his] father's murderers go unpunished" (272). Ostensibly a recruitment drama, the one-act play reverberates with traumatic echoes of East Saint Louis in its nearly obsessive focus on atrocities against women and children. When a black soldier home on leave informs Chris that Germans have crucified children, Chris retorts: "They're little white children. But here our fellow countrymen throw our little black babies in the flames" (273-274).

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[100] As with Grimke's short story, Dunbar-Nelson's play emphasizes the destruction of home and family. Chris's father is shot for trying to defend his home, which a southern mob, enraged by the family's prosperity, burns to the ground. The family now lives in a sordid tenement in "a manufacturing city in the northern part of the United States" (271).

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What finally moves Chris to enlist is his brother Dan's impassioned and startling plea to "feel pity for the little crucified French children—for the ravished Polish girls, even as their mothers must have felt sorrow, if they had known, for OUR burned and maimed little ones." Then Dan cries out: "Oh, Mothers of Europe, we be of one blood, you and I" (274). These African American males find common cause not with embattled white manhood, but with the universal suffering of mothers. The play ends melodramatically with Chris standing at rapt attention (looking for all the world like the Christ figure/lynching martyr Dunbar meant to invoke) as strains from the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" float up from the street below, but the real question the play addresses is how African Americans can go on after East Saint Louis.

In May 1918, less than a year after the East Saint Louis riots, the lynching of Hayes Turner and his pregnant wife Mary in Valdosta, Georgia drew an immediate and anguished response from black politicians, artists and journalists.[101] In a letter accompanying her submission to the *Atlantic Monthly* of "Blackness," a short story based on the lynching, Angelina Weld Grimke wrote:

> I am sending enclosed a story. It is not a pleasant one, but it is based on fact. Several years ago, in Georgia, a colored woman quite naturally

[101] Indeed, it remains one of the most widely-mentioned lynching atrocities to this day. For many, Turner's lynching surpassed the worst stories of German depravity. In his 1923 recreation of the lynching in Cane, Jean Toomer makes the details of Mame Lamkins death identical with Mary Turner's—with one notable exception—his story goes that "some white man . . . jabbed his knife into the baby an' stuck it t a tree," echoing wartime propaganda about German bayoneting of Belgian infants.

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> it would seem became wrought up, because her husband had been lynched. She threatened to bring some of the leaders to justice. The mob, made up of . . . white men determined to teach her a lesson. She was dragged out by them to a desolate part of the woods and the lesson began. First she was strung up by her feet to the limbs of a tree, next her clothes were saturated with kerosene oil, and then she was set afire. While the woman shrieked and writhed in agony, a man, who had brought with him a knife used in the butchering of animals, ripped her abdomen wide open. Her unborn child fell to the ground at her feet. It emitted one or two little cries but was soon silenced by brutal boots that crushed out the head. Death came at last to the poor woman. The lesson ended. (417)

The lesson the mob sought to teach through Mary Turner's lynching was that any challenge to white supremacy—whether acted upon or merely spoken—would be answered with immediate annihilation. Not only were women and children considered targets, they stood to receive even more sadistic treatment in order to make the lesson stick. Grimke's description of the incident makes clear that this lesson was "learned" not just by Turner, but by Grimke and all others who witnessed its aftermath, mediated through news reports and heightened by a horrified identification with the victim. The outpouring of words and art following this event signals the degree to which this injury cried out for redress. Many connected the assault against Turner

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with the earlier riots.[102] Meta Warrick Fuller's 1919 statue of a woman clutching her stomach protectively as figures swirl around her lower limbs bore the title: "Mary Turner: A Silent Protest Against Lynching." Like the marchers in Harlem's Silent Protest Parade, Fuller's statue restored speech to the silenced abjected black body through a visible physical presence that communicated dignity, anguish, and rage exceeding words.

Anne Spencer's poem "White Things," written in outrage over Turner's lynching and published in the *Crisis* in 1923, seeks, on the other hand, to make visible the unnatural and destructive power of white supremacy. Noting that "most men are black men, but the white are free," Spencer describes a race of mutants who steal onto the earth and in a nihilistic rampage bleach everything of beauty they find. Her invocation of landscape recalls how this culture of violence displaced the native populations and destroyed the natural resources of the country to fuel its imperialistic industrial expansion. Reversing traditional western associations of white and black as good and evil, positive and negative, Spencer shows that the white things consume people as well, burning "a race of black, black men" to "ashes white." The

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[102] In a 1922 volume entitled *The Widening Light*, the poet, feminist and civil rights activist Carrie Williams Clifford included a sequence of poems documenting her reaction to wartime terrorization at home. With titles such as "A Dream of Democracy," "The Goal," "Race-Hate," "The Silent Protest Parade," "Little Mother," "Deceived," and "The Black Draftee from Dixie," these poems trace an emotional trajectory from hope to shock to anguish, and a profound feeling of betrayal. Clifford situates "Little Mother," her poem memorializing Mary Turner, just after the commemorations of the East Saint Louis riots and immediately before "Deceived," a mother's lament for a son needlessly sacrificed in the war. She thus identifies Turner's death as a primal trauma for African American mothers.

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white skull of the black man, "a glistening awful thing" and a "trophy for a young one," becomes in Spencer's poem a prophetic symbol of the accelerating degeneration of white civilization (Rice 235-236).

The fact that Spencer, like Grimke, drew on nature imagery in much of her poetry provides one explanation for why she chose to express her anger and sadness over the murder of Mary Turner through a landscape ravaged by white supremacy. This devastated landscape was not simply a poetic device, however, but an accurate depiction of the landscape in which African Americans lived and moved in the years during and after the war. The spike in violence stemmed in part from white anxiety over the migration of African Americans from the South, an anxiety that was only partially economic. As Mark Robert Schneider points out, "by voting with their feet against Jim Crow, defending their own rights, and creating the threat of a black labor shortage in the South, the migrants helped shift the balance of power in the struggle for civil rights" (20). Twenty-six race riots took place during the summer of 1919, a period so bloody James Weldon Johnson christened it "The Red Summer." White riots broke out in cities across the country, including Washington, D.C., Chicago, Omaha, Charleston, and Knoxville. Violence swept rural areas as well, most infamously in the massacre of black sharecroppers who had dared to form a union in Elaine, Arkansas.[103] Seventy-six lynchings were officially recorded for the year.

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[103] See Lee E. Williams, II. *Anatomy of Four Race Riots: Racial Conflict in Knoxville, Elaine (Arkansas), Tulsa and Chicago 1919-1921*. Hattiesburg, MS: U P of Mississippi, 1972; William Pickens, "Lynching and Debt Slavery."

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For five days in early July, 1919, unemployed white veterans, resentful of black employment and success and using a false report of an assault against an officer's wife as their pretext, rioted throughout the nation's capitol. Lurid newspaper coverage, including a notice to veterans in the *Washington Post* to "mobilize" in a certain area for a "clean-up" operation provided community sanction. During the riot, white mobs beat black men and women in front of the White House and the US Capitol building. Carter G. Woodson, the new dean at Howard University, witnessed the lynching of a black man as he walked home down Pennsylvania Avenue: "They had caught a Negro and deliberately held him as one would a beef for slaughter, and when they had conveniently adjusted him for lynching, they shot him. I heard him groaning in his struggle as I hurried away as fast as I could without running, expecting every moment to be lynched" (Perl A1).

Washington's African American community did not passively submit to this onslaught. In the "first major urban resistance to racial violence in the nation's history," many took up arms against the white mob, as blacks would do in the Chicago riots six days later (Foley 310). Blacks in nearby Baltimore rushed guns to the city, and pawnshops and gun dealers reported selling more than 500 guns on Monday, the worst day of the violence. Black mobs confronted white mobs advancing up the Seventh Street commercial corridor and erected barricades to afford themselves cover. Veterans readied their army-issue weapons, and sharpshooters positioned themselves on the roof of the Howard Theatre. Blacks drove through the street of Washington firing at

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whites, and "turned the tables" on the rioters as they "pulled whites off streetcars," and, in at least one instance, fired shots at the occupants. At the corner of 12th and G Streets NW, "a 17-year-old black girl barricaded herself in her house and shot and killed an MPD detective. In all, 10 whites and five blacks were killed or mortally wounded that night" (Perl A1). As James Weldon Johnson observed in the *Crisis*, "[t]he Negroes saved themselves and saved Washington by their decision not to run, but to fight. . . . If the white mob had gone unchecked—and it was only the determined effort of black men that checked it—Washington would have been another and worse East St. Louis" (243).

The sociologist Arthur Waskow, who interviewed riot survivors in the 1960s, said the experience gave people of all classes a new self-respect and "a readiness to face white society as equals" (qtd Perl A1). The riots united the black masses and the black elite in common cause. The "center of the black aristocracy in the United States" from Reconstruction until "at least World War I," Washington found itself in a state of crisis by World War I due to Wilson's efforts to segregate the federal government, passage of legislation making racial intermarriage a felony in the District of Columbia, and the barring of blacks from many public accommodations (Gatewood 39). The "previously exempted Washington elite"—members of "old families" who worked as lawyers and doctors and educated their children at the prestigious M Street School where Grimke taught for many years—responded militantly to this segregation in part by developing "a significant cultural nationalist

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movement" antedating the Harlem Renaissance and driven by Washington's accomplished circle of writers (Foley 296-297). Jean Toomer, Carrie Williams Clifford and Grimke, all of whom wrote about the lynching of Mary Turner, were part of a study group that included M Street faculty and members of the Howard community. Female members of the group, in particular, focused their efforts on the violence against and oppression of the African American masses, continuing in the tradition of Ida B. Wells-Barnett by using their words as weapons against lynching.

As Judith L. Stephens points out anti-lynching dramas comprise "perhaps the only collection of performance texts providing a sustained portrayal of white Americans as terrorists" (521). Women affiliated with the Washington circle wrote most of the early anti-lynching plays, which were performed in Washington and other cities to support and promote the NAACP's anti-lynching campaign. Most presented a woman's view of lynching that aimed both to memorialize the plight of black females and win the sympathy of their white sisters to the cause. Georgia Douglas Johnson, best known as a poet of the Harlem Renaissance, became "the leading playwright" of the anti-lynching drama, as seen in Safe, Sunday Morning in the South, and Blue-Eyed Black Boy, and in unpublished plays that Stephens discovered in 1999 among the papers of the NAACP. Johnson's salon in her house on S Street, beginning in the early 1920s, reinforced this program of aesthetic resistance to oppression. Hirsch insists of the Washington group of activist female playwrights that "one cannot overstress the collectivity of their

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vision" of themselves as black women (207). All of their plays drove home forcefully the impossibility of an African American version of domestic harmony and uplift when house and family remained under attack and the rights of full citizenship violently denied.

The earliest known anti-lynching play, *Rachel*, was written by Grimke herself. *Rachel* dramatizes a young woman's decision not to marry and reproduce after learning that her long-dead father and brother had been lynched in the South, propelling her family's sojourn northward. When Rachel learns of their deaths and sees the psychological and physical injuries racism inflicts even on the very young, she decides never to bring children into harm's way, explaining: "it would be more merciful—to strangle the little things at birth" (149). The first successful drama written by an African American and interpreted by African American actors, Grimke's three-act play was performed in Washington in 1916. The NAACP production program described *Rachel* (which aimed to counter the impact of the motion picture, *Birth of a Nation*) as "the first attempt to use the stage for race propaganda" (Rice 191).[104] In an article published in the January 1920 *Competitor*, Grimke answered charges that the play advocated race suicide by explaining that purpose had been instead to move the hearts of white women, who "are about the worst enemies with which the colored race has to contend." Identifying the "vulnerable point in their armor" as motherhood, Grimke insisted that if

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[104] *Rachel* was also produced at the Neighborhood Theatre in New York City on April 26, 1917, and was published by Cornhill Publishers in 1920. A second antilynching play, *Mara*, was never published or produced.

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"the white women of this country could see, feel, understand just what effect their prejudice and the prejudice of their fathers, brothers, husbands, sons were having on the souls of colored mothers everywhere, and upon the mothers that are to be, a great power to affect public opinion would be set free and the battle would be half won" (414). It is important to note that Rachel's decision not to have children is based in large part on the worsening prospects for African Americans in the North. Though she and her brother have received higher education, their job prospects include only the most menial labor. Grimke, moreover, places Rachel's decision in line with a family tradition of resistance. Her father, who is lynched for refusing to retract an editorial denouncing the lynching of an innocent man, faces the mob with loaded gun, and her half-brother willingly and valiantly dies defending his father. She will not allow white mobs to inflict this fate on her own children, and in the absence of means of protection, her only choice is not to bring them into the world.

Published in the April, 1919 *Liberator*, *Aftermath*, a play by Grimke's long-time friend, Mary Powell Burrill, exemplifies the shift by war's end toward an explicit call for militant resistance by men. Three months later, the *Liberator* would publish what many consider the penultimate anthem of New Negro resistance—Claude McKay's "If We Must Die"—in which the Jamaican-born poet proclaimed: "If we must die, let it not be like hogs" but "like men .

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. . [p]ressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!" (Rice 190). [105] In *Aftermath*, a black soldier returns from France to discover that while he was fighting for democracy abroad, his father has been burned alive following a wage dispute with his white employer. He spurns his grandmother's quotation of scripture in favor of direct action. The play ends with the soldier handing a loaded gun to his brother and leading him off to avenge their father's lynching. As in McKay's poem, *Aftermath* celebrates a "back-against-the-wall" aesthetic of militant black manhood. Burrill's play was produced as part of the competition in the David Belasco Sixth Annual Little Theatre Tournament on May 8, 1928, in New York City, as part of a collaborative effort between the Krigwa Players Little Negro Theatre and the Workers' Drama League. The white producers decided to change the ending without consulting the author. Burrill was angered by the new ending, in which the hero is shot offstage and then staggers back to die, because it twisted the message of militancy her play was meant to project.

Like Burrill, Grimke repeatedly came up against the efforts of supposedly enlightened whites to keep outside the limits of discursive

[105] In his autobiography, *A Long Way from Home*, McKay describes the unbearable tension of working for the Pennsylvania Railroad during the "Red Summer" of 1919: "Our Negro newspapers were morbid, full of details of clashes between colored and white, murderous shootings and hangings. Traveling from city to city and unable to gauge the attitude and temper of each one, we Negro railroad men were nervous. . . . We stuck together, some of us armed, going from railroad station to our quarters. We stayed in our quarters all through the dreary ominous nights, for we never knew what was going to happen." McKay explained that during this time, "the sonnet, 'If We Must Die," exploded out of me. And for it the Negro people unanimously hailed me as a poet. . . . It was the only poem I ever read to members of my crew" (qtd. Rice 189).

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possibility the idea that successful African American revenge for lynchings could go unpunished. The great-niece of prominent white abolitionists Sarah and Angelina Grimke, and the daughter of Archibald Grimke, an outspoken civil rights leader, NAACP vice-president and consul to Santo Domingo, Angelina grew up in a household known for its activism.[106] Her own writing exhibits a consistent and growing resistance against the country's violent disenfranchisement of its African American population. Claudia Tate maintains that the lynching of Mary Turner acted as a catalyst for Grimke's recurring lynching stories: "Evidently this event so severely affected Grimke that not only did she rewrite that story over and over again, but the activity of rewriting it seems to have been more important to her than her desire to see it in print or performed" (217).[107] Grimke's letter to the *Atlantic Monthly*, in which she goes on to argue for the story's inclusion in a magazine devoted to exposing atrocities abroad, suggests, however, that the working through of her own wounding by the event demanded public action as well as private expression. Her argument reveals, moreover, how deeply Turner's lynching called into question the status of African American citizenship and belonging in the United States.[108]

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[106] Archibald Grimke was the oldest of three sons born to Sarah and Angelina Grimke's brother Henry and Nancy Weston, an enslaved woman on the Grimke family's South Carolina plantation.

[107] Grimke addressed Turner's lynching four times in "Blackness," "The Waitin," "The Creaking" and "Goldie" (Hull 129-131).

[108] Angelina's uncle, the Rev. Francis Grimke, observed in 1918 that "Germany hardly equaled the United States in savagery," and to the question

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> Last fall, I think it was you printed an article entitled "Can These Things Be?" That was a very brutal [argument on] the Turks. It, of course, did not happen in America.
>
> The facts upon the lynching upon which I based my story happened in the civilized U.S.A. in the 20th century. Was this woman lynched for the "usual crime?" "Can These Things Be?" Even the Turks have been astounded by the brutality and ruthlessness of the lynching in this country. Where are these lynchings leading the U.S.A? Where will they end? (417-418)[109]

The evolution of Grimke's narrative from a first-person confessional calling for an ultimately successful revolution in "Blackness," to her third-person evocation in "Goldie" of a landscape riven by white violence in which retribution is answered with death, should be seen in large part as a response to white censorship. Grimke's short story, "Blackness," was rejected both by the *Atlantic Monthly* and Margaret Sanger's *Birth Control Review*, which had earlier published Grimke's short story, "The Closing Door" for an issue entitled "The New Emancipation: The Negroes' Need for Birth Control as

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asked by many white Americans in reference to the war—"Shall Humanity Rule or the Savage?"—replied "whites are nothing but savages themselves; . . . they are still on a very low plane of development" (qtd. Bay 200). Angelina's observations continue this militant questioning of the legitimacy of a civilization responsible for race riots and lynching.

[109] Grimke here refers to the Turkish campaign of genocide against the Armenian people from 1915-1920, in which 1.5 million died. On the US response, see Peter Balakian, *Black Dog of Fate*. New York: Basic Books, 1997 and Samatha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*. New York: Harper Collins, 2003.

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Seen by Themselves."[110] "The Closing Door" tells the story of Agnes Milton, a mother whose awakening to the reality of racial oppression and violence leads her to smother her newborn son before he enters a world in which he is sure to be lynched, a story of infanticide as resistance that Ericka Miller sees as an updating of the Margaret Garner story, "recasting a slave narrative in a modern setting" (83).[111] By showing the despair of an African American woman whose pregnancy seems to follow all the reformers' criteria for sensible reproduction—the pregnancy comes a number of years into the marriage and the couple enjoys a comfortable financial situation—Grimke emphasizes that the African American family needs protection from violence as a first step toward any improvement in its condition. Although Agnes has been living uneasily in a dream world of domesticity, with this news of her brother's death in the South—delivered by another brother arriving straight from a Jim Crow car—she realizes that racism also travels north, that lynching and racial prejudice threaten the lives of all the country's black citizens.

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[110] This issue also included a play by Grimke's friend and one-time lover, Mary Powell Burill, "They That Sit in Darkness," in which a young woman must give up her education at Tuskeegee to care for her many siblings after her mother collapses from overwork.

[111] The daughter of a black man and a white woman (Sarah Stanley), Grimke experienced the trauma of racial division in her primary relationship. Her white grandparents had opposed her parents' marriage, and Sarah Stanley deserted the family when Angelina was just a child. She never saw her mother again. Gloria T. Hull believes this abandonment may inform her constant return to issues of motherhood in her fiction, Grimke's concern with embattled mothers and children is certainly shared by her contemporaries, and it would be a mistake not to consider her depictions of motherhood in the context of the very real endangerment of African American children.

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In both *Rachel* and "The Closing Door," militancy means refusing to reproduce because male attempts at resistance have been doomed to failure: Rachel's newspaper editor father is lynched for penning an editorial against lynching, and her half-brother is killed as he resists the murder of their father; Agnes Milton's favorite brother is lynched for violating the spatial etiquette of Jim Crow by not moving quickly enough off of a sidewalk. In "Blackness" and "Goldie," however, Grimke channels outrage over lynching not into a refusal of motherhood by women, but into a call for violent retribution by men. Though motherhood in "Goldie" and "Blackness" leads to infanticide by the mob, Grimke's willingness to advocate, indeed, to insist upon militant resistance and to portray it as ultimately successful marks a significant departure from the earlier texts.

Although the archival evidence does not make clear if her rejection by the *Atlantic Monthly* preceded its submission to the *Birth Control Review*, it is clear that Grimke cared more for seeing her story in print than for catering to the ideology of the readers of the *Review*. The year after "The Closing Door" appeared, Mary Knoblach, co-editor of the *Review*, wrote to solicit another story from Grimke, cautioning the author to try to make her writing more palatable to a white audience: "This time if you write, it will be for the general reader. . . . Anything you wish to write about in connection with Birth Control we would be more than grateful to have" (qtd. Miller 88).

If "The Closing Door" had more to do with protest against segregation and its violent underpinnings than with birth control, the connection between

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the need for birth control and African American women is even less clear in "Blackness." While scholars beginning with Carolivia Herron generally point to the ending of the story, in which the revolutionary protagonist escapes, as the reason for rejection, there are several other aspects of the story that have been tempered in the accepted revision entitled "Goldie," which the Review published in 1920. First of all, "Blackness" is a first person attack on segregation by a member of the northern black bourgeoisie, a lawyer who inverts the logic of white lynch mobs to argue that the bankruptcy of the system justifies extra-legal violence by blacks. The lawyer, a southerner who came north after a disappointment in love to make his fortune, delivers his confession in a darkened house to his friend and law partner, Reed, while outside a white detective, unaware that Reed has entered the house, awaits his return. Reed has murdered the man behind the lynching of his former lover, her husband and their unborn child in retaliation for the husband's "crime" of defending his wife against rape. The lawyer expresses no remorse for his own "crime": "In the most lawless part of the country that is itself steadily growing lawless, I have broken a man-made law, but if there is a God, and He is just, and He is understanding, I shall not be afraid, at any time, because of the one act of mine, to stand before Him and look in his eyes" (249).

The movement of the story's opening sentence—"I stepped from the warm and wettest blackness I remember into the chilling blackness of the cellar"—from uterine imagery into a death-like state describes Reed's journey from false consciousness into immersion in the cold reality of

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"blackness" in the United States (218). The men communicate strictly through sound and touch as they traverse a house defamiliarized by the dark, which they enter through the cellar. (This fugitive underground status recalls the fugitive slave narratives and brings to mind later revolutionaries such as the protagonists of Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Wright's "The Man who Lived Underground," who also mine the creative possibilities afforded by "blackness.") Reed describes his friend as "rather radical," "unconventional" and perhaps "embittered. But then, were we not all of us as colored men, even though living in a northern city, more or less that? Certainly we had cause enough to be" (223).

While critics have paid a great deal of attention to Grimke's use of space as metaphor for female entrapment, domestic space in both "Blackness" and "Goldie" functions to critique white terrorism and Jim Crow segregation north as well as south of the Mason Dixon Line. Reed recalls that the lawyer purchased the house in which they hide as a business venture, but it soon turned into a "very white and heavy elephant on his hands," as he refused to renovate it until he had the capital "to carry out his plans for remodeling." This failure to remake the house to his liking underlines the inability of the black bourgeoisie ever to assimilate into a segregationist society, North or South, lacking money, but also less tangible assets such as cultural capital and the full rights of citizenship. The item that stands out most clearly in the lawyer's darkened study—Reed sees it as a "huge blur of white"—is a bust of Wendell Phillips, the fiery abolitionist orator who joined

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the anti-slavery movement in outrage after seeing William Lloyd Garrison nearly lynched by a white mob following a speech at the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society. Phillips secured his fame as a leading figure in the society after an 1837 speech at Boston's former slave market, Fanieul Hall, condemning the mob murder of Elijah P. Lovejoy, a minister whose own persecution began when he denounced the lynching of a black man.[112] By making the bust of Phillips the only whiteness admissible in this revolutionary space, Grimke establishes the lawyer as the intellectual and moral heir of the abolitionist tradition and links his fugitive status in the North to that of famous runaways such as Frederick Douglass who also felt compelled to "confess" the conditions of their oppression and rebellion.

Grimke makes the link between slavery and current conditions even more explicit in the lawyer's lengthy, nearly four-page description of journeying down south in the "pig pen" of the Jim Crow car. The lawyer stresses the bankruptcy of a legal system that construes the abject circumstances he witheringly describes as "equal accommodation" (232-236). To his description of the car's "unspeakable" filth, into which were herded, "body wedged against body," at least one hundred passengers, Reed replies that such tight packing of the cars, with their stifling heat and body odor,

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[112] Phillips attacked "the tyranny of this many-headed monster, the mob, where we know not what we may do or say, till some fellow citizen has tried it, and paid for the lesson with his life . . . [the mob] deprives not only the individual and the minority of their rights, but the majority also, since the expression of their opinion may sometimes provoke disturbance from the minority." See Wendell Phillips. *Speeches, Lectures, and Letters*. Boston: James Redpath, 1863: 1-10.

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might actually be "evidence of [the white man's] long sighted policy. In case of an epidemic, for instance" (234). This passage not only connects such herding and deprivation to the Middle Passage, but highlights white supremacy's genocidal impulses that came, perhaps, too close to comfort to the aims of eugenics espoused by many allies of Sanger's cause.

Another aspect of "Blackness" that may have been unsettling to Review editors is the excruciating focus on the bodies of the lynching victims—initially through sound and ultimately through sight. In "Blackness," sound both precedes and exceeds sight, first in the communication in the invisibility of the lawyer's home and then in the lengthy passages about the "creaking voices" and "the duet"—the sound of the ropes holding bodies of different weight swinging from the tree limb in the breeze, moving first one, then the other, and then together—that the lawyer hears as he waits for dawn outside his lover's home. In a passage of agonizing deferral, the lawyer puts off—in the memory and in the telling—seeing what he—and we—know is already there in the midst of a new morning "breathtaking" and "poignant" in its beauty. He goes slowly toward the trees, using extraordinary effort to keep his feet moving toward the sound: "I knew that between me and whatever it was, was now only this thin screen of delicate and beautiful green leaves. I put up my hands to them and then I noticed an inch worm making his awkward, energetic and seemingly important journey along the leaves and twigs. I watched him a long time, and just beyond were the creaking and the

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stillness" (243). He closes his eyes and pulls the branches aside, hearing the creaking of the branches:

> "Nothing between, now, but my closed eyelids.
>
> "I stepped forward and I opened my eyes—and I saw.
>
> "Each with a rope around the neck—strung up—onto the same limb—that made the creaking—. Their faces swollen, distorted, unrecognizable—awful!—and naked—both of them!"
>
> Reed's friend pauses, his breathing shallow, his words coming in gasps, as he remembers:
>
> "Her beautiful golden body—swaying there—ripped open—" . . .
>
> "Ripped open—I say—and under her poor little swaying golden feet—her child—unborn—beautiful—tiny hands and feet perfect—one little hand reached up—as though—appealing—the little head—blotted out—crushed—its little brains"—(243-244)

At this point, the listener, Reed, jumps up and cries out: "Stop!"—the accumulation of atrocity too much for listener and reader.

The lawyer describes next his visit to the home of the woman's cousin, where he demands the names of her attackers, then vomits. Earlier on his journey, the Jim Crow car had made him sick to his stomach, and his vigil on the steps of his lover's house during the night produces in him "a most horrible nausea" (240). This abject, nauseous condition is thus portrayed as systemic to segregation. It is significant that the would-be rapist and leader of the lynch mob is a station master, the one in charge of keeping the Jim Crow

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system running smoothly. When the lawyer asks the cousin to identify the culprit, he reacts in a "frenzy of fear," imploring his questioner to "be quiet." Asked what the community has done about the lynching, the cousin stammers, "there-there isn't anything—I know of—can be done. There's no law—" (245).

The stammer of the cousin constitutes an interruption of the linguistic underpinnings and demand for silence in Jim Crow segregation. In Grimke's enactment of revenge for the violent silencing of a woman, the ability to regain control of speech is all important. The lawyer tells Reed when he begins his confession: "I am going to do a thing I never remember doing before and, after tonight, I shall never do it again. I am going to talk about myself" (231). The revelation that takes place in hushed tones, circumscribed by the watchful presence of the white man outside, takes on a conspiratorial as well as testimonial charge. Several times during the confession, the two communicate through a silence in which the blackness flows between them. This control over communication includes the ability to deprive the stationmaster of speech. After carefully selecting a place for revenge—"a little patch of woods. It seemed fitting we should meet where the trees were" (247)—the lawyer takes his time verbally tormenting his victim, who begins to stammer with fear before the lawyer strangles him and leaves him "hidden away—among the trees" (248).

As important as this act of speech is Reed's witnessing role. When he has unburdened himself, the lawyer tells Reed that he can't imagine what he has done for him by listening to his story. The ending of the story suggests,

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moreover, the presence of a larger resistance effort, like the Underground Railroad, assisting fugitives and conveying vital messages and information: "He held out his hand and mine gripped it. Neither of us said a word and then abruptly he turned away and went down the alley. . . . He would have to pass under the gas light at the corner. He came to it, passed through and was lost in the blackness beyond. I have reason to believe he escaped. But I have never heard from him or seen him since" (250-251). This story of an African American man who murders a white attacker and seems to operate as part of a group far exceeded what the *Birth Control Review* magazine—or any magazine with a predominantly white readership for that matter—would be willing to publish in an anti-lynching story written by an African American woman.

It is important to read the resubmitted version of the story, "Goldie," as a critique of such censorship as well as of lynching and segregation. In "Goldie," Grimke's evocation of the southern landscape must sustain the critique of segregation that her earlier story accomplished through detailed scenes of abjection in the Jim Crow car and graphic imagery of the abject bodies of the lynching victims. The story begins in *medias res* and is told through the third person perspective of a man newly embarked from the train who battles survivor's guilt on the road towards his sister's home, trying not to think about her frantic telegram summoning him there. The slow pace and sheer length of "Goldie" enact a post-traumatic deferral of knowledge. The woods he must pass through seem a "boundless, deep, horrible waiting sea," in which he wrestles to avoid the truth he already knows (that his sister has

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been lynched) and to deny the dread of a future he can already guess (his own death by lynching).[113] The first sentence makes clear the change in focus from revolutionary blackness to a world divided into black and white: "He had never thought of the night, before, as so sharply black and white; but then he had never walked before, three long miles, after midnight, over a country road" (282). The going is difficult, and he has to pause step by step, much as Reed does when entering the house in "Blackness"—he has entered a new world that he does not understand, is coming close to the violent center of segregation.

The name of Grimke's protagonist, Victor Forrest, marks him as a kind of African American Everyman struggling on an arduous journey toward redemption. The darkness is "palpable" and the landscape seems alive and breathing. It seems, indeed, to Victor, that the "woods . . . were not really woods at all but an ocean that had flowed down in a great rolling black wave of flood to the very lips of the road itself and paused there as though suddenly arrested and held poised in some kind of strange and sinister spell" (282). Though he tells himself not to worry and chides himself for his fanciful imagination, he feels as if he's in "actual danger," that "at any second the spell might snap and with that snapping, this boundless, deep upon deep of horrible waiting sea, would move, rush, hurl itself heavily and swiftly together

[113] Given the proximity between Turner's lynching and the publication of the story, it is likely that readers would also have been resisting the already-known fate of this "little mother."

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from two sides, thus engulfing, grinding, crushing, blotting out all in its path" (283).

He is kept going only by the "bright spots" that he calls "white islands of safety," where the woods seem to "draw back . . . in order to get a good deep breath before plunging forward" (283). He feels the air in the woods as "dank, black oppressiveness," and he stops in one of the clearing to "fill his lungs anew with God's night air." As he gazes upwards, however, he sees millions of stars above him, "each one hardly brilliant stabbing its way whitely through the black heavens." Sometimes "if the islands were large enough," Victor catches sight of "a very pallid, slightly crumpled moon sliding furtively down to the west" (283). The image of violent penetration and furtive criminality suggests that what he takes to be islands of safety have been violently carved out of a landscape "sharply black and sharply white . . . but mostly black." Danger comes not from the woods, but from his exposed position of vulnerability on the road.

In *Passed On*, Karla Holloway argues that the way many African Americans die—in riots and rebellions, through executions, lynching, police brutality, suicides and undertreated illness—produces an association between blackness and mortality that does great harm to the "culture's collective sense of itself" (59). Victor's misidentification of the life-giving and death-dealing values of whiteness and blackness signals the distance he must travel towards racial and self-awareness. Victor discovers that "a dark road . . . could make it possible for you to see yourself quite plainly—almost too

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plainly" (286). The nauseous condition of "Blackness" returns with his memory of why he left: "Certainly a colored man couldn't do the things that counted in the South.—To live here, just to live here, he had to swallow his self-respect. . . . The trouble was he couldn't keep it swallowed—it nauseated him" (285). In escaping to relative freedom in the North, however, Victor also abandoned sister and community, participating in the epistemology of Jim Crow by choosing not to think about their ongoing oppression.

Part of the terror of white violence required that it remain unacknowledged as such. Without courtroom depositions or official inquiry, violent spectacles and mass crimes never entered the public archive, or entered through white supremacist manipulations of the language of innocent and victimization, goodness and evil, suffering and moral responsibility. Although African Americans had always to perform their knowledge of white violence through submissive actions, to speak this knowledge in the South amounted to suicide; in the North such speech provoked an immediate silencing and censorship. Creating images of whiteness as concentrated evil and bringer of death became an important strategy for African Americans to turn their "grief to grievance" and to move "from suffering injury to speaking out against that injury" (Cheng 5). [114]

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[114] See, for example, W.E.B. Dubois, "Litany at Atlanta" (1906); T. Thomas Fortune Fletcher, "White God" (1927); James S. McPeek's "White Barbarians"; Robert Hayden's "Speech" and James Weldon Johnson's "Brothers." Mia Bay's chapter on "New Negroes, New Whites" in *The White Image in the Black Mind* provides an excellent introduction to the "anti-white sentiment" among blacks following the First World War, situating it in the context of a larger tradition of black intellectual thought.

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The "dank, blank oppressiveness" of Grimke's living forest describes, therefore, not an intrinsic property of blackness, but the emotional and psychological condition described in her Competitor article: "From morning to night, week in week out, year in year out, until death ends all, [African Americans] never know what it means to draw one clean, deep breath free from the contamination of the poison of that enveloping force which we call race prejudice. Of necessity they react to it." While some "are made hopeless, indifferent, submissive, lacking in initiative," and others pursue "temporary pleasures to drown their memory," still others are "embittered, made resentful, belligerent, even dangerous" (413). It is the presence of this last group Victor feels all around him while journeying down segregation's road. In defiance of racism's toxicity, the woods remain alive, palpable, and threatening, pushing ever more insistently at the artificial margins of whiteness.

In Grimke's fiction and poetry, trees operate as complex and often occult figures of African American embodiment and experience. At times, as in her poem, "At April," such embodiment is an expression of joy: "Toss your gay heads,/Brown girl trees;/Shake your downy russet curls/ . .. Who knows better than we,/With the dark, dark bodies/What it means/When April comes . . .?" (65). At others, as in "The Black Finger," Grimke uses the tree to express racial uplift and pride: "I have just seen a most beautiful thing/. . . A straight black cypress,/ Sensitive,/Exquisite,/ A black finger/Pointing upwards" (101-102). More often, however, her use of the tree recalls violent

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oppression, culminating particularly in lynching. Her undated poem, "Trees," begins with a conventional salute to trees as special symbols of God's providence that is cancelled out by the speaker's awareness of an uncanny eruption of evil in the tranquil landscape: amid the "wistful sounds of leaves," a "gruesome black hued something . . . swings and swings." The traumatic rupture of the everyday in "Trees" is answered in her poem, "Tenebris" (1927), by an indeterminacy of dread: "There is a tree, by day,/That at night,/ Has a shadow." Falling like huge black hand moving against the white man's house, the shadow's "fingers long and black" pluck at bricks which are "the color of blood and very small." The title, Latin for "in darkness," refers to the moral state of the South and to the blindness of whites to the coming threat against their power structure as retribution and guilt, fingers on the hand, relentlessly work to destroy the house of pain built on the bodies of the tortured and enslaved.

The lynching tree had great symbolic importance for many white communities, with mobs ritually returning with new victims to a favored spot, usually a tree near the center of the community. Orlando Patterson explains that the "religion of the lost cause" that emerged in the South after the civil war fused the secular and sacred, with political symbols and rituals assuming a religious aura and Christian symbols and rituals taking on "political-cultural meaning. Southern culture, society, and landscape became a sacred space, the home of a 'chosen people'" (205). In Christianity, the cross "is usually symbolically conflated with a tree," and Patterson sees a "substantial minority

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of lynchings" as partaking of a "cult of human sacrifice," in which the destruction of the African American body consecrated white supremacist ownership of southern space.

Many African American writers, on the other hand, also saw lynching as a ritual of human sacrifice and connected the sufferings of the victim with the martyrdom of Jesus Christ. In their poetry and fiction they therefore identified the tree as a memorial site and a place of transcendence. Countee Cullen, for example, in his long poem, "The Black Christ," referred to the lynching site as a "Second Calvary," with the tree becoming "the cross, the rood" and the ground becoming sanctified space for African Americans. By the time of the NAACP-sponsored 1935 "Art Commentary on Lynching," the representation of Christlike lynching victim merging into the tree had become very common. Grimke herself explicitly connects the tree with the cross when she asks at the end of "Trees": "Was Christ Himself not nailed to a tree?" Yet she tempers this reminder with an observation of how "slowly God weaves" (109).

Most of Grimke's poetry and fiction rejects religious consolation and sublimation of the victim's suffering in favor of a revolutionary response. In "Black is as Black Does," her first story, published when she was twenty in Pauline Hopkins' *Colored American*, Grimke imagines a lynching victim, his body in a state of extreme abjection, arriving in heaven for judgment. He is made whole, while his attacker leaves for hell in a state of accelerating decomposition, leaving bloody footprints on the floor of heaven. The black

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lynching victim begs for forgiveness for his attacker, proving that his soul is indeed white. But the dreamer awakes from this dream less comforted than before, perhaps because the scene of retribution has been short-circuited or because she has returned to the world of shadow, rain and chill, where lynching remains a constant threat. It is important to note that Grimke turned away from the idea of divine retribution in this life or after death as an attractive means of redress. One of her very early poems, "Beware Lest He Awakes" expresses Grimke's growing disillusionment with religion, predicting a coming tide of retribution on a landscape soaked in blood: The mobs hang and burn their victims until their "freelands reek/From gory peak to peak,/With bloody, bloody sod,/And still there lives a God./But mark! There may draw near/. . . A day of endless fear; /Beware, lest he awakes!" (120). [115] Like many other African Americans, Grimke had great difficulty reconciling the image of a merciful god with the daily onslaught of violence. In "The Puppet-Player," a sadistic puppeteer, "clenched claw cupping a craggy chin," controls the universe, sitting "just beyond the border of our seeing,/Twitching the strings with slow, sardonic grin" (94). Rachel struggles with doubts over God's permitting cruelty against her people, and Agnes

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[115] Published in the *Pilot* in 1902, this version represents the fourth revision of a poem originally entitled "Beware When He Awakes!" that even more forcefully reveals Grimke's "politically radical concerns regarding lynching, racism, and the usually disallowed subject of revenge on whites." Herron notes that in her unpublished *Life and Writings of the Grimke Family*, Anna Julia Cooper "records a fragment of a similar poem by Grimke, 'Enceladus': 'Beware, Beware, O Land o' Dreams,/the black giant sleeps, unquiet yet awhile;/Anon , he turns to ease his tired side./Beware, O Land o' Dreams!" (114).

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Milton's last desperate act of faith is her plea that God will kill her infant before it is born to spare him the cruelty he allows on earth. When this prayer is not answered, the distraught mother takes it upon herself to show mercy to the child by smothering him to death.

Even Goldie, whom Grimke portrays as a paragon of true womanhood, worries that she must bargain with God for any chance at happiness. Like Rachel and Agnes Milton, Goldie's highest aspiration is to have a "little home" all her own with "young things in it and about it" (288). Vic recalls teasing her when she was about fifteen whether her desires were asking for too much from God—and how terribly this had upset her. She speculated that perhaps God would let her have her happiness if she gave up the little animals, then panicked at the idea that God might require that she give up the children, asking breathlessly if he thought that if she were good "always—from now on," God might relent and allow her the happiness of motherhood.

The newly-wed Goldie's prayers seem to have been answered. She writes that she lives in a house so beautiful "the very trees came right down to the very edges of the clearing on all four sides just to look at it.—If he could only see how proudly they stood their and nodded their entire approval to each other" (290). Her husband, Cy, has the habit of "mooning" among the trees, as if communicating with the ancestors: "Talk to me—they do—sometimes.—Tell me big, quiet things, nice things." Cy builds his home in a clearing just beyond a great live oak that Victor remembers carving "his initials all over" and playing in as a child, literally engraving African

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American memory on the landscape through his act of writing (289).[116] Grimke uses the trees to embody not just African American domestic desires but a rootedness and connection with the soil stretching back for generations.[117]

"How happy it all had sounded," Victor remembers. "[A]nd yet—once or twice—he had had the feeling that something wasn't quite right" (291). Noting the difference in literary style between "Goldie" and "Blackness," Ericka Miller maintains that the "highly sentimentalized dialogue of the latter," particularly evident in Goldie's childhood prattle and her letters to Vic, should not be dismissed as evidence of Grimke's "difficulty with convincing dialogue," but as a deliberately "genteel mannerism rendered parodic by the ultimate barbarity of the crime against Goldie and her family" (92). To read Goldie's sentimentalized dialogue as simply parodic would be, however, to miss the underlying terror, expressed through spatial metaphor, that makes this idealized space always already a sorrow home. In her letters to Vic, Goldie describes her house as having "a hall that had the most absurd

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[116] Forrest's act of writing on the live oak recalls the trope of the Witnessing Tree in Paul Laurence Dunbar's "The Haunted Oak" in which the memory of the victim's suffering is inscribed upon the landscape through the withering of the branch on which the victim hung.

[117] Many texts of the Great Migration lament the traumatic break with the land and the forcible uprooting of generations. In her "Southern Song, " for instance, Margaret Walker laments laments the intrusion of the mob between her body and home. In Countee Cullen's long poem, "Black Christ," the mother refuses to leave the countryside where she was born and raised her children, claiming "I am dirt." Other texts, such as Jean Toomer's Cane feature African Americans raised in the North who journey back to find their southern roots.

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way of trying to get out both the front and rear doors at the same time. Would he believe it, they had to keep both the doors shut tight in order to hold that ridiculous hall in. . . . Why the unbearable thing might rise up, break down the front and back doors and escape . . . . " (290). Embedded in her coy description of domesticity is panic verging on hysteria, filled with images of flight and pursuit: "it wasn't safe, if you had any kind of heart trouble at all, to stand in the road in front of the little home all her own, because it had a way of calling you that before you knew it, you were running to it and running fast" (291).

Goldie's letters move from such manic descriptions of domestic "bliss," to her frightened confession of long-standing and intensifying harassment by Lafe Coleman, a sexual predator who embodies abject and repulsive whiteness: "a stringy, long white man with stringy colorless hair, quite disagreeably underclean; eyes a pale grey and fishlike. . . . [His] grin . . . displayed the dark and rotting remains of tooth stumps" (295). Evoking Vic's "grimace of strong disgust and loathing"—a return of segregation's nauseous condition—Coleman's appearance sharply contrasts with Goldie's idealized womanhood: "She had never lost that beautiful even gold color of hers.—Even her hair was 'goldeny' and her long eye lashes. Nice eyes, Goldie had, big and brown with flecks of gold in them—set in a little wistful, pointed face" (294).

As in "Blackness," Goldie has changed the motive behind the lynching from an economic dispute to sexual harassment to highlight African American

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women's vulnerability to assault. Goldie tells Victor of her despairing efforts to hide the Coleman's advances from her husband out of fear that Cy would act like a man and thus bring down an apocalypse on the entire settlement:

> The feeling between the races was running higher than it used to.—There had been a terrible lynching in the next county only last year. She hadn't spoken of it before—for there didn't seem any use going into it. –As he had never mentioned it, she supposed it had never got into the papers. Nothing , of course, had been done about it, nothing ever was. . . . The brother of the lynched man, quite naturally, had tried to bring some of the leaders to justice; and he, too, had paid with his life. Then the mob, not satisfied, had threatened, terrorized, cowed all the colored people in the locality.—He was to remember that when you were under the heel it wasn't the most difficult of matters to be terrorized and cowed. There was absolutely no law, as he knew to protect a colored man. –That was one of the reasons she had hesitated to tell Cy, for not only Cy and she might be made to pay for what Cy might do, but the little settlement as well. (296)

When he reaches "the little colored settlement," Victor is immediately relieved to see the "silent, black little masses " of the houses. No sound broke the stillness" (198). Viewing the homes still intact, he realizes "there was something to this home idea, after all." Yet his return to origins has brought him to a community under a siege that renders the "home idea" virtually impossible. The corpselike imagery of the "black little masses"

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recalls the "black hued something" of "Tenebris." Just as white violence turns the black body into a thing, the threat of violence similarly destroys the life of the black home. In the lynching climate he has entered, therefore, Victor's musings on the ways of country folk has a sinister edge: "Bet every window is shut tight too. Turrible, the night air always used to be.—Wonder if my people will ever get over these things" (293).

He sees a faint illumination from the home of Aunt Phoebe, whom he reckons must be "way over ninety" (294). A survivor of slavery, "through many years and long of sorrow, and heartbreak, and bitter, bitter tears," Aunt Phoebe has always kept a light on against the darkness through her memories. As Goldie explained to Vic: "And though they could take her husband and children and sell them South, though she lost them in the body—Never a word of them, since—she keeps them always in her heart." (304). A "muffled but continuous" sound reaches him from behind the "closed faintly lighted pain of Aunt Phoebe's room. It was a sound, it struck him, remarkably like the keening he had heard in an Irish play" (294). [118] Although he tells himself she is probably dreaming, her moaning

[118] David Lloyd sees in the mourning ritual of keening during and after the Irish famine "both colonial mastery of and loss of control over colonized space" (Kazanjian 21). Lloyd writes: "In account after account of the Famine, the terrible silence of the land is time and again counterpointed by the sound of wailing or howling, as if indifferently human or animal. The silence is at once the silence of depopulation and the silence of traumatized culture. . . . [I]t marks simultaneously the dissolution of the Irish as subjects of their own culture and history and the historical emergence of a new kind of Irish subject" (206). In the same volume, Fred Moton's essay, "Black Mo'nin'" looks at the similar function of the "moan" in African American culture. Aunt Phoebe's keening, or moaning, transmits the collective cultural memory of grief as well as the possibility of political action available in collectivity.

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communicates with him, releasing his understanding: "Thoughts, conjectures, fears that he had refused, until now, quite resolutely to entertain would no longer be denied."

Victor's repression of memory up to this point, while partially post-traumatic deferral, should also be seen as strategic: "Way down, inside of him, in the very depths, a dull cold rage began to glow, but he banked it down again, carefully, very carefully, as he had been able to do, so far, each time before that the thoughts of Lafe Coleman and little Goldie's helplessness had threatened anew to stir it" (297). He has been keeping these thoughts at bay, keeping his rage in reserve until the moment to strike. When he reaches the live oak, contrary to Goldie's prediction about running to the house, Vic advances only by "an act of sheer will" (297). "Save for the stabbing, white stars above the clearing, there was nothing else in all the world, it seemed, but himself and the heavy black silence" (297).

In the center of the clearing lies "a dark small mass" that is "the little home" (297). Victor ascends the steps, stumbles over a broken chair, and feels his way along the house front. The realization that the house lies penetrated and opened (as he will discover, like his sister's body), leads to traumatic splitting: "The other person who seemed, somehow, to have entered his body, moved forward, ... Nothing seemed to make very much difference to this stranger . . . what he saw there did not surprise him in the least. In some dim way, only he knew that it affected him" (299-300). Victor

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takes an agonizing tour of the destroyed house, finding on every surface traces of the now-withdrawn invading white bodies.

He discovers a boot print on the floor and a bloody handprint on the wall. The shards of a bourgeois domestic idyll lie everywhere, torn to pieces by the mob—pictures, knickknacks and vases, a smashed china clock. "The frail white curtains and window shades had gone down too in this human whirlwind; not a pane of glass was whole" (300). The black notes on the overturned piano with one side caved in remind him of Lafe Coleman's "rotting stumps of teeth" (300). When he enters the bedroom "the stranger" finds "something dark at the foot of the bed. He moved nearer, and understood why the air was not pleasant. The dark object was a little dead dog. . . . A kick in the belly had done for him" (302). These discoveries both displace and multiply the horror of what has happened to the family.[119] As in "Blackness," Victor waits out the night on the steps of the ruined home Dawn brings a breeze, and with it, the sound of "two creakings . . . among the trees" (301). As the light grows, the mob's physical imprint, a trampled path from steps to trees, emerges on the landscape.

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[119] As in Carrie Clifford's poem, "Little Mother," each version of Grimke's story features the discovery of husband, wife, and child murdered together at their home. As NAACP anti-lynching activists, both authors knew that Turner and her husband died three days apart in different locations. The choice to have the family murdered together in their home would seem therefore to address a psychological truth about the event.

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Unlike the lawyer in "Blackness," Victor wastes no time in making his discovery.[120] "Quite automatically he arose and followed the path. Quite automatically he drew the branches aside. Underneath those two terribly mutilated swinging bodies lay a tiny unborn child, its head crushed in by a deliberate heel" (301-302). Victor cannot comprehend what he has just seen: "Something went very wrong in his head. He dropped the branches, turned and sat down. A spider, in the sunshine was reweaving the web someone had just destroyed while passing through the grass. He sat slouched far forward watching the spider for hours."

Grimke's revised version is in many ways more excruciating than her first, as Victor's eyes must witness what the text can no longer show. He emerges from the woods as a witness with "very terrible eyes indeed" (203). It is with these eyes that he castigates his fellow townsmen, who, like Goldie before them, refuse to get involved lest more violence occur. They insist that they know nothing, avoiding his gaze and assuming the Jim Crow position. Only Aunt Phoebe, who is nearly blind from cataracts—"two blue rings encircl[ing] the irises of her dim eyes"—yet gifted with a second sight, will tell him where Lafe Coleman can be found. After receiving this information, Victor turns, and we are told "the wood swallowed him up" (205). A low

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[120] Carolivia Herron reports in *Selected Works* that the holograph pages describing the condition of the house in "Blackness" have been lost. Although scholars have generally assumed that Grimke's description of the home is similar to that in "Goldie," I suspect that this is not the case given the very significant differences in the way the event is processed by the two protagonists and the increased emphasis on domesticity in the second story.

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keening from Aunt Phoebe begins. We learn that after killing Lafe Coleman, "Victor Forrest died, as the other two had died, upon another tree" (205).

The story does not end, however, with the death of Victor Forrest, but with an image of thousands of trees, each chosen because it once bore "a creaking victim," that have been transplanted to form a "Creaking Forest" on either side of a country road along which many carefree people travel. Most people who pass along this road, "even at night," can't hear the "many things" there are to hear, for their souls are deaf to the messages of the creaking and keening in the forest. This refusal to see or to hear corresponds to the silence of both North and South about lynching. At once a living memory of the enormity of African American suffering and loss and the overwhelming nature of their trauma, Grimke's wood-ocean also signals the instability of the system of segregation that like the white road cuts brutally through the woods, and through African American lives. This foundational illusion that white islands of safety can exist in the middle of others' trauma portends an apocalyptic end to the structure of segregation: "At night the trees become an ocean dark and sinister . . . made up of all the evil in the hearts of all the mobs . . . It is an ocean arrested at the very edges of the road by a strange spell [that] may snap at any second and . . . this sea of evil will move, rush, hurl itself heavily and swiftly, engulfing, grinding, crushing, blotting out all in its way. "

Noting that scholars have yet to fully map the "white image in the black mind," Mia Bay reminds us that "African American discussions of whiteness"

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are always "embedded within a larger story about black resistance to racism" (7). Preserving the memory of Mary Turner's lynching seen through the aftermath of the Red Summer, Grimke's text refuses to be silent, carrying in its creaking and keening a revolutionary message that speaks loudly to those who would hear. As James Baldwin understood, "the wholesale dismissal by whites of African-American expertise regarding whiteness was one critical condition under which such knowledge could be obtained" (Roediger 5). Grimke responds to white censorship and silencing by creating a landscape in which African American resistance and endurance are hidden in plain view of her white audience.

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