

BUILDING THE BLACK PUBLIC SPHERE:
LYNCHING, COMMEMORATION, AND ANTI-LYNCHING STRUGGLES
IN THE UNITED STATES

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

American Studies

2012

ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is concerned with the commemoration of lynching in the United States and revisits several anti-lynching struggles from the 1930s-1940s to the present. Cases explored in this study include a transnational aspect of the interwar anti-lynching campaigns, African American protests on the street, jazz singer Billie Holiday's lyrical rendition of "Strange Fruit," the use of lynching photography in the anti-lynching movement, as well as the problem of bearing witness to the black suffering in recent traveling exhibits of lynching photography *Without Sanctuary* (2000-2005) and in the discussion of the U.S. Senate's official apology for lynching in 2005.

Building the Black Public Sphere asserts two major contentions. First, it claims that, from a perspective of historical memory, many African American anti-lynching struggles of the past, which primarily attempted to eradicate contemporary racial violence, simultaneously functioned as the act of remembrance that challenged the historical erasure and misconstruction of lynching. Second, it argues that this political act of remembrance was conducted through exhibitions of the black body. That is, in order to challenge the epidemic of the spectacle of lynching, in which the torture and annihilation of the black body was witnessed and consumed, and to contest racialized and sexualized (under)representation of blacks in white supremacist lynching discourse, African American anti-lynching activists demonstrated their resistance from within the very

discourse and representation of lynching.

It is this revisiting of the space of death—discursive, representational, demonstrative, and performative—that enabled African American activists to fight the existing power structure, the structure that attempted to extinguish the black body yet simultaneously represented it as a memento of racial “justice.” *Building the Black Public Sphere* analyzes how their reentering into the space of death made it possible for African Americans to challenge, deconstruct, and ultimately reconstruct the dominant memory of lynching. In short, this study illustrates how diverse black public spheres were formed in the anti-lynching movement.

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In memory of Dr. Aimé J. Ellis

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this dissertation turned out to be a more challenging goal than I had expected. I would not have been able to finish this long journey without the support and guidance of mentors, friends, and family on both sides of the globe. I would like to express my first and foremost appreciation to my committee members. I am especially thankful to my chair, Dr. David W. Stowe, not only for his generous yet persistent mentorship throughout my writing process, but also for his long-lasting friendship since his days in Kyoto, Japan. I also thank Drs. Lloyd Pratt and Ann Larabee, who most kindly agreed to serve on my committee when I was in desperate need of replacements. My sincere gratitude also goes to Dr. Sayuri Shimizu, who has always shown academic integrity and been a model of successful international female scholar in transnational settings. I also thank Drs. Darlene Clark Hine, Daina Ramey Berry, and Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, whose graduate and undergraduate courses on African American history I took or audited almost a decade ago during my first stay at MSU as an exchange student. These classes helped build the foundation of my dissertational research.

I would also like to express many thanks to my friends and colleagues for their continual friendship and intellectual support throughout my graduate life in East Lansing—Zarena Aslami, Pırl Hatice Atabay, Darren Lee Brown, David Mark Carletta, Marcie Cowley, John Davis, Jr., Ronald A. DeSuze, L. Rain Gómez, Tama Hamilton-Wray, Rashida Harrison, Akesha Horton, Anne-Katell Jaffrezic, Kirk S. Kidwell, Yuki Maruyama, Raven Moore, Sowandé Mustakeem, Yasuhiro Okada, Mike Pfister, Mary Phillips, Nik Ribianszky, Catherine Ryu, Jyotsna Singh, Walter Lee Sistrunk, Marshanda Smith, Alicia Troutman, Stuart D. Willis, Anthony C. Woodhouse, Jeff Wray, Mary

Clingerman Yaran, and Amanda York-Ellis. I am particularly grateful to Pırıl and Darren for proofreading chapters, listening to me whining both in person and via email, as well as kindly offering me a place to stay when I visited MSU after I had moved back to Japan. I am also grateful to Ikuko Asaka and Naoko Wake for their comradeship. I have known them more than a decade since our graduate days in Japan, but we have become closer friends since we all started our graduate studies in the United States and shared joys and hardships with each other as Japanese women pursuing our academic careers in the States.

Most importantly, I thank my family in Japan. I owe a huge debt to all of them for their continuous support and encouragement while I was pursuing my doctoral degree in the United States: Akinobu Sakashita, Keiko Sakashita, Mototaka Sakashita, Noriko Nakagawa, Shigeko Sakashita, the late Akio Abe, and the late Hisako Abe. It is exciting that we have (finally!) three doctors in the house.

Lastly, I would like to send my bittersweet but biggest thanks to my former chair, the late Dr. Aimé J. Ellis, who passed away too young after a year-long battle with cancer in May 2009. As an emerging scholar with similar research interests with me, he would have mentored me throughout not only my graduate but also my professional career. It was an unbelievably painful task to work on my dissertation, due to its subject, at the time of (but especially after) his death, but his last days also gave me much strength and inspiration. Recalling his hard-fought struggles on his deathbed very often conjured up images in me of these anti-lynching fights of African Americans I studied in my dissertation. I enjoyed my imaginary conversations with Dr. Ellis during my writing process. I am not fully confident whether I have answered all the critical questions he left me, but I do hope that he would like my work.

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INTRODUCTION

On June 13, 2005, the U.S. Senate passed a resolution concerning failed federal anti-lynching bills of the past. Entitled “A Resolution Apologizing to the Victims of Lynching and the Descendants of those Victims for the Failure of the Senate to Enact Anti-Lynching Legislations,” it expressed the Senate’s “deepest sympathies and most solemn regrets” to the descendants of victims of lynching, and stated that the Senate “remembers the history of lynching, to ensure that these tragedies will be neither forgotten nor repeated.”¹ The resolution was first proposed as Senate Resolution 442 by Louisiana Democratic Senator Mary L. Landrieu and Virginia Republican Senator George Allen on September 29, 2004, and introduced again four months later on February 7, 2005, as Resolution 39. The senators symbolically reintroduced the resolution during the Black History Month, and it was “unanimously” passed in front of nearly 200 descendants of lynching victims who were invited to witness the proceedings. Among them were Simeon Wright, the cousin of Emmett Till who was murdered in 1955 in Mississippi; Dan Duster, the great-grandson of pioneer anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells; and the late James Cameron, the survivor of the 1930 lynching in Marion, Indiana, who told the public his first-hand experiences spanning over decades. In their speeches before and after the vote, one cosponsor after another emphasized the importance of the resolution and celebrated its passage, while reviewing various historical moments of lynching and anti-lynching efforts that represented their own states as well as the nation as a whole.

The resolution was surely a great achievement, but it may be naïve to celebrate the

¹ *S. RES. 39*, reprinted in *Congressional Record*, 109th Congress, 1st Session (June 13, 2005), S6364-6365.

Senate's unanimous vote because it didn't necessarily reflect the support of all the Senate members. Among sixteen congressmen who were absent from the decision, for example, neither of the Republican members from Mississippi, where the greatest number of lynchings occurred, voted for the resolution. Also, it was a voice vote rather than a roll call vote, thus making it impossible to verify who actually voted for the resolution. Moreover, the fact that not all the members cosponsored the resolution shows another discrepancy in this bipartisan effort. At the time of the press conference, seventy-five out of one hundred senate members cosponsored the resolution, leaving twenty-five members off the list of supporters. Ten more senators joined the list by the time of the vote. The remaining fifteen who did not cosponsor the resolution were all Republicans.² Finally, the resolution was just an apology that had no legal power to punish racial violence. The late historian John Hope Franklin evaluated the resolution candidly: "An apology for past crimes or the failure to deal with them means very little to me."³ Interviewed on the radio, historian Nell Irvin Painter, while recognizing its significance, stated that the resolution was merely a "feel-good measure" for the Senate. Similarly, on the same radio program, sociologist Troy Duster, grandson of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, called the resolution "a pebble

² "The Eight GOP Senators Who Declined to Apologize for the Senate's Historical Failure to Enact Anti-Lynching Legislation," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (Summer 2005), 93. By June 15, five more senators supported the resolution. "Editorial: Where are the Other 10?," *Knight Ridder Tribune Business News* (Washington), June 16, 2005. Two more members later joined the list of cosponsors, thus leaving eight senators off the list in the end, as the title of the above piece shows.

³ "Commentary: Senate Apology for Failing to Pass Anti-Lynching Legislation is Too Little Too Late," in *All Things Considered*, NPR, June 14, 2005. Transcript. Proquest document ID: 853751831.

in the water.”⁴ Franklin, Painter, and Duster all echoed then-Illinois Senator Barack Obama, who also made a speech on the Senate floor after the vote. While in strong support of the resolution, Obama remarked: “I do hope, as we commemorate this past injustice, that this Chamber also spends some time doing something concrete and tangible to heal the long shadow of slavery and the legacy of racial discrimination.”⁵ A commentator for the *New Pittsburgh Courier* noted: “Apologizing for history is easy. I challenge the Senate to make TODAY better.”⁶

According to the preamble to the resolution, between 1882 and 1968, at least 4,742 people, predominantly African Americans, were reported lynched in all but four U.S. states. Nearly 200 federal anti-lynching bills were introduced to the Congress during the first half of the twentieth century. Although the House of Representatives passed three anti-lynching bills between 1920 and 1940, and seven presidents petitioned for their passage to the Congress, all of the bills died on the Senate floor through filibustering.⁷ The resolution deserves credit for its explicit acknowledgement of the history and disgrace of lynching in the United States, but one might wonder about the timing of this redress. Coincidentally or not, the beginning of the new millennium witnessed the

⁴ *Democracy Now!*, June 14, 2005. Transcript. <http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=05/06/14/1350253>. Last accessed on February 13, 2012.

⁵ *Congressional Record*, 109th Congress, 1st Session, S6375 (June 13, 2005).

⁶ *New Pittsburgh Courier* (City Edition) 96:27 (June 22-26, 2005). Emphasis in the original.

⁷ *S. RES. 39*, reprinted in *Congressional Record*, 109th Congress, 1st Session (June 13, 2005), S6364-6365.

reopening of several court cases concerning lynching and racial violence for further investigation that had happened during the period of the Civil Rights Movement, including the infamous Emmett Till case.⁸ The murderers were already dead, as was Till's mother Mamie Till-Mobley, who had fought throughout her entire life to pursue justice following her son's tragic death. With all the major actors gone, one cannot help but see these cases as a form of merely symbolic justice given the dark history of racial violence.

Historian Manfred Berg states that the 1990s turned into "a decade of apologies for historical injustices" around the world—the decade when the willingness to face painful historical legacies and to admit guilt became "a new standard of international morality."⁹ The 2000s seem to follow the trend of the previous decade with regard to remembering the history of lynching. A New-York exhibition of lynching pictures and postcards, *Witness*, and the simultaneous publication of *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* aroused interests and discussions of the public and scholars in 2000. Subsequent exhibits, *Without Sanctuary*, toured nationwide through New York, Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Jackson, Mississippi, Detroit, and Chicago. And the online version of *Without*

⁸ "Mississippi Trial Begins in 1964 Civil Rights Killings," *Democracy Now!*, June 14, 2005. Transcript. <http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=05/06/14/1351203>. Half a century after the 1955 murder, the Department of Justice and the Mississippi District Attorney's Office announced a reopening of the case on May 10, 2004. "Justice Department to Investigate 1955 Emmett Till Murder," The Department of Justice, May 10, 2004. http://www.usdoj.gov/opa/pr/2004/May/04_crt_311.htm. Last accessed on February 10, 2012.

⁹ Manfred Berg, *Popular Justice: A History of Lynching in America* (Lanham, MD: Ivan R. Dee, 2011), 187.

Sanctuary continues to draw visitors across cyberspace.¹⁰

These recent cases, Resolution 39 in particular, raise essential questions concerning how the history of lynching has been commemorated. The resolution's cosponsors emphasized the importance of remembering the history of lynching because it had been long overdue. Introducing the resolution in September 2004 and again four months later, for instance, Senator Landrieu repeatedly highlighted the history of lynching being "not well known or understood" and "neglected."¹¹ Similarly, Senator Allen, whose statement followed Landrieu's in 2004, urged senators to reprove "this omission of history."¹² Their view parallels that of some scholars in the previous decade such as W. Fitzhugh Brundage and Joel Williamson, who likewise observed that the history of lynching had long been overlooked or avoided as a scholarly subject by historians.¹³ However, one must wonder if the history of lynching has in fact been forgotten over decades. If we recall the studies on lynching by scholars and/or activists dating back as early as the 1890s during the peak of this racial terror, or remembering many contemporary artists and writers who had dealt with lynching for generations, how could

¹⁰ James Allen, et al., *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe: Twin Palm Publishers, 2000).

¹¹ *Congressional Record*, 109th Congress, 1st Session, S9957 (September 29, 2004); S1061 (February 7, 2005). Emphasis is added.

¹² *Congressional Record*., 109th Congress, 1st Session, S9958 (September 29, 2004).

¹³ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 8; Brundage, *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 9-10; Joel Williamson, "Wounds not Scars: Lynching, the National Conscience, and the American Historian," *The Journal of American History* 83:4 (March 1997): 1242-1244.

we make the conclusion that the history of lynching was overlooked? And if that was indeed the case, by whom has it been neglected?

It is this dynamic between the remembrance and disavowal of lynching in the U.S. history with which my dissertation, *Building the Black Public Sphere: Lynching, Commemoration, and Anti-Lynching Struggles in the United States*, is concerned. To demonstrate this dynamic, it revisits several anti-lynching struggles from the 1930s-1940s to the present. I am particularly interested in those struggles conducted by African Americans. Most of the cases and subjects considered in this study are either mentioned directly or implied in the discussion of Resolution 39, ranging from anti-lynching efforts in the international context to jazz singer Billie Holiday's famous rendition of "Strange Fruit," anti-lynching struggles spurred by lynching cases including Claude Neal, Rubin Stacy, and James Cameron (who survived), and the photo book, *Without Sanctuary*. Resolution 39 serves as an important point of reference for this study, for the close examination of how the senators who cosponsored the resolution phrased and dealt with the history of lynching gives us an idea as to how lynching has been commemorated to this day.

Revisiting certain particular issues of lynching in the past that resurfaced in the discussion of the resolution helps us understand what is still at stake in considering the history of lynching. If the history of lynching had been excluded from the national discourse as so claimed, whose voices have been heard in the national discourse against lynching throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? How have African American commemorative efforts resisted such historical erasure of the memory of lynching? How, on the other hand, have they capitulated to a mode of questionable redress? Through

exploring these questions, *Building the Black Public Sphere* contributes not only to a growing body of scholarship detailing the history and historical memory of lynching and anti-lynching struggles by offering new information and interpretations, but also to the pedagogy of lynching by reevaluating the methods and discussions in the past scholarly works from the perspective of remembering the past.

For several reasons it seems relevant to focus on the anti-lynching struggles dating back to the decade that spanned the 1930s-1940s rather than earlier periods, such as Ida B. Wells' pioneering campaign in the 1890s. Resolution 39, this study's point of reference, was the official apology for the Senate's long failure to enact federal anti-lynching legislation from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, and it was in this decade that the Senate rejected the last two of three anti-lynching bills that were passed in the House of Representatives in 1937 and 1940.¹⁴ The efforts toward the passage of the federal bill were enormous and probably most intensive during the New Deal era. Although the number of lynching dramatically decreased by the mid-1930s, 130 anti-lynching bills were introduced in Congress between 1934 and 1940, which made up more than half of all the bills that appeared in the sixty-nine years between 1882 and 1951.¹⁵ Furthermore, many contemporary organizations— from major associations such

¹⁴ Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching, 1919-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 19.

¹⁵ Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching*, 165. During the score spanning 1882-1901, the number of lynching marked more than 100 every year but 1890 with the highest records of over 200 in 1884 and 1892. As for the number of anti-lynching legislation between 1882 and 1951, 61 bills were introduced in 1882-1933, 130 in 1934-1940, and 66 in 1941-1951. For the extensive statistics of lynching, see Table 2 by the Tuskegee Institute cited in Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching*, 6-7. For the statistics in early years, see also Ida B. Wells, "A Red Record: Tabulated

as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Atlanta-based Commission of Interracial Cooperation (CIC), the Association of Southern Women for Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL), and the International Labor Defense, to a number of more local and smaller groups—endeavored to eliminate the long-term epidemic of racial terror during that period. If the 1890s were the dawn of the anti-lynching movement, the period between the 1930s and 1940s saw the culmination of diverse anti-lynching campaigns both on the local and the national level.

While the anti-lynching campaigns of the 1930s and 1940s were for the most part interracial efforts, this study focuses on the anti-lynching struggles that were conducted mainly, if not only, by African Americans. It is highly significant to shed light on their struggles because the history of lynching has been sometimes unwittingly contextualized in disfavoring ways for African Americans under the circumstances of the contemporary white supremacy and the current white/mainstream appropriation of African American history at the time. Focusing on African American anti-lynching struggles is important also because the history of lynching has often received less attention in spite of the existing body of scholarship due to the deference of African American scholars' contribution to the works of "WASP" scholars.¹⁶ Equally important is to pay particular

Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States, 1892-1893- 1894," originally published in 1895, reprinted in *On Lynchings: Southern Horrors, A Red Record, Mob Rule in New Orleans* (Salem: Ayer Company, 1991), 69-78; James Elbert Cutler, *Lynch-Law: An Investigation into the History of Lynching in the United States* (1905, Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith Publishing Corporation, 1969), 163; The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Thirty Year of Lynching in the United States 1889-1918* (1919, New York: Negro University Press, 1969), 29; and Walter White, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (1929, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 230-232.

¹⁶ See comments by Robin D. G. Kelley and David Levering Lewis on Williamson's

attention to anti-lynching endeavors by black women, since black men's experiences have been prioritized over black women's in the historical narratives of lynching.¹⁷ Thus, this dissertation also pays particular attention to how black women—both activists at the time of lynching and scholars in the later periods—challenged lynching and the historical erasure of it.

The struggle against lynching became one of the most pressing concerns for many African Americans during the heyday of lynching. Even the aforementioned interracial NAACP, the most prominent anti-lynching organization of the decade, had experienced its transition from white- to black-oriented executive leadership by the mid-1930s with the appointments and initiative of James Weldon Johnson and Walter F. White as the first and second African American Field Secretary. They led the association's anti-lynching campaign during the 1920s, and White continued its mission until the late 1940s. In his early effort to increase association's branch offices in the South, Johnson recalled: "I realized that, regardless of what might be done *for* black America, the ultimate and vital part of the work would have to be done *by* black America itself."¹⁸ As one of the most

essay. "Referees' Reports," *The Journal of American History* 83:4 (March 1997), 1260, 1263.

¹⁷ Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981), 173-174; Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1987), 39; Elsa Berkley Brown, "Imagining Lynching: African American Women, Communities of Struggle, and Collective Memory," in Geneva Smitherman, ed., *African American Women Speak Out on Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas* (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1995), 112-115; Jonathan Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching: Racial Violence and Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), chapter 1.

¹⁸ The NAACP started with only one black founder, W. E. B. Du Bois, among whites. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching*, 32-33; James Weldon Johnson, *Along This*

critical works done by black America, the anti-lynching struggle provided African Americans with more access to political arenas. Historian Robert L. Zangrando states:

Since black men and women were routinely denied participation in major corporate, governmental, educational, philanthropic networks, or were consigned to make token roles in decision-making process, the anti-lynching campaigns offered indispensable alternatives: training in public affairs, exposure to political practices at the highest and most sophisticated levels, insights into the mechanisms for effecting social change, and a direct, if sometimes harsh, appreciation for how the power brokers of this society function.¹⁹

Examining several sites of anti-lynching struggles of the 1930s and the 1940s thus helps us understand how such African American political arenas—what this study calls “black public spheres”—were created to challenge ongoing racial violence.

Based on research concerned with remembrance and disavowal of lynching, and through the consideration of various anti-lynching movements, *Building the Black Public Sphere* asserts two major contentions. First, this study claims that, from a perspective of historical memory, many African American anti-lynching struggles of the past, which primarily attempted to eradicate contemporary racial violence, simultaneously functioned as the act of remembrance that challenged the historical erasure and misconstruction of lynching. It further argues that this political act of remembrance was often conducted through exhibiting the black body. That is, in order to challenge the epidemic of the lynching spectacle, in which the torture and annihilation of the black body was witnessed and consumed, and to contest racialized and sexualized (under)representation of African Americans in white supremacist lynching discourse, African American anti-lynching

Way (1933, New York: Viking Press, 1961), 315. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁹ Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching*, 19.

activists demonstrated their resistance from within the very discourse and representation of lynching. It is this revisiting of the space of death—discursive, representational, demonstrative, and performative—that enabled African American activists to fight the existing power structure, the structure that attempted to extinguish the black body yet simultaneously represented it as a memento of racial “justice.”²⁰ Indeed, this dissertation focuses on how their reentering into the space of death made it possible for African Americans to challenge, deconstruct, and ultimately reconstruct the dominant memory of lynching. It illustrates how diverse black public spheres were formed in the anti-lynching movement.

Methodology and Framework of Analysis

To demonstrate the way in which anti-lynching struggles both endeavored to eradicate racial violence and functioned as the act of remembrance over time, this study utilizes the notion of the black public sphere as a major analytical framework. In so doing, it explores how African Americans created diverse cultural and political spaces that challenged the dominant white supremacist power structure and resisted the historical erasure of lynching. The black public sphere, a concept introduced by Houston A. Baker, Jr. and others, is a counter-public sphere, a site where African Americans, formerly excluded from official spheres of public discourse, conduct critical practice—both discursive and performative—to challenge the existing power structure.²¹ It is a concept

²⁰ On the concept of “space of death,” see Michal Taussig, “Culture of Terror, Space of Death,” in *Shamanism, A Study in Colonialism, and Terror and the Wild Man Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), Chapter 1.

²¹ The Black Public Sphere Collective, ed., *The Black Public Sphere: A Public Culture*

drawn from Jürgen Habermas' "public sphere."²² Through his examination of various social spaces in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, Habermas defined the public sphere as an autonomous space that was independent of the political and economic power structure of the state, where all citizens could engage in cultural and political discourse criticizing governmental authority. Habermas' formulation of the public sphere, however, was criticized by scholars including Baker and Nancy Fraser who stated that it was a bourgeois masculinist public sphere, which excluded the presence of many other people such as workers, women, and blacks.²³ Thus, scholars present counter-public spheres as an alternative public sphere. In studies of the black public sphere, scholars including Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Houston A. Baker, Jr., Elsa Berkley Brown, and Paul Gilroy, focused on political/cultural sites such as black churches, prison, streets, black popular music and films.²⁴

Book (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

²² Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (1962. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

²³ Houston A. Baker, Jr., "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," in The Black Public Sphere Collective, ed., *The Black Public Sphere*, 9-13; Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26 (1990), 56-80.

²⁴ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Baker, Jr., "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," 7-37; Elsa Berkley Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," in The Black Public Sphere Collective, *The Black Public Sphere*, 111-150; Paul Gilroy, *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993). Higginbotham's monograph, which was published before *The Black Public Sphere*, uses the term "counter-public" in reviewing Habermas and Fraser.

Strategies to create a black public sphere, then, merit further scrutiny. It is worthwhile to turn our attention to three counter-strategies that contest racialized representation, introduced by Stuart Hall: reversing the stereotypes, substituting a range of “positive” images to “negative” ones, and contesting it from within.²⁵ The third strategy is particularly useful in understanding varieties of African American anti-lynching efforts. This strategy, Hall explains, “positively takes the body as the principal site of its representational strategies, attempting to make the stereotypes work against themselves” and “deliberately contests the dominant gendered and sexual definitions of racial difference by working on black sexuality,” and it does so by utilizing the very attention of looking.²⁶ Given that the spectacle of actual, discursive, and representational lynching maintained the white supremacist patriarchy by both consuming the sexually-tormented black body and forcing black people to view the torture, it was in this space where anti-lynching struggles let the public bear witness to challenge the dominant discourse of lynching through the reproduction of photography, storytelling, rendition of the song, display of the lynched body, and re/presentation of their bodily presence on streets, as will be seen in the following chapters. It is on these anti-lynching platforms—in the newspapers and magazines, on streets, in the nightclubs and other collective and communal locales—that the black public spheres were created both discursively and performatively.

Even though it utilizes the concept of the black public sphere, this dissertation does

²⁵ Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, 1997).

²⁶ Hall, *Representation*, 274.

not posit any essentialist “blackness” in reconstructing the history of anti-lynching struggles. Rather, theoretical models conceptualizing “blackness” by scholars including Hall and Higginbotham influence the manner in which this study incorporates discussions of race.²⁷ Pointing out that essentialized “blackness” naturalizes and dehistoricizes difference, Hall calls our attention to the diversity of black experience that is embedded in the specific historical, cultural, and political contexts. Likewise, Higginbotham’s notion of race as a metalanguage and her call for challenging conceptions of the harmonious, monolithic black community that have been created due to the analytical privileging of race over other categories is of great use in reconsidering the diverse anti-lynching struggles among African Americans. Drawing on their conceptualizations, this dissertation demonstrates how, through the anti-lynching struggles, diverse black public spheres were formed by various political mobilizations in different historical and cultural moments. It shows the way in which “blackness” in these counter-public spheres was determined differently due to gender, sexuality, masculinity, and the transnational imagination.

In addition to the core concept of the black public sphere, the following theoretical models conceptualizing race, gender, sexuality, and masculinity inform how this study incorporates discussions of the complicated mechanism of historical lynching and its cultural representation. French political theorist Michel Foucault’s analysis of the state’s sanctioning of “regular sexuality” through its policing of “peripheral sexualities” is

²⁷ Stuart Hall, “What Is This ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?,” in Gina Dent, ed., *Black Popular Culture: A Project by Michele Wallace* (New York: The New Press, 1983), 21-33; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 17:2 (Winter 1992): 251-274.

helpful in understanding how black sexuality was policed through the act of lynching.²⁸ With the hidden intention to control the political, economic and social status of black people mainly in the South after Reconstruction, lynching was often carried out in the name of justice against sexual crimes. The invention of the black rapist in the contemporary dominant discourse of lynching sanctioned regular sexuality of white men and women, while policing the peripheral sexuality of black men and women.²⁹

Also, the concept of representation—the production and circulation of meaning through language (in a broader sense), especially representation of the “racialized Other” or the “spectacle of Other,” best exemplified in the work of Stuart Hall, is useful to understand how the black body was racialized, sexualized, and even fetishized through the actual and discursive realms of lynching, and how such representational practices were invested with power.³⁰ Finally, the theoretical concepts of the “politics of respectability” by Higginbotham and the “culture of dissemblance” by Darlene Clark Hine help to consider the way race, gender, and sexuality are inextricably intertwined in black

²⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction* (1976, New York: Vintage Books, 1990). Foucault argues that since the seventeenth century, the discursive explosion of sexuality in the western society caused the state’s sanctioning of “regular sexuality”—heterosexual monogamy of legitimate couples—and its simultaneous policing of “peripheral sexualities,” that is, sexualities of children, mad men and women, criminals, and homosexuals. Although Foucault limited his focus to the white European body, his point is still relevant to the case of lynching in the United States.

²⁹ This black rapist hysteria in the lynching scenario is further theorized by revolutionary thinker Frantz Fanon, who revealed how black men were confined and fixed into their sexuality in the European imagination. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952, New York: Grove Press, 1967).

³⁰ Hall, ed., *Representation*, chapter 4.

women's life experiences.³¹ Higginbotham's politics of respectability and Hine's culture of dissemblance will be applied to examine gendered and sexual aspects of anti-lynching struggles conducted by black women, particularly in Chapters Two and Three.

Building the Black Public Sphere is an interdisciplinary project that bridges the fields of history, literature, and cultural studies. The incorporation of those disciplines is important because this study not only deals with the written historical events of lynching and anti-lynching struggles but also their cultural politics in anti-lynching performances and representations. The methodology entails textual and contextual analyses of the particular historical events both in the past and the present, and critical conversations with other scholarly works on lynching and anti-lynching movements. This study also incorporates a range of primary sources including official governmental documents, newspapers and periodicals, manuscript collections, organizational records, photographs, museum exhibits, contemporary literature, music, visual materials, and oral history collections.

Although it is common practice for scholars to quote from texts and cite accounts and/or images of their subjects as the primary source, this dissertation attempts not to use/abuse the historical images and accounts that depicted lynching unless they are in definite need of close scrutiny. It does so for two reasons. First, because this study does

³¹ The politics of respectability was a strategy of collective racial uplift used by educated black female reformers to counter the denigrated image of black women. The "culture of dissemblance," on the other hand, was the attitudes of black women that created the appearance of public openness but actually reservedly shielded the truth of their inner lives from their oppressors. Both were used to desexualize black womanhood. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "The Politics of Respectability," in *Righteous Discontent*, 185-229; Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle East: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," in Beverly Guy-Sheftall, ed., *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thoughts* (New York: New Press, 1995), 380-387.

not deal with lynching *per se* but rather examines how lynching has been remembered, it has less need to cite images and depictions of lynching. Second, as a scholar of lynching, I am aware of the ease with which scholars incorporate such images and depictions of lynching into their works, which runs the risk of triggering an exploitative and/or voyeuristic gaze and thus reproducing the legacy of white supremacy. This particular concern comes from my own experience of publishing an article on the *Without Sanctuary* exhibit, in which I decided to reprint “representative” pictures and postcards without fully analyzing these images themselves. As will be closely examined in Chapter Four and particularly Chapter Five, I would like to call our attention to complicated issues surrounding the use of lynching images. On what basis, for instance, do we choose one lynching image over the other (or among many others) to reprint in our scholarly works? How do we determine the size of the images? These questions tell us that our preoccupation with the “proper way” to present historical documents could desensitize ourselves to the fact that those visual materials of lynching were representations of the actual death of human beings. We need to be constantly reminded of the very fact that we are accountable to the life experiences of other people, who are not only the subjects of our studies but also actual human beings who lived in the past.

Historiography

By examining how anti-lynching struggles during the 1930s and the 1940s attempted to build the black public sphere through the commemoration of lynching, *Building the Black Public Sphere* engages in conversation with the body of scholarship on four major subject areas: the history of anti-lynching movements, commemoration of lynching, representation of lynching, and the black resistance and public sphere theory

discussed in the previous section. Early studies of the first subject, in the late 1960s through the 1980s, such as the works of Robert L. Zangrando (1965), John Shelton Reed (1968), Robert W. Dubay (1968), Henry E. Barber, and George C. Rable, offered detailed empirical examinations of the major anti-lynching organizations such as the NAACP and ASWPL and the federal anti-lynching legislations.³² The publication of Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's *Revolt against Chivalry* (1979), which dealt with the ASWPL and its leader Jessie Daniel Ames, further enriched the historical analysis of the anti-lynching movement by elucidating the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality in the southern lynching.³³ Recent studies, including those of Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (1991), Gail Bederman (1995), Mary Jane Brown (2000), Patricia A. Schechter (2001), Jonathan Markovitz (2004), and Crystal N. Feimster (2009), apply gender analysis to their subject, ranging from Ida B. Wells' campaign, the NAACP's Anti-Lynching Crusaders, and the ASWPL, to

³² Robert L. Zangrando, "The NAACP and a Federal Antilynching Bill" (1965); John Shelton Reed, "An Evaluation of an Anti-Lynching Organization" (1968); Robert W. Dubay, "Mississippi and the Proposed Federal Anti-Lynching Bills of 1937-1938," *Southern Quarterly* 7:1 (October 1968): 73-89, reprinted in Paul Finkelman, ed., *Lynching, Racial Violence, and Law* (New York: Garland, 1992), 157-173; Henry E. Barber, "The Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, 1930-1942," *Phylon* 34:4 (4th Quarter, 1973): 378-389; George C. Rable, "The South and the Politics of Antilynching Legislation" (1985); Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching* (1985). Also, see Robin Bernice Balthrope, "Lawlessness and the New Deal: Congress and Antilynching Legislation, 1934-1938," Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1995.

³³ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and Women's Campaign against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979). This does not necessarily mean that Hall was the first scholar who examined the intersection of race, gender and sexuality in lynching. Black woman journalist Ida B. Wells had paid attention to this dynamics as early as 1890s in her writings, as the later scholars such as Bederman and Schechter pointed out.

demonstrate how race and gender played out in these anti-lynching movements.³⁴

A second set of scholarly studies that this dissertation engages with relates to the historical memory of lynching. The questions of how people remember, forget, or reconstruct the past has attracted scholars of lynching, including Charlotte Wolf (1992), Bruce E. Baker (2000), James H. Madison, (2001) William D. Carrigan (2004), and Markovitz.³⁵ The local case studies by Wolf, Baker, and Carrigan offer us a variety of examples concerning the commemoration of lynching. Wolf's sociological study deals with a lynching incident in Tennessee in 1900 and its memory. Through participant observation and interviews, Wolf clarifies how people in the town, after ninety years, remembered and perceived the incident differently according to race and generation. Baker compares the formation of collective memories of eight lynchings in Laurens County, South Carolina, between 1880 and 1940 by examining both public and private

³⁴ Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "African-American Women's Networks in the Anti-Lynching Crusade," in Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, eds., *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 148-161; Gail Bederman, "'The White Man's Civilization on Trial': Ida B. Wells, Representation of Lynching, and Northern Middle-Class Manhood," in *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), chapter 2; Mary Jane Brown, *Eradication This Evil* (2000); Patricia A. Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Markovitz, *Legacy of Lynching* (2004); Crystal N. Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

³⁵ Charlotte Wolf, "Construction of a Lynching," *Sociological Inquiry* 62 (Winter 1992), 83-97; Bruce E. Baker, "Under the Rope: Lynching and Memory in Laurens County, South Carolina," in W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 319-346; James H. Madison, *A Lynching in Heartland: Race and Memory in America* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); William D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching*.

discourses of each lynching through archival sources and interviews, and demonstrates the way in which these local lynchings were remembered or forgotten in the community. Carrigan's historical inquiry focuses on the development of a lynching culture in Central Texas, most exemplified by the infamous spectacle lynching of Jesse Washington in Waco, Texas, in 1916, and exhibited how, shortly after the Civil War, white Central Texans' tolerant attitude towards extralegal violence was formed by several memories of local history.

Madison shows the way in which a lynching in Marion, Indiana, in 1930 has been remembered or forgotten over the past half century, by examining the actual lynching incident and its aftermath. In exploring the famous photograph of this lynching and the role of the lynching survivor James Cameron as a storyteller, Madison demonstrates that through the (mis)representation of the photograph multiple and changing meanings of racial violence were constructed during the decades following the incident. He further reveals that later in the 1980s Cameron's individual memory became dominant in forming a collective memory of the Marion lynching and even impacted on the local racial politics in the present. Markovitz, too, explores the collective memory of lynching, by first detailing how anti-lynching activists and organizations remembered lynching as a metaphor of racism between the 1890s and 1940s. Because the image of the black rapist was so prevalent in the white supremacist discourse of lynching during that time, anti-lynching struggles were forced to focus on challenging this myth. As a result, Markovitz contends, the lynching of black men became the dominant collective memory of racial violence, while black women's experience was overlooked. Markovitz further demonstrates how memory of lynching had determined racial politics over time, by

showing how such dominant collective memory of lynching had remained as a powerful representation in films and recent cases of racialized violence.

Thirdly, in addition to contributing to scholarship on the history of the anti-lynching movement and the historical memory of lynching, *Building the Black Public Sphere* seeks to engage scholarly debates concerning the representation of lynching in different disciplinary fields such as literary criticism, cultural studies, and history. Literary criticism was one of the first fields that focused closely on racial, gendered, and sexual politics of lynching through the earlier works of Trudier Harris (1984), Hazel V. Carby (1985), and Sandra Gunning (1996).³⁶ Harris examines how black male writers tackled the theme of castration much more than black female writers by graphically portraying the scenes of ritualistic lynching and burning. Carby, on the other hand, analyzes the insights of early black feminist writers on lynching and rape, and clarified how they theorized racial, gendered, and sexual dynamics of racial terror. Gunning explores fiction on racial violence written by both black and white writers at the turn of the twentieth century, and demonstrated the diverse ways in which their writings addressed the issues of rape and lynching.

Although they are not original scholarly works, two edited volumes, Kathy A. Perkins and Judith L. Stephens' compilation of lynching drama (1998) and Ann P. Rice's collected works by American writers (2003), provide this study with rich primary

³⁶ Trudier Harris, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Hazel V. Carby, "'On the Threshold of Woman's Era': Lynching, Empire, and Sexuality in Black Feminist Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 12:1 (Autumn 1985): 262-277; Sandra Gunning, *Race, Rape, and Lynching: The Red Record of American Literature, 1890-1912* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

documents to consider how artists responded to the social problem of their time. Moreover, latest studies on artistic responses of playwrights and writers such as Feimster, Jennie Lightweis-Goff (2011), Koritha Mitchell (2011), and articles in Evelyn M. Simien's anthology (2011) further analyze this subject by particularly focusing on the works by black women.³⁷

Recent works in cultural studies have encouraged scholars to consider the relationship between actual politics and cultural politics of lynching, which will be the interest of this dissertation as well. The studies produced by Marlene Park (1994) and Helen Langa (1999), for example, revisit such a relationship by reviewing two anti-lynching art exhibits sponsored by the NAACP and the John Reed Club in 1935. Through comparative examination of the art works, the display organization, and responses to the exhibits, Park and Langa demonstrate how these organizations strategically utilized anti-lynching arts as effective propaganda to help their political campaigns.³⁸ With a similar interest in mind, Dora Apel (2004) explores the power of lynching images by focusing on visual representation of lynching, such as photographs,

³⁷ Kathy A. Perkins and Judith L. Stephens, eds., *Strange Fruit: Plays on Lynching by American Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Ann P. Rice, ed., *Witnessing Lynching: American Respond* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Jennie Lightweis-Goff, *Blood at the Root: Lynching as American Cultural Nucleus* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011); Koritha Mitchell, *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011); Evelyn M. Simien, ed., *Gender and Lynching: Politics of Memory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

³⁸ Marlene Park, "Lynching and Antilynching: Art and Politics in the 1930s." *Prospects* 18 (1994): 311-66; Helen Langa, "Two Antilynching Art Exhibitions: Politicized Viewpoints, Racial Perspectives, Gendered Constraints," *American Art: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution* 13/1 (Spring 1999): 10-39.

paintings, woodprints and contemporary artworks from the 1880s to the present. While demonstrating that the creation and circulation of the photographs and postcards functioned to reinforce white supremacist ideology that justified lynching of black men to protect white women, Apel also shows how anti-lynching artworks produced since the 1930s challenged, by using the very same themes of lynching and rape, the existing discourse of race, gender and sexuality.³⁹

Moreover, the publication of *Without Sanctuary* and its subsequent traveling exhibits further encouraged interests of scholars, including the aforementioned Apel, David Marriott (2000), Jacqueline Goldsby (2006), Apel and Shawn Michael Smith (2007), Amy Louise Wood (2009), and Leigh Raiford (2011), in interrogating the representational power and the politics of bearing witness to lynching, as will be discussed in further detail, particularly in Chapter Five.⁴⁰

Chapter Overviews

Building the Black Public Sphere consists of five chapters. Chapter One, “‘Remember Pearl Harbor, but Don’t Forget Sikeston’: Anti-Lynching Discourse and Transnational Politics of Race,” examines what we might call the “imagined community”

³⁹ Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

⁴⁰ David Marriott, “‘I’m Gonna Borrer Me a Kodak’: Photography and Lynching,” in *On Black Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), chapter 1; Jacqueline Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Dora Apel and Shawn Michelle Smith, *Lynching Photographs* (Berkeley: University of California, 2007); Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2009); Leigh Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

of the anti-lynching movement from a transnational perspective, one of the least studied subjects in the scholarship of lynching.⁴¹ It particularly focuses on the Japanese reactions to U.S. lynching and the African American responses to that Japanese discourse. In the passage of Resolution 39, several cosponsors called lynching “domestic terrorism,” thus contextualizing their denunciation of lynching into international affairs, namely the present-day “war on terrorism.” They drew a parallel between the ongoing terrorism abroad and the past terrorism at home, thus urging people to recognize their own history of atrocities. The strategy that placed domestic injustices in an international context had long been utilized by African American anti-lynching activists, but particularly in the 1930s and 1940s, they had the similar rhetorical strategy with the cosponsors of the resolution. African American leaders and newspapers attempted to rouse domestic public sentiment by drawing an analogy between racial violence at home and fascist atrocities of the Axis Powers abroad. As the *Pittsburgh Courier*’s “Double V” campaign during World War II best exemplified, they created a discursive black public sphere, in which they utilized international references to lynching to advance their cause at home. By looking at various black newspapers and periodicals that mentioned the Japanese reaction to U.S. lynching, this chapter elucidates the way in which African Americans treated the anti-lynching responses of the Japanese, whose status shifted from “a leader of the darker races” to a wartime enemy throughout the decade. In so doing, the chapter illuminates how such anti-lynching discourse reflected African Americans’ efforts to redefine the black body as a national entity that was both black and American.

Chapter Two, “With Pens, Buttons, and Signs: Anti-Lynching Activism in the

⁴¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and the Spread of Nationalism* (1983, London: Verso, 1991).

Street,” sheds light on the anti-lynching campaign on the street by several groups in the 1930s and 1940s, including the NAACP, the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), and African American youths. As the preamble to Resolution 39 mentioned, the NAACP played a major role in prompting the campaign to enact the federal anti-lynching legislation in various ways. During that time, the NAACP did not only lobby for the bill by petitioning U.S. congressmen and presidents, but also conducted protest demonstrations on many occasions and directed nationwide fundraising by selling anti-lynching buttons. The *Crisis*, the organization’s monthly magazine, reported these activities extensively in addition to the status of the federal anti-lynching bills. By closely examining the photographic images of the picketers and fundraisers, as well as their accompanied descriptions in the magazine, this chapter exhibits the way in which anti-lynching struggles created the black public sphere on two levels: on the street and on magazine pages. The *Crisis* produced the discursive counter-public sphere, where the information on the NAACP’s anti-lynching struggles was shared among the subscribers, thus creating another “imagined community” of the anti-lynching movement. Of particular importance is the role of black women protesters and fundraisers, who, by their very presence on streets, created a site of resistance. Thus, this chapter demonstrates how these anti-lynching activities offered black women a political arena, in which they were able to make themselves visible and active in the history of lynching that had always been overrepresented by the black male experience, thus further changing the discourse concerning lynching.

Chapter Three, “Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Performative Space of Billie Holiday’s ‘Strange Fruit,’” reconsiders Holiday’s famous performance of “Strange Fruit.”

While the cosponsors of Resolution 39 along with most scholars have focused on race and gender in Holiday's "Strange Fruit"—the song which depicted a lynching in the South—as an anti-lynching song, this chapter attempts a more nuanced and complex reading of Holiday's performance by particularly focusing on its politics of sexuality. How did the lyrics conjure up the intersection of race and sexuality in southern lynching? In what way did lynching function as racial and sexual spectacle in which the bodies of black male "rapists" were eradicated to protect white womanhood? How had the dominant discourse of lynching overlooked black female victims of lynching and sexual exploitation over time? From these questions, this chapter explores how, on the one hand, Holiday's rendition in the entertainment space ironically created another spectacle where predominantly white audiences consumed the racialized and highly sexualized image of southern lynching, but on the other hand, Holiday successfully challenged such an image by her very presence as a black woman who functioned politically in this spectacle space of the white gaze. Through a close examination of the lyrics, Holiday's performance, and the audience's reactions, as well as the historical background of lynching and of black women's experience, this chapter attempts to reconstruct the performative space of "Strange Fruit" as another example of the black public sphere.

The last two chapters closely examine the politics of looking at racial terror by drawing on the past and present examples regarding the commemoration of lynching. Chapter Four, "The Politics of Bearing Witness: Lynching Photography and Anti-Lynching Struggles," deals with the past cases by first elucidating how bearing witness to lynching, both actual and representational, impacted on lynch mobs and the African American community of the so-called lynching era. It examines the way in which

the collective sharing of racial terror both reinforced the communal bond of whiteness and also served to terrorize African Americans, thus maintaining racial hierarchy of the time. This chapter then analyzes the anti-lynching strategies of bearing witness, the NAACP and the black press' use of lynching photographs in the 1930s. It argues that while facing a risk of creating another spectacle, anti-lynching struggles countered the white supremacist discourse of lynching by making the public bear witness, through reproduction of photography, display of the lynched body, and storytelling.

Chapter Five, "Remembering Lynching through Anti/Lynching Photography: *Without Sanctuary*, Scholarship, and Resolution 39," focuses on the recent usage of lynching photography in the *Without Sanctuary* exhibitions, in scholarly works, and in the discussion of Resolution 39. Not only did the *Without Sanctuary* project stir a heated discussion on the dialectic relationship between the importance of bearing witness and the risk of reproducing a voyeuristic white supremacist gaze; scholars have also critically dealt with this dilemma through their scholarly and pedagogical works, pointing out that scholars could run the same risk through their work. Several images of lynching were also shared on the Senate floor to discuss the passage of the resolution. In an attempt to tackle one of the questions that Susan Sontag has posed—"Is looking at such pictures really necessary?"—, this chapter takes into consideration how the politics of bearing witness has been played out in the popular, academic, and national commemoration of lynching history.

My conclusion, "Whose Wounds to be Healed, and How?: Towards Building the Black Public Sphere in the Historicization of Lynching," explores the question concerning the ownership of history of lynching. In supporting Resolution 39, most cosponsors gave

excessive credit to the book *Without Sanctuary* for awakening the public from its historical amnesia regarding lynching. Also, they repeated the significance of remembering racial violence to heal wounds without specifying to whose wounds they referred. Thus, the issues relating to the mainstream appropriation of African American history are briefly examined through the case of Resolution 39 and scholarly discussions on lynching. I first show diverse ways in which the resolution subsumed critical memories of black struggles under national reconciliation by scrutinizing the senators' intention of national healing. I also observe scholarly debates over these issues, from Joel Williamson's controversial essay that pointed out the absence of lynching studies until the 1990s and rebuttals of Williamson's claim by Robin D. G. Kelley and David Levering Lewis, to black women scholars' criticism of the prioritization of the history of black men's experience in general and of lynching in particular. Through mapping out these recent instances in the academe as well as the political arena where critical memory of lynching capitulated nostalgic remembering/forgetting and African Americans struggled to maintain the former, I would like to highlight the importance of remembering black past struggles, just as the latest scholarship has attempted to do.

CHAPTER ONE

“Remember Pearl Harbor, but Don’t Forget Sikeston”:

Anti-Lynching Discourse and Transnational Politics of Race

In the discussion of Resolution 39, Senator Mary Landrieu stated: “the facts about this remote domestic terrorism and rash of terrorism stand today and will not be pushed aside. It is with humility but with pride that I support and put forth before the Senate today, with the Senator from Virginia, this resolution.”¹ By calling lynching “terrible domestic terrorism” and “rash of terrorism,” Senator Landrieu contextualized Resolution 39 into the age of “war on terrorism.” Here she seems to make a clear parallel between the ongoing terrorism abroad and past terrorism at home, thus urging people to protest against their own history of atrocities by recognizing it, just like protesting the current terrorism. The strategy that placed domestic injustices in an international context had long been utilized by African American anti-lynching activists, dating back to Ida B. Wells’ campaign in Britain in 1893-1894 that aroused British public sentiment against lynching to influence American society. Such efforts mounted even more in the 1930s and 1940s when the country fought Nazism and fascism. The black press and leaders constantly reminded the public that international audiences, particularly those in enemy countries, saw lynching as an American disgrace. They warned the government that lynching armed Hitler and his allies—Italy and Japan—with a powerful propaganda weapon against the United States.

But did these “enemy countries” in fact use the information on lynching for Axis propaganda, as anti-lynching activists claimed? How did the wartime enemy countries see American lynching? How were their views on lynching formed over time? And in what way did African Americans react to their reporting of American lynching? This chapter offers a case

¹ *Congressional Record*, 109th Congress, 1st Session (June 13, 2005), S6370.

study exploring Japanese views on the issues of lynching and race in the United States spanning from the late 1910s to the 1940s as well as African American responses to them. The Japanese today, who use the word “rinchi” (“lynch” in Japanese pronunciation) to describe collective violence in general, has little awareness of the term’s original American context. In the early twentieth century when lynching was a contemporary social problem in the United States, however, Japanese books, newspaper accounts, and editorials kept the nation well informed about American lynching and racial friction. Ongoing international developments, such as the defeat of Japan’s racial equality proposal at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924, and the Manchurian Incident in 1931, helped promote Japanese interest in and discussion of American lynching. Diverse Japanese narratives from leftists to ultra-nationalists criticized lynching from their own perspectives. While the Japanese media paid only intermittent attention to American lynching, it nevertheless proved an effective tool in promoting Japan’s domestic and international political goals.

After reviewing various Japanese narratives on American lynching, I will demonstrate how the African American anti-lynching discourse changed as their country moved toward war with Japan. Black newspapers and periodicals strategically shifted their anti-lynching rhetoric as their view of Japan changed from “a leader of the darker races” to a wartime enemy. Admittedly, unlike Wells’ campaign that physically crossed over national boundaries, most anti-lynching efforts discussed in this chapter were transnational only on the discursive level. However, the wartime anti-lynching discourse, just like other anti-racist utterance, helps us understand how African Americans created the discursive black public sphere, in which they struggled to redefine the black body as a national being that was both black and American. The unique

wartime status of the Japanese and their anti-lynching views played a complex yet important role in forming African American anti-lynching narratives during the decades.

Earlier Japanese Views on American Lynching

The concept of lynching had existed in Japanese long before the Japanese learned the American term “lynching” was introduced in Japan, according to leftist journalist Gaikotsu Miyatake, who in 1922 published a book entitled *Shikei Ruisan* [*Compiled Story on Lynching*], a collection of stories on lynching mainly in Japan but also around the world. Miyatake stated that “shikei” (私刑), which literally meant private persecution in Japanese, originated in China, reaching Japan by the 1680s. He further explained to his readers that in Europe and America “it [‘shikei’] was generally called ‘lynch’ or ‘lynching,’” and quoted its definition from *Encyclopedia Britannica*.² It was around the 1920s when the American term “lynching” became interchangeable with the Japanese term “shikei,” and Miyatake used both in *Shikei Ruisan*. Newspapers often printed “lynching” in Japanese kana-letters alongside Chinese characters for “shikei,” and the term “rinchi” (lynch) alone became recognizable in many Japanese media. An article in *Yomiuri* newspaper in 1922, for example, stated: “you already know what shikei, rinchi, or lynching means . . . it is a private persecution.” This underlines the assumption that it was a widely recognized term.³

Japanese newspapers cited the occurrence of lynching in the United States as early as 1886, but it was not until the first decades of the twentieth century that the news of these reports

² Gaikotsu Miyatake, *Shikei Ruisan* (Tokyo: Hankyō-dō, 1922), 5.

³ *Yomiuri*, August 29, 1922. In this essay, I will standardize the usage of the term as “lynching” hereafter, except for the case of specific Japanese book titles.

gained attention of the Japanese masses.⁴ In 1919 and 1921, the press reported on the major race riots in Chicago; Washington D.C.; Knoxville, Tennessee; New York; Omaha, Nebraska; Helena, Arkansas, and Tulsa, Oklahoma, under such headlines as “A Fight between Black and White” and “Another Race Riot Occurred.”⁵ Most of those cases included the lynching of black men either as their cause or effect, and several newspapers mentioned that black men’s assaults on white women had caused the lynching. The report of *Tokyo Nichinichi* newspaper, for instance, described the Omaha riot in 1919 as follows: “while the Omaha, Nebraska, riot raged out of control, the mob finally killed a black man named William Brown, who had allegedly attempted to rape a white woman. This supposed rape incident caused the riot.”⁶ Likewise, the newspaper *Tokyo Asahi* newspaper reported that the Tulsa riot of 1921 “began on May 31 when a young black man was arrested for raping a white girl. About twenty-five whites rushed into the criminal court to lynch him.”⁷

Although the image of the black rapist was widely introduced in Japanese newspapers, journalists paid more attention to the brutality of white mob than to the alleged black criminals. In the report on the Knoxville riot of 1919 that was headlined “White Mob,” the *Osaka Asahi* depicted a frenzied white mob who “attacked the jail to lynch” a black murder suspect of a white

⁴ For earlier newspaper accounts on lynching, see *Yomiuri*, January 27, 1886 (on the lynching of Alexander in Mobile, Alabama); June 29, 1899 (on the lynching of Sam Hose in Palmetto, Georgia); and January 8, 1900 (on the lynching of Richard Coleman in Marysville, Kentucky).

⁵ See, for instance, *Tokyo Nichinichi*, July 31, 1919; *Kokumin* and *Osaka Asahi*, September 3, 1919; *Osaka Asahi*, September 19, 1919; *Tokyo Nichinichi*, October 1, 1919; *Tokyo Asahi* and *Tokyo Nichinichi*, June 24, 1920; and *Tokyo Asahi*, June 3, 4, and August 5, 1921.

⁶ *Tokyo Nichinichi*, October 3, 1919.

⁷ *Tokyo Asahi*, August 5, 1921.

woman. Failing to find the suspect, the mob instead found many gallons of whiskey that was forfeited as a violation of Prohibition. “[T]hey gulped down cup after cup instantly,” the report continued, “and rushed to the black residential area to start hunting black people.”⁸

Such stories of white American’s cruelty against blacks promoted sympathy towards African Americans among Japanese intellectuals. In 1920, Fumimaro Konoe, who was one of the delegates to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and later served three times as the Prime Minister (1937 to 1941), published a book titled *Ōbei Kenbun Roku* [*Personal Experiences in Europe and America*]. In it, he explicitly condemned lynching in the South, but saw race friction as a problem throughout the United States. Attributing American rioting to white brutality, Konoe sympathized with black protests against white bigotry, writing that after: “huge conflicts between whites and blacks in Washington and Chicago last year, it is now clear that black rage against white persecutions and insults is reaching its peak.” He recalled a young black man, a servant for his train compartment on the way from Chicago to Seattle, who frequently came up to Konoe with teary eyes and told him how brutal whites were.⁹

Many Japanese saw such racial conflicts as contradictory to American ideals of freedom and democracy. In 1919, an essay entitled “Kokujuin Kaihō Ron [Black Liberation]” appeared in the leftist journal *Kaihō* [*Liberation*] after major race riots broke out. The author was the university professor Shinjirō Kitazawa. Briefly mentioning that he actually saw two lynchings during his stay in the United States, Kitazawa wrote: “when we see that the United States, one of the world’s most civilized nations, still frequently allows such barbaric atrocities even in the

⁸ *Osaka Asahi*, September 4, 1919.

⁹ Fumimaro Konoe, *Ōbei Kenbun Roku* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron-sha, 1920), 145-146.

daytime, we keenly realize how awful racism is.”¹⁰ Likewise, the *Yorozu Chōhō*, a paper known for its yellow journalism, began its report on another race riot in Chicago with the following sensational sentence: “American citizens, who have shouted freedom while advocating justice and humanity, are lynching the black race everywhere in public, even in the daytime.”¹¹ Takeo Gotō, a Washington correspondent for the *Jiji Shimpō*, published *Saikin Beikoku no Shinsō [The Truth about Recent America]* in 1922, where he devoted one whole chapter “Beikoku Kokujin no Gyakutai [Abuse against American Blacks]” to examine lynching and violence against black people. The first section of the chapter was titled “Sangyaku na Byōkan [Miserable Pathology],” in which he declared:

The United States’ citizens possess great spirits. Many of them believe that American civilization, which was established particularly based on justice and freedom, has its own superiority different from European and Asian civilizations. . . . However, it is a shame for such a law-abiding civilization that the most hateful pathology is sweeping through the society. . . . It has revealed the greatest defect in American civilization. . . . Emancipation by Lincoln was certainly good news to all the human races. . . . But have black Americans, freed for sixty years, been blessed with the comfortable lives under such American spirit?¹²

Such a view was also shared in a four-part series of reports on lynching in *Yomiuri* newspaper on August 29, 30, 31, and September 1, 1922. The writer, Fusae Ichikawa, was a prominent Japanese woman suffragist who stayed in New York and Chicago from 1921 to 1924 to study the American women’s movement. Her article, “Bunmei no Ojoku, Jindō no Zoku [The Disgrace to Civilization, Outrage against Humanity],” covered diverse issues from its statistics, causes, specific cases, the black media working for the anti-lynching campaign, the NAACP’s

¹⁰ Shinjirō Kitazawa, “Kokujin Kaihō-ron,” *Kaihō* (October 1919), 74.

¹¹ *Yorozu Chōhō*, August 1, 1920.

¹² Takeo Gotō, *Saikin Beikoku no Shinsō* (Tokyo: Mita Shobō, 1922), 338-339.

efforts, and the on-going debate on the Dyer anti-lynching bill. While seeing lynching primarily as a black, southern problem, Ichikawa also introduced its diverse characteristics by mentioning female victims and by including a picture of three white immigrants lynched in California.¹³ The article began by noting a keen irony: “the United States, which loves to win anything best in the world, has the world record in lynching as well.”¹⁴ For the Japanese, lynching served as one of the best examples to pinpoint American racial hypocrisy.

The fact that Japanese intellectuals sympathized with black people, however, does not mean all of them were free from racial prejudice towards blacks. A series of three articles in the *Tokyo Nichinichi* in 1922, for instance, forester Keiji Uehara revealed his own prejudice when he commented: “it is obvious even in the eyes of a layman that they are not a superior race. . . . Some have no ability to count to twenty, much less the sense of morality or virtue.”¹⁵ Even aforementioned progressive Gotō, while sympathetic to the state of blacks, advanced a similar view: “the color of black people, which is in fact revolting, might cause their filthy living conditions. . . .”¹⁶

White supremacist ideology engendered such imagery. The era of Japan’s modernization and Westernization coincided almost exactly with the period when (pseudo-)scientific racism dominated in Europe and America in the late nineteenth century. “Scientific” racial theory helped Japanese people create their own version of racial hierarchy in the non-white world, in

¹³ *Yomiuri*, August 30, 1922.

¹⁴ *Yomiuri*, August 29, 1922. Aforementioned journalist Miyatake cited Ichikawa’s widely-covered report in *Shikei Ruisan*.

¹⁵ *Tokyo Nichinichi*, January 29, 1922.

¹⁶ Gotō, *Saikin Beikoku no Shinsō*, 341.

which they were superior to other dark races. Their racist attitudes towards other Asian nationals, as well as other ethnic and social minority groups within Japan—including the Ainu (indigenous people), the Okinawans, and the Burakumin (the descendants of outcaste group created in the 17th century), were based on a powerful belief in Japanese ethnic homogeneity and in the purity of the Japanese race. This myth of homogeneity helped convince many Japanese nationalists that they had a duty to mediate between the Western world and “lesser” Asian nations. While American “ideals” did not protect people of color, Japan believed that its new status could help redress this problem and thus became the “true” inheritor of the ideals America had abandoned.¹⁷

The Japanese perception of lynching also reflected contemporary Japanese racial ideology regarding the non-white world. In Japan lynching was sometimes linked with Japanese political and social issues discussed in contemporary racial terms. Some intellectuals saw America’s racial conflicts in relation to the racial equality proposal offered by Japanese delegates in the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.¹⁸ Although the rejection of the proposal disappointed many Japanese people and even led to anti-American sentiment among them, they were at the

¹⁷ John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 203-204; Marc Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 61. For a brief historical overview of the black image among the Japanese, see John G. Russell, “Narratives of Denial: Racial Chauvinism and the Black Other in Japan,” *Japan Quarterly* 38: 4 (October 1991): 3. For a detailed analysis of the idea of Japanese ethnic purity, see Dower, *War without Mercy*, chapter 8.

¹⁸ The proposal aimed at the “equality of nations” as a “principle of the League of Nations” regardless of “their race or nationality.” While the Japanese delegation only demanded their equal status with the Great Powers, the proposal was considered as a challenge against the then world order of Western imperialism in non-white nations. Spencer C. Tucker and Priscilla Mary Roberts, eds., *Encyclopedia of World War I: A Political, Social, and Military History, Volume I* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 1598.

same time very proud of their status as the only non-white nation among the “first-class nations” in the world. Introduced within the context of imperialist diplomacy, Japan urged racial equality to achieve its imperial ambitions more than attack white supremacy. The proposal, as historian Yuichiro Onishi observes, “ironically became an effective tool to strengthen Japan’s position within the global racial polity in attaining ‘white’ imperial power status.”¹⁹ In this context, condemnation of lynching turned in a strange way into a self-congratulatory appraisal of Japanese leadership in the non-white world. One such case was Sei Kawashima, the Chicago correspondent for *Tokyo Nichinichi* newspaper. In 1919, he mentioned the proposal in a long article entitled “Kuro Shiro Sensō [Black-White War].” Providing a detailed report on the Chicago race riot, Kawashima observed: “a white mob attacked blacks, poured gasoline over them and burnt them to death. . . . we can hardly imagine that such brutality has occurred in the big city of a civilized country.” Asking, “why in the world have white perceptions of black people not changed at all since the slavery era, despite that blacks are now fully American citizens. . . and acquire equal rights with whites on the surface?,” he explained to Japanese readers that black people had ardently desired to abolish racial discrimination for a long time. Then he abruptly raised the issue:

It was Japan’s proposal of abolishing racial discrimination at the Peace Conference that gave black people a great psychological impact at that time. *After Japan made the racial equality proposal, black trust in Japan has remarkably increased and*

¹⁹ Yuichiro Onishi, “The New Negro of the Pacific: How African Americans Forged Cross-Racial Solidarity with Japan, 1917-1922,” *Journal of African American History* 92:2 (Spring 2007): 194. On the other hand the proposal was partly the result of white American racism against Japanese immigrants, particularly on the West Coast. See, for example, Yasuaki Ōnuma, “Harukanaru Jinshu Byōdō no Risō: Kokusai Renmei Kiyaku eno Jinshu Byōdō Jōkō Teian to Nihon no Kokusaihō-kan [The Lofty Ideal of Racial Equality: The Racial Equality Proposal to the League of Nations and Japan’s Views of the International Law],” in Ōnuma ed., *Kokusaihō, Kokusai Rengō to Nihon [The International Law, the United Nations and Japan]* (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1987), 475-476.

they have shown much respect to Japanese people. At the same time they regret that China did not make an effort to pass the proposal with Japan. . . . Some blacks believe that this October [in 1919] Japan would take action again with the same proposal, and boast that it is the time when they should start a much more severe race war. *Not a few of them regard the Japanese as a leader of the colored races.*²⁰

Intentionally or not, Kawashima attempted to use America's racial conflicts as evidence that the colored races could overcome such worldwide prejudice under Japanese leadership.

Kametarō Mitsukawa, a distinguished right-wing and pan-Asianist intellectual, echoed Kawashima's argument in a more dramatic manner. His 1925 book, *Kokujin Mondai [Issues Surrounding Black People]*, devoted a chapter to the history of American lynching. For Mitsukawa, lynching powerfully demonstrated the cruelty of white people. In the chapter "Kokujin Shikei Mondai [Problem of Black Lynching]," he discussed the KKK, lynching, and race riots, before concluding that "the violence of white people who advocate justice and humanity is beyond description."²¹ Particularly remarkable were two pictures of lynching Mitsukawa included in the book, each of which portrayed a number of whites with the burnt corpse of a black body. Although no identification is attached to the pictures, the captions tell us how Mitsukawa saw these lynchings. The description of the first photo, which is seemingly the lynching picture of William Brown in Omaha in 1919, read: "Lynching of a Black by Americans (1): A Horrific Scene Where They Forced the Victim to Sit on Piled Woods, Poured Gasoline on Him, and Burned Him to Death." The second photo—the lynching of Jesse Washington in Waco, Texas in 1916—was captioned: "Lynching of a Black by Americans (2): At the Gallows the

²⁰ *Tokyo Nichinichi*, September 3, 1919. Emphasis in the original.

²¹ Kametarō Mitsukawa, *Kokujin Mondai* (Tokyo: Niyū Meicho Kankō-kai, 1925), 244.

Body They Burnt to Death Was Displayed.”²²

Written in 1922 and published three years later, *Kokujin Mondai* dealt with the history of black people—both in Africa and America—as an international human rights movements among ethnic groups. Inspired by the Garvey Movement, Mitsukawa’s interest in the race problem came out of his view that blacks shared with Asians an experience of Western colonialism. In his 1922 preface, Mitsukawa stated that he had long engaged himself in helping liberate Asian people from Western oppression, and because of that, he was heartbroken to learn about “Africa being exploited as badly as Asia and black people who are oppressed as much as yellow people.”²³ Mitsukawa believed that the Japanese should become “the champion of the darker races” whose oppression they had once shared. In the 1925 preface, Mitsukawa began by asking:

Why do black people exhibit the portrait of our baron Nobuaki Makino [who made the racial equality proposal at the Paris Peace Conference], along with the one of the liberator Abraham Lincoln on the wall in their houses?

Although Japan’s proposal to abolish racial discrimination was disapproved by the pressure from Great Powers at the Paris Peace Conference, it was surely a bombshell dropped against the white autocracy base. . . . They advocate the League of Nations and international cooperation. What kind of human love or world peace is possible while excluding the oppressed colored people? . . . The

²² Mitsukawa, *Kokujin Mondai*, no page numbers but between 240 and 241. The identification of the first picture is not certain, but based on the well-known picture of the Omaha lynching, it seems that this is a picture of the same lynching, taken from a different angle. See James Allen, et al., eds., *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe: Twin Palm, 2000), fig. 97.

²³ Mitsukawa, *Kokujin Mondai*, preface of 1922, 3. Written in 1922, the manuscript was once lost during the turmoil after the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 and was not found until 1925 when the book finally came out. On the influence of the Garvey Movement on Mitsukawa, see Yukiko Koshiro, “Beyond an Alliance of Color: The African American Impact on Modern Japan,” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 11:1 (Spring 2003): 187; and Hiromi Furukawa and Tetsushi Furukawa, *Nihonjin to Afurika-kei Amerikajin: Nichibei Kankei-shi ni okeru Sono Shosō [Japanese and African Americans: Historical Aspect of Their Relations]* (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2004), 105.

Japanese race . . . must keep their eyes on black people.²⁴

Mitsukawa indeed published the portraits of Lincoln and Makino side by side on the following page of the contents. The caption read: “Two Portraits Exhibited and Respected in Black Families.”²⁵

This anecdote seems to have been widely shared among Japanese nationalists. In 1920, prior to Mitsukawa’s *Kokujin Mondai*, the *Yomiuri* carried a news account headlined “Our Baron Makino, Who Is Worshipped by Ten-Million Blacks.” It reported on a speech delivered by law professor Shinkichi Uesugi to a nationalist gathering, where he related his firsthand experiences with African Americans: “I have met several [black] key figures, and everybody is counting on Japan. [I saw] two pictures displayed in their Far East headquarters office. One was the portrait of . . . their president, Mr. Lincoln, and the other, that of our Baron Makino, who proposed the racial equality clause at the Peace Conference.”²⁶ For pan-Asianists and their apologists, the proposal’s rejection symbolized the West’s disdain for Japan, and in this context, Kawashima and Mitsukawa saw the American race problem as an experience all oppressed people of color could relate to. Mitsukawa added: “Those who question if there is any relationship between the Japanese and blacks, imagine how huge the influence of 150 million blacks would be if the second world war happened in the Pacific. I say to those who are myopic stating that the problem of the Pacific is the problem of California: the postwar problem of the Pacific is . . . expanding

²⁴ Mitsukawa, *Kokujin Mondai*, preface of 1925, 1-2.

²⁵ Mitsukawa, *Kokujin Mondai*, 9.

²⁶ *Yomiuri*, December 16, 1920.

and even including the Indian Ocean and the African Continent.”²⁷ Kawashima and Mitsukawa situated American lynching and racism in the broader context of white racism, and urged all colored people to follow under Japanese leadership. Their very belief, along with Uesugi’s, that the Japanese should be a leader of other races of color, however, shows the emerging imperialist intentions among Japanese intellectuals.²⁸

Also typical of such an expansionist idea was the case of the *Asian Review*, an English monthly published in Japan between 1920 and 1921 by the Kokuryū-kai [Black Dragon Society], one of the most notorious nationalist organizations during the interwar period.²⁹ The journal intended to introduce Japan to the world as the champion of “people’s diplomacy,” as the organization announced in its Japanese magazine, *Ajia Jiron* [*Asia Chronicle*]. Although the *Asian Review* denied Japan’s imperial ambition in Asia, that was in fact what the Kokuryū-kai primarily sought. *Ajia Jiron* further explained the purpose of starting the *Asian Review* as follows: “Not only do we [Kokuryū-kai] hold a humanitarian mission of justice to abolish any discriminatory treatment against human race; we also have to propagandize our nation’s grave

²⁷ Mitsukawa, *Kokujin Mondai*, preface of 1925, 2.

²⁸ Naoko Shimazu, *Japan, Race and Equality: The Racial Equality Proposal of 1919* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 176.

²⁹ Yoshiki Sakurai, “Kokuryū-kai to Sono Kikanshi [Kokuryū-kai and Its Journals],” in *Kokuryū-kai Kankei Shiryō-shū* [*The Related Materials of Kokuryū-kai*] (Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobō, 1992), IX-X. Kokuryū-kai, which is literally translated as “Black Dragon Society,” was in fact named after the Amur River located between Northeastern China and Russian Far East. “Amur” means “cupid” in Russia but is notated in Chinese as “Kokuryū Kō [Black Dragon River],” which is why the organization was named as such. This coincidental denotation helped some African Americans favor Kokuryū-kai.

obligation to protect and advance the rights and happiness of the Asian race in particular.”³⁰ The rhetoric used here is reminiscent of the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere,” the Japanese version of Manifest Destiny, which was formally introduced in 1940 to justify the wartime Japanese imperialist expansion, or of similar ideas (such as “Asia for Asiatics” and “East Asia New Order”) that had been in place for many years. In the first edition of the *Asian Review* the editors expressed their wish to see “our colored brothers of all shades of opinion to present a united front” on racial equality, and although mostly dealing with issues on Japan and Asia, the journal paid considerable attention to the problems that black Americans faced. The journal published such articles as “Treatment of the Negroes in the United States,” “Awakening of the Negroes,” “Lynching in America,” and “Race-War in the United States.”³¹ Citing the report on lynching (statistics and several cases) by NAACP, “Treatment of the Negroes in the United States,” for instance, commented:

Indeed the tale [of lynching] unfolded above is horrible. It is inconceivable that any human being is capable of imposing such revolting cruelties upon his fellow beings. . . . Americans boast that theirs is a democratic country. But when one considers the barbarous excesses committed by them, one cannot but come to the only possible conclusion that America is a land of “Mobocracy.”. . . [T]hey have not a word for the most outrageous crimes of their co-religionists in America, Africa and other coloured countries!³²

In “Race-War in the United States,” the writer added to “the horror-provoking chapter of the vile deed” an account on the lynching in Tulsa that caused the riot. In conclusion, the author

³⁰ “The Purpose of Publishing the *Asian Review*,” *Asia Jiron*, 3:9 (November 1, 1919): 83.

³¹ “Coloured and Whites,” *Asian Review* 1 (July 1920): 459, quoted in Marc Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 60.

³² “Treatment of the Negroes in the United States,” *Asian Review* 1:7 (October 1920): 693.

stated: “The facts stated above prove clearly that the whites were the guilty party. Let us see what deterrant [*sic*] punishments are inflicted on them by the government authorities who are at least expected not to have one standard of justice for the whites and another for the colored people.”³³ Although the Kokuryū-kai’s condemnation of white racism seemed sincere, historian Marc Gallicchio observes that the journal “served the interest of the Japanese government to remind Americans of their own failings” from the fact that the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as many political leaders supported the journal. As Gallicchio points out, in the 1920s Japanese nationalists like the Kokuryū-kai produced “a rhetorical defense of Japanese imperialism” that rebuked the West and simultaneously appealed to colonized people around the world.³⁴ Reference to lynching served as one of the best rhetorical defenses of Japan’s imperialist policy.

The Rise of Anti-American Sentiment and the Changing Views on Lynching in Japan

The year 1924 became a kind of watershed for the Japanese view on lynching. While American lynching had been well publicized in Japan before 1924, it was through the conditions of Japanese immigrants, particularly on the West Coast, that the Japanese people became more aware of American racism and mob violence. In 1924, the U.S. Congress passed the Immigration Act, better known as the Japanese Exclusion Act in Japan, was passed in spite of Japan’s diplomatic effort to prevent it. While the Act restricted immigration into the United States to 150,000 people a year based on a quota system, it achieved statutory Japanese exclusion by the

³³ “Race-War in the United States,” *Asian Review* 2:5 (July-August 1921): 434-435.

³⁴ Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan and China*, 59-60. Among its supporters were above-mentioned Nobuaki Makino, former Foreign Minister Kikujirō Ishii, Navy Minister Admiral Tomosaburō Katō, and Prime Minister Takashi Hara.

constructed concept of “persons ineligible to citizenship,” and thus completed Asiatic exclusion.³⁵ Lumping Japanese people together with other Asians who were inferior in the Japanese racial ideology, the act infuriated Japanese intellectuals who were proud of Japan’s status as the only non-Western great power. Not a few of them became disillusioned with America as a land of democracy.³⁶

As W. E. B. Du Bois sympathetically told an audience during his Japan trip in 1936, American policy of Japanese exclusion resulted from political bargaining between Republican senators from the South and the West, in which the former endorsed the Exclusion Act proposed by the latter, in exchange for sacrificing the 1924 federal anti-lynching bill.³⁷ Japanese readers understood that such political deals too often prevented the passage of the anti-lynching bills. In 1922, *Yomiuri*, *Yorozu Chōhō*, *Tokyo Nichinichi*, and *Kokumin* newspapers reported that, in choosing between giving up the whole session to a filibuster or going ahead with the regular business of the session dealing with other legislation, the Senate decided to abandon the Dyer

³⁵ Mae M. Ngai, “The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924,” *The Journal of American History* 86:1 (June 1999): 67-70, 80-81.

³⁶ Kimitada Miwa, “Taibei Kessen eno Imēji [The Image towards the War against the United States],” in Hidetoshi Katō and Shunsuke Kamei eds., *Nihon to Amerika: Aitekoku no Imēji Kenkyū* [Japan and America: Study of Mutual Images], (Tokyo: Nihon Gakujutsu Shinkō-kai, 1991), 229.

³⁷ Reginald Kearney, “The Pro-Japanese Utterances of W. E. B. Du Bois,” *Contributions in Black Studies*, 13/14 (1995/1996): 208; Gerald Horne, “Tokyo Bound: African Americans and Japan Confront White Supremacy,” *Souls* 3 (Summer 2001), 20. On the Immigration Act of 1924 and the process of political bargaining, see Toshihiro Minohara, *Kariforunia-shū ni okeru Hainichi Undō to 1924-nen Imin-hō no Seiritsu Katei: Imin Mondai wo meguru Nihibei Kankei, 1906-1924-nen* [The Development of Anti-Japanese Movement in California and the Immigration Act of 1924: Japan-U.S. Relations on the Immigration Problem, 1906-1924], Ph.D. dissertation (Kobe University, 1998), chapter 5. On African American views on the anti-Japanese movement, see David J. Hellwig, “Afro-American Reactions to the Japanese and the Anti-Japanese Movement, 1906-1924,” *Phylon* 38:1 (1st Qtr., 1977): 93-104.

Anti-Lynching Bill. The Senate's Majority Leader was Henry Cabot Lodge, a vocal supporter of immigration restriction who played a crucial role in the passage of the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924.³⁸ As early as 1920, *Yomiuri* probably saw the relationship between anti-Japanese measures and anti-black violence in the United States; the paper, intentionally or not, juxtaposed two headlines "Impossible to Prevent the Anti-Japanese Law [California's Alien Land Law of 1920]" and "Lynching of a Black Person," as if calling particular attention to the malicious racial prejudice in the United States.³⁹ So did Kijūrō Shidehara, then Ambassador to the United States who had been a major negotiator in efforts to solve the problem regarding Japanese immigrants. In July 1920, Shidehara sent the Japanese Foreign Minister copies of the *Congressional Record* and the *House of Representatives Report* containing debates on the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill.⁴⁰ The issues of lynching reminded Japanese people of the racially hostile conditions that they had to face.

In 1924, lynching and discrimination against the Japanese merged into one issue when Japanese newspapers picked up the stories about the murder of two Japanese immigrants and the attempted lynching of another that occurred on June 19 and 20 in California. The attempted lynching in L.A., which allegedly involved KKK members tarring and feathering the victim, attracted considerable attention among the Japanese media. Under such headlines as "Barbaric Lynching against Japanese for the First Time," "Horrific Lynching by Japanophobe Mob," and

³⁸ *Yomiuri*, *Yorozu Chōhō*, *Tokyo Nichinichi*, and *Kokumin*, December 5, 1922.

³⁹ *Yomiuri*, September 1, 1920.

⁴⁰ Kijūrō Shidehara, "Beikoku ni okeru Shikei ni taisuru Kokujin Hogo-hōan Sōfu no Ken" [On Sending Copies of the U.S. Bill Protecting Blacks from Lynching], *Gaimushō Kiroku* [Foreign Ministry Record], 1-6-3, *Gaikō Shiryō-kan* [The Diplomatic Record Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan], Tokyo, Japan.

“Mob Rushed for Lynching Japanese,” the papers devoted full pages to detailed explanations of lynching and the Klan. Carrying the picture of a KKK meeting, The *Tokyo Asahi* stated: “tarring and feathering was a horrible password for lynching.”⁴¹ The *Kokumin* published a picture of KKK leader H. W. Evans, and explained that tarring and feathering was the KKK’s unique method of lynching to ensure white supremacy.⁴² In the account headlined “Tarring and Feathering: The Lynching Method beyond Brutality,” The *Osaka Asahi* commented: “Who on earth invented such a cruel punishment? While such a penalty had been used in European countries in the Crusades, in the twentieth-century world only a few American states continue such malicious lynching.”⁴³

Eventually, Japanese ultra-nationalists’ hostility toward the lynching of African Americans became even more militant when white Americans lynched a Japanese immigrant. The *Kokumin* carried Mitsuru Tōyama’s furious denunciation of the incident. Prominent leading right-wing political leader, Tōyama charged, “Americans are really unconcealed savages. It is said that when they lynch black people, they burn them to death. . . . We must let the government arouse the public sentiment. We must teach Americans that outraged people are the most formidable.”⁴⁴ Through the incident, law professor Uesugi saw American racism against all people of color: “Americans look down on the Japanese completely. This is clear if we recall their inhuman, brutal lynchings of black people from year to year. . . . The conflict between

⁴¹ *Tokyo Asahi*, June 22, 1924.

⁴² *Kokumin*, June 22, 1924.

⁴³ *Osaka Asahi*, June 22, 1924.

⁴⁴ *Kokumin*, June 22, 1924.

Japan and America will be inevitable.”⁴⁵

While lynchings of African Americans functioned as a crucial reference point for the treatment of the Japanese in the United States, Japanese anti-lynching sentiment began to change its character by the 1930s. In that decade, anti-American sentiment in Japan kindled by the Japanese Exclusion Act and the rough treatment of Japanese immigrants caught fire. With the rise of Japanese militarism, Japanese intellectuals increasingly fended off America’s criticism of Japan’s imperialist expansion in East Asia by denouncing American racism. To accomplish this they merely had to refer to lynching. In 1933, the future Prime Minister Konoe, in his defense of Japan’s imperialist policy in Manchuria, charged, “they [Americans] call it barbarity that Japanese soldiers killed native people in Manchuria, but is it a real civilization that permits white Americans to tie black citizens to trees, burn them, and call that lynching?”⁴⁶ NAACP Secretary Walter White disgustingly recalled that the Japanese translation of his *The Fire in the Flint* (1924), first published in 1935, with the original title “Hiuchi-ishi no Hi” [The Fire in the Flint], was later renamed *Shōsetsu Rinchi* [*Lynching: A Novel*] in 1937 to propagandize against the United States:

Unwittingly and unwillingly, I was also utilized through the medium of *The Fire in the Flint* in Japan. . . . Later, when American indignation over Japan’s invasion of China mounted, a new Japanese edition, with the title changed to *Lynching*, was brought out. The new edition sold in fantastic numbers, due to a publicity campaign by the Japanese government pointing out that the novel pictured the kind of barbarities which were tolerated and even encouraged in the democracy which had the temerity to criticize Japan for her acts in China.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Yorozu Chōhō, June 22, 1924.

⁴⁶ Konoe, quoted in Junichirō Shōji, “Konoe Fumimaro no Taibei-kan [Fumimaro Konoe’s Views on America],” in Yūichi Hasegawa, ed., *Taishō-ki Nihon no Amerika Ninshiki* [*Japanese Views of America in the Taisho Period*] (Tokyo: Keiō Gijuku Daigaku Shuppan-kai, 2001), 93.

⁴⁷ Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (1948, New York:

It is not clear if the Japanese government indeed publicized the book to the Japanese audience as White claimed, but he was not the only American author to see his work converted to propaganda uses by Japanese publishers. The Japanese translation of Scott Nearing's *Black America* (1929) appeared in 1931 with the renamed title: *A History of Black Oppression: Lynching Story*.⁴⁸ The translator of *The Fire in the Flint* was Yasuichi Hikida, a Japanese independent scholar sympathetic to African Americans residing in New York since 1920. Columbia-educated and Christian (he went to a local black church in Harlem), Hikida did indeed work as a government agent for the Japanese Consulate from 1938 to 1942, but did so after the publication of *Shōsetsu Rinchi*.⁴⁹ In the preface, Hikida commented with apparent sincerity, “[i]n this present time the issues of colored races are particularly studied and discussed, and attract the public interest in my home country Japan. It would be my greatest pleasure if this translation helps the readers understand the current conditions of American Negroes who are suffering in the depth of despair.”⁵⁰

White's friendship with Hikida must have deepened his sense of betrayal over the Japanese translation of *The Fire in the Flint*. In his 1933 letter to James Weldon Johnson, White

Arno Press, 1969), 69; Furukawa and Furukawa, *Nihonjin to Afurika-kei Amerikajin*, 95.

⁴⁸ Furukawa and Furukawa, *Nihonjin to Afurika-kei Amerikajin*, 110.

⁴⁹ Reginald Kearney, “The Pro-Japanese Utterances of W. E. B. Du Bois,” 211; Kearney, *African American Views of the Japanese: Solidarity or Sedition?* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 83-84; Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan and China*, 103-104, Gerald Horne, “Tokyo Bound,” 22; Furukawa and Furukawa, *Nihonjin to Afurika-kei Amerikajin*, 161-169; Yasuhiro Idei, *Kokujin ni Mottomo Aisare, FBI ni Mottomo Osorerareta Nihonjin [The Japanese Who Was Loved Most by Blacks and Feared Most by the FBI]* (Tokyo: Kōdan-sha, 2008), 204-208, 214-215.

⁵⁰ Yonezō Hirayama [Hikida's pseudonym], *Lynching: A Novel* (Tokyo: Nihon Kōron-sha, 1937), preface.

introduced Hikida as “my very good friend” and “one of my most esteemed friends,” who “has done already a very great deal through the writing of articles for Japanese publications to set before the people of Japan the real facts regarding the Negro in the United States.” White also told Johnson that Hikida was trying to arrange a Japanese translation of *The Fire in the Flint*.⁵¹ He wrote Johnson to forward a letter from Hikida asking Johnson for permission to translate into Japanese Johnson’s famous “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” Hikida enthusiastically told Johnson that the Japanese translation of the song “will bring a significant result in years to come.” Unsatisfied with the current situation where the Japanese “are contented with worthless publications that come through white agents with the white man’s view point of Negroes,” Hikida thought that the translation “will eventually contribute toward creating a sentiment and promote understanding of American Negro among Japanese.”⁵²

As a member of the NAACP for decades, before he worked for the Japanese Consulate “the ubiquitous Yasuichi Hikida,” as described by historian Reginald Kearney, actively involved himself in the African American political scenes in Harlem and elsewhere. He maintained a close relationship with prominent black leaders including White, Johnson, Du Bois, Arthur Schomburg, Alain Locke, Rayford Logan, Carter G. Woodson, and Nannie Burroughs of the National Association of Colored Women.⁵³ By 1941 the FBI had concluded from decoded messages

⁵¹ Walter White to James Weldon Johnson, September 25, 1933, James Weldon Johnson & Grace Nail Johnson Papers, box 24, folder 542, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

⁵² Hikida to Johnson, September 26, 1933, James Weldon Johnson & Grace Nail Johnson Papers, box 9, folder 206.

⁵³ Kearney, *African American Views of the Japanese*, 83; Yasuichi Hikida to James Weldon Johnson, September 26, 1933 and October 11, 1935, James Weldon Johnson & Grace Nail Johnson Papers, box 9, folder 206; David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (1979,

between the Foreign Office in Tokyo and Japanese embassies and consulates in the United States that Hikida spoke for the Japanese government. One decoded message discussed plans to hire an espionage agent living among African Americans in New York.⁵⁴ Although the person's name was deleted by the Department of Defense, it was Hikida according to Harlem's black newspaper *Amsterdam Star News*, which reported that the FBI intended to investigate some black leaders on charges of bribery by the Japanese government and that the FBI singled out Hikida as a key person on the Japanese side.⁵⁵ Hikida's involvement in espionage was also confirmed by the Japanese report on the wartime conditions of African Americans, *Sensō to Kokujin [War and Blacks]*, whose preface stated that the report was written by Hikida, "who had been mainly responsible for this operation [propagandizing among blacks] at the Japanese Consulate in New York."⁵⁶ When authorities apprehended Hikida as an "alien enemy" on January 13, 1942, they seized his large collection of African American literature, which led the FBI to conclude that "Hikida had been in charge of Japanese propaganda among the negroes for four or five years and

New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 302; Furukawa and Furukawa, *Nihonjin to Afurika-kei Amerikajin*, 162-163; Idei, *Kokujin ni Mottomo Aisare, FBI ni Mottomo Osorerareta Nihonjin*, 204, 218-219, 231.

⁵⁴ Kichizaburō Nomura, Ambassador to the U.S., to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 4, 1941, MAGIC (decoded Japanese intelligence files) intercept, quoted in Idei, *Kokujin ni Mottomo Aisare, FBI ni Mottomo Osorerareta Nihonjin*, 205-206.

⁵⁵ *Amsterdam Star News*, January 3, 1942, quoted in Idei, *Kokujin ni Mottomo Aisare, FBI ni Mottomo Osorerareta Nihonjin*, 238-239.

⁵⁶ Gaimushō Chōsabu Dairokka [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Research Section, Department Six], *Sensō to Kokujin: Nichibei Kaisen Igo no Kokujin no Dōkō oyobi Sono Haikei [War and Blacks: Activities of Blacks and Their Background since the Outbreak of the Japan-U.S. War]*, October 1942, preface, in "Minzoku Mondai Kankei Zakken: Kokujin Mondai" [Documents Related to Racial Issues: Issues on Blacks], Gaimushō Kiroku, I 460-1-3. It also stated that the operation had been conducted "since the second Sino-Japanese War [of 1937] by the Japanese Consulate in New York and elsewhere."

had formerly been employed by the Japanese Consulate to spread propaganda among the negroes.”⁵⁷

The over 100-page report *Sensō to Kokujin*, which Hikida wrote after he returned to Japan, provided the Japanese government with comprehensive, up-to-date information on the status of African Americans following the opening of the Pacific War. Quoting a number of white- and black-oriented newspapers, periodicals, and articles describing African Americans’ wartime demands and views, the report rightfully concluded that blacks “were caught between love for their own race and love for their country.”⁵⁸ For instance, the report included a comment by Emmett J. Scott, a long-time personal secretary of Booker T. Washington and highest ranking African American official in the Woodrow Wilson Administration: “If America needs blacks to protect American democracy, she should give us rights as American citizens. . . . America would not need to worry about whether blacks believe fascism or communism and blacks would have no interest in the Japanese plot about skin color, if America abolishes lynching, accepts political rights for blacks, and treats them as citizens of the democratic nation.”⁵⁹ The report also mentioned how African Americans utilized the famous “Remember Pearl Harbor” slogan as “their own weapon” in January and February 1942, by quoting black journalist George S. Schuyler: the nation raised “[a] united voice of ‘Remember Pearl Harbor!’ Blacks have been lifting their united voice to ‘Remember Alexandria!’ and ‘Remember

⁵⁷ “Japanese Influence and Activity among the American Negroes,” in Robert A. Hill, compiled and ed., *The FBI’s RACON: Racial Conditions in the United States during World War II* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995), 509-510.

⁵⁸ *Sensō to Kokujin*, 88. The quotes from this report are translated by the author from Hikida’s Japanese translation (of the original English quotes) back into English.

⁵⁹ *Sensō to Kokujin*, 67-68.

Sikeston!’ . . . [since] a black man in uniform in Alexandria, Louisiana, and another black man Cleo Wright in Sikeston, Missouri were brutally lynched.”⁶⁰

These accounts of African Americans’ wartime frustration with mob violence and racism at home convinced the Japanese government that it could effectively agitate among blacks. In 1943, the government assigned Hikida to write another report on African Americans, but this time, more particularly on wartime espionage. Entitled *Senji Kokujin Kōsaku [The Wartime Black Propaganda Operations]*, the report explained in its preface how African American antipathy to domestic racism was the greatest obstacle for the United States claiming it fought for democracy. Hikida insisted on the importance of developing propaganda aimed at blacks based on his belief that African Americans felt a particular friendship for Japan. The report outlined a three-part propaganda program: (1) information gathering, (2) use of black prisoners of war, and (3) short-wave radio broadcasts. Sections 2 and 3 provided detailed plans on recruiting black POWs for a Japanese propaganda campaign and using them in broadcasts aimed at blacks in the United States and abroad. For recruitment, Hikida suggested creating propaganda leaflets targeting black POWs, including pictures of lynchings carried out on the U.S. Army facilities, reports on racial frictions in the United States, and propaganda that uncovered American intention to have black servicemen particularly fight the Axis armies of color. The plan for short-wave radio broadcasts would cover the following topics: “matters that the black intellectuals and others find pertinent,” “matters that blacks want to know about,” “matters that should please blacks,” “specific matters that should arouse blacks’ attention,” and “matters that should attract blacks’ interests.” Under these headlines, the report planned to propagandize the view that American and British “democracy” was nothing but “hypocrisy” and that Japan was

⁶⁰ *Sensō to Kokujin*, 48-49.

fighting for the advancement of the colored races.⁶¹

As historians Masaharu Sato and Barak Kushner have pointed out, Japan's propaganda to African Americans, contrary to much of the propaganda released during the war, did not need to rely on fabrication but accurately reported the ongoing lynchings and racial discrimination in the United States. Even before the Japanese government officially launched its radio propaganda campaign, according to Sato and Kushner, the racial threat in Japanese propaganda had been picked up by the American Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Commission Service. One of the broadcasts portrayed America as barbaric due to the fact that outside the United States, "notorious lynchings are a rare practice even among the most savage specimens of the human race."⁶² Similarly, regarding "specific matters that should arouse blacks' attention" in employing short-wave broadcasts, Hikida proposed first to point out to African Americans the stark contrast between their contribution to World War I and how white Americans treated them in the postwar U.S. society. He did not forget to list lynching as an example of such unfair treatments of blacks.⁶³

While Japanese intellectuals often countered American criticism of Japan's imperialistic expansion by exposing American racial hypocrisy, Japanese propaganda activities intentionally employed racial themes particularly targeting the African American audience to justify Japan's

⁶¹ Yasuichi Hikida, *Senji Kokujin Kōsaku [The Wartime Black Propaganda Operations]*, January 1943, Gaimushō Kiroku, S1700-25. For a detailed study on Japan's propaganda operation to blacks via short-wave radio broadcasts, see Masaharu Sato and Barak Kushner, "'Negro Propaganda Operations': Japan's Short-Wave Radio Broadcasts for World War II Black Americans," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 19:1 (March 1999): 5-26.

⁶² Sato and Kushner, "'Negro Propaganda Operations,'" 9.

⁶³ Hikida, *Senji Kokujin Kōsaku*, 29.

war to liberate the colored races from Western colonialism. Nothing served this purpose better than lynching.

African American Responses to Japanese Anti-Lynching Protests

Before starting their rhetorical campaign of “lynching for the Axis propaganda,” the U.S. black press reported favorably on the Japanese anti-lynching propaganda. In 1919, when reports of American race riots and related lynching incidents appeared in Japanese newspapers, the *Cleveland Advocate* published an article headlined “Japanese Paper Takes a Fling at Uncle Sam” that included Japanese newspaper *Yamato*’s criticism of the United States for hypocritically advocating justice to “the weaker peoples of the world.” It described the *Yamato* as “one of the leading Japanese newspapers,” before stating that the paper “accused Americans of lynching and discriminating against Negroes in open defiance of the Constitution.” The paper also introduced *Yamato*’s prediction that “unless the federal lynch law was passed to prevent such depraved and outlawed occurrences the United States would face the most serious crisis in history.” The *Cleveland Advocate* thus cited international criticism to shame the public into supporting the federal anti-lynching legislation.⁶⁴ Likewise, in 1921, Cincinnati’s black weekly newspaper the *Union*, whose headline read “Japan Considers American Lynchings,” reported the NAACP’s announcement that a Japanese periodical (Kokuryū-kai’s *Asian Review*) had condemned American lynching. It introduced the periodical’s call for strong public condemnation throughout the world “in order to bring sufficient pressure to bear on the American government to adopt effective measures” to stop lynching.⁶⁵ These papers show how blacks tried to let the public

⁶⁴ *Cleveland Advocate*, September 27, 1919.

⁶⁵ *Union*, July 30, 1921.

know that American racial politics had to respond to international attention, not only from Japan but from other countries as well. In 1925 an Indian activist living in Japan forwarded a copy of Mitsukawa's *Kokujin Mondai* to Marcus Garvey.⁶⁶ Though sympathetic to Japan Garvey could not read Japanese and therefore had only a limited access to the book's overall message, but its visual images—not only of the lynching photos but also of the UNIA's pan-African flag inserted on the title page—probably told him enough.⁶⁷

The irony, however, is that Japanese imperialists wrote the *Yamato*, the *Asian Review*, and *Kokujin Mondai* articles. As pan-Asianists, they implicitly justified the idea of Japanese expansion in Asia by linking lynching with Western oppression of non-white people, and promoting Japan's role as liberators. To some extent, African American intellectuals were aware of Japan's imperialistic policies in the Far East, but for them, Japan's status as a victim of racism, her criticism of American racism, and her support of racial equality outweighed any negative aspects of Japanese imperial foreign policy. As many scholars have pointed out, a number of African American intellectuals and leaders sided with Japan as "a leader of the darker races" or at least looked to Japan for inspiration for decades.⁶⁸ Among them were Booker T. Washington

⁶⁶ Ernest Allen, Jr., "When Japan Was 'Champion of the Darker Races': Satotaka Takahashi and the Flowering of Black Messianic Nationalism," *The Black Scholar* 24:1 (Winter 1994): 29.

⁶⁷ Furukawa and Furukawa, *Nihonjin to Afurika-kei Amerikajin*, 105.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Kearney, "The Pro-Japanese Utterances of W. E. B. Du Bois," 201-217; Ernest Allen, Jr., "Waiting for Tojo: The Pro-Japan Vigil of Black Missourians, 1932-1943," *Gateway Heritage* (Fall 1995), 38-55; Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 69-71; Horne, "Tokyo Bound," 16-28; Gerald Horne, *Race War!: White Supremacy and the Japanese Attack on the British Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 84, 145, 258, 306, 330; Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan and China*, chapters 1-4; Gallicchio, translated by Yūko Itō, "Amerika Kokujin no Tainichi-kan no Kioku: Sono Bōkyaku to Saisei" [Memory and the Lost Found Relationship between Black Americans and

and Mary Church Terrell, who praised Japan's victory over Russia,⁶⁹ and James Weldon Johnson, who stated in 1919 that Japan was "perhaps the greatest hope for the colored races of the world."⁷⁰ In the same year, when the Japanese delegation stopped in New York en route to the Paris Peace Conference, an African American delegation, including Ida B. Wells-Barnett, William Monroe Trotter, Madam C. J. Walker, and A. Philip Randolph, visited the Japanese representatives to show their support for Japan's racial equality proposal.⁷¹ As early as 1918, Garvey, an advocate of "Asia for the Asiatic" as well as "Africa for the Africans," warned that "the next war will be between the Negroes and the whites unless our demands for justice are

Japan], in Chihiro Hosoya, Akira Iriye, Ryō Ōshiba, eds., *Kioku to shitenō Pāru Hābā [Pearl Harbor as Memory]* (Tokyo: Minerva Shobō, 2004), 229-239; Gallicchio, translated by Itō, "Afurika-kei Amerikajin no Sensō-kan, Ajia-kan" [African Americans and the Asia Pacific War], in Aiko Kurasawa, Tōru Sugihara, Tessa Morris-Suzuki, and Daizaburō Yui, eds., *Ajia Taiheiyō Sensō (3) Dōin, Teikō, Yokusan [The Asia Pacific War, vol. 3, Mobilization, Resistance, and Collaboration]* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2006), 249-250; and George Lipsitz, "Frantic to Join . . . the Japanese Army': Beyond the Black-White Binary," in *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, rev. and expanded ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 189-196.

Some African Americans, including Langston Hughes who visited Japan in 1933 and interacted with Japanese leftist intellectuals, A. Philip Randolph, and Chandler Owen of the *Messenger*, were critical of Japanese imperialism during the interwar period. Daniel Widener, "'Perhaps the Japanese Are to Be Thanked?': Asia, Asian Americans, and the Construction of Black California," *Positions* 11:1 (2003): 158-159; Koshiro, "Beyond an Alliance of Color," 194; Onishi, "The New Negro of the Pacific," 200-202.

⁶⁹ Allen, Jr., "When Japan Was 'Champion of the Darker Races,'" 29; Furukawa and Furukawa, *Nihonjin to Afurika-kei Amerikajin*, 89-90; Lipsitz, "'Frantic to Join . . . the Japanese Army,'" 191; Kearney, *African American Views of the Japanese*, 20.

⁷⁰ *New York Age*, March 29, 1919, quoted in Kearney, *African American Views of the Japanese*, 57. Yukiko Koshiro points out that Johnson, after having visited Japan in 1929, became cautious about the alliance with the Japanese because of Japan's dualistic racial identity. Koshiro, "Beyond an Alliance of Color," 186-187.

⁷¹ Kearney, *African American Views of the Japanese*, 54-55; Widener, "'Perhaps the Japanese Are to Be Thanked?,'" 157-158. On African Americans and the racial equality proposal, see Plummer, *Rising Wind*, 15-20; and Onishi, "The New Negro of the Pacific," 191-213.

recognized. . . . With Japan to fight with us, we can win such a war.”⁷² Du Bois, who visited China, Manchuria, and Japan in 1936, was convinced of Japan’s successful imperialism in Manchuria, where “[a] lynching . . . would be unthinkable.” With high admiration toward Japan as “a country of colored people run by colored people for colored people,” he remained a strong advocate of Japan’s pan-Asianism until the 1940s.⁷³

As World War II approached, the image of the major Axis of Powers—Germany, Italy, and Japan—as enemies of American democracy offered the African American anti-lynching struggle a variety of opportunities. While black newspapers and periodicals began to make direct parallels between American racism and the atrocious deeds of these “enemy countries,” prior to the Pacific War they focused mainly on Nazism. Hitler and the swastika became symbols as strong as the KKK and the noose in the anti-lynching campaign. In June 1934, the *Crisis* published a cartoon of a hooded KKK figure with a rope in his hand looking across the Atlantic at Europe from where the words “Nazi Persecution of Jews and Negroes” are flaming up. The caption “Giving Him Some Fresh Ideas” clearly suggests the resemblance between racial atrocities by Nazism and the KKK (see Figure 1.1).⁷⁴ A similar motif is used in the September 1934 issue of the *Crisis* to criticize the hypocrisy of a governmental figure, General Hugh S.

⁷² Allen, Jr., “When Japan Was ‘Champion of the Darker Races,’” 29; Horne, “Tokyo Bound,” 18.

⁷³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 13 and March 20, 1937, reprinted in W. E. B. Du Bois, *Newspaper Columns* (White Plains, NY: Kraus-Thomson Organization, 1986), edited by Herbert Aptheker, vol. 1, 167, 182. On Du Bois’ East-Asia trip, see Kearney, “The Pro-Japanese Utterances of W. E. B. Du Bois,” 204-209; Kearney, *African American Views of the Japanese*, 19, 87-91; Koshiro, “Beyond an Alliance of Color,” 187; Lipsitz, “‘Frantic to Join . . . the Japanese Army,’” 191; and Furukawa and Furukawa, *Nihonjin to Afurika-kei Amerikajin*, 93-94.

⁷⁴ *Crisis*, June 1934, 158.

Johnson, the director of the New Deal's National Recovery Administration (NRA). The cartoon featured Johnson looking at Europe where swastika flags were waving, while standing on American soil covered by graves of lynching victims. The caption cited the speech Johnson had made on July 12: "A few days ago, in Germany, events occurred which . . . made me physically sick" (see Figure 1.2).⁷⁵ Such visual comparison enabled African Americans to condemn the hypocrisy of American democracy.

Black leaders' comments, in the letters to the White House, in speeches, and in the press pages, echoed the idea embedded in these cartoons. Particularly at a time when white southerners repeatedly filibustered anti-lynching bills, they used Nazism to urge the Senate and the President to take immediate action to pass a bill. On July 31, 1935, a day after "the tenth lynching" of that year occurred at Louisburg, North Carolina, Walter White wrote President Franklin Roosevelt. Informing Roosevelt that the lynching had happened in the state of "one of the most vociferous leaders of the filibuster" against the Costigan-Wagner bill, White wrote that the "[s]ituation necessitates your urging upon Congress that it act without delay to pass the Costigan-Wagner bill. Our country cannot with good grace denounce barbarism in Nazi Germany as long as these mob outrages disgrace America."⁷⁶ Carl Murphy, the president of the *Baltimore Afro-American*, wrote a secretary to the President: "It is not doing us as a [Democratic] party any good to have the *Congressional Record* and the public press filled, day after day, with anti-Negro propaganda matching in bigotry and prejudice anything published in Germany, Russia or Italy against Jews,

⁷⁵ *Crisis*, September 1934, 257.

⁷⁶ Walter White to President Roosevelt, July 31, 1935, in George McJimsey, ed., *FDR and Protection from Lynching, 1934-1945, Documentary History of the Franklin Roosevelt Presidency*, vol. 11 (Congressional Information Service, Inc., 2003), 251.



Figure 1.1. “Giving Him Some Fresh Ideas”
Source: Crisis, June 1934



Figure 1.2. "Victims of Lynching!"

Source: Crisis, September 1934

Catholics and aliens.”⁷⁷ NAACP Field Secretary William Pickens stated in a radio address that American Hitlerism revived “ku-kluxism in Georgia . . . vigilantism in California, and . . . lynching in Mississippi.” Likewise, in his anti-lynching speech at the NAACP’s annual meeting,

White reminded the audience: “a counterpart of Hitlerism ha[d] existed in the United States for many generations.”⁷⁸ In commenting on the lawlessness for African Americans faced in American society and the Senate’s refusal to pass a federal anti-lynching bill in 1940, the *Crisis* editor Roy Wilkins stated:

The CRISIS is sorry for brutality, blood, and death among the peoples of Europe, just as we were sorry for China and Ethiopia. But the hysterical cries of the preachers of democracy for Europe leave us cold. We want democracy in Alabama and Arkansas, in Mississippi and Michigan, in the District of Columbia—in the Senate of the United States.

It is not important (if true) that there have been “only a few” lynchings. It is supremely important for this democratic process we say we revere that the Constitution, and not the emotional whims of hoodlums, be known as the law of the land. Until that is made unmistakably clear, the only essential difference between a Nazi mob hunting down Jews in Central Europe and an American mob burning black men at the stake in Mississippi is that one is actually encouraged by its national government and the other is merely tolerated.⁷⁹

Wilkins quoted the *New York Times*, “[n]othing that can happen in this country is better grist for the Nazi propaganda mill than a lynching.” He continued: “America is marching to war for the purpose of stopping brutalities overseas, but apparently our government does not choose to stop

⁷⁷ Carl Murphy to Marvin McIntyre, February 5, 1938, in McJimsey, *FDR and Protection from Lynching*, vol. 11, 523-524.

⁷⁸ Jonathan Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land?: World Affairs and the American Civil Rights Movement from the First World War to Vietnam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 112-113.

⁷⁹ *Crisis*, July 1940, 209. Emphasis in the original.

lynching within its own borders, or even within the borders of its army camps.”⁸⁰

While making Nazism an important component of their anti-lynching language, African Americans still held mixed feelings toward Japan, the only Axis enemy of color. On December 6, 1941, at the dawn of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the *Baltimore Afro-American* published an opinion column entitled “In Fighting Japan Our Own Hands Are Not Clean.” In it, the author noted that it is “a great mystery to many people why we insist on a Monroe Doctrine and deny to Japan similar political leadership in Asia,” before giving a brief overview of American history of slave trade and the westward and colonial expansion, all of which was described as invasion. The column concluded: “No, we can’t preach morality and consistency to the Japanese. They want to know why we, who have slaughtered the reds and the blacks, have so suddenly become Christian crusaders for the yellows of China.”⁸¹ Although in the following week, the paper’s editorial tone changed dramatically with more overtly patriotic sentiments and reference to the Japanese as “Japs,” this column shows how African Americans remained ambivalent about Japan’s imperialist expansion. The writer may have no longer seen Japan as a liberator of the colored race from Western colonialism, but he at least questioned if the United States had a right to criticize Japan’s “Monroe Doctrine.” They were well aware of hypocrisy of American democracy, something the wartime lynching and racism best represented.

After the Pearl Harbor attack, the image and iconography of Japan joined Hitler in anti-lynching narratives. Black newspapers used a similar motif in their cartoons showing Japanese figures favorably observing the lynching of Cleo Wright occurred in Sikeston, Missouri, on January 25, 1942. A week after a mob lynched Wright, an African American cotton mill

⁸⁰ *Crisis*, June 1941, 183.

⁸¹ *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 6, 1941.

worker, for rape, the African American newspaper *Louisville Defender* published a cartoon that depicted Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese emperor Hirohito peeking into a white mob burning a black man, and Hitler telling Mussolini and Hirohito: “Boys! That’s Democracy a la USA” (see Figure 1.3).⁸² Likewise, the *Baltimore Afro-American* carried a cartoon entitled “Defending America Our Way,” in which grinning Hitler and a smiling slant-eyed Japanese soldier witnessed the hanging and burning scene of the Sikeston lynching (see Figure 1.4).⁸³ These cartoons well captured the contradictory situation that African Americans had long faced, where the “war for democracy” was reverberating throughout the country while the U.S. society perpetuated rampant racial violence and segregation. The visual parallel between lynching and Nazism/fascism was a useful tactic for African Americans to best describe the contradictions that American society entailed, and the image of Japanese imperialism was deployed to serve their anti-lynching cause.

Just like these cartoons, African Americans employed rhetorical strategy to unveil the paradox of American democracy in their efforts against mob violence. Described by anti-lynching organizations as “the first lynching after Pearl Harbor,” the Sikeston lynching became a new symbol for African Americans’ two-front war—fighting fascism abroad, while fighting Jim Crow at home. On February 26, a month after the incident, the St. Louis and St. Louis County Branches of the NAACP protested the Sikeston lynching with a silent parade. The *Pittsburgh Courier* reported that the protestors carried several anti-lynching signs with such messages as “Stop Lynching and Pass the Anti-Lynch Bill” and “V for Victory Abroad and V for Victory at Home.” A picture captured the protestors and their signs, one of which read:

⁸² *Louisville Defender*, January 31, 1942.

⁸³ *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 31, 1942.

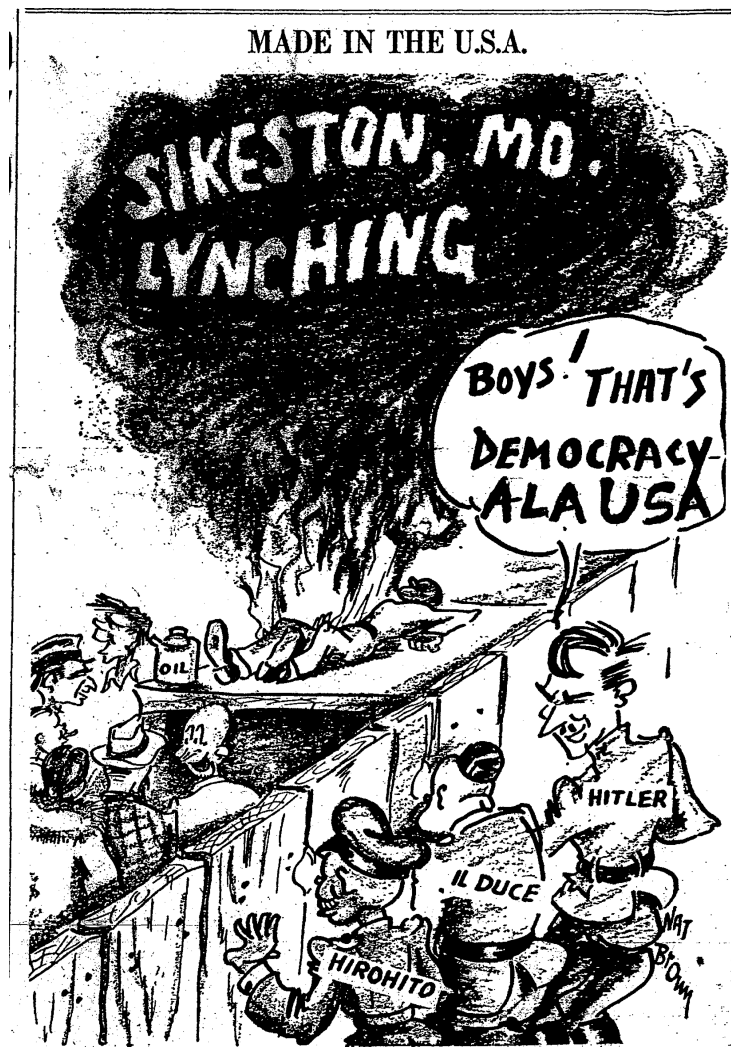


Figure 1.3. "Made in the U.S.A."
Source: Louisville Defender, January 31, 1942



Figure 1.4. "Defending America Our Way"
Source: Baltimore Afro-American, January 31, 1942

“‘Remember Pearl Harbor’ But Don’t Forget Sikeston” (see Figure 2.5).⁸⁴ Similarly, *Pittsburgh Courier* columnist Joseph D. Bibb stated in 1942: “While we are remembering Pearl Harbor, we are not forgetting the race riots that ran rampant over the nation after the Armistice was signed. We remember the racial clashes in Washington and Chicago. We never forget how soldiers were lynched, flamed and mutilated in the South.”⁸⁵

Perhaps “War Quiz for America,” a three-page, call-and-response prose by journalist Frank Marshall Davis that appeared in the *Crisis*, best represented the wartime view of African Americans. The piece opened with a leading voice asking, “Who am I?,” followed by three responding voices naming African American figures in history from Crispus Attucks to Dorie Miller, a hero “shooting down four Jap planes with a machine gun” at Pearl Harbor. A chorus chanted: “I am four of nine Scottsboro boys still rotting in Kilby prison in Alabama. I am Cleo Wright lynched at Sikeston, Missouri, while you cried for national unity in the face of Jap savagery.” Another voice posed a question to Uncle Sam: “Why send me against Axis foes . . . / Without shielding my back / from the sniping Dixie lynchers / In the jungles of Texas and Florida?” Responding to black soldiers’ skepticism about democracy, the leading voice stated: “if it [democracy against fascism] works in lands I never saw before / Against strangers with

⁸⁴ *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 28, 1942, Visual Materials from the NAACP, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LOT 13093, no. 24. For the detailed study of the Sikeston lynching, see Dominic J. Capeci, Jr., *The Lynching of Cleo Wright* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998). The following studies also mention the Sikeston lynching and the Pearl Harbor analogy: Neil A. Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1993), 100; Ernest Allen, Jr., “Waiting for Tojo,” 39; Marc Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 127-128; Gallicchio, “Amerika Kokujin no Tainichi-kan no Kioku,” 240; and Gallicchio, “Afurika-kei Amerikajin no Sensō-kan, Ajia-kan,” 253.

⁸⁵ *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 7, 1942.

faces new to me / Then it must be the right thing to use / Against all foes of freedom / Against all apostles of fascism / Against some people I know / Right here in America.” Then the following voices immediately followed:

VOICE: I know more about Biblo than I do about Tojo

VOICE: I’ve heard about Hitler but I have also lived in Georgia
when Talmadge was governor

VOICE: Talk about Mussolini if you want to, but did you ever
hear Rankin rave in Congress?

VOICE: Tell me the Black Dragon Society is just a foreign
nightmare but I have been beaten and murdered by the Ku Klux Klan⁸⁶

By comparing the Axis figures (Japanese Prime Minister Hideki Tojo, Hitler, and Mussolini) to racist southern politicians (Senator Theodore G. Bilbo, Governor Eugene Talmadge, and Senator John E. Rankin), and Japanese imperialist society Kokuryū-kai to the KKK, Davis skillfully unveiled the double standard of the nation’s “democracy against fascism” slogan. Bibb and Davis, among many African Americans, utilized the idea of the “war for democracy” to win their struggle against lynching and racism.⁸⁷

On February 7, 1942, the *Pittsburgh Courier* embarked upon its famous “Double V Campaign”—victory over fascism abroad and victory over Jim Crow at home.⁸⁸ But as we have

⁸⁶ “War Quiz for America,” *Crisis*, April 1944, 113-114, 122.

⁸⁷ On the racist politics of Bilbo, Talmadge, and Rankin, see White, *A Man Called White*, 268; Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue: The Depression Decade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 106-107, 117-118, 122, 292; and Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 150.

⁸⁸ The *Pittsburgh Courier* explained on February 14: “Last week, without any public announcement or fanfare, the editors of The Courier introduced its war slogans—a double “V” for a double victory to colored America. We did this advisedly because we wanted to test the

seen, the idea of “double victories” had been introduced prior to the *Courier*’s official launch of the campaign. In 1941, Mary McLeod Bethune, a member of President Roosevelt’s Black Cabinet, declared: “We have the dual task of defeating Hitler abroad and Hitlerism at home.”⁸⁹ African American leaders and the black press shared a similar perspective with their audience and utilized such wartime rhetoric to advance their cause at home. Admittedly, during the war, the domestic victory aimed mainly at ending segregation and discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces.⁹⁰ But lynching was an equally urgent issue to solve. In October 1943, for example, the Alabama state convention of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) adopted a resolution urging support of the Gavagan anti-lynching bill and pledged the organization’s funds and efforts to promote an intensive campaign for the passage of the legislation “as an essential program for winning the war.”⁹¹

Under the “Double V” banner, African American leaders repeatedly warned the American public and the government that lynching provided perfect propaganda for the Axis Powers. On January 26, 1942, the day after the Sikeston lynching, the NAACP wired President Franklin Roosevelt requesting immediate legislation giving authority to the Federal government to proceed against lynch mobs and lynching. The telegram stated: “We are certain that Japanese propagandists are already citing this lynching as evidence of what colored races of the Far East response and popularity of such a slogan with our readers. The response has been overwhelming.” *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 14, 1942.

⁸⁹ Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land?*, 137.

⁹⁰ Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching*, 166-167. Zangrando observes that in the 1940s when the NAACP’s activities expanded, the anti-lynching bill ceased to be the organization’s primary legislative objective.

⁹¹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 30, 1943.

would suffer if the democracies win. . . .”⁹² On October 19, 1942, a week after another three lynchings occurred in Mississippi, the National Negro Congress, a Popular Front organization created by the Communist Party of the United States of America (CP-USA) in 1935, sent a telegram to President Roosevelt to protest the incident. Calling these lynchings “traitorous crimes,” the organization stated that the lynchings provided “a comfort to Hitler and the Axis enemies of the United Nations” that represented “a direct challenge to our national government and the win-the-war policies of our Commander-in-chief, by the white supremacy forces in this country, acting for Hitler.”⁹³ Referring the Sikeston lynching and the Mississippi lynchings, the *Crisis* affirmed: “in this war time a community that stages a lynching is working for Hitler and Tojo.” “These lynchings,” it continued, “are sabotaging our war effort, making it easier for Japan to influence the hundreds of millions of colored peoples in the Far East against the United Nations. American mobs make our ally, China, suspicious of the democracy of white people.”⁹⁴ By citing the leftist New York City paper *PM*, the *Pittsburgh Courier* simply wrote: “Axis propagandists know how to use a little ugly truth when we hand it to them. We hand it to them every time an American mob lynches a Negro, every time we discriminate against a Negro

⁹² *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 7, 1942.

⁹³ National Negro Congress Papers, part I, reel 23, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York. In spite of their anti-lynching efforts especially in relation to the Sikeston lynching, African American witnessed the refusal of federal anti-lynching bills. On February 7, 1942, for example, the *Baltimore Afro-American* reported on the death of eight anti-lynching bills that were introduced in the House of Representatives a year ago in the first session of the 77th Congress. The paper criticized that no comments were made in the Congress on the Sikeston lynching by either Missouri Senators or Congressmen, including then Senator Harry S. Truman, or the President Roosevelt. *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 7, 1942.

⁹⁴ *Crisis*, November 1942, 343.

soldier.”⁹⁵

These claims about Axis propagandists were not groundless. As we have seen, the Japanese government did launch a wartime propaganda operation targeting African Americans, and often used lynching to urge them to question the hypocrisy of American democracy. Although African American newspapers continuously paid attention to Japanese views on lynching, after Pearl Harbor they were more interested in how Japan used the news on American lynching. And these messages of foreign and domestic oppression surely reached African American masses as well. In February 1942, Archibald MacLeish, director of the War Department’s Office of Facts and Figures, received a letter from a white woman in New York, who had listened to his radio address delivered to the National Urban League. As a head of the newly established agency to disseminate information about wartime defense efforts to the general public, MacLeish shared with his black audience his naïve assertion of African Americans’ support for the ongoing war. The concerned white woman detailed what she had heard through her maid and several other black friends. “I learn that all Negroes, from menial laborers to professional people are unconvinced they have in fact, a stake in this country,” she told MacLeish. “They wonder whether living under the domination of the Japanese or even under Hitler, could be worse than living under the fascism as practiced in the southern states. They wonder if the brutality of the storm troopers is any worse than the brutality of a mob in Sikeston, Mo.”⁹⁶ While African Americans’ “Double V” campaign may have picked up middle-class male voices of dissent more often than others, the letter clearly revealed that

⁹⁵ *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 14, 1942.

⁹⁶ Barbara Dianne Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War, and the Politics of Race, 1938-1948* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 109-110.

skepticism about American democracy was shared among African Americans across class and gender.

The “Double V” ideology helped African Americans condemn lynching without risking being labeled as “un-American.” Since Americans lumped together Japan with Italy and Germany, African Americans tried to distance themselves from the Japanese, who had been their colored comrades for decades, thus redefined themselves as American citizens. In the May 1942 issue of the *Crisis*, Benjamin E. Mays, then the president of Morehouse College, insisted that African Americans “must and will be loyal to his country in the present crisis.” One of the reasons, according to Mays, was that Japan’s intentions did not serve black interests. He concluded:

One fact became clear to me. Japan has no particular love or interest in the darker people of the earth. Japan is for Japan. And she will seek to suppress and does suppress her darker brothers in the same way as imperialistic white nations. The idea that existed some years back that Japan would be the nation around which the darker races of earth might rally and look to for guidance is utter nonsense. Japan is interested in Japan. The American Negro therefore need have no sympathy for Japan. His destiny is in the United States of America and his salvation must be worked out here where the ideals are democratic and the religion is Christian.⁹⁷

African Americans may have had no need to sympathize with Japan as Mays insisted, but they did remain sympathetic with Japanese Americans, the only Axis-affiliated group incarcerated due to their ancestry. Less than a week after Pearl Harbor, in opposition to the governmental plan of Japanese internment, Seattle’s black newspaper *Northwest Enterprise* reminded African Americans: “the same mob spirit which would single them [Japanese Americans] out for slaughter has trailed you through the forest and to string you up at some

⁹⁷ *Crisis*, May 1942, 160, 165.

crossroad.”⁹⁸ In “Americans in Concentration Camps,” the *Crisis* attributed the incarceration of Japanese Americans to American racism by pointing out that neither German Americans nor Italian Americans were put into the internment camps. It further predicated: “What has happened to these [Japanese] Americans in recent months is of direct concern to the American Negro. For the barbarous treatment of these Americans is the result of the color line.”⁹⁹ “This may be a prelude to our own fate,” George Schuyler concluded. “Who knows?”¹⁰⁰

As in the United States, in Japan lynching provided a powerful symbol for American racism that contradicted the image of America as “a land of democracy and freedom.” Almost all the intellectuals and journalists in this chapter never forgot to point out such a contradiction. Ideology and background controlled how Japanese writers approached lynching. While some intellectuals and journalists criticized lynching as an infringement on basic human rights, others saw lynching in the context of Japanese political discourse. Race rioting, after the 1919 Paris Peace Conference spurned Japan’s racial equality proposal, encouraged Japanese pan-Asianists to link American racism with Western oppression against non-white people. These pan-Asianists announced that Japan had a mission to liberate them, thus implicitly justifying the idea of Japanese expansion in East Asia. Furthermore, the increased diplomatic friction between the United States and Japan encouraged the Japanese to find in lynching an effective means of deflecting American criticism of Japanese actions in China and elsewhere. Such tendencies culminated in Japan’s propaganda operation among African Americans during the Pacific War.

⁹⁸ Quintard Taylor, “Blacks and Asians in a White City: Japanese Americans and African Americans in Seattle, 1890-1940,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 23:4 (November 1991): 425.

⁹⁹ *Crisis*, September 1942, 281, 284.

¹⁰⁰ *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 25, 1942, quoted in Horne, “Tokyo Bound,” 26.

The anti-lynching movement along with Japanese criticisms of lynching reflected the unique racial politics of African Americans under the wartime condition. African-Americans' strategic shift toward publicizing the Japanese anti-lynching responses before Pearl Harbor shows how they negotiated their wartime status as a national being that was both black and American. In their "Double V" two-front war, they struggled to find an answer to what it meant to be "American," yet Japan's paradoxical status as a colored imperialist power gave them ambivalent feelings about Japan and the Japanese, thus complicating African American identity politics. Their contradictory views of Japan and the Japanese further reveals how African Americans faced their "double consciousness" in relation to the Japanese. To position themselves as Americans, African Americans had to consider imperial Japan the enemy, but at the same time, as people of color, they still sympathized to some extent with the Japanese as allies against Western imperialism and white supremacy. The Japanese case offers us one of the examples of African Americans' continuous struggles to form a wartime national identity in relation to other racialized subjects during periods of U.S. war in the Pacific in the following decades.

Wartime anti-lynching struggles show how African Americans created a discursive black public sphere where they advanced their crusade by utilizing the Axis propaganda on lynching. In so doing, black newspapers and magazines often provided African Americans, both writers and readers, with a space to remember not only lynching but also the victims. From cartoons graphically depicting graves of lynching victims and the burning and hanging of Cleo Wright, the poetic representation of lynching, to the "Remember Pearl Harbor, but Don't Forget Sikeston" and other similar slogans, they visualized both the act of lynching and its victims, thus attempting to place them in the forefront of the wartime national imagination. It is this

imaginative act of remembrance through which African Americans challenged the state neglect of lynching even during wartime.

CHAPTER TWO

With Pens, Buttons, and Signs: Anti-Lynching Activism in the Street

In the New Deal years, Mary McLeod Bethune was well aware of the magnitude of her racially symbolic if not politically influential presence in the White House. While feeling lonely as the only black among female government workers invited for a tea at the White House, Bethune wrote in her diary that she “thought how vitally important it was that I be here, to help these others get used to seeing us in high places.” She continued: “I know so well why I *must* be here, *must* go to tea at the White House.” Her very presence, historian Nancy J. Weiss has stated, was a “forceful and visible reminder that blacks were part of the New Deal constituency.” What is more important for our purpose, though, is Bethune’s obligated notion of the black (woman’s) visibility and physical presence in the public sphere of politically “high places,” or more precisely, her determination that she should represent her race as a respectable black woman in a respectable, politically high-profile setting (“tea at the White House”).¹ Indeed, more than any other civil rights movements during the time, this respectable presence was a key factor in the anti-lynching struggle for African Americans, who were too often labeled as sexually degraded subjects in the lynching discourse.

This chapter examines the role that African American anti-lynching activists played on streets by analyzing the photographic images of the picketers and fundraisers in the 1930s and the 1940s, including the NAACP members, the NACW clubwomen, and youths. It further sheds light on how their anti-lynching struggles were reported in publications, most notably in the NAACP’s magazine *The Crisis*, by looking at some of these images, their accompanying

¹ Nancy J. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 147-148. Emphasis in the original.

descriptions, and other related anti-lynching articles published there. The purpose of the federal anti-lynching legislation was to have the federal government solve this urgent and life-threatening problem of racism that most often targeted African Americans. It was also a legislative act of remembrance, which aimed at the governmental recognition of lynching through the effort to codify the very problem of lynching and its remedy in law. The NAACP's anti-lynching campaign in the 1930s and the 1940s culminated in the association's resumption of lobbying for a federal bill, but the NAACP, among other organizations, used other tactics as well, such as investigation of lynching, protest demonstrations, and nationwide fundraising. The *Crisis* extensively reported these activities along with updated information on the federal anti-lynching bills. Through the close examination of those reports, this chapter demonstrates how the magazine created a discursive black public sphere, where information on the NAACP's anti-lynching struggles was shared among the subscribers as supporters, thus producing a so-called "imagined community" of the anti-lynching movement.

Lynching became a spectacle of ultimate dehumanization and commodification of the black, particularly male, body. Not only the actual spectacle of lynching but also its representation, such as newspaper accounts and pictures of lynching, terrorized African Americans.² It was these sites of racial terror—actual, discursive, and representational—in which anti-lynching activists intervened to mobilize resistance.³ How, then, did African

² By commodification I mean the way the black body was turned into body parts as "souvenir" for white mobs to take home, or how the lynch victim became a subject for souvenir pictures and postcards. For the study of the victim's body as souvenir, see Harvey Young, "The Black Body as Souvenir in American Lynching," *Theatre Journal* 57 (2005): 639-657.

³ For example, one of the tactics the association often used was to publish, in the *Crisis* or other outlets, news accounts and pictures of lynching as a constant reminder of this heinous act. In order to let the public know its brutality, the NAACP had to revisit the discursive and

Americans' anti-lynching campaigns on the streets challenge and intervene in such a space of racial terror? How were those struggles reported? With these questions in mind, this chapter particularly focuses on how these anti-lynching campaigns helped black women create a black public sphere, in which they were able to make themselves visible and active in the history of lynching that had always been overrepresented by the black male experience while simultaneously maintaining their respectable womanhood. Not only did black protest rallies and other grass-roots activities against lynching make it possible for the African American masses to participate in political movements, but they also functioned as a counter-public sphere where black men and women presented themselves as respectable citizens by protesting heinous atrocities. Close examination of the photographic images of African American anti-lynching activists in the historical context of lynching through the analytical framework of the politics of respectability shows us the hidden transcript of the gendered politics of African American struggles against lynching.

Banners, Signs, and Nooses: Representing the Lynch Victims

In October 1936, the *Crisis* published a picture on its cover with the sensational caption: "Death Flag" (see Figure 2.1). Beneath the caption was the message: "See page 293," suggesting that the reader go to the contents page for more details. The page explained that the flag hanging was planned after every lynching "as a method of publicizing and protesting against lynching." It further noted that on this particular occasion the flag was hung to mark the lynching of A. L. McCamy in Dalton, Georgia, on September 6th, which was the ninth incident on record for that

representational site of violence. See Jonathan Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching: Racial Violence and Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 22-31; Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 40-43; and Dora Apel and Shawn Michelle Smith, *Lynching Photographs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 23-24, 44-45, 59-61.

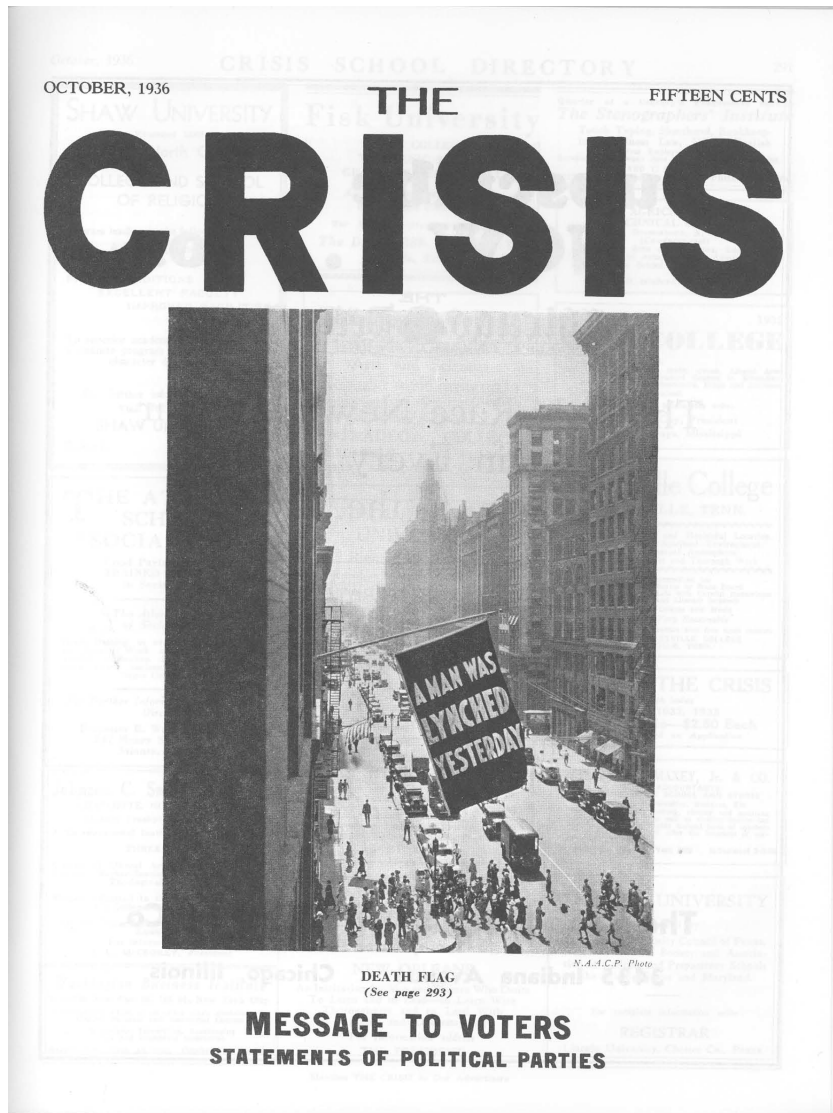


Figure 2.1. *Crisis* Cover (October 1936)

year according to the NAACP.⁴

The picture clearly depicts the power of forming a political space for the anti-lynching struggle on two levels: first, on the street, and second, on the magazine cover. It captured a black banner with a message in white letters hanging from the window of the NAACP's headquarter office in Manhattan (see Figure 2.2). The message, "A Man Was Lynched Yesterday," simply announced the disturbing fact that another lynching incident had occurred somewhere in the United States (in Georgia in this case) on the previous day. The information itself was not so noteworthy, because any newspaper account could have told its readers more detailed stories about this particular lynching. What is rather important here is that a representation of lynching was inserted into the public space. The picture shows how the flag, hanging up in the air on the street of New York's Fifth Avenue, functioned as a substitute for the actual lynch victim. By the flag's presence, the nameless victim, who had been murdered somewhere else, was taken to Manhattan to be imagined as well as recognized by the passersby on the street. It is this imagination that the NAACP aimed to stir up among people who might otherwise be indifferent to "another" lynching.

The flag hoisting was a strategy to recreate, in a symbolic way, a lynching spectacle for the northern city dwellers to vicariously witness racial terror that most frequently occurred in the South. By so doing, the NAACP publicly commemorated lynching and the lynch victim. The association occupied a space, not only on the paper pages but also in the air, to display the simplest yet most compelling obituary of lynch victims. As a constant reminder of racial terror, the protesting power of this flag hoisting should not be overlooked. The banner appeared twenty

⁴ *Crisis*, October 1936, 293.

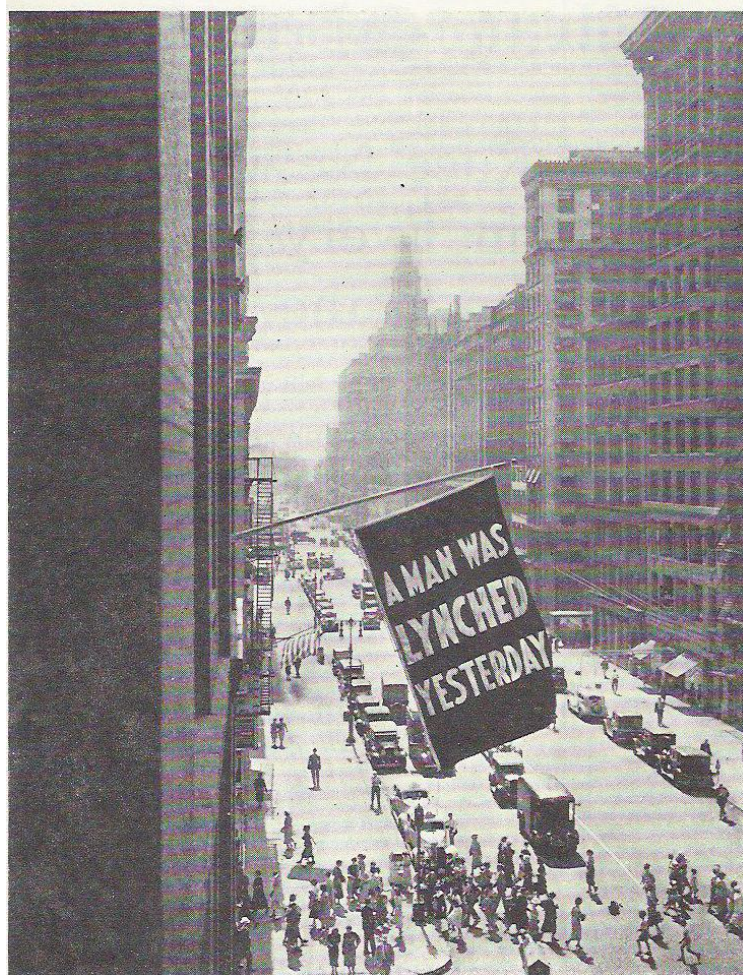


Figure 2.2. NAACP Banner (1936)
Source: Crisis, October 1936

times up on the street in 1935.⁵ The actual color of the banner is unknown due to the nature of black-white photograph, but on the *Crisis* cover, the reprinted monotone image of the flag hoisting, in which *white* letters on *black* banner represented white mob violence inflicting upon the black body, possibly sent the readers an even more vivid message of what lynching was all about.

Hoisting the “death flag” was not the only way for the NAACP to remember lynch victims and to protest lynching; anti-lynching activists brought out the signs and other instruments on the street to publicly deliver their messages. For example, the association conducted an anti-lynching picket in Washington D.C. on December 11, 1934 (see Figure 2.3). As seen in one of the picket signs that read: “Follow the President Outlaw Lynching,” the NAACP was in the midst of intensive lobbying campaign for the passage of the Costigan-Wagner federal anti-lynching bill. According to the *Crisis*, picketing was primarily conducted to protest against the “failure of the federal government to take any action in the Claude Neal lynching” of 1934 and “failure of Attorney H. S. Cummings to include Lynching on the program of the National Crime Conference” that was held in D.C., December 10-13.⁶ Among the picketers were prominent black leaders in the D.C. area, including the magazine’s managing editor Roy Wilkins, George B. Murphy, Jr. of the *Baltimore African-American*’s Washington office, attorney Edward P. Lovett, president of the NAACP’s D.C. branch Virginia

⁵ The banner had been used since the 1920s. In 1926, for example, it appeared 30 times. *Life*, December 6, 1968, 94; Margaret Rose Vendryes, “Hanging on Their Walls: An Art Commentary on Lynching, The Forgotten 1935 Art Exhibition,” in Judith Jackson Fossett and Jeffrey A. Tucker, eds., *Race Consciousness: African-American Studies for the New Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 156; Apel, *Imagery of Lynching*, 51. Due to the disturbing nature of the protest, in 1938 the association was threatened with the termination of lease and forced to discontinue the practice.

⁶ *Crisis*, January 1935, 26.

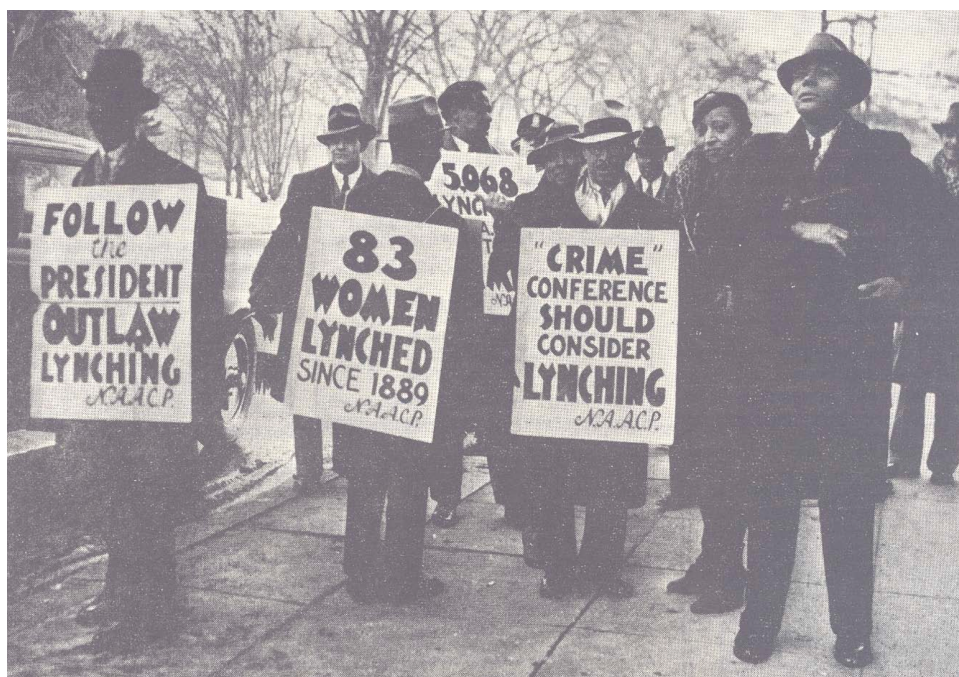


Figure 2.3. NAACP Picketers on the Street (December 1934)
Left to Right: Roy Wilkins, George B. Murphy, Jr. (with back turned),
Edward P. Lovett, Virginia R. McGuire, and Charles H. Houston
Source: Crisis, January 1935

R. McGuire, and attorney/Howard University law professor Charles H. Houston.

Sponsored by the Department of Justice, the conference was scheduled to discuss the anti-crime policy of the first Roosevelt Presidency with the President and the FBI Director John Edgar Hoover as keynote speakers. While its agenda included prevention of interstate crime by coordination between the federal and state police, the conference neglected lynching as a pressing subject within crime despite the interstate kidnapping and lynching of Neal that had just occurred. Neal, a young African American field hand, who had been arrested for alleged rape and murder of a white woman in Greenwood, Florida, and sent to jail in Brewton, Alabama for his safety, was kidnapped by a mob, transported back to Florida, and murdered on October 26, 1934. Seeing the Neal incident as “a perfect case for federal persecution,” in November the NAACP repeatedly wired its appeal to Cummings to place lynching on the conference agenda. The department, however, declined the association’s repeated requests, even after President Roosevelt denounced lynching as one of the major crimes in his keynote speech on the opening night of the conference.⁷ The NAACP decided to hold a picket in the following day. Four picketers were arrested immediately, and charged with parading without a permit and violation of the D.C. sign law that prohibited carrying a sign larger than twelve inches.⁸

The picketers on the street protested the conference’s neglect of lynching by holding such picket signs as “‘Crime’ Conference Should Consider Lynching” and “5068 Lynchings in U.S.A. Is This Crime?”⁹ In reprinting this picketing picture on its January 1935 cover, the *Crisis*

⁷ Claire Bond Potter, *War on Crime: Bandits, G-men, and the Politics of Mass Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 123-124, 171; *Crisis*, October 1935, 310.

⁸ *Crisis*, January 1935, 5, 26.

⁹ *Crisis*, January 1935, 26.

further emphasized this point (see Figure 2.4). Beneath the picture appeared an enlarged title of the feature article “Public Enemy No.1 Is the Mob.” In the 1930s, the FBI started using the term “Public Enemy” to describe the most-wanted fugitives and gangsters, who were often favorably portrayed by the public. To reverse such an image, Hoover introduced the “Public Enemy Number One” concept, a title first given to the notorious bank robber John Dillinger in the early 1930s. This successful image campaign drew national attention and support to federal anti-crime initiatives that Cummings proposed.¹⁰ By associating a lynch mob with the infamous criminal, the *Crisis* cover alerted the readers that lynching was an equally heinous crime deserving federal attention.

Among all the picket signs, perhaps the most outstanding was a sign that read: “83 Women Lynched Since 1889.” This sign seemed to function the same as the other sign behind it, that is, giving the viewers numbers of lynch victims, in this case, female victims. However, it revealed the very obvious yet oft-overlooked fact that there were female, predominantly African American, victims who were lynched in the past 45 years from 1889 to 1934. Even though the number was quite small compared to the total (5,068 according to the other sign), this information was highly significant, given that lynching was usually practiced based on, and discussed in, a white masculinist discourse that excluded black women. In this discourse, lynching was explained as a communal persecution of black men who allegedly raped, or

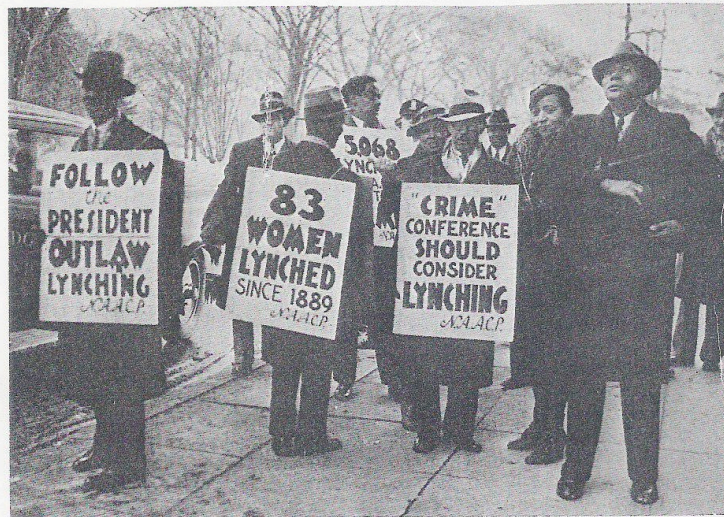
¹⁰ Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *The FBI: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 90-92.

JANUARY, 1935

THE

FIFTEEN CENTS

CRISIS



CRIME CONFERENCE PICKETS
(Police called the "Black Maria"—See Pages 5 and 26)

International

PUBLIC ENEMY NO. 1 IS THE MOB

A Symposium on Lynching by Oswald Garrison Villard—DuBose Heyward
— W. E. Woodward — James Weldon Johnson — Fannie Hurst —
Senators Edward P. Costigan and Robert F. Wagner — William
Pickens—Gertrude Atherton — George F. Milton — Martha
Ostenso — Sherwood Anderson — Pearl S. Buck

NATIONAL FOOTBALL CHAMPIONS

By William I. (Bill) Gibson

Figure 2.4. *Crisis* Cover (January 1935)

attempted to rape, white women.¹¹

Such a myth of the “black rapist” was so rampant that the NAACP, among many other anti-lynching groups, spent much energy to refute it. Historian Jonathan Markovitz argues that although anti-lynching activists were concerned with racist representations of, and racial violence against, both black men and women, they were forced to combat this rape myth (thus less able to confront racist representations of black women) because the major justification of lynching focused on black male sexuality and criminality.¹² This sign might have simply tried to remove the stigma of the “black rapist” image from black men by pointing out the existence of black female victims who were not sex criminals. But it is crucial to note that the sign, at the same time, placed black women in the forefront of the dominant lynching discourse.

The sign focusing on female victims becomes even more significant, given that the Neal incident involved two black women as possible lynching victims: his mother, Annie Smith, and his aunt, Sallie Smith. The Sheriff arrested both of them, who lived with Neal, for allegedly hiding evidence of the murder. The three were placed in the same jail at first, but hundreds of an angry mob seizing them caused the sheriff to transfer Annie and Sallie to separate jail. The decision spared their lives, but they were never returned to the local jail even a month after the lynching of Neal for fear that they would be lynched, too. Indeed, most black women lynching victims were murdered because of their alleged responsibility for the crime of their husband or

¹¹ Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Race Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 116-118, 183-185, 306-309; Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the 19th-Century South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 198-207; Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 301-307.

¹² Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching*, 3, 8-18.

son.¹³

The picture captures another simple yet significant fact: that all the picketers were out in the street to protest for those who had been lynched. The signs mentioning the number of lynch victims suggest that the picketers remembered those victims collectively, if not individually. In this sense, the anti-lynching picketing functioned as an act of remembrance that created a space for mourning. The picketers were well aware of their responsibility to represent the voiceless lynch victims. According to the *Crisis*, another picket sign that was out on street (yet not seen in this photo) read: “Lynch Victims Cannot Talk, We Speak for Them.”¹⁴ What can be also reminded is the fact that the NAACP often rallied to protest particular lynching incidents throughout the decade. As mentioned in Chapter One, the association’s St. Louis and St. Louis County branches sponsored a silent protest parade against the Sikeston lynching in 1942, in which one protestor held the sign that read: “‘Remember Pearl Harbor’ But Don’t Forget Sikeston” (see Figure 2.5). While the sign showed how African Americans responded to the wartime lynching incident through the “double victory” ideology of fighting fascism abroad and at home, it also captured the NAACP’s commemorative effort not to forget lynching.¹⁵ Just like

¹³ NAACP, *The Lynching of Claude Neal*, 1, 7; reprinted in George McJimsey, ed., *Documentary History of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidency, Vol. 11: FDR and Protection from Lynching, 1934-1945* (Congressional Information Service, 2003), 208, 304; James R. McGovern, *Anatomy of a Lynching: The Killing of Claude Neal* (Chapel Hill: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 44-46, 51-55. For recent scholarship on black women lynching victims, see Crystal N. Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Race and Lynching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Kerry Segrave, *Lynchings of Women in the United States: The Recorded Cases, 1851-1946* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2010); and Evelyn M. Simien, ed., *Gender and Lynching: Politics of Memory* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).

¹⁴ *Crisis*, January 1935, 26.

¹⁵ *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 28, 1942.



Figure 2.5. NAACP Protestors with Anti-Lynching Signs (1942)

Source: Visual Materials from the NAACP, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LOT 13093, no. 24.

the flag-hoisting photo, this picture also shows how the NAACP used a similar anti-lynching tactic for occupying a space, this time by using the picketing signs and their own bodies as media through which the organization represented the dead.

Indeed, it was this determined action to occupy public space by the NAACP that resulted in winning another anti-lynching space. The January issue of the *Crisis* reported that the D. C. branch director McGuire and a committee were refused a picket permit by the police on the first day of the Crime Conference and refused again on the following day, but “the branch decided to proceed and take chances on arrest.” While four picketers were actually arrested for violating the sign law, their struggle did not end in vain. The *Crisis* further reported that later on the day of picketing an African American bar association received an invitation to send five delegates to the conference. Although the subject of lynching was not placed on the program, these delegates gained an opportunity to briefly discuss lynching from the floor, and one of the delegates Charles H. Houston presented an anti-lynching resolution to the committee.¹⁶

Following the NAACP’s action, students of Howard University also protested against the National Crime Conference that omitted lynching from its agenda. In representing lynch victims in their anti-lynching picketing, they utilized the most striking iconography of lynching—nooses. More than sixty students met at night on December 11, 1934 with the D.C. branch of the NAACP that picketed earlier on that day. The students appeared at the conference hall on the next day “in a dramatic picket line,” as described in the *Crisis*.¹⁷ They didn’t hold big picket signs as the NAACP picketers did; instead, they turned themselves into vocal signs by each wearing a sign on his/her chest and a noose around his/her neck (see Figure 2.6).

¹⁶ *Crisis*, January 1935, 5.

¹⁷ *Crisis*, August 1935, 233.

The meeting with the NAACP taught these student picketers a useful lesson. The signs were made small enough—eleven-inches wide—to avoid violating the sign law. Instead of a vocal protest parade that would have needed permission, they silently lined up from the entrance of the conference hall to the sidewalk in front of it, welcoming the conference participants who came out of the morning sessions. What this photo captures is an imaginary lynching scene that the picketers strategically created, and the conference participants eventually witnessed. Standing still and unspoken, each “hanged” picketer embodied a lynching victim’s silenced body, thereby directing at the conference participants a silent, yet (or therefore) much vocal protest.¹⁸

Their bodily politics are captured best in the photo of one female student picketer (see Figure 2.7). Similarly to one of the NAACP signs in the picketing photo previously discussed (Figure 2.3), the sign stuck on her chest, “94 Women 48 Years,” reminded the public of the existence of female lynch victims. Through the body of this black female student wearing a noose and the sign, the protest message became clearer: she visually represented all the female victims, claiming that their presence should not be forgotten. These pictures clearly show how African American picketers created their own spaces—black public spheres—not only to contest the atrocious act of lynching but also to challenge the denial of lynching as a crime and the erasure of female lynch victims.

¹⁸ *Crisis*, August 1935, 233; October 1935, 310.



Figure 2.6. Howard University Student Protest (December 1934)

Source: ©Bettmann/CORBIS



Figure 2.7. A Howard Student Picketer (December 1934)
*Source: Kathleen Thompson and Hilary Mac Austin, *The Face of Our Past: Images of Black Women from Colonial America to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999)*

The Politics of Respectability in Anti-Lynching Protests

While the anti-lynching picketers in these pictures utilized different ways to represent lynch victims, they seemed to have one thing in common: a strategy to exhibit positive visual images of themselves. In the pictures of the NAACP picketers (Figures 2.3 and 2.5), for example, both black male and female picketers were well dressed with nice hats on, gracefully standing with or without the signs. Similarly, in the pictures of the Howard students picketing, nicely dressed black female and male students stood on the street with dignity. They presented themselves as respectable citizens. In fact, this concept of “respectability” was crucial for African American social movements during the Jim Crow era when the contemporary pseudo-scientific race theory that had legitimized black inferiority permeated the nation and justified racist practices of lynching and segregation. African American activists and reformers of the early twentieth century oriented themselves toward countering the image of inferior blacks by utilizing what historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has called the “politics of respectability.” The politics of respectability, a strategy of collective racial uplift used by black female elites, had the dual goals of gaining racial self-help and respect from the respectable white community. To counter the prevalent stereotypical images of inferior, lascivious blacks, it aimed at promoting middle-class, Victorian ideals of thrift, hard work, religious and educational values, and sexual purity among the black masses, whose uneducated, working-class values and behaviors were considered to degrade the whole African American community.¹⁹ Black elite women utilized the politics of respectability to defend black womanhood throughout their reform

¹⁹ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “The Politics of Respectability,” in *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), chapter 7.

activities in both sacred and secular settings.²⁰ Moreover, recent scholarship has shown that black men also utilized the idea of respectability to construct respectable manhood as “race men,” as seen in the cases of W. E. B. Du Bois, the YMCA, and the Garvey movement.²¹

As Higginbotham and others have rightly pointed out, the politics of respectability (or similar racial uplift ideology) that embraced a set of these Victorian values emphasized the class differentiation within the African American community, for the stereotypical racial identification often lumped black middle-class and working-class people together. The black elites’ discursive strategy of respectability thus represented the black lower-class as the uncivilized “Other” to construct themselves as a respectable and civilized cohort as middle-class whites, thus justifying their claims to citizenship and bourgeois privileges regardless of race.²² Marcus Garvey and his male supporters in the UNIA, for example, constructed their individual and collective gendered identity from Victorian middle-class manhood to challenge charges that the organization largely consisted of poor, uneducated, and violent black people.²³ Although the politics of

²⁰ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*; Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers during the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

²¹ Martin Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Nina Mjagkij, “True Manhood: The YMCA and Radical Advancement, 1890-1930,” in Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt, eds., *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 138-159; Ayumu Kaneko, “A Strong Man to Run a Race: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Politics of Black Masculinity at the Turn of the Century,” *The Japanese Journal of American Studies* 14 (2003), 105-122.

²² Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, chapter 7; Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

²³ Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents*, 76, 111-136.

respectability was a somewhat elitist strategy, it was believed by many middle-class blacks to be one of the most effective strategies to counter racist representation.

While racial stereotyping of African American males as brutes was something anti-lynching organizations focused on refuting, they were cognizant that the real reason behind lynching of these so-called “black rapists” lay in the political, economic, and social advancement of African Americans that threatened the existing white patriarchal power structure. Anti-lynching activists knew that well-off respectable citizens of their race were often labeled as savage sex predators by white perpetrators of lynching. Most typical of such cases was Ida B. Wells’ experience, which prompted her to devote herself to the struggle against lynching. In 1892, Wells heard the news about the lynching of her friends, Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Henry Stewart, who were accused of raping a white woman in Memphis, Tennessee. Wells revealed the truth about the “rape myth” based on her firsthand knowledge of these men, who were established co-owners of a grocery store that was in a fierce rivalry with a white-owned grocery in town. In one of her publications, she stated that these lynch victims were “peaceful, law-abiding citizens and energetic business men.”²⁴ Wells’ pioneering campaign was followed by later anti-lynching organizations, which likewise pointed out that rape accusations were fabricated to mask the economic reason. They challenged the image of the “black rapist” through diverse media such as pamphlets, magazines, and newspapers. In *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (1929), for example, then the NAACP’s assistant secretary Walter White stated: “All of these reasons for the dominance of sex as a factor in lynching, with all their other

²⁴ Ida B. Wells, “A Red Record” (1892), reprinted in Wells-Barnett, *On Lynchings: Southern Horrors, A Red Record, Mob Rule in New Orleans* (Salem, NH: Ayer, 1991), 36.

complications, center in one objective—the economic ascendancy over Negro labour.”²⁵

The effort to debunk rape as a rationale for lynching was not only conducted in writing. Also on streets, anti-lynching activists demonstrated a similar argument by using their own bodies. As we have seen earlier, on the one hand the signs mentioning the presence of black female victims successfully refuted lynchers’ justification of lynching alleged black rapists. Anti-lynching picketers in the street, on the other hand, further showed the truth to the public visually through their respectable bodies that epitomized the economically uplifted status of African Americans. As the photos of the Crime Conference picketers and the protesters of the Sikeston lynching portray, the anti-lynching picketers’ attire—from men’s tailored suits and ties, women’s dresses, to their hats—accentuated the economic standing of those picketers, thus showing their political approach of how to represent the advancement of the race as a whole. Their poised presence in the rallies, which were seemingly conducted as silent protests, further reinforced their respectable presence in the public sphere. While lynching was a spectacle of persecuting black brutes in the public arena, the street picketers created a counter spectacle by exhibiting their respectable presence.

These pictures also show gendered dimensions of the picketers’ politics of respectability. For black male picketers, presenting their well-dressed and dignified bodies in the public arena was highly significant because of the widely-circulated discourse and representation of the black rapist. In the 1930s, tortured bodies of alleged black sex criminals—shot, castrated, burnt, and/or hung were still a dominant and familiar image of lynching in the predominantly southern landscape as well as in the public mind. In fact, the NAACP’s Crime Conference picketing was, as mentioned earlier, conducted partly in response to the lynching of alleged sex criminal Claude

²⁵ Walter White, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (1929, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2001), 76.

Neal, who was castrated, mutilated, shot, burnt, dragged, and hung in a spectacle setting. Thus the black male picketers at the Crime Conference—both the NAACP members and the Howard students—visually challenged such a negatively-sexualized image of black men by re/presenting respectable middle-class manhood. Particularly striking is how by wearing nooses the black male students represented lynch victims, but in a respectable way. Nooses, as the most symbolic iconography of lynching, enabled the male students to enter a representational site of lynching, where their bodily poises replaced the images of lynch victims from savage rapists to emasculated and tortured bodies—to those of esteemed, intelligent, and law-abiding citizens. Thus, these male picketers’ respectable presence itself functioned as a counter-representation that challenged the dominant representation of lynching. As cultural critic Stuart Hall has argued, one of the strategies to counter racialized representation is to challenge it from within. Black male picketers deployed their bodies as the principal site of its representational strategy, challenging such racialized representation of the “black rapist” from within.²⁶

The black press seemed to be aware of the importance of exhibiting African American males as respectable citizens. For example, in the report on a dinner speech entitled “The Lynching of Claude Neal” that Roy Wilkins made in front of African American members of the YMCA in New York, the *New York Amsterdam News* proudly described him as “a Negro who was proud of his birth—tall, young, smooth-shaven, handsome, restful-looking in his business suit.” And his audience was “strictly . . . business and professional men. . . . [S]ome belonged to the college fraternities, and all were men who read The Amsterdam News and were active in a

²⁶ Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 1997), 274.

civic way.”²⁷ This account did not simply show that black male elites remembered the lynching of Neal in the respectable setting; it also attempted to form a counter-discourse refuting the myth of the black rapist, by focusing on Wilkins’ decent appearance and his respectable audience.

Black women, too, protested lynching by collectively utilizing the politics of respectability, but mainly for their own purposes of protecting black womanhood. At the Howard students’ Crime Conference picketing, for example, the bodily presence of these black female students functioned differently from that of their male comrades. While they entered a representational site of lynching just as the male student picketers did, with a noose around their necks, female students recreated a scene quite unfamiliar to the public: lynching of black women. Given that female lynch victims were underrepresented not only in the dominant lynching discourse but also in the anti-lynching struggles as mentioned earlier, representing the presence of female victims was a crucial mission especially for black women. In this sense, the photo of the female student (Figure 2.7) wearing a noose and the sign mentioning the number of female lynch victims is of particular importance. Among other female picketers, she was well aware of the counter-representational power that her respectable body could bring in the discussion on lynching.

Similarly, in 1946, black clubwomen conducted an anti-lynching protest by bringing their respectable presence to the street. Immediately after the quadruple lynching in Monroe, Georgia on July 25, 1946, members of the NACW picketed at the White House on July 30. The killing of two African American young married couples—World War II veteran George W. Dorsey, his wife Mae Murray Dorsey, her sister Dorothy Malcolm and husband Roger Malcolm—prompted

²⁷ *New York Amsterdam News*, December 15, 1934. Wilkins visited Marianna, Florida, during his trip to the NAACP branches in the South on November 24, about a month after the incident. *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 8, 1934.

nationwide anti-lynching protests and picketing.²⁸ Among them were a mass protest march conducted by the National Negro Congress and other organizations in Washington, D.C. on July 29; “Rally for Justice in Georgia” at the Madison Square Park in New York on July 31, sponsored by an affiliate of the Congress of Industrial Organizations; and a silent protest parade sponsored by the NAACP and other organizations in San Francisco on August 13.²⁹ In D.C., the NACW was holding its national convention with five hundred members celebrating the association’s golden jubilee from July 27 to August 2, when the Georgia lynching became a pressing issue. On the second day of the convention, the participants discussed how to respond as a collective body representing the association’s protest of the Georgia lynching. NACW President Christine S. Smith appointed the committee to draft anti-lynching resolutions, one of which was to be sent each to President Harry Truman, Congress, and the newspapers; the Committee of Picketing was formed to further arrange their picketing scheduled for the following day. The committee discussed and announced to the members details of the picket including time, transportation, and procedure.³⁰

In spite of the limited time for preparation, black clubwomen carefully organized the picket to send their collective message to the public. On July 30, the NACW members went over their strategies for course of action in the morning meeting before it adjourned for the 11 a.m. picketing parade at the White House. According to the convention minutes, President Smith

²⁸ *Crisis*, September 1946, 277.

²⁹ *Crisis*, October 1946, 298, 300, 312; NACW Convention Minutes (1946), 9, Records of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (NACW), reel 2; Mildred G. Mayne of New York Women’s Auxiliary for the National Maritime Union to the National Negro Congress, July 30, 1946, Papers of the National Negro Congress, part I, reel 24.

³⁰ NACW Convention Minutes (1946) 8-10, Records of the NACW, reel 2.

stressed the significance of presenting a united front in the picketing parade, and Letha Fleming, a delegate from the Ohio branch of the association and the chairman of the picketing committee, gave the members “detailed instructions for the forming and procedure for the parade.”³¹ The realization of those instructions can be seen in the pictures of their picketing, where a long line of nicely-dressed NACW members—delegates with anti-lynching signs leading the rest—were marching to the White House (see Figure 2.8) and those who were holding the signs were solemnly rallying outside the White House (see Figures 2.9). Similar to women picketers in the other picketing photos, these images of the NACW protest capture how black women’s respectable body presence functioned in creating another counter-public space for the anti-lynching struggle. For black women, it was even more important to be on the street as anti-lynching activists for two major reasons—to remember the victims of rape and lynching.

Given its history, it is clear that the NACW conducted its anti-lynching campaign by utilizing the politics of respectability. The NACW was the first national black women’s club established in 1896 by regional black clubwomen. Their decision to found the association was prompted in part by one particular incident. In the previous year, a white male editor in Missouri had written a letter against Ida B. Wells’ attack of white “rapists” who were never punished for their crime of assaulting black women. In his letter, the infuriated editor labeled black women prostitutes and liars.³² As Wells rightfully pointed out, the sexual abuse of black women was never considered rape under slavery because of their status as white owners’ property and

³¹ NACW Convention Minutes (1946), 13, Records of the NACW, reel 2.

³² Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 22-23.



Figure 2.8. NACW Members Marching to the White House (1946)

Source: Deborah Willis and Jane Lusaka, eds., *Visual Journal: Harlem and D. C. in the Thirties and Forties* (Washington: The Center for African American History and Culture and Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 91.



Figures 2.9. NACW Picketers in front of the White House (1946)

Source: ©Bettman/CORBIS

their alleged promiscuous nature.³³ The “absence” of black women rape victims continued in the postbellum period, and even lynching of black men was attributed to black women’s lack of virtue.³⁴ With its motto “Lifting as We Climb,” the NACW emphasized racial uplift and self-help in their reform efforts, and one of its major goals was protection of black womanhood. Through various social reform programs from temperance to settlement houses, kindergartens, religion and education, black clubwomen worked for the moral elevation of their less-privileged, less-educated sisters who had moved from the South partly because of sexual exploitation.³⁵ By so doing, black clubwomen responded to accusations of their alleged sexual promiscuity by constructing respectable womanhood.³⁶ As the NACW protest pictures clearly show, these black clubwomen collectively presented themselves as respectable women in their anti-lynching picketing, thus successfully challenging the circulated image of “promiscuous” black women that existed behind the lynching scenario.

Moreover, in this particular protest, black clubwomen had another important mission: to protest for two black women victims who were lynched for one of their husbands’ action of stabbing a white man. During the NACW convention, the anti-lynching resolutions committee

³³ Thelma Jennings, “‘Us Colored Women Had To Go through a Plenty’: Sexual Exploitation of African-American Slave Women,” *Journal of Women’s History* (Winter 1990): 45-74; Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Women Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 20-39.

³⁴ Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (1981, New York: Vintage, 1983), 182.

³⁵ Darlene Clark Hine, “Black Migration on the Urban Midwest: The Gender Dimension, 1915-1945,” in Joe William Trotter, Jr., ed., *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 130. Hine has pointed out that black women were sexually exploited and abused not only by southern whites but also black men, within and outside of their families.

³⁶ White, *Too Heavy a Road*, 27-86.

released resolutions appealing to the Attorney General to support and press the federal legislation against lynching and mob violence, in which the committee highlighted the presence of female victims: “the barbarities have reached a tragically alarming state, in that women are now being lynched with impunity.”³⁷ Indeed, the NACW had a long experience in conducting protest campaigns against lynching of black women. In 1914, for example, the NACW passed a resolution protesting the “lynching of two colored women” that year. Among the committee members was anti-lynching foremother Ida B. Wells-Barnett.³⁸ Also in 1918, the association joined other black women’s organizations in raising their voices against the lynching of Mary Turner, a pregnant black woman who was burned alive for protesting the lynching of her husband in Georgia. Lucy Laney, an NACW leader and famous educator in Savannah, Georgia, urged black women to petition authorities for further investigation of the incident and prevention of future lynching.³⁹ In 1922, the participants of the NACW convention appointed an anti-lynching delegation consisting of fourteen women to visit President Warren G. Harding, who had opposed lynching during his campaign for the presidency. New Jersey delegate Ida Brown spoke for the group, providing the president with the statistics of lynching. She focused on the fact that eighty-three women had been lynched in the U.S. between 1887 and 1922.⁴⁰ The association’s 1904 resolution is illustrative of the ways in which the NACW clubwomen

³⁷ NACW Convention Minutes (1946), 69-70, Records of the NACW, reel 2.

³⁸ NACW Convention Minutes (1914), 25, Records of the NACW, reel 1.

³⁹ Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 96.

⁴⁰ Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, “African-American Women in the Anti-Lynching Crusade,” in Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, eds., *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 153.

presented themselves and their anti-lynching mission. It stated:

In view of the fact of the numerous lynchings and the many victims burned at the stake, extending even to women, which have occurred in nearly every section of our country;

Be it Resolved, That we, the representatives of negro womanhood, do heartily deplore and condemn this barbarous taking of human life, and that we appeal to the sentiment of the Christian world to check and eradicate this growing evil; and be it further

Resolved, That we do all in our power to bring criminals to justice, and that we appeal to all legislative bodies and courts of justice to see that all persons are protected in their rights as citizens.⁴¹

As the “representative of negro womanhood,” their anti-lynching appeal was directed toward the “sentiment of the Christian world.” Such rhetoric quite clearly represented the Victorian ideology and the Protestant ethic that they thought middle-class black womanhood should embody.

As briefly mentioned earlier, black women had been long excluded from the dominant racially gendered discourse of lynching that focused on white men as chivalrous protectors, white women as innocent victims, and black men as savage rapists.⁴² By imaginatively revisiting the space of racial terror through the politics of respectability, these black female protestors—the NAACP members, the Howard students, and the NACW clubwomen—countered the white supremacist lynching discourse that had silenced voices of black female victims of lynching *and* rape. Furthermore, the picture of the Howard female student, in particular, could send a strong protest message about rape even more visually, for her

⁴¹ NACW Convention Minutes (1904), 25, Records of the NACW, reel 1.

⁴² Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985, 1999), 176-177; Nell Irvin Painter, “Who Was Lynched?” *Nation* (November 11, 1991): 577; Robyn Weigman, “The Anatomy of Lynching,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3:3 (1993): 466 n. 1.

seemingly fair complexion was a possible reminder of the legacy of racial mixing, or more precisely, white slaveowners' sexual exploitation of female slaves.

Fundraising was another arena where the politics of respectability was utilized in the NAACP's anti-lynching struggle. The association often launched fundraising campaigns for its struggle against lynching, in which black women played a crucial role. In February 1937, for instance, the *Crisis* reported in detail the NAACP's ongoing nation-wide campaign to sell and wear anti-lynching buttons (see Figure 2.10). The campaign was planned under the direction of National Field Secretary Daisy E. Lampkin. Lampkin, a noted suffragist and civil rights activist for decades whom Walter White had recruited as the NAACP's regional field secretary in 1930, was offered the national position in 1935 for her impressive leadership as a fundraiser. The NAACP planned the sale of 150,000 buttons to meet the cost of the association's fight for presenting the Wagner-Van Nuys anti-lynching bill in Congress, a revision of the Costigan-Wagner bill sponsored by the NAACP. The staff was allotted another 100,000 buttons for sale or distribution.⁴³ With its headline that read, "Anti-Lynching Button Sale Sweeps Country," the *Crisis* report informed readers of the objective of the campaign (fundraising for the association's anti-lynching and legal defense work), the number of groups involved (more than 250), the official campaign period (February 1-12), the price of the buttons (10 cents each minimum), and the current sales record by region.⁴⁴ The April issue of the *Crisis* announced that the campaign was extended for several more weeks "because of the popular demand."⁴⁵

⁴³ Daisy E. Lampkin to the NACW, January 15, 1937, Records of the NACW, reel 10; Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching*, 140.

⁴⁴ *Crisis*, February 1937, 52.

⁴⁵ *Crisis*, April 1937, 116.

Along the N.A.A.C.P. Battlefront

Anti-lynching Button Sale Sweeps Country

The nation-wide campaign of the N.A.A.C.P. to sell anti-lynching buttons in the month of February is meeting enthusiastic response. More than 250 groups, including branches of the N.A.A.C.P., are selling these buttons. In Harlem alone, thirty committees are at work.



The largest order so far has been placed by the Harlem groups. It totals 18,000 buttons. The next largest order comes from Detroit, Mich., which has ordered 8,000. Branches which have ordered 5,000 include Pittsburgh, Pa., Chicago, Ill., and Toledo, O. Other large orders: 3,000, Cleveland, O., Brooklyn, N. Y., Louisville, Ky.; 2,000, Charleston, W. Va., Buffalo, N. Y., Richmond, Va., Baltimore, Md., Albany, N. Y., Oklahoma City, Okla.; 1,000, Boston, Mass., Springfield, Mass., Chester, Pa., Charleston, S. C., Flint, Mich., E. St. Louis, Ill., St. Petersburg, Fla., Philadelphia, Pa., Jackson, Miss., Wilson, N. C., Indianapolis, Ind., Plaquemine, La., Lansing, Mich., Logan, W. Va., Staten Island, N. Y.

Other orders for 500 or more buttons include Jersey City, N. J., Dover, Ohio, Youngstown, Ohio, Jamaica, N. Y., Portsmouth, Ohio, Petersburg, Va., Fairmont, W. Va., Morton, Pa., New Kensington, Pa., New Castle, Pa., Mansfield, Ohio, Newton, Kans., Massillon, Ohio, Ellsworth, Pa., Uniontown, Pa., Mobile, Ala., Lynchburg, Va., Syracuse, N. Y., St. Clairsville, Ohio, Council Bluffs, Ia., Wilmington, Del., Mt. Vernon, N. Y., Lake Charles, La., Marion, Ind., Princeton, N. J., Chickasha, Okla., Goldsboro, N. C., Austin, Tex., Haverford, Pa., Providence, R. I., Montclair, N. J., Newark, N. J., Newport, R. I., Savannah, Ga., Texarkana, Tex., El Paso, Tex., Johnstown, Pa., Pontiac, Mich., Beaumont, Tex., Bloomington, Ill., San Antonio, Tex., Madera, Calif., Elizabeth, N. J., McAlester, Okla., Salisbury, Md., Waterloo, Ia., Aliquippa, Pa., Roanoke, Va., Waxahatchie, Tex.

The campaign is being directed by Mrs. Daisy E. Lampkin, field secretary of the association, from the New York office. The official time for the sale and wearing of the buttons is



MRS. DAISY E. LAMPKIN
Directs button sale

February 1-12. It is hoped that all groups will wind up their sale on February 12, which is the 28th birthday of the N.A.A.C.P., and will forward their money to New York. The funds raised by the sale will be used for anti-lynching and legal defense work. The minimum price on the buttons is 10 cents each, but many persons who have already made their purchases are paying from twenty-five cents to one dollar for a button. Twelve sales have been made in New York City alone at one dollar each.

New York State Conference Organized

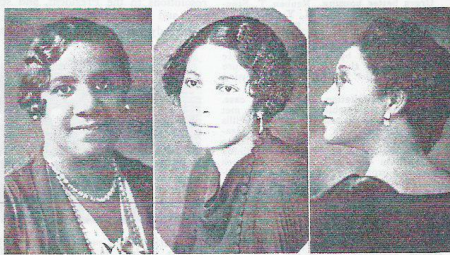
The work of the N.A.A.C.P. took on new impetus with the formation of a New York State Conference of Branches on January 3.

Delegates from many of the leading state branches met at the 137th Street Y.W.C.A., New York City, on call of William Pickens, director of branches. Walter White, secretary, and Miss Juanita Jackson, director of youth activities, were also present from the national office.

After short addresses by Mr. White, Miss Jackson, James Egert Allen, ex-president of the New York branch, Gordon H. Jones of the Jamaica branch, and several others, the following officers were elected; president, James Egert Allen, New York; vice-president, Gordon H. Jones, Jamaica, N. Y.; secretary, Mrs. Ellen Kell, Albany, N. Y.; assistant secretary, Lionel C. Brown, New York; and treasurer, Mrs. William L. Imes, New York.

The next meeting of the state conference will be held in the City of New York in April 2, 3, and 4. The state-wide oratorical contest will be held at this time. The Governor Herbert H. Lehman trophy will be awarded again to the branch whose representative wins first place.

The new president of the state conference, Mr. Allen, has laid down a three-point program for the year. (1) The breaking down of barriers that create contradictory privileges in many sections of the state. (2) A thorough



Richmond, Va., campaign workers: left to right, Mrs. Ora B. Stokes, chairman women's division; Mrs. Gladys G. Randolph, chairman youth council division; and Mrs. Mary McDougall Brown who directed the 1936 campaign

Figure 2.10. *Crisis* (February 1937)

Black women's leadership and hard work in the campaign successfully raised the total sum of \$9,657.77 by April 22 when African Americans were still financially suffering from the Great Depression.⁴⁶ Lampkin mobilized black women at regional branches as well as other organizations including the NACW. Upon the launching of the campaign, in her letter to the NACW on January 15, 1937, Lampkin who herself was on the executive board of the NACW asked the black clubwomen not only to buy anti-lynching buttons that stated "Stop Lynching: NAACP Legal Defense Fund" as shown in the *Crisis*, but also to permit the NAACP to send them "additional buttons to sell to others who want to help finance this fight against lynching." She enclosed a sample button and an order form.⁴⁷ The *Crisis* encouraged the readers to contribute to the NAACP's fundraising effort by listing all the regions with large button sales, recognizing Harlem's success with the largest order of 18,000 buttons where thirty committees were at work, followed by Detroit with 8,000 orders, and Pittsburgh, Chicago, and Toledo with 5,000 orders each.⁴⁸

What is perhaps more significant than the report itself is that the pictures attached to it visually helped the readers envision the respectable presence of these black women leaders in the struggle against lynching. The *Crisis* included four portrait pictures of black women campaign workers: campaign director Lampkin, three campaigners from Richmond, Virginia—Ora B. Stokes, chairman of women's division, Grady G. Randolph, chairman of youth council division, and Mary McDougald Brown, campaign director of the previous year. The way these women are captured in the portraits reminds us of how African American leaders of the previous era, from

⁴⁶ *Crisis*, May 1937, 151.

⁴⁷ Lampkin to the NACW, January 15, 1937, Records of the NACW, reel 10.

⁴⁸ *Crisis*, May 1937, 52.

the turn of the twentieth century to the 1920s, presented the image of the “New Negro” through portraiture to defy racist stereotypes of blacks. As Leigh Raiford states, utilizing the genre of portraiture as the embodiment of uplift and bourgeois ideals “signified a conscious and public choice meant to counter the repressive functions of lynching images.”⁴⁹

The *Crisis* also helped visualize many black women street fundraisers who were a driving force of the “Stop Lynching” button campaigns. The picture of the 1940 campaigners, for instance, offers us a glimpse of what their fundraising looked like (see Figure 2.11). Here, nineteen predominantly black women fundraisers, well-dressed and gracefully smiling, wore sashes that read: “Buy an Anti-Lynching Button: NAACP.” The *Crisis* vividly described their diligent efforts: “The buttons were sold on the streets and girls shook their boxes in the face of passersby who had often had other boxes held out to them. . . .”⁵⁰ The picture and report shows that the NAACP’s fundraising campaigns were grassroots efforts conducted by many black women volunteers. The visual presence of these black women in these campaign pictures thus proves the oft-overlooked fact that black women were actively involved in the NAACP’s anti-lynching campaign. What these photos captured—the respectable presence of black women on the street—successfully reminds us of their diligent battle for black womanhood in the anti-

⁴⁹ Leigh Raiford, “Lynching, Visuality, and the Un/Making of Blackness,” *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 20 (Fall 2006): 27-29. See also Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Trope of New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black,” *Representations* 24 (Fall 1988); Deborah Willis, *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photography, 1840 to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000); and Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁵⁰ *Crisis*, March 1940, 88. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn has observed that in the NAACP’s fundraising efforts of the 1920s, women usually worked as unpaid volunteers unlike male leaders such as Walter White who were usually paid as investigators and lobbyists. All the NAACP-affiliate Anti-Lynching Crusaders were volunteers, while the six women of the thirteen members in the association’s Anti-Lynching Committee were all volunteer black women. Terborg-Penn, “African-American Women’s Networks in the Anti-Lynching Crusade,” 159.



Figure 2.11. Anti-Lynching Button Fundraisers (1940)
Source: The Crisis, March 1940

lynching struggle.

Future Leaders in the Making: African American Youth Protests on the Streets

Anti-lynching picketing pictures and related reports further captured another important yet oft-overlooked constituency in these protests: African American youths. As seen in the cases of the Howard students' picketing and the participation of young female members in the NACW picketing, young African Americans also contributed to building the black public sphere for anti-lynching struggles. The March 1936 issue of the *Crisis*, for example, reported that the members of the NAACP's Brooklyn junior branch were among fifty picketers on January 28, protesting outside of the meeting in Brooklyn where Senator William E. Borah of Idaho, a Republican opponent of the Costigan-Wagner anti-lynching bill, gave a speech announcing his campaign for the presidency. There were also members of the NAACP Harlem Branch, the Young Council of Abyssinian Baptist Church, and Brooklyn's young Socialist group. Some of the picketing signs were designed by famous African American artists Aaron Douglas and Romare Bearden, and among the legends were: "Borah Talks While Lynchers Lynch," "94 Women Lynched, Yet Borah Opposes Federal Law," and "Stop Lynching Terror, Remember Scottsboro." The picketers also distributed 2,500 anti-lynching leaflets.⁵¹ Through the signs and their presence on the street, these young picketers registered their voices of dissent against the senator who opposed the federal anti-lynching bill.

African American youths in New York were also actively involved in mobilizing public opinion against lynching through picketing. When the motion picture *They Won't Forget* was opened at the Strand theatre on Broadway on July 14, 1937, members of the United Youth Committee Against Lynching demonstrated in front of the theatre and throughout Times Square

⁵¹ *Crisis*, January 1936, 16, 17; March 1936, 70-72, 81, 88.

with picketing signs from July 30 to August 2. The committee, composed of 180 black and white youth organizations in New York City, was sponsored by the Youth Council of the NAACP.⁵² The film was based on Atlantan author Ward Greene's novel *Death in the Deep South* (1936), a fictionalized account of the trial and lynching of Jewish factory manager Leo Frank who allegedly raped and murdered a 13-year-old employee named Mary Phagan in Atlanta in 1913. "[A] brilliant sociological drama and a trenchant film editorial against intolerance and hatred," a *New York Times* critic stated in his favorable review in 1937: "*They Won't Forget* cannot be dismissed as a Hollywood exaggeration of a state of affairs which once might have existed but exists no longer. Between the [Leo] Frank trial at Atlanta and the more recent ones at Scottsboro is a bond closer than chronology indicates."⁵³ As the photo of the picketing that was published in the *Crisis* shows, outside the theatre, members of the United Youth Committee Against Lynching encouraged passersby to see the film and the moviegoers to take further action for the passage of the anti-lynching bill by holding the signs (see Figure 2.12). Among the signs were: "Write or Wire Senators Wagner and Barkley, Washington, D.C., Pass the Anti-Lynch Bill Before Senate Adjourns," "See 'They Won't Forget' at Strand theatre, See to it that Lynching Stops," and "It Only Happens in the U.S.A. Stop Lynching, the Shame of America." They also distributed 20,000 handbills to the crowd in Times Square.⁵⁴

The *Crisis* report also shared with its readers diverse reactions of those who were

⁵² "N.A.A.C.P. Youth Council News," *Crisis*, September 1937, 282.

⁵³ *New York Times*, July 15, 1937. For the movie and novel, see Matthew H. Bernstein, *Screening a Lynching: The Leo Frank Case on Film and Television* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), chapter 2; Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2009), 225-239.

⁵⁴ "N.A.A.C.P. Youth Council News," *Crisis*, September 1937, 282. Emphasis in the original.



Figure 2.12. New York Youth Council Picketing in Times Square (1937)

Source: The Crisis, September 1937

approached by the young picketers. The majority of those who came out of the theatre received the picket favorably, promising to write their senators, while a few “berated the sign carriers and handbill distributors, stating that it was a racket.” “A number of southern whites,” the *Crisis* continued, “after reading them, either tore them into bits in a rage, or started arguments with distributors.” The picketers sometimes faced resentful reactions from African Americans. The report stated: “One [black] couple demanded of the distributors ‘Why in the devil do you bring this down on Broadway. It’s bad enough to do it up in Harlem.’” But overall, the *Crisis* concluded it was a success judging from the fact that “the issue of the anti-lynching bill was put squarely in the thinking of many people who had been unreachable.” African American youths among others created a space in Times Square for the public not only to be reminded of lynching but also to be encouraged to take direct action for the passage of the anti-lynching bill. During their four-day anti-lynching drive, a total of 1,000 New York citizens sent to Senators Wagner and Barkley mimeographed and addressed postcards that urged them to make every effort to get the bill out on the Senate floor for a vote before adjournment.⁵⁵

The United Youth Committee Against Lynching that conducted the Times Square picketing was primarily formed to organize a nationwide demonstration against lynching on February 12, 1937. The youth councils and college chapters of the NAACP sponsored the event in collaboration with other youth groups. While the NAACP’s youth members had carried out regional protest rallies before, this was the first national anti-lynching demonstration organized by youth groups. The plan came out of the first national youth conference that the NAACP’s youth delegates held the previous year in conjunction with the national annual conference in Baltimore, June 29-July 5. The conference was carefully planned for over a year and directed by

⁵⁵ “N.A.A.C.P. Youth Council News,” *Crisis*, September 1937, 282.

Juanita Elizabeth Jackson, an active black female youth leader from Baltimore who was appointed as a national office staff in September 1935. It hosted 217 registered youth members—majority of them were younger than twenty-one years old—from more than thirty cities and towns, including eleven representatives from the South and ten from the West.⁵⁶ The conference program was organized under five headings, the first of which was lynching. The young attendees resolved to support the NAACP's anti-lynching campaign through fighting for the Costigan-Wagner bill, rousing public sentiment, and fundraising. They further passed a resolution that the youth councils would lead the youth in a nation-wide "militant and dramatic demonstration against lynching." It was planned for Lincoln's birthday of the following year (February 12, 1937) under the leadership of young J. G. St. Clair Drake, who was chairman of the National Youth Committee Against Lynching.⁵⁷

The *Crisis* reported in detail on this anti-lynching demonstration, keeping its readers updated on the activities of the association's future leaders. Its December issue made an official announcement of the youth demonstration in a section entitled "N.A.A.C.P. Youth Council News," a new addition to the magazine pages as a result of the emerging nationwide youth movement in the association. According to the announcement, the demonstration was scheduled to feature "'no more lynching' parades, mass meetings, soap box meetings, student rallies on college campuses, and a nation-wide broadcast." Under the slogan "For a Lynchless America," the purposes of the demonstration were introduced: (1) to enlist youth groups, particularly black youth, in a national demonstration fighting in solidarity for the African American rights, (2) to

⁵⁶ "Juanita E. Jackson to Join N.A.A.C.P. National Staff," *The Crisis*, September 1935, 272; *The Crisis*, August 1936, 246, 248; September 1936, 281. 65% of the conference attendees was reported younger than twenty-one years old, 36% of which were between fifteen and eighteen.

⁵⁷ *The Crisis*, December 1936, 378.

demonstrate to legislators and the public the demand for anti-lynching legislation, and (3) to offer a channel through which the voice of black and white youths could be heard in a demand for a lynchless America. The *Crisis* also announced that the youth councils planned to participate in the aforementioned “Stop Lynching” button sales campaign.⁵⁸

Similar to the other NAACP anti-lynching protests, the national youth demonstration was planned as a collective act of remembrance. The *Crisis* announced as follows: “All of the adult as well as youth members of the Association on that day will wear black arm bands as a dramatic sign of mourning for all those victims who have been lynched. Anti-lynching flags such as the one used by the national office recently [Figure 2.2] will be erected in over 200 communities throughout America.”⁵⁹ Indeed, the youth members had already conducted a similar demonstration at their national conference in Baltimore. The planning committee chairman Drake recalled a scene at the meeting: “Three hundred of them rise, black bands upon their arm, and stand in silence. The flag flutters to half mast . . . while a placard proclaims: We Mourn for All Who Have Been Lynched.” For the NAACP youths, just like their senior members, these anti-lynching demonstrations were not simply direct actions to protest lynching and lobby for the anti-lynching bill; they were also crucial occasions to commemorate past lynch victims. Commenting on the placard, Drake stated: “Yes, [mourn] for *all*! Over 5,000 of them—some black, some white; some guilty of crime, many innocent, but all the victims of grievous wrong and therefore worthy to be mourned.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *The Crisis*, December 1936, 378.

⁵⁹ *The Crisis*, December 1936, 378.

⁶⁰ J. St. Clair Drake, “Along the Battlefront,” *The Crisis*, November 1936, 327. Emphasis in the original.

Through detailed coverage of the demonstration on pages of the *Crisis*, the NAACP invited the readers to its collective act of remembrance in the anti-lynching struggle. These reports enabled the readers to vicariously revisit the embattling spaces that the association's youths had created in the national landscape. The March and April issues of the *Crisis*, which celebrated the great success of the first nation-wide youth demonstration against lynching, captured how the youth groups across the country organized local demonstrations in a number of places on February 12. The mere list of demonstration sites proved the scale of this national event. Mass meetings, anti-lynching button sales, black armbands wearing, radio broadcasting, lynching play performances, and other related anti-lynching events were conducted in major cities—Chicago, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Detroit, Pittsburgh, New York, Baltimore, Richmond, Nashville, Birmingham, and Atlanta—and smaller cities including Lansing, Michigan; Marion, Indiana; Poughkeepsie, Jamaica, and White Plains, New York; St. Louis, Missouri; Rochester, Pennsylvania; Mobile, Alabama; Augusta, Georgia; Columbus and Newark, Ohio; Charleston, West Virginia; Jersey City and Orange, New Jersey; and Muskogee, Oklahoma. Student demonstrations were held on the college campuses of Lincoln, Dillard, Morris Brown, Morehouse, Spelman, Wilberforce, Fisk, Howard, Shaw, Talladega, Morgan, Allen, Benedict, Bishop, Pennsylvania State, Bates, and West Virginia, most of which were black colleges. Prominent NAACP leaders—including Charles H. Houston, Thurgood Marshall who had just joined the NAACP legal staff in October 1936, Roy Wilkins, Walter White, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., and Juanita E. Jackson—as well as other local leaders spoke at different meetings.⁶¹

The mass demonstration in Harlem, which the *Crisis* introduced in its most lengthy coverage, started with the “No More Lynching” parade in the evening right after the radio speech

⁶¹ *Crisis*, November 1936, 343; March 1937, 89-90; April 1937, 122.

of Senator Robert F. Wagner, cosponsor of the Wagner-Van Nuys anti-lynching bill. A loudspeaker broadcasting Wagner's speech was set up outside the YMCA on the 135th Street for the parade participants. They paraded from the YMCA through the major streets of Harlem to the A. M. E. Zion Church, where the mass meeting was held. Anti-lynching buttons were sold on the streets during the parade.⁶² The meeting with the overflowing audience—more than 2,500—featured representative speakers from the United Scottsboro Defense Committee, the Youth Division National Negro Congress, the American Youth Congress, the American Student Union, and the Negro Labor Committee as well as NAACP members and Angelo Herndon, an African American communist organizer who was arrested and convicted for insurrection in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1932. The members of the United Youth Committee Against Lynching enacted a dramatization of the Scottsboro case. Button sales director Lampkin received the reports on the regional button sales. The “mammoth” mass meeting, so described by the *Crisis*, was a huge success.⁶³

The success in New York and elsewhere was due largely to the commitment and hard work of the youth members, who were growing through the organizing process to represent the NAACP. In preparation for the upcoming historic event, a study guide was prepared to further educate youth groups on lynching issues by the day of the demonstration.⁶⁴ “Toward a Lynchless Year: Study and Discussion Guide,” a five-page manual consisting of eight units, was designed for “Understanding the Problem” (Units I-V) and “Attacking the Problem” (Units

⁶² *Crisis*, April 1937, 121.

⁶³ *Crisis*, March 1937, 89; April 1937, 121.

⁶⁴ *Crisis*, January 1937, 26.

VI-VIII). Each unit included a statement of the problem, questions for discussion, and suggested readings. These units offered the youth groups useful discussion points on how to debate some issues regarding lynching from typical misunderstandings such as the “rape myth,” to the ritual of lynching and its economic and social factors, public consciousness raising, the role of youth, and the value of the federal anti-lynching legislation. The study guide focused on how to put theory into practice.⁶⁵ Regarding common misunderstandings of lynching, for example, it asked how youth could “proceed, on your campus or in the community, to help in the correction of these misunderstandings.” It further encouraged the youth members to determine “the most effective ways to fight against lynching” in the upcoming demonstration by asking several questions: “How can our local group best participate in the demonstration?” “How will we proceed to secure publicity?” “How can we draw in other groups, young and old?”⁶⁶ The study guide did not simply aim to advance the youth groups’ knowledge of lynching; it also nurtured youth leadership.

The reports and pictures of the national youth demonstration in the *Crisis* shared with readers the image of future leaders in the making. Its January 1937 issue reported that the youth groups were preparing for the demonstration by using a study guide made by youth committee chairman Drake.⁶⁷ The February “Youth Council News” shared particular goals that youth groups had set: (1) 100,000 Negro and white youth participating, (2) 100,000 citizens wearing

⁶⁵ “Toward a Lynchless Year: Study and Discussion Guide,” Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), group II, box L-20, the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁶ “Toward a Lynchless Year,” 2-4.

⁶⁷ “N.A.A.C.P. Youth Council News,” *Crisis*, January 1937, 26.

black armbands, (3) sale of 10,000 “Stop Lynching” buttons by youth groups, (4) 1,000,000 signatures secured to petitions, (5) national youth delegation to visit congressional officials, and (6) telegrams, letters and resolutions to the President and congressmen. These goals proved the determination and commitment of the youth groups towards the upcoming demonstration against lynching.⁶⁸

The picture of the Youth Advisory Committee, which accompanied the report, further offered a visual image of determined African American youths—respectable, dedicated male and female leaders in the making (see Figure 2.13). The photo clearly captured the sense of pride and mission they inscribed on their faces. Their attire, especially men’s three-piece suits, further reinforced the respectable image of the body and soul of the future race leaders. Commenting about W. E. B. Du Bois’ three-piece suit, cultural critic Cornel West has observed: “The Victorian three-piece suit . . . not only represented the age that shaped and molded him [Du Bois]; it also dignified his sense of intellectual vocation, a sense of rendering service by means of a critical intelligence and moral action.”⁶⁹ West’s observation is applicable to young black men in the photo, who dressed like their senior leader Du Bois. Yet the significance of this picture further lies in the respectable presence of African American young females who outnumber their male counterparts in the photo, because, as Hazel V. Carby points out, representations of black leadership has too often excluded women. In her comparative analysis of the portraits of Du Bois and West in three-piece suits, Carby shows how the black male body

⁶⁸ “N.A.A.C.P. Youth Council News,” *Crisis*, February 1937, 56-57.

⁶⁹ Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 40.



Figure 2.13. Members of the Youth Advisory Committee Planning the Nationwide Demonstration against Lynching on February 12, 1937
Front Row, Left to Right: Estella Williams, Eleanor Roach, Martin L. Harvey, Dorothy Height, Ruth Williams; Back row: Claire Turner, Edna Morgan, Charles Riddick, Ruth Lee, Charles Smith, Louise Rowe, Edna Scott, and Juanita E. Jackson of the NAACP national office staff
 Source: *The Crisis*, February 1937

“can be sculpted to model an intellectual mentor.”⁷⁰ If the Victorian three-piece suits sculpted the young black male bodies in the photo to model intellectual mentors in the making, young black women’s graceful dresses likewise molded their bodies into respectable leaders of the future.

The pictures of young picketers in Harlem and Chicago also showed the readers how young African Americans were involved in the anti-lynching struggle (see Figures 2.14). Similar to the previous photo of the Youth Advisory Committee, the image of the well-dressed Chicago Youth Council members captured how future race leaders were nurtured through the anti-lynching direct action. Furthermore, the image of three black children picketing in Harlem becomes of particular importance when we recall contrasting images of white children in several remaining lynching photos, who were with their parents supporting the practice of lynching. Given that lynching photographs aimed to maintain white supremacist patriarchy by intimidating the African American community, the inclusion of the images of white children as spectators of lynching sent the public a clear message that the next generation of whites would also support the existing power structure. In this context, the image of black children in anti-lynching demonstrations functioned as a counter-representation that the next generation of African Americans would challenge lynching and the maintenance of white supremacist patriarchy. Through these pictures, the *Crisis* visually announced that the future anti-lynching activists were being created.

These historical pictures offer us some visual clues about how grassroots anti-lynching struggles were conducted at that time. Given that lynching was aimed at keeping African Americans “in their place,” the very fact that these picketers were engaged in such determined

⁷⁰ Hazel V. Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 21-22.

N.A.A.C.P. Youth Council News

Huge New York Meeting

New York City's Anti-lynching Demonstration was held under the auspices of the United Youth Committee Against Lynching composed of representatives of over 100 youth organizations, with Miss Dorothy Height as chairman, Juanita E. Jackson and James Egert Allen, president of the New York branch, advisers. The demonstration was held in Mother A.M.E. Zion church, with Dr. Allan Knight Chalmers, chairman of the United Scottsboro Defense Committee, speaking on the "Scottsboro Boys"; Angelo Herndon, "Let Me Live" and Walter White, secretary of the N.A.A.C.P., on the "Federal Anti-lynching Bill." Youth speakers were Louis Burnham, Youth Division National Negro Congress; Janet Feder, American Youth Congress; and James Wechsler, American Student Union. Frank R. Crosswaith, Chairman Negro Labor Committee, spoke on "The Economic Basis of Lynching." A dramatization of the Scottsboro case was enacted by members of the United Youth Committee, led by James H. Robinson, member of the N.A.A.C.P. national board of directors. Mrs. Daisy E. Lampkin, field secretary of the N.A.A.C.P., received button reports from the various chairmen.

A parade was held before the mass meeting. Posters made by the members of the artists' guild and other interested persons were featured. A loud speaker was rigged up outside the Y.M.C.A. on 135th Street, where the parade formed, in order that the parade might listen to Senator Robert F. Wagner's broadcast over the National Broadcasting System from 6:15 to 6:30 p.m. The parade began at 6:30, passed through the principal streets of Harlem and ended up at the church where the mass meeting was held. The church was crowded to overflowing with more than 2,500 in the audience. Pickets advertised the parade about a week before the demonstration and buttons were sold on the streets. On the day of the demonstration, a loud speaker was used to broadcast news of the Lincoln day activities.

Miss Jackson on Tour

Miss Juanita E. Jackson, director of youth councils of the N.A.A.C.P., spent the month of March on a tour of Oklahoma and Texas. She began February 26 at St. Louis, Mo., and from there

went to Kansas City. March 1 to 15 was spent in the state of Oklahoma and March 17 to 21 in Texas. Youth councils and college chapters were organized by Miss Jackson and in addition she spoke before white and college groups and reorganized or revived branches of the N.A.A.C.P. Miss

Jackson then launched the membership campaign of the New Orleans, La., branch and returned to New York through Atlanta, Ga. Miss Jackson will spend the month of April conducting membership campaigns in Boston and Springfield, Mass.

Youth Groups Preparing for Detroit Conference

From every section of the country reports are coming in from youth councils and college chapters of their activities. (Continued on next page)



Top picture shows section of the Harlem parade February 12 in the youth demonstrations against lynching. Lower photo gives views of original posters used by Chicago youth council in its demonstration

Figure 2.14. Youth Picketers at the National Youth Demonstration against Lynching (February 12, 1937)

Top: Anti-Lynching Parade in Harlem; Bottom: Chicago Youth Council Members with Picketing Signs

Source: *The Crisis*, April 1937

protest actions could send the public a strong political message that they wouldn't capitulate to racial terror. Indeed, the ultimate purpose of lynching was not to immediately expunge the threat of the black hypermasculinity from the white community, but rather to enforce the power of white supremacy by slowly torturing the black subject. If lynching was intended to terrorize African Americans by forcing them to bear witness to the black subject being dehumanized, the picketers claimed by their very presence in the public space that black people were finding their strength through mobilizing.

African American anti-lynching struggles, which primarily attempted to eradicate contemporary racial violence, also functioned as an act of remembrance that challenged the historical erasure and misconstruction of lynching. The messages on banners, the numbers of lynch victims on the signs, nooses around the picketers' necks, and black armbands, all aimed to remember the dead. The respectable presence of picketers, both black male and female, young and elder, countered the racialized and sexualized representation of black men and underrepresentation of black women in the white supremacist lynching discourse. Through exhibiting their respectable bodies, African American anti-lynching activists demonstrated their resistance from within the very discourse and representation of lynching. Moreover, through the publication of anti-lynching pictures and reports, the *Crisis* created what we might call an "imagined community" of the anti-lynching movement, where information on the NAACP's anti-lynching struggles was reported by its editors and shared among subscribers. Given that the spectacle of actual, discursive, and representational lynching aimed at forcing black people to view racialized torture, the anti-lynching activists created a counter-spectacle in rallying, picketing, and fundraising, by letting the public bear witness to the re/presentation of their bodily presence on the streets. It was upon these anti-lynching platforms—in the *Crisis*, on the streets,

and other collective and communal locales—that respectable black public spheres were created both discursively and performatively.

CHAPTER THREE

Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Performative Space of Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit"

Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black body¹ swinging in the Southern breeze,
Strange Fruit hanging from the poplar trees.
Pastoral scene of the gallant South,
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
Scent of Magnolia sweet and fresh,
And the sudden smell of burning flesh!
Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for the tree to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.

—Lewis Allan, "Strange Fruit" (1939)²

"Jazz legend Billie Holiday provided real texture in her story and song 'Strange Fruit.'" So asserted Senator Mary Landrieu in her final speech prior to the passage of Resolution 39. In a review of various historical moments of lynching and anti-lynching efforts on the state and national level, Senator Landrieu introduced the lyrics of the song and further observed that "[s]omething in the way she [Holiday] sang this song. . . must have touched the heart of Americans because they began to mobilize, and men and women, White and Black, people from different backgrounds, came to stand up and begin to speak."³ Attributing in an anecdotal way the formation of public actions against lynching to the power of Holiday's singing, Senator

¹ Although this part of the lyrics is often reprinted as plural "black bodies," I use the singular "black body" based on the original lyrics.

² Lewis Allan, *Strange Fruit* (New York: New Theatre League, 1939), Abel Meeropol Collection, Box 14, Folder 14, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston.

³ *Congressional Record*, 109th Congress, 1st Session (June 13, 2005), S6366.

Landrieu seemed to agree with most former studies on the song, which have focused on the politics of race, class, and/or gender of “Strange Fruit.”

Some scholars, including Michael Denning, David W. Stowe, and David Margolick, have pointed out the song’s cultural political power as an anti-lynching and social protest song. They link it to the historical context of anti-lynching struggles in the cultural activism of the labor movement (Popular Front) in the 1930s, which Denning labeled the “cultural front,” where the song was written and performed. “Strange Fruit” was composed by the Jewish-American schoolteacher/political activist Abel Meeropol (known by the pseudonym “Lewis Allan”) around 1937. Holiday began to sing it in 1939 at New York’s Café Society Downtown (hereafter Café Society), the first racially integrated nightclub opened outside of Harlem in December 1938, and it quickly came to be known as an establishment that welcomed “labor leaders, intellectuals, writers, jazz lovers, celebrities, students and assorted leftists.”⁴

Others, like Angela Y. Davis and Dawn-Wisteria Bates, have offered an alternative analysis, one that emphasizes, from the racial and gender perspective, the political aspect of Holiday’s performance of the song, refuting previous studies by mostly white male critics and biographers alike, that downplayed Holiday’s political role in her rendition of the song.⁵

⁴ David Stowe, “The Politics of Café Society,” *The Journal of American History* (March 1998): 1391. The latest book on Café Society has corrected the notation of the club name as “Cafe Society” (without an accent aigu), based on how it was written at that time. Barney Josephson with Terry Trilling-Josephson, *Cafe Society: The Wrong Place for the Right People* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009). In this essay, however, I stay with “Café Society,” which has been the widely-used notation.

⁵ Michael Denning, *Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997), 324-361; Stowe, “The Politics of Café Society,” 1384-1406; Angela Y. Davis, ““Strange Fruit”: Music and Social Consciousness,” in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Pantheon, 1998), 181-198; Dawn-Wisteria Bates, “Race Woman: The Political Consciousness of Billie

“Strange Fruit” has been covered by a number of performers, but it is notable that among them are many black female singers, including Nina Simone, Diana Ross (who played Holiday in *Lady Sings the Blues*), Abby Lincoln, Miki Howard (who played Holiday in Spike Lee’s *Malcolm X*), Cassandra Wilson, Dee Dee Bridgewater, and India Arie, who either recorded the song or covered it for live performances, suggesting that there has been a black feminist tradition following Holiday. Crowned as the “Best Song” of the twentieth century in *Time* magazine’s last issue before the new millennium, and selected number one of the “100 Songs of the South” by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* in 2005, one can hardly deny that Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” remains one of the strongest musical outcries against racial injustices both in the popular imagination and in the academic discourse.⁶

However, “something in the way” Holiday sang the song might also have “touched the heart of Americans” in a quite different way. Recall, for example, how the song was used in the 1986 film *Nine and A Half Weeks* that depicted a short-lived erotic and sadomasochistic

Holiday” (Master Thesis, Sarah Lawrence College, 2001). See also Kathy A. Perkins and Judith L. Stephens, eds., *Strange Fruit: Plays on Lynching by American Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 15-20; and Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America* (New York: Broadway, 1998), 259-260.

See also David Margolick, *Strange Fruit: Billie Holiday, Café Society, and an Early Cry for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2000); and Margolick, *Strange Fruit: The Biography of a Song* (New York: The Ecco Press, 2001). The recent documentary on “Strange Fruit” shares such political views by tracing the song’s influences as a protest song on the American society during the time of the anti-lynching and Civil Rights movements. Joel Katz, directed, *Strange Fruit* (California Newsreel, 2002).

⁶ *Time*, December 31, 1999, no page number; “100 Songs of the South,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (*AJC*), n.d. but in 2005, <http://alt.coxnewsweb.com/ajc/swf/songsofthesouth/index.html>. Last accessed on February 16, 2012. The *AJC* calls “Strange Fruit” “anti-lynching song,” commenting: “[w]hen Billie Holiday took it [the song] on, it became one of the most powerful pieces of popular music ever recorded. The chilling images are made even more horrifying by Holiday’s reportorial, matter-of-fact delivery.” Other songs among the top five includes Sam Cooke’s “A Change Is Gonna Come,” Nina Simone’s “Mississippi Goddam,” and “We Shall Overcome”; showing the *AJC*’s inclination to political songs.

relationship between New Yorkers John (played by Mickey Rourke) and Elizabeth (Kim Basinger). In the scene where John invites Elizabeth to his friend's boathouse on their second encounter, he plays Holiday's "Strange Fruit" after making the bed, suggesting the erotic engagement afoot between the two. Why was this particular song—the song about the brutalized black body in the southern landscape—selected for this scene to portray white New Yorkers' erotic love affair? The combination of the song and the scene seems incongruous, yet this seemingly inappropriate matching—the way in which Holiday's "Strange Fruit" is eroticized in the recent cultural representation of the urban white couple's sexual relationship—merits further analysis to consider how Holiday's rendition of the song conjures up something sensual in the white imagination. Lynching's erotic nature, however disturbing, —the rape rationale, the nudity, sadistic torture delivered against the victim's stilled body—seemed, for this filmmaker, to mirror the sexual encounter between man and woman, far removed both temporally and geographically from the site of the song's gruesome murder scene.⁷

Indeed, the eroticization of the song was often the case in the contemporary reception of Holiday's live performance. Some audiences imagined race, sex, and violence in the South in a quite erotic way through the lyrics of "Strange Fruit" and within the nightclub space. Historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall has stated that Holiday "made famous the indelible image of 'strange fruit' of race and sex in the American South." While, as Hall suggests, "the imagery of lynching—in

⁷ Adrian Lyne, directed, *9½ Weeks* (MGM, 1986). In this scene, when John asks Elizabeth: "Do you like music?," the camera briefly captures him smiling at her and zooms into her perplexed look while the song plays: "Southern trees bear a strange fruit." John says, "It's Billie Holiday," showing her the record jacket with a seductive look (and the song goes: "blood on the leaves and blood at the root"). Elizabeth tries to change the topic to break the sexual tension by asking him what he does for a living while the song plays: "black body swinging in the Southern breeze/ Strange Fruit hanging from the popular trees," and the song fades away as their conversation continues. John's blatant seduction scares Elizabeth and she leaves the boathouse, but this critical scene predicts their subsequent sexual relationship.

literature, poetry, music, in the mind of men—was inescapably erotic,” few studies have closely examined Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” from this perspective, thus failing to grasp more comprehensive and complicated politics of race, class, gender and sexuality in her performance.⁸ Although mostly overlooked or only briefly mentioned by past studies, such receptions make sense, I contend, given that by the time of the song’s debut by Holiday, American society had become quite familiar with negative sexual stereotypes of black men and women and with the spectacle-like characteristics of lynching sexual criminals. These erotic reactions remind us of what cultural critic bell hooks has observed about representation of black people. She states that there is a connection between “the maintenance of white supremacist patriarchy” and “the institutionalization via mass media of specific images, representations of race, of blackness that support and maintain the oppression, exploitation, and overall domination of all black people.”⁹

This chapter reconsiders Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” from the perspective of sexuality by thoroughly examining its development, its relationship to the historical context of lynching, the lyrics’ meanings and symbolism, the public reception of the song by the media and by nightclub audiences, and the way Holiday performed the song—both her bodily presence and the musical interpretation she introduced in the nightclub setting. The main focus here is on her early performance in nightclubs, Café Society in particular. In so doing, this chapter complements and complicates the existing interpretations of the song and her performance. First, I explore the way Holiday’s rendition of “Strange Fruit” reconstructed and reinforced in the public mind a stereotypical image of race, sex and sexuality of southern lynching. After discussing the

⁸ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women’s Campaign against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979, 1993), 150.

⁹ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 2.

historical context from which the song came—the history of the complex elements that tied racial and sexual politics together through lynching, I demonstrate how Holiday’s performance of a song by a left-wing Jewish composer, which was carefully directed by the progressive Jewish club owner to draw political attention to the predominantly white audience in the entertainment space, was sometimes received otherwise. Ironically, it was consumed in a manner almost similar to the way in which the spectacle of lynching was consumed by white mobs. It is through the vicarious experience of this “secondary” lynching presented by Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” that white supremacist patriarchy was maintained.

Second, I further examine how Holiday’s rendition of the song, being complicit with the production of such voyeuristic pleasure on the one hand, simultaneously resisted the commodification of lynching and sexual stereotyping of black men and women. Here I draw on the theory of a counter-strategy to contest racialized representation introduced by hooks, who emphasizes the need of the struggle to “critically intervene and transform the world of image making authority,” and by cultural critic Stuart Hall, who proposes to contest the stereotype from within. I contend that Holiday’s very presence as a black woman and her artistry changed the whole dynamics of white male-controlled representation of lynching, thus challenging the institutionalization of exploited images of African Americans.¹⁰ In short, this chapter sheds particular light on the politics of sexuality in Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” to demonstrate how Holiday’s performance created a subversive public sphere in the contemporary anti-lynching movement.

¹⁰ hooks, *Black Looks*, 4; Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 1997), 274.

Lynching and Rape: Sexual Context of “Strange Fruit”

By the time of the song’s debut by Holiday in 1939, the image of the black rapist had been well publicized throughout the American society via diverse media. Rape of white women by black men was one of the strongest racial/sexual images associated with southern lynching. According to historian Sharon Block, as early as the Revolutionary era, rape narratives offered a discursive site to define white manhood and citizenship, and since the Post-Reconstruction period the black rapist image dominated the narrative.¹¹ The more black men gained political and economic equality with white men, the more they were regarded as a sexual threat against white women.

Thus, whites rationalized lynching in the name of justice against sexual crimes and protecting white womanhood in particular. Lynching worked as a device for whites to preserve white supremacist patriarchy in southern society, especially after Reconstruction. A large number of narratives of the “black beast” or “black rapist” were published at a time when southern whites needed a rationale for lynching African Americans.¹² One study, which

¹¹ Sharon Block, “Rape without Women: Print Culture and the Politicization of Rape, 1765-1815,” *Journal of American History* (December 2002): 849-868. While warning that historians have sometimes confused the postbellum stereotype of black rapists and the antebellum image of libidinous slave men, Diane Miller Sommerville emphasizes that the rape myth was constructed after Reconstruction era. Diane Miller Sommerville, “The Rape Myth in the Old South Reconsidered,” in Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine Jenkins, eds., *A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U. S. Black Men’s History and Masculinity*, Vol. 1 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 438-472.

¹² George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New Haven: Wesleyan University Press, 1971, 1987), 273-282; Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Race Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 116-118, 183-185, 306-309; Martha E. Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the 19th-Century South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 198-207; Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 301-307; and Jonathan

compiled various newspaper accounts of lynching since the 1880s, presented that the image of the black rapist was still prevalent even in the 1930s. Many northern newspapers like the *New York Times*, *New York Herald-Tribune*, *New York Post* and *Philadelphia Tribune*, as well as various southern newspapers, reported lynching of “a Negro” who allegedly “attacked” or “assaulted” a white woman.¹³ People had already experienced such an image not only through newspaper accounts of the actual lynchings, but also in the representation of lynching in literature and film, most notably D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* (1915), Hollywood’s first feature-length megahit film based on Thomas F. Dixon, Jr.’s *The Clansman* (1905), which sensationalized a black male sexual threat against white womanhood. The film was repeatedly released in 1924, 1931, and 1938.¹⁴ Although anti-lynching sentiments were widely shared on the national level (the 1937 Gallup poll showed that 70% supported federal anti-lynching legislation), a 1939 anthropological study found that nearly 65% of southern white respondents believed that lynching for rape was justifiable.¹⁵

Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching: Racial Violence and Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 8-11.

¹³ Ralph Ginzburg, *100 Years of Lynchings* (New York: Black Classic, 1962, 1988).

¹⁴ John Hope Franklin, “The Birth of a Nation: Propaganda as History,” in *Race and History: Selected Essays 1938-1988* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 14-17, 22. On the black rapist image in *The Clansman*, see Sandra Gunning, *Race, Rape, and Lynching: The Red Record of American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 28-43. For the themes of lynching and rape in literature, see Trudier Harris, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Robyn Wiegman, “The Anatomy of Lynching,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3:3 (1993): 445-467; and Crystal N. Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

¹⁵ Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South* (1939, New York: Russel & Russel, 1968), 54-55, 389; George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), 48.

In this way, lynching and rape had become inseparable in the American imagination and public discourse. The rape myth so dominated society that advocates working to end the practice of lynching focused their energies on refuting it as the real reason for the economic competition between whites and blacks.¹⁶ It is well known that pioneer anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells challenged the myth of the black rapist in the early 1890s, but even forty years later, anti-lynching activists continued to fight against this stereotype.¹⁷ For instance, in 1935, the NAACP sponsored the anti-lynching art exhibit “An Art Commentary on Lynching,” and published an accompanying pamphlet by writer Erskine Caldwell denouncing the familiar reasoning that lynching existed “to protect the honor of Southern womanhood.” Such rhetoric, Caldwell concluded, served “merely [as] an excuse designed to cover up the true intent and purpose.”¹⁸ The Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL), founded by southern white woman Jessie Daniel Ames in 1930, criticized the existent image of vulnerable white women who needed white men’s protection from black men’s sexual

¹⁶ Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching*, 3, 8-18.

¹⁷ On Wells’ anti-lynching campaign, see Hazel V. Carby, “‘On the Threshold of Woman’s Era’: Lynching, Empire, and Sexuality in Black Feminist Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985): 262-277; Gail Bederman, “‘The White Man’s Civilization on Trial’: Ida B. Wells, Representations of Lynching, and Northern Middle-Class Manhood” in *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 45-76; Patricia A. Schechter, “Unsettled Business: Ida B. Wells against Lynching, or, How Antilynching Got Its Gender,” in W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 292-317; and Jacqueline Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 43-104.

¹⁸ Erskine Caldwell, “A Note,” *An Art Commentary on Lynching* (1935), Papers of the NAACP, Group I, Box C-206, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

assaults.¹⁹ Whether to reinforce or to refute the “rape myth,” discourse was created around this image. As Jacquelyn Dowd Hall makes clear, “rape and rumors of rape became a kind of acceptable folk pornography in the Bible Belt,” but some reactions to Holiday’s “Strange Fruit,” as will be shown later, clearly reveal that these pornographic images of savage black men raping defenseless white women gained widespread acceptance outside the South as well.²⁰

The castration of black men likewise became a well-circulated type of “folk pornography.” As seen in the lyrics of “Strange Fruit,” hanging and burning were familiar aspects of lynching, but lynching very often included mutilation, particularly of black men’s genitals. Historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage has shown that, across the South, castration occurred in one in every three lynchings.²¹ The 1934 lynching of the alleged black rapist Claude Neal in Greenwood, Florida, for example, haunted the whole nation on account of the detailed description of his castration reported not only in newspapers but also in the NAACP’s anti-lynching pamphlet.²² As

¹⁹ Jessie Daniel Ames, “Can Newspapers Harmonize Their Editorial Policy on Lynching and Their News Stories on Lynching?,” speech delivered at the Southern Newspaper Publishers’ Association Convention, May 18, 1936, reprinted in Ames, *The Changing Character of Lynching: Review of Lynching, 1931-1941* (1942, New York: AMS, 1973), 58; ASWPL, “Southern Women Look at Lynching” (Atlanta, 1937), 4-5; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “‘The Mind That Burns in Each Body’: Women, Rape, and Racial Violence,” in Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 338.

²⁰ Hall, *Revolt against Chivalry*, 150.

²¹ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 66.

²² The organization distributed and sold over 15,000 copies of *Lynching of Claude Neal*. James R. McGovern, *Anatomy of Lynching: The Killing of Claude Neal* (Chapel Hill: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 126-131; Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon, 1998), 222-227.

historian Amy Louis Wood observes, castration, as the most powerful symbol of lynching, has “affected the cultural memories of both blacks and whites, more than any other aspect of lynching.”²³

Such a sadistic punishment came out of the white obsession with black male hypersexuality. The ritual of lynching reflected whites’ imaginary fear and desire of the black male body.²⁴ In the white imagination, black men were turned into sexual beings or mere genitalia. As Frantz Fanon pointedly states: “projecting his own desires onto the Negro, the white man behaves ‘as if’ the Negro really had them [desires]. . . . [T]he Negro is fixated at the genital; or at any rate he has been fixated there.”²⁵ Kobena Mercer likewise argues that the “essence” of black male identity is placed in the “domain of sexuality.” He further remarks that “black men are confined and defined in the very being as sexual and nothing but sexual, hence hypersexual.”²⁶ In other words, as Trudier Harris writes, lynching in general, and castration in particular, functioned as nothing more than “communal rape” of black men. It was rape in terms of assaulting black male sexuality.²⁷ Fanon’s question rightfully articulates this point: “Is

²³ Amy Louise Wood, “Lynching Photography and the ‘Black Beast Rapist’ in the Southern White Masculine Imagination,” in Peter Lehman, ed., *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 204.

²⁴ Hazel V. Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 46-47; Williamson, *Crucible of Race*, 306-310.

²⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*, translated by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967), 165.

²⁶ Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 174.

²⁷ Harris, *Exorcising Blackness*, 23.

lynching of the Negro not a *sexual* revenge?”²⁸ Rape and alleged rape of white women by black men had caused lynching that emasculated black men’s bodies in sadistic, sexual ways in the public arena. Although the number of lynchings declined in the 1930s, public obsession with black male sexuality still continued. It was this social context that impacted the sexual images of “Strange Fruit.”

Receptions and the Lyrics: Eroticization of “Strange Fruit”

As many studies have demonstrated, Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” was most often recognized within the political context in which it came out of the peak of a nationwide anti-lynching campaign, along with the emergence of Popular Front culture of the 1930s. The lyrics first appeared in 1937 as a poem entitled “Bitter Fruit” in the *New York Teacher*, a union publication.²⁹ Lyricist/composer Lewis Allan and his wife Anne regularly performed “Strange Fruit” at leftist gatherings a year before Holiday first sang it.³⁰ Allan later recalled, “I wrote *Strange Fruit* because I hate lynching, and I hate injustice and I hate the people who perpetuate it.”³¹ Café Society’s owner Barney Josephson, who claimed to have suggested Holiday to perform “Strange Fruit” at the integrated club, described the song as “agitprop,” “a piece of propaganda.”³² Affiliates of the anti-lynching campaign and the labor movement understood

²⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin*, 159. Emphasis is added.

²⁹ *New York Teacher*, January 1937, 17, Abel Meeropol Collection, Box 14, Folder 15.

³⁰ Denning, *Cultural Front*, 327.

³¹ *PM*, September 23, 1945.

³² Josephson quoted in Denning, *Cultural Front*, 327.

correctly the intentions of the composer and the club owner in the performance of the song. In 1939, the New Theatre League published the song in sheet music, while the leftist magazine *New Masses* called Holiday's rendition "a superb outcry against lynching."³³ In the same year the NAACP executive director Walter White also praised the song, commenting that "[t]he music is very beautiful and Miss Holiday sings this piece with extraordinary power."³⁴ In February 1940, the Theater Arts Committee (TAC), a Popular Front affiliate, sent a copy of "Strange Fruit" to U.S. senators to urge them to vote for the passage of the Gavagan Anti-Lynching bill, also known as the second NAACP bill.³⁵ First and foremost, then, the song was discussed as a protest narrative.

Others, while aware of the song's protesting message, belittled Holiday's political awareness as the song's performer. For example, in *Time's* April 1939 report on Holiday's first recording of "Strange Fruit," the magazine mocked the songstress and denounced her song as a "Strange Record" in its headline. The report stated:

Billie Holiday is a roly-poly young colored woman with a hump in her voice. . . . She does not care enough about her figure to watch her diet, but she loves to sing. . . . Last spring Billie Holiday went to the Manhattan studios of the Vocallion Company, . . . to make a batch of records. One number, . . . she particularly wanted on wax. Called Strange Fruit, . . . its lyric was a poetic description of a lynching's terrible finale. Billie liked its dirge-like blues melody, was not so much interested in the song's social content. But Vocallion was. The record was never made.

Last week Manhattan's Commodore Music Shop . . . gave Billie Holiday and

³³ *New Masses*, June 20, 1939, 55.

³⁴ "Night Club Singer Records Song About Lynchings In South," *New York Age*, June 17, 1939.

³⁵ TAC, n.d. but after March 1940, Abel Meeropol Collection, Box 15, Folder 27. For the Gavagan bill see Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 161-162.

others a chance to hear her sing *Strange Fruit*, and also provided the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People a prime piece of musical propaganda. . . .³⁶

While the article called the song “musical propaganda” for the NAACP and thus recognized its political importance, what seems rather prominent here is this anonymous (yet clearly white) author’s attempt, whether intentional or not, to disregard the song’s political power by portraying Holiday as a “roly-poly” young black woman who “does not care enough about her figure” but simply “loves to sing.” By dismissing Holiday as someone who liked the melody but was “not so much interested in the song’s social content,” the white-made *Time* author undercut Holiday’s political potential as a feminist and civil rights advocate, as well as an artist and singer.

Moreover, *Time* presented Holiday—and her uniquely unsettling rendition of the song for the Vocallion Company—as puppetry for the NAACP and its leftist supporters. Angela Y. Davis criticizes the way in which many white male critics and biographers claimed that Holiday never understood the meaning of the song without white men’s tutelage. Club owner Josephson, for instance, claimed to have suggested Holiday perform “*Strange Fruit*.” Biographer John Chilton has described how, although at first Holiday was slow to understand the song’s imagery, “her bewilderment decreased as Allen [*sic*] patiently emphasized the cadences, and their significance.” Similarly, Donald Clarke labeled Holiday a nonpolitical person who “never read anything but comic books” and “didn’t know what to make of” the song when she first looked at “*Strange Fruit*.” Davis writes: “Chilton’s, Clarke’s, and Josephson’s stories capture Holiday in a web of gendered, classed, and raced inferiority and present her as capable of producing great work only

³⁶ *Time*, June 12, 1939, 66.

under the tutelage of her racial superiors.”³⁷ *Time*’s description clearly exhibited such a view by contrasting Holiday’s alleged unawareness of the song’s political content with the record company Vocallion’s awareness.

This depiction of an ignorant, “happy-go-lucky” type of heavysset black woman reminds us of the stereotypical Mammy image, which was widely publicized by the mass media, most notably in the Hollywood film *Gone with the Wind* that was released in the same year of 1939. It simultaneously conjures up the seductive Jezebel image, deriving from the fact that the word “hump” connotes a woman as purely a sexual object.³⁸ Not only the love songs Holiday sang prior to “Strange Fruit,” but also her lighter skin might have reinforced such a lascivious image.³⁹ As Farah Jasmine Griffin rightfully observes, “Billie Holiday emerged at a time when the dominant cultural stereotypes of black women were Mammy and Tragic Mulatto.”⁴⁰ Record producer Jerry Wexler’s comment on the song summarizes the *Time*’s reaction to Holiday’s

³⁷ Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, 184-187. In her intriguing exploration of the myths that surround Holiday, Farah Jasmine Griffin praises Davis’s discussion for its contribution to rescuing Holiday from those white critics and biographers. Griffin, *In Search of Billie Holiday: If You Can’t Be Free, Be a Mystery* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001), 130-131.

³⁸ On the images of Mammy and Jezebel see Deborah Gray White, “Jezebel and Mammy: The Mythology of Female Slavery,” in *Ar’n’t I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985, 1999), 27-61. In the United States, the usage of “hump” in the sexual sense dates from 1910s. Jonathon Green, *Cassell’s Dictionary of Slang* (London: Cassell, 1998), 624.

³⁹ In her 1937 performance at the Fox Theatre in Detroit, Holiday had to “black up” her face because her skin color was too light. Donald Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon: The Life and Times of Billie Holiday* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 130.

⁴⁰ Griffin, *In Search of Billie Holiday*, 28. She, too, mentions *Gone With the Wind*, but also *Imitation of Life* (1934), which “reproduced the stereotype of the oversexed, over-ambitious, ‘tragic mulatto’” (29).

performance: “It’s so un-Billie Holiday. It’s got too much of an agenda.”⁴¹ Similarly, a critic of *DownBeat* magazine reviewed Holiday’s recording, writing: “Perhaps I expected too much of *Strange Fruit*, . . . which, via gory wordage and hardly any melody, expounds an anti-lynching campaign. At least I’m sure it’s not for Billie, as for example, *Fine and Mellow* is.”⁴² For such critics, political consciousness was not what Holiday represented—nor what they were prepared to see in her.

Able to wrest these stereotypical images from her performance, it should not surprise us that nightclub audiences who gave the song a cursory listening might not have understood its clear protest message. As Kenneth Spencer, a notable African American actor of the 1940s-50s, commented in 1942: “Yes, ‘Strange Fruit,’ that casually bitter song by Lewis Allan, is a strange song for a night club entertainer to be singing, and stranger still is the fact that the white people at Café Society Uptown [which opened on 58th street in October 1941] call for it every night”; the nightclub setting very likely provided room for the audience to receive the song as merely entertaining.⁴³ One audience member recalled “the contrast between the tragic song of protest sung with the deep feelings by a Negro woman who felt [the] horror of a lynching, and the patrons out for a good time[,] drinking and[,] at times[,] yakking, some of them oblivious to the message of the singer.” He “wondered then whether it made sense to sing such a song in such a milieu.”⁴⁴ The club owner Josephson stated that “Strange Fruit” was performed under the

⁴¹ Wexler quoted in Margolick, *Strange Fruit: The Biography*, 60.

⁴² *DownBeat*, July 1939.

⁴³ *New York Post*, February 11, 1942, Abel Meeropol Collection, Box 15, Folder 27.

⁴⁴ Margolick, *Strange Fruit: The Biography*, 35.

carefully directed staging (“I insisted she [Holiday] closed every show with it [‘Strange Fruit’] every night. Lights out, just one small spotlight, and all service stopped. . . . There were no encores after it. My instruction was walk off, period”), so that “people had to remember ‘Strange Fruit,’ get their insides burned with it.”⁴⁵

Judging by some audience members’ descriptions, however, Josephson’s mission—and Holiday’s “nightly” mournful crooning—might have fallen on deaf ears. Some in the audience clearly thought that Holiday’s performance evoked an erotic image of lynching. In her autobiography *Lady Sings the Blues* (1956), Holiday recalled one woman in a Los Angeles audience requested her “Strange Fruit” by asking: “Billie, why don’t you sing that sexy song you’re so famous for? You know, the one about the naked bodies swinging in the trees.”⁴⁶ While Bates and Davis have dismissed the woman’s reaction as “pathological” and “impervious to her [Holiday’s] message” respectively, Davis has further made an intriguing observation: “what is interesting about this anecdote . . . is the bizarre and racialized way the woman links the song with the ubiquitous engagement with sexuality in Holiday’s work.”⁴⁷ The way in which this woman regarded “Strange Fruit” as the “sexy song” and developed the perception that “black body” linked with a sexy, naked image reminds us of the “folk pornography” of rape in the lynching discourse, thus sanitizing its bizarre and pathological landscape.

Even in progressive places like Café Society, Holiday received similar reactions. Songwriter Irene Wilson recalled a white southerner at Café Society as follows:

⁴⁵ Josephson quoted in Denning, *Cultural Front*, 327.

⁴⁶ Billie Holiday with William Dufty, *Lady Sings the Blues* (1956, New York: Penguin, 1992), 84.

⁴⁷ Bates, *Race Women*, 19; Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, 195.

And she [Holiday] told me then that there was this fella—a white man from Georgia, . . . who was sitting ringside and drinking and Lady was doing “Strange Fruit.” And when Lady was on her way out of the club, he yelled, “Come here, Billie.” She went thinking he wanted to buy her a drink, but he said “I want to show you some ‘strange fruit,’” and . . . well, he made this very obscene picture on his napkin and the way he had it, honey, it was awful!⁴⁸

One can only speculate what kind of “very obscene picture” he drew, but it was possibly male genitalia, which is later described as “strange fruit.”⁴⁹ This white man’s perception of the song is even more pornographic, suggesting that lynching conjured up a certain erotic image.

Focusing on how the lyrics were created helps us further understand how the song, probably contrary to the composer’s intention, was perceived sexually at the time. Composer Allan once mentioned his encounter with an actual lynching photograph that inspired him to write the song, and recalled that after seeing the lynching image he “suddenly saw all lynchings—as strange, strange fruit.”⁵⁰ This powerful, yet somewhat bizarre analogy merits further attention. In his imagination, the particular brutalized black body in the photograph turned into a mere object (labeled as “*Strange Fruit*”) in a very poetic and sexual manner. While

⁴⁸ Wilson quoted in Margolick, *Strange Fruit: The Biography*, 37.

⁴⁹ In his analysis of the modern-day representation of black men, Kobena Mercer describes that “the lynching of black men routinely involved the literal castration of the other’s ‘strange fruit.’” Mercer, *Welcome to Jungle*, 185.

⁵⁰ “Of ‘Strange Fruit’ (the song),” an unidentified article clip, n.d. but after 1944, Abel Meeropol Collection, Box 15, Folder 27. Although journalist David Margolick speculates that Allan was possibly inspired to write the song by a widely publicized photograph of the 1930 lynching in Marion, Indiana, this photograph of two lynched men is less likely the one Allan referred to, given that Allan described what he came across as “a lynching of a human being.” Margolick, *Strange Fruit: The Biography*, 21. Emphasis is added. It is possible, however, that Allan saw the same photograph in different framing showing only one lynching victim, just as writer Jacquie Jones did. Jacquie Jones, “How Come Nobody Told Me about the Lynching?” in Deborah Willis, ed., *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography* (New York: The New Press, 1994), 153.

“strange fruit” describes the literal image of the black body hanging from the tree, it may conjure up “forbidden fruit,” a Biblical metaphor that represents seduction and the object of desire that one is not supposed to have but cannot help wanting.

This notion of taboo is often powerfully melded from Adam and Eve’s original sin to narratives of lynching. In the case of the latter, the taboo rests with the sexual relationship between white women and black men. Indeed, given that southern white women symbolized the South itself in the southern legend, the southern landscape filled with the “Scent of Magnolia” possibly connotes southern white womanhood and white female sexuality.⁵¹ Pay particular attention to the contrast between “Scent of Magnolia sweet and fresh” and “the sudden smell of burning flesh,” which alludes to “forbidden fruit” of the sweet and seductive white female sexuality to black men (who were not supposed to have the fruit of the white female body but could not help wanting it in the white imagination), and describes the hideous outcome of such black men’s sexual desire. The cost of coveting that fragrant fruit is clear: sudden death. Its cause—black male sexual transgression—and effect—violence and murder brought onto black men because of their own impetuosity—are compellingly coupled by Allan’s use of “and” in his lyrics and Holiday’s “then” in her performance.

Another important juxtaposition occurs between “Pastoral scene of the gallant South” and “bulging eyes and twisted mouth,” in which the adjective “gallant” possibly signifies white southern manhood and masculinity—the image of the chivalric old South—analogue to how “Scent of Magnolia” represents southern white womanhood. These four lines, the alternate

⁵¹ W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941, 1962), 115-116. Historian Mary Jane Brown argues that it was a crucial aspect of southern legend “that the delicate flower of southern womanhood needed protection from rapacious black males. . . .” Brown, *Eradicating this Evil: Women in the American Anti-Lynching Movement 1892-1940* (New York: Garland, 2000), 27. Emphasis is added.

juxtapositions of such romanticized and sexualized images of the South (represented by southern white masculinity and white female sexuality) with the sadistic flashback depictions of the images of the brutalized black body, complete the lyrical description of the prevalent lynching discourse of black men being persecuted by white men for their alleged crime of raping white women. They stimulate to erotic imagination, as evidenced by how the song describes only a black body, a sexless object, yet some audiences imagined a sexualized black *male* body. Of course, Allan must have relied on those peaceful scenes of the South for the stark contradiction they made of the gruesome reality of lynching, but the way the lyrics are phrased could imply otherwise.

Equally perplexing, while the lynching pictures usually captured the process or immediate aftermath of lynching, as well as the white mobs happily pictured with the hanging bodies, the presence of those spectators are erased or absent from the song. A possible exception is the reference to white manhood in the phrase “gallant South,” but it does not fully depict the white mobs’ direct and often gruesome role in lynching African Americans. Overall, the lyrics describe the southern landscape of lynching’s aftermath, particularly in the first and last parts, while the middle section focuses on lynching’s eroticism in a series of flashbacks capturing the ongoing event. Due to the absence of mobs and the poetic description of lynching, the lyrics, as a whole, give an impression that it is more a meditation on lynching, particularly its sexual aspects. Clearly, some in Holiday’s audience found the song highly sexual, despite the fact that the lyrics never illustrated overtly sexual imagery. Envisaged sexuality and lyricism might have embodied somewhat erotic tones. The imaginary lynching in the song reproduced the racial/sexual image of southern lynching that was prevalent enough in the contemporary American society.

Bodily Presence and Performance: Holiday in the Contested Space of Spectacle/Witnessing

Just as lynching—the public spectacle of sadistic punishments—became a new space of consumption where blacks themselves became commodities (the lynching scenes were often pictured with the spectators, and the victims’ body parts were brought back as “souvenirs”), the image of the South and of southern lynching were commodified and consumed through Holiday’s rendition of “Strange Fruit.”⁵² The performance of the song was essentially a consumer spectacle. For instance, in 1939, the *New Yorker* advertised the song by asking: “Have You Heard? ‘Strange fruit growing on Southern trees’ sung by Billie Holiday at Cafe Society.”⁵³ The way it was advertised (“Have You Heard?”) alludes to newspaper accounts that announced scheduled lynchings. The advertisement was intended to attract, and did eventually attract people who had never heard “Strange Fruit” to come listen to Holiday singing, thereby experiencing what a southern lynching was like. Paradoxically, Holiday’s rendition of “Strange Fruit” in nightclub settings became a similar lynching spectacle. The public space for enjoyment, where Holiday narrated the story about southern lynching, produced a kind of secondary lynching (see Figure 3.1).

The picture of Holiday’s performance at Café Society set the atmosphere for her rendition of “Strange Fruit,” and this scene of people surrounding a black person (Holiday) in the entertainment space invokes for many the actual lynching spectacle evident in many existing

⁵² Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 200-239; Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 2-15.

⁵³ *New Yorker*, March 18, 1939, 68. It reprinted the lyrics wrong, combining two lines in the first section (“Southern trees bear a strange fruit” and “Strange Fruit hanging from the poplar trees”) into one and using a different verb “growing.”



Figure 3.1. Holiday at Café Society (1939)
Source: Frank Driggs Collection,
Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University

lynching photos.⁵⁴ In such a space, Holiday was not only the narrator of lynching, but also embodied the black victim, male and female. Indeed, this nightclub picture shares some similarities with the typical photograph of lynching spectacle—in terms of their spatial composition—although the photos’ different characteristics—as commemorative and documentary—have offered the cameras different gazes (lynching pictures/postcards usually captured the spectators looking back at the camera). The audience surrounding Holiday at Café Society unintentionally supplemented the absence of white mobs in the lyrics, thus turning the club space into the spectacle of secondary lynching, albeit a benign one staged in New York. Nightclubs might not have offered a carnival-like atmosphere, but the song did help the predominantly white audience to participate vicariously in southern lynching.

What makes this situation even more complicated, however, is that it was Holiday, a black woman, who represented through song this spectacle of southern lynching. A pointed remark by Robert O’Meally, who has stated “that song, with its imagery of trees that ‘bear’ and ‘fruit’ that is ‘plucked’ or ‘dropped,’ also gave expression to her role as a woman who discerned a sexual motive in the act of lynching,” suggests Holiday’s role as a successor to black female predecessors who disclosed lynching’s true purpose behind the myth of the black rapist.⁵⁵ They challenged white justification of black men raping white women by focusing on the cases of lynching and rape of black women. For example, Ida B. Wells wrote in 1895 that “the same

⁵⁴ On lynching photographs, see Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 7-45; Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 71-112; Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret*, 214-281, and Dora Apel and Shawn Michelle Smith, *Lynching Photographs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). A collection of lynching photographs and postcards is available in James Allen, et al., eds., *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe: Twin Palm, 2000).

⁵⁵ Robert G. O’Meally, *Lady Day: The Many Faces of Billie Holiday* (New York: Da Capo, 1991), 130.

crime [rape] committed by white men against Negro women and girls, [wa]s never punished by mob or the law.”⁵⁶ Also, as discussed in the previous chapter, the NACW passed a resolution protesting the lynching of two black women in 1914, and campaigned, among other black women’s organizations, for the further investigation of the lynching of a pregnant black woman in 1918. The Anti-Lynching Crusaders greatly contributed to fundraising for the passage of the Dyer anti-lynching bill in 1922. At the Crime Conference picketing in 1934, a female Howard University student held a small sign on her chest stating the number of female lynch victims. In all these cases, black women activists persistently made black women lynching/ rape victims visible.⁵⁷

As some scholars have argued, the dominant discourse of lynching by whites has excluded black women in focusing only on white male chivalry, white female victims and black male rapists.⁵⁸ Until recently, the historiography of lynching has overlooked the fact that black women were also frequent victims of lynching and rape throughout U.S. history.⁵⁹ Under

⁵⁶ Ida B. Wells, *A Red Record* (1895), reprinted in Jacqueline Jones Royster, ed., *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900* (Boston: Bedford, 1997), 127.

⁵⁷ For other cases of black women’s role in the anti-lynching movement, see Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching*, 18-23.

⁵⁸ White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?*, 176-177; Nell Irvin Painter, “Who Was Lynched?” *Nation* (November 11, 1991): 577; Weigman, “The Anatomy of Lynching,” 446 n. 1. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn points out that history of anti-lynching movements also overshadowed black women’s contributions to them. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, “African-American Women’s Networks in the Anti-Lynching Crusade,” in Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, eds., *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 159.

⁵⁹ Seventy-six black women were lynched between 1882 and 1927. Walter White, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (1929, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 267. For examples of black female lynch victims, see Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in*

slavery, the sexual abuse of black women was never fit into the category of rape, not only because of their status as white slaveholders' property but also due to their dominant image as immoral. This image of sexually loose black woman functioned as an excuse for slaveholders to sexually exploit black women to reproduce more slaves.⁶⁰ The perpetrators of the postbellum rape and lynching of black women were rarely persecuted, and even lynching of black men was attributed to black women's lack of virtue and alleged promiscuous nature.⁶¹

As Hazel V. Carby rightfully points out, "rape of black women has never been as powerful a symbol of black oppression as the spectacle of lynching."⁶² Indeed, what is striking about the lyrics of "Strange Fruit" is that the gendered-ambiguous black body in this fictional southern lynching fails to represent the black female experience, thus reproducing another

White America: A Documentary History (New York: Vintage, 1972), 161-162; Terborg-Penn, "African-American Women's Networks," 150-153; Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 158-175, 235-239; and Kerry Segrave, *Lynchings of Women in the United States: The Recorded Cases, 1851-1946* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010).

⁶⁰ On the sexual exploitation against female slaves, see Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 27-36, 51-52; Thelma Jennings, "'Us Colored Women Had To Go through a Plenty': Sexual Exploitation of African-American Slave Women," *Journal of Women's History* (Winter 1990): 45-74; Melton A. McLaurin, *Celia: A Slave* (New York: Avons, 1991), 22-37; Nell Irvin Painter, *Soul Murder and Slavery* (Waco: Markham, 1995), 15-21; and Daina Ramey Berry, *Swing the Sickle for the Harvest Is Ripe: Gender and Slavery in Antebellum Georgia* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 77-88.

⁶¹ Hazel V. Carby argues that during the antebellum period black women's immoral image was constructed in relation to white women's virtuous image. Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 20-39. On rape of black women after emancipation, see Lerner, *Black Women*, 149-161, 172-190; Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1976), 133-140; Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (1981, New York: Vintage, 1983), 175-177; Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 342-349; and Nell Irvin Painter, *Southern History across the Color Line* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 121.

⁶² Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 39.

lynching narrative similar to the white racist dominant discourse. Under such circumstances, Holiday's bodily presence in this consuming space—the fact the audience witnessed and listened to a black woman telling a story of lynching—adds to the interpretation of the song more complicated dynamics of race, gender and sexuality. In the consuming space of a nightclub setting that resembled the scene of a lynching spectacle, where Holiday was surrounded by the predominantly white audience; not only did she represent black male victims and/or their mothers, wives, daughters and sisters; she also possibly embodied black female victims of lynching *and* rape.

Not only Holiday's presence as a black woman in the song performance but also her bodily politics of sexuality through attire, expressions, gestures and musical artistry contributed to recuperating a hidden transcript of the buried history of black sexual oppression.⁶³ At nightclubs, Holiday's black female sexuality was objectified and consumed. Journalist David Margolick writes that Holiday was often referred to in the press accounts as “the buxom, colored songstress” or “the sepian songstress.” For example, in its report on the performance by Holiday and the all-white Artie Shaw Orchestra at the Savoy Ballroom in Chicago on October 22, 1938, *Billboard* magazine described Holiday as “[Shaw's] sepia songsterss Billie Holliday [*sic*].”⁶⁴ The way the magazine illustrated Holiday (“*his sepia* songstress”) indicates how Holiday's race and sexuality was perceived. While nightclubs offered a space where black female sexuality was objectified and consumed, Holiday subverted the white gaze and challenged the negation of

⁶³ I am referring to anthropologist James C. Scott's concept of “hidden transcript” that represents “a critique of power behind the back of the dominant.” Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), xii.

⁶⁴ Margolick, *Strange Fruit: Billie Holiday*, 62; *Billboard*, October 29, 1938, 11.

black female sexuality through her artistic qualities.⁶⁵ Evelyn Cunningham, a prominent black woman reporter for the *Pittsburgh Courier* since 1940, recalled that “many times in nightclubs when I heard her sing the song it was not a sadness I sensed as much as there was something else; it’s got to do with sexuality.”⁶⁶

Although Cunningham mentioned sexuality in a sense that she “never had the feeling that this [rendering of “Strange Fruit”] was something she [Holiday] was very, very serious about,” her comment is very suggestive to contemplate Holiday’s performance that was, according to Angela Y. Davis, deeply rooted in the blues tradition. Davis explains that the blues departed from other contemporary popular music in terms of its provocative and pervasive sexual imagery and that its distinctiveness came from the unique historical context of African Americans who had long been denied their sexual autonomy.⁶⁷ It was in this tradition that Holiday challenged the negation of black female sexuality in the dominant discourse of lynching. In her analysis of Holiday’s love songs, Davis argues that some of Holiday’s renderings represented “a juxtaposition and performance of the conflict between representations of women’s sexuality in the dominant popular musical culture and those in the blues tradition—the former denying female agency, the latter affirming the autonomous erotic empowerment and independent subjectivity of female sexuality.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Farah Jasmine Griffin points out that Holiday is a “salable commodity” just like other American icons. Griffin, *In Search of Billie Holiday*, 32.

⁶⁶ Cunningham quoted in Margolick, *Strange Fruit: The Biography*, 61.

⁶⁷ Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, 3-24.

⁶⁸ Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, 175. Michael Denning also examines the relation of Holiday’s love songs to the blues, but from the perspective of the Popular Front culture.

This was clearly the case in Holiday's rendition of "Strange Fruit." Despite the fact that the media and audiences, intentionally or not, downplayed her agency as a black woman and reproduced the discourse of lynching through consuming it, Holiday resisted them by her very presence as an embodiment of black female sexuality. Holiday's sexuality was exposed and objectified in the nightclubs, it was through this attention to her sexuality—and sexual freedom expressed overtly in her love songs—that Holiday could remind the audience of the sexual exploitation and captivity of black women that had suppressed in the white supremacist discourse of lynching. It is significant that Holiday musically protested the white supremacist discourse of lynching through the affirmation of sexuality, rather than the politics of respectability.⁶⁹ While aforementioned organizations such as the NACW and the NAACP's black women protesters and fundraisers mentioned in Chapter Two utilized this strategy to counter the denigrated image of black women by desexualizing black womanhood, Holiday's politics of sexuality stood out as a strategy to challenge negative stereotypes of black women in a quite different manner. By affirming the autonomy of black female sexuality, something black women had never attained under slavery and during Jim Crow, Holiday offered her black foremothers a symbolic liberation from bondage of long-overlooked history of their sexual exploitation.

Holiday's attire, a vital part of the performance, clearly exemplifies the affirmation of black female sexuality. Her Grecian-style stage dresses were, most of the time, very fitted to her

Denning, *Cultural Front*, 344-347.

⁶⁹ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 185-299. Holiday's strategy was also quite different from what Darlene Clark Hine coins the "culture of dissemblance," another strategy often used to desexualize black womanhood. Hine, "Rape and Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West," 380-387.

voluptuous body and showed her curves. The sleeveless long white dress in the picture, for instance, exposes her arms and further accentuates her breast with its tightened belt. Holiday's hair was usually swept up neatly, showing her full face and neckline. She often wore various kinds of artificial flowers in her hair, most notably gardenias, or magnolias that represented white female sexuality in the lyrics of "Strange Fruit." Holiday was possibly claiming that black women, too, could be represented by this emblematic southern flower, thus embodying the southern womanhood. Also, Holiday's facial expressions and gestures during her performance of the song (though we can only speculate from the picture)—her closed eyes, slightly uplifted chin, and half-opened mouth—further played up her sexuality. It is important to note that Holiday usually performed "Strange Fruit" at the very end of the show, as the club owner Josephson explained, after singing several other songs in her repertoire that were mostly torch songs. Having heard other love songs that openly expressed black female sexuality, the audience might have received "Strange Fruit" not as a clear protest message but rather something similar to a love song.

What, perhaps, ultimately determined most audience's experience of "Strange Fruit" is Holiday's musical artistry, that is, the way in which she utilized her voice tone, phrasing, timing, and intonations in the rendition of the song. It is through this performativity that Holiday refused to simply reproduce the fictional lynching scene based on the dominant discourse of lynching to be consumed. Holiday first recorded "Strange Fruit" on April 20, 1939, soon after she started performing it at Café Society on a regular basis. This particular recording explains the mood around the earlier time the song was performed and received.⁷⁰ A cursory listening to this version might give us an impression that Holiday's overall melancholic tone sounds almost like

⁷⁰ For reviews of Holiday's rendition by music scholars and critics, see Margolick, *Strange Fruit: Billie Holiday*, 65-67.

the other love ballads in her repertoire, in contrast to the later versions in 1945 and 1956, for example, in which both Holiday's hoarse warbling voice and the dramatic arrangement of an accompanied trumpet and piano demonstrate much more gripping strength.⁷¹ But this very gloomy timbre in her voice that expressed love, pain, and despair of black women in her early torch songs equally articulates black women's same feelings about the loss of their loved ones in "Strange Fruit." The way in which the voice of a black woman (Holiday) describes the landscape of southern lynching in a calm, objective, and meditative manner amplifies her sorrow, and Holiday's musical phrasing and intonation of each word deepens it even more.

In the 1939 recording of "Strange Fruit," her lyrical performance of the song begins after a minute-long, slow introduction of a trumpet solo accompanied by tenor and alto saxophones, followed by a piano solo backed by bass, guitar, and drums. Her simple, descriptive way of singing of the first line ("Southern trees bear a strange fruit") that makes the listeners wonder about "a strange fruit," immediately changes in the second line. Here, Holiday sings most of the words ("Blood" "on" "the" / "blood" "at" "the") with staccato phrasing, conveying musically the scene of blood dripping from the "strange fruit." We do not know what this "fruit" is until the third line: "Black bodi[es] swinging in the Southern breeze." Note that Holiday changes the singular "black body" in the original lyrics into plural "black bodies" in her performance, making clear that this violence is often repeated against many African American men and women's bodies alike. This slight lyrical alteration successfully inserts in the lyrics much more

⁷¹ Billie Holiday, "Strange Fruit" (recorded on April 20, 1939), in *Billie Holiday Strange Fruit 1937-1939* (Jazzterdays, 1996); "Strange Fruit" (recorded on February 12, 1945), in *Billie Holiday Verve Story Vol. 1: Jazz at the Philharmonic* (Polygram, 1994); "Strange Fruit" (recorded on June 7 1956), in *Lady Sings the Blues* (Polygram, 1995).

horrifying image of lynching, thus reinterpreting lyricist Allan's view.⁷² With Holiday's emphasis on "Black bodies" and her stretching out the words "swinging," "Southern" and "breeze," it sounds like the gentle wind is blowing black bodies, thus perfectly depicting a horrifying picture of hung bodies.

In the song's second section, where the lyrics portray the flashback of lynching paralleled to the southern scenery, her rendition makes more palpable, although subtle, the stark contrast between the serene southern landscape and gruesome lynching scene. Holiday overstretches "pastoral" and emphasizes the peaceful scene in the South while she rises and drops the pitch in the pronunciation of "twisted," thus illustrating the victim's mouth being crooked with pain, as well as the stillness and silence that follow violence and death. In the following line, after stretching "Magnolia," she pauses for a moment before quietly adding "sweet and fresh," as though evoking sexuality of southern white womanhood.

The last section of the song portraying the lynched body's predictable fate—"a fruit for the crows to pluck/ for the rain to gather/ for the wind to suck/ for the sun to rot/ for the tree to drop"—is the climax of Holiday's lyrical performance. While stretching each noun and verb, she gradually raises her voice as the song goes. In the last two lines, Holiday slows down and makes long pauses between each section. Her phrasing of the words, the way she overstretches "rot," "drop," "bitter," and "crop" even more, dramatically heightens the atrocity of lynching. In particular, Holiday's intonation of "drop"—first rising then falling down slowly in a parabolic way—induces imaginatively the moment the body is being dropped from the tree. Although the lynched body is already dead, it appears to have been killed again by her powerful performance.

⁷² Indeed, many contemporary media including the aforementioned *Time* that reviewed the 1939 recording reprinted this part of the lyrics as "black bodies." Perhaps Holiday usually sang it as such in nightclubs, too, judging from the comment by a woman in LA ("naked bodies"). Today, Holiday's lyrical version seems more popular than the original.

It is this musical interpretation of “Strange Fruit” through which Holiday contested the audience’s voyeuristic gazing on imaginary lynching and her sexuality. Indeed, Holiday’s musical revisiting of the southern landscape of lynching raises the specter once again for the audience of another imaginative scenario, where a black woman standing in front of the lynched body hanging from the tree recalls her encounter of the lynching practice and prays for the dead with deep sorrow and anger—did she run into the ongoing incident? Did the mob force her to look? Or, did she have to bear witness, because the alleged sexual criminal was someone she knew or her very loved one?

Considering Holiday’s performance as well as her bodily presence in the nightclub helps us see more clearly the multi-layered dynamics of this contested terrain, in which the audience vicariously witnessed the southern lynching while simultaneously saw Holiday, a black woman, looking at the lynching. On the one hand, Holiday’s rendition of “Strange Fruit” offered a cultural space in which audiences imagined and consumed race, gender, and sexuality through southern lynching. Her performance sometimes unwittingly helped reinforce the existing discourse of lynching, in which black men sexually threatened white womanhood, and allowed the audience to participate imaginatively in an actual lynching. It reconstructed, reinforced, and commodified the image of southern lynching in the popular mind outside the South. The song first appeared when racially and sexually stereotypical images of lynching and of black men and women were well propagated in the society, while anti-lynching feeling was simultaneously developing among the public. Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” emerged out of such a unique historical conjuncture, and her performance itself functioned as a conjunctural space where those contested ideas and perceptions of lynching, race and sex were encountered, contested, and intertwined.

On the other hand, Holiday’s performance—her physical and vocal presence in the story

of a lynching—revealed further complicating politics of race and sexuality in the actual and imagined lynching. While the media and audience commodified lynching stories that exploited black male sexuality and negated black female sexuality in the realm of popular culture, Holiday subverted the institutionalization of racialized and sexualized images of “black body” by her very sexuality, thus challenging white supremacist patriarchy. Furthermore, her bodily presence in the vocalist reproduction of the southern lynching made black women and black female sexuality visible in the dominant lynching discourse, which had long obscured their presence. For Holiday as a black woman to sing “Strange Fruit” was not only to protest against racial violence; it also allowed her to give voices to her silenced sisters who had been continuously denigrated as racialized/sexualized others. In the cultural space of her performance of “Strange Fruit,” Holiday’s body became the principal site where she contested racialized representation of lynching from within.

Holiday’s rendering of “Strange Fruit” likewise offers us another interpretation on the politics of sexuality from white women’s perspective. It created a cultural space where, by listening to Holiday’s musical affirmation of women’s sexual autonomy, white women could also participate, albeit differently from black women, in resisting white patriarchy that suppressed female sexual subjectivity. While southern white men had long exploited black women sexually and excluded them from the category of rape victims in the lynching narrative, they attempted to control white women’s sexuality by confining them to the protective rhetoric of innocent rape victims. Hence, on the one hand, Holiday’s public avowal of black women’s sexuality resisted the sexual objectification of black women and the historical silencing of their sexual abuse as stated above. White women’s affirmation of sexuality through consuming Holiday’s performance, on the other hand, liberated themselves from the imposed notion of rape

victimhood. Although the consensual sexual relationship between white women and black men had often existed in the antebellum South, it became one of the key threats to the weakened white patriarchal positionality, particularly since Post-Reconstruction. According to historian Martha Hodes, ideas about “the agency of white women” in such interracial liaisons had been replaced by new ideas about “the dangers of empowered black men” (the image of the black rapist) by the 1890s. But the notion and reality of consensual relationships between black men and white women, by their persistence into the twentieth century, carried within them the germ of another subversive force: the agency of white women.⁷³ Thus, by consuming “Strange Fruit,” white women could subtly validate the proscribed interracial sexual relationships Holiday elegized in the song. In so doing, they undermined the taboo of black-white consensual liaison, thereby subverting white patriarchal norms.

In this case, the request for the “sexy song” by a (white) woman in LA makes more sense; indeed, it would seem that she valued it as the genuinely “sexy song” that it was. She said sexy because of “the naked bodies swinging in the trees,” thereby emphasizing not on the brutality inflicted upon these (black) bodies but rather their nakedness, which conjured up something erotic and seductive in her mind. She actively asked for Holiday’s musical rendering of what she considered the sexy, naked bodies of black men. It is this very act of this white woman, her affirmative and autonomic desiring for imagined (and possibly actual) black male sexuality that white men had long tried to suppress through the rape myth. Thus, through the act of musical consumption, Holiday’s white female audiences acquired a new vehicle for challenging the dominant social norm of women’s sexuality that restricted female agency. They were able to do so without damaging their respectable womanhood. The picture clearly captures

⁷³ Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 176-208.

how comfortably well-dressed, descent white female audiences consumed Holiday's overtly sexual performance of both love songs as well as "Strange Fruit" that musically described black male and while female sexuality, forbidden interracial sex, and sadistic violence as an outcome of such a relationship. From the perspective of the politics of sexuality, the complicit relationship between Holiday and these white women becomes more apparent. Through the performance and consumption of the song about lynching in nightclub spaces, both parties gained access to agency in affirming female sexuality and eventually challenged the white supremacist patriarchy that suppressed, albeit differently, black and white female sexuality.

In the arena of the actual politics, middle-class black women had tried but largely failed during the 1930s to foster interracial cooperation with southern white women in the anti-lynching movement. But such an alliance became possible, if not always successful, within the imagined realm through cultural politics.⁷⁴ Holiday's "Strange Fruit" contributed to creating an alternative transgressive interracial culture and sisterhood between black women and white women through the politics of sexuality. Both the song "Strange Fruit" and Holiday's performativity that suffused the song thus opened multiple windows of subversive possibilities.

⁷⁴ ASWPL did challenge the southern patriarchal system by refuting the rape myth, not necessarily because white women affirmed their sexual autonomy but rather because they attempted to emphasize their respectable womanhood. Their anti-lynching efforts mainly aimed at educating the southern white community about uncivilized and un-Christian acts of lynching, for lynching, from their perspective, was a moral-threatening problem for the white community that respectable white women should solve; it was not a problem because of the victimization of African Americans.

Thus, the ASWPL's strategy of moral uplift did not entail such actions as organizational support for the federal anti-lynching legislation that would directly challenge the state power. Hishida, "Jinshu-kan Kyōryoku eno Kitai to Zassetsu [The Hope and Failure in Interracial Cooperation]," *The Journal of American and Canadian Studies* 23 (2005), 78-92.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Politics of Bearing Witness: Lynching Photography and Anti-Lynching Struggles

It would be important for people to look at what had happened on a late Mississippi night when nobody was looking, to consider what might happen again if we didn't look out. . . . I knew that I could talk for the rest of my life about what had happened to my baby, I could explain it in great detail, I could describe what I saw. . . . They would not be able to visualize what had happened, unless they were allowed to see the result of what had happened. They had to see what I had seen. The whole nation had to bear witness to this.

—Mamie Till-Mobley on the open-casket funeral of Emmett Till (2003) ¹

Sixteen-year-old James Cameron was the third person scheduled to be lynched in Marion, Indiana, on August 7, 1930, after a mob dragged his friends Thomas Shipp and Abraham Smith out of their cells and lynched them for the alleged killing and rape of a white couple. On the verge of execution with a noose around his neck, however, Cameron's life was miraculously spared. For being an accessory to voluntary manslaughter, he served for four years in prison until paroled.² Cameron started his testimonies about the Marion lynching as early as 1944, but it was not until 1982 when his memoir *A Time of Terror: A Survivor's Story* came out and he spoke to promote it at community gatherings and schools in the Midwest that his story began to attract attention. His appearance in the mainstream media such as the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, the BBC, and the *Newsweek* further developed the public interest in him as one of the few-known lynching survivors. In 1988, Cameron opened the America's Black Holocaust Museum in Milwaukee, and

¹ Mamie Till-Mobley and Christopher Benson, *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America* (New York: One World and Ballantine Books, 2003), 139.

² For a detailed account of Cameron's experience, see James Cameron, *A Time of Terror: A Survivor's Story* (1982, Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1994); James H. Madison, *A Lynching in the Heartland: Race and Memory in America* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 5-11, 117; and Cynthia Carr, *Our Town: A Heartland Lynching, A Haunted Town, and the Hidden Story of White America* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006), 16-21.

continued to keep the Marion lynching alive through the exhibits that focused on lynching despite the fact that the museum faced temporary closures and changed its location several times.³ Historian James H. Madison stated that two agents in particular—the famous photograph of the Marion lynching taken by a local photographer Lawrence Beitler, and Cameron’s testimonial story—prevented forgetting and forced public remembering of the incident. They were, indeed, the main exhibits presented at the America’s Black Holocaust Museum. Cameron shared his first-hand experience with visitors while showing them blown-up versions of the Beitler’s photo and other lynching photos. Not only was the Beitler’s photo published on the cover of *A Time of Terror*; its copies were sold at the museum shop for five dollars a piece. As a *New York Times* reporter wrote in 1995, Cameron was not only the founder and tour guide of the museum, but he was also “its star exhibit.”⁴

While many historical narratives utilize photography and testimony as significant primary sources to reconstruct the past, those visual/oral sources become of particular importance in telling the history of racial violence. In order not to forget atrocities of the past, detailed descriptions of historical events are provided too often through the presentation of victims’ bodies captured in photography and testimony. One can hardly think of any historical narrative of atrocities that do not offer a representation of victims’ brutalized bodies, be it through photographs, documentary films, newspaper accounts, and/or survivors’ testimonies. Mamie

³ Madison, *A Lynching in the Heartland*, 118-128. The museum closed temporarily in 2008 (but has never been re-opened since then). “America’s Black Holocaust Museum Closing after 20 Years in Milwaukee,” *JS Online*, July 30, 2008. <http://www.jsonline.com/entertainment/29565784.html>. Last accessed on February 9, 2012.

⁴ Madison, *A Lynching in the Heartland*, 111; *New York Times*, July 10, 1995. Cameron and his story regained the media attention even more after he received a pardon for his youth crime from the Indiana Parole Board in 1993.

Till-Mobley's recollection of her decision to have a four-day open casket funeral for his son Emmett Till in 1955—"the whole nation had to bear witness to this"—drives us to a troubling question: Why is it that critically important to showcase the victim's body in public and let people bear witness to it, in order to remember the past that must never be forgotten?

With this question in mind, this chapter and Chapter Five explore the politics of bearing witness, the viewing and re-viewing of racial terror—what art historian Dora Apel calls "the responsibility of historical witnessing"—by drawing on past and present examples regarding the commemoration of lynching.⁵ In this chapter, I first elucidate how bearing witness to lynching, both actual and representational, affected contemporary lynch mobs and the African American community. I review the way in which collective watching of racial terror reinforced the communal bond of whiteness among the mobs and spectators while forced looking served to terrorize African Americans, thereby functioning to maintain white supremacist patriarchy. This chapter also considers how anti-lynching activists protested lynching through the very same act of looking, by focusing on the usage of lynching photographs of African American males in the 1930s, including Shipp and Smith (1930), Claude Neal (1934), Rubin Stacy (1935), and Lint Shaw (1936). African American newspapers often reprinted pictures of these victims, and the same images appeared in the NAACP's anti-lynching pamphlets or the *Crisis*. Lynching survivor Cameron (now deceased) later used the Beitler's photo of Shipp and Smith in his life-long efforts to commemorate the incident. They reappropriated these photographic images, taken as mementoes of white supremacist ascendancy, to advance their anti-lynching cause while facing the risk of reinforcing the existing racial and gendered hierarchy.

In elucidating the politics of bearing witness, not only does this chapter deal with

⁵ Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 7.

historical examples of encountering the actual lynching scenes; it also considers the secondary witnessing such as reading newspaper accounts on lynching and looking at lynching photographs. These discursive and visual representations have equally contributed to historicization of actual lynching.

Forcible Looking: White Terrors and Black Fears in Historical and Literary Lynching

Lynching functioned as a spectacle of ultimate dehumanization and commodification of the black body, particularly the black male body. Literary scholar David Marriott rightfully points out that the spectacle of lynching was not merely “a form of popular theatre, or pain as public entertainment, but a ritual, cathartic act of initiation and absolution.”⁶ Lynching was often carried out in the public space in a very carnival-like manner. Newspapers announced scheduled lynchings to attract many spectators. Schools were sometimes cancelled, and arranged excursion trains brought more people to witness the presentation of torture. In this spectacle of atrocious communal gatherings, lynching victims were shot, mutilated, castrated, burned and/or hanged; their body parts were cut off into pieces along with the noose, and taken back as “souvenirs.” Because the purpose of lynching lay less in expunging the threat of the black hypermasculinity from the white community, but rather in re/enforcing the power of white supremacy through the ritualistic act, “the process of violence itself,” according to historian Amy Louise Wood, “became more significant than the lynching’s intended result (that is, death to punish).”⁷ It was a ritual that united the white community where white supremacist patriarchy

⁶ David Marriott, *On Black Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 19.

⁷ Amy Louise Wood, “Lynching Photography and the ‘Black Beast Rapist’ in the Southern White Masculine Imagination,” in Peter Lehman, ed., *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 195.

was maintained. As Jonathan Markovitz contends, lynching was intended “to create collective memories of terror and white supremacy.”⁸

Because the public torture of the black body was designed “not merely to put death” the lynch victim “but to display the putting to death” of the victim, the very witnessing of lynching, just like the actual lynching, served as a device to subjugate the black body and in turn reinforce and remember the existing white patriarchal power structure.⁹ At the spectacle of lynching, one local newspaper reported in 1912, “None of men or boys were [*sic*] willing to miss an incident of the torture.”¹⁰ In 1920, the *Atlanta Journal* wrote: “The execution of the negro was witnessed by hundreds of persons, and many thousands who were in the crowd literally fought to get close enough to see the actual details.”¹¹ Walter White witnessed a white store clerk’s excitement of watching lynching during his 1918 field trip to investigate a lynching in Georgia. “When he told of the manner in which the pregnant [black] woman had been killed,” White recalled, “he chuckled and slapped his thigh and declared it to be ‘the best show, Mister, I ever did see.’” On another occasion, White recollected how a train conductor in Arkansas, who assumed light-skinned White was white, excitedly informed him about the expected lynching. After he

⁸ Jonathan Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching: Racial Violence and Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xxvi. On the spectacle aspect of lynching, see Grace Elizabeth Hale, “Deadly Amusements: Spectacle Lynchings and the Contradictions of Segregation as Culture,” in *Making Whiteness*, chap. 5.

⁹ Kirk W. Fuoss, “Lynching, Performances, Theatres of Violence,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 19:1 (January 1999): 17.

¹⁰ Special correspondence of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *Crisis*, June, September 1912, reprinted in NAACP, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States* (1919, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 22.

¹¹ *Atlanta Journal*, June 21, 1920, reprinted in Ralph Ginzburg, *100 Years of Lynchings* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1962, 1988), 133.

managed to get on the train escaping from the hands of the mob, White was encouraged to stay to see his own lynching. “Why, Mister, you’re leaving just when the fun is going start!,” the conductor exclaimed, “There’s a damned yaller nigger down here passing for white and the boys are going to have some fun with him.”¹² His recollections illustrate how watching lynching was considered as a fun event to share among whites. These accounts show spectators’ eagerness and excitement of witnessing the torture.¹³

Lynching became a spectacle for whites to see, and for African Americans to be forced to see. Marriott writes, “this is what the lynchers want. A memory, an imago, that will not go away. Not only the body, burned and stinging in the trees, but black men, women, and children looking, and then looking away, from what the white men have done.”¹⁴ While attending the communal ritual of lynching disciplined and trained white mobs and bystanders to live in accordance with white patriarchal rule, the forced witnessing reminded African Americans of the continuous white policing of the black body. The *New York World* reported that, after the burning, the mob dragged the charred body in a sack behind an automobile to the victim’s hometown, and hanged

¹² Walter White, “I Investigate Lynchings,” *American Mercury*, January 1929, reprinted in Anne P. Rice, ed., *Witnessing Lynching: American Writers Respond* (New Brunswick, NJ; Rutgers University Press, 2003), 255, 260.

¹³ Admittedly, not all the community members actively participated in the execution of the torture—some were horrified and traumatized as much as African Americans, while others probably simply stayed home to avoid being a part of it. Many contemporaries have pointed out the damaging impact of lynching on the psyche of the white community. ASWPL, for example, was founded partly because of southern white women’s concern with such impact on women and children. Rice, *Witnessing Lynching*, 15.

¹⁴ Marriott, *On Black Men*, 14.

it to a telephone pole “for the colored populace to gaze upon.”¹⁵ In 1920, a black witness of the double lynching in Paris, Texas, wrote to the NAACP:

A mob of about 3,000 awaited the arrival of the prisoners. . . . [T]he men were chained, tortured, saturated with oil and burned to a crisp. Their charred, smoking bodies were then chained to an automobile and dragged for hours through the streets, particularly in sections inhabited by our Race. It was a regular parade of seventeen cars and a truck, all filled with armed men, crying aloud: “Here they are; two barbecued niggers. All you niggers come see them and take warning.”

As a result of this display that the white mob forced black neighbors to see, the reporter wrote: “Hundreds of Negroes have left Paris since this occurrence. Others who have real estate are planning to leave as soon as possible.”¹⁶ In the case of Lint Shaw, who was lynched in Royston, Georgia, in 1936, his body was still bound to the tree even several hours after the lynching “as throngs assembled on the nearby highway” for the spectacle. Shaw’s family was so terrified that they “refused to claim the body.”¹⁷

African American leaders and writers of the lynching era observed how this forced witnessing and hearing of lynching terrorized them. Some had only to recall their personal experiences. Aforementioned recollections by White, while illustrating whites’ private sharing of the white power through willing to witness lynching on the one hand, also revealed terrifying psychological impact on a black man in facing such a blatant display of racist sentiments. When listening to the white store clerk telling White his excitement of watching lynching, White tried

¹⁵ *New York World*, May 16, 1916, reprinted in Ginzburg, *100 Years of Lynchings*, 103.

¹⁶ *New York Negro World*, August 22, 1920, reprinted in Ginzburg, *100 Years of Lynchings*, 139-140.

¹⁷ *Hickory (North Carolina) Record*, April, 1936, reprinted in Ginzburg, *100 Years of Lynchings*, 229.

to cover “the nausea the story caused me as best as I could.”¹⁸ Although he could easily pass for white (and he did so to investigate lynching), White had been bound to blackness since his adolescence when he nearly escaped from white terrorization during the Atlanta race riot of 1906. When the riot broke out, White and his father, holding guns in their hands to protect their family, watched all night at a mob on the street hunting black people in their neighborhood. When he heard a white acquaintance of theirs yelling: “Let’s burn it [their house] down!” a light-skinned, blonde, blue-eyed White had a full realization of his blackness. He wrote:

In that instant there opened up within me a great awareness: I knew then I was a Negro, a human being with an invisible pigmentation which marked me a person to be hunted, hanged, abused, discriminated against, kept in poverty and ignorance, in order that those whose skin was white would have readily at hand a proof of their superiority, a proof patent and inclusive, accessible to the moron and the idiot as well as to the wise man and the genius.¹⁹

The mere news about a lynching discouraged W. E. B. Du Bois for a moment to protest against the atrocity. In 1899, Atlanta University professor Du Bois, in his early 30s, heard that the black sharecropper Sam Hose, who had allegedly murdered his white employer and raped his wife, was to be lynched in rural Georgia. Du Bois headed for the office of the *Atlanta Constitution* to discuss the incident with the writer Joel Chandler Harris and the editor, carrying letters, one of which protested the act of the lynch mob. “I did not get there,” Du Bois recollected in 1940, because “[o]n the way news met me.”²⁰ Before he reached the office, Du

¹⁸ White, “I Investigate Lynchings,” reprinted in Rice, *Witnessing Lynching*, 256.

¹⁹ Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (1948, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975), 11.

²⁰ W. E. B. Du Bois, quoted in Shawn Michelle Smith, “Spectacles of Whiteness: The Photography of Lynching,” in *Photography of the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 113.

Bois heard that Hose had already been lynched and that his knuckles were displayed for sale at a grocer's window, only a couple of blocks away from where Du Bois was walking. The grave shock "pulled me off my feet," recalled Du Bois.²¹ He only heard about the lynching; he did not even see Hose's knuckles on display, but his anti-lynching determination was hindered, albeit for a moment, by the mere news on the lynching and the fact that he could have encountered the "trophy" of the lynching if he had kept walking several more blocks. As Shawn Michelle Smith argues, Du Bois "may have felt that the severed knuckles of Samuel Wilkes [Hose's real name] metonymically figured the racialized social body to which Du Bois himself also belonged."²²

Richard Wright shared with Du Bois the identification with preconditioned blackness as the victimized body. "I had never in my life been abused by whites," wrote Wright, "but I had already become conditioned to their existence as though I had been the victim of a thousand lynchings."²³ The news of a lynching left a devastating impact on the psyche of young Wright. In his autobiography *Black Boy* (1937), Wright recalled how he felt as a teenage boy in 1924 when he learned that his classmate's brother Bob had been killed for his alleged relationship with a white woman. "Inside of me my world crashed and my body felt heavy," Wright described, observing that Bob had been "caught by the white death, the threat of which hung over every male black in the South." Similar to Du Bois' case, the news of the white terror incited Wright's instant identification with the brutalized black body. African Americans did not have to see a lynching to be terrorized by it, because, for Wright, hearing about lynching was

²¹ Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002), 14-15.

²² Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*, 115.

²³ Richard Wright, *Black Boy* (1937, New York: Perennial Library, 1989), 84.

even more petrifying than looking at the actual scene. He wrote: “The things that influenced my conduct as a Negro did not have to happen to me directly; I needed but to hear of them to feel their full effects in the deepest layers of my consciousness. Indeed, the white brutality that I had not seen was a more effective control of my behavior than that which I knew.”²⁴ As Wood observes, lynching terrified Wright because “it existed purely in the realm of representation, as horrific images that haunted his consciousness,” the images he was compelled to envision through hearing of it.²⁵

Others described the impact of traumatic witnessing upon the African American psyche in their literary and poetic works. Historian Ann Rice observes that these 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.”²⁶ Sutton Griggs’s *The Hindered Hand* (1905), for example, graphically portrays the torture of a young black couple, Bud and Foresta Harper, a lynching scene that Rice and literary scholar Trudier Harris believe were inspired by a historical account of an actual lynching incident.²⁷ In the scene where the mob tortured Foresta, “[p]oor Bud her helpless husband closed his eyes and turned away his head to avoid the terrible sight. Men gathered about him and forced his eyelids

²⁴ Wright, *Black Boy*, 190.

²⁵ Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 2.

²⁶ Ann Rice, “How We Remember Lynching,” *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 20 (Fall 2006): 35.

²⁷ Trudier Harris, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 2.

open so that he could see all.”²⁸ Here Griggs pointedly depicted the intense fight between the forcible looking and the resistance to it. In this moment of terrorization, the husband, already under sentence of death, was forced to witness the lynching of his wife. Even his struggle of not looking was denied at the hands of the mob, who knew exactly the power of such a forcible looking.

In his novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), James Weldon Johnson described the impact of witnessing lynching upon the biracial male narrator as follows:

He [the lynch victim] squirmed, he writhed, strained at his chains, then gave out cries and groans that I shall always hear. . . . I was fixed to the spot where I stood, powerless to take my eyes from what I did not want to see. . . . Before I could make myself believe that what I saw was really happening, I was looking at a scorched post, a smoldering fire, blackened bones, charred fragments sifting down through coils of chain; and the smell of burnt flesh—human flesh—was in my nostrils. . . . A great wave of humiliation and shame swept over me. Shame that I belonged to a race that could be so dealt with.²⁹

Here, a combination of traumatic looking, hearing, and smelling constituted the narrator’s encounter with lynching. In the midst of the lynching, he first captured the fear of the victim visually (“he squirmed, he writhed, strained at his chains”), then heard the victim’s agony (“cries and groans”) that he would never forget (“I shall always hear”). Even after the lynching was all over, the narrator could not move and remained powerless to look away from what he “did not want to see.” He was still forcibly exposed to the visual remainder of the ritual—a scorched post, a smoldering fire, blackened bones, charred fragments, and coils of chain, as well as its odor (“the smell of burnt flesh—human flesh—was in my nostrils”). It is this firsthand, catastrophic

²⁸ Sutton Griggs, *The Hindered Hand*, quoted in Harris, *Exorcising Blackness*, 1.

²⁹ James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912, New York: Vintage, 1989), 187-188.

experience of racial terror through which the narrator felt “a great wave of humiliation” that he “belonged to a race that could be so dealt with.” The narrator’s shame that he was fixated to the dehumanized blackness ultimately led to his decision to leave the South and pass for white.³⁰

While Johnson’s biracial protagonist could escape from the black victimization, Wright’s black speaker in “Between the World and Me” (1935) was less fortunate than Johnson’s protagonist. Wright portrayed a black person’s inescapable identification with the death-bound black body in his/her traumatic witnessing. In this poem, the speaker unexpectedly encounters with the remains of lynching in the woods, from “a design of white bones . . . upon a cushion of ashes,” to “a pair of trousers stiff with black blood,” and “scattered traces of tar, restless arrays of feathers, and the lingering smell of gasoline.” In the end, his/her discovery of “a stony skull” makes the speaker’s mind “frozen with a cold pity for the life that was gone.” A series of such involuntary witnessing forces the speaker to imagine the lynching of his/her own. The imaginary reenactment of lynching begins with a fusion of the victim’s body into the speaker’s (“The dry bones stirred, rattled, lifted, melting themselves into my bones / The grey ashes formed flesh firm and black, entering into my flesh”), followed by the communal execution:

And a thousand faces swirled around me, clamoring that my life be burned. . . .
And then they had me, stripped me, battering my teeth into my throat till I
swallowed my own blood.
My voice was drowned in the roar of their voices, and my black wet body slipped
and rolled in their hands as they bound me to the sapling.
And my skin clung to the bubbling hot tar, falling from me in limp patches.
And the down and quill of the white feathers sank into my raw flesh, and I moaned
in my agony.
. . . .
Now I am dry bones and my face a stony skull staring in yellow surprise at the
sun. . . .³¹

³⁰ Smith, *Photography of the Color Line*, 128-129.

³¹ Richard Wright, “Between the World and Me,” reprinted in Rice, *Witnessing Lynching*,

As the cases presented by White, Du Bois, Wright, and Johnson demonstrate, forcible looking and hearing of lynching scenes, whether actual or fictional, threatened and traumatized contemporary African Americans in such a devastating way. Through bearing witness to racial terror inflicted upon the black body, they were instantly fixated to pre-determined black victimhood.

Just like their male counterparts, black women writers wrote about the psychological impact that their witnessing and hearing of lynching left on African Americans, but they especially focused on black women as mothers and wives of lynch victims.³² “Rachel,” a full-length play written by Angelina Weld Grimké in 1916, for example, depicted a scene where Mrs. Loving, a black woman, recounted her firsthand experience of the double lynching of her husband and one of her sons, when she confessed about the incident to her now grown-up children, Rachel and Tom, for the first time after ten years. Mrs. Loving recalled the moment after a mob dragged the two out: “I covered my ears with my hands—and waited. . . . [I]t was very still when I finally uncovered my ears. The only sounds were the faint rustle of leaves and the “tap-tapping of the twig of a tree” against the window. I hear it still—sometimes in my

305-306.

³² Koritha Mitchell, *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 147-174. While black male writers tended to focus on the physical descriptions of the lynched black body that their characters witnessed, black women writers, as Harris observed, “seem to be equally less concerned with graphic depictions of the violence inherent in lynching and burning rituals.” Harris, *Exorcising Blackness*, xii. Scholars like Julie Buckner Armstrong and Mitchell further contend that, in their literary works, women writers placed their focus on the effects of lynching on black families rather than mob violence itself. Julie Buckner Armstrong, “‘The People . . . took exception to her remarks’: Meta Warrick Fuller, Angelina Weld Grimké, and the Lynching of Mary Turner,” *Mississippi Quarterly* 61:1/2 (Winter 2008): 125-126; Mitchell, *Living with Lynching*, 71-76, 173-174.

dreams. It was the tree where they were.”³³ Through a vicarious witnessing of the lynching of her father and brother, Rachel shared her mother’s pain. She concluded: “everywhere, everywhere, throughout the South, there are hundreds of dark mothers who live in fear, terrible, suffocating fear, whose rest by night is broken, and whose joy by day in their babies on their hearts is three parts—pain. Oh I know this is true—for this is the way I should feel if I were . . . [a] mother. How horrible!”³⁴

Similarly, in her one-act play, “Safe,” written in circa 1929, Georgia Douglas Johnson described black women’s traumatic experience in witnessing lynching. Set in 1893, Liza, a black expectant mother, heard the ongoing lynching of Sam Hosea, the fictional figure but a clear reminder of the actual lynch victim Sam Hose.³⁵ When hearing Hosea’s voice shouting, “Don’t hang me, don’t hang me! I don’t want to die! Mother! Mother!,” Liza said: “Oh my God, did you hear that poor boy crying for his mother? He’s jest a boy—jest a boy—jest a little boy!”³⁶ Hosea’s pleading voice and the sight of the crowd outside terribly threatened her, who had never seen lynching before. Right after the incident, she gave birth to a boy, but the doctor told her husband and mother that Liza killed her newborn baby immediately after she learned it was a boy. Liza’s constant muttering after her infanticide—“Now he’s safe—safe from the lynchers! Safe!”—demonstrates how witnessing lynching psychologically damaged black women. But it

³³ Angelina Weld Grimké, “Rachel,” reprinted in Kathy A. Perkins and Judith L. Stephens, eds., *Strange Fruit: Plays on Lynching by American Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 41.

³⁴ Grimké, “Rachel,” reprinted in Perkins and Stephens, *Strange Fruit*, 42.

³⁵ Mitchell, *Living with Lynching*, 163.

³⁶ Georgia Douglas Johnson, “Safe,” reprinted in Perkins and Stephens, *Strange Fruit*, 113.

also shows how, just like the case of enslaved women, such a traumatic experience often urged black mothers to conduct an ultimate resistance to racial terror—killing their own offspring.³⁷

Witnessing Lynching Photography

In considering historical witnessing of lynching that existed in the realm of representation, nothing functioned more spectacle-like, hence more terrorizing, than photographs of lynching taken on-site and postcards made out of these photos. Lynching photography functioned as “spectacle within the spectacle” of lynching.³⁸ Both the act of taking pictures and the subsequent images perpetuated the racial and sexual ideologies embedded in the act of lynching. These images disclosed the moment and aftermath of the carnival-like atmosphere of lynching, where people gathered to see the torture and were proud to be pictured with hanging bodies. Laurence Beitler’s photo of the Marion lynching, for example, captures both the hung bodies of Shipp and Smith on the background—one is clothed and the other covered with rugged cloths—and a number of white spectators in front of the lynching victims—men and women, young and old, some looking at the bodies, others cheerfully looking at the camera. Local photographers, both amateur and professional, snapped shots of such spectacle lynching just like other communal events. Beitler made thousands of copies of the Marion lynching photo and sold them for fifty cents apiece.³⁹ These pictures and photographic postcards filled in for the rare

³⁷ Johnson, “Safe,” reprinted in Perkins and Stephens, *Strange Fruit*, 115. For a detailed study of the play, see Mitchell, *Living with Lynching*, 161-167.

³⁸ Wood, “Lynching Photography and the ‘Black Beast Rapist’,” 194-195.

³⁹ James Allen, et al., *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe: Twin Palm Publishes, 2000), 176 n. 31; Madison, *A Lynching in the Heartland*, 112; Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*, 135-136.

occurrence of the spectacle mass lynching. Looking at pictures gave lynch mobs a sense of reconfirmation that “justice” was done, and offered vicarious experiences for those who did not directly witness the event. As Shawn Michelle Smith observes, lynching photographs do not only “work as defining images that make whiteness visible to itself,” but further function as a medium through which “whiteness can be constituted and claimed . . . both by those represented in the photographs and by those who will later view these images.”⁴⁰ While the cultural power of lynching (and white supremacy itself) “rested on spectacle” as Wood states, photographic images of lynching helped consolidate the white patriarchal power in the same way that actual lynching did.⁴¹

The very presence of photographs and postcards compiled in the photo book *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (2000) are the evidence of their prevalence, but personal inscriptions on several images further prove that those images were actually circulated to reinforce the existing racial hierarchy. A framed version of the Beitler’s photo of the Marion lynching in the book, for instance, has several inscriptions: one on the photo’s background that reads “Beitler Studio,” and the others on the inner and outer mattes, one of which reads, “Klan 4th, Joplin, MO. 33.”⁴² This indicates that it was framed by the Fourth Klan of Joplin, Missouri, in 1933. Included perhaps between mat and glass is a lock of black hair, which is presumably one of the victims’. The way the photograph is kept—double-matted, framed, and inscribed with a “trophy”—clearly shows that it was displayed on some Klan member’s wall as a memento of

⁴⁰ Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*, 139, 143.

⁴¹ Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 3.

⁴² Allen, et al., *Without Sanctuary*, fig. 32, 177.

boasting white supremacy. The picture on the wall must have incited another witnessing among the private circle, thus further bonding white supremacist ties. Indeed, it was this reaffirmation of whiteness for which the representation of racial terror was intended for display.⁴³ Sam Hose's knuckles that Du Bois nearly encountered also functioned as such. The victim's body parts as a token of racial terror were on public display to expect more witnessing by passersby: whites who were reminded of their power, and African Americans who were terrorized by their presence, which ultimately led to the consolidation of existing racial hierarchy.⁴⁴

The Beitler's photo best exemplifies how lynching pictures, just like any actual lynching, triggered a battle of forcible looking between white mobs and African Americans—a battle in which the former forced the latter to look at a reminder of racial terror while the latter refused to look. In the fall of 1930, for instance, T. R. Poston, a black reporter for the *New York Amsterdam News*, was approached by “a snickering white youth” in Indianapolis who tried to sell him a copy of the Beitler's photo of the Marion lynching. Asked if he “would like to buy a picture,” Poston refused. But the youth “snickered again, [and] pushed a large photograph into the writer's hand and scurried up the street.”⁴⁵ The young white man's smothered laugh (and subsequent action after Poston's rejection) proves that his intention was not to sell Poston a picture but rather to terrorize an African American man by forcing him to look at the lynching picture. And Poston's natural refusal to buy the picture shows how, although he failed, some African

⁴³ Apel, *Imagery of Lynching*, 21-23.

⁴⁴ In the cases of Hose and two other black men, Harvey Young analyzes how the body parts of lynch victims as souvenirs, fetish objects, and the remains actually reminded the viewers “their ordeal.” Harvey Young, “The Black Body as Souvenir in American Lynching,” *Theatre Journal* 57 (2005): 639-657.

⁴⁵ *New York Amsterdam News*, March 9, 1935.

Americans resisted being forced to look at representations of racial terror.

Likewise, the Marion lynching survivor James Cameron encountered multiple forced witnessing he tried to counter. On the following day of the incident, white detectives brought him back to Marion from a neighborhood town jail where he was imprisoned. Around the courthouse square where Shipp's and Smith's bodies were still hung on the tree, Cameron first heard newsboys selling papers on the incident: "Read all about it! Mob lynches two Negroes here last night! Read all about it!" Cameron was then forced to take a look at the paper that one of the detectives got from a paperboy. He "raised his head and looked" at the front-page picture of the lynching. Seeing in the photo "Tommy and Abe with ropes around their necks, swinging from limbs of the tree" and "many upturned faces, pointing and laughing at the spectacle," Cameron "shoved the paper aside in disgust." He had no choice not to look at the picture, but he refused to look further after his initial glance. His rage was kindled even more with humiliation when the driver and the detectives told Cameron to look at the lynching site at the courthouse. A comment by one of them, "look how their necks have stretched," did not necessarily force Cameron to look at the bodies of his friends, but it inevitably drove him to cast his attention to the scene. "I raised myself off the floor to see Tommy and Abe," Cameron wrote. "I was sorry I did. It was a gruesome sight. I felt like vomiting. I couldn't control my tears."⁴⁶ Poston and Cameron's experiences illustrate how, on the one hand, whites utilized forced looking of the actual and representational lynching, as well as forced hearing, to threaten African Americans. They prove how, on the other hand, African Americans attempted to resist such forcible looking by refusing to look at or looking away from it.

⁴⁶ Cameron, *A Time of Terror*, 83-84.

Anti-Lynching Usage of Lynching Pictures

African Americans and anti-lynching sympathizers did not just remain terrorized or traumatized by being forced to look at scenes of racial terror. Nor did they only refuse to look at it. Quite often, they turned their attention to lynching photos. Paradoxically, African Americans utilized the very same strategy of bearing witness to lynching, but for the different purpose of revealing white brutality, through the ocular presentation of the actual, representational or fictional lynching. Ever since Ida B. Well's inclusion of lynching images in her works at the turn of the twentieth century, lynching photographs served for anti-lynching activists as the most effective visual evidence to remind the public of ongoing racial atrocities. From the 1910s through the 1930s, the NAACP and the black press constantly published lynching photographs to incite the public outcry against lynching.⁴⁷ In the 1930s when lynching was on the decline, the display of these photographs rather frequented in the *Crisis* and the black newspapers. Wood observes that readers of these newspapers and periodicals had become more accustomed to seeing lynching photographs by the 1930s, when the images came to serve as "interchangeable symbols of racial atrocity" and any details—when, where, how and why they were produced—grew less needed.⁴⁸ These "anti-lynching photographs," according to Leigh Raiford,

⁴⁷ Leigh Raiford states that, between 1909 and 1922, the NAACP reproduced about three photographs of lynching per year in their anti-lynching publications. Leigh Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 33. On Well's use of photographs, see Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 186; Leigh Raiford, "Lynching, Visuality, and the Un/Making of Blackness," *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* (Fall 2006): 25-27; Dora Apel and Shawn Michelle Smith, *Lynching Photographs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 24; and Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare*, 41-46. On the reappropriation of lynching photographs by the NAACP or the black press in the 1910s-1920s, see Ann Rice, "How We Remember Lynching," 35-36; and Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare*, 29-34, 50-65.

⁴⁸ Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 183-221.

highlighted African Americans' struggle to "possess and represent blutalized black bodies in order to change the condition of black lives."⁴⁹ By reprinting the images with their own versions of captions and headlines, these anti-lynching activists created an alternative spectacle of lynching, a counter-spectacle that challenged white supremacist discourse.

The Beitler's picture of the Marion lynching was one of the most utilized anti-lynching photographs. The image, which has later become "the generic lynching photograph," was often used to condemn the atrocity itself in the anti-lynching context.⁵⁰ For example, the October 1930 issue of the *Crisis* reprinted the Beitler's picture with the caption: "Civilization in the United States, 1930: The lynching of Tom Shipp and Abe Smith at Marion, Indiana, August 7, 'by party or parties unknown.'"⁵¹ With the image and the simple caption, the journal highlighted the stark contrast, not only between the ideal image of the country and the reality, but also between the widespread narratives of unidentified lynchers ("parties unknown") and the presence of those who were voluntarily involved in the picture. Similarly, the *Chicago Defender* published the image on its front page with the caption "American Christianity." The article stated: "Although members of the mob . . . couldn't be identified according to the officers, here is a picture which shows plainly any number of the guilty persons."⁵² The March 9, 1935 issue

⁴⁹ Raiford has coined the term "antilynching photography" to explain anti-lynching activists' usage of lynching photography in their struggles. She states that "antilynching photography" was an "explicitly antiracist political project." Raiford, "Lynching, Visuality, and the Un/Making of Blackness," 24.

⁵⁰ Madison, *A Lynching in the Heartland*, 113.

⁵¹ *Crisis*, October 1930, 348.

⁵² *Chicago Defender*, August 16, 1930, quoted and reprinted in Apel and Smith, *Lynching Photographs*, 20-21.

of the *New York Amsterdam News* also featured the Beitler's photo of the Marion lynching with the caption that stated: "grand jury ruled that 18-year-old Abraham Smith and 19-year-old Thomas Shipp met their deaths by the hands of 'persons unknown.' Yet, couples of the above picture were hawked on Marion, Ind., street for 50 cents apiece. . . . Were any of the above lynchers punished?"⁵³ The *Crisis*, *Chicago Defender*, and *New York Amsterdam News* let their readers' eyes behold the true nature of the image that captured the crime scene and its perpetrators, thereby challenging the white justice.

The *Amsterdam News* used the Beitler's image in the last of the three-part series of special articles as a part of campaigns for the passage of the Costigan-Wagner Bill. The writer was T. R. Poston, upon whom a white youth thrust an enlarged copy of the photo in 1930. By publishing it in an anti-lynching article, Poston, who had failed in the initial rejection of the image, successfully turned a token of white supremacy into evidence of white savagery. He described the photograph as follows:

The swinging, mutilated bodies shown in the picture are those of 18-year-old Abraham Smith and 19-year-old Thomas Shipp, who on August, 7, 1930, were dragged from the county jail at Marion, Ind., beaten and clawed to death by a mob of several thousand white men and women, and strung up on the courthouse lawn. A few hours after this picture was taken, the bodies were cut down by the sheriff and further mutilated by bloodthirsty white women who drove their sharp heels into the eye sockets and faces of the victims. The gleeful countenances of the mob members shown above, including that of the pregnant woman in the foreground, demonstrate effectively the high level of culture in the "advanced" Northern states.⁵⁴

The article complemented what happened before and after the picture was taken by focusing on the white mob, particularly white women. Not only did white women participate in the collective

⁵³ *New York Amsterdam News*, March 9, 1935.

⁵⁴ *New York Amsterdam News*, March 9, 1935.

act of lynching; some did initiate “bloodthirsty” mutilation onto the victims’ already dead bodies. The author directed the readers’ attention to the “gleeful countenances of the mob members” in the picture, but especially “that of the pregnant [white] woman in the foreground.” By pinpointing the presence of white women throughout the entire incident—from the commission of lynching to the picture taking and the aftermath—and detailing their cruelty, the article countered the dominant lynching discourse that portrayed white women as innocent, vulnerable beings protected by white men. Thus, the lynch mob and spectators caught in the Beitler’s photo gave the black press an effective strategy to refute the promulgated rhetoric of lynching—“persons unknown” and fragile white women. The picture naturally drew readers’ attention to the perpetrators, and with the help of its caption focusing on the atrocious aspect of lynching, African Americans successfully leveled their accusation against the mob.

The white mob in the lynching photo was not the only one whom the black press reproached. During the intensive lobbying campaign for the passage of a federal anti-lynching bill in the 1930s, African Americans did not only petition but also sometimes accused President Roosevelt. Apparently he was not in the lynching photo, but on November 3, 1934, the *New York Amsterdam News* had Roosevelt visually involved in the lynching of Claude Neal in a very dramatic manner. On October 26, 1934, when Neal, a 23-year-old African American field hand, was brutally tortured to death in Marianna, Florida, the *Amsterdam News* published an open letter to President Roosevelt entitled “Speak, Mr. President.” The letter was sandwiched by two pictures that the press juxtaposed: the image of Neal’s hung body on the left (captioned as “The Victim”), and the president’s portrait on the right (“The President”). The letter wrote:

Mr. President, Claude Neal is dead. YOU, as well as every intelligent citizen of this country, know upon whose hands his blood must rest. It is too late now for you to do anything to aid this unfortunate youth. Through inaction, you scorned that opportunity. But it is not too late for you to prevent the future mass murders

of other Claude Neals, forty-five of whom have been done to death since you and your New Deal became the symbol of American “progress.” Nor is it too late for you to demand that this particular crime be punished.⁵⁵

The layout seems deliberate, given that the letter strongly blames Roosevelt’s inability to prevent this previously announced lynching from happening. An attacking tone in this letter of indictment, in particular, informs readers that the president was indirectly responsible for the lynching of Neal. Thus, the submerged connection between the pictures of “The Victim” and “The President” comes to the fore, that is, an outcome (Neal’s death) and a reason (Roosevelt’s inaction), thereby turning the portrait of “The President” into a mug shot of a criminal. In fact, his portrait added a “white mob” to the lynching photo of Neal, which captured no mob or spectators. By announcing the casualties of forty-five lynch victims during the New Deal era, the paper further exposed Roosevelt’s “previous convictions.”

Among many contemporary anti-lynching organizations, it was the NAACP that utilized most this strategy of reappropriating lynching photos in their anti-lynching struggles. During the 1930s, more often than the previous decade, the NAACP started publishing lynching pictures in anti-lynching pamphlets as well as the *Crisis*. The executive leadership within the association had already shifted from white- to black-oriented by then, and all the executive officers—Walter White, William Pickens, Roy Wilkins, and Daisy E. Lampkin—were African American at the time of the lynching of Claude Neal.⁵⁶ As Grace Elizabeth Hale has observed, with the Neal case, the black-led NAACP started capturing the “cultural power inherent in sensationalized,

⁵⁵ *New York Amsterdam News*, November 3, 1934. Emphasis in the original.

⁵⁶ Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 32-33; NAACP, *The Lynching of Claude Neal*, 8, reprinted in George McJimsey, ed., *Documentary History of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidency, Vol. 11: FDR and Protection from Lynching, 1934-1945* (Congressional Information Service, 2003), 305.

gruesomely voyeuristic stories and even more grisly pictures for the anti-lynching crusade.”⁵⁷

In late November, a month after the lynching of Neal, the NAACP published and distributed over 15,000 copies of an eight-page pamphlet *The Lynching of Claude Neal*. The copy was sent to President Roosevelt and Attorney General Homer S. Cummings on November 28, and to each senator and representative by December 8. The association also started fundraising to send a copy to 100,000 religious leaders.⁵⁸

The Lynching of Claude Neal was a detailed study of the incident with the first-hand reports and pictures, one of which captured Neal’s mutilated corpse hung from a tree—the same image published in the *Amsterdam News*. In the preface of the pamphlet, Walter White stated: “This report is published with the hope that its sheer sadism and abnormal cruelty may stir thoughtful Americans to action.”⁵⁹ He asked the readers to urge President Roosevelt, Senators and Congressmen to act for the passage of the Costigan-Wagner anti-lynching bill. As a means of forcing passage of anti-lynching legislation, the association’s widely circulated leaflet turned a local incident into a national spectacle. White’s preface clearly shows that the pamphlet intended to stir the public consciousness by presenting gruesome details of ten-to-twelve-hour torture of Neal, which one southern newspaper described as follows: “A crowd of 100 men, women and children silently gazed at the body. . . . Photographers say they will soon have pictures of the body for sale at fifty cents each. Fingers and toes from Neal’s body are freely

⁵⁷ Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 222.

⁵⁸ *New York Amsterdam News*, December 1 and 18, 1934; *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 1, 1934.

⁵⁹ *The Lynching of Claude Neal*, 1, reprinted in McJimsey, *Documentary History of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidency*, Vol. 11, 298.

exhibited on street –corners here.”⁶⁰

The reprinted photographic image of Neal’s brutalized body served as a visual confirmation of the literary account on the earlier page—castration, mutilation, burning, and hanging—through which readers were informed about what had happened to the young black man. Its caption, which in part read: “Note mutilation of Neal’s chest and thighs. Note also how fingers have been cut from hands as souvenirs. After this picture was taken toes were cut from the feet as souvenirs,” successfully helped the image further function as a counter-spectacle.⁶¹ Because of the absence of the mob/spectators in this picture, the caption all the more demanded of readers a close examination of the image, thereby directing their gaze to a proof of white brutality inflicted upon Neal’s body parts—from mutilated chest and thighs to fingerless hands. Furthermore, the explanation about his toes—still attached to the feet when photographed but only to be cut off as souvenirs—conjured up in the public mind the vicarious moment of decapitation. This caption shows that the NAACP carefully instructed readers how to view the Neal picture. It highlighted white mobs’ gruesome tortures themselves rather than the “punishment” of an allegedly bestial black rapist, most common portrayal in the white supremacist lynching discourse. The NAACP’s reappropriation of the Neal picture along with their story of the incident in *The Lynching of Claude Neal* created a counter-narrative that challenged such justification.

Not only the photographic pamphlet but also a public lecture functioned as a medium that formed such a counter-narrative of the Neal incident. In December 1934, the *Crisis* editor Roy

⁶⁰ *Birmingham Post*, Oct. 27, 1934, reprinted in Ginzburg, *100 Years of Lynching*, 222-223.

⁶¹ *The Lynching of Claude Neal*, 5, reprinted in McJimsey, *Documentary History of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidency, Vol. 11*, 302.

Wilkins gave a dinner speech on the Neal lynching to African American YMCA members in New York. About a month after the incident, Wilkins had visited Marianna during his periodical trip to the southern branches of the NAACP, where he found that black residents were afraid to talk about the incident.⁶² Out of such willful amnesia of the Neal lynching among blacks in Marianna, Wilkins vividly reconstructed the scene of torture for his black male audience in New York, thereby creating an embattling site for their collective remembrance of a black man's death. The *New York Amsterdam News* reported the gathering as follows:

When he [Wilkins] told of strips of flesh being cut from the body of Claude Neal, the audience visioned savages surrounding a prostrate figure in the woods, each one taking a slice of skin and all but resorting to cannibalism. When he told of how the victim's toes were cut off, the audience saw a million toes preserved in alcohol in the homes of whites in Marianna, Fla. To the observer it seemed that they all knew the story, but were only realizing the horror now that they were being told about it by the young assistant secretary of the N.A.A.C.P.⁶³

The paper shows how, in the reporter's eyes, Wilkins' recreation of the atrocious acts inflicted upon Neal helped his black male audience envisage "savages" and "whites" as the subject of the violent acts. Thus, by letting the audience focus on the very violence in the lynching story, the black press resituated the barbarity and spectacle character of lynching into the anti-lynching context.

While *The Lynching of Claude Neal* instructed readers how to look at a lynching photo to call for white brutality and urge the passage of a federal anti-lynching bill, the NAACP offered them a different direction in bearing witness to the lynching picture of Rubin Stacy, who was murdered in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in 1935. In that year, the NAACP published copies of a double-sided leaflet with an enlarged photo of the lynching scene on the one side, which

⁶² *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 8, 1934.

⁶³ *New York Amsterdam News*, December 15, 1934.

captured Stacy, still handcuffed, hanging from the tree at the center surrounded by white onlookers including little girls (See Figure 4.1). The association distributed 100,000 copies of the leaflet to its branches and other organizations.⁶⁴ The message underneath the photo instructed its readers how to look at the picture:

Do not look at the Negro.

His earthly problems are ended.

Instead, look at the seven WHITE children who gaze at this gruesome spectacle.

Is it horror or gloating on the face of the neatly dressed seven-year-old girl on the right?

Is the tiny four-year-old on the left old enough, one wonders, to comprehend the barbarism her elders have perpetrated?

Rubin Stacey, the Negro, who was lynched at Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on July 19, 1935, for “threatening and frightening a white woman,” suffered PHYSICAL torture for a few short hours. But what psychological havoc is being wrought in the minds of the white children? Into what kinds of citizens will they grow up?

What kind of America will they help to make after being familiarized with such an inhuman, law-destroying practice as lynching?⁶⁵

Contrary to the instruction in *The Lynching of Claude Neal* that requested readers to pay close attention to Neal’s lynched body, or that of the black press focusing on the white mob’s atrocious torture of the black body, this message told readers not to look at the victim. Instead, it demanded readers to pay attention to white children and their possible psychological damages brought by the act of their elders. A close examination of these children that the message directed, however, rather turns the readers’ gaze back to the victim’s body. This is because,

⁶⁴ Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 195.

⁶⁵ NAACP pamphlet (n.d., but in 1935), reprinted in McJimsey, *Documentary History of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidency, Vol. 11*, 306-307. Emphasis in the original.

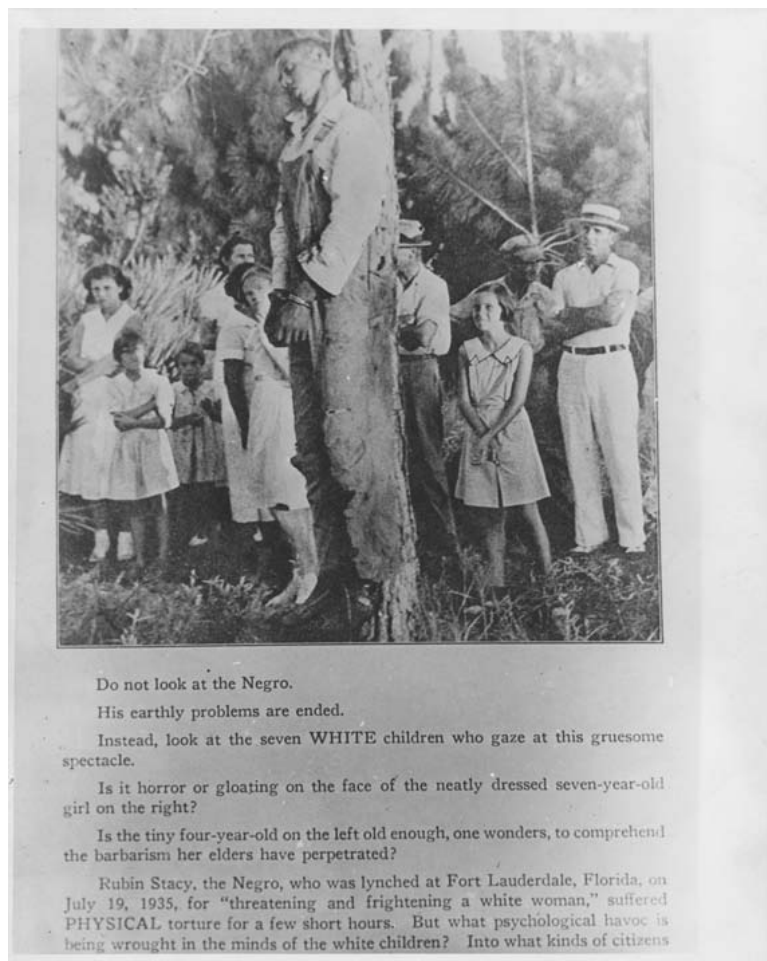


Figure 4.1. Lynching Photo of Rubin Stacy in the NAACP Pamphlet (1935)
Source: George McJimsey, ed., Documentalry History of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidency, Vol. 11: FDR and Protection from Lynching, 1934-1945 (Congressional Information Service, 2003)

unlike the Beitler's photo that captured Shipp and Smith in the background and the spectators in the foreground, this lynching picture imprisoned Stacy at the forefront—a close-up of his body hung from a tree, stretching from the top to the bottom of the photo—and onlookers in the background, standing behind the tree. It is impossible to cast our attention, as directed, to the face of one girl on the right or the others on the left without first glancing at Stacy's lynched body swinging in front of them. We can never look away from Stacy because it is this "gruesome spectacle" that these white children are gazing. By combining the photographic image of Stacy with the caption telling not to look at him, the NAACP's anti-lynching pamphlet all the more invited readers' attention to the victim. Perhaps this was precisely its intention.⁶⁶

As discussed so far, on the one hand, the spectacle of the actual lynching maintained white supremacist patriarchy by both consuming brutalized black body through looking and forcing black people to see the torture. The discourse of lynching and its representation such as photographs functioned the same way. On the other hand, anti-lynching struggles also let the public bear witness and challenge the dominant discourse of lynching by displaying the lynched body via reproduction of photography and storytelling. As Leigh Raiford has argued, lynching photographs in the anti-lynching struggles "reconceived and received the narratives of black savagery as one of black vulnerability; white victimization was recast as white terrorization."⁶⁷

It is particularly important to note that, to act against lynching, African Americans had to exhibit the very body brutalized by lynch mob or its representation created by them. In so doing, the

⁶⁶ On the photograph of Rubin Stacy and the NAACP pamphlet, see Apel, *Imagery of Lynching*, 40-42; Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching*, 25-27; Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*, 132-134; and Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 195-196.

⁶⁷ Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare*, 40.

black body that was kept in the space of death offered, and ultimately became, a site of resistance, thus forming the black public sphere.⁶⁸

Such resistance, however, inherently faced a definite dilemma, for reappropriating newspaper accounts and visual images of lynching could reproduce their original white supremacist discourse and voyeuristic views. Anti-lynching activists had to deal with this dilemma—what Raiford calls “inherent ambivalences about the employment of the photography as part of social movement strategy.”⁶⁹ In the previous decade of the 1930s, for example, responses to the NAACP’s anti-lynching usage of lynching photography varied even within the association’s leadership. In late November of 1922, the NAACP’s “The Shame of America,” a full-page anti-lynching advertisement, appeared in major white-owned newspapers and drew the public attention to the national crime of lynching. The success of this advertisement led then assistant secretary Walter White to draft its second version, this time with photographs of lynching included. While White believed that the graphic version would work most effective to advance their cause, executive secretary James Weldon Johnson was skeptical about the effect of photography in the proposed advertisement on the ongoing condition, where the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill was about to die on the Senate floor in spite of the association’s yearlong intensive lobbying campaigns. In response to White’s proposal, Johnson asked White to pull the

⁶⁸ Through her examination of the use of lynching photographs in white-owned papers, Amy Louise Wood points out that, when white-owned newspapers both in the North and the South, usually reluctant to reprint lynching photographs, did publish the images, they were more likely to focus on the white crowd by cropping the lynched black body from the photos. She concludes: “white Americans were reluctant to witness the sight of lynched black men.” Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 211-213.

⁶⁹ Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare*, 33.

advertisement, which was to appear in a nationally-subscribed photo magazine in a few weeks.⁷⁰

By the late 1930s, however, the NAACP seemed to have more confidence in their use of lynching photography. In 1937, the association again faced a similar discussion after the May 1936 issue of the *Crisis* published a picture of the lynching of Lint Shaw in April 1936.⁷¹ On the two facing pages, there published the enlarged picture of Shaw on the left and an extract of the *Congressional Record* on the right capturing counterproductive discussions of a federal anti-lynching bill. The photo and captions attached to each page—"Mob Act, While—" "U.S. Senators Talk"—visually highlighted the senators' inaction to prevent lynching.⁷² But the graphic impact of the whole-page photo of torture was so enormous that the magazine immediately received a letter from a Midwesterner protesting that reprinting such pictures "did not aid the fight against lynching, but served only to create racial hatred." After receiving a similar protesting letter on the magazine's reprinting of a detailed study of a Texas lynching in January 1937, the February 1937 issue of *Crisis* reported its readers that the magazine replied to the writer of each letter that "it had not been the experience of the N.A.A.C.P. or THE CRISIS that the exposure of the horrors of lynching tended to increase racial antagonism." It further

⁷⁰ Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare*, 29-34, 61.

⁷¹ Walter White asked the *Chicago Defender*, which published the image in April 1936, to lend the image to the NAACP. Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 195.

⁷² *Crisis*, May 1936, 172-173. On the NAACP's use of the photograph of Lint Shaw, see Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 195, 198-201. Wood analyzes how the northern and southern black newspapers used different strategies in printing photographs for their anti-lynching cause. In the case of the Shaw lynching, for example, the *Atlanta Daily World* printed a photographic portrait of Shaw as a respectable father, instead of the image of his lynched body. "In humanizing Shaw and his family," writes Wood, "the *Atlanta Daily World* may have done more to subvert the intent and significance of the lynching photograph than reprinting it as part of an antilynching message would have done." Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 210-211.

stated that the NAACP believed “that very often the sheer horror of lynching serves to rouse ordinarily lethargic people to action.”⁷³ These conflicting arguments—the confidence in and doubt about the effective usage of lynching photography in anti-lynching struggles—continued in the present-day commemorative efforts, as will be discussed in Chapter Five.

⁷³ *Crisis*, February 1937, 61.

CHAPTER FIVE

Remembering Lynching through Anti/Lynching Photography:

Without Sanctuary, Scholarship, and Resolution 39

What is the point of exhibiting these pictures? To awaken indignation? To make us feel “bad”; that is, to appall and sadden? To help us mourn? Is looking at such pictures really necessary, given that these horrors lie in the past remote enough to be beyond punishment? Are we the better for seeing these images? Do they actually teach us anything? Don’t they rather just confirm what we already know (or want to know)?

—Susan Sontag on the exhibition of lynching photography *Witness* (2003)¹

In this chapter, I would like to direct our attention to present-day cases of bearing witness including Resolution 39 and the *Without Sanctuary* project, particularly in their use of lynching photographs to remember the past. Because lynching photography continues to function as a “site of struggle over the question of memorializing past racial violence and terror, and also mobilizing against it in the twenty-first century,” recent cases of historical witnessing of lynching photography echo similar conflicting reactions between Walter White and James Weldon Johnson in 1922, or between the readers of the *Crisis* and the NAACP in 1937. There was skepticism about the deployment of such photography for the anti-lynching cause on the one hand, and sturdy confidence in it on the other.² As discussed in the previous chapters, anti-lynching activists engaged themselves in the act of remembrance of lynching, using any possible strategies to make lynching, especially its victims, visible in mind of the public who was otherwise indifferent to the ongoing social problem. They were well aware of the power of

¹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 91-92.

² Leigh Raiford, “Lynching, Visuality, and the Un/Making of Blackness,” *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 20 (Fall 2006): 24.

bearing witness to representational lynching, and believed that the photographic images served most effectively to carry out their protest campaign against lynching. If that was the case in the past, how can we make sense of the recent cases of using the same images? Today's users of lynching photography are supposedly direct successors of these anti-lynching activists in remembering lynching, but may still wonder, like Susan Sontag: "What is the point of exhibiting these pictures? . . . Is looking at such pictures really necessary?"

The historical witnessing of racial terror raises other compelling questions. That is, for the purpose of remembering the atrocious past, how many photographs of lynching do we have to look at, or how many news accounts on lynching do we need to read? Sontag observed that, in the discussions of the *Without Sanctuary* project, some argued the need of the "more clinical 'examine'" which was "substituted for 'look at'—the pictures."³ But how much "clinical examination" of each photograph is enough? At the *Without Sanctuary* exhibits that displayed forty to one hundred photographs and postcards of lynching, how should we look at those photographs in our limited time? Would our gaze not be inured to the representation of atrocities in the presence of too many photographs? Moreover, who has the right to choose which photograph is "the representative" of lynching, as if one picture could represent the totality of the brutal reality of the past?

Bearing these questions in mind, this chapter explores the politics of bearing witness: how its conflicting dynamics seen in past anti-lynching struggles functioned in recent efforts to commemorate the history of lynching in the popular, national, and academic arenas. Specifically, it pays close attention to the present-day use of lynching photography and the problematic nature of witnessing it has caused. If the modern-day audience, distant from the past lynching era,

³ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 92.

examines pictures “differently from the way in which the photographers/ participants intended them to be seen,” how successfully is this kind of looking enacted in the recent cases?⁴ The chapter first examines diverse discussions regarding the display and looking of lynching photography in the *Without Sanctuary* project—the picture book, the website, and exhibitions in New York and elsewhere. It considers how, by confronting these photographic images that demand our gaze, today’s American public, sometimes ambivalently, participated in the nationwide collective witnessing of racial terror. It also sheds light on scholarly responses to the responsibility of historical witnessing of lynching photography. I particularly focus on how scholars of lynching and racial violence, myself included, come to terms with the responsibility of historical witnessing, when they reconstruct the atrocious past, examine representations of racial terror, and teach this supposedly long-overlooked history. Finally, the chapter analyzes the usage of lynching photography during and prior to the discussion of Resolution 39, where cosponsors introduced the Beitler’s photo of Thomas Shipp and Abraham Smith and the picture of Rubin Stacy, the same images used in the past anti-lynching campaign. I demonstrate how these photos drew the momentary attention of senators and reporters only to be overlooked at these commemorative venues of lynching.

Re-presentation of Lynching Photography in the *Without Sanctuary* Project

The year 2000 marked a watershed in how we remember the history of lynching. With the publication of a picture book, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, the launching of an accompanying online exhibition, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, and two on-site exhibitions in New York, *Witness: Photographs of Lynchings from the*

⁴ Wendy Wolters, “Without Sanctuary: Bearing Witness, Bearing Whiteness,” *jac* 24:2 (2004): 399-400.

Collection of James Allen and John Littlefield and *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, photographic records of lynching became the most integral primary source to tell present-day viewers about the atrocious past. The book published ninety-eight photographs and postcards of lynching that mostly, if not exclusively, targeted African American men in the South spanning from the 1880s to the 1960s. The images were drawn from the Allen-Littlefield Collection, which was deposited at the Robert Woodruff Library of Emory University, thereby only available to researchers until its debut to the public eyes in 2000. By the time of the passage of Resolution 39 in 2005, *Without Sanctuary* exhibitions were held at six venues in the United States: the Roth Horowitz Gallery and the New-York Historical Society in New York, the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site in Atlanta, Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi, and the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit. The Chicago Historical Society was hosting the exhibit when the resolution was discussed in the Senate. The *Without Sanctuary* project ultimately became the new millennium's national project of commemorating lynching.⁵

⁵ *New York Times*, January 13, 24, and February 13, 2000; *CNN.com*, January 18, 2000, http://articles.cnn.com/2000-01-18/us/lynching.photography_1_lynchings-exhibit-souvenirs?_s=PM:US (last accessed on March 10, 2012); *Los Angeles Times*, August 27, 2000; *New Pittsburgh Courier*, September 15 and 26, 2001; *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 28, 2002; *Mississippi Link*, February 11, 2004; *Jackson Free Press*, May 13, 2004; Keonya Booker, "Southern Discomfort: Jackson State Lynching Exhibit Seeks to Engage Campus, Community in Dialogue about History," *Black Issues in Higher Education*, 21:8 (June 3, 2004): 9-10; *Michigan Chronicle* June 9-15, September 8, 2004; *Chicago Defender*, June 3, 2005.

The following long list of scholarly reviews and analysis of the book and exhibitions speaks volumes not only about the importance of the *Without Sanctuary* project in the history of lynching, but also about scholarly interests in these images. See, for example, Patricia J. Williams, "Without Sanctuary," *Nation*, February 14, 2000, 9; Cynthia Carr, "The Atrocity Exhibition," *Village Voice*, March 22-28, 2000; George Fredrickson, "For African Americans, Justice Was Often at the End of a Rope: Without Sanctuary; Lynching Photography in America," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 28 (July 31, 2000): 123; Robert E. Snyder, "Without Sanctuary: An American Holocaust?," *Southern Quarterly* 39:3 (Spring 2001): 162-171; David Phillips, "Without Sanctuary: Photographs and Postcards of Lynching in America," *Journal of*

The number of exhibition viewers alone speaks volumes about the grand scale of this collective witnessing of lynching photography. Approximately 5,000 people beheld sixty images on display at the Roth Horowitz Gallery's one-month show, about 50,000 viewed sixty-five images at the New-York Historical Society for the first four months of the exhibit period, and another 50,000 saw forty-two images in Atlanta for the first four month, which reached 176,000 by the end of the exhibit's eight-months period. While each turnout at other locations was not revealed, ninety-eight images were displayed at the exhibition in Pittsburgh, eighty-three in Mississippi, and more than one hundred in Detroit.⁶ The centrality of these images in remembering the oft-forgotten past was also obvious in the senatorial decision to propose Resolution 39. Not only did cosponsors argue in the discussion prior to vote that the visual

American History 88:1 (June 2001): 319-320; Louise P. Maxwell, "Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America," *Journal of Southern History* 68:1 (February 2002): 216-218; Eric Lott, "A Strange and Bitter Spectacle: On 'Without Sanctuary'," *First of the Month*, June 21, 2002, http://www.firstofthemonth.org/archives/2002/06/a_strange_and_b.html, last accessed on March 6, 2012; Paige P. Parvin, "Strange Fruit: Emory Takes a Hard Look at One of America's Deepest Sorrows," *Emory Magazine*, Summer 2002, http://www.emory.edu/EMORY_MAGAZINE/summer2002/without_sanctuary.html, last accessed on March 10, 2012; Grace Elizabeth Hale, "Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America," *Journal of American History* 89:3 (December 2002): 989-994; Dora Apel, "On Looking: Lynching Photographs and Legacies of Lynching after 9/11," *American Quarterly* 55:3 (September 2003): 457-475; Duane J. Corpis and Ian Christopher Fletcher, "Without Sanctuary," *Radical History Review* 85 (Winter 2003): 282-285; Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching*, 137-141; Mark Simpson, "Archiving Hate: Lynching Postcards at the Limit of Social Circulation," *ESC* 30:1 (March 2004): 17-38; Andrew Austin, "Explanation and Responsibility: Agency and Motive in Lynching and Genocide," *Journal of Black Studies* 34:5 (May 2004): 719-733; Wolters, "Without Sanctuary," 399-425; Natasha Barnes, "On Without Sanctuary," *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 20 (Fall 2006): 88-91; Walter Cohen, "Lynching, Visuality, Empire," *Nka* 20 (Fall 2006): 118-121; Sandy Alexandre, "Out: On a Limb The Spatial Politics of Lynching Photography," *Mississippi Quarterly* 61:1/2 (Winter 2008): 72-112; Bettina M. Carbonell, "The Afterlife of Lynching: Exhibitions and the Re-composition of Human Suffering," *Mississippi Quarterly* 61:1/2 (Winter 2008): 197-215; Anthony W. Lee, "Introduction," in Apel and Smith, *Lynching Photographs*, 1-9; and Jennie Lightweis-Goff, *Blood at the Root: Lynching as American Cultural Nucleus* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 113-119.

⁶ Apel, "On Looking," 459-463; Hale, "Without Sanctuary," 989; *The Emory Wheel*, February 26, 2004, <http://www.emorywheel.com/detail.php?n=21609>. Last accessed on March 1, 2012.

images in the picture book awakened senators from their ignorance of and indifference toward the history of lynching; the preamble of the resolution also declared: “the recent publication of *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* helped bring greater awareness and proper recognition for the victims of lynching.”⁷

Many agreed with the resolution cosponsors, pointing out the contribution of the *Without Sanctuary* project to unveiling history that had been overlooked. “History has been late in recognizing these traditions [of lynching]. *Without Sanctuary* is allowing New Yorkers a rare opportunity to confront the sins of the past,” said Betsy Gotbaum, the president of the New-York Historical Society. Likewise, Joseph F. Jordan, African American studies professor and curator of the Atlanta exhibition, stated, “it has been gratifying to see that when people come out of the exhibit they are capable of seeing the value of keeping these photographs in existence and making sure that they are placed in prominent places with dignity and with respect to the ones who were victims.”⁸

On the other hand, the *Without Sanctuary* project was also severely criticized for the fact that editors like James Allen made a profit from the photographs of lynching victims that they turned into commercial products. “To make coffee-table books out of that kind of pain is highly problematic,” asserted African American sociologist Michel Eric Dyson. “To commercialize the suffering of black people is to do the ultimate disservice to black people.”⁹ A viewer posted a comment in the “Forum” on the website: “I am concern[ed] that this is a for profit venture. . . . I

⁷ S. RES. 39, reprinted in *Congressional Record*, 109th Congress, 1st Session (June 13, 2005), S 6365.

⁸ *New York Daily News*, May 15, 2000; *Independent Weekly*, July 10, 2002.

⁹ Michael Dyson, quoted in Apel, “On Looking,” 464.

do think that the African American community and the public at large would be better served if the images were donated to a museum. It saddens me to see profit made from the lynching of my ancestors.”¹⁰ Against their will, however, the sixty-dollar book sold roughly 30,000 copies by 2003, and has published its tenth edition. During the exhibition period in Atlanta, Allen tried (but failed) to sell the collection to Emory University for one million dollars, the price he was once offered by a benefactor who planned to donate the collection to Harvard University.¹¹ Literary scholar Mark Simpson concludes that “in key ways the larger endeavor [was] resolutely commercial,” judging from the “ever-present invitation to purchase its print version at Amazon.com.”¹²

Perhaps the *Without Sanctuary* project held such contradictions from its inception. The rich collection of these visual images made accessible to the public thanks to the long, devoted efforts of Allen, a white Atlanta-based antique dealer who collected about 150 lynching pictures and postcards from the 1980s to the 1990s by setting up a website, distributing fliers, and attending antique fairs and flea markets. He was often approached by private owners of these images. Allen recalls an experience that a trader “pulled me aside and in conspiratorial tones

¹⁰ “Forum,” March 24, 2000, in the author’s possession. The earlier comments were removed from the “Forum” when the website moved from <http://www.journale.com/withoutsanctuary/index.html> to <http://withoutsanctuary.org>. All the “Forum” citations hereafter are based on what I printed out from the previous website.

¹¹ Apel, “On Looking,” 459-460; “Noteworthy News: Emory May Lose Rare Collection of Lynching Photos,” *Black Issues in Higher Education* 19:24 (January 16, 2003): 10; *Emory Wheel*, February 26, 2004. After his initial attempt to sell his collection to Emory University, according to Leigh Raiford, the Allen-Littlefield Collection became part of the permanent collection of the soon-to-be-opened Atlanta’s National Center for Civil and Human Rights (CCHR) in October 2008. Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare*, 210. The CCHR website states that the Center secured the collection, now entitled “Without Sanctuary,” in 2009. <http://www.cchrpartnership.org/Building/Exhibitions/Collections.html>. Last accessed on March 7, 2012.

¹² Simpson, “Archiving Hate,” 31.

offered to sell me a real photo postcard”—a similar manner to the private sharing of these pictures and postcards among whites in the heyday of lynching.¹³ The amount he paid for the images ranged from fifteen to 30,000 dollars for each piece, which used to be sold for twenty-five to fifty cents at the lynching site. For instance, Allen bought a double-matted Beitler’s photo for 750 dollars.¹⁴ His self-styled title, “Southern Picker,” and the website address “www. willbuy.com” bewilder us about his complicated role in this commemorative project of lynching, since they remind us of lynch mob or spectators, who willingly picked up any relics of lynching and bought the pictures.¹⁵ Given their history, lynching photographs are destined for consumption, and it may be hard to break genealogical ties between these white spectators and Allen, a dealer of such images, despite that his devotion came out of his antiracist motives. “Was he motivated by compassion—or money?,” a *Los Angeles Times* writer questioned, “Is he a crusader—or a voyeur?”¹⁶

Both praise and blame for the *Without Sanctuary* project, as well as ambivalence toward it, stem from the same issue of how we bear witness to representational violence. Reactions varied depending on which versions of exhibition to look at—the book, online, or on-site with locational and curatorial differences, but they were also diverse in terms of how each exhibit challenged the audience’s act of looking. At the New York’s first exhibit, *Witness*, for example, many viewers and reviewers alike confronted the risk of becoming accomplices to voyeurism

¹³ James Allen, “Afterword,” in Allen, et al., *Without Sanctuary*, 204.

¹⁴ *Los Angeles Times*, August 27, 2000.

¹⁵ *New York Times*, January 13, 2000. Allen’s homepage address has changed to <http://southernpicker.com>. Last accessed on February 28, 2012.

¹⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, August 27, 2000.

and spectatorship. *Witness* displayed mostly small-sized images without captions in the claustrophobic art gallery, thereby possibly eliciting a voyeuristic gaze. “It’s a difficult task,” legal scholar Patricia Williams writes, “this re-viewing of violence, this striving for reflection rather than spectacle, for vision rather than voyeurism, for study rather than exposure.” She wondered if the exhibit “entirely transcends such dangers” of falling within the genre of spectacle.¹⁷ Historian Anne Rice shares Williams’ skepticism about *Witness* in recalling her own experience of viewing the exhibit. She 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 books.”¹⁸

The issues of looking were also at stake in the New-York Historical Society’s exhibition, *Without Sanctuary*, where the curators more carefully contextualized the displayed photographic images with captions and other archival materials. The Society’s larger exhibit space—roughly six times that of the Roth Holowitz’s—enabled more room for additional installation.¹⁹ Not only did the surrounding walls feature framed images of lynching and of the anti-lynching movement; five glass showcases at the center also displayed more lynching photographs, lynching-inspired artifacts, and anti-lynching pamphlets. Moreover, a wall sign at the entrance to the exhibit space warned visitors that “[t]he photographs in this exhibition are painful to see.”²⁰

¹⁷ Williams, “Without Sanctuary,” 9.

¹⁸ Rice, “How We Remember Lynching,” 34-35.

¹⁹ Carbonell, “The Afterlife of Lynching,” 200.

²⁰ Fumiko Sakashita, “Rekishi Tenji to Sono Shakai-teki Juyō: Rinchi Shashin-ten ‘Without

Despite that, or perhaps because of that warning, some viewers still faced the paradox of becoming voyeurs. A *New York Times* critic simply put: “After all, at this exhibition we are a crowd looking at a crowd looking at a lynching. And we are looking at the lynching too. Again and again, a white mob looks back at us.”²¹ Historian Louise P. Maxwell observes that the placement of many of the pictures—slightly above eye level—put the visitors “in the discomfiting position of becoming spectators themselves, peering upward to gaze at the brutal photographs of lynching and their assailants.”²²

This discomfort of becoming spectators was also attributed to the exhibit’s too heterogeneous re-composition. Carbonell argues that the exhibit’s inclusion of anti-lynching narratives “distanced and protected the viewer from the unadulterated, searing violence to which the actual lynching images testify.”²³ In fact, it was not the intention of James Allen to display the anti-lynching materials with his collection of lynching photographs in the same room. As a firm believer in the power of these images, he thought that they deserved independent space and that the anti-lynching materials should be in another gallery either before or after the visitors experienced the exhibit. But the other curators and staff decided otherwise in order to appeal to a broader audience.²⁴ Visitors may have been further distracted or even confused by the exhibit’s

Sanctuary’ wo Rei-ni” [The History Exhibit and Its Social Reception: A Case of “Without Sanctuary”], *Amerikashi Kenkyu* [Study of American History] 24 (2001): 72; Carbonell, “The Afterlife of Lynching,” 201.

²¹ *New York Times*, March 16, 2000.

²² Maxwell, “Without Sanctuary,” 218.

²³ Carbonell, “The Afterlife of Lynching,” 202.

²⁴ Sakashita, “Rekishu Tenji to Sono Shakai-teki Juyō,” 72. It is understandable that the

inclusion of the online exhibition as well as the photo book in the same room: two computers were set up on the table next to the glass showcases, and each three copies of the book were placed at three bay windows on one wall that displayed the images. If, as literary scholar Wendy Wolters has argued, the different settings of these three exhibitions—on-site, online, and book versions—incited viewers to look at the photographic images differently, the New-York Historical Society exhibit offered its visitors highly complicating viewing experiences.²⁵

When I visited the exhibition in August 2000, I spent about four hours to view this one-room exhibit. I looked at pictures carefully, both lynching and anti-lynching images, examined all the materials in the glass showcases, and read all the captions while taking detailed notes. I even thumbed through hundreds of photocopied book pages compiled in one of the three thick binders on the table with the computers. But I didn't view the online presentation because I had already visited the website. I only took a glance at the photo book because I had my own copy. I must have thought that I could skip the book because I could see it anytime later. Was my "clinical examination" to the photographs enough? How so? After viewing all the images, I remember going back to certain images to examine further. Why did one image attract my attention more than another? In recalling my experience, Sontag's questions strike me: "Is looking at such pictures really necessary? . . . Don't they just confirm what we already know (or want to know)?"

Perhaps for many, the online exhibition of lynching photography posed the highest risk of enabling voyeuristic looking. Because it gave the viewers anonymity and free, private access to

Society's exhibiting policy came out of its intention to appeal the broader public, given that the Society was set up mostly with contributions from private foundations, corporations, and individuals. Only 10% of its revenue came from public funds. New-York Historical Society, *Know Where You Live* (pamphlet, in the author's possession).

²⁵ Wolters, "Without Sanctuary," 422.

look at the images, the exhibit invited much broader audiences than the on-site or book exhibition, even including racially hostile viewers like self-proclaiming Klan members whose comments reproduced the old white supremacist discourse of lynching. One such viewer stated: “hanging was the penalty for such crimes [against humanity]. We as a lawful society should not shed tears for the guilty, but, should thank god that the guilty were prosecuted, and that justice prevailed as it should today.”²⁶ A comment like this clearly shows a risk of reproducing and exhibiting lynching photographs as relics of the white power. This is partly because of the website’s exclusion of detailed historical context and introductory essays in the book version, as Simpson argues, which “risks reifying the spectacle of lynching at the expense of its less visible, more conflictual histories.”²⁷ A viewer agreed with Simpson, commenting, “I just received the book in the mail today . . . and also found out about this website. I found the book much more shocking and disgusting than the website. . . . But the most disturbing of all was the description on the lynchings found in the beginning of the book, and these descriptions are left out of the movie.”²⁸ Simpson further points out that the absence of “any record of the *counterpublic* spheres,” namely anti-lynching activism and resistance, “undermines a political legacy we urgently need to face and see.”²⁹

Also problematic was the quality of the images in the online gallery. Another viewer wrote: “I found the photos to be too small and too blurry. . . . I expected to see the horror of real

²⁶ “Forum,” May 18, 2000, in the author’s possession.

²⁷ Simpson, “Archiving Hate,” 32.

²⁸ “Forum,” March 31, 2000, in the author’s possession.

²⁹ Simpson, “Archiving Hate,” 33-34. Emphasis in the original.

faces—victims, lynchers, and others—but saw little because of the fuzziness. . . . [A]ll of the photos, therefore, are very anonymous, and, unfortunately, that makes me too far removed from that horror.”³⁰ Historian David Phillips likewise observes that many of the images are too small, thus “rendering details imperceptible, and too many appear washed out (unlike the excellent reproductions in the book).” He assesses that the gallery’s design should have incorporated “a useful feature” of several pictures permitting viewers click on the image to an enlargement. Despite of its shortcomings, however, Phillips concludes: “but if it compels visitors to purchase the book or attend the museum exhibition then it will have served its purpose well.”³¹

But why does Phillips consider it somehow successful that viewing the online images simply compels visitors’ further looking of the same images in different media? His evaluation of the multiple-way looking among these exhibitions merits further attention, for many viewers and reviewers alike witnessed more than one version of the exhibits. In the “Forum,” for example, those who left comments often wrote that they had purchased the book or visited an on-site exhibition before visiting the website. Some critics reviewed an on-site exhibit (or exhibits), the book, and/or the website that they viewed on different occasions. Why were the photographic images of lynching looked at multiple times? How did such a repeated looking impact viewers’ ways of witnessing these pictures?

Favorable responses to the *Without Sanctuary* project emphasized the inevitable need to witness the photographic records of torture to remember its history. Atlanta exhibition curator Jordan argued: “If we put these photographs back into the trunks, or slide them back into the crumbling envelopes and conceal them in a corner of the drawer, we deny to the victims, once

³⁰ “Forum,” April 7, 2000, in the author’s possession.

³¹ Phillips, “Without Sanctuary,” 319-320.

again, the witness they deserve. We deny them the opportunity to demand recognition of their humanity, and for us to bear witness to that humanity.”³² Just as the anti-lynching activists struggled to save the victims from the societal silence and the state neglect, Jordan believed that the physical presence of the images in front of the public view could save the present-day audience from historical amnesia. Historian Leon Litwack agrees with Jordan in his introductory essay in the photo book. While acknowledging that “[t]he need for this grisly photographic display may be disputed for catering to voyeuristic appetites and for perpetuating images of black victimization,” Litwack emphasizes that “the extent and quality of the violence unleashed on black men and women in the name of enforcing black deference and subordination cannot be avoided or minimized.”³³

Although Jordan asserted that the Atlanta exhibit “emphasized the humanity of these individuals, rather than the spectacle of their deaths,” it is because of this very focus on blacks as victims rather than whites’ involvement in the atrocities, according to historian Grace Elizabeth Hale, that viewers were “left with an exhibit that is too close to the spectacle created by the lynchers themselves.” In her review of the Atlanta exhibition whose display was “almost entirely silent” about white mobs and spectators who participated in lynching, Hale problematizes this point:

Why do we learn the names of the dead in those images and not the names of the living? Why do we learn very little about the people who participated in the tortures, took the photographs, and sent the postcards? Why do we learn nothing about the people who saved the images down through the years and the people who sold them to James Allen . . . who purchased the photographs in recent years

³² *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 28, 2002

³³ Leon Liwack, “Hellhound,” in Allen et al., *Without Sanctuary*, 33.

and assembled this collection?³⁴

Hale's observation about the white invisibility shows that the display of the images, on the contrary to its anti-lynching motives, gave back white mobs and spectators the old name of "persons unknown."

For some scholars, Hale's remark also applies for the images published in the photo book. Wolters observes that the spectacle of the lynched body of the past, which was reproduced for a new audience in the present, "remains at the center" of the book. She examines how a photo postcard of the spectacle lynching of a black male, Lige Daniels, which was reprinted in the middle of the book, appeared on the dust jacket in an edited version. The image was "clipped, *erasing* most of the spectators and focusing our attention on Daniel's body hanging in the center." This introductory picture, Wolters argues, "sets the tone for the text that follows it." As a result, despite the presence of the spectators in many photographs in the book, "this lynching memorial directs us to look at, and to expect to look at, the bodies of African American men displayed before white spectators."³⁵ Historian George M. Fredrickson likewise points out the danger of such looking possibly objectifying and commodifying the lynched black body. He writes: "this unrelenting portrayal of blacks as unresisting victims—deprived of every shred of human dignity, sometimes literally emasculated, and ultimately reduced to dead meat at the end of a rope or to ashes—will devalue them further in the mind of those whites who cannot imagine their ancestors visiting such degradation on those who did not somehow deserve it."³⁶ The *Without Sanctuary*

³⁴ *Tri-State Defender*, August 14, 2002; Hale, "Without Sanctuary," 993.

³⁵ Wolters, "Without Sanctuary," 400-401. Emphasis in the original.

³⁶ Fredrickson, "For African Americans, Justice Was Often at the End of Rope," 123.

project's focus on the black body and its neglect of the white spectators led its viewers to become possible spectators.

Even the clinical examination of the black body was never free from spectacle, because, as literary scholar Saidiya Hartman rightfully points out, beholding black suffering was a difficult task “since the endeavor to bring pain close exploit[ed] the spectacle of body in pain and oddly confirm[ed] the spectral character of suffering and the inability to witness the captive’s pain.”³⁷ And what was more complicating about the witnessing of the *Without Sanctuary* images is that the very attention to the white spectators was equally criticized. On James Allen’s comment on the *Witness* images: “After you get through the shock, what lingers are the images of the perpetrators, and not of the corpses, and that’s where the focus needs to be,” Dora Apel questions, “Why should the focus be here?” Similarly, despite that Allen directed our attention to the spectators rather than the lynched bodies in the photo book (“It wasn’t the corpse that bewildered me as much as the canine-thin faces of the pack, lingering in the woods, circulating after the kill,” writes Allen), Wolters pointedly concludes: “whiteness does not become the object of our gaze or replace the spectacle of the black body, as whiteness is simultaneously erased by his [Allen’s] own descriptions and comments on the photographs, and adopted by our gaze at them.”³⁸

At stake here is how these images invite us to the identification with white access to looking—what Wolters has termed “bearing whiteness.” Because the pictures in the book did not interrupt but reproduce black victimhood and white spectatorship, Wolters argues, “the racial

³⁷ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 20.

³⁸ Allen, “Afterword,” in Allen, et al., *Without Sanctuary*, 204; Wolters, “Without Sanctuary,” 410.

lines of looking [were] reinforced *Without Sanctuary* in spite of the efforts of its rhetor.”³⁹ It is ironic that, although Allen’s book title “without sanctuary” meant to point out that there was no sanctuary for the victims of lynching even after their death because their dead bodies continued to be consumed through the circulation of the photographs and postcards of lynching, his very act of publishing those photographs, too, resulted in depriving the victims of their sanctuary.⁴⁰ Fredrickson criticizes Allen for not responding the reactions of African Americans “who see more pain for blacks than shock therapy for prejudiced whites in the display and promulgation of these images.”⁴¹ Apel also observes: “for blacks, an awareness of different spectatorial positions, specifically the position of privilege for the ‘white’ viewers whose ‘look’ is therefore different from the ‘black look,’ would make seeing the photographs in public crowds all the more difficult.”⁴²

Indeed, for many black viewers, beholding the images of the lynched black body was a challenging and traumatic experience. Having viewed the pictures on display at the *Witness* exhibit, Brent Staples, a writer for the *New York Times*, confessed that he “could not bear seeing them.”⁴³ For Hilton Als, who contributed an introductory essay for the photo book, witnessing lynching photography forced him, just like his forefathers like Du Bois, White, and Wright, the

³⁹ Wolters, “Without Sanctuary,” 402.

⁴⁰ James Allen, “Afterword,” Allen, et al., *Without Sanctuary*, 205.

⁴¹ Fredrickson, “For African Americans, Justice Was Often at the End of a Rope,” 123.

⁴² Apel, “On Looking,” 460-461.

⁴³ *New York Times*, April 9, 2000.

inevitable identification with black victimization. “I looked at these pictures, and what I saw in them . . . was the way in which I’m regarded, by any number of people: as a nigger,” writes Als. “I felt my neck snap and my heart break, while looking at these pictures.”⁴⁴ At a public forum in the Atlanta exhibition, a teacher commented: “When I look at those pictures . . . I don’t just see a lifeless body. I look at those pictures, and I see my son, I see my brother, I see my father. If I’m looking at that lifeless figure long enough, I see myself.”⁴⁵

These recent examples of the identification with black victimhood remind us of what literary scholar Elizabeth Alexander has called “bottom line blackness,” where African Americans share subconscious collective memories of bodily trauma, which are “reactivated and articulated at moments of collective spectatorship” through the flesh and “frequently forged and maintained through a storytelling tradition.”⁴⁶ She further writes: “To see is unbearable, both unto itself as well as for what it means about one’s own likely fate. But knowledge of this pervasive violence provides necessary information of the very real forces threatening African Americans.”⁴⁷ It seems that Alexander’s “bottom line blackness” assumes that black people cannot be spectators of racial terror inflicted on the black body. Literary theorist David Marriott likewise observes: “Can any black man resist the identification with a dead black body written into an image which reproduces the divisions of racist culture by showing white men pointing

⁴⁴ Hilton Als, “GWTW,” in Allen, et al., *Without Sanctuary*, 38.

⁴⁵ Apel, “On Looking,” 465.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Alexander, “‘Can You Be BLACK and Look at This?’: Reading Rodney King Video(s),” in The Black Public Sphere Collective, ed., *The Black Public Sphere*, 84.

⁴⁷ Alexander, “‘Can You Be BLACK and Look at This?’,” 88-89.

and laughing? At that point, I would suggest, the identification can be irresistible.”⁴⁸ Yet one might still wonder whether this “bottom line blackness” possibly contributes to spectatorship of racial terror. Do Alexander and Marriot mean that one can escape from becoming a spectator of racial terror against African Americans if one is black? Literary scholar Jacqueline Goldsby poses a question: “can we talk—should we talk—about discrete ‘black’ and ‘white’ ways of viewing lynching photographs?”⁴⁹ Or, more generally speaking, can one’s gaze strictly bear witness to the spectacle of terror of one’s kind without being voyeuristic? When we bear witness, do we bear bottom line blackness, or do we bear whiteness?

Dealing with the Black Body in Pain: Scholars and Lynching Photographs

How have scholars confronted the issue of the identification with black victimhood and white spectators in dealing with the photographic images of lynching? Although photographs and postcards of lynching have been reprinted in many recent scholarly works, their treatments vary. Some scholars have simply published images as historical evidence, while others have closely examined the images themselves. Historian Louis P. Masur’s observation about historians’ usage of images in general—that they “do not interpret these images or suggest how to read them as texts”—may apply to the case of lynching photography. Sometimes these images simply sit in the pages of scholarly works, which briefly describe what they represent or detail the historical context of the images, but do not necessarily examine them.⁵⁰ In such cases,

⁴⁸ Marriot, *On Black Men*, 4-5.

⁴⁹ Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 247.

⁵⁰ Lois P. Masur, “‘Pictures Have Now Become a Necessity’: The Use of Images in American History Textbooks,” *Journal of American History* 84:4 (March 1998): 1410. See, for example,

readers may take a cursory looking at the images but perhaps immediately return to the text to go on reading unless there is no further mention to them. Despite their presence these images may result in disappearing from readers' sight. But even close examination of the images may be as troubling as giving a glance at them, for the politics of bearing witness to these images, as discussed in the previous chapter, indelibly functions in two conflicting ways. Goldsby's question about the past witnessing is indeed a question directing to us: "Was the act of looking at lynching photographs a gesture of complicity with or resistance to anti-black mob violence?"⁵¹ Or consider Hartman's troubling yet significant question: "Are we witnesses who confirm the truth of what happened in the face of the world-destroying capacities of pain . . . ? Or are we voyeurs fascinated with and repelled by exhibitions of terror and sufferance?"⁵² If, as Amy Louise Wood argues, "the body of the lynching victim was brought back to life through the image, only to be killed once more by the viewer" of the past, what is the role of scholars in the present-day viewing of these images?⁵³

In this section I would like to focus on the usage of lynching photography in two settings: education and book cover design, for they should lead us to the question of necessity and editorial decisions. What is the point of exhibiting these pictures in the classroom? To draw students' attention? To shock them? How are the images selected to exhibit, and how are they

Koritha Mitchell's criticism of art historian Dora Apel's treatment of lynching pictures in *Lynching Photographs* (2008). Koritha Mitchell, *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 203 f.11.

⁵¹ Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret*, 247.

⁵² Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 3.

⁵³ Wood, "Lynching Photography," 207.

incorporated into teaching? Also, why have many scholarly works reprinted lynching pictures on the cover? To signal to readers what is inside? But is looking at such pictures really necessary even before we open a book? How have scholars edited (or agreed to the editors and designers editing) the images in a way they are reprinted on the cover? Do they actually teach us anything?⁵⁴

Many viewers and reviewers alike saw the *Without Sanctuary* images as a powerful educational tool, and not a few of them emphasized the need to incorporate these lynching photographs into school curriculums. “Although many scholars have documented this history with many words, pictures can often speak in greater volumes,” commented a website viewer. “All Americans, many of whom are still in deep denial about this history, should see this work. And I think the book should be required reading in every American Jr. High and High School, public and private.” Another wrote: “Exhibits like this should be MANDATORY viewing in ALL our schools—and yes, it should make our kids sick!” Yet the other felt ambivalent: “I have mixed emotions—maybe this should be used with teachings of black history or maybe not.”⁵⁵

Educators who have used lynching pictures likewise stress the importance of teaching this atrocious past because of students’ unfamiliarity with the topic in their previous education. “[M]ost high school American history textbooks mention neither lynching nor the antilynching campaigns,” writes high school teacher Timothy J. Greene.⁵⁶ English professor Linda Tucker

⁵⁴ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 91-92.

⁵⁵ “Forum,” March 23, April 6 (emphasis in the original), and May 13, 2000, in the author’s possession.

⁵⁶ Timothy J. Greene, “Teaching the Limits of Liberalism in the Interwar Years: The NAACP’s Antilynching Campaign,” *OAH Magazine of History* 18:2 (January 2004): 28.

also states: “in contrast to the Holocaust, a subject to which many students are at least introduced in high school, lynching is rarely included in secondary or postsecondary curricula.”⁵⁷ Historians Wood and Susan V. Donaldson seem to agree with Greene and Tucker. Attributing “a profound social amnesia about lynching in this country” to education, they observe: “Most of the college students we have taught come to class with a foundational understanding of the history of slavery and a passing knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement but remain sadly ignorant of lynching or even the breadth and intensity of Jim Crow segregation and its effects.”⁵⁸ For them, presenting lynching photography seems to be an indispensable method to teach its history especially in their recent pedagogical projects, for which the *Without Sanctuary* pictures serve as the primary visual source.

But why does the incorporation of these images into course materials on lynching seem so imperative? Consider, for example, historian Alexander X. Byrd’s lesson plan for the history of lynching in the Jim Crow South:

From James Allen’s *Without Sanctuary* (2000), photocopy the half-title page, plates 25, and 26 on a single page, plate 57, and plate 98. With the exception of plate 26, the photographs can also be found at the *Without Sanctuary* web site. . . . Keep in mind, however, that the quality of the online versions of the photographs may hinder students’ ability to complete the assignment. Please warn your students that these images may be very disturbing.⁵⁹

While Byrd is well aware of the possibility that the blurry images of the online versions hinder

⁵⁷ Linda Tucker, “Not Without Sanctuary: Teaching about Lynching,” *Transformations* XVI:2 (Fall 2005): 70.

⁵⁸ Amy Louise Wood and Susan V. Donaldson, ““Lynching’s Legacy in American Culture,” *Mississippi Quarterly* 61:1/2 (Winter 2008): 8.

⁵⁹ Alexander X. Byrd, “Studying Lynching in the Jim Crow South,” *OAH Magazine of History* 18:2 (January 2004): 32.

students' understanding of lynching, he pays less attention to the photocopied versions of the images, which are possibly as unclear as the online images. Also, his arbitrary selection of these five images—he writes “the half title page and plate 98 (photos of solitary black victims) versus . . . plates 57, 25, and 26 (photographs that contain both victim and perpetrators)” —illustrates how images are treated as interchangeable within these two categories, thus losing their own particular contexts. Individual lynch victims lose their name and come to represent “one of the hundreds—thousands of photographs of men, women, and children who were lynched in this Nation,” as Senator Landrieu has described in the discussion of Resolution 39, which will be discussed shortly.⁶⁰

In a similar vein, literary scholar Bridget R. Cooks explains her usage of lynching photographs in her ethnic studies and art history classes as follows:

Before I show lynching photographs for the first time, I tell students that they will have ten minutes of silence to look at two images projected on the screen. I vary the two images I select but make sure that the images are different enough to immediately educate students on the diverse practice of lynching. For example, I have shown “The barefoot corpse of Laura Nelson. May 25, 1911, Okemah, Oklahoma” . . . because it shows a well-dressed African American woman hung from the bottom of a bridge instead of an image that the students may expect of an African American man hung from a tree. I have also shown “The burning corpse of William Brown. September 28, 1919, Omaha, Nebraska” . . . because of the especially shocking brutality of the lynching and the well-dressed smiling crowd that poses for the photograph behind Brown’s smoldering body.⁶¹

Cooks does give us (and her students) brief information about each photograph—the victim’s name, and the date and place that each lynching occurred—but she varies her selection of the two images. Why do these images of her choice have to be “different enough to immediately

⁶⁰ *Congressional Record*, 109th Congress, 1st Session (June 13, 2005), S6385.

⁶¹ Bridget R. Cooks, “Confronting Terrorism: Teaching the History of Lynching through Photography,” *Pedagogy* 8:1 (Winter 2008): 137. Emphasis is added.

educate students diverse practice of lynching”? Her reasoning that the image of Laura Nelson shows students something different from what they “may expect”—an image of a lynched African American man—remains questionable, given that lynching is rarely included in most high school American history textbooks and few college students are knowledgeable about the history of lynching (they may not even know that the lynch victims were predominantly black male). Also, the photo of William Brown is decontextualized in showing students a stark contrast between “the especially shocking brutality of the lynching” and “the well-dressed smiling crowd,” because it can be interchangeable with any image containing these two components if the purpose is just to show this contrast.

The problem of looking becomes even more apparent in the second part of her lesson plan, where Cooks categorizes the images into four types: “crowd, crowd with lynching victim(s), lynching victim(s) alone, and souvenirs.” She has done that in order not to allow herself “to have an emotionally debilitating experience as a viewer.” In this section Cooks shows more pictures and let her students clinical examination of each image, but her focus is on the perpetrators rather than the lynch victims. She writes: “Organizing them into types also helps us think about what the photographer/participant wanted to preserve and express through each image.”⁶² Although Cooks believes that most of contemporary viewers of these images “alter the meaning of the photographs by adding a purpose other than that originally intended,” one may wonder if her method successfully subverts the original meaning of these images.⁶³

Tucker, who has incorporated lynching photography into her introductory English course,

⁶² Cooks, “Confronting Terrorism,” 138-139.

⁶³ Cooks, “Confronting Terrorism,” 137.

recalls how she directed students to examine lynching photographs. “I asked students to look at the spectators and lynchers, rather than the victims depicted in the images, by having them view photographs in which the image of the victim’s body was blocked out,” writes Tucker.⁶⁴ Her instruction of how to look at the images reminds us of how James Allen directed readers’ gaze from the lynched victim to mobs and spectators. Moreover, her omission of the lynched body also calls our attention to the fact that white-owned newspapers of the lynching era censored lynching photography in publishing it. In an attempt not to disturb their readers, they cropped out the lynched black body in the photographs and reprinted white mobs alone.⁶⁵ Intentionally or not, the white-owned press denied readers’ access to identification with the black victimhood, thereby maintaining the racial status quo. Quite unwittingly, her censorship likewise may have let students bear whiteness but not blackness. In retrospect, Tucker regrets her decision:

My greatest regret about my presentation of the unit has to do with how I incorporated the lynching photographs. Whereas I intended to lessen the risk or trauma by covering the victims’ bodies in the photographs that we viewed at the end of the unit, this move risked reproducing the effects of the violence the images depict. Covering the bodies censored the testimonies embedded in the pictures and denied the victims witness to their humanity. . . . In other words, taking the black male bodies out of the pictures neither reinforced their humanity nor protected their memory. Instead, this erasure contributed the sanitization of a history that needs to be examined as a profane historical narrative. . . . [C]overing the victim was a presumptuous and futile attempt to inhibit possible, even inevitable, identifications with the victims. It was a misguided attempt to invite students to look at, but prevent them from witnessing, the violence represented in the texts.⁶⁶

These lesson plans show us the usually unexposed process of course preparation, thereby

⁶⁴ Tucker, “Not Without Sanctuary,” 76.

⁶⁵ Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 22-23.

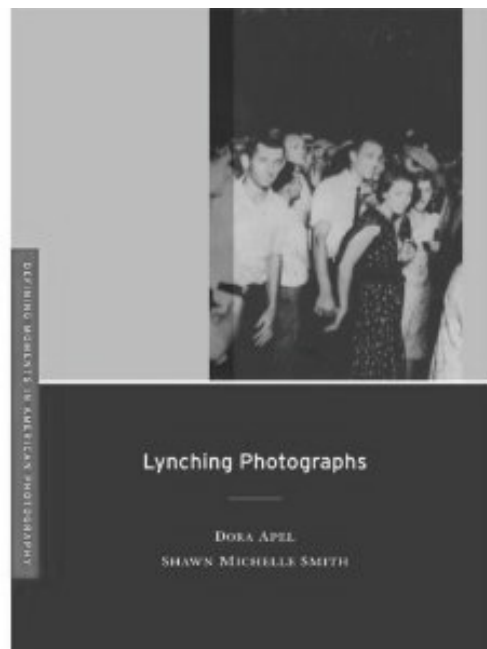
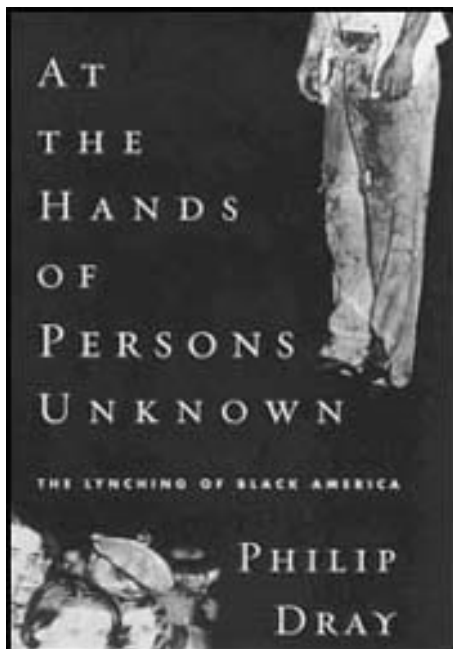
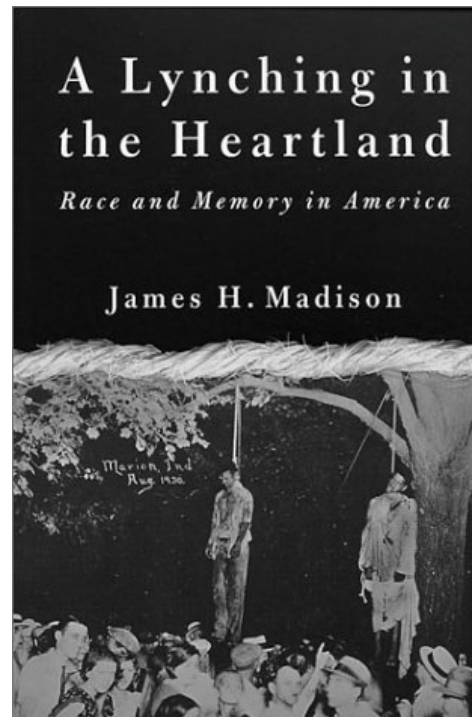
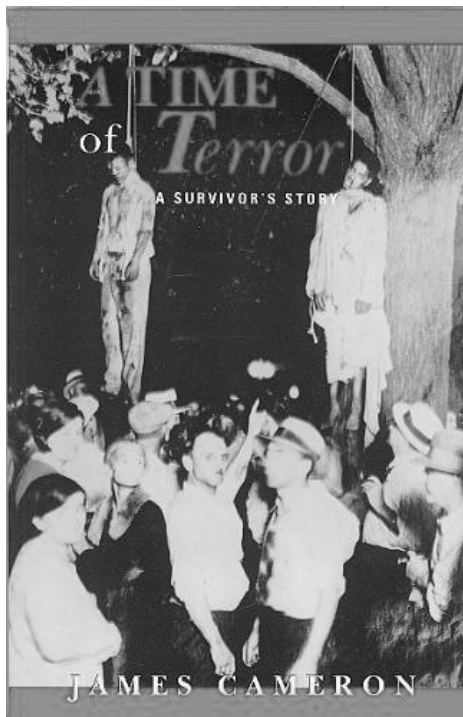
⁶⁶ Tucker, “Not Without Sanctuary,” 78-79.

illustrating more clearly the problems and risks they yield. We, as readers, are more alert to the usage of the images in classroom settings and the influence of looking on students with whom teachers deal in person. Perhaps what is more problematic, however, is the fact that scholarly use of lynching photographs seems to be less concerned about these problems and risks. While some scholars have observed how other scholars have incorporated the photographic images of lynching into their analysis, here I focus on the use of the images on the cover to explore how looking functions.⁶⁷

Let us pay particular attention to the way the Beitler's photo has been used in recent works (see Figures 5.1). Among many lynching photographs, the Beitler's image has appeared most often on the front cover of books on lynching. While James Cameron, as someone directly involved in the incident, reprinted the image on the cover of his anti-lynching memoir *A Time of Terror: A Survivor's Story* (1982) for the first time after the black press used it in the anti-lynching context, the recent usage of the Beitler's photo—from James H. Madison's *A Lynching in the Heartland: Race and Memory in America* (2001) to Philip Dray's *At the Persons Unknown: The Lynching in Black America* (2002), and Dora Apel and Shawn Michelle Smith's *Lynching Photography* (2007)—differs from its antecedents.⁶⁸ The cover of the current edition of Cameron's book, published in 1994, utilizes a similar strategy to the black press that formed the counter-spectacle of lynching photography. A close-up of the image draws viewers'

⁶⁷ See, for example, Ann P. Rice's criticism on Shawn Michele Smith, Wendy Wolter's on James Allen, and Koritha Mitchell on Dora Apel. Rice, "How We Remember Lynching," 32-34; Wolters, "Without Sanctuary," 400-401, 405-414; and Mitchell, *Living with Lynching*, 203 f.11.

⁶⁸ James Cameron, *A Time of Terror: A Survivor's Story* (1982, Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1994), James H. Madison, *A Lynching in the Heartland: Race and Memory in America* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), Philip Dray, *At the Person's Unknown: The Lynching in Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002), Apel and Smith, *Lynching Photography*.



Figures 5.1. Beitler's Photo on Book Covers

From Top Left to Bottom Right: James Cameron, *A Time of Terror* (The Black Classic Press Edition, 1994); James H. Madison, *A Lynching in the Heartland* (Hardcover, 2001; Paperback, 2003); Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown* (Hardcover, 2002); Dora Apel and Shawn Michelle Smith, *Lynching Photographs* (Paperback, 2007).

Source: Amazon.com

immediate attention to both the victims and the spectators. The word “Terror” inserted between the victims’ hung bodies rejects the conventional viewing of the image as a trophy of white supremacy, but rather highlights more vividly the atrocious character of lynching. On Cameron’s cover, the title functions as a counter-discourse in a similar manner to the captions used in the anti-lynching pamphlets and news accounts.

The first edition of Cameron’s book also reproduced the same image on its cover, but with a different design. A third empty rope was drawn between the two bodies, indicating that it was intended to use for Cameron. The image was sandwiched between the title “Time of Terror” on the top and a different, longer subtitle at the bottom: “The true story by the third victim of this lynching in the North who missed his appointment with death.”⁶⁹ The graphic power of the empty noose was even greater, for the presence of the not-yet-used rope turned this postmortem image back into the picture of ongoing lynching. The added noose visualized the climax of Cameron’s experience in his memoir, where the frenzied mob, which had just killed his two friends, prepared to kill Cameron by putting a noose around his neck. The edited image with the third noose, elaborated by the subtitle, vividly warned the readers what they were about to witness inside the book.

On Madison’s book cover, the same icon—a noose—seems to function in a different way. Served as a divider between the white letters (the title and author’s name) on the black background and the black-and-white image, a linear rope is the only component printed in color on the front cover. Given that the book examines how the color line has been drawn to this day in Marion, Indiana, by the lynching of 1930 and through the community’s remembrance of it, perhaps the noose represents the color line, the racial divide that was manifested in this particular

⁶⁹ Madison, *A Lynching in the Heartland*, fg. 17, 119-120.

lynching incident and remembered until the end of the twentieth century. In his introduction, Madison writes: “I use the [Marion] lynching . . . as a way to turn the reader’s attention to the lines of color that run through twentieth-century America.”⁷⁰ Not only does the highlighted noose indeed direct our gaze to the color line (quite literally, of rope) that divides black and white landscape of lynching on the dust jacket; the rope, reincarnated in color from the monochrome lynching photo, also reminds us of the fact that the past incident still haunts the Marion community. “The lynching did not go away. Indeed, the stories, the memories, even, some said, the collective guilt, increased,” notes Madison. The Beitler’s black-and-white image may belong to the past, but people’s memories of the lynching and of its black-and-white issues are as vivid as the colorized rope. In fact, the rope embodies Madison’s conclusion: “Through all these lynching stories run lines of color.”⁷¹

Cameron’s memoir and Madison’s case study that deals with the particular case of the Marion lynching seem to have a legitimate reason to use the Beitler’s image on their covers, and the way they focus on this particular lynching reflect how the image is reprinted. Dray’s general study of the history of lynching, on the other hand, not only publishes Beitler’s photo as a generic lynching photograph; it also edits the image in a collage-like manner. By using the well-circulated rhetoric of “at the hands of persons unknown” as its title and juxtaposing it with some of the mob visible in the Beitler’s photo, Dray’s book cover highlights a similar contradiction between the mob’s anonymity in the dominant lynching discourse and their stark visibility in the image, a contradiction that the black press unveiled. However, spectators’ faces appearing on a corner of the cover are so fragmented that the image has lost its particular context.

⁷⁰ Madison, *A Lynching in the Heartland*, 1.

⁷¹ Madison, *A Lynching in the Heartland*, 4.

Perhaps more disturbing, Dray's cover adds to the photo a misrepresented edition by including only one of the victims' lower bodies clipped from the picture. In the editing process, the image of the already brutalized body were mutilated again and displayed as an unidentified, decapitated body.⁷² Ultimately, the victims have disappeared on Apel and Smith's book cover, the latest example of the usage of Beitler's image. The way the image was edited for the book covers of Dray's and Apel and Smith's, although probably contrary to their intention, reminds us of the aforementioned editorial cropping done by white-owned newspapers in the early twentieth century. While their edited images force us to confront the presence of white spectators, they deny our visual access to remember the dead, thus possibly preventing us from critically commemorate the history of lynching.

These examples of scholarly/educational usage of lynching photography demonstrates that Sontag's precise warning—"the display of these pictures makes us spectators, too"—is even more compelling to these scholars because they are not only possible spectators but also exhibitors of those images.⁷³ While many scholars have analyzed the politics of looking in the past and present, its complicated dynamics of production, dissemination, and consumption of lynching photography, not many have tackled the question of complicity in the scholarly use of these images—a danger that scholarly reproduction and re-dissemination of the images lets present-day readers consume representation of racial terror. How can we intervene in this never-ending dialectic of violence and its reproduction? For historian Wood, the answer is to

⁷² In the later editions of Dray's book (paperback in 2003 and Kindle in 2007), however, the photographic image of the lynching on the cover was replaced by a more symbolic picture—upper branches of a tree.

⁷³ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 91.

recontextualize the representation of lynching. She notes:

While resurrecting these images from forgotten history is, to be sure, to risk once again reengaging in this process of violence and symbolic representation, we can hope that by recontextualizing these photographs, we can transform the ideological message embedded in the image. Indeed, both then and today, activist and artists have reappropriated these images, removing them from their original, oppressive context, to let them stand as a different kind of souvenir—reminder of racial terrorism and white brutality.⁷⁴

Yet, even so doing, there still remains a risk. Hale is well aware that the danger also lies in the scholarly act of quoting historical accounts of racial terror. “Reading my reconstruction of the newspaper’s eyewitness accounts of the [Sam] Hose lynching is an example of looking at the spectacle,” she writes. “We, too, are looking and thus also contributing the power of the lynching narrative.”⁷⁵ Hartman, who decided not to cite Frederick Douglass’s well-known description of the beating of his aunt by her master, calls our attention to the “casualness with which they [the scenes of torture] are circulated, and the consequences of this routine display of the slave’s ravaged body.”⁷⁶ We scholars have to be aware of our complicit role in bringing lynching photographs into life without sanctuary—the fact that reproduction of those scenes easily calls us to participate in such scenes and thus helps reinforce the spectacular character of black suffering.

Lynching Photography and Resolution 39

The issue of what to witness in lynching photography or how to witness it deserves further attention in the discussion of Resolution 39, another national project to commemorate lynching in the 2000s. The paradox of looking and not looking was further staged when several

⁷⁴ Wood, “Lynching Photography,” 208.

⁷⁵ Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 364.

⁷⁶ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 19.

lynching photographs, reprinted from the photo book *Without Sanctuary* and enlarged, were introduced at the press conference and on the Senate floor. Prior to showcasing the photographs, Senator Landrieu asserted that *Without Sanctuary* “showed the real faces of lynching” and that these images “began to change the way people viewed these tragic events.”⁷⁷ How, then, were the images viewed differently?

It may be useful to recall a previous case of congressional viewing of atrocious images, because, when Senator Landrieu called lynching “domestic terrorism” right before her visual presentation on the Senate floor, a controversial incident that had stirred American society a year before must have still remained in senators’ minds: in January 2004, a U.S. army personnel disclosed, and subsequently in April the CBS News first reported, the disturbing fact that the U.S. military had tortured and sexually abused Iraqi prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Not only detailed descriptions on torture in the 6,000-page confidential report but also 1,800 photographs and videos of visual evidence of atrocities shocked and disgusted congressmen at the three-hour, closed-door hearing session on May 12, 2004. Many critics and scholars alike have pointed out and further analyzed a striking similarity between the photos of Abu Ghraib and lynching photos. “If there is something comparable to what these pictures show,” Susan Sontag wrote a few weeks after the hearing, “it would be some of the photographs of black victims of lynching. . . .”⁷⁸ Hazel Carby has made a clearer statement: “There is a direct, but hidden, line connecting Abu Ghraib, the Rodney King video, and the photographs and ‘postcards’ of

⁷⁷ *Congressional Record*, 109th Congress, 1st Session (June 13, 2005), S 6365.

⁷⁸ Sontag, “Regarding the Torture of Others,” *New York Times*, May 23, 2004.

lynching which circulated widely in the early 20th century.”⁷⁹ Both sets of pictures captured the perpetrators of those tortures standing proudly by sexually brutalized bodies of the racialized “Other,” believing justice was done at their hands. Although the incident in Abu Ghraib was not much mentioned directly in the discussion of the resolution, Senator Patrick Leahy clearly stated in his speech: “The atrocities and dehumanizing mistreatment that have occurred in U.S. military detention facilities in Afghanistan, Iraq and Guantanamo, are eerily reminiscent of some of the despicable acts described in this resolution.” Senator Leahy’s claim, “[w]e should not be satisfied with long overdue apologies. There are serious human rights problems that we need to address today” shows how lynching, a human right issue of the past, was considered in the context of urgency to solve the present-day human rights issues.⁸⁰ At this particular historical moment, commemorating the history of lynching was probably even more an important national project for senators like Landrieu.

⁷⁹ Hazel V. Carby, “A Strange and Bitter Crop: the Spectacle of Torture,” *OpenDemocracy*, October 10, 2004, http://www.opendemocracy.net/media-abu_ghraib/article_2149.jsp. Last accessed on February 20, 2012. Carby further argues, “the importance of spectacle, the taking of photographs and videos, the preservation and the circulation of the visual image of the tortured/lynched body and the participants, the erotic sexual exploitation which produced pleasure in the torturers—all of these practices are continuities in the history of American racism and the unacknowledged history of American fascism.”

For the comparison between lynching photographs and the Abu Ghraib photographs, see, also, Dora Apel, “Torture Culture: Lynching Photographs and the Images of Abu Ghraib,” *Art Journal* 64:2 (Summer 2005): 88-100; Hazel V. Carby, “US/UK’s Special Relationship: The Culture of Torture in Abu Ghraib and Lynching Photographs,” *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 20 (Fall 2006): 61-71; Julie Gerk Hernandez, “The Tortured Body, the Photograph, and the U.S. War on Terror,” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 9:1 (2007); Nicholas Mirzoeff, “Invisible Empire: Visual Culture, Embodied Spectacle, and Abu Ghraib,” *Radical History Review* 95 (Spring 2006): 21-44; Shawn Michelle Smith, “White Womanhood, Lynching, and the War in Iraq,” *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 20 (Fall 2006): 73-85; and Katherine Henninger, “Atrocity or Nation Building? The Difference is in the Eye of the Beholder,” *Mississippi Quarterly* 61:1/2 (Winter 2008): 237-266.

⁸⁰ *Congressional Record*, 109th Congress, 1st Session (June 13, 2005), S6385.

Witnessing the photographic images of lynching seemed to comprise the core of Senator Landrieu's commemorative effort. Just as the Abu Ghraib photos forced members of Congress to face America's ongoing racial terror and to act upon it, the photographic records of lynching had to be shared among senators to remember and correct their past failure. Yet how the images were viewed at the Senate floor yielded a paradox of looking and not looking. In her final speech prior to voting for the passage of the resolution on the Senate floor, Senator Mary Landrieu showed several lynching pictures. She stated:

I would like to show some of these photographs, Mr. President [the presiding officer], now. This is one of the hundreds—thousands of photographs of men, women, and children who were lynched in this Nation, lynching that occurred—a citizen of our Nation, lynched. *And as your eyes look at this picture, they are immediately drawn, Mr. President, to the victim.* These hangings were sometimes—in most instances—very brutal events. Sometimes the hanging itself came after hours of torture and just excruciating fear and humiliation.

Mr. President, as this book was published and these pictures came into more full view of the American public, *what happens is your eyes leave the figure of the victim and move to the audience.* This, Mr. President, is part of the story that, in my mind, has not been completely told, and it needs to be told tonight and every day into the future.

As you can see, there are children gathered here. There are children looking up at this man hanging from a tree. History will record that some of these children were let out of Sunday schools to attend the lynchings. History will record that some businesses closed down so that the whole town could attend these lynchings. History will record that these lynchings did not occur mostly at night or in the back woods or across the levees—lynchings were a community event. In many instances, it was a form of public entertainment. It was mass violence, an open act of terrorism directed primarily against African Americans and others who sympathized with their cause.⁸¹

What was the point of exhibiting the picture here? Senator Landrieu made a few remarks on the

⁸¹ *Congressional Record*, 109th Congress, 1st session (June 13, 2005), S 6365. Emphasis is added. Revision is added to the transcript based on to the actual senate session broadcasted on C-SPAN 2. The video clip is available at C-SPAN Video Library, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/187145-1&start=280>. Last accessed on September 11, 2011.

history of lynching, stating that a number of citizens—men, women and children who were primarily African Americans—were lynched in the past, and that the hangings were often very brutal events involving hours of torture. She also explained that schools were cancelled and businesses were closed so that many people including children could attend lynching, proving that lynching was a community event and a form of public entertainment. She showed the audience some lynching photographs (we don't know which ones) to explain these historical facts, not necessarily to be critically engaged with the pictures themselves. But was “looking at such pictures really necessary,” given that the images Senator Landrieu exhibited might have functioned as a mere reference point to “rather just confirm what we already know”?⁸²

Pay further attention to the way Senator Landrieu treated those photographic images. The televised coverage of the senate session on C-SPAN 2 shows that she displayed an enlarged image of the lynching of Rubin Stacy—the same version that the NAACP used in their anti-lynching campaign—on the senate floor. The photo was reprinted from the photo book *Without Sanctuary* that inadvertently reversed the image (see Figure 5.2). As her aforementioned comments clearly proved, Senator Landrieu offered no specific information about this particular lynching during her presentation. While giving details to other particular lynching incidents she introduced following the presentation of photos, including the lynching of Claude Neal and Emmett Till, Senator Landrieu simply described the displayed photograph: “This is one of the hundreds—thousands of photographs of men, women, and children who were lynched in this Nation.” Without actually being in the Senate session or seeing its broadcasted image, there is no way of knowing which photograph Senator Landrieu showed to the senate floor. But even with the visual evidence of C-SPAN 2, given no information on the picture itself we still have no

⁸² Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 91-92.



**Figure 5.2. Senator Landrieu with the Enlarged Lynching Photo
of Rubin Stacy**

Source: Democracy Now!

knowledge about when and where the lynching occurred and who the victim was. Thus, the historical fact that the victim was Rubin Stacy who was lynched in Florida in 1935 was overshadowed by her general description of lynching (“one of the hundreds—thousands of men, women, and children who were lynched”).⁸³ Senator Landrieu’s intention to choose this particular photograph for display is obvious: she selected the photograph that could “represent” brutal lynching as a community event that adults and children attended. Although the lynching of Rubin Stacy played an important role in exhibiting the atrocious aspect of lynching, Stacy himself remained a nameless victim in the national discourse of commemorating lynching.

The anonymous victim Stacy became even more marginalized in Senator Landrieu’s guidance to the Senate floor on how to look at the photograph. She first called for the audience’s attention to the victim (“as your eyes look at this picture, they are immediately drawn . . . to the victim”) just to mention briefly the brutal aspect of lynching (again, the photograph was presented as an example without any specified information). The centrality of the victim in the eyes of the audience was terminated when Senator Landrieu told the audience to focus on the lynch mob (“what happens is your eyes leave the figure of the victim and move to the audience”), the part of the story that she thought “ha[d] not been completely told” and “need[ed] to be told.” At this point the focus was no longer on the victim but the *figure* of the victim only to be looked away from. After leading the audience’s gaze to children in the photograph (“as you can see, there were children gathered here”), Senator Landrieu gave the audience further details on how people usually attended lynchings. During the rest of her speech (about fifteen minutes), however, the photograph was left behind, further unmentioned.

Prior to the decision, the same photograph was displayed at the press conference along

⁸³ Allen, et al., *Without Sanctuary*, fig. 57, 185.

with other images, including the enlarged panel of Beitler's image of Shipp and Smith and the portrait of Anthony Crawford, a victim of the South Carolina lynching of 1916. Here, the role of these photographs became even more peripheral. While the press cameras focused on speakers at the podium, these photographs set in the background remained unnoticed most of the time (see Figure 5.3). The images drew attention on only a few occasions, when Senator Mark Pryor was glued to the image of the Stacy lynching (but at whom was he gazing?) while his fellow Senator John Kelley was making his speech in front of the camera (see Figure 5.4); and when Senator Kelley's comment about these photographs prompted the C-SPAN 2's video camera to leave him to zoom in for a close-up of Stacy's photograph. Its subsequent attempt to focus on the Beitler's image of Shipp and Smith next to Stacy's image, however, was prevented by the figures of Senator Pryor and James Allen standing in front of the image.⁸⁴ The photographs' marginalized presence was probably because the very attendance of the invited guests at the press conference—including lynching victim Anthony Crawford's great-great-granddaughter Doria Johnson, Emmett Till's cousin Simeon Wright, Ida B. Wells' great-grandson Dan Duster, and most importantly, lynching survivor James Cameron, all of whom were introduced as such by Senator Landrieu before making their comments—better represented the historical reality of lynching than the photographs. Indeed, many newspapers that reported the press conference

⁸⁴ C-SPAN Video Library, "Anti-Lynching Apology Resolution," June 13, 2005, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/187174-1>. Last accessed on September 11, 2011. *BBC News* included the image of Senator Pryor looking into Stacy's photograph. *BBC News*, June 14, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/4090732.stm>. Last accessed on February 21, 2012.



Figure 5.3. Beitler's Photo at the Press Conference
Source: C-SPAN



Figure 5.4. Senator Pryor Looking at the Picture of Rubin Stacy
Source: Getty Images

preferred to include a few images of these individuals, especially Cameron, with cosponsors.⁸⁵

The media's particular attention to Cameron as a living legacy of lynching turned him again into a "star exhibit" for this commemorative event. The way senators, invited guests, and photographers surrounded a black male lynching survivor retelling his story created another spectacle similar to the actual lynching scene, just as the picture of Billie Holiday at Café Society (Figure 3.1) conjured up the spectacle of lynching (see Figures 5.5). But the presence of racially diverse participants—both white and black standing not as voyeuristic onlookers but as serious witnesses—did make this spectacle of commemoration visually different from lynching pictures. By having them revisit an imaginative lynching scene where James Cameron remarked, "It's 100-something years late, but I'm glad they're doing it," the press conference built a space for the national reconciliation among the lynching survivor, descendants and relatives of lynching victims, and senators whose predecessors had failed the passage of a federal anti-lynching bill, as well as the press cameras.⁸⁶ Yet the enlarged lynching pictures were cropped out of this commemorative moment, becoming no longer visible to the witnesses.

Historical witnessing of lynching photography at the resolution sites shows us the contradictory roles that the images were forced to play. In the *Without Sanctuary* project, the contribution of lynching photography to remembering the past stemmed from, however

⁸⁵ See, for instance, the following online news accounts: *USATODAY.com*, June 13, 2005, http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2005-06-13-senate-lynching_x.htm; *CBS News*, June 13, 2005, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/06/13/politics/main701582.shtml>; *msnbc.com*, June 13, 2005, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8206697>; *washingtonpost.com*, June 14, 2005, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/06/13/AR2005061301720.html>; *BBC News*, June 14, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/4090732.stm>; and *Christian Science Monitor*, June 15, 2005, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0615/p03s01-ussc.html>. Last accessed on March 3, 2010. See also *Jet* 108:1 (July 4, 2005): 8-12.

⁸⁶ *Jet*, July 4, 2005, 8.



Figures 5.5. James Cameron at the Press Conference
Sources: Washington Post (top), Getty Images (bottom)

controversially, the very centrality of these images. The pictures introduced at the resolution sites, however, played only a secondary role in the senatorial commemoration of lynching. The images were buried in the background of the press conference, where the only witness to the Stacy photo, Senator Pryor, seemed to focus on the white spectators rather than the black victim. On the Senate floor, senators were instructed to glance at the black body only to look away and shift their gaze at the white crowd. The senatorial oversight of the black corpse echoes Allen's aforementioned similar direction and the question of the identification with white access to looking (bearing whiteness). Literary scholar Koritha Mitchell states: "After all, there are many ways to access lynching history, but only the pictures in *Without Sanctuary* inspired the Senate's apology. When we pause to ask why, we find that the nation has again allowed the archives left by perpetrators to eclipse all others."⁸⁷ Perhaps the *Without Sanctuary* photos inspired the senatorial apology because of this bearing whiteness and directing the gaze away from the black victimhood.

⁸⁷ Mitchell, *Living with Lynching*, 6.

CONCLUSION

Whose Wounds to Be Healed, and How?:

Toward Building the Black Public Sphere in the Historicization of Lynching

[T]he black majority and its institutions have always provided the only imaginable repository for the formation of a self-interested and politically engaged black public sphere in the United States. Furthermore, the resources of the black majority have enabled both the emergence of effective (self-, or better, community-interested) leadership and radical redefinitions of black publicness itself. Critical memory works to illustrate the continuity, at a black majority level, in the community-interested politics of black publicity in America.

—Houston A. Baker, Jr., “Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere”¹

In 2003, Grant County, Indiana, began debating the possibility of a memorial for the Marion lynching of 1930. The discussion arose in response to an interracial commission that planned a “day of forgiveness,” in which the black and white communities would apologize to each other—African Americans would apologize for the killing of Claude Deeter and assault on Mary Ball, and whites for the double lynching of Shipp and Smith and for assault on Cameron—as well as the city and county governments would send apology to the black community. The memorial event was supposed to conclude with the dedication of a plaque, first planned as a monument, then reduced to a plaque being placed inside the courthouse instead of at the lynching site. It would have read: “As citizens of Marion, Grant County, Indiana, we acknowledge that hatred, violence, and bigotry have scarred this community. We confess that this legacy touches all of us. We both seek and offer forgiveness. We commit ourselves to the

¹ Houston A. Baker, Jr., “Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere,” in the Black Public Sphere Collective, ed., *The Black Public Sphere: A Public Culture Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 8.

pursuit of healing, unity, and peace.”² But the plan was cancelled due to diverse objections by both white and black communities. A poll indicated only eight percent of Marion residents approved of a proposed plaque.³

The majority of townspeople’s disapproval speaks volumes about the fact that they rather forget this shameful part of the town’s history, as Cynthia Carr and Jennie Lightweis-Goff have observed. But some comments by African Americans clearly show the black community’s resistance to the city’s questionable memorial project that seems to have tried to memorialize the incident to forget it. Ruth Ann Nash, Thomas Shipp’s niece who collected over five hundred signatures in her “no plaque” petition, told the commissioners that she “resent[ed] the implications that this act will bring closure” to the families of the lynch victim or African Americans who experienced prejudice in Marion. An elderly black woman stated at a commissioners’ meeting: “Why wait till now to do something? It should have started long ago. Every time we go in the courthouse and see that plaque, we’re are going to remember all the injustice we’ve had over the years.”⁴ Indeed, the message on the proposed plaque would have been problematic to descendants of the lynch victims in particular and the black community as a whole. While omitting the word “lynching” from its text by using instead more vague words like “hatred, violence, and bigotry” that have “scarred” the community, the message proposed “forgiveness” for “healing, unity, and peace.” Without mentioning the lynching of two black youths, it would have been impossible to heal scars left on the town’s African American

² Quoted in Cynthia Carr, *Our Town: A Heartland Lynching, a Haunted Town, and the Hidden History of White America* (New York: Crown, 2006), 457.

³ Carr, *Our Town*, 458; Jennie Lightweis-Goff, *Blood at the Root: Lynching as American Cultural Nucleus* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 170-171.

⁴ Carr, *Our Town*, 457-458.

residents. Nash's resentment at the intended memorial and the phrasing of the proposed plaque lead us to a question of who was to remember the Marion lynching. Who was "we" in the message on the plaque? Whose scars were sought to heal?

The similar rhetoric of "healing the wounds" was also used in the discussion of Resolution 39. While the senatorial apology commemorated lynching through bearing whiteness and directing the gaze away from the black victimhood as discussed in Chapter Five, it also raises complications in its wording of "healing the wounds" and "a stain" in history. In supporting the resolution, many cosponsors repeated the significance of the apology to remember the atrocious past for the wounds to be healed. In introducing the resolution, Senator Landrieu stated:

Many of my colleagues might wonder why now? After all, some of these incidents are over a century old. There are two reasons. First, this aspect of American history is not well known or understood. . . . However, despite the change of attitude we have taken no action to remedy our wrong. That is the purpose of this resolution today. . . . I believe that this resolution of apology will be an important symbolic step in this process of healing and growth.⁵

After its passage, she brought up the same rhetoric again: "It is an embarrassingly and unforgivably late moment in coming, but we are addressing a stain on our history, and we are working to heal wounds across generations."⁶ Senator Mark Pryor shared a similar view with Landrieu. He described the history of lynching as "one of our Nation's darkest periods, a stain in history we would rather forget but that we cannot ignore." After expressing his sincere apologies and regret to the victims and descendants in his state Arkansas in particular and the nation as a whole, Pryor expressed his hope that acknowledging the history would "help begin to heal the

⁵ *Congressional Record*, 109th Congress, 1st session (February 7, 2005), S 1061.

⁶ *Congressional Record*, 109th Congress, 1st session (June 13, 2005), S 6374.

wounds that exist today.”⁷

These comments seem to suggest sincere hopes of healing the wounds, but one must wonder about whose wounds Senators Landrieu and Pryor are referring. Some specified the wounds to be those of the victims and their descendants. Among them was Senator John McCain, who said: “While our predecessors failed in that regard, we have an opportunity today to begin healing the wounds that this body’s failures have inflicted upon the African American community for so many years.”⁸ Senator Olympia J. Stowe likewise expressed her hope that the resolution “will help heal some of the wounds for the surviving family members of the victims of lynching.”⁹ Senator Carl Levin, on the other hand, clearly described the passage of the resolution as “some national healing.” Calling the history of lynching “a stain on the Nation’s past,” Senator Edward M. Kennedy also stated: “All of us hope that . . . the Senate apology today, can begin to heal these bitter wounds of injustice that the nation still feels because of the sordid legacy of lynching.”¹⁰

These national wounds most likely signifies those of the descendants of people who were responsible for lynching—lynch mobs, spectators, and Senate filibusters—given that lynching is described as “a stain in history we would rather forget but that we cannot ignore.” They are “we,” and “we” do not include the descendants of the victims and the African American community because it seems impossible for them to “rather forget” about the history of lynching or regard it

⁷ *Congressional Record*, 109th Congress, 1st session (June 13, 2005), S 6375.

⁸ *Congressional Record*, 109th Congress, 1st session, S 6380.

⁹ *Congressional Record*, 109th Congress, 1st session, S 6384.

¹⁰ *Congressional Record*, 109th Congress, 1st session, S 6380-6381.

as “a stain.” The majority of Senate cosponsors identified white wounds with the national healing, just as the national project of senatorial apology was inspired by the *Without Sanctuary* images, which Koritha Mitchell describes as “the archives left by [white] perpetrators.”¹¹

The way Senate cosponsors of Resolution 39 described their commemorative effort—how they saw their apology as healing wounds of this “forgotten” history—coincidentally echoes scholarly debates that emerged in the previous decade. In 1997, the *Journal of American History* (*JAH*) featured an unusual round table entitled “What We See and Can’t See in the Past,” which published senior historian Joel Williamson’s essay “Wounds Not Scars: Lynching, the National Conscience, and the American Historian,” judgment reports on the essay by six referees (Edward L. Ayers, David W. Blight, George M. Fredrickson, Robin D. G. Kelley, David Levering Lewis, and Steven M. Stowe), and Jacqueline Dowd Hall’s closing comment, all in their original forms.¹²

Using Clarence Thomas’s infamous analogy of “high-tech lynching” in the Anita Hill-Thomas hearings of 1991 as the springboard of his essay, Williamson shared, first with the referees and eventually with the readers, his personal recollections of the memory of lynching in the South, historiography of scholarship on lynching, and the issue of historians’ avoidance and erasure of lynching as their research subjects. As a distinguished historian of segregation and race relations, Williamson confessed how long he had overlooked the history of lynching. He

¹¹ Koritha Mitchell, *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2011), 251.

¹² David Thelen, “What We See and Can’t See in the Past: An Introduction,” *Journal of American History* (March 1997), 1217-1220; Joel Williamson, “Wounds Not Scars: Lynching, the National Conscience, and the American Historian,” 1221-1253; Edward L. Ayers, David W. Blight, George M. Fredrickson, Robin D. G. Kelley, David Levering Lewis, and Steven M. Stowe, “Referees’ Reports,” 1254-1267; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “A Later Comment,” 1268-1270.

recalled that he had grown up with “a vague awareness that white men had lynched black men at some time in the past,” but young Williamson “never bothered to find the [lynching] tree.” It was only as a scholar in the mid-1960s that Williamson learned about the southern lynching “by accident,” while he was doing research on origins of segregation. He found out that other segregation historians had also overlooked this history.¹³ Describing lynching as “our own holocaust” where “southern whites lynch[ed] blacks in the turn-of-the-century South while northern whites looked on,” Williamson concluded: “And that, too, is a wound that will not heal, a wound, in fact, that we whites recurrently feel but prefer not to see. Perhaps it was easier for us Americans—as historians and a people—to deal with slavery than to deal with lynching, and easier still to deal with disfranchisement and segregation than to deal with slavery or lynching.”¹⁴

Williamson’s analogy of lynching as “our own holocaust” becomes oddly oxymoronic, because the phrase does not signify victims of lynching, unlike his usage of the “Jewish holocaust” or the “Japanese holocaust” (as he described in his essay) that focus on victims of the atrocity—the Jewish or the Japanese. It illustrates a stark contrast to James Cameron’s naming of “America’s Black Holocaust Museum.” Williamson’s “our own holocaust” connotes the experience of whites, both southern lynchers and northern spectators. He further describes lynching as an unhealed “wound . . . that we whites recurrently feel but prefer not to see.” Ann Rice observes that Williamson’s language “reconstructs white Americans as amnesiac victims of

¹³ Williamson, “Wounds Not Scars,” 1229.

¹⁴ Williamson, “Wounds Not Scars,” 1232.

a loss.”¹⁵ The way Williamson embraces psychological wounds of whites at the expense of physical wounds of blacks is similar to senatorial embracing of “national” wounds. Perhaps it was Williamson’s unhealed white wound that Resolution 39 tried to heal. Admittedly, this idea was part of earlier anti-lynching campaigns by African Americans as well (recall attached message to the photo of Rubin Stacy in the NAACP pamphlet), but what makes past campaigns and more recent commemorations critically different is that the former always beheld the lynched black body while the latter have often gazed away from it.

The refereeing process on whether to publish Williamson’s essay was incidentally split by race. Four white referees, Ayers, Blight, Frederickson, and Stowe, encouraged the editors to publish Williamson’s essay with revision, while two African American referees Kelley and Lewis completely rejected it. The fact that their decisions turned out to be divided by race deserves further scrutiny than just a cursory attention. It is important, for the purpose of Conclusion, to closely examine how they responded to Williamson’s view about scholarly silence.

In spite of the essay’s flaws (or unusualness) as a historical article, white referees were quite intrigued by Williamson’s self-reflective piece as a historian. “I found myself pulled along by this essay’s momentum, by its revelations and emotional power,” confessed Ayers.¹⁶ Frederickson saw the essay “a highly personal, partially autobiographical,” lacking the “objective tone and scholarly apparatus of the normal *JAH* article,” but at the same time

¹⁵ Ann Rice, “How We Remember Lynching,” *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African American Art* 20 (Fall 2006): 40.

¹⁶ Ayers, “Referees’ Reports,” 1254.

“intelligent, incisive, and full of interest for anyone concerned with southern history.”¹⁷ Blight and Stowe evaluated the essay in further details, and concluded that its strength laid in Williamson’s claim on the avoidance of lynching as the theme for historical inquiry. Blight stated that as a “wise provocateur” Williamson aimed “to show in retrospect how American historians didn’t or couldn’t see lynching in their developing visions of the past,” and this was the theme, in his opinion, that Williamson’s piece made important.¹⁸ Stowe likewise commented: “Learning how we run away from, as well as make, our histories—our research and writing and thinking—seems to be the central (and autobiographical) message of this paper.”¹⁹

Responses of black referees strikingly differed from those of white referees, not only in terms of the simple fact that they rejected the essay but also in the way they evaluated Williamson’s claim concerning scholarly avoidance of lynching. Kelley found astounded by the fact that Williamson had entirely overlooked the rich scholarship on the subject by African American historians. He noted: “How could anyone write an essay like this and act as if African American historians don’t exist or are tangential?”²⁰ Lewis insisted that such scholarly silence about lynching should be understood not as a result of an absence of memory but “repression, conspiracy of silence, genteel protocols among WASP scholars.”²¹ Equally appalling for Kelley was how easily Williamson used “we” and “us” to refer to “American” historians in making an

¹⁷ Fredrickson, “Referees’ Reports,” 1257.

¹⁸ Blight, “Referees’ Reports,” 1256.

¹⁹ Stowe, “Referees’ Reports,” 1267.

²⁰ Kelley, “Referees’ Reports,” 1260.

²¹ Lewis, “Referees’ Reports,” 1263.

important observation about the historical erasure of lynching. “If he’s talking about white WASP men, mainly from the South, then he should say so,” Kelly argued.²² Given that, also in the discussion of Resolution 39, “we” were used almost interchangeably with “Americans” without pinpointing who “we” were; one may find a genealogical linkage between how Williamson and Senate cosponsors of the resolution remembered the history of lynching in the late 1990s and 2005. These two discursive arenas, set apart by time and space, offered both Williamson and U.S. senators opportunities to reconcile with the shameful past that they had the privilege of being oblivious about.

At stake here is what Kelley called “past and current segregation in the historical profession, the racial underpinning of canonization, etc.”²³ For Kelley and Lewis, Williamson’s claim about historians’ inability to see lynching and white male referees’ agreement to it themselves reveals how the national memory of the racist past contradicts vernacular memories that African Americans have passed on for decades. Patricia J. Williams writes: “Among many black families such [lynching] photos used to be passed around . . . as memorials to specific victims—often relatives.” She remembers that her aunt once showed her photographs of hanged black men, which, she writes, “quietly discipline me.”²⁴ Latonya Thames Leonard likewise recalls how, in the late 1970s, her grandmother gave her teenage sons (Leonard’s uncles) a warning of “Remember Emmett Till! You hear me. Remember Emmett Till” when they left

²² Kelley, “Referees’ Reports,” 1259.

²³ Kelley, “Referees’ Reports,” 1260.

²⁴ Patricia J. Williams, “Without Sanctuary,” *Nation*, February 14, 2000, 9.

home for weekend nights out.²⁵ As Elizabeth Alexander points out, “the white-authored national narrative deliberately contradicts the histories our [black] bodies know.”²⁶ In her closing comment Hall observes that the essay “keeps Williamson circling around the question of how whites have seen and treated blacks,” but “the ideas and actions of black southerners can never drive his stories.”²⁷ Thus, the very act of Kelley and Lewis in raising objections to Williamson’s silencing the history and scholarship of lynching illuminates black scholars’ struggles to counter and rewrite the dominant discourse of lynching history.

Kelley and Lewis’ protest against the “white-authored national narrative” of lynching history resurfaces in African American scholars’ skepticism about senatorial apology we have seen in Introduction: John Hope Franklin thought Resolution 39 was unconvincing, Troy Duster saw it as ineffective, and Nell Irvin Painter considered it as just a “feel-good measure” for the Senate. This “feel-good measure” was also true in the planned commemoration of the Marion lynching, which was attacked by a lynch victim’s niece. What interests me the most is this chorus of dissents by African Americans with the recent commemorative efforts of lynching, where repression of memory was suddenly replaced by remembering, which, however, was done either through objectifying or forgetting the lynched black body. Today’s general African American public and scholars alike seem to have struggled to carve out their counter public spheres to challenge such mainstream silencing of the past and problematic measures of lynching

²⁵ Latonya Thames Leonard, “Veneer of Civilization: Southern Lynching, Memory, and African-American Identity, 1882-1940,” Ph.D. diss. (University of Mississippi, 2005), ix.

²⁶ Elizabeth Alexander, “‘Can You Be BLACK and Look at This?’: Reading Rodney King Video(s),” in The Black Public Sphere Collective, ed., *The Black Public Sphere: A Public Culture Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 84.

²⁷ Hall, “A Later Comment,” 1269.

commemoration.

This dissertation has attempted to carry on their dissenting claims by reconstructing past anti-lynching struggles as sites of resistance—black public spheres—where African Americans remembered black suffering and let the public bear witness to it. Houston A. Baker, Jr. emphasizes the urgency of “critical memory” in the black public sphere that essentially functions as the “cumulative, collective maintenance of a record” that bridges the past and present, thus resisting nostalgic beautification of the past.²⁸ At the time of a series of recent nostalgic commemorations of lynching, it becomes necessarily a critical and imaginative act to focus on the cases of past anti-lynching struggles, which themselves can be considered as examples of the critical memory formation in discursive, representational, or performative black public spheres.²⁹

Building the Black Public Sphere has shown how the anti-lynching struggles in the 1930s and the 1940s served as acts of remembrance to challenge the neglect of and indifference to then-ongoing racial terror by the Senate, by the Attorney General, by the President, as well as by the public at large. To counter such a national willful amnesia, African Americans endeavored to build black public spheres—in newspapers, magazines and pamphlets, in the street, and in various cultural venues—as sites of memory making. They used diverse commemorative strategies in these anti-lynching arenas, but at the center of their crusade was the lynched black body to remember and represent. One of the interwar anti-lynching slogans, “Remember Pearl Harbor, but Don’t Forget Sikeston,” for example, is very suggestive in this sense. Not to forget lynching or lynch victims was perhaps the most important aspect of anti-lynching struggles

²⁸ Baker, “Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere,” 7-8.

²⁹ Baker, “Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere,” 35.

during this decade when the number of actual lynching cases was on the decline and lynching was not considered as such a pressing issue by the government.

The past anti-lynching cases examined in this study evince very critical acts of remembrance. African American protestors and fundraisers in the street, for instance, often utilized banners, signs, sashes, nooses, and black armbands to commemorate and/or represent lynching victims. As seen in a range of protest demonstrations by NAACP and NACW members and African American youths, these activists' respectable bodily presence challenged widely-shared sexually denigrated images of black men and women, thereby successfully rewriting the dominant memory of lynching. Black women activists, in particular, played a vital role of remembering and representing female victims on streets and magazine pages. Billie Holiday likewise visualized, through her musical performance, not only a southern lynching and a hanging black body but also black women behind the lynching scene. Holiday's bodily presence in this black public sphere also rewrote the dominant lynching discourse, but in a quite different manner from her respectable contemporaries. Her artistic affirmation of black female sexuality, rather than desexualization of black womanhood, resisted the sexual objectification of black women and the historical silencing of their sexual exploitation.

Building the Black Public Sphere has also demonstrated how African American anti-lynching activists conducted these acts of remembrance through exhibiting representations of the black body. NAACP's "hanging" of the "A Man Lynched Yesterday" banner, for example, created a secondary lynching scene in Manhattan. Howard students turned themselves into hanged victims by putting a noose around their neck, and reenacted a mass lynching site with sixty "victims." Holiday, too, turned herself into a hanging black body not in the street but in front of white nightclub spectators. NAACP and the black press presented the principal

representation of lynching: photographs. Their reentering into the space of death, in discursive, representational, demonstrative, and/or performative ways, enabled them to resist the deliberate repression of memory of racial terror and subvert the dominant lynching discourse.

As a scholarly work that has re/considered the formation and politics of several black public spheres in past anti-lynching struggles, *Building the Black Public Sphere* itself has attempted to carve out a small counter public sphere in the field of lynching scholarship. It has also critically examined the politics of recent commemorative efforts in relation to these past struggles. By highlighting contemporary voices and agencies of African American anti-lynching activists, this study aims at joining the scholarly counter discourse of our predecessors. Dealing with the pain of others is a difficult task, but it is my sincere hope that *Building the Black Public Sphere* has contributed to the body of recent scholarship on resisting racial terror, without exploiting black suffering or fetishizing the black body.

Recent commemorative projects examined in this study have served to bear whiteness, but the latest example of remembering racial terror has clearly been intended to build another black public sphere by bearing blackness.³⁰ While completing my dissertation I witnessed the phenomenal impact of the ongoing case of Trayvon Martin, a seventeen-year-old African American youth who was shot to death on February 26, 2012, in his father's gated community in Sanford, Florida, by a white Hispanic neighborhood watch captain George Zimmerman. Zimmerman insisted that Martin, unarmed but wearing a hooded sweatshirt, looked "real suspicious," thus claiming self-defense. He has not been arrested even a month after the

³⁰ In her study of America's first lynching memorial established in Duluth, Minnesota, in 2003, Dora Apel likewise argues that "the nature of black oppression, suffering and loss . . . remains obscured" (231) in the Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial. Dora Apel, "Memorialization and Its Discontents: America's First Lynching Memorial," *Mississippi Quarterly* 61:1/2 (Winter 2008): 217-235.

killing.³¹ The issues of racial profiling and problematic stereotyping of young black males as criminals certainly deserve attention, as does the contextualization of the Martin case into the history of racial terror and vigilantism, most notably its comparison with the murder of Emmett Till.³² But what strikes me the most is how a large crowd of protestors, predominantly black or people of color, who have attended nationwide mass movement—both in the street and on cyberspace—calling for further investigation and the arrest of Zimmerman, utilized quite a similar strategy to past anti-lynching activists to challenge the establishments’ neglect of the black killing in the present-day antiracist activism. Today’s protestors wore hoodies, the attire worn by Martin at the time of his death, just as Howard students wore nooses to represent lynching victims and reenact the moment of hanging in 1934.

While this protest movement has undoubtedly been more massive than the nationwide anti-lynching youth demonstration in 1937 thanks to the advent of social network services (SNS), the two movements share some common elements. Hooded protestors holding signs filled streets throughout the nation from Florida to California especially in late March, one month after Martin’s death. Among these protest campaigns was “A Million Hoodies March for Trayvon Martin-NYC” held in New York’s Union Square on March 21, on the UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. A public event announcement on Facebook encouraged SNS users to upload pictures of themselves in hooded sweatshirts on Twitter,

³¹ For a detailed account of the incident, see *New York Times*, April 1, 2012.

³² See, for example, Wilmer J. Leon III, “The Murder of Trayvon Martin Highlights Other Issues,” March 23, 2012, H-Afro-Am Discussion Logs, <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-Afro-Am&month=1203&week=d&msg=5io0Ezi5/fGu4TjmTohfKw&user=&pw=>, last accessed on March 27, 2012; “Trayvon Martin is Today’s Emmett Till,” *The New Yorker*, March 23, 2012; and the Association of Black Sociologists, “Statement in Support of Trayvon Martin Protests,” March 25, 2012, http://www.associationofblacksociologists.org/Association_of_Black_Sociologists/News.html, last accessed on March 27, 2012.

Facebook, or Instagram, sign the online petition on the Change.org website, and join the gathering in Union Square.³³ Several thousand people participated in the on-site protest, while more than 300,000 pictures have been posted.³⁴ The petition, originally started by an Irish Howard graduate and transferred to Martin's parents, has collected over two million signatures in the month since its inception, the largest number in the website's history.³⁵ Additional numbers of individual and collective "hoodies" pictures appeared on SNS sites and elsewhere, including "Million Hoodies I Am Trayvon Martin" on Facebook.³⁶

Among these nationwide protests, of particular interest for this study are two examples of remembering and representing the death of Martin. One is congressional responses. On March 22, while reading his protest statement on the U.S. House floor, Representative Bobby Rush took off his suit jacket to reveal a hooded sweatshirt and put the hood over his head. His voice was immediately interrupted by the rapping sound of the chairman's gavel, and his hooded black body was taken out of the legislative space. He was physically escorted out of the floor due to

³³ "A Million Hoodies March for Trayvon Martin-NYC," <http://www.facebook.com/events/347784265268106/>. Last accessed on April 1, 2012.

³⁴ Sapna Maheshwari, "Hoodies Don't Kill Protest After Trayvon Martin Shooting," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, March 27, 2012. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-03-27/hoodies-don-t-kill-becomes-protest-slogan-after-martin-shooting.html>. Last accessed on March 28, 2012.

³⁵ Miranda Leitsinger, "How One Man Helped Spark Online Protest in Trayvon Martin Case," *U.S. News*, April 2, 2012. http://usnews.msnbc.msn.com/_news/2012/03/29/10907662-how-one-man-helped-spark-online-protest-in-trayvon-martin-case. Last accessed on April 3, 2012; "Prosecute the Killer of Our Son, 17-Year-Old Trayvon Martin," *Change.org*, <http://www.change.org/petitions/prosecute-the-killer-of-our-son-17-year-old-trayvon-martin>. Last accessed on April 3, 2012.

³⁶ "Million Hoodies I AM Trayvon Martin," <http://www.facebook.com/#!/MillionHoodiesIAmTrayvonMartin>. Last accessed on April 1, 2012.

the violation of “wearing hats” in the chamber during the session, but this can be seen as another example of the repression of the critical act of remembrance.³⁷ Four days later, several state senators from New York, most of whom were African American including Kevin Parker, Bill Perkins, and Eric Adams, wore hoodies during the Senate session.³⁸ These protests successfully made other state senators and U.S. congressmen bear witness today’s death-bound black subjects (hooded black male bodies), something that the 2005 senatorial apology failed to represent in its commemorative effort.

The other example is “Am I Suspicious?,” a video campaign launched by a newly-formed Howard University student group, Howard Students for Justice. This two-and-half-minute video features about a dozen of African American male students and alumni of Howard, all wearing hoodies, facing the camera and asking viewers, “Do I look suspicious?”³⁹ By exhibiting their black bodies in deathly garments before the public eyes, these black male students not only remember and represent the victim and his moment of death just as their alumni did with nooses seventy-eight years ago, but also claim that they could be next Trayvon Martins, thereby protesting racial profiling of young black males. The video, however, rejects a simple association

³⁷ Pete Kasperowicz, “Dem Rep. Rush Kicked off House Floor for ‘Hoodie’ in Trayvon Martin Protest,” *The Hill*, March 28, 2012, <http://thehill.com/video/house/218691-rep-bobby-rush-kicked-off-house-floor-for-wearing-hoodie>. Last accessed on April 1, 2012.

³⁸ Eric Adams, “Senator Adams and Democratic Members of the NYS Legislature Declare ‘I am Trayvon Martin,’” <http://www.nysenate.gov/blogs/2012/mar/26/senator-adams-and-democratic-members-nys-legislature-declare-i-am-trayvon-martin>. Last accessed on April 1, 2012; “NY Lawmakers Wear Hoodies in Honor of Fla. Teen,” *NBC New York*, March 27, 2012. <http://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/Trayvon-Martin-Hoodies-Lawmakers-Albany--144219395.html>. Last accessed on April 1, 2012.

³⁹ “Am I Suspicious?: A Campaign by Howard University Students,” <http://www.visiontu.com/sus/index.html>. Last accessed on April 1, 2012.

of criminality with young black men by introducing them as college-educated. For instance, Howard Conday, a two-time alumnus of Howard University's School of Law and School of Business, asserts in the video as follows: "Some of us are going to be lawyers, doctors, dentists, and even politicians. Some of us have already, and would eventually change the world. We all are not suspicious!"⁴⁰ His comment reminds us of how the black press described black YMCA members at the commemorative gathering of the Claude Neal lynching. The video ends with a picture of sixty students (both male and female) in hoodies standing in front of the "Howard University School of Law" sign. It shows the apparent sense of pride and self-confidence in the faces of these students, just as we have seen in the picture of the Youth Advisory Committee (Figure 2.13). Asked the reason why they made the video, Courtney Scrubbs, another alumnus of the School of Law, explains: "We wanted to give Black men an opportunity to respond intelligently to racial profiling, an experience most of the Black men I know have had."⁴¹ Like their older alumni in the 1930s but much more vocally than them, today's Howard students utilized their politics of respectability to counter racist representation of the black (male) body.

These demonstrations not only reflect the continuity from earlier anti-lynching movements; there are also differences between them, particularly in response due to the extraordinary rapidness of disseminating information on the Internet and social networks. Unlike any past movements from youth demonstrations to pickets and fundraising for which activists spent months to prepare, this new medium enables today's protestors to instantly organize

⁴⁰ "Am I Suspicious?" (video clip), available at <http://www.visiontu.com/sus/index.html>. Last accessed on April 1, 2012.

⁴¹ "'Do I Look Suspicious?' Howard Students' Video Goes Viral," *Ebony*, April 2, 2012, <http://www.ebony.com/news-views/do-i-look-suspicious-howard-students-video-goes-viral>. Last accessed on April 3, 2012.

gatherings, easily mobilize a huge turnout, and record and post pictures or videos almost simultaneously. The enormous scale of collective witnessing of Martin's case and protests against it drives immediate and massive responses. They brought out a very powerful and empathetic comment from now-President Obama, for example, who said, "If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon."⁴² This highly personal line illustrates Obama's identification with black victimhood, something likely made possible because of his racial/ethnic background. But whether responses have been positive or futile is yet to know until the case is further investigated and some judgment is determined.⁴³

As a writer of the online magazine, *Colorlines*, pointedly observes, there is a "long tradition of marking the violent deaths of young black men through visual, communal memorials."⁴⁴ The case of Trayvon Martin shows that the SNS generation of African Americans (and others) contributes to building countless, more diverse black public spheres, both on the street and on cyberspace, to resist the mainstream silencing of modern-day racial terror. They are the legitimate descendants of past anti-lynching activists.

⁴² "Obama Speaks Out on Trayvon Martin Killing," *New York Times*, March 23, 2012.

⁴³ Postscript: Zimmerman was charged with second-degree murder and taken into custody on April 11. Although praised but called overdue by Martin's family, the charges were clearly realized as a result of the hard-fought mass movement throughout the nation. The past anti-lynching movement could never achieve at arresting perpetrators of racial terror. *New York Times*, April 11, 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/12/us/zimmerman-to-be-charged-in-trayvon-martin-shooting.html?_r=1&scp=3&sq=george%20zimmerman&st=cse. Last accessed on April 12, 2012.

⁴⁴ Hatty Lee, "This Is What Trayvon Solidarity Looks Like," *Colorlines*, April 3, 2012, http://colorlines.com/archives/2012/04/trayvon_martin_photos.html. Last accessed on April 4, 2012.

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