



Under Sentence of Death

Lynching in the South

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When Race

Didn't Matter

Black and White Mob

Violence against Their

Own Color

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Between 1880 and 1930 the American South experienced a rising surge of collective violence. Southern newspapers reported almost weekly incidents of mobs hanging, shooting, burning, or drowning hapless victims. African Americans endured the brunt of this wave of savagery, and more than two thousand blacks died at the hands of white lynchers.¹ Although mob violence directed at African Americans has been well documented, intraracial lynchings—those in which the victim and the mob had the same skin color—have received decidedly less scholarly attention. Perhaps the best-known incident of this type of mob violence is the 1915 lynching of Atlanta factory supervisor Leo Frank for the murder of Mary Phagan.² This case was sensationalized by the contemporary press and later dramatized for television, but it is only one of the over two hundred incidents of white-on-white collective violence that took place between 1882 and 1930 in the American South.³

Concurrent with being subjected to frequent white mob rule, the African American community witnessed the enigmatic spectacle of blacks lynching other blacks. Between 1882 and 1930, 148 southern blacks died at the hands of mobs that were integrated or composed entirely of African Americans. In this essay we examine the phenomenon of same-race lynchings, document trends in the frequency with which blacks and whites employed collective action in their own communities, identify the areas of the South where same-race lynchings were the most numerous, and offer an interpretation for mob violence when race was not the issue.

TIME TRENDS IN SAME-RACE LYNCHINGS

A reasonable first step toward understanding the phenomenon of same-race lynchings is to describe their distribution through time and space. Were intraracial lynchings more concentrated during some periods of this forty-nine-year era than others? Did some regions of the South experience more than their share of intraracial violence? These are important questions as we search for possible explanations for this type of lethal sanctioning.

Before considering the trends in intraracial lynchings, it will be useful to examine the pattern of conventional white-on-black lynching activity and then use this as a basis for gauging trends in same-race lynchings. Figure 1a graphs the number of casualties of traditional lynchings each year from 1882 to 1930.⁴ As this figure demonstrates, conventional antiblack mob violence increased during the 1880s, peaked in 1893, and then began a gradual descent to the Great Depression. This general decline after the mid-1890s was interrupted, however, by three resurgent waves of antiblack violence: during the turn of the century business recession, again during the 1908 economic downturn, and finally after World War I, coinciding with yet another recession, the resurgence of the second Ku Klux Klan, the rise of nativism, and the return of black troops from Europe.⁵

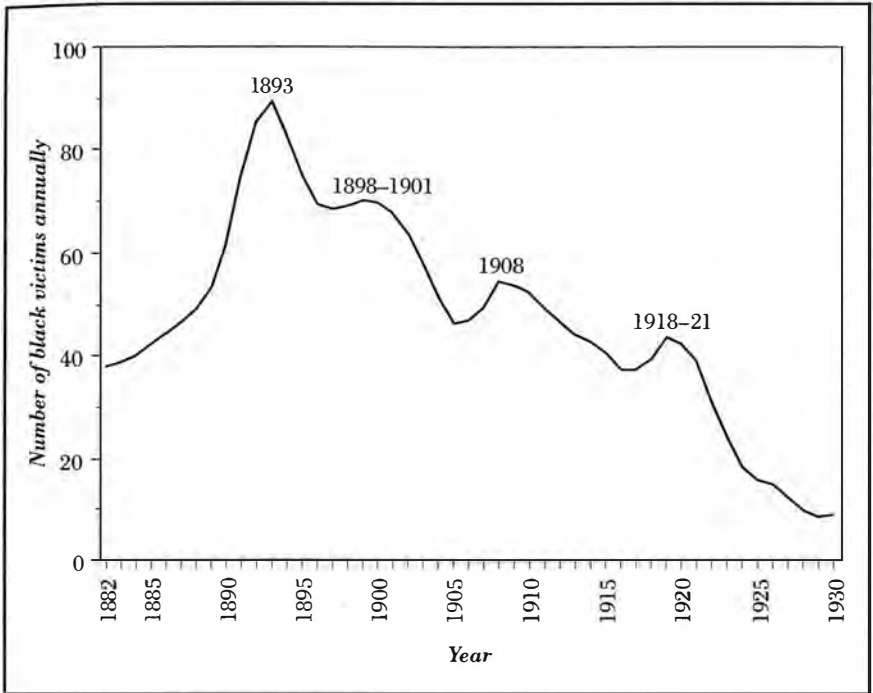
Figure 1b presents the trends over time in intraracial mob violence for the period 1882 to 1930. The annual toll of blacks lynched by other blacks increased unevenly during the decade of the 1880s, reached its maximum in 1892, then entered a decline to 1930, with only one significant reversal in the period between 1900 and 1904.⁶

The trend in white-on-white lynchings shown in Figure 1b has a configuration comparable to that of black-on-black lynchings, with increased lynching activity until the early 1890s followed by a decline and only a small increase during the Ku Klux Klan revival in the early 1920s. Figure 1b shows, however, that before 1900 and after 1914 the annual number of whites killed by white mobs was greater than the number of blacks murdered by black mobs.⁷

In the broad view, the trends in black-on-black and white-on-white lynchings are similar, and both are roughly comparable to the trend in traditional white-on-black lynchings.⁸ The number of victims of lynch mobs grew during the 1880s, reached its annual maximum early in the 1890s, then diminished gradually over the next thirty-five years, with only occasional violent resurgences.

This similarity among patterns raises the possibility that the trend of

FIGURE 1A. *Trends in Black Victims of White Lynch Mobs^a*



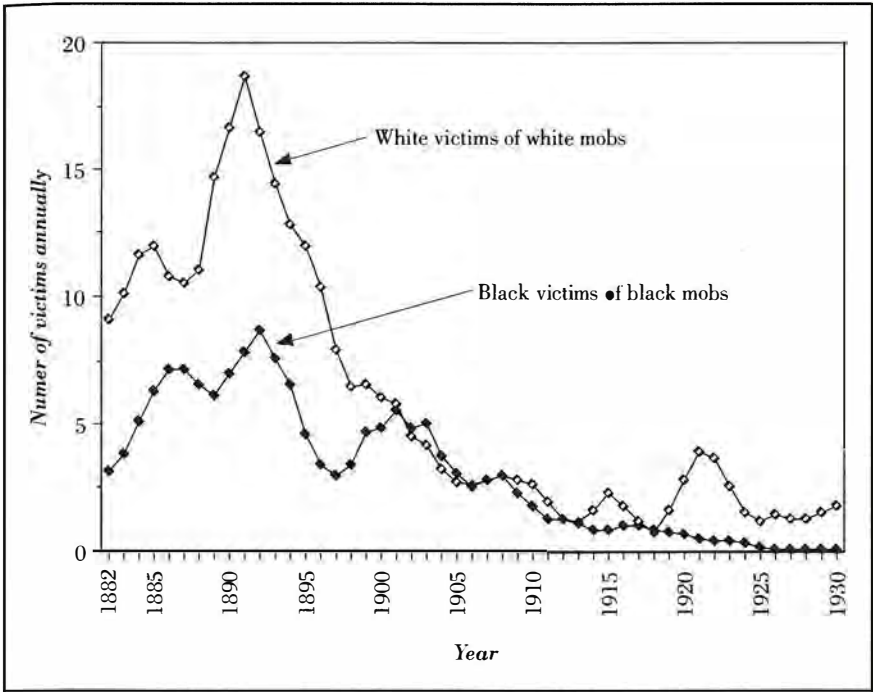
^aTwice smoothed statistically

intra-racial lynchings simply mimicked the secular trend in mob violence and that there is little unique about these less conventional varieties of lynchings. In other words, the patterns of same-race lynchings in Figure 1b may be confounded with the more general trend in mob violence seen in Figure 1a.

The trends in same-race lynchings in Figure 1b are a mixture of two elements: a pattern resulting from the trend in mob violence in general and a trend unique to same-race lynchings. One way to separate these two components is to use time-series regression to eliminate the general component from the same-race trends reported in Figure 1b.⁹ After that is accomplished, the “purified” trends can be reexamined for informative patterns.

Figures 2a and 2b present the smoothed trends in same-race lynchings adjusted for the secular trend in mob violence. The zero line is the overall trend in traditional lynchings, and each point is a deviation away from that baseline trend. Deviations above zero indicate years when the number of same-race lynchings was greater than would have been predicted from the general trend, and deviations less than zero indicate years when the number of same-race lynchings was less than expected.

FIGURE 1B. *Trends in Black-on-Black and White-on-White Lynching Victims^a*



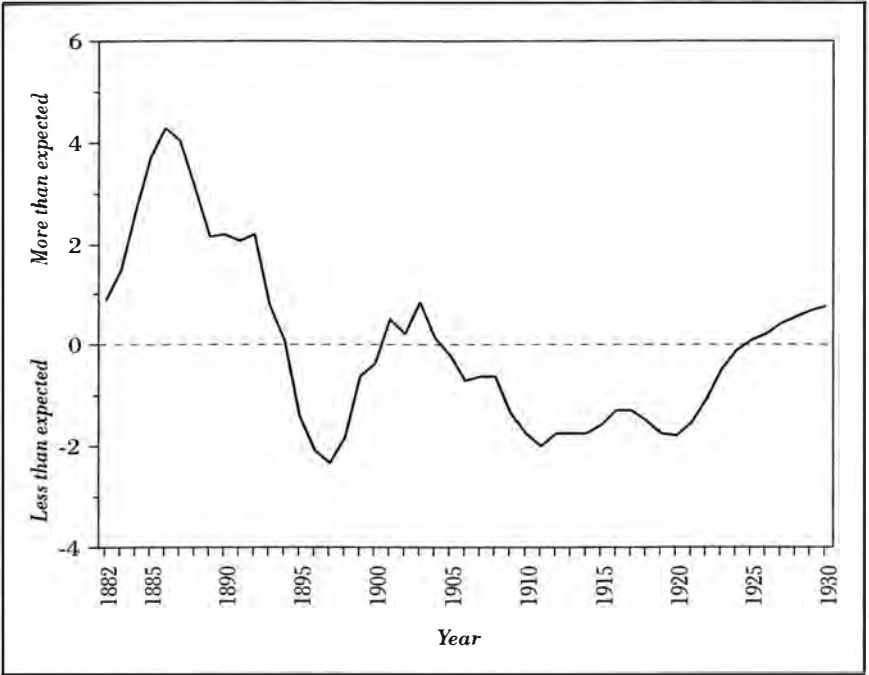
^aTwice smoothed statistically

Figure 2a shows that from 1882 through the early 1890s, there were more black-on-black lynching victims than would be expected on the basis of the general trend in conventional mob violence. This is remarkable because, as shown in Figure 1a, the overall lynching trend during this period was increasing dramatically. After the early 1890s, the number of blacks lynching other blacks was generally less than would have been predicted.

The pattern for white-on-white lynchings, Figure 2b, is broadly comparable to that of black-on-black lynchings in Figure 2a. During the 1880s and until the early 1890s, the number of white victims of white mobs exceeded the general trend in mob violence, but after about 1895 the number of white victims was less than would have been predicted based on the general trend.

Figures 2a and 2b demonstrate that during the 1880s, same-race lynchings increased at a rate greater than that of traditional white-on-black lynchings, and after the early 1890s they declined at a steeper rate than

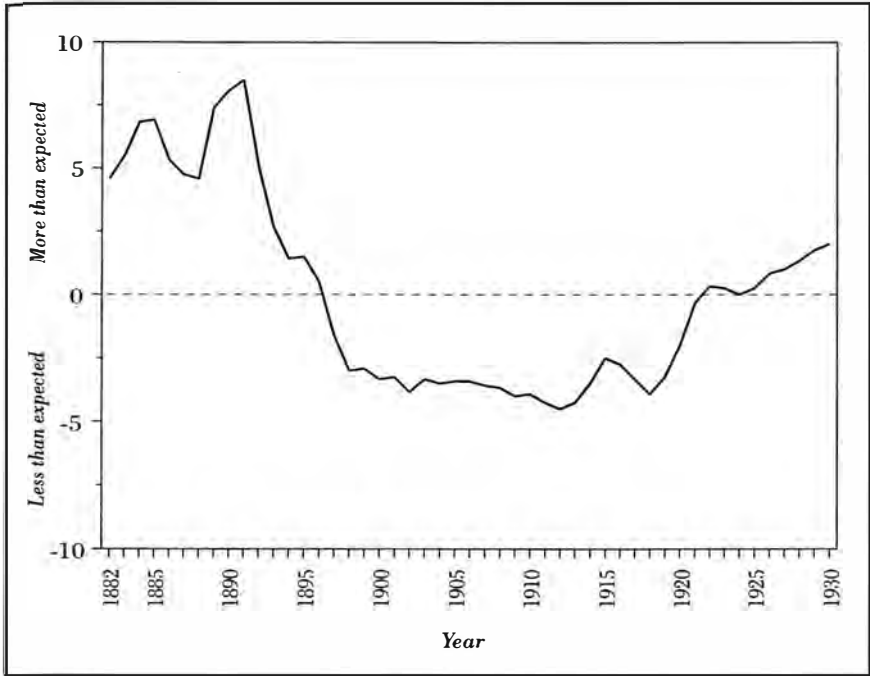
FIGURE 2A. *Adjusted Trend in Black-on-Black Lynching Victims^a*



^aTwice smoothed statistically

that of traditional lynchings. Thus, while the temporal pattern of same-race lynchings follows the broad sweep of mob violence during the lynching era, they differ in one significant way: they were more prevalent during the early years of the 1880s, and they were relatively less frequent after the frenzy of mob violence peaked in the 1890s. Documenting this pattern in a different way, we discovered that 67.4 percent of the incidents of black-on-black lynchings and 70.5 percent of the incidents of white-on-white lynchings occurred before 1900, whereas only 46.4 percent of the traditional white-on-black lynching incidents occurred before that date.¹⁰ This indicates, therefore, that same-race mob violence was primarily, although not exclusively, a nineteenth-century phenomenon and that same-race lynchings became increasingly rare after the turn of the century. This, of course, raises the question, Why were same-race lynchings more common in the early years of the lynching era? One possibility is that intraracial lynchings were a form of “popular justice” in which racial communities punished violators of community norms in the absence of an efficient, formal law enforcement authority.

FIGURE 2B. *Adjusted Trend in White-on-White Lynching Victims^a*



^aTwice smoothed statistically

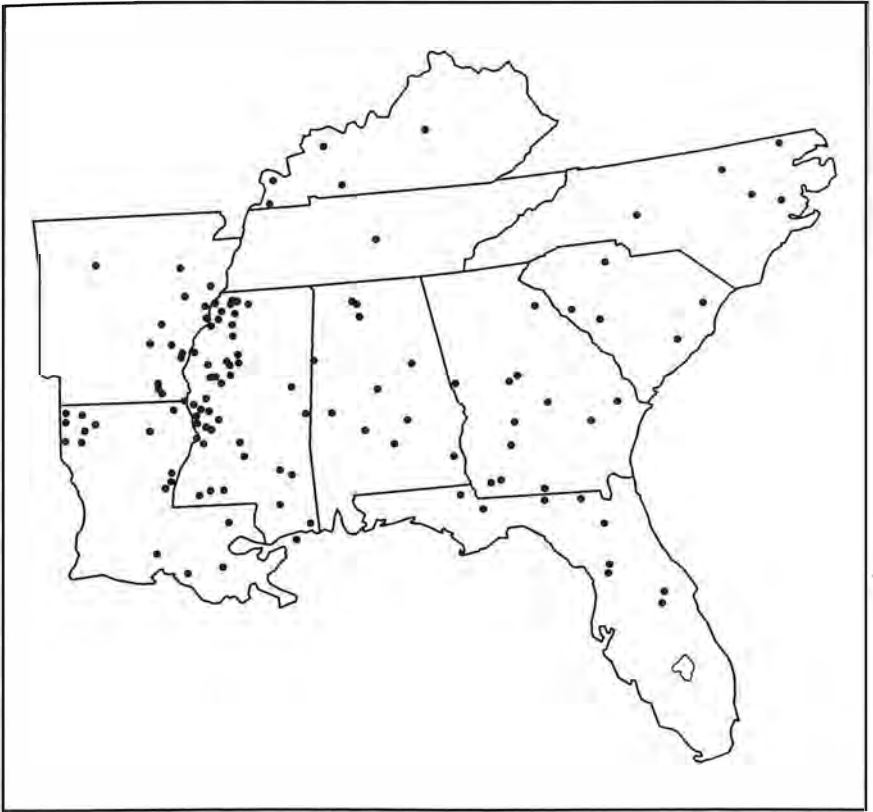
BLACK-ON-BLACK MOB VIOLENCE

Spatial Patterns

For additional clues that might point toward an explanation of intraracial violence we can turn to their geographical distribution across the southern landscape. If same-race lynchings were concentrated in certain areas of the South, then the characteristics of those areas may suggest conditions that gave rise to these incidents.

Map 1 illustrates the distribution of black-on-black lynching incidents across ten southern states during the 1882–1930 period. We have noted elsewhere that intraracial violence within the African American community was geographically concentrated and that most lynchings occurred in the more recently settled areas of the South.¹¹ A similar pattern emerges in Map 1, which shows the geographic distribution of the 129 incidents of black-on-black violence. A heavy clustering of intraracial lynchings is

MAP 1. *Incidents of Black or Integrated Mobs Lynching Black Victims*



clear along the Mississippi River delta in Arkansas and Mississippi and extending southward into Louisiana. Indeed, these three states alone account for fully 61 percent of all black-on-black lynching incidents.¹² In contrast, Georgia, which compiled one of the bloodiest histories of conventional white-on-black violence (368 incidents, or 17 percent of the total lynching incidents for the South), recorded only 12 incidents of black mob violence (9 percent of the total).¹³ To be sure, incidents of black-on-black violence also occurred outside of the Mississippi River delta region, but they account for a relatively small percentage of all such episodes.

An intriguing concentration of black intraracial violence appears in Bossier and Caddo Parishes, both in the extreme northwest corner of Louisiana. With a total of nine incidents, they account for half of Louisiana's eighteen incidents of black-on-black lynching. An even harsher picture emerges, however, if we shift our attention to the number of black victims of intraracial lynching. Both Bossier and Caddo Parishes had

incidents in which more than one victim was killed. Indeed, Bossier had five incidents with six victims, and Caddo had four incidents with six victims—mobs in these two parishes were responsible for more than half of Louisiana's twenty-one black victims of intraracial lynching. On October 19, 1893, for instance, two unnamed black men were lynched by an integrated mob in Bossier Parish for being "notorious hog thieves."¹⁴ Three men were lynched in Caddo Parish on November 30, 1903, for attempted murder. Phil Davis, Walter Carter, and Clint Thomas were taken to the bayou, given time to pray, then hanged from a willow tree.¹⁵ These multiple-victim incidents demonstrate the lethality of intraracial violence in these two parishes.

A possible explanation for the geographic distribution of black intraracial violence emphasizes the size and concentration of the African American population. That is, there was greater opportunity for such violence where the black population was larger. Indeed, there is a moderate relationship, across counties, between the absolute size of the black population and the number of black victims of intraracial violence ($r = +0.213$), suggesting that simple availability of potential black victims and mobs partially accounts for the pattern observed in Map 1.¹⁶ A second, related explanation stresses the proportionate, rather than absolute, size of the African American population. Where the black population represented a larger percentage of a county's total population, the African American community may have retained somewhat greater independence in exercising social control—including the punishment of norm violators. Of course, given the importance of the racial caste line in southern society, this independence would have extended only to cases in which blacks were victims of the norm violation. Whenever whites were victimized by blacks, punishment typically was inflicted by white courts or white mobs. There is also empirical evidence supporting this second explanation, with a significant association between the number of black victims of intraracial lynching and the proportionate size of the black population across counties ($r = +0.298$).¹⁷

To gain greater insight into the social forces that may have been responsible for blacks lynching other blacks we now move beyond the temporal and geographic distributions of such incidents and examine more closely the circumstances surrounding these events.

Interpreting Lynchings by Black Mobs

Elsewhere, we have suggested that the best way to understand the motivation for interracial lynching is to ask the question, How was the

white community threatened, and by whom? For the more typical incident of interracial lynchings, we have argued that whites were more likely to lynch blacks when they felt threatened by the black population, especially economically.¹⁸ The same general approach may be taken to interpret black-on-black violence. Naturally, southern blacks were constrained in their ability to react violently to redress grievances against the white population, by whom they were certainly threatened during this era. So it comes as no surprise that there are extremely few records in our database that document the lynching of a white person by a black mob.¹⁹ Thus interracial tensions must figure only marginally in our consideration of the social forces responsible for the activities of black mobs. Conversely, interaction within the African American community will assume greater prominence.

In a few incidents, representing only a small percentage of all black-on-black lynchings, interracial conflict was indirectly responsible. In every case, the black community punished a fellow member for collaborating with whites in the prosecution, or persecution, of blacks. Two examples will suffice. John Brown was lynched in Talladega County, Alabama, on September 29, 1891, for testifying against other blacks. Apparently Brown had passed along information to the police implicating two black males in a barn burning. According to Brown's wife, a group of blacks visited their home, telling John that they had a warrant for his arrest for killing hogs. Later, Brown was found in the Tallasahatchie creek with his hands and feet tied and a rope around his neck.²⁰ A similar incident had its origin in events that occurred on June 10, 1899, when a black man was lynched by a white mob in Marion County, Florida, for murdering a police officer. The following day, two black men were lynched in the same county by a mob of angry blacks. The victims were accused of aiding the white mob during the lynching on the previous day.²¹ These and similar cases suggest that some members of the black community felt threatened when other blacks aided and abetted efforts by whites to punish African Americans.

Far more common, however, were cases in which black mobs lynched victims accused of serious crimes (e.g., murder, rape, and assault) against other blacks (see Table 1). We have suggested that, unlike the more common lynching of blacks by whites, many black intraracial lynchings were instances of popular justice. Four key pieces of information support this conclusion: the concentration of black-on-black lynchings before the turn of the century; the concentration of black intraracial lynchings in less developed areas of the South; the serious nature of accusations against the lynch victims; and the lack of enthusiasm with which the white-

TABLE 1. *Alleged Offenses of Lynch Victims (in percentages)*

Offense	Black Victims, Black Mobs ^a	White Victims, White Mobs	Black Victims, White Mobs
Rape or incest	25.68	8.45	29.21
Murder	45.95	59.51	37.25
Murder and rape	2.03	2.82	1.86
Miscegenation or other sex offense	4.06	1.76	4.37
Assault	6.08	4.93	9.77
Theft or fraud	4.73	7.04	4.02
Arson	3.38	3.52	4.28
Other and unknown	8.11	11.97	9.25
Total	100.02 (N = 148)	100.00 (N = 284)	100.01 (N = 2,314)

^aBlack or integrated mobs.

dominated criminal justice system punished black criminals who victimized other blacks. Regarding the last of these points, between 1882 and 1930 the state of Georgia legally executed forty-four black men charged with rape, but only seven of these men were accused of raping a black woman. Over the same time period, Georgia executed only one white man for rape, and his victim was a white women. So, taking sexual assaults as a single example, the formal justice system clearly overlooked or dealt relatively leniently with crimes against black victims. Perhaps black mobs took matters into their own hands because they had little confidence that the white-dominated justice system would mete out punishment that was swift enough or severe enough to satisfy them.²² If there is merit to this popular justice interpretation, then another reason for black intraracial lynchings is that the black community felt threatened by the criminal activity of some of its members.

Most victims of black mobs were accused of very serious offenses; fully 73.7 percent were alleged to have committed murder, sexual assault, or rape-murders. In this respect, black-on-black lynchings were similar to the more common lynching of blacks by white mobs, in which 68.4 percent of victims were accused of murder or rape. The crimes attributed to Sam Wilson mirrored most of the vile motives usually ascribed to black lynching victims of white mobs. Wilson, who was lynched on December 17, 1885, in Jones County, Mississippi, was accused of murdering a

black woman and her son, as well as raping and murdering her daughter. Wilson was half-brother to the two murdered children. Upon learning of the crime, a group of black men ambushed Wilson, "gave him a dose of lead and then hung him to a tree." Interestingly, the white press, in this case the *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, strongly endorsed the lynching of Wilson, as it often did the actions of white lynch mobs. The paper described the lynching as "a fate too good for such a monster" and opined, "It is a good thing to know the villain was captured and that he did not live to see the sun go down on his bloody work."²³

Not all victims of black mobs stood accused of such heinous crimes as those committed by Sam Wilson. W. J. Jackson, who was lynched on October 15, 1908, in DeSoto County, Mississippi, stood accused of stealing a bale of cotton from a neighboring black man.²⁴ In another incident a black Baptist preacher, known only as "Lightfoot," was lynched in Jackson County, Arkansas, on December 9, 1892, for committing a "stupendous fraud" upon the black population. Apparently, Lightfoot claimed to be a government agent responsible for preparing African Americans for a trip to Liberia and collected fees for that purpose from over eight hundred local blacks. When his deception was discovered, several contributors demanded that Lightfoot return their money. When he refused, they shot him to death.²⁵

A special category of black-on-black lynchings involved the punishment of behavior that may be labeled as "offenses against the black family." Roughly 16 percent of all incidents involving black mobs included victims accused of crimes against other members of their family—more than we find among white-on-white or black-on-white lynchings. These "crimes" included such behavior as murder of a spouse, murder of a father-in-law, getting "too thick" with kinsmen's wives, and nonmarital cohabitation. One of the most common was incest, or the rape of a young family member. A typical example of the latter group of incidents was the lynching of David Scruggs in Jefferson County, Arkansas, on July 23, 1885. After Scruggs was accused of engaging in incestuous acts with his daughter, he was abducted by a black mob and "carved to pieces with knives."²⁶ Julien Mosely was similarly dispatched by a black mob in Desha County, Arkansas, on July 14, 1892. Mosely, who was accused of raping his seven-year-old stepdaughter, had been arrested and was in custody when a mob of black men overpowered the constable. They "took Mosely to a cotton gin and hanged him with a rope used for drawing up cotton."²⁷ It is well known that the African American family was under stress during this era. Mortality, desertion, and nonmarital childbearing resulted in more

female-headed households and more children living separately from one or both parents than was the case in the white community.²⁸ Therefore, it would not be surprising if the African American community had mobilized to promote greater stability for families, especially children, even if it meant the lethal and visible punishment of behavior that threatened the family. Of course, this connection between black family patterns and black mobs must remain only speculative until it is investigated further.

The description of black intraracial lynchings as incidents of popular justice may appear to be contradicted by the fact that in roughly one-third (36 percent) of all lynching incidents by black mobs the victim was removed from the custody of a sheriff, jailer, or judge. Labeling black-on-black lynchings as acts of popular justice may appear inappropriate when the formal criminal justice system was already engaged. Justice, after all, might have been done even without the intervention of the mob. To be sure, in some cases the justice system would have meted out punishment that was swift and severe enough to satisfy the black community's desire for retribution. In those cases, mob action was not required to achieve "justice." The record compiled by the southern justice system, however, at least with respect to rape, probably gave African Americans cause to doubt its effectiveness in punishing black-on-black crimes. Furthermore, the frequency with which victims of black mobs were removed from custody falls short of the corresponding frequency for the victims of white-on-white or white-on-black violence. In all southern states 52.5 percent of white victims of white lynch mobs were removed from the custody of authorities, whereas 39.5 percent of black victims of white mobs in Arkansas were so obtained. In sum, we believe that the description of black intraracial lynchings as episodes of popular justice is reasonably accurate. But we also recognize that black mobs, like their white counterparts, lynched victims who would have been punished adequately by legal authorities and sometimes sought to send a message to the larger African American community through their punishment of norm violations.

Black Brutality

Occasionally, black mobs subjected their victims to extreme suffering—possibly to make sure that other potential norm violators received the message. Several lynch victims were burned alive or after they had been killed by other means. More rarely the victim was tortured with more elaborate methods. Anderson Moreland, who was lynched in Monroe County, Georgia, on June 8, 1892, was one of those unfortunate souls. When Moreland was captured by the mob that accused him of raping a

black girl, "he was stripped of his clothes and beaten into insensibility and dropped into a hot tub of salt water."²⁹ Dan Reynolds of Phillips County, Arkansas, was also tortured by the mob that lynched him on January 13, 1889, for "jilting" a black girl. After whipping Reynolds nearly to death, the mob of nine black men rubbed mud into his wounds and packed his nose and mouth with mud.³⁰ Although our records suggest that black mobs resorted to torture and mutilation somewhat less than white mobs (with either black or white victims), these cases clearly demonstrate that such methods were also in the repertoire of punishments of black mobs.

WHITE-ON-WHITE MOB VIOLENCE

Spatial Distribution

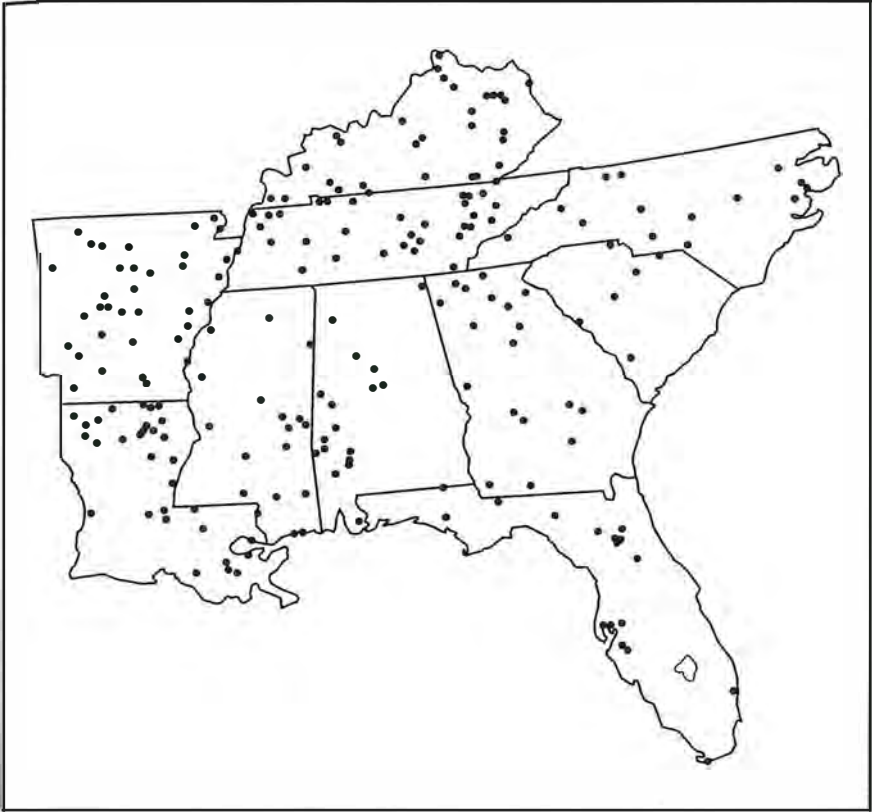
Turning to the spatial distribution of white-on-white mob violence, Map 2 shows that the 224 incidents of white lynchings were concentrated in the parishes of northern Louisiana, in the counties of central Arkansas, along the Kentucky-Tennessee border, and in the upland areas of eastern Tennessee and Kentucky.³¹ There was also a significant cluster of white lynchings along the Mississippi-Alabama border.

A comparison of Map 2 with Map 1 shows that white-on-white lynchings were rarely located in the same areas as black-on-black mob violence. In fact, of the counties that had any intraracial lynchings, only 10 percent experienced both types. White lynchings were somewhat more likely in counties with a high concentration of white population, and 60 percent of white-on-white lynching incidents took place in the least densely populated counties. This indicates that white intraracial lynchings occurred disproportionately in predominantly white, rural counties of the South. Again, in concert with the temporal concentration of white-on-white lynchings, this spatial distribution is consistent with a popular justice interpretation.

Varieties of White-on-White Lynching

The worst single incident of white-on-white mob violence took place in a far different environment. This tragedy occurred in New Orleans, Louisiana, where eleven Italians were lynched in late winter of 1891.³² David C. Hennessy, police chief of New Orleans, was slated to testify against one of the city's main gang factions. On October 15, 1890, two days before he was scheduled to appear in court, Hennessy was shot down by five gunmen on Rampart Street. A close friend reported that as he lay dying, he implicated

MAP 2. *Incidents of White Mobs Lynching White Victims*



Italians in the assassination. Nine Italians were indicted, and their trial began in late February 1891 for conspiracy to murder. Six of the accused were acquitted, but the jury could not agree on the guilt of three others. Immediately the district attorney speculated that the jury had been bribed. The next morning, March 14, city newspapers carried a notice for a “Mass Meeting,” which urged outraged citizens to “Come prepared for action.”³³ A throng estimated in the thousands gathered at Canal and Royal Streets to hear three mob leaders goad the crowd into marching to Parish Prison to hang the Italians. After failing to storm the prison’s main entrance, the mob assaulted the Treme Street gate of Parish Prison, forced entry, and shot nine Italians and hanged two more. The vigilantes were praised by local and state leaders for their actions, and a subsequent grand jury investigation concluded that the incident was a popular “uprising” of the city’s “best and even most law-abiding” citizens.

The second worst incident of white-on-white violence took place in a

more typical remote settlement in the rural South. On December 25–26, 1891, citizens of Choctaw County, Alabama, killed seven members of the Sims-Savage outlaw gang. Apparently the Sims-Savage band had terrorized the community for many months and had murdered a family the previous December. Robert Sims, the leader, and the four members of the Savage family had been arrested and were being taken to the jail in Butler when a white mob intervened and killed the five captives. The next evening, a mob captured two more members of the gang and lynched them as well.³⁴ Almost three years later, a similar incident took place in a neighboring county. Over a three-day interval in August 1893, angry citizens of Clarke County lynched four members of the Meacham gang, a band of rogues accused of moonshining, counterfeiting, and murder.³⁵ Five other members evaded a posse and escaped into Mississippi. In these cases, some members of the white community felt that the miscreants were either beyond the grasp of the formal system of criminal justice, as was the Meacham gang, or that the judicial system had failed to reach an adequate solution to unacceptable behavior.

Being in the hands of the authorities did not preclude mob violence, as the lynchings of the eleven Italians in New Orleans and of the Sims-Savage gang in Alabama illustrate. In fact, we estimate that over half (52.5 percent) of white victims were seized while in the custody of lawful authorities. Typical of this type of violence was the 1892 lynching of Charles Stewart. Stewart was awaiting trial in the Perry County, Arkansas, jail for criminally assaulting a ten-year-old girl. Not wanting to trust his fate to blind justice, Stewart tried to escape and killed Deputy Sheriff Holmes in the process. On May 21, a mob took Stewart from the jail and hanged him, but before dying he implicated his three uncles, the McArthur brothers, in the abortive jailbreak. Apparently, the McArthurs had encouraged Charles Stewart to kill the jailer and flee Perry County. The local sheriff arrested the three brothers and was delivering them to Little Rock when a mob abducted the brothers and lynched them as well.³⁶

Another representative incident took place in Tennessee. A white woman of DeKalb County accused Charley Davis of assault. On Friday, August 2, 1901, friends and relatives of the accuser snatched Davis from the courthouse and hanged him.³⁷ An Arkansas mob abducted John Coker and Dr. Flood, a dentist, from the Yell County Jail in Danville on the night of September 8, 1883. The mob took the pair to the iron bridge across the Petit Jean River and hanged them from the center span. Coker had been suspected of leading a sheriff's posse into an ambush several weeks before, and Dr. Flood had been accused of sheltering outlaws.³⁸ As

these incidents testify, white lynch mobs were not hesitant to storm jails or seize civil authorities in order to capture accused white offenders.

One might think that after the judicial process was complete, defendants would have little concern for popular justice, but this was not always the case, as W. H. Hardin of Clinton, Arkansas, discovered. Hardin had been found guilty of murder and sentenced to be hanged by state authorities. For reasons that are not clear, the governor commuted his sentence to twenty-one years in prison. Outraged at this turn of events, a mob of fifty well-armed masked men broke into the Van Buren County jail on April 17, 1899, secured the jailer and a guard, then obliterated Hardin's head with shotgun blasts.³⁹ Also illustrative is the case of J. V. Johnson of Wadesboro, North Carolina. Johnson had been accused of murdering his brother-in-law, but the jury was unable to reach a unanimous decision. At about 2:00 A.M. on May 28, 1906, a mob acted more decisively and hanged Johnson until he was dead.⁴⁰ Fellow North Carolinian John Starling did not fare any better. He had been charged and tried for the murder of his mother-in-law and nephew to inherit their property. Although acquitted on those charges, he was still suspected by many in the community, and recently he had made threats against a local citizen. On Saturday night, May 24, 1890, Starling was shot to death by a throng of masked men.⁴¹

We argued above that a partial explanation of black-on-black lynching was the hesitation of white police, white prosecutors, white judges, and white juries to address (at least to the satisfaction of blacks) crime within the black community. Clearly, the same argument cannot be applied directly to white-on-white lynchings unless we substitute the element of social class for that of color. It is possible that some less advantaged whites perceived the formal judicial system as being nonresponsive or too lenient toward white-on-white violence among the lower class. If there was a class bias in the effectiveness of the formal system of criminal justice, it could have provided a strong motivating factor for mob violence, especially considering that the formal system indulged lynch violence in general.⁴²

Within the white community, like the African American community, persons believed to have committed incest, fratricide, spouse abuse, or related offenses against the family were sometimes punished by kin and family confidants. There may have been strong cultural values placed on keeping kinship offenses private and relying on those most immediately involved to sanction the malefactor, rather than depending on some distant judicial body for amends. We estimate that 13 percent of the white victims had been accused of family-related offenses. For example, a man named Barker of Hurricane Creek, Arkansas, was believed to have mur-

dered his daughter because she wanted to marry a young man of whom he disapproved. Barker's neighbors took the law into their own hands and hanged Barker in his front doorway.⁴³ A similar fate awaited Redden Williams. Williams was en route from Mantua, Alabama, to the jail in Eutaw when he was killed by a mob of vigilantes on May 8, 1896.⁴⁴ He had been accused of raping his daughter.⁴⁵ William Herring of St. Francis, Arkansas, allegedly murdered his young wife, Julia, and her lover in December 1887. Trying to escape Arkansas, Herring fled north but was captured by a band of vigilantes and hanged.⁴⁶

White Brutality

The NAACP's *Thirty Years of Lynching* documents the ruthlessness with which white mobs treated blacks, but mobs could also be unmerciful with victims of their own color.⁴⁷ A case in point is that of George Corvett, a white resident of Crittenden County, Arkansas. Ada Goss of Crawfordsville was raped and murdered, and Corvett stood accused of the foul deed. After being interrogated by a mob, Corvett's wife admitted that her husband was guilty of the outrage against Mrs. Goss. On February 13, 1890, the mob took George Corvett to the scene of the murder, amputated his arms and legs with a barnyard ax, and then summarily decapitated him.⁴⁸ The Polk brothers of Pike County, Arkansas, did not die a lenient death either. Having been charged with murder, the two brothers were incarcerated in the iron cage jail of Murphreesboro. On Sunday night, September 6, 1885, a mob attacked the keep, piled wood around the caged men, and "roasted the prisoners alive."⁴⁹ A few weeks later, an accused murderer named Churchill was placed in Murphreesboro's old wooden box jail, the previous jail having been destroyed in the lynching of the Polk brothers. On October 20, 1885, a mob soaked the wooden structure with coal oil and set it aflame, burning Churchill to death.⁵⁰

These examples demonstrate that brutality and cruelty were not the special province of white mobs torturing black victims. Although we do not yet understand why some lynchings were particularly horrific, it is safe to say that the dynamics that sometimes led to extreme savagery in conventional lynchings could be present in same-race lynchings as well.

CONCLUSION

We estimate that more than twenty-seven hundred southerners died at the hands of mobs during the lynching era, 1882-1930. Scholars have

devoted most attention to episodes of whites brutalizing and murdering African Americans, and rightfully so because eight out of every ten casualties were black victims of white mobs. It is important to remember, however, that mob violence was not always a racist affair—two of every ten victims were killed by mobs of their same color, especially in the early years of the era.

We found that black-on-black mob violence was concentrated along the Mississippi River delta regions of Arkansas and Mississippi and in northwestern Louisiana. There is some evidence that black intraracial lynching was more common in counties where the African American population dominated. This distribution is not entirely surprising because in these “black” counties, the local population may have resorted to popular justice because the white-controlled criminal justice system was notorious for ignoring black-on-black crime.

White intraracial lynchings showed greater geographical dispersion and seemed to be more pronounced in the hinterlands of the South. The most common offense cited by white lynch mobs was murder, and more than half of the victims were abducted from the custody of proper authorities.⁵¹ Like black intraracial lynchings, a significant minority of white lynchings involved offenses against related family members. White-on-white lynching incidents pose a significant problem to explain because whites controlled the formal system of punishment. One interpretation rests on differences in social class within the white community. Possibly some members of the white lower class thought the formal system was too remote or too lax in dealing with deviant behavior in their own community and that the only recourse was the popular justice of the lynch mob, especially when the aggrieved party was kin.⁵²

Racial hatred and race-based competition cannot offer plausible explanations for incidents in which mobs lynched victims of their own race. When race did not matter, we must turn to alternative explanations for mob violence. While this portrait of intraracial lynchings is limited in its ability to unearth those alternatives, it does provide intriguing evidence that many same-race lynchings occurred when the white or black communities felt threatened by norm violators in their midst. Either unwilling or unable to rely on legal authorities to punish those violators, whites and blacks got out their ropes and guns.

We have mentioned some differences between intraracial and interracial lynchings, for example, their temporal and spatial distributions. But there were also many similarities. A hypothetical exercise may illustrate this point. Imagine that we know nothing about the race of the lynch

victim or the racial composition of the mob—only the circumstances surrounding the event, such as the mob's grievance and behavior. Could we successfully guess whether the incident was interracial or intraracial? We suspect the success rate from a series of such guesses would be greater than 50 percent, but probably not by much. This, we believe, is revealing for it suggests that the black and white communities alike endorsed mob violence as an acceptable method of social control. Vigilantism, then, must have had rather broad legitimacy within southern society.

Was the motivation for intraracial extralegal violence the same within the black and white communities? We believe that it was, but only to a degree. Both communities shared a skepticism that the formal justice system would, or could, punish norm violators to their satisfaction. For whites, this concern may have had origins in their basic suspicion of the southern justice system which also carried over to motivate some interracial lynchings. In addition, less privileged whites may have perceived a special ambivalence by legal authorities toward norm violations within the lower class. For blacks, another layer of explanation is probably required. Formal avenues of social control, where they existed, were controlled by whites who were little concerned about crime within the African American community as long as it victimized only blacks. In both cases, then, blacks and whites perceived a special need to resort to a supplementary variety of punishment that enjoyed wide acceptance in the region.

Why, then, did same-race mob violence decline earlier than the more typical white-on-black lynching? We can suggest an explanation based on two fundamental, and related, factors: increased and improved legal alternatives for punishment and the tight connection between interracial lynchings and the southern "race problem." As the southern region developed, especially after the turn of the twentieth century, the formal avenues of punishment became more widely established. As a rule, disorder and lawlessness, including intraracial crime and extralegal violence, became more serious threats to the social order and those who were empowered to enforce it. That is, lawlessness challenged institutional power and strengthened the incentive for authorities to take intraracial offenses more seriously. As a result, the motivation for intraracial lynchings weakened. Why did not interracial lynchings respond in the same way? Primarily, we suggest, because white-on-black lynchings were so intimately intertwined in the broader race conflict and competition that extended far into the new century. As we have suggested elsewhere, interracial lynchings were linked to maintaining white dominance, socially and econom-

ically, rather than to victimization of whites at the hands of black criminals.⁵³ Because interracial lynchings served this broader southern agenda, they continued to be tolerated by the legal authorities even though the latter were probably perfectly capable of squelching such mob activity.

We offer these speculations about the motivations for intraracial lynchings and their decline for our readers' consideration. And they must be considered only that—speculation. By presenting these ideas, however, we hope to have placed them on the agenda for future research into mob violence.

NOTES

1. See Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), for detailed statistics and a description of the data used in this chapter. Classic studies of lynchings include Jessie Daniel Ames, *The Changing Character of Lynching: Review of Lynching, 1931–1941, with a Discussion of Recent Developments in This Field* (Atlanta: Commission on Interracial Cooperation, 1942); James E. Cutler, *Lynch-Law: An Investigation into the History of Lynching in the United States* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1905); Arthur Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933); and Walter White, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (1929; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1969). More recent work includes the comparative studies of W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); and George C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865–1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and “Legal Lynchings”* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), as well as the case studies of Dennis B. Downey and Raymond M. Hyser, *No Crooked Death: Coatesville, Pennsylvania, and the Lynching of Zachariah Walker* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); James R. McGovern, *Anatomy of a Lynching: The Killing of Claude Neal* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); and Howard Smead, *Blood Justice: The Lynching of Charles Mack Parker* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

2. See Leonard Dinnerstein, *The Leo Frank Case* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968); Robert S. Frey and Nancy Thompson-Frey, *The Silent and the Damned: The Murder of Mary Phagan and the Lynching of Leo Frank* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1988); and Nancy MacLean, “Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Lynching: The Leo Frank Case Revisited,” in this volume.

3. Although less well known than the Leo Frank incident, the lynching of eleven Italians by a Louisiana mob in 1891 has received some study. See Richard Gambino, *Vendetta: A True Story of the Worst Lynching in America, the Mass Murder of Italian-Americans in New Orleans in 1891* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977). W. Fitzhugh Brundage devotes a chapter in *Lynching in the New South* to white-on-white lynchings in Virginia and Georgia.

4. The trend has been twice-smoothed statistically to dampen annual variation and more clearly reveal the general trend.

5. See Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Kathleen M. Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920's* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); and Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915–1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), for discussions of the post-World War I Klan revival.

6. Incidents of black-on-black mob violence are those in which blacks were killed by black or racially integrated mobs.

7. The risk of being a lynching victim, however, was about equal. Using 1900 population estimates as a base, there were 2.39 black victims of black mobs per 100,000 black population, as compared to 2.84 white victims of white mobs per 100,000 white population. As a point of comparison, the risk of a black becoming a victim of a white mob was 37.38 per 100,000 black population.

8. The zero-order correlations between the raw, unsmoothed trends are +0.598 between traditional lynchings and black-on-black lynchings, +0.520 between traditional lynchings and white-on-white lynchings, and +0.630 between the trends in black-on-black and white-on-white lynchings.

9. Time-series regression is similar to standard regression except that the units of observation are points in time. See any introductory econometrics textbook for a discussion of the technique and its assumptions. To make this adjustment for the secular trend in traditional lynchings, we regressed each race-specific lynching trend on the smoothed trend in conventional white-on-black lynchings. Then we computed the residuals for each regression. These residuals represent the annual amount each race-specific trend differed from the general pattern of conventional mob violence. The raw residuals were then twice smoothed statistically to reveal the patterns shown in Figure 2.

10. Here we are speaking of incidents or events of lynchings, not necessarily the percentage of victims. Each incident or event may have multiple victims. There were an average of 1.27 white victims per white-on-white incident and 1.15 black victims per black-on-black incident. We will shift between the use of victims and incidents as the discussion requires, but from the context it will be clear whether we are speaking of victims or events.

11. See Tolnay and Beck, *Festival of Violence*.

12. These three states also account for 61 percent of all black victims of black mobs.

13. Georgia's 368 incidents resulted in 423 African American victims of white lynch mobs, 18 percent of the total number of blacks in the South murdered by white mobs.

14. *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, October 25, 1893.

15. *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, December 1, 1903.

16. The correlation between the size of the black population and the number of incidents of black-on-black mob violence is marginally higher, $r = +0.226$.

17. The correlation between the percentage black in the population and the number of black-on-black lynching incidents is $r = +0.313$.

18. Tolnay and Beck, *Festival of Violence*.

19. Brundage cites a case in Virginia (*Lynching in the New South*, 45, 178–79), but in our states there are only three cases in which it is reasonably clear that a black mob

lynched a white victim. All three occurred during the 1880s, one incident each in Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee. In a fourth case, the racial composition of the mob is uncertain. On June 16, 1890, George Swayze was lynched in East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, for attempting to keep blacks from voting on a lottery issue. Although it might seem safe to infer that the mob was black, it is also possible that other whites were angered by Swayze's effort to keep blacks from supporting their side of the issue.

20. *Montgomery Advertiser*, October 3, 1891.

21. *Jacksonville Times-Union*, June 13, 1899.

22. We have discounted a similar explanation for black lynchings by white mobs because there is little evidence to suggest that the southern criminal justice system was reluctant to punish blacks accused of crimes with alacrity and severity.

23. *New Orleans Times Picayune*, December 18, 1885.

24. *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, October 16, 1908.

25. *Macon Telegraph*, December 11, 1892.

26. *Little Rock Daily Gazette*, July 25, 1885.

27. *Jacksonville Times-Union*, July 21, 1892.

28. Philip Morgan, Antonio McDaniel, Andrew T. Miller, and Samuel H. Preston, "Racial Differences in Household Structure at the Turn of the Century," *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (January 1993): 799-828; Steven Ruggles, "The Origins of African-American Family Structure," *American Sociological Review* 59 (December 1994): 136-51.

29. *Atlanta Journal*, June 8, 1892.

30. *Little Rock Daily Arkansas Gazette*, January 15, 1889.

31. These 224 incidents of white mob violence claimed 284 white lives.

32. See Gambino, *Vendetta*, for a detailed narrative and analysis of this lynching and the general anti-Italian sentiment in New Orleans. This was not the only attack on the Italian population of Louisiana. In 1899, five Italian men in Madison Parish were taken from the sheriff and killed by a mob (*New Orleans Daily Picayune*, July 22, 1899).

33. Gambino, *Vendetta*, 77.

34. *Atlanta Constitution*, December 27, 29, 1891.

35. *Atlanta Constitution*, August 12, 13, 15, 1893.

36. *New Orleans Times Democrat*, May 22, 1892; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, June 1, 1892.

37. *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, August 3, 1901; *Atlanta Constitution*, August 3, 1901.

38. *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, September 11, 1883.

39. *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, April 19, 1899.

40. *Charleston News and Courier*, May 29, 1906.

41. *Charlotte Chronicle*, May 27, 1890.

42. Unfortunately, we do not have the data necessary to examine this social class thesis empirically.

43. *Memphis Daily Appeal*, August 5, 1883.

44. This victim was listed as Radden H. William in some newspaper accounts.

45. *Columbus Enquirer-Sun*, May 10, 1896.

46. *Memphis Appeal*, December 31, 1887.

47. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918* (1919; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1969).

48. *New Orleans Times Democrat*, February 14, 1890.

49. *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, September 8, 1885.

50. *Little Rock Daily Arkansas Gazette*, October 22, 1885.

51. As shown in Table 1, 59.5 percent of white victims of white mobs had been accused of murder. White victims were significantly less likely to be accused of rape or incest than were black victims of either black mobs or white mobs.

52. Apologists for antiblack mob violence often alleged that lynchings were instruments of uncontrollable lower-class rabble. We are not advancing the same argument.

53. See Tolnay and Beck, *Festival of Violence*.