

AMY KATE BAILEY, *Lynched: The Victims of Southern Mob Violence* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2015), 276 pp.

TAMEKA BRADLEY HOBBS, *Democracy Abroad, Lynching at Home: Racial Violence in Florida* (Tallahassee: UP of Florida, 2015), 273 pp.

MANFRED BERG, *Popular Justice: A History of Lynching in America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2011), 212 pp.

In July 2016, following the death of two African American men at the hands of police, black artists raised a flag in New York City eerily reminiscent of symbolic protest against mob violence perpetrated against African Americans during the Jim Crow era. The blocky white letters printed on black fabric read “A Man Was Lynched by Police Yesterday.” To protest and publicly condemn lynching, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) hung a flag reading “A Man Was Lynched Today,” followed by every reported lynching in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century. From 1882 to 1965, white mobs killed thousands of black Americans, mostly black men between 20 and 40 years of age. Lynching was not solely a white on black crime. While the majority of lynch victims were African American, whites and other races and ethnicities also fell victim to mobs. The exact number of victims regardless of race and color will probably never be known, although not for the lack of trying on the part of researchers.

Over the last twenty-five years, sociologists, literary scholars, historians, and scholars of other disciplines have studied lynching in the United States extensively. The three books under review here add to this continuously growing field of study with different approaches, questions, and intentions. With the help of historical statistics, sociologists Amy Kate Bailey and Stewart E. Tolnay specify the identities of black lynch victims and identify commonalities and differences. By looking at four lynching cases in Florida in the 1940s, historian Tameka Bradley Hobbs uncovers the longevity of this form of violence and its painful and destructive legacy in the African American community. In contrast, historian Manfred Berg provides a sweeping historical overview of lynching in the United States.

Sociologists Amy Kate Bailey and Stewart E. Tolnay build on an earlier sociological

study on lynchings in the U.S. South published by Tolnay and his colleague E. M. Beck. In *A Festival of Violence* (1995), the two developed an inventory of black lynch victims in ten Southern states to review the lists compiled by the NAACP, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the Tuskegee Institute. By sifting through newspapers, they managed to verify more than 2,400 deaths between the 1880s and 1930. Moreover, through statistical evidence they linked lynching to the fluctuation of the cotton price during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—a thesis that did not go unchallenged by many academics. Lynching, they argued, represented a social control mechanism, a way to manage agricultural laborers. Thus, the decline of lynching came with the industrialization and the demise of the cotton economy.

In *Lynched*, Bailey and Tolnay now turn their attention to the identities of the lynch victims, as previous research has shown “almost total ignorance of the personal characteristics of the vast majority of the thousands of victims of southern mob violence” (xii). Historical case studies, they contend, might shed light on the identities and backgrounds of individual victims, they do not, however, allow for generalizations of the circumstances and triggers for lynching. The authors use the inventory of victims to uncover “fuller identities to several hundreds of lynch victims” (2) and “construct a profile of lynch victims” (13). In eight chapters, Bailey and Tolnay manage to systematically “augment the paucity of information that we had about victims before this record linkage project was completed” (59). They intersperse their statistical analysis with individual cases of lynching and their victims that underline their findings.

The book contains a detailed description of the methodology developed by the authors to collect the data and information on the victims. Central to their project are the census records which contain essential information on individuals and households like sex, age, race, family status and level of education. To uncover the details, the authors tried to find victims in the last census before they were killed. To the chagrin of the researchers and readers alike, a fire destroyed the 1890 census records which made it almost impossible to find out more about the victims killed in the 1890s, the decade with the most deadly attacks.

Of the more than 2,400 victims in the inventory, the research team found 935 and their

specifics in the census record. The average age was 29 years; the youngest was 11 years old, the oldest seventy-six. In general, mixed race people were less likely to be killed by white mobs. To exemplify the differences between lynched men and non-victims, the research team compared the lynch victims to other blacks living in the counties where lynchings occurred, creating more accurate comparative results than if they had compared victims to the general black population in the United States.

Guided by findings of earlier research, the book tests three main hypotheses: 1. Blacks lynched were poorer and more marginal than the black male population in general. 2. Blacks of a higher social status were more likely to be lynched. 3. There exists no statistically significant difference in the social status of lynching victims. Along the lines of earlier research, the detailed statistical analysis shows, in short, that the first two assumptions can be statistically verified: Marginality represents a key element in the difference between victimhood and non-victimhood. The authors, however, underline that the likelihood of victimization of people with one of the specific markers mentioned above depended on the black community's composition in the county where the lynching took place. For instance, a successful African American was less likely to be lynched in a county where the general black population was more affluent. A transient African American was more likely to be killed in an area where fewer black newcomers lived. Ultimately, the authors convincingly argue that not only the particular profiles of possible targets, but also the specifics of the area and the composition of its population proved essential for the selection of victims by mobs.

Despite its significance and strengths, especially its innovative method, the book shows some shortcomings when it comes to citations. Especially in chapter one, which provides a review of scholarship, the lack of references to relevant works is problematic. Throughout the book, historical surveys are offered, but they all too often lack citations. The bibliography is quite long but it would have been helpful if the authors had referenced the literature listed when appropriate. The book contains unnecessary repetitions that more editing could have prevented. Furthermore, the exclusion of Virginia and especially Texas is unfortunate. While the former had a relatively low number of mob violence, the latter had one of the highest death tolls in the nation.

Nevertheless, these flaws ultimately do not lessen the importance of the book. Never before has a study on lynching proven its hypotheses so thoroughly by giving details on and identities of such a staggering number of victims. The book may affirm many assumptions made in previous research, but the sheer size of the number of lynch victims assessed gives them more reliability and credence. Following in Bailey and Tolnay's footsteps, researchers can now start to answer the questions the book has left unanswered. Their method represents an invaluable roadmap for scholars to investigate lynch victims in other states and of other backgrounds.

Historian Tameka Bradley Hobbs is not so much interested in statistical analysis or sweeping overviews of lynching in the United States. Rather, her historical study investigates four cases of lynching in North Florida in the 1940s, a time when these acts of violence had begun to decline significantly and lose support in white communities across the South. Hobbs points out that lynchings happened longer in Florida than in any other state and subsequently unravels the lynchings of A.C. Williams in Gadsden County in 1941, Cellos Harrison in Jackson County in 1943, Willie James Howard in Suwannee County in 1944, and Jesse James Payne in Madison County in 1945. She recounts the events of each of these murders in detail, and more importantly, she paints a lively picture of the communities in which the lynchings occurred and discusses the reactions of the community, law enforcement, the press, and politicians in and outside the state of Florida.

Hobbs successfully integrates the horrific events in the larger developments in the state, the nation, and the world. She adds to the burgeoning historiography that underlines the interrelationship of the local and the global, civil rights, or rather the lack thereof, in the United States and in the international realm. All four lynchings took place during the Second World War that changed the playing field between the races. Whites' blatant disregard for blacks, expressed in its most vicious form in lynchings, received growing national and international attention as these acts of mob violence in midst of the war that was fought for democracy and freedom revealed America's hypocrisy. The pressure on Florida and the South in general grew as the United States feared for its international reputation. The African American community underlined the

parallels between the treatment of blacks in the South and Jews in Germany. Japanese and German propaganda made use of lynching to discredit the United States, raising serious doubts on the image of the U.S. as the pinnacle of democracy and its leadership skills. In the midst of negative international attention, the Federal government intervened more forcefully, by threatening, and eventually pursuing, investigations into mob violence.

White Floridians feared that this renewed interest in Southern race relations could be the swan song for white supremacy and lead to more federal interference in the South. As Hobbs shows, the majority of Florida's politicians, although aware of the possible negative effects on the state politically and economically, refrained from going against mob violence with full force. Moreover, "many locals still excused lynching as a justifiable form of homicide and despised the meddling of outsiders who did not understand the southern way of life or their unique 'Negro problem'" (37). Hobbs points out that while lynchings decreased significantly, the fate of African Americans accused especially of serious crimes did not improve, as "legal lynchings" as a way to resolve the community's desire for retribution" (118) took their place. They might receive their day in court, however, due process existed only on paper. The trials were far from fair and all too often African Americans were quickly sentenced to death with the execution following swiftly. The procedure changed, but the result remained the same.

The sections on the longevity and toll of lynching on the African American community are the most captivating part of the book. This is Hobbs at her best. The oral history method she uses elevates the book to another level and underlines the importance of giving voice to the voiceless and silenced. Lynching did not only end the victims' lives, but it destroyed the lives of family members. Their fate in the community was sealed and many fled to the North in order to escape the white communities. The long-term effects are still visible today. As Hobbs points out, lynching has left a "legacy of suspicion, distrust, and an inherent lack of faith in the legal and judicial system [...] in the collective consciousness" (4) of the black communities affected by lynching, not only in Florida. In telling and retelling stories of lynching, blacks tried to take control back from whites who usually dominated and oppressed them in all aspects of life. They

also acted as a warning to new generations "about the dangers present in the racism and discrimination that permeated American society" (218).

The composition of the introduction is a little off-putting. The book would have benefited from the addition of another chapter instead of putting all information on the general history of blacks and the history of lynching before the 1940s into the introduction. The same holds true for the conclusion. Furthermore, a tighter editorial process could have avoided repetitions. All criticism notwithstanding, *Democracy Abroad, Lynching at Home* is an important book that shows the traumatizing effects of lynching on the African American community. It proves that more research is needed on this topic, especially in light of the ongoing police violence against blacks. This experience is not only reminiscent of lynching, but will haunt the African American community and race relations for decades.

Unlike Bailey, Tolnay and Hobbs, Manfred Berg's *Popular Justice* does not solely focus on the lynching of African Americans, but presents a well-informed introduction to lynching. Rather than a work of original research, the book draws from and synthesizes the extensive research on mob violence in the United States that has evolved over the years. Today, lynching is usually associated with racial violence against African Americans in the South at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century or extralegal punishment in the West—and rightfully so. Still, this act of violence predates the second half of the nineteenth century and evolved over time. Other racial and ethnic minorities as well as whites fell victim to lynching. It was not a sole phenomenon of the South, but also manifested itself in other parts of the country. In nine chapters, Berg follows lynching's diverse history from colonial times to its legacy and memory today, introducing readers to the different forms of this extralegal punishment throughout U.S. history. In accordance with other scholars, Berg puts this mob violence in context of "the frontier experience, the race conflict, and the anti-authoritarian spirit of grassroots democracy" (xi). Distrustful of authority, Americans have held onto the power of the people and vigilante justice as a citizenship right.

The book's first chapter investigates the roots of lynching in the colonial era and later

the American Revolution. It reveals the development of extralegal punishment linking its persistence in the United States to the “libertarian spirit forged in the American Revolution” (22). More importantly, it establishes a strong link between colonial slavery and the rise of the lynching of African Americans. In chapter two, Berg delves deeper into the occurrence of lynching before and during the Civil War, arguing that the rise of mass democracy, the smoldering conflict over slavery and its expansion, and the move westward fueled mob violence and lynching in the United States. Only slowly did the “state monopoly of force” take hold in the United States, but popular justice has remained a staple in American society (28).

Especially the South lagged behind in revoking its right to vigilantism and self-defense. Throughout the existence of slavery, it was applied to rid the community of offenders, regardless of race, as well as to uphold “the peculiar institution” against any criticism or onslaught. White mobs attacked white abolitionists and black slaves whom they suspected of undermining slavery, as the fear of slave uprising in the antebellum era was omnipresent; lynching followed suit. Their violence went unpunished as the majority of the white community continued to embrace it as their right to defend and protect their own.

Chapters four and five delve deeper into the omnipresence of lynching in the South during and especially after the Civil War. The belief that whites were allowed to control and punish blacks violently with impunity exceeded the abolishment of slavery. The era of Reconstruction was filled with extralegal violence against Northerners, Northern sympathizers, and blacks, especially black Union soldiers. Berg contends that white mobs, especially the newly formed Ku Klux Klan, murdered more people during Reconstruction than during the heyday of lynching in the 1880s and 1890s, as they intended to uphold white supremacy, stop black advances, and prevent Union interference in the South. To explain the demise of lynching of blacks in the South, Berg points to the growing anti-lynching movements among blacks and whites, more police interventions, and the negative national and international attention the United States garnered. But he also links the decline of lynching to a distinct increase in the application of the death penalty. Although he admits that “no perfect statistical proof exists that the death penalty became a substitute for lynch law,” he points

to the parallels between African Americans’ fates in death penalty and lynch cases (159).

Berg does not downplay the enormous toll lynching has taken on the African American community and the scars it has left on the nation, but he makes clear that lynching was not solely a white-on-black crime. Other racial and ethnic minorities fell victim to white lynch mobs as they were perceived as the intruding “other” who should not be granted access to the U.S. The fear of economic competition as well as racial and ethnic xenophobia spurred lynch mobs. White Americans lynched Native Americans on the frontier, Chinese and Mexican laborers, especially in California, but also Italians represented frequent victims. Moreover, the author successfully debunks the persistent myth of the rightful vigilante justice on the frontier. According to this, settlers acted in self-defense and with the support of the community against rogue criminals due to the lack of a functioning government. More often than not, they believed that “law enforcement should not be a government monopoly but a right and duty of the people themselves” (57). Westerners distrusted bigger government and objected to paying more taxes. While the lynching of African Americans has mostly been shunned in American history and memory as an act of crude and racist violence, lynching in the West is often still represented as a justifiable and romanticized act of self-defense and a viable force in popular culture and memory.

Academically-inclined readers will struggle with the fact that the book lacks footnotes or endnotes throughout, although it contains quotes from primary and secondary texts. The reader’s only chance to learn more about the author’s sources is a short “Note on Sources” at the end of the book. It contains a concise annotated bibliography and lists the key primary and secondary sources on which the chapters are based. Readers might want to turn to the book’s German version published under the title *Lynchjustiz* in the 2014 Hamburger Edition, which provides endnotes with references to the quotes in the text. All in all, while the book does not contain much original research or new findings, it offers a comprehensive synthesis of thought-provoking theses. It is an accessible introduction to the wide field of the history of lynching in the United States from its beginnings to the present.

In conclusion, the books under review offer varying viewpoints and approaches to the sub-

ject. For instance, while Hobbs considers the racial strife in the post-Civil War South as the starting point of lynchings, Berg traces it back to slavery and physical punishment. However, Hobbs and Berg certainly agree on the death penalty as substitute for lynching—and much more. Bailey and Tolnay, on the other hand, raise doubts on the claim that the death penalty replaced lynching in the United States. But Hobbs's victims might very well fall under the categories unearthed by Bailey and Tolnay

if one looks at the census records before their lynching. The books simultaneously complement and contradict each other. They, thereby, create space for productive discussions and give researchers plenty of starting points for further research on lynching and its legacy in the United States. Ultimately, all three books make important contributions in the field in their own right.

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