

INTRODUCTION

Self and State

Lynching's Intimate Violence

The Color

When I was six years old, I moved to South Carolina from suburban New Jersey. My father worked as a platinum broker for Engelhard Corporation, which had branches in Ann Arbor, Michigan; Seneca, South Carolina; and various international locations. When offered a transfer, my parents narrowed their options by omitting the coldest locales and the foreign ones. They were remarkably gentle; the worst slight they ever perpetrated against their children was declining the option of moving to Rome. Their worst punishment was a rap on the knuckles with a wooden spoon, so one can imagine the surprise when I began public school in South Carolina where, as my classmates gleefully relayed, teachers hit. A teacup paddle—a wooden plank with a depression and drilled holes designed to land with the *thwack* of phenomenal velocity on the posterior of the unlucky—would emerge to punish me for the frenetic humming sound that I make—quite unwittingly—as I work, or the more significant crime of having come from somewhere else.

I told my mother I was afraid to return, but she could not believe my story. After all, she had gone to parochial school in New York City in the 1950s, and had never been subject to corporal punishment. Thirty years later, ensconced in the halls of a more democratic public institution, children's bodies ought to have been inviolable. But my classmates had spoken the truth; when the day of my primal scene arrived, it was not my unlucky ass on the receiving end of the paddle, though I became a witness to the pain of another. While the rest of us lined up for lunch, our teacher positioned the punished child ten feet away. He placed his hands against the wall; she hit him four times with thunderous *thwacks* against his flesh. His thin shoulders

convulsed, blood pooled in his bitten lips, and the rest of us did nothing. He was small and dark-skinned, but I am not certain I knew that at the time; in the liminal and undifferentiated space of childhood resided a pleasurable androgyny that I recall with much nostalgia for the days before, as W. E. B. DuBois wrote about race, “it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil” (DuBois 1999, 10).

What account I gave of his suffering to my mother has also disappeared into the memory hole, but it certainly impressed her. She did not drop me off the next day, but parked the car and walked me in to school. While I went alone to my classroom, my mother kept her appointment with the principal. She wanted to know that I was safe, that no hostile hand would touch me while I was away from her; she undoubtedly hoped that my story was false. The principal, who retired at the end of that year and died at the end of the subsequent one, told her not to worry.

“Mrs. Lightweis, we use the paddle to control the color.”

The words they exchanged—his casual racism, her confusion and anger—were ones I was not privy to that day, or for years afterwards. Nevertheless, I did not have to be told what the paddle was used for, or what color it controlled. Over the next ten years, I saw its damage—not often, but often enough—and always against children who grew up to be African-American men, a population uniquely vulnerable to containment and discipline because—in part—of targeted enforcement, discretionary arrests, and strategies of surveillance that would, if enacted on the college campuses of the Ivy League, fill American prisons with young white men. My place also felt fixed and determined: I was always the audience and never acted. Never moved to defend, never interposed with my body, never felt pushed toward resistance. I suspected that the school was run by bigots; insidious racial separation prevailed in the demographics of our tracked classes and the segregated lunch tables, but I responded to it with detachment and withdrawal rather than heroism. When I graduated from high school, my transcripts were unremarkable, save for the juxtaposition of two earned Fs with maximum scores on advanced placement exams, so I felt lucky when I was accepted to University of South Carolina, located in what passed for a city inside the state’s borders. Though I remember little of what I was taught in Seneca and refused any authority asserted there, I had attained one lesson perfectly: *we use the paddle to control the color*. Of all the wisdom imparted in the childhood I lived in public space, my role as a voyeur to racial violence is all that I can recall.

Twenty-five years later, with a multiracial president of the United States, I still feel the weight of this expectation. In the emergency dental clinic where I went for treatment as a cash-strapped graduate student, I saw the casual racism with which women of color and their children are treated by nurses who gatekeep access to doctors, treatment, and, most vigorously, drugs. Local news stations in Rochester, New York refer to a predominantly black neighborhood as the “Murder Crescent”; when acquaintances echo the phrase in conversation, I offer no correction. Life is nasty, brutish, and short, as Hobbes observed, but nastier, more brutal, and shorter for people of color. The system that sustains inequality trains “whites” to regard the “premature death of the Other” as their natural lot (Gilmore 2007, 27). These violent erasures and metaphors of invisibility bequeathed to American rhetorics of difference by Ralph Ellison shape the problematic of racism.

Long before I witnessed the paddling, racism had been imagined by Ellison and others as a structure of looking, a strategy of surveillance, and a quality of vision. The public sites of American democracy—the courthouse lawns, churchyards, main streets, and, indeed, school hallways—had been militarized for white supremacy, though private spheres were permeable to this violence. Whether or not my fate was sealed at the moment I saw the other child paddled is unclear to me. In a town as small as mine, few people leave. When I return to visit my parents, I sometimes encounter one of the classmates who lined the walls with me—always the white ones, since the town’s public spaces remain remarkably segregated and too many of my childhood friends who were subject to the paddle now reside with a number for a name in Afghanistan, Iraq, or Turbeville Correctional Institute. The rest are unremarkable—neither firebrands for equality nor hooded Klansmen. We and the spectacle we witnessed are mundane. What marked me as different—as a person who would one day write a book about lynching, rather than buy a Toby Keith album with a song that valorizes lynching—is as yet unknown.¹ Can I attribute it to feeling always like an outsider—a Northern child from a family of recent immigrants? The fact that I looked like no one else in school, since it was full of towheads and freckled faces whose worst insult for other so-called “white” people was “nigger lips?” I cannot answer, though I cannot stop asking the question.

What I saw in Seneca was no lynching, but it nonetheless offered a pedagogy of racialized citizenship. For theorist Lauren Berlant, the interventions of women of color who have offered testimony against sexual and racial violence constitute “diva citizenship,” public claims that create an optimistic intimacy between speaking subjects, wherein the “member of a stigmatized

population” transforms the public sphere “into a scene of teaching and an act of heroic pedagogy” (Berlant 1997, 222). In watching the paddle control the color, I experienced public space as the site of my most painful lessons. Rather than watching a “risky dramatic persuasion” that enabled me to respond “to the sublimity of reason” in agitation against inequality, I encountered a stunning silence, a shocking lack of testimony on the role of race in identity formation (Berlant 1997, 223). Had a white student said, “only black children are paddled,” the likely response would have been “don’t be *racial*,” a curious substitution in the language for the more value-laden term *racist*. It was nonetheless the response I heard to every intervention about race in South Carolina public schools. “I don’t mean to be *racial*; I don’t want to be *racial*; stop me if this sounds *racial*.” All were common refrains in the admittedly limited vernacular theorizations of race I heard as a child and young adult. The substitution would have enabled an identical response to a white or black student who said, “only black children are paddled”; the sentence asserts parity between any statements—pernicious or liberatory—in which race is acknowledged as a lived reality.

Witnesses to this discipline nonetheless experienced a form of citizenship contiguous to and inherited from American mob violence. The practice of lynching, as Ken Gonzales Day has argued, began earlier than most histories of black-white lynching, on the Western frontier (Day 2006, 27). As white settlers moved west, lynching moved east—migrating from its uses against Latinos, Native Americans, and Chinese immigrants on the West Coast and the frontier—to the East, where it was deployed against African-Americans. A thirty-year history of mob violence in the West precedes what many scholars have offered as an origin point for lynching—1862, the first year listed in Ralph Ginzburg’s influential *One Hundred Years of Lynching* (1962), but I nonetheless focus on the problematic of white-black racism in almost exclusively Eastern contexts. The acceleration of lynching against African-Americans at the end of Reconstruction indicates a changing value of black life that alters the commodity status of enslaved peoples into the degraded status of the “Fourth World” populations, against whom white settlers exercised their violence on the frontier. Spectacle that lynchings became, they also had the function of vernacular pedagogy; moving eastward in the years of the Civil War (1861–1865) and the Reconstruction Amendments (1865–1870), they delineated a form of citizenship that neither manumission nor legislation could racially “corrupt” in the metaphoric miscegenation of integration. Just as the incomplete project of black citizenship sparked

the civil disobedience of the Freedom Movement in the 1960s, the “uncivil disobedience” of American lynch mobs disregarded “power-conferring rules” of multiracial citizenship for a form that was “participatory and public” (Kirkpatrick 2008, 14). Of course, it was also exclusionary and violent; its publicness cannot be mistaken for an ideology or an ethic. Once codifications of citizenship were no longer exclusively white, lynch mobs offered a vision of mob citizenship to replace them, a vision that staged a drama of intrusion by and protection from external enemies.² Mobs lost their war with history and were supplanted by citizenships of inclusion offered by civil rights reforms of the mid-twentieth century, yet the strategies of violence, vision, and exclusion that constituted their political inheritance to American political life did not disappear.

Studying that patrimony reveals that its terms remain under contestation. In the early days of the NAACP, a black banner with white letters that read “a man was lynched yesterday” hanged over a busy block in New York City, echoing the “strange fruit” of Billie Holliday’s song. The banner, which appeared after reports of lynching, would have been hung at a rate of twice a week had it counted every lynching (Dray 2002, 257). Though the history is recent and the memory historically accessible, nothing in American culture memorializes lynching the way that the black banner marked its living presence. Constructing a genealogy of the act evinces the entrenched cultural repression that silences memory. To investigate lynching, I have set aside the study of pathological individuals and begun the study of pathological cultural formations, though my introduction to this chapter—with its attention to subjectivity under white supremacy—reveals something of the permeability of the two categories.

The constitutive feature of lynching is not only violence, but the collapse of the boundary between private prejudice and public punishment. The replacement of the crime of lynching with the juridical model of the hate crime enables forgetting of its collective, public face, substituting the crowded public square of the lynching with the murderer’s lair—the darkened, private spaces where Matthew Shephard and James Byrd were murdered by men in pairs. While the murderers’ bigotry emerges from an American lineage of violence, their crimes did not have the explicit community approval that lynching did—evinced by the crowds surrounding the lynched bodies in James Allen’s *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*. Influenced by Nietzschean formations of subjectivity, Judith Butler has argued that selfhood is “fabricated as a prior and causal origin of a painful effect that is

cast as injury”; therefore, the self comes into being as a juridical convenience to punish criminality (Butler 1997, 45). The visceral truth of her formulation is revealed by the fact that, while there is federal anti-hate crime legislation, the quest for federal anti-lynching legislation failed spectacularly. Seemingly, the law has no tools by which to imagine group psychology or prosecute collective accountability.

Because of these erasures, my book undertakes the project of recuperating group identity and collective accountability from American hagiographies of selfhood that would occlude both in favor of a national innocence that renders its citizens unimplicated in structures of racial violence. Each chapter considers an element in these practices of forgetting. The first chapter complicates the replacement of the racist nation with the pathological South in accounts of racism and political retrogression—with recourse to Richard Wright’s theorization of the state as seamless and portable within the migrant who flees the “night” of Southern oppression for a dawn presumed to arrive in the Northern metropolis. Through readings of Jean Toomer’s “Portrait in Georgia” and George Schuyler’s *Black No More*, the second chapter complicates the assumption of antiracist politics that have offered the private sphere as salvation from the racist American public, despite the permeability of the body and subjectivity of the oppressed to the forces of racism. The third chapter traces the deployment of the prevailing logics of American racism—the pathology (rather than normativity) of lynch mobs, the innocence of the passive witness, and the aberration of racial violence—in the lynching narratives of William Faulkner, locating his refusal to provide eyewitness accounts of lynching in his short stories in the Western tradition of privileging sight over other senses. My fourth chapter reads critical responses to lynching photography, which have located agentic resistance in the frozen instant before the subject’s death, positing narratives of agency as attempts to virilize the dead men by casting them as heroic resisters. I offer contemporary artist Kara Walker’s images of suicidal, self-injuring black subjects as complications to prevailing narratives of agency. Ultimately, my conclusion locates the impetus for erasures and refusals that characterize both critical and literary narratives in the public sphere of American lynching towns, where the locations of violence are left naked with neither memorial nor memory. Each chapter considers abdications of collectivity and publicity as present in both dominant narratives of lynching practices and antiracist resistance to them—arguing for an intervention against racism that reclaims and reforms the public sphere, rather than retreating to

the imagined sanctities of (respectable) privacy and individual (unmarked) subjectivities.

Modes of Memory, Nodes of Forgetting

Until recently, one could follow the twisting path of lynching's genealogy to encounter a four-headed creature guarding the term's discursive deployment. The four heads belonged to Matthew Shephard, James Byrd, O. J. Simpson, and Clarence Thomas. The relationship of lynching to the first two men is evident; unspeakable hate crimes penetrated their bodies with particular ferocity. The Simpson and Thomas cases are more nebulous; both men invoked the specter of lynching to contest the public conviction of their guilt and, in Thomas's case, to reconnect the events of the "high-tech lynching" of his Supreme Court confirmation hearings—nearly derailed by an accusation of sexual harassment—to the cultural surveillance of black male sexuality. The public, sexualized spectacle is what both Thomas and Simpson evoke. Though they were wrong about their victimhood, they had some knowledge of how publicity constructs blackness; the racialized spectacle of violence is elided when lynching is fused with the juridical model of the hate crime.

From the mid-century to the millennium, the assumptions that undergirded these comparisons— notions of lynching as "anomalous, aberrant, local, and anti-modern"—predominated in the limited inquiry that the subject had attracted (Goldsby 2006, 27). But the publication of Jacqueline Goldsby's *Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* profoundly reshaped the field, changing the language with which we narrate the cultural practice with more force than any writer or activist since the initial anti-lynching campaigns of the early twentieth century. Alongside the publication and exhibition of lynching photographs, Goldsby's study has initiated something of a renaissance in examining American mob violence. Our studies share more than an analysis; her language has so infiltrated the field that I find myself using her phrase *cultural logic* almost reflexively throughout this project. Indeed, her influential thesis bears restatement here:

Lynching thrived at the turn of the new century not because violence was endemic to the South's presumably retrograde relation to the developments that constituted modernity in America. Rather, I contend that anti-black mob murders flourished as registers

of the nation's ambivalences attending its nascent modernism.
(Goldsby 2006, 24)

Because of the force of Goldby's claim, I take the association of modernity and lynching as a presupposition within this study, which attempts to consider cultural forces that rendered lynching illegible before Goldsby's intervention. The four terms—*anomalous*, *aberrant*, *local*, and *anti-modern*—are ones that inform my study, which emphasizes the construction of the lynching spectacle as secret, Southern, and fundamentally individual. Goldsby's list of adjectives have cumulative effects; they add to a longstanding cultural refusal to offer systemic critiques of lynching. After Goldsby's critique of this logic, it becomes necessary to consider *why* lynching was rendered anti-modern and anomalous to the history of the United States; therefore, I spend the rest of this section offering reasons for the erasure of lynching from the middle of the twentieth century to the millennium.

Within the primary sites of cultural mythmaking—from public schools to the miniseries *Roots*—the defining experience of African-American history is presumed to be slavery. While I do not contest the importance of slavery, emphasis on the practice enables anti-antiracist arguments, in which whites self-righteously swear that they have never owned slaves and, thus, have no stake in racial politics. Yet, Jim Crow has had no official end. Because many Americans believe that racial justice has moved in a linear progressive fashion since Emancipation, the national conversation about race is woefully incomplete. This cultural conversation is, as I argue in my fourth chapter, enabled by the new social history of the 1960s, which made slavery the central issue of racism in American because of its agentic potential in contrast to the seemingly total victimization that lynching offers. By excluding Jim Crow from the cultural conversation, Americans disavow the nearness of racism and the potential for continued vulnerability to its discipline.

In those contemporary conversations, racism is a linguistic pose, a singular utterance. Consider the case of comic Michael Richards, *Seinfeld's* Cosmo Kramer (or, for that matter, any prominent celebrity racist from John Mayer to Don Imus). Media attention focused on his repeated use of racial epithets; *The New York Post* referred to him as “the n-word comic” in a headline, associating him with discursive rather than physical violence (Johnson 2007, 12). The verbal threat of lynching, in which he told an African-American audience member that “fifty years ago, we would have you upside down with a fucking fork up your ass,” went unmentioned in the *Post*. Similarly, former Virginia Senator George Allen was repeatedly called

upon to swear that he had never used “the n-word” during the 2006 election (Shear and Craig, B01). The accusation that he stuffed a severed deer head in a black family’s mailbox when he was a college athlete at University of Virginia was relegated to the final sentences of a brief news article about his habitual use of racial slurs (Scherer 2006, 2). Enthroning the word over the deed promotes manners and restraint as the ideal relationship between interracial communities; thus, discursive violence supplants the mortification of the flesh.

That discursive shift replaces pathological *racism* with the pathologist *racist* in accordance with the paradigm that elevates the individual, rather than the collective, as the prized unit of American capitalism. Hagiographies of selfhood emerge in narratives of self-actualization and fulfillment that dominate American culture. As I have previously argued, narratives of the self and the related concepts of agency and will are omnipresent in academic chatter and frequently obscure the issues of coercion, violence, and force that are inseparable from lynching (Lightweis-Goff 2006). Frankly, I cannot imagine what bell hooks would find to write about at the scene of the lynching and its circumscription of black subjectivity, since she defines *agency* as the power to resist by acting in “one’s best interest” (hooks 1990, 206). What about Haiping Yan, who argued in a 2006 address to Cornell School for Criticism and Theory, that agency enables subjects to choose what they feel about prior trauma (Yan 2006)? Certainly, I hope contemporary spectators of lynching photography “choose” well what they feel about their trauma; otherwise, I fear critics would accuse them of not exercising their personal responsibility.

Contingent upon the tendency to study, isolate, and pathologize racism within the individual subject is the likelihood of quarantining racism with the American South, whose “dangerous territory” serves as the national id (Ladd 1996, xii). At rare moments when collective responsibility is assessed, it is located in the traditional Confederacy, despite the fact that racism is a fifty-state phenomenon. Sociologist James Loewen, in his study of whites-only “sundown” towns across the United States, writes that audiences frequently refer to his research as located in the South, despite the fact that the majority of sundown towns were in border states and around cities to which African-Americans migrated in the 1920s (Loewen 2006, 23). Surrounding a multi-racial city was, inevitably, a ring of all-white suburbs. This spatial metaphor can easily be transposed onto the cultural use of the South. Like racism, racial difference is quarantined in the South. Such a discursive deployment of the South is seldom labeled racist, but I would

argue—influenced by Houston Baker’s *Turning South Again*—that uses of the word *Southern* to mean David Duke but not Medgar Evers, Margaret Mitchell but not Alice Walker, Lester Maddox but not Martin Luther King, Strom Thurmond but not Louis Armstrong are collaborations with white supremacy. However ardently speakers may wish it, such language does not divest them of “the possessive investment in whiteness,” the title of George Lipsitz’s seminal work on white privilege (Lipsitz 1998).

This critique does not deny the racism of the South; it nationalizes it, resisting narratives of American exceptionalism that posit violence as an aberration in the history of a largely moral nation. In so doing, I attempt to break the chain of displacements and denials that James Allen warns of in his epilogue to *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*:

Studying [lynching] photographs has engendered in me a caution of whites, of the majority, of the young, of religion, of the accepted of the accepted. . . . I believe the photographer was more than a perceptive spectator at lynchings . . . the photographic art played as significant a role in the ritual as torture or souvenir grabbing . . . a sort of two-dimensional biblical swine, a receptacle for a collective sinful self. Lust propelled the commercial reproduction and distribution of the images, facilitating the endless replay of anguish. Even dead, the victims were without sanctuary. (Allen et al. 2000, 203)

This admonition speaks to the necessity of remembering the collective. Forgetting public spectacle and widespread cultural collusion means forgetting the perpetrators (the community) and the weapon (white supremacy), and recollecting the victim—in the most sanitary memory—with no crowds, no mob and, thus, no crime. In the section that follows, I attempt to explore this forgotten collectivity with recourse to Freudian group psychology.

Collective Violence

Using two “artificial” organizations as paradigms for group psychology, Freud argues that collective action is motivated by forces distinct from the drives of the individual psyche. The church and the armed services, regardless of their apparent function of sublimation, aid a process by which “individual inhibitions fall away and all the cruel, brutal and destructive instincts, which

lie dormant in individuals as relics of a primitive epoch” replace them (Freud 1959, 11). Freud illuminates how the trappings of these groups transform individual racism into the punitive violence of the lynch mob. His classification of these group structures as artificial, while accurate, neglects to explain how both structures become naturalized within society and thereby posits exclusionary practices as intrinsic to human nature. The church reproduces an organic and spiritual allegation about the origins of the universe, while the nation’s simultaneous prevention and preparation for war reinforce the illusion of the naturalness of national boundaries. Both organizational structures enabled the violence of Reconstruction-era domestic terrorism by the Ku Klux Klan, founded by Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest to extend the violence of his early massacre at Fort Pillow to the postwar political climate, during which he supported the use of violence to control miscegenation between black men and white women (Dray 2002, 44). The prevalence of lynching in the nation’s most religious regions made its violence synonymous with “American Christianity,” a headline the *Chicago Defender* used as a caption for Lawrence Beitler’s iconic image of the 1930 lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith. The lynch mob seizes the brotherly, pseudo-democratic structure of both the church and the army to police the borders of the nation within a nation—the inner sanctum of patriarchy: the white woman’s body.

By the end of federal occupation of the American South, many whites felt as though they were living post-apocalyptically and seized on the church’s structure to punish African-American overreaching. As Leon Litwack argues, “The closer the black man got to the ballot box . . . the more he looked like a rapist” (Allen et al. 2000, 30). Though an accusation of rape preceded fewer than a quarter of all lynchings, the white mobs posited themselves as defenders of religious and sexual virtue, restituting the rape of the white woman’s body as well as the postwar national body. Indeed, a popular name for the post-Reconstruction period was the “Redemption,” which ultimately came for white supremacy in the form of Jim Crow (Dray 2000, 80). The crusade waged by whites against African-Americans cannot be separated from religion. American fundamentalism is, as Philip Dray notes, marked with a radically delineated line between good and evil that reproduced the linguistic frame of evil blackness and pure whiteness (Dray 2000, 78). The sheer medievalism of American Christianity led to the most archaic of all religious trappings—the collection and enshrinement of relics. Souveniring and relic-hunting were standard features of lynchcraft. After the lynching of Sam Hose in Newnan, Georgia, W. E. B. DuBois heard that Hose’s

knuckles were preserved in the window of a butcher shop in Atlanta. James Allen, curator of the Without Sanctuary project, found a framed photograph of the lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith with hair trapped between the matting and glass—representing a simultaneous memorial and fetish (Allen et al. 2000, 84, frame 32). The preservation of the souvenir reveals the “oblatory, efficacious goal of giving up something valuable” that is inherent to the act of collective violence; a presumptive brutal, degraded physical power transforms the lynched person into an object of veneration who could be overcome and contained to shore up the social power of the lynchers (Pizzato 2005, 8).

Freud’s reading of religion accommodates violent and democratic principles, as well as fetishistic tendencies. As in the lynch mob, a libidinal economy binds the group. Desire for the woman’s purity calls the fantasy of the black rapist into being, and the act of looking at and policing the black male body obliterates it—according to Frantz Fanon, replacing it, with a penis: the “black man has been occulted” by assumptions about his hypersexual body (Fanon 2008, 147). Such religious exclusivity relied on the artificial parallel between blackness and evil, but Jewish victims of lynchings were pariahs because of a tangible religious difference. According to the fantasies of the lynchers of Leo Frank, the immigration of European-born Jews into the Protestant South would result in the “usury” of African-Americans as automatons. Controlled by “Jewish money,” these automatons would agitate for civil rights and violate Christian womanhood (Dray 2002, 436). The message was devastatingly clear; Christian love extended only to white Christians. The outsider was not tolerated, despite the “equal share” of Christ’s love that each human subject allegedly receives. White Christians delineated the boundary of what Freud calls “the community of believers, who do not love [Christ], and whom he does not love” (Freud 1959, 26). Lynch victims “stand outside the tie” of *herrenvolk* democracy and are exterminated for their deviance. Their suffering does not “cause sympathy or make torture unacceptable,” as Slavoj Žižek has argued of the tortured, because it is not the “physical proximity [of the body] . . . but the proximity of the Neighbor”—in religious conceptions of loving and privileging the subjectivity of one’s culturally similar neighbor—that causes a shudder in the presence of pain (Žižek 2008, 45).

Martial group character mimes that of the religious group within Freud’s model, though the terms one might use to describe lynch mobs—*murderers*, *terrorists*—were subsumed to the martial language of *warriors* and, in the case of both the KKK and the lynchers of Leo Frank, *knights*. In 1921, the white

citizens of Tulsa, Oklahoma commandeered planes from the local army base to firebomb the city's black neighborhood. The fact that 9/11 rather than the Tulsa riots is remembered as the first terrorist air attack on American soil indicates how deeply the term *terrorist* is raced, since white communities are so often protected from the stigma of its application.³ By mixing elements of the conventionally martial and the paramilitary, racists established constant racial warfare in the American South and Midwest, the region into which white supremacist groups later branched out with far greater power. The martial intensity and structure of their organizations are a symptom of the "group panic" that Freud observed in the paramilitary system. Pathological racism is dedicated to perpetuating the lie that empowered racial others constitute a "common danger" that will infiltrate and destroy the community via sexual and cultural miscegenation.

Because ideological constructions of race and community find locations of contestation in the public spaces of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, much of my book's polemic force emerges in critiques of nationalism, citizenship, and publicness, as well as the institutions that undergirded them. And yet, private spheres are not analytically abandoned by the project—because, for minority communities, the private sphere was particularly permeable. As Elizabeth Schneider has argued, there is "violence" inherent in figurations of privacy. "There is no realm of personal and family life that exists totally separate from the reach of the state. . . . 'Private' and 'public' exist on a continuum," she writes. "Thus, in the so-called private sphere . . . which is purportedly immune from law, there is always the selective application of law [which] invokes 'privacy' as a rationale for immunity in order to protect male domination" (Schneider 1990, 977). Comparable formations of racial privilege enabled the unique benefits of both privacy and publicness to accrue exclusively to the white male subject, who was guaranteed full participation in American democratic spheres, as well as an impermeable private sphere that protected his privilege. Insofar as contemporary memory of racism considers it private—manifest only in the invisible "heart" and intention of the subject—rather than public speech acts and outcomes foundational to democratic structures and theorizations of citizenship, the invisibility of lynching in American public space collaborates with practices of forgetting and evasion that have become hallmarks of white male identity politics.

Forgetting the collectivity of violence indicts the pathological individual at the cost of forgetting a pathological culture; it obliterates the continuity of lynching with racial violence occurring in the shadow of its history. Eleven decades ago, Ida B. Wells-Barnett argued for lynching as a distinctly

national crime at a moment when reunion between the defeated Confederacy and the victorious Union required precisely this nostalgia, one accomplished by bringing the assumptions of white innocence and black pathology into stark relief. Rather than enable this erasure by retreating to the politics of respectability found in the women's club movements, she staged a spectacular coup, by demonstrating a commitment to resist and declaim lynching in the public sphere that the practice had claimed for itself.⁴

Though a recent explosion of work on Wells-Barnett's activism and exile has told her story, she has seldom been placed within the literary and political nexus of twentieth century migration narratives. Even the bravura statement on literature and migration, Farah Jasmine Griffin's *"Who Set you Flowin'?: The African-American Migration Narrative"* (1996) offers two scant references to Wells-Barnett's writing. Her work is treated as offering historical verification of American lynching practices, rather than new creations of meaning associated with African-American literary and cultural production. As Anthony Bogues has argued, "Her essays on lynching are interventionist texts in which the issues about the referential functions of language are replaced with notions about language and writing as truth claims" (Bogues 2003, 48). Though Bogues' work on Wells-Barnett is laudatory, reading her work as "sociological excursions" makes little room for inventions of meaning that she bequeaths to migrants like Richard Wright, who offered his own vernacular theorization of the national crime of lynching.

Influential readings of her polemics by Gail Bederman and Jeffery A. Clymer have located Wells-Barnett's claims in discourses of nation and citizenship, terms that I treat extensively in the reading of *Southern Horrors* that follows. Bederman suggests that Wells-Barnett's speaking tour in Great Britain in opposition to lynching enabled her to deploy the terms of *citizenship* against the nation, inspiring the Northern metropolitan to militate against Southern lynching practices by warning that "Southern men's unrestrained lust had spread north and corrupted Northern men's manliness" (Bederman 1995, 59). Taking from Bederman the terms of both *civilization* and *nationhood*, Clymer argues that Wells-Barnett "ground[s] her rhetoric in an argument of civilization and patriotic nationhood in which the North and South are equally accountable for the era's racial terrorism" (Clymer 2003, 104). I do not disagree with either critic that our shared analysis overturns assignments of primitivism and civilization, nor do I contest the discourses of national accountability that characterize both interpretations. Instead, I argue that Wells-Barnett concretizes geographies and borders to locate lynching, rather than legal accountability, in the American nation rather than its Southern

region. Formal strategies in her pamphlets foreground Northern lynchings despite her claim to treat only *Southern* horrors. Though her title anticipates twentieth-century attempts to discursively quarantine racial violence in the South, her theorizations of the nation and region lay claim to citizenship in both geographical categories—thereby, enacting national reunion (and collective accountability) without the sacrifice of black citizenship that such practices often demanded. Those sacrifices—and the disappointments that attended them in communities of freedmen—are resisted by Wells-Barnett’s rhetorical immediacy; her pamphlets seem to be written in transit and motion that delay the horrors of the migrant’s discovery of racial violence in the Northern city. Though her title foregrounds the South, her argument resists its isolation.

Sanguinary Banners of the Sunny South

In his germinal definition of the relationship of racial violence to American culture, Southern historian Fitzhugh Brundage writes that the remarkable thing about lynching is not that it happened at all—not that cities like Atlanta, Georgia; Marion, Indiana; the District of Columbia; and Port Jervis, New York tortured and murdered African-Americans convicted of no crime and often accused of only minor violations of Jim Crow etiquette—but that it has receded from its once foundational place in American life and public space (Brundage 1993, 258). Despite years of agitation by moderate groups like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, and radical ones like the Communist Party, lynching continued into the 1930s—with a major spike in the Red Summer of 1919, when more than thirty race riots hazarded the lives of new Northward migrants as well as those who had stayed in the South. Though federal anti-lynching legislation failed, the practice slowed considerably after World War II, when the 1946 lynching of two married couples in Moore’s Ford, Georgia raised public outrage against the treatment of returning black GIs (Wexler 2003, 90). The last known spectacle lynching was in 1981 in Mobile, Alabama, where white supremacists kidnapped, stabbed, and hanged Michael Donald in a well-traveled public space—to the relative indifference of local authorities. Despite the Southern locations I have listed in this introduction, the practice of lynching was a national one—a claim that Wells-Barnett anticipates—so much so that I cannot walk down the street of any American city without imagining how violence constitutes its very architecture. Even Manhattan—that safe harbor

from American “flyover country”—is a mere eighty-three miles from Port Jervis, the site of the spectacle lynching of Robert Jackson Lewis in 1892.

While lynching was one form of public spectacle, counter-hegemonic protests of the practice adapted its publicness for the purposes of resistance. A decade before DuBois’s black banner and, indeed, the most ardent anti-lynching campaigns of the NAACP, journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett located her acts of resistance—her guerilla theatre—in the urban South, the primary sites of lynching in the period following Reconstruction. Indeed, her resistance began close to home. When Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and William Stewart—three men who operated a grocery in Memphis—were lynched in March 1892 for “commit[ing] no crime other than to open a store that challenged a nearby white-owned business,” Wells-Barnett began a political campaign informed and motivated by her ties of friendship and community to the dead men (Bay 2010, 5). The violence and economic motive for the triple lynching led her to flee Memphis (as Moss urged his fellow African-Americans in his last words to the assembled mob) and to challenge and complicate the politics of respectability and racial uplift for which both Southern whites and moderate blacks advocated (Ibid., 87–88).

In the months after the lynching at the “Curve”—a black neighborhood in Memphis—the economic motive for the violence was forgotten and the white press began to “invoke . . . rape as a justification for the killings,” in response to condemnatory media coverage of the lynching in the liberal press (Ibid., 99). Despite the risk of violence and ostracism vicariously acquired in her friendships with the three lynched men, Wells-Barnett forced her voice into the public dialogue on lynching in an act of speech so incendiary that it led to her exile in Chicago. Published in a journal called *Free Speech* on May 21, 1892, and reprinted in her subsequent broadside *Southern Horrors*, Wells-Barnett’s protest took the form of a brief editorial letter:

Eight negroes lynched since last issue of the ‘Free Speech’ one at Little Rock, Ark. [sic], last Saturday morning where the citizens broke (?) [sic] into the penitentiary and got their man; three near Anniston, Ala., one near New Orleans; and three at Clarksville, Ga., the last three for killing a white man, and five on the same old racket—the new alarm about raping white women. . . . Nobody in this section believes the old threadbare lie that Negro men rape white women. If Southern white men are not careful, they will over-reach themselves and public sentiment will have a reaction; a conclusion will then be reached which will be very damning to the moral reputation of their women. (51–52)

The response to the editorial was immediate and violent. *The Daily Commercial* newspaper argued that the “wonderful patience of Southern whites” was tested by such calumny and libel against the flower of Southern womanhood, which ought to be protected because of the editorialist’s testing of the “very outermost limits of public patience” (52). *The Evening Scimitar* demanded that the author, who they assumed to be a man, be “brand[ed] . . . in the forehead with a hot iron” and castrated, a practice euphemistically described as a “surgical operation with a pair of tailor’s shears” (52). Rushing to the offices of Wells-Barnett’s newspaper, the mob found her missing and lynched her printing press as a proxy for her body (Goldsby 2006, 46).

The “threadbare” editorial offers two interventions against the lynch mob that correspond with the deprivileged intersectionalities of Wells-Barnett’s identity as a woman of color, negotiating the rhetoric of “manhood rights” and “woman’s suffrage” in a culture where, as a trio of black feminists have more recently titled a polemic, dominant rhetoric asserts that “all the women are white [and] all the blacks are men” (Hull, Scott, and Smith 2003). Wells-Barnett first provides the voice and testimony of the white female subject who was silenced by the lynch mob and, ultimately, lays claim to citizenship in the American nation, the Southern region, and the city of Memphis. The gendered dimension of the first claim is felt in her reprinting of the testimony of “Mrs. Underwood,” a white woman whose black lover was imprisoned when she accused him of rape to disguise their consensual adultery:

I met Offett at the Post Office. It was raining. He was polite to me, and as I had several bundles in my arms he offered to carry them home for me. . . . He had a strange fascination for me, and I invited him to call. . . . He called, bringing chestnuts and candy for the children. By this means we got them to leave us alone in the room. Then I sat on his lap. He made a proposal to me and I readily consented. . . . He visited me several times after that and each time I was indiscreet. I did not care after the first time. In fact I could not have resisted, and had no desire to resist. (Wells-Barnett 1997, 54–55)

Emerging in a chapter called “The Black and White of It,” which catalogs consensual relationships between black men and white women, this testimony is a powerful statement of female desire. As Wells-Barnett later argued in *A Red Record: Lynching in the United States of America*, an accusation of rape was the initiating cause in fewer than a quarter of all lynchings. Even in those cases when rape was alleged, there was often no woman offering testimony,

since the lynched men were sometimes their lovers—named “rapists” by the prevailing logic that structured rape as a crime not against a class of people (women) by another class (men), but committed by a race of people (black rapists) against another race (white victims). Wells-Barnett’s intervention concretizes the female subject, often evoked abstractly by pro-lynching rhetorics that refer to white women as “the flowers of Southern womanhood,” “virtuous Southern belles.” and “honorable white virgins,” staples of propaganda that Wells-Barnett parodies by spelling honor “honah,” in a mockery of the moonlight-and-magnolias Southern accent.”

The history of lynching evinces that it was not white women but white mobs that most often alleged rape. They policed interracial desire and the public sphere, and therefore eschewed the possibility of white women’s engagement with either. Wells-Barnett attests to the mob’s disregard for actual women’s testimony in favor of abstract notions of white womanhood—noting a Maryland lynching in which a woman who had been assaulted swore that the African-American man captured by the mob had never touched her (Wells-Barnett 1997, 61) as well as a Mississippi lynching in which a mob lynched a man with whom the town sheriff’s daughter had been having a consensual affair (Ibid., 65) and a Memphis case in which a woman who bore a biracial child refused to give the father’s name; the press nonetheless reported the cause of the child’s conception as rape (Ibid., 56). Lynch mobs went without female verification, often avoiding testimonies of consent to avoid complicating notions of white women’s sexual purity.

The long citation of Mrs. Underwood’s testimony replaces the archetypal black Jezebel with the white Delilah, who lied about her own desires to save her reputation and virtue. Sandra Gunning argues, “With a white, not black female voice referencing sexual misconduct, the return to the female body—the site of sexual transgression—is approached by a white narrator, through the tabooed discussion of white female lust” (Gunning 1996, 86). Wells-Barnett affirms, Gunning argues, that the desire for miscegenation is “white not black.” Subverting the unspeakability of interracial desire might be the function of Wells-Barnett’s citation. By disavowing Mrs. Underwood, she delineates black women’s chastity in a culture that made no space for it; yet, in giving the testimony so much narrative room, Wells-Barnett remarks on the sexual desirability of black men, whose rising social and educational statuses between manumission and the fin de siècle, are offered as primary reasons for white women’s sexual attraction. Wells-Barnett thereby “afford[s] a woman’s desire some respect” absent in lynchers who valorized sexual chastity (Davis 1995, 90). The rigid sexual restrictions of the intra-racial community of Memphis, as well as the opprobrium of the white press, delimited Wells-

Barnett's own sexual freedom; because of her feelings of restriction, she uses Mrs. Underwood's voice as a testament to both female sexual desire and imminent white betrayal. Conventions of black sexual pathology as espoused by white supremacists and the politics of respectability that sprung up in response to those claims shape Wells-Barnett's representation of eroticism.⁵

Though Mrs. Underwood's confession of lust and love might have given Wells-Barnett space for identification with her own sexual longings, she rhetorically pairs white female desire with black female resistance, attesting to sexual exploitation of black women that had its roots in slavery. As Jacqueline Goldsby notes:

The evidence Wells[-Barnett] marshals to document the rape of black girls or women by white men best measures th[e] effect of *Southern Horror's* parodic force: disturbingly, there is none. Wells[-Barnett] lists no newspaper accounts of the four cases she discusses, not even from the black press. Nor does she claim personal relationships to the victim as authority for her statements. Refusing to disclose her sources, [she] lets these elisions stand as testimony to the stunt's power to mediate how acts of racial violence were archived as public history in the first place. (Goldsby 2006, 79)

When juxtaposed to the voices of white women earlier in Wells-Barnett's text, this omission is notable. Sexual desire is locatable in the public and legal testimony of white women, but is not expressible for women of color. Indeed, biographer Mia Bay reads these representations as models of "Victorian discretion," which resist identifying black victims in an anticipation of contemporary rape shield laws (Bay 2010, 126). All but one of the women's names are hidden; all of the rapists' names are revealed. The anonymity of even the white women underscores the lynch mob's indifference to the identities and experiences of the women they claimed to protect; Wells-Barnett reveals that the mob preferred the abstract woman to actual women.

Just as profoundly as she gives voice to desire and resistance, Wells-Barnett claims Southern citizenship, counting herself as a regional citizen of "this section," the South, and "this city," Memphis. By deploying the language of national honor and public consensus, lynch mobs delineated national citizenship as *mob* citizenship, participation in violent retribution against black subjects, and belief in the bestiality of African-Americans. Refusing the logic that attributes whiteness and maleness to the unmarked "American" or "Southern," Wells-Barnett's intervention in the public sphere asserts her

national and regional identity in resistance to mob citizenship—jettisoning a logic that I assail in my next chapter, in which *Southern* delineates whiteness and the South is imagined as a sectional quarantine for racial violence.

As Tara McPherson argues in *Reconstructing Dixie*, the displacement of American racism is achieved by “lenticular logic,” which she defines as a “schema by which histories or images that are actually copresent get presented (structurally, ideologically) so that only one of these images can be seen at a time” (McPherson 2003, 7). Though lenticular logics of vision have been the guiding modes by which the South has constituted race, America suffers from its own lenticular vision with regards to the South. The commodification of Southern culture through PBS documentaries, the marketing of Scarlett O’Hara, and plantation tours in Natchez and New Orleans have enabled white Americans to “connect imaginatively to Old South traditions of grandeur and elegance” in a “lost world of white dominance and beauty . . . [un]complicated by race or racism” (Ibid., 253). Outside of this culturally approved game of dress-up, Americans are less eager to claim Southernness; in fact, the discourse of American exceptionalism requires a disavowal of the region. Wells-Barnett’s *Southern Horrors*, in which the “threadbare lie” editorial was later interwoven, contests the logic of quarantine—slyly alluding to it in the title but asserting that contemporaneous gestures toward post-Reconstruction national reformation achieved reconciliation with the bloody sacrifice of black bodies.

Written in the anthologizing style of the troubadour’s travelogue—from the Grand Coolie Dam to the Capital in Bob Dylan’s “Idiot Wind” (1971), from Pascagoula to Ottawa in Lucky Starr’s “I’ve Been Everywhere” (1962), and from the redwood forests to the gulf stream waters in Woody Guthrie’s “This Land is Your Land” (1931)—*Southern Horrors* crosses the nation to assemble the “red record” of mob violence. Though the title delineates regional boundaries, it is bookended with two distinctly un-Southern lynchings. Near Cleveland, Ohio—the antebellum contact zone between North and South, slave and free—an African-American man is jailed when his white lover accuses him of rape to save herself from her husband’s wrath at her infidelity (Wells-Barnett 1997, 54). In Port Jervis, New York, the apparently cosmopolitan Northeast, a white man hires a black man to rape his former girlfriend as revenge for her rejection. The black man is lynched, but the white man goes free (Ibid., 71).

Though the majority of Wells-Barnett’s cases take place in the urban South, the text’s slippages are not limited to two. Lawrence, Kansas, a hotbed of progressive racial politics since the Free-Soil Revolt, also makes an appearance. And yet it is “Southern hate and prejudice” and “Southern horrors” that eviscerate, kill, and disarticulate black men (Ibid.). Her consciously-styled