PART III BEARING WITNESS

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WE WANTED TO BE BOOSTERS AND NOT KNOCKERS

Photography and Antilynching Activism

THE 1916 LYNCHING of Jesse Washington in Waco, Texas, stands as one of the most widely known and scrutinized lynchings because it, in many ways, typified the grotesque excess of spectacle lynching. Just over two months after *The Birth of a Nation* played in Waco, an estimated 10,000 people watched as a mob mutilated, strangled, and burned Washington to death on the grounds of the city hall. The mayor and the chief of police watched from a window above. Washington was a seventeen-year-old African American who lived about eight miles from Waco, in Robinson, with his parents and several siblings on the farm of George Fryer. When Fryer's wife Lucy was found dead on the farm, her skull smashed with a hammer, authorities promptly arrested Washington and brought him to Waco, where he confessed to murdering and raping her. On the day of the trial, thousands of people poured into the city, and, though most assumed Washington would be convicted and hanged quickly, talk of lynching filled the air. Indeed, just moments after the jury, which had deliberated for only four minutes, read its guilty verdict, the crowd in the courtroom surged forward and seized Washington. Local businesses promptly closed their doors as spectators—men, women, and children—swarmed the city center, climbing trees and standing on rooftops to get a better view. A local photographer, Fred Gildersleeve, who had been notified that Washington would be lynched, captured the events on film from a window in city hall. Afterward, his images were sold on the streets of the city along with body parts and other grisly remnants from the day's events (figures 3.4 and 3.5).[1]

The lynching of Washington is also noteworthy because it represents a defining moment in the history of lynching, an instance when the spectacle of lynching began to sow the seeds of its own collapse. Newspapers across the country covered the lynching, generating national attention, which gave

vital fuel to the NAACP's antilynching movement and embarrassed not only Waco's political and business leaders but white elites across the South. The northern press swiftly condemned the savagery of the lynching as a shameful stain on the South's, and America's, reputation. "What the [citizens of Waco] did . . . brings disgrace and humiliation on their country as well as themselves," read a *New York Times* editorial, "for wherever the news of it goes—and the news of it will go far—it will be asserted that in no other land even pretending to be civilized could a man be burned to death in the streets of a considerable city amid the savage exultation of its inhabitants." The NAACP also took notice and, within days of the lynching, hired Elizabeth Freeman, a white northern suffrage activist working in Texas at the time, to travel to Waco to investigate.[2]

When Freeman arrived in Waco, she found a thriving city that belied the assumption, widely held outside the South, that lynchings were confined to backward and impoverished communities. Lying on the Brazos River in central Texas, Waco in 1916 was a substantial city of about 35,000 people, a quarter of whom were African American. A booming retail and railroad center, it was considered a progressive city. In the previous five years, the city had come to boast the construction of Texas's then tallest building (the twenty-two-floor Amicable Insurance Company building, built in 1911), an interurban railway connecting Waco to Dallas, and the introduction of electricity and streetcars. Residents also expressed pride in the city's numerous churches and educational institutions, including the state's oldest college, Baylor University. The city's religious conservatives, however, chafed against the vitality of the new urban center and expressed growing alarm about numerous saloons and a flourishing red-light district. In the spring of 1916, a heated public debate was under way over whether local movie theaters should be permitted to open their doors on Sundays. And, despite that the city had a relatively sizable black middle class and was home to two black colleges, Waco newspapers focused on stories of "Negro crime." Waco and its surrounding area had a long history of vigilante violence, including lynching. In 1905, a lynch mob had hanged Sank Majors, an African American man accused of assaulting a white woman, from a bridge near the city center—an act that Jesse Washington's lynchers briefly considered mimicking before deciding to burn him instead. What is more, several months before the lynching of Washington, photographs of a lynching by burning of Will Stanley in Temple, Texas, including images of Stanley's charred corpse, were sold on the streets of Waco for ten cents each.[3]

Although the murder that Washington allegedly committed took place

out in the county, Freeman found that the mob and spectators of Washington's lynching consisted primarily of Waco residents, most of whom presumably had little personal connection to Lucy Fryer.[4] After some digging, she discovered the names of six supposed mob leaders, including a bricklayer, a saloonkeeper, and several men who worked as clerks and drivers for a local ice company. These men acted with the full complicity of city leaders, who evidently considered lynching to be of "political value" to the sheriff and other county officials who were running for office that year. Neither the presiding judge in Washington's trial nor the mayor made any effort to stop the mob. In fact, Freeman concluded, the mayor had arranged for Gildersleeve to take the photographs from city hall as part of a "cooked business" between the men.[5]

Yet, soon after Freeman arrived, Waco residents began to cover up the spectacle, scrambling to undo the damage to their reputation that national attention had wrought. "Suddenly everyone became silent about the lynching," reported Freeman, particularly when they became suspicious about her purpose in town. Local estimates of the crowd's size shrank from 15,000 to 500. Believing she was a journalist, the former mayor of the city asked Freeman to "fix it up as well as you can for Waco, and make them understand that the better thinking men and women were not in it." Several city elites, including both a former railroad entrepreneur from the North and a wealthy businessman who had been the foreman of the jury that had condemned Washington to death, told Freeman privately that they had wanted to protest the lynching publicly. But ultimately the men retained an embarrassed silence, as did the *Waco Times Herald*, which reported the lynching as the work of a frenzied and "mad" mob but refrained from making any editorial comment. A number of local pastors, led by the minister of the First Presbyterian Church, C. T. Caldwell, did speak out, but stressed that the mob's actions represented the "sins of the few" or, as one Baptist resolution indicated, "the lowest order of society." The faculty of Baylor University also issued a public renunciation of the lynching, condemning it in part because they recognized "that the incident will evoke from the outside world reproaches unmerited by the majority of the people of our fair city and county." These responses from Waco's elite reveal a conspicuous fault line within the white community that belies the sense of class unity that the lynching supposedly enacted and that is so boldly represented in Gildersleeve's photographs.[6]

As might be expected amid this atmosphere, Freeman had a particularly difficult time obtaining copies of the lynching photographs. She made nu-

merous attempts to buy them from the mayor and from the sheriff, who told her he did "not dare" sell them. The photographer himself eventually agreed to sell some, but then "he got cold feet" and let her have only three at fifty cents apiece. Gildersleeve later wrote to the NAACP explaining that "we have quit selling the mob photos; this step was taken because our 'city dads' objected on the grounds of 'bad publicity,' as we wanted to be boosters and not knockers, we agreed to stop all sale." For "city dads," that these images might circulate outside their community was particularly troubling, for what were consumed as celebratory souvenirs of white triumph in Waco would most certainly become icons of disgrace, "bad publicity," outside it. Waco elites recognized that new contexts changed the meaning and significance of the images entirely.[7]

For the NAACP, the photographs served as much needed publicity. The organization printed a special report based on Freeman's investigation in a supplement to the July issue of its magazine, the *Crisis*. It sent the report, titled "The Waco Horror," to NAACP supporters, as well as to President Wilson, his cabinet, and members of Congress, with the aim of raising money and support for a large-scale antilynching campaign. The *Nation* predicted that the NAACP fund-raising drive would "raise double the amount it asks if it would circulate with its appeal the pictures of the burning at Waco," something the organization had already done. The *Nation* also hoped, in vain, that the pictures would be used to identify and indict the ringleaders of the mob. In addition to placing advertisements in the *Crisis* asking readers to "read the shame of Waco" and "back us with your dollars," the NAACP sent Freeman on a speaking tour to publicize both her investigation of the Waco lynching and the NAACP's antilynching efforts. By the fall, these efforts had raised over $10,000, which the association used to support more lynching investigations and to establish the foundation for later campaigns for federal antilynching legislation.[8]

"The Waco Horror" not only emboldened the NAACP, but also led whites across the South to recognize that such "bad publicity" could threaten their New South economic ambitions and their sectional reputation. In an editorial several months after the lynching, the *Atlanta Constitution* expressed concern that the NAACP pamphlet "now being circulated throughout the United States" reflected badly not just on Waco but on Georgia and "any other southern state." It called for the Georgia legislature to take firm action against lynching not just for the "commercial future" of the state but for the "self-respect" of all Georgians. "It is more for the sake of ourselves, of our own flesh and blood and the civilization it represents, that we should stand

so emphatically for law enforcement," the paper insisted. This editorial was part of a larger trend, as Georgia officials had begun to express strong antilynching sentiments after the lynching of Leo Frank in 1915 brought negative publicity to their state. Indeed, as news and images of lynching circulated through the national media and through antilynching publicity campaigns, white southerners increasingly found they could no longer openly support or defend mob violence with impunity.[9]

The aftershocks of Washington's lynching did not bring an immediate end to lynching—it was not the last lynching even in Waco—but the reaction to it epitomized a significant shift in the history of lynching, when the most visible excesses of mob violence, so vital to the construction and persistence of white supremacy, came into the service of antilynching activism.[10] From the mid-1910s through the 1930s, the NAACP and the black press's concerted efforts to disseminate and publish lynching photographs rendered the South, along with what were perceived as its backward and degenerate punitive practices, the object of a critical national gaze. In doing so, these activists created an alternate form of lynching spectatorship, one that impelled viewers both outside and within the South to bear witness to white injustice and brutality. By removing the photographs from the context of their white southern localities and by bringing them into national consciousness in far broader and more lasting ways than postcards and prolynching pamphlets had done, activists undermined their power to substantiate white supremacy and to act as yet another weapon against black autonomy. They bestowed on them an entirely different kind of authority.

Antilynching activism had emerged much earlier, in the 1880s, as a loose, disparate movement of organizations, ministers, and journalists who saw lynching as the most egregious hindrance to black advancement. Antilynching activism gained more cohesive political force with the founding of the NAACP in 1909. The association put opposition to lynching at the forefront of its agenda and devoted a large portion of its resources to investigating and publicizing as many lynchings as it could. It was aided in these efforts by the rise of the black press, especially as newspapers like the *New York Amsterdam News* and the *Chicago Defender* circulated nationwide. An escalation in racial violence during and after World War I, in particular, led the NAACP to focus its efforts on lobbying the U.S. Congress to pass antilynching legislation. Recognizing that southern authorities would rarely prosecute mobs or

enforce state antilynching statutes, the NAACP sought to make lynching a federal crime, which would allow the U.S. government to penalize local authorities and communities that failed to stop mob violence. In this respect, the NAACP made lynching a national, rather than a local or regional, issue, and it appealed to a national audience to do so.[11]

Lynching photographs became crucial tools in these political campaigns. The horror they displayed with graphic realism—in short, their sensationalism—could capture attention and sway sentiment to a degree unmatched by text. To this end, the NAACP collected lynching photographs whenever possible and reproduced them in the *Crisis*, as well as in antilynching pamphlets and posters. By the 1930s, the association had its own archive of images, which it frequently lent to other activists, teachers, writers, and publishers.[12] Black newspapers also increasingly published lynching photographs when they had access to them, especially as, by the 1930s, developments in halftone reproduction made the printing of photographic images less burdensome and expensive. Activists, in these ways, made ample use of modern visual technologies, as well as the tropes of sensational media, to shock and incite outrage in the American public.

Lynching opponents also sought to challenge the original intention of these photographs by inverting the racist assumptions of black bestiality and propensities for violence that undergirded the defense of lynching. They instead represented white mobs as savage threats to American civilization, a representation that held particular force in light of the United States' international role as a beacon of democracy. In turn, the black media projected themselves, and by extension all African Americans, as the true defenders of American law, order, and justice. For many African Americans, the power of the lynching image helped to construct an alternative social identity that not only defied prevailing stereotypes of black men and moved beyond passive victimhood but also rendered them active critics of white hypocrisy and rightful participants in American democracy. In these ways, most antilynching activists aligned themselves with the values of modern liberalism and its commitment to human rights, a commitment that downplayed racial differences in favor of a universalist vision of equality and individual value. They insisted that racial prejudice and violence were at stark odds with civic ideals of progress and human advancement, and they relied on both the power of moral persuasion and government intervention to further these ideals.[13]

In this light, activists usually refrained from attacking lynching as a violent expression of race prejudice or a gruesome mechanism to ensure white

power. Rather, they posited lynching as a universal and primeval form of criminal retribution that no civilized and modern nation should condone. In doing so, they aimed to appeal to white liberals and moderates who might harbor fears about black criminality but who would sympathize with the goals of social order and progress. They thus sought to convince white Americans that lynching was damaging and destructive not to black communities but to the nation as a whole. Accordingly, antilynching rhetoric increasingly shifted attention away from the black victims of lynching and onto the perverse brutality of white lynch mobs and spectators. The selective use and placement of lynching photographs in the press and in political propaganda did much to represent and accentuate this rhetoric.

As happened in Waco, the proliferation of lynching images in the media brought unwelcome attention to the South. For many white southerners, the growing national perception that lynching was a barbaric custom became a regional embarrassment, particularly for those "boosters" who wanted to promote economic and social development in their cities and states. In response, these southerners sought to prevent the widespread circulation and display of lynching photographs—that is, to conceal lynching as much as possible from public view. At the same time, many white southerners adopted the rhetoric of antilynching activism, especially as its deflection away from racial prejudice allowed them to denounce lynching without challenging racial segregation or undermining their claims to white supremacy. The national attention on lynching thus solidified growing sentiments across the South that lynching was a shameful practice that not only damaged the South's reputation but harmed civil and moral order, sentiments that ultimately rendered the public torture and killing of African Americans indefensible.

WITHIN TWO YEARS of its founding, the NAACP began publishing lynching photographs in the *Crisis* and in antilynching pamphlets, where they served as graphic testimony to the terrible wrongs that white mobs were inflicting on black Americans. In doing so, the organization relied on viewer expectations that a photograph represented a transparent and truthful reflection of reality, that it could, in fact, provide visual corroboration of what were incomprehensible acts of atrocity.[14] Yet the images were also horrifying because they represented a point of view—that of racist and sadistic mobs—that was embedded in the very taking of the photograph. In other words, because viewers assumed that the camera did not lie, the photographs stood as irrefutable evidence of lynching's reality, that it took place at all. At the

same time, the photographs testified to a larger moral truth that to make and celebrate such an image was itself a grotesque and brutal act. Viewers were thus impelled to read the images oppositionally, that is, against their intended point of view, and to distance themselves morally from those who had taken and posed for the images.

Ida B. Wells pioneered this political reappropriation of lynching photographs when she published a postcard from an 1891 lynching in Clanton, Alabama, in her 1894 antilynching pamphlet *A Red Record*. She used this image in the text and in her public lectures to convince skeptical readers that the atrocities she narrated were true.[15] In an 1894 interview, Wells recounted that a white gentleman at one of her lectures protested that a pen and ink illustration of the Clanton lynching printed in English newspapers was "demoralizing," and he "expressed the greatest astonishment" once she "assured him that the picture was an absolute reproduction of a photograph, and proved it by showing him the photograph."[16] A photograph, in this sense, carried an authority that an artistic rendering did not.

The use of photographs to protest lynching, however, was still rare enough in the early 1910s that the NAACP had to prepare its audiences to view the images against their intended purpose. When the *Crisis* started printing lynching photographs, it explained to readers that photographs were taken at lynching scenes as an aspect of the violence. In 1912, it published a speech by New York minister and lynching opponent John H. Holmes, in which he mentioned the recent lynching of John Lee in Durant, Oklahoma, and excoriated the mob's decision to pose for photographs with its victim like hunters with their prey. Beside the speech, the *Crisis* reproduced a lynching postcard from Andalusia, Alabama, most likely from a 1906 lynching, which had been sent to Holmes with a menacing message: "This is the way we do them down here. . . . Will put you on our regular mailing list. Expect one a month on the average." (This postcard, figure 6.1, suggests that white southerners were paying attention to the actions of lynching opponents in the North.) But by positioning this postcard against Holmes's speech, the *Crisis* directed viewers' interpretation of the image so that they would disidentify with the writer of the postcard and the white spectators posing beneath the victim. Its placement, in this respect, predetermined viewers' disgust and horror at it—just as white spectators' hungry consumption of similar images was shaped by their knowledge of, spectatorship of, or participation in the lynching itself.[17]

By reproducing the image in this way, the NAACP punctured its threat for viewers and for Holmes himself. In March 1912, the *Crisis* printed a note

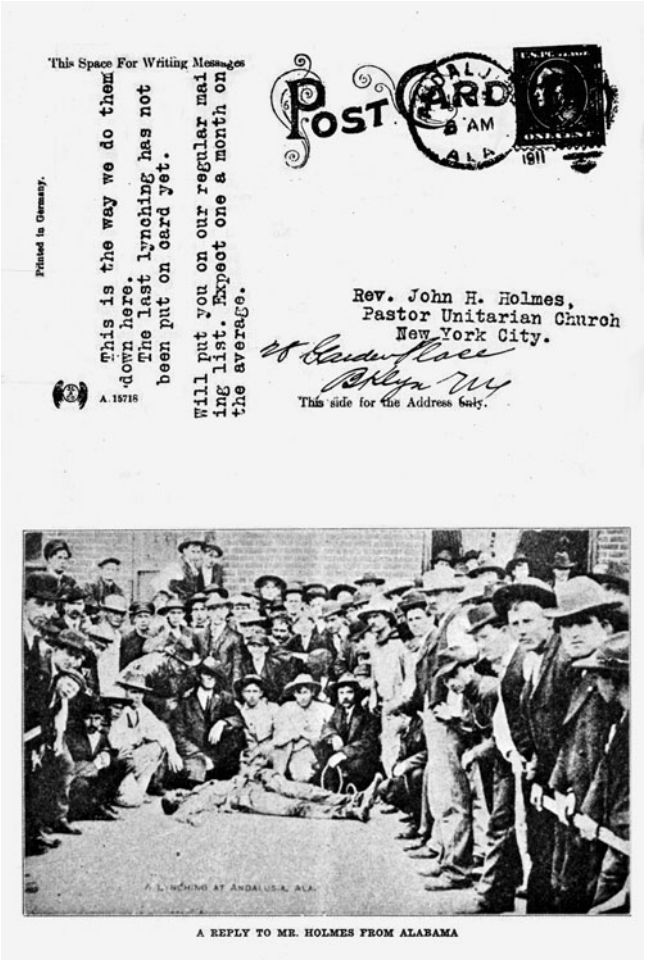


FIGURE 6.1 Lynching postcard, Andalusia, Alabama, *Crisis*, January 1912.

from one of its readers that included a lynching postcard from Georgia that had "so aroused" the reader that he "purchased the entire supply, with the purpose of enlisting your aid in preventing the publication of such cards." The journal ignored its reader's plea, however, and reprinted the lynching image beside the note, broadening the audience further.[18] By buying the "entire supply," the writer had perhaps stopped its circulation in the lynching locale. Yet the *Crisis* ensured that its publication continued beyond it, and in doing so, it thwarted the terrorizing power of the image.

The NAACP thus transformed the ideological significance of these photographs by detaching them from their specific localities and recontextualiz-

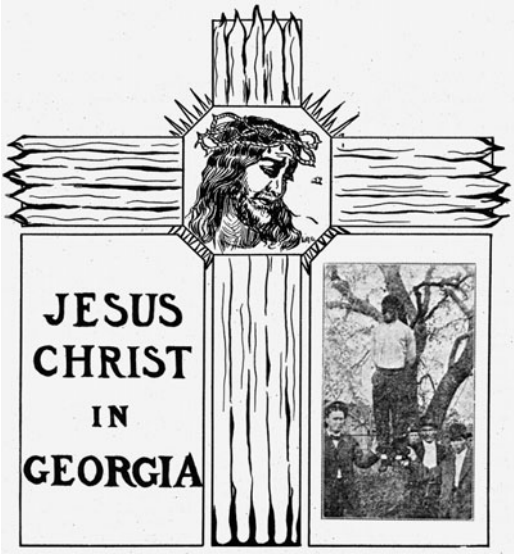


FIGURE 6.2 "Jesus Christ in Georgia," *Crisis*, December 1911.

ing them. On the pages of the black press, these images no longer served as visual testimonies of white unity and superiority but instead as graphic and indisputable symbols of white brutality and racial injustice. In December 1911, within a year of its inauguration, the *Crisis* printed its first lynching photograph, an uncaptioned, cropped image of an unidentified lynching, to accompany a short story, "Jesus Christ in Georgia," by editor W. E. B. Du Bois. The photograph appears as part of the title graphic, which is dominated by a wooden cross with an image of Jesus' face at its intersection and flanked on one side by the story's title and on the other by the photograph (figure 6.2). Jesus gazes down in sorrow at the hanged body of the black lynching victim, a juxtaposition of images that mirrors the ending of the story, in which a crucified Christ appears "heaven-tall, earth-wide" beside the body of a lynched black man, his gaze "all sorrowful . . . fastened on [his] writhing, twisting body." But the title graphic did more than simply illustrate the story's ending; because the photograph depicted an actual lynching, it literalized the story's lynching, bringing it from the realm of fiction to that of truth. Within this context, the photograph had literally become iconic, a material representation of the divine.[19]

In this fashion, most lynching photographs shown in the *Crisis* remained unspecified, displaced entirely from the local circumstances and sentiments that had produced them. These images indeed served as interchangeable symbols of racial atrocity, one lynching image standing for all white brutality and black suffering. When the *Crisis* chose to illustrate John Holmes's

antilynching speech about John Lee's lynching in Oklahoma with the postcard from Andalusia, Alabama, for example, this was not because there was no image of Lee's lynching. In fact, later in the same issue, the magazine reprinted a photograph from Lee's lynching, in crude halftone. It situated it, along with the image that had appeared with "Jesus Christ in Georgia," beside a poem by Leslie Pinckney Hill, "Vision of a Lyncher," which, as an inverse of "Jesus Christ in Georgia," represents the lynching scene as a vision from hell. As illustrations to the poem, the photographs, each depicting white men enveloping their victims with proprietary gestures, provided visual verification for Hill's ghastly image of "the burning plain" where "the tortured swarm" prepared for the lynching. In turn, Hill's poem would have guided viewers' understanding of the images as representing hellish and "soul-wrought pain." When these photographs appeared in an NAACP antilynching pamphlet, they bore different captions, recontextualized once again.[20]

As readers became more accustomed to seeing these kinds of images in the black press, explanations of how mobs photographed lynching—why lynching photographs existed at all—grew less necessary, presumably because viewers now understood the intrinsic violence of the images. Indeed, the fact that, in the mid-1910s, the *Crisis* felt impelled to explain to its readers that lynch mobs took and circulated lynching photographs at all indicates that most such images had not circulated far beyond the South until the black press began to publish them in greater numbers.

By the 1930s, lynching photographs had become almost entirely iconographic.[21] Some photographs, to be sure, were used to illustrate specific lynching reports. But, presumably because editors were not always able to obtain an image until after the relevant story had run, they often printed images days or even weeks after lynchings and provided readers with little or no context. For example, in 1934, the *Baltimore Afro-American* reprinted a cropped version of a 1930 photograph of George Hughes's lynched body in Sherman, Texas (figure 6.3), beside an antilynching poem by Esther Pope that had previously appeared in *Opportunity* magazine. With the title "Blasphemy—American Style," the poem derides lynch mobs' hypocritical claims to piety; beside it, the photograph of Hughes's burned and crumpled hanging corpse seems to signify both Christlike martyrdom and iconic effigy. Although a caption beneath the image reads "Sherman, Texas, Lynching," it misstates the date, and Hughes remains anonymous.[22] A "News Note" above both the poem and image refers to a Kentucky lynching in which the mob had its victim recite the Lord's Prayer before hanging and burning his body.

FIGURE 6.3 The lynching of George Hughes, Sherman, Texas, 1930.

Hughes's lynching became further abstracted when, in 1934, artist Isamu Noguchi modeled a metal sculpture, *Death (Lynched Figure)*, on the image of Hughes's corpse (figure 6.4). The piece appeared in the NAACP's 1935 art exhibition held in New York to garner public support for federal antilynching legislation. The power of the photographic rendering of Hughes's unnamed, abstracted body derived not from any understanding that it was represented through the perspective of the white mob; rather, as an icon, it took on a hallowed quality that stood outside time and place.[23]

In this respect, lynching photographs became visible touchstones for antilynching agendas, developing their own abstract power in the process. In fact, to present-day eyes, these photographic reproductions hardly seem realistic. The halftone process, which made it possible to print photographs beginning in the 1890s, broke the photograph into a series of black dots to convey the full range of photographic tone on the newsprint page, in a sense tricking the eye into seeing a photographic image from a series of etched dots. Larger newspapers perfected this process so the images appeared real and seamless, but in smaller papers, some photographs appear almost like drawings. At times, even the authenticity of the original image seemed to matter little, as is apparent in the *Chicago Defender*'s printing of a "composite photograph" in which several images were melded to depict

Image Not Available

FIGURE 6.4 Isamu Noguchi, *Death (Lynched Figure)*, 1933. Photograph by Shigeo Anzai. © 2008 The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

"the actual lynching" of John Carter in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1927 (figure 6.5). Such alterations of images were common in the tabloid press, and the tabloids bore much criticism for it, but the *Chicago Defender* clearly was not using the photograph to illustrate with graphic realism the report of Carter's lynching. Rather, the photograph served to highlight the paper's opposition to lynching, much like an editorial cartoon. The caption described how "the most prominent white citizens" burned Carter at the stake, and it censured officials for making "no attempt to check the mob and save the city and state

FIGURE 6.5 "A composite photograph depicting the actual lynching and burning at the stake of John Carter by a crowd of the most prominent white citizens of Little Rock, Ark., on Thursday night, May 5." *Chicago Defender*, 21 May 1927. Courtesy of the *Chicago Defender*.

from the disgraceful exhibition of cannibalism." The photograph could thus encapsulate both a complex narrative of lynching and the argument against lynching in one image.[24]

On the other hand, lynching opponents were well aware that photographs, as accurate documents of reality, could provide the legal identification of mob participants. Lynching photographs thus held the potential to act as witnesses in the most literal, legal sense. Several weeks after it published the composite "photo" of Carter's lynching, the *Chicago Defender* published another view of Carter's hanged body showing a police officer standing several feet away. The headline read, "And They Can't Identify This Policeman!" accompanied by a caption that noted that "the picture . . . shows quite clearly, one of the stalwart guardians of Arkansas law" who had apparently played "an important role" in the lynching. Yet, the caption stated with dismay, officials in Little Rock claimed they could not identify members of the mob, and it added, "If this policeman cannot be identified,

with a face like the one exposed in this picture, there is something wrong with the identifiers." Similarly, the *Chicago Defender* published a photograph of the lynched body of Lint Shaw, hanged and tortured in Royston, Georgia, in 1936, surrounded by a group of white men, with the headline "These Can Be Identified." Although the photograph was taken the day after the lynching and the men pictured could very well have been curious spectators, the caption argued, "The above men, whose identity cannot be questioned, must surely possess information which would lead honest officials to arrest and convict the murderers responsible for this human outrage." Lynching opponents, indeed, regularly expressed a frustrated sense of disbelief that the irrefutable "proof" of a photograph was so casually ignored in lynching communities, even as they themselves regularly altered these images and dislodged them from their local specificity.[25]

WITH THESE KINDS of dramatic editorial commentary and emotional appeals, the display of lynching photographs in black newspapers often became indistinguishable from their use as propaganda in NAACP pamphlets and advertisements for antilynching legislation. Lynching, it should be noted, was already on the decline as antilynching activism gained political force in the 1930s. The outcry against lynching in this period was in many ways more a response to a relatively small number of extraordinarily sadistic lynchings than to any sense that lynching was a consistent problem. For activists, the issue was that lynching was still happening at all in modern America. In this context, lynching photographs played a critical role in activists' efforts to incite outrage in a public that might otherwise wish to believe that lynching was a waning practice. In short, lynching photographs were particularly well suited to sensationalize the already sensational. Throughout the 1930s, both the NAACP and black newspapers thus continued to print these images primarily to keep the ugly specter of lynching at the forefront of readers' minds and to persuade them to commit energy and money to antilynching campaigns.

They adopted the tools of modern advertising and modern tabloid journalism to do so. In publishing lynching images, the black press and the NAACP made use of the very developments in modern photographic technology that caused a great deal of apprehension among other newsmen. By the first decades of the twentieth century, not only were newspapers able to reproduce images more cheaply and accurately, but photographers were able to take pictures at night and to wire photographs to news outlets across the country. Photojournalism quickly developed into a competitive

and lucrative profession. These changes enabled the print media to compete with radio and led readers to expect photographic illustrations of the news. Many editors and cultural critics in the early twentieth century bemoaned these changes, believing that photographs appealed to base emotionalism and aliterate sensibilities at the expense of reason and complexity. More austere papers like the *New York Times* used photographs sparingly, and the decisions in the 1930s of magazines like *Time* and *Fortune* to compete with the most sordid tabloids by illustrating the news with photographs met with controversy. While defenders of the practice argued that photographs augmented the credibility and realistic depiction of the news, critics comprehended that photographs were hardly neutral conveyors of reality but were highly manipulative and titillating.[26]

To their critics, the print media were collapsing the boundary between news and entertainment, a sentiment felt with particular force since the advertising industry in this period was increasingly relying on photographic imagery to appeal to viewers' emotions. Modern advertisers recognized that photographs could encapsulate and freeze a host of feelings, sensibilities, and ideas into one schematic. In doing so, they created a mental association between the feelings the image stirred in the viewer and the product that was being marketed. This process rested on the assumption that consumers were impressionable and easily manipulated, that they were ruled by passion over reason. Photographs, in their graphic realism, not only could more readily attract consumers' attention than could text or even drawings but were also more likely to stimulate viewers emotionally. At the same time, because viewers assumed photographs to be factual, advertisers enhanced the credibility of their products when they used photographs to market them. That is, viewers could suppose that their emotional choices were rational ones.[27]

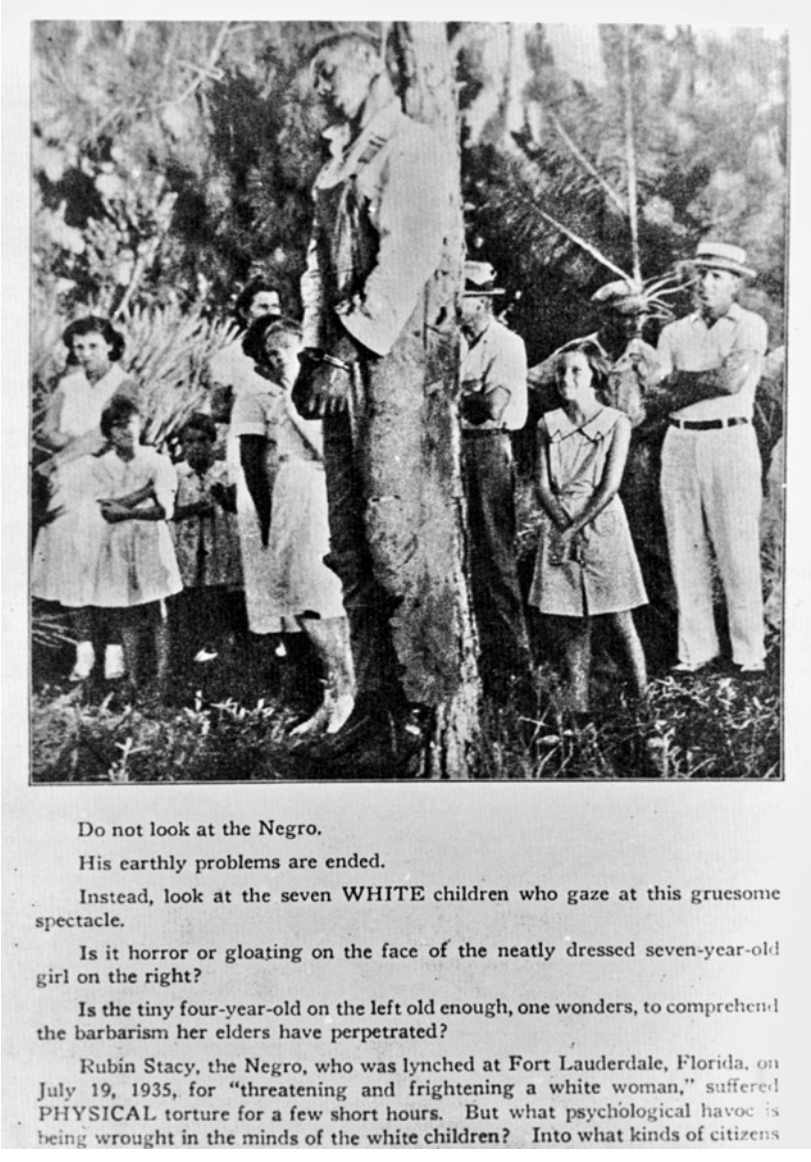
The NAACP and the black press relied on these dynamics in using lynching photographs as pleas for antilynching support. Because of their symbolic clarity, photographs could summarize for readers the antilynching position of the press with far more immediacy and accessibility than reportage or editorials could. At the same time, their stark realism would create a sense of disgust and agitation in readers that would sway them in support of that position. That realism would also lend credibility to antilynching advertisements or editorials as indisputable fact. When viewers encountered these images in the black press, the violence of the image very well could have horrified them, compelling them to turn away in revulsion. But the conventions of tabloid journalism and of modern advertising had already prepared

them to accept photographs, even shocking photographs, as both news and propaganda.

As early as 1912, the NAACP created its own version of a lynching postcard when it produced a promotional postcard using the photograph of John Lee's lynching in Durant, Oklahoma, with a caption that included the NAACP's address and encouraged viewers to write to the association if "you are interested in joining our protest." The postcard ingeniously defused the white supremacist power imagined in the image and, in its place, called for an alternative community of lynching protestors. Several years later, in April 1916, John Ross, a reader of the *Crisis*, wrote to Du Bois urging him to use a lynching photograph from Georgia that the magazine had recently published to raise funds against lynching. Stating that "a number of my white friends" were shocked to see the photograph, "express[ing] astonishment that such atrocities are occurring in the United States today," Ross suggested the NAACP launch a chain letter campaign and include a copy of the photograph with each letter. "This I am sure would make every Negro interested in his race be willing to comply to the conditions, viz. contribute one dime and send five letters," he affirmed, implying that the photograph bore a particular power to incite action and build a sense of communal purpose. Acting secretary of the NAACP Roy Nash courteously responded to Ross that he had already "struck off" 1,000 copies of the images and was "going to give serious consideration to your idea." Several months later, of course, the NAACP began to use the images from Jesse Washington's lynching to great effect.[28]

By the 1930s, the NAACP regularly relied on image-based promotional materials. According to a 1935 publicity report, it sold and distributed 100,000 copies of a pamphlet featuring an image of the lynched body of Rubin Stacy for "25 cents a hundred, to permit maximum circulation" to NAACP branches, churches, women's groups, and other organizations, creating a network of exchange that far exceeded the original circulation of lynching photographs (figure 6.6). Similarly, when the photograph of Lint Shaw's lynched body appeared in the *Chicago Defender* in April 1936, NAACP secretary Walter White asked the paper to "lend" the NAACP the image, with the possibility of, as one friend suggested to White, "flooding the country with it." The NAACP also aided glossy pictorial magazines like *Look* and *Life* in obtaining lynching photographs to accompany stories about antilynching legislation efforts.[29]

Indeed, the most horrific aspects of lynching spectacles invigorated attempts to pass federal antilynching legislation. After the failure of Repre-



Do not look at the Negro.

His earthly problems are ended.

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

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

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

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

FIGURE 6.6 NAACP antilynching pamphlet, 1935, showing the lynching of Rubin Stacy, Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Courtesy of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

sentative Leonidas Dyer's antilynching bill in 1922, the NAACP largely abandoned its lobbying efforts until a terrible upsurge in lynchings in late 1933. The national attention these incidents garnered made a new campaign seem both necessary and opportune. Activists also redoubled their efforts after the high-profile, spectacular lynching of Claude Neal in Florida in 1934. The *New York Amsterdam News*, for instance, published a photograph of Neal's lynched body next to an image of President Roosevelt, along with an open letter to Roosevelt beseeching him to prosecute the members of the mob under federal kidnapping statutes, since the mob had crossed state lines with Neal before lynching him.[30]

In at least one instance, a ghastly lynching and congressional debates over antilynching legislation brought attention to each other. As Congress debated the Gavagan antilynching bill in April 1937, two men in Duck Hill, Mississippi, Roosevelt Townes and Robert McDaniels, accused of murdering a local white merchant, were gruesomely lynched. A mob of 200 men beat them and scorched them with gasoline blowtorches to extract their confessions before shooting McDaniels and burning Townes alive. Although it was shocking, the lynching might have escaped national notice if federal antilynching legislation had not been pending. Unlike other high-profile lynchings in the 1930s, the Duck Hill lynching was attended by a relatively small crowd and occurred outside town, in the woods. But someone took what became infamous pictures of McDaniels and Townes chained to trees, in the midst of their suffering (figure 6.7). Lynching opponents seized on the lynching as further evidence that federal legislation was necessary to stop this kind of atrocity. Both the lynching and the congressional debates made front-page news across the country, and some newspapers and magazines reproduced the Duck Hill photographs. According to *Time*, when the Associated Press report of the lynching was read on the House floor, "debate rose to a furious crescendo," and the bill subsequently passed the house by a vote of 277 to 120, with 17 southerners voting for the bill. That fall, while the Senate debated its version of the bill, supporter Senator Bennett Clark, a Democrat from Missouri, displayed a poster on the wall of the Senate chamber that included two images of Townes and Roosevelt's lynching. The poster read, "These blow torch lynchings occurred while the Wagner-Van Nuys Anti-Lynching Bill was Pending before Congress. There have been NO arrests, NO Indictments, NO Convictions, of any one of the lynchers. This was NOT a rape case."[31] The symbolic use of this particularly spectacular lynching mirrored in some ways the symbolic nature of federal antilynching legislation. Many proponents of these bills knew that enforcement

FIGURE 6.7 The lynching of Robert "Bootjack" McDaniels, Duck Hill, Mississippi, 1937.

would be weak, just as antilynching statutes in southern states were routinely ignored. But they also believed that a federal antilynching law would send the national and international message that lynching was anathema to American ideals.[32]

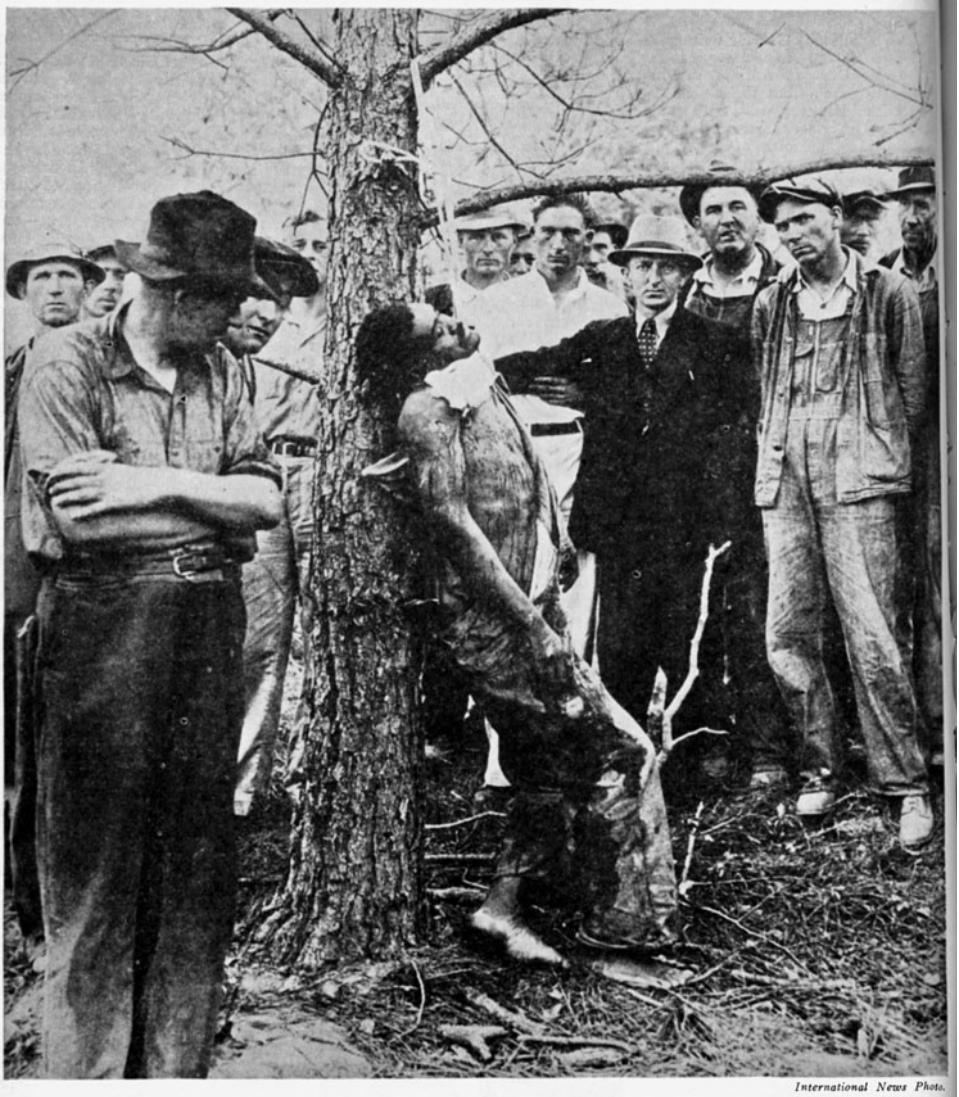
Despite their iconic use in the service of antilynching politics, lynching photographs held such power to move the public because viewers not only accepted them as factual but also recognized that they were not impartial documents, that they were, in fact, bound up with the violence of the scene. Editors often gave lynching photographs captions that spoke to this indistinguishability between the lynching and the visual record of the lynching by marking the photograph with the violent language of the mob or by making no distinction between those posing for the photograph and the perpetrators of the violence. For instance, the *Crisis* used the photograph of Lint Shaw's lynching in a clever advertisement commenting on the Senate's decision not to vote on an antilynching bill. It positioned the lynching on a full page with the headline "Mobs Act, While—" next to a page titled "U.S. Senators Talk," which featured the relevant extract from the *Congressional Record* (figure 6.8). This juxtaposition set the activity of the mob against the

passivity of the Senate. But since, as discussed above, the photograph was taken the day after the lynching, the NAACP knew that the men posing for the photograph may have been not members of the mob but merely curious bystanders. Still, the caption assumed that to pose for a lynching photograph was to join the mob, a mob that continued to "act" even after its victim was dead. In this context, the photograph represented a continuous act of violence, one in which the Senate, through its failure to act, participated.[33]

The violence and exploitation embedded within the images denied viewers any aesthetic or emotional distance from the photographs. In this sense, lynching opponents relied on the most sensational qualities of these images—their use in the service of white supremacy—to stimulate shock and revulsion in the viewer, literally to produce sensation. They added dramatic captions and headlines to appeal further to viewers' emotional sensibilities and to jar them out of their complacency or voyeuristic curiosity. For activists, the spectator's revulsion became a political necessity and an ethical imperative. In publishing photographs of the lynched bodies of John Holmes and Thomas Thurmond, hanged in San Jose, California, in 1933, the *Atlanta Daily World* wrote that it was the paper's "duty to print these photographs, as horrible as they are, in the hope of causing public sentiment to surge against this most terrible of all American crimes." Despite that the images were crude halftone reproductions, the press asked, "Is there any human who can see this picture without fully realizing how revolting a crime lynching is?" To look at these images and to respond with horror was to move from the position of spectator to moral witness.[34]

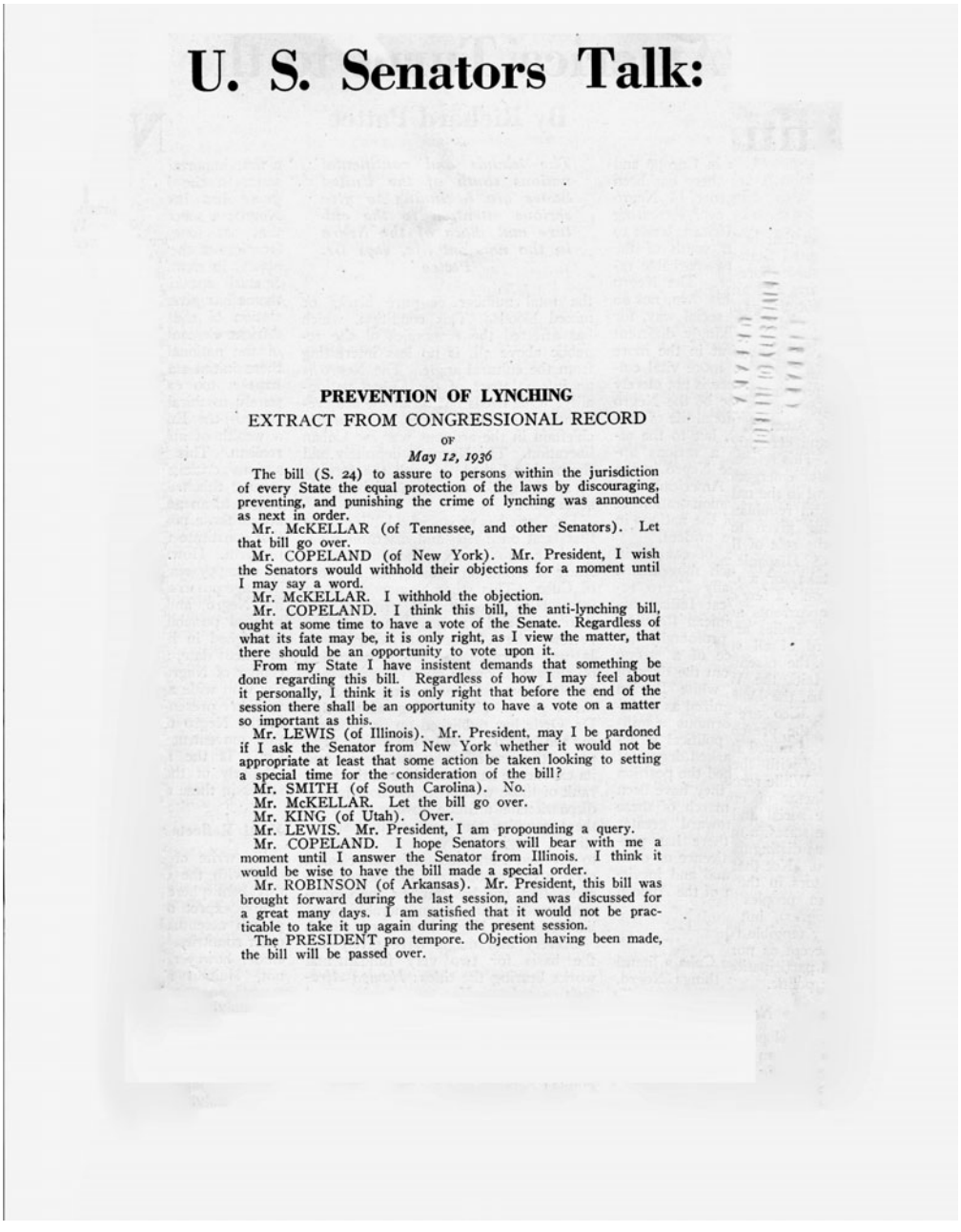
It is this sense that lynching photographs are implicated in the violence, that the subjugation of African Americans is bound up within them, that has given rise to present-day concerns that displays of lynching photographs might reproduce the dynamics of lynching itself, positioning the viewer of the photograph as yet another spectator of lynching and reifying black victimhood.[35] Such concerns did not trouble antilynching activists, however. They were more likely to be uneasy about the possibility that lynching images would intensify racial prejudice and provoke antagonism against them. In 1937, the *Crisis* printed a letter from a reader who criticized the magazine's decision to publish the photograph of Shaw's lynched body. "Such publicity tends to increase race hatred," averred the letter writer, echoing the arguments made against *The Birth of a Nation*. For this viewer, the photograph was so tied to the white supremacist narrative that he imagined that viewers would see not a victim but a black criminal deserving of his fate. The editors responded that they believed that "the sheer horror of lynching serves to

Mobs Act, While —



International News Photo.

This is a picture of the lynching of Lint Shaw, killed by a mob near Royston, Ga., April 28, 1936, eight hours before he was scheduled to go on trial on a charge of attempted assault. There was another lynching in Georgia on April 29, 1936 and still another in Arkansas on May 3, 1936



U. S. Senators Talk:

PREVENTION OF LYNCHING

EXTRACT FROM CONGRESSIONAL RECORD

OF

May 12, 1936

The bill (S. 24) to assure to persons within the jurisdiction of every State the equal protection of the laws by discouraging, preventing, and punishing the crime of lynching was announced as next in order.

Mr. McKELLAR (of Tennessee, and other Senators). Let that bill go over.

Mr. COPELAND (of New York). Mr. President, I wish the Senators would withhold their objections for a moment until I may say a word.

Mr. McKELLAR. I withhold the objection.

Mr. COPELAND. I think this bill, the anti-lynching bill, ought at some time to have a vote of the Senate. Regardless of what its fate may be, it is only right, as I view the matter, that there should be an opportunity to vote upon it.

From my State I have insistent demands that something be done regarding this bill. Regardless of how I may feel about it personally, I think it is only right that before the end of the session there shall be an opportunity to have a vote on a matter so important as this.

Mr. LEWIS (of Illinois). Mr. President, may I be pardoned if I ask the Senator from New York whether it would not be appropriate at least that some action be taken looking to setting a special time for the consideration of the bill?

Mr. SMITH (of South Carolina). No.

Mr. McKELLAR. Let the bill go over.

Mr. KING (of Utah). Over.

Mr. LEWIS. Mr. President, I am propounding a query.

Mr. COPELAND. I hope Senators will bear with me a moment until I answer the Senator from Illinois. I think it would be wise to have the bill made a special order.

Mr. ROBINSON (of Arkansas). Mr. President, this bill was brought forward during the last session, and was discussed for a great many days. I am satisfied that it would not be practicable to take it up again during the present session.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection having been made, the bill will be passed over.

FIGURE 6.8 Antilynching advertisement showing the lynching of Lint Shaw, Royston, Georgia, 1936, *Crisis*, June 1936. Courtesy of the Crisis Publishing Co. Inc.

rouse ordinarily lethargic people to action," indicating that their intention was to incite an emotional response. They called on their readers to offer their own opinions and published a selection of responses in the following issue. The readers in that selection unanimously agreed with the magazine's decision to print lynching photographs, confirming the *Crisis*'s own argument that the pictures were gruesome but necessary tools to arouse the national conscience. According to these readers, photographs provided a truthful depiction that could capture attention and educate the "indifferent" and "uninformed." One reader, identified as the chair of the public relations committee for the American Federation of Teachers, wrote that "to fight lynching, every available means of publicity must be employed." Another female reader noted that "a picture seen or described gets under the skin as no argument can."[36]

THESE READERS' REMARKS attest to the fact that, by 1937, lynching opponents had successfully erased the white supremacist narrative imprinted in the photographs and, by reframing the images, had replaced it with an antilynching narrative. This antilynching narrative focused attention not on black victimhood or suffering but on the savagery of white mobs, mobs that stood as abominations to American democratic ideals. In doing so, activists effectively used lynching photographs to overturn the rhetorical claims of white supremacy and to position African Americans and their allies as the true defenders of civilized morality.[37]

The use of captions and headlines did much to impose this new ideological truth on the images. Editors' use of text, in many ways, mirrored the signs white spectators displayed beside lynched bodies and the personal reports they scrawled on the backs of lynching postcards. Editors, for instance, commonly juxtaposed images with language that derided white southerners' claims to moral superiority, often by using the words of lynch mobs or their defenders against them. In the *New York Amsterdam News*, the headline that accompanied a front-page photograph of the 1938 lynching of C. C. Williams in Rustin, Louisiana, consisted only of a quote from one witness: "Then We Rammed a Red Hot Poker into Him." The caption below the image quoted the witness in full while noting that the picture depicted "300 blood-mad white American citizens" perpetrating America's "GREATEST SPORT." The witness's "gleeful" words were thus recontextualized to indict the perpetrators. Similarly, in its caption of a photograph from the 1933 lynching of Freddie Moore in Labadieville, Louisiana, the *Chicago Defender* drew readers' attention to the sign white spectators were holding up

to the camera: "Niggers, let this be an example." In doing so, the *Chicago Defender* transformed the implication of the word "example" so that it stood as a message of white injustice and hypocrisy. In fact, a sardonic headline above the image read "What Louisiana Worships." With the same acerbic irony, the *Pittsburgh Courier* included in its caption of a photograph from the 1930 lynching of George Hughes in Sherman, Texas, the lines "Texas Justice Has Its Fling" and "The Southern White Man's Glory . . . Pictured as Texas Mob Turns Savage."[38]

Activists often tied these critiques of white supremacist claims to larger nationalist claims of American superiority, particularly in light of U.S. foreign policy. They regularly pointed out that, although the U.S. government felt entitled and obligated to indict other nations for their blatant disregard for human equality and their undemocratic principles, it had denied African Americans full citizenship and had systematically refused to protect them from lynching violence. Soon after the 1916 Waco lynching, the *Chicago Defender* printed an editorial drawing of several black men hanging from trees with a caption that read, "Shall the American Republic be pointed with scorn by the foreign powers as a barbarous nation? . . . Why Mexico? Why bother about Germany or Japan? No civilized nation has disgraced itself with the above scenes in the past fifty years." In 1930, the paper echoed this rhetoric in its caption accompanying a photograph of George Hughes's burned corpse. First, in a deft racial twist, it questioned the "decent people, the churchgoers, those who belonged to civic clubs and the Y.M.C.A." who "resorted to cannibalism unknown even in the most remote part of Congo. Suddenly they became beasts, worse than any savage." Turning to American anticommunism, it asked, "Why raise the hue and cry about Godless Russia? Nothing in Russia equals the above. . . . Godless Russia? No! Godless America!" Likewise, in a 1934 advertisement for the NAACP campaign for antilynching legislation, the *Crisis* gave an unidentified photograph of a lynched black man the sardonic headline "My Country, 'Tis of Thee, Sweet Land of Liberty." Beneath the image, the text read, "This is a picture of what happens in America—*and no other place on earth*.".[39]

Lynching became a particular source of embarrassment to the United States when foreign newspapers published lynching photographs. In 1934, the NAACP sent its report on Claude Neal's lynching, including the photograph of his nude, hanged body, to 144 newspapers in forty countries, and at least one, *El Nacional*, Mexico City's leading newspaper, published the report and a scathing critique of U.S. racism on its front page. Throughout the 1930s, lynching accounts and photographs appeared in newspapers in

Nazi Germany as evidence of American barbarism and hypocrisy compared to what Nazis perceived to be their more civilized and orderly police state. Because the Nazi press felt sympathetic to America's racial caste system, it expressed outrage that the United States condemned Germany for its racist practices, and the press sought, in turn, to assert German superiority. One newspaper in Berlin, for instance, published a graphic account that denounced the Duck Hill lynchings and commented that "fairy tales of horror" about Nazism were regularly printed in the U.S. press. The liberal press in the United States also liked to point out this hypocrisy, recognizing, as the *New Republic* did just after the San Jose lynchings in 1933, that "Hitler and his cohorts . . . must have read the recent dispatches with wry smiles."[40]

In criticizing American lynching practices, black activists were asserting the human and citizenship rights of lynch mob victims and, in turn, positing themselves as rightful and patriotic defenders of American principles. In its post-Waco editorial, the *Chicago Defender* not only compared the United States unfavorably to Mexico, Germany, and Japan but also implored white politicians for help: "If our race is good enough to give you our votes, then as American citizens, WE DEMAND PROTECTION." A 1942 cartoon in the *Chicago Defender* crystallized this sentiment in its rendering of an iconic lynched black man, hanging with flames lapping his feet and flanked by two other hanging figures—"National Unity" and "Democracy"—reminiscent of the three figures of the crucifixion. The hanged black man is labeled "Lynched American," bestowing on him the citizenship he was otherwise denied (figure 6.9). In these ways, antilynching activists reconfigured the prolynching narrative to construct a patriotic African American identity against white brutality.[41]

This commentary represented a larger rhetorical shift in black activism. After World War I, rather than explaining lynching as an outcome of deeply rooted racist structures and institutions, as had, for instance, Ida B. Wells, African American activists increasingly attacked lynch mobs, in their primal savagery, as disgraces to democracy and modern civilization. In doing so, they characterized lynching as an American, rather than a particularly southern, form of injustice—even though most lynchings still occurred in the South. White lynching opponents since the late nineteenth century had accentuated this argument, positing lynching as a barbaric menace to law and order rather than a historically or regionally specific tactic within a larger system of racial oppression. As federal antilynching legislation came closer to passage in the 1920s and 1930s, black lynching opponents adopted this rhetoric to appeal to white liberals and moderates in both the North

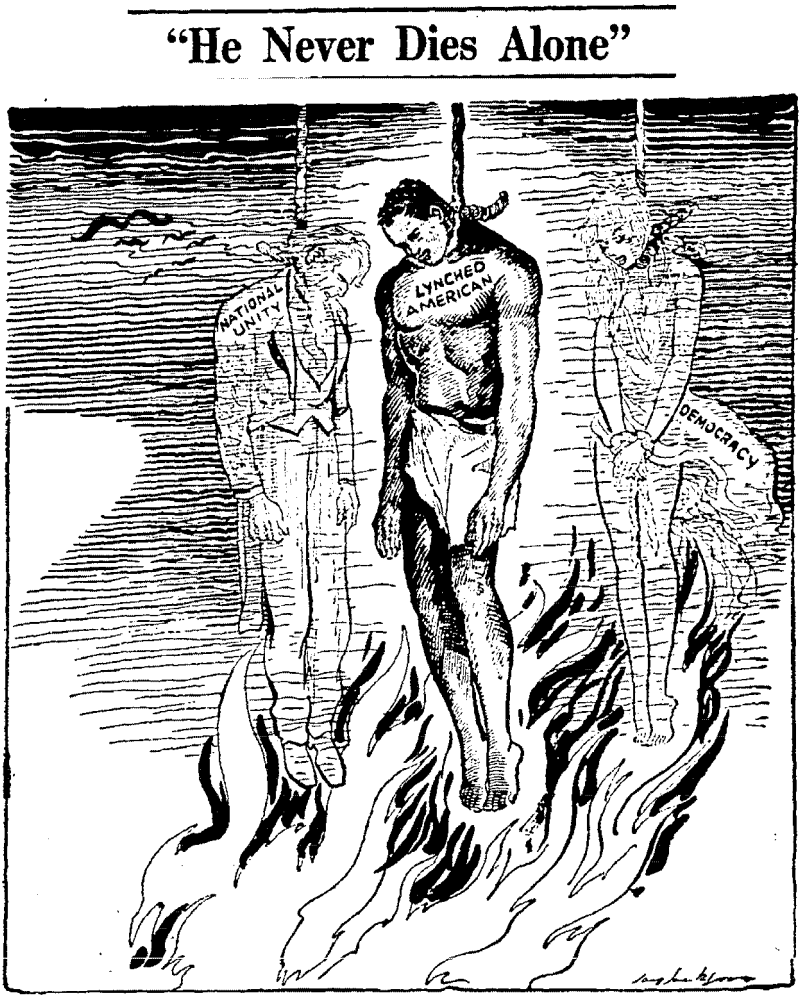


FIGURE 6.9 Antilynching cartoon, *Chicago Defender*, 7 February 1942. Courtesy of the *Chicago Defender*.

and the South, who often expressed sympathy for white fears about black criminality even as they criticized the lawless violence of lynching. To be sure, in more detailed, analytical denunciations of lynching, these activists explained lynching as a mechanism to ensure white racial and economic domination over African Americans. But their political rhetoric, and imagery, made surprisingly little mention of race or racial prejudice. In fact, the black victim—a too visible reminder of black criminality—became largely eclipsed, while the members of the mob, as defilers of justice and law, moved to the center of antilynching discourse.[42]

Editors' decisions about how to contextualize lynching photographs mirrored, and even shaped, this discourse. Photographs, in their two-dimensionality, were particularly well suited for a simpler, more schematic argument that could unify lynching opponents, who often differed on the tactics and goals of the antilynching movement, in their collective shock and horror. Rarely did captions and lynching reports provide information about the victim beyond his name and age, although editors frequently commented on the lack of information about the white participants. What is more, although editors most likely had very little control over the photographs they had access to, it is striking that photographs depicting only the lynched man's body were exceptional in the black press. But even in images that foregrounded the lynched man's body, captions regularly drew focus away from the corpse and onto the white perpetrators. The NAACP antilynching pamphlet noted above that reproduced a photograph from the 1935 lynching of Rubin Stacy in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, included text that read, "Do not look at the Negro. His earthly problems are ended. Instead, look at the seven WHITE children who gaze at this gruesome spectacle." The caption compared the physical torture Stacy endured "for a few short hours" to the "psychological havoc . . . being wrought in the minds of the white children," as if to imply that the real victim of lynching was white society itself (figure 6.6).[43] As noted in earlier chapters, pointing out the women and children among lynching spectators was a common rhetorical device, since it cut into white supremacist claims that lynch mobs were protecting the most vulnerable members of their communities.

The discourse that figured mobs as savages beneath the veneer of civilization coincided with popular understandings in this period of civilization as a fragile institution restraining humans' primal impulses. Lynching, accordingly, was primarily an expression of a natural human reaction to crime that legal institutions otherwise inhibited. In 1935, for instance, the *Crisis* published short analyses of the Claude Neal lynching by several psychologists, who described the violence as "an orgiastic celebration" and a form of "sexual perversion" performed by "primitive sadists" similar to that "practiced by savage and semi-savage peoples." In the late nineteenth century, white supremacists had based their claims of racial superiority on the same Darwinian and Freudian conceptions of civilization, believing that whites represented a more advanced race, further removed from and better able to control their primitive desires. This thinking still had currency in the 1930s, especially as both psychoanalysis and evolutionary theory had been popu-

larized in the 1920s. By this time, however, Americans were accustomed to conceiving of savagery as a universal concept rather than one specific to a racial group—after all, World War I had introduced them to the specter of the savage "Huns." This thinking also reflected an intellectual interest in the social psychology of race hatred and mob behavior, as manifest not only in U.S. racial structures but also in colonialism and fascism. The persistence of racist feelings and violence in the modern world flew in the face of liberal trust that modern progress and development would inexorably lead to more rational and enlightened sensibilities. Race hatred and mob violence thus came to be studied and understood as antimodern and irrational, symptoms of psychological sickness and degeneration. Antilynching activists were shaped by, and took keen advantage of, this thinking, positioning themselves in opposition to lynch mobs as orderly, civilized, and modern.[44]

IT IS STRIKING that in printing lynching photographs, the black press was transforming its largely African American readership into spectators of an act of violence that, though intended to terrorize them, was not necessarily performed *for* them. After all, despite the threats and warnings that white crowds sometimes held up for the camera's view, African Americans were not expected to be the primary witnesses to the spectacle of lynching. As has been shown, lynching photographs were primarily messages to other whites that amplified and solidified their own power and unity. Indeed, African American spectators and bystanders, the purported recipients of those menacing signs, are conspicuously absent from most lynching accounts and images. Whereas at legal executions, the presence of African Americans was well noted—the family of the condemned, the clergy who read him his last rites, and the black spectators who witnessed his final moments—lynching accounts in the white press resounded with their disappearance: the family members who decline to claim the body, the townspeople who hide behind closed doors, the absence of coverage of black resistance or protest. Thus when African Americans do appear in lynching photographs, their presence is jarring. In the photograph of Rubin Stacy's lynching, a black woman, dressed in uniform and most likely a nanny accompanying one of the young children in the photograph, appears behind a spectator, her face obscured by the young man in front of her (figure 6.6). She stands sideways, the only figure in the crowd who is gazing at neither the camera nor Stacy's corpse. "Do not look at the Negro," the NAACP's caption commands, further obscuring her reaction. Her presence is easily overlooked, reproducing the ways

in which the mourning, fear, and anger that African Americans in these localities experienced was largely invisible in both pro- and antilynching accounts.[45]

For many African Americans, especially those in large northern cities, seeing lynching images in newspapers and NAACP pamphlets might have been their only direct visual encounters with lynching. The photographs may have satisfied any morbid curiosity they had to see the invisible terror, one that was perhaps more terrifying precisely because it was shrouded from view. In instances when bodies were left in public spaces for days after the lynching, local blacks certainly viewed them—they could not escape from viewing them—much like the woman in the Rubin Stacy photograph. There are also instances in which the lynched black body was brought before black communities as a warning and a threat. A representative from the NAACP described in a telegram to the governor of Tennessee one particularly frightening act of terror. A lynch mob in Erwin, Tennessee, in 1918 forced "the whole Negro population" to "line up and witness [the] burning" of Thomas Devert. The previous year, the severed head of Ell Person, burned to death in Memphis, Tennessee, was apparently thrown onto Beale Street, a location dominated by black-owned businesses. The local edition of the *Defender* carried the photograph of Person's head, making note that the atrocity was "not the work of the Germans, but the South." In printing the image, the paper extended and reconceptualized the African American witnessing that the mob intended on Beale Street.[46]

We know lamentably very little about how African Americans responded to or felt about these acts of witnessing, whether they unconditionally received them as messages of intimidation or treated them as sites of mourning. Similarly, much more needs to be known about the ways in which African Americans privately reappropriated lynching photographs. Although they most likely lamented the local circulation of lynching photographs, they at times collected and circulated them as tokens of mourning and memory. Legal scholar Patricia Williams has written that her aunt owned lynching photographs and that these pictures were commonly passed around African American communities to memorialize specific victims. Similarly, in Laurens County, South Carolina, black members of the community preserved the photograph of Richard Puckett's lynching to remember his murder. As memorializations of lynched corpses, lynching photographs eerily replicated postmortem memorial photography, a photographic convention that persisted, particularly in rural communities, well into the twentieth

century. Preserving likenesses of loved ones produced just after they died, or laid out in coffins, was a popular means for Americans of various classes and ethnicities to grieve for lost family members. The realism of the photograph, by providing a lifelike portrait, aided the bereaved in their grief and provided a tangible memory of the deceased.[47]

For white southerners, the production of lynching images seemed to mock postmortem photography's sentimental memorialization of the dead. In the photograph of Charlie Hale's lynching (figure 3.11), the mob placed a sign on his body that read, "PLEASE DO NOT WAKE," a sign that takes on more meaning when understood within popular turn-of-the-century conceptions of death as an eternal, peaceful sleep. The image of death as sleep was made manifest in funeral photography, particularly in the 1890s and after, that depicted the deceased as if at tranquil rest in bed or in a coffin replete with cushions and pillows. For the lynchers to place this sign on Hale's body was to impose, with satire, the sentimentality of late Victorian notions of death on the distinctly unsentimental figure of a lynching. For black southerners to reappropriate these images as mourning photographs was, in some sense, to reimpose sentimentality on them, framing the deceased as someone with loved ones who mourn his death; he is thus conferred with dignity through them.[48]

Considering that these practices happened locally, it is significant that some black-owned papers in the South were more circumspect than those in the North in publishing lynching photographs. Lynching photographs undoubtedly assumed a more immediate terrorizing power in Georgia and Virginia than they did in New York and Chicago. For example, after the lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abe Smith in Marion, Indiana, African American residents were reportedly furious that local whites had produced and distributed a photograph of the lynching (figure 3.13). Local NAACP representatives protested and even interrupted its sale in both Marion and nearby Terre Haute. Although the NAACP as an organization regularly sought out and publicized lynching photographs, within and around the lynching locality, the photograph still bore the weight of its terror against African Americans, and its sale in the community commodified that violence. The image could not stand as an icon against racial injustice because it was too tied to a specific incident. Indeed, in lynching localities, fears that photographs might incite "racial antagonism" were felt with an urgency that did not exist in a national context.[49]

In this respect, as much as southern black papers like the *Atlanta Daily*

World and the *Richmond (Va.) Planet* took firm stands against lynching, to publish images that white southerners wanted to retain control over would have been to take too great a risk. The *Atlanta Daily World* did print a photograph of John Holmes and Thomas Thurmond, lynched in San Jose, California, but it did so only with the apologetic explanation that it was a "duty," one surely made easier by the facts, as noted below, that Holmes and Thurmond were white and the lynching occurred outside the South. The newspaper did not, however, publish photographs of the most sensational and public lynchings of African Americans throughout the 1930s. When Lint Shaw was lynched in Royston, Georgia, in 1936, the paper covered the incident heavily because of its relative proximity to Atlanta but did not print the image of his lynched body that circulated through the International News Photo Agency and appeared in several other black papers in the North—even though presumably it also had access to the photograph.[50]

The paper instead chose to publish photographic portraits of Shaw and his family, images that are surprising for their rarity. As noted above, although it did sometimes offer more personal details about victims, certainly more than the white press did, the northern black press tended to render victims emblems of American barbarism to promote antilynching legislation. Photographs of victims when they were still alive—images that resurrected lynched corpses—did at times appear in the pages of black newspapers, but in the forms of mug shots and images of the men in police custody flanked by white officers, images that marked them as dangerous and criminal while reminding viewers that the lynching had thwarted the law.[51] But the *Atlanta Daily World* printed a photographic portrait of Lint Shaw, dressed in suit and tie and sitting in a tall chair, his legs spread open in manly confidence. The caption described him as a "handsome, 225-pound, 45-year old father of eleven children and pioneer resident of Danielsville, Ga." Both the image and its description belied the larger headline printed above, which described Shaw as a "helpless victim." In the next day's issue, the paper printed more "interesting glimpses into the life of Lint Shaw," which a staff photographer had taken after the lynching: an image of his home, a portrait of his wife and eleven children—their names and ages provided—and a close-up of his wife holding their youngest child. Though their faces, in the conventions of portrait photography that persisted in rural communities as late as the 1930s, are stoic and inscrutable, they provide a rare view into the violence lynching continued to exact long after the event itself. In humanizing Shaw and his family, the *Atlanta Daily World* may have done more to subvert the

intent and significance of the lynching photograph than reprinting it as part of an antilynching message would have done.[52]

WHEREAS ANTILYNCHING ACTIVISTS began printing photographs in pamphlets in the 1890s and in the wider black-owned media by the 1910s, white-owned papers in both the North and the South were more reluctant to adopt the practice, in part because they believed the images would be distasteful to readers. For instance, although the photograph of Thomas Shipp and Abe Smith's lynching circulated through a wire service, the *Marion (Ind.) Chronicle-Tribune*, as well as larger Indiana newspapers, chose not to print the photograph because editors deemed it "revolting" and not in "good taste."[53] Yet newspapers regularly printed sensational photographs of natural disasters and civic unrest with less concern for "good taste." Their circumspection about lynching photographs more likely reflected a deeper discomfort with racial violence. Lynching photographs were too graphic, too capable of inciting volatile and unmanageable emotional responses, including white guilt and shame. When viewed in light of opposite editorial choices made by the black press, these decisions to suppress lynching photographs appear only to soften the impact of lynching's horror.

In choosing not to print these images, editors concealed from public view the victims of lynching, a fact that was made more conspicuous in instances when editors did choose to print lynching photographs. These editorial choices mirrored and buttressed popular antilynching rhetoric, which increasingly sought to draw attention to lynching's negative impact on white society rather than on black personhood. Some papers that held strong antilynching positions did reproduce some photographs of lynching scenes, but rarely did they show the lynched body of the black victim. They more commonly printed images of people and places that obliquely gestured toward the lynching, visual metonyms that viewers' imaginations could fill in: local officials, the white victim of the black man's alleged crime, the site of the lynching, or the county courthouse or jail. The *Memphis News-Scimitar* printed three "exclusive photos" taken moments before J. P. Ivy was burned alive in Rocky Ford, Mississippi, in 1925, but the images depict only the white crowd surrounding Ivy. The series of photographs abruptly ends before the crowd committed any crime and before Ivy's suffering began. Other papers showed only the aftermath of lynchings, in many cases because photojournalists had not reached the scene until the next day. Photographs of national guardsmen on duty, for instance, appeared in the *Wash-*

ington Post after the Marion, Indiana, lynching and in the *Chicago Tribune* after the 1934 lynching of Claude Neal in Marianna, Florida. But neither paper reproduced the photographs of the lynching crowd or of the black men's corpses, which had appeared in several black-owned papers.[54]

Even when they did publish photographs from the scene of a lynching itself, white-owned papers were more likely to focus on the white crowd, enacting a displacement of the black body similar to that which the black press sought. Yet, unlike the black press, they erased the black body altogether. In doing so, they reflected the dominant thrust of antilynching opposition that placed the rhetorical focus on the lawlessness of white mobbers rather than on the wrongs committed against their victims. In a most telling instance, the *Chicago Tribune*, which had adopted a fierce, nationally recognized antilynching stance in 1892, when it began publishing yearly lynching statistics, published a photograph of the 1919 lynching of William Brown in Omaha, Nebraska. The photograph, which depicts a large group of white people leaning into the camera's view, grouped behind the sight of Brown's body being incinerated on a bonfire, also appeared in the NAACP's 1920 pamphlet *An Appeal to the Conscience of the Civilized World* (figure 6.10). Because this was one of the few lynching photographs that revealed a lynching in process—the action momentarily stopped so the photographer could snap a picture—it stood as a dreadful and vivid "appeal to conscience." But rather than reproduce this image in its entirety, the *Chicago Tribune* chose to crop Brown's burning body from it, on the grounds that it was "too revolting for publication." What remained was an amorphous mob of whites, an image that required clarification to have any meaning. "It is unique in the clearly defined faces of people at an actual lynching," the caption explained. "The expressions on the faces . . . are . . . a study in humankind in the mood of taking law into its own hands." Similarly, the *New York World* printed the photograph of the Marion, Indiana, double lynching but cropped it to depict only, as the headline read, "the spectators and participants in killing of negro boys." The text surrounding both these images called on viewers to scrutinize the mob to unlock the mystery of its brutality, when, in fact, what is most harrowing about these photographs is how normal the crowds appear—without the caption that denotes their purpose, they could be any crowd.[55] Not until 1937 did the body of a lynched black man appear on the pages of the mainstream press, when, amid congressional debate of the Gavagan bill, photographs of Robert McDaniels's and Roosevelt Townes's tortured bodies appeared in *Time* and *Life* magazines—a remarkable instance in which the struggling

FIGURE 6.10 The lynching of William Brown, Omaha, Nebraska, 1919. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

black body was made the center of antilynching discourse. These images later appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* as part of Senator Clark's antilynching poster. For the most part, however, white Americans were reluctant to witness the sight of lynched black men.[56]

Indeed, when two white men were lynched in San Jose, California, in 1933, all the rules regarding what could and could not be represented in the press changed. The case received a tremendous amount of attention—arguably more than any other lynching—and was the catalyst for the recrudescence of antilynching activism in the 1930s. The photographs of this lynching and their treatment in newspapers and magazines throughout the country confounded editors' previous claims that they declined to print lynching photographs out of decency. John Holmes and Thomas Thurmond had been the lead suspects in the kidnapping and murder of Brooke Hart, the son of a wealthy San Jose storeowner. For weeks, coverage of the crimes had dominated the local news, stirring the city populace into a frenzied desire for vengeance. Once authorities apprehended Holmes and Thurmond, a mob stormed the county jail, abducted the prisoners, took them to a nearby park, and hanged them before a crowd of thousands. Soon after the lynching,

California governor James Rolph issued a statement praising the lynching as "the best lesson that California has ever given the country" and promising that "if anyone is arrested for the good job, I'll pardon them all." Yet, although Rolph's assertion was stunning and the lynching itself was brutal, there was nothing exceptional about this chain of events within the history of lynching, except that they took place in California and the victims were white—facts that certainly startled those who otherwise dismissed lynching as a southern problem of race hatred.[57]

The lynching in San Jose also became a national spectacle because, for the first time, large mainstream presses chose to print lynching photographs. Since the lynching was announced beforehand, a number of news photographers were at the scene to document the entire event on film, despite that some members of the mob tried to stop them. Pictures of the crowd outside the jail, men battering down the jailhouse door, and crowds in the park where Holmes and Thurmond were hanged were emblazoned across the pages of almost every major newspaper in the country. Photographs were also made into postcards, and several were compiled in a "souvenir booklet" of the lynching, along with quotes from Governor Rolph's inflammatory defense of the mob. Some newspapers also printed pictures of Holmes and Thurmond while still alive. The *New York Journal* published photographs of Holmes's young children, who, according to the caption, would now have a "life clouded by sorrow and shame." Although the *New York Journal* was known for its sensational tabloid style, the images humanized the lynched man in a way that no white-owned papers ever did for African American victims.[58]

Remarkably, many newspapers across the country chose to print photographs of Holmes's and Thurmond's hanged bodies (figure 6.11). Because the mob had stripped Holmes nude and had removed Thurmond's trousers, these images were particularly indecent. For one postcard, a photographer manipulated the image to elongate Holmes's penis and make it appear semierect, a salacious alteration that would never have been made to a photograph of a black man's lynched body—to the contrary, as noted in chapter 3, black men's genitalia invariably were covered up for the camera. Most newspapers, however, managed to reproduce the photographs of Holmes and Thurmond without revealing their genitalia. Some, including *Time* magazine, published an image of Holmes's body turned so his backside faced the camera, while other papers altered the images to conceal the nudity. Several papers drew underwear or trousers on the men's bodies.[59]

These photographs were, understandably, deemed incendiary near San

FIGURE 6.11 The lynching of Thomas Thurmond and John Holmes, San Jose, California, 1933. This postcard was constructed from two photographs of the men. Prints and Photograph Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Courtesy of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Jose. A special edition of the *Oakland Post-Enquirer* had featured images from the lynching, including one that depicted Holmes's and Thurmond's nude bodies. The chief of police, however, seized all copies of the paper and, in addition, forbade the selling of lynching photographs in the city because he deemed them "indecent." City officials in San Francisco similarly banned the images, although entrepreneurs continued to sell bootleg copies of the *Oakland Post-Enquirer* for a handsome profit. The *San Jose News*, on the other hand, announced to its readers, with smug self-congratulation, that although it would publish no pictures from the lynching, it had not been "scooped." It simply had chosen, in "good taste," not to print the "gruesome and horrible pictures" so as not to shock "children and sensitive women." Yet, while it found the photographs of the lynching "gruesome and horrible," the paper's editorial on the lynching refrained from condemning the mob, deeming them a "vigilante committee" that had simply "demanded what they and the general public believed to be justice."[60]

Most news editors, politicians, and other officials around the country, however, spoke out with unparalleled vehemence against the San Jose

lynching and Governor Rolph's flimsy justification of it. With no violated white woman or frightening black criminal to contend with, San Jose put the crime of lynching into sharp relief as a travesty of justice and of due process, as a cold, thirsty act of savage vengeance. The photographs made this conception of lynching, one that obscured race and assuaged white Americans' sense of guilt and collective responsibility, visually evident—their circulation accentuated that some victims of lynching were white. Much like the eager spectators shown in one image from San Jose, straining for a better view, they could witness a lynching without having to bear witness to racial injustices. Antilynching activists seized on the moment, calling for the impeachment of Rolph and renewing efforts to enact federal antilynching legislation. Indeed, the expediency of the San Jose lynching to their cause was not lost on black lynching opponents. "As long as Negroes were the victims, it was nothing for the nation's leaders to get worked up about. But now the show begins to squeeze the other foot," wrote the editors of the *Atlanta Daily World*. They added, "If black men are mobbed and nothing is done, it means that eventually there will be white victims. So we have the San Jose massacre. Already sentiment in the right places is beginning to crystallize for federal anti-lynching laws." Not only did the San Jose lynching coincide with antilynching rhetoric that deflected attention away from race and characterized lynching as a barbaric attack on civilization itself, but it helped cement those arguments in the national consciousness.[61]

Corresponding to the dominant rhetoric of black-led antilynching activism, white opponents of lynching regularly conceptualized the primary victims of lynching as legal institutions and American democracy. As Representative Hamilton Fish, a Republican from New York, stated in defense of the Gavagan bill just after the Duck Hill lynching, "[Lynching] amount[s] to a rape of justice, liberty, civil rights, equal rights, human rights, human lives, and the Constitution itself." (The cartoon in figure 6.9 echoes this rhetoric.) This language, which stunningly inverted the prolynching defense, had the added effect of creating a sense of disidentification between white lynch mobs and white lynching opponents, a distance that could relieve opponents from feelings of culpability. In other words, although lynching opponents conveyed great shame that such atrocities were committed in America, their rhetoric simultaneously expressed a sense that a vast gulf existed between the "sadistic barbarians" who made up lynch mobs and themselves as upholders of American civilization.[62]

Southern liberals, who, through organizations like the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC) and the Association of Southern Women for

the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL), led by Jesse Daniel Ames, became the most organized and outspoken of white antilynching activists in the 1930s, echoed much of this same language. The official declaration of the Georgia chapter of the ASWPL, for example, stated, "The real victim in the crime of lynching, we affirm, is not the person done to death, but constituted and regularly established government." Similarly, the CIC's Southern Commission on the Study of Lynching declared in its 1931 report that "lynching makes a mockery of courts and citizenship. The state itself has been lynched." In their literature, white southern intellectuals and activists, like Ames, certainly recognized lynching as principally a southern problem and a southern disgrace, and they analyzed it as a practice that derived from the interplay of socioeconomic conditions and cultural attitudes concerning race, gender, and sex. But they also felt that lynching could best be opposed by persuading the potential participants in lynch mobs that lynching was to their own detriment, that they and their communities were lynching's primary victims. Their rhetoric thus stressed that lynching not only threatened law and order in southern communities but also corroded individual ethics and psyches.[63]

Although such rhetoric dovetailed with that of the NAACP, the organizations' goals and tactics were decidedly different. While the NAACP targeted African Americans and white moderates and liberals, mostly in the North, to garner support for federal antilynching legislation, the CIC and ASWPL primarily sought to change southern attitudes and behavior. Accordingly, while they did publicize lynchings, both the CIC and the ASWPL avoided using lynching photographs, since they did not want to alienate their southern audiences, who might deem this material incendiary. In this respect, Ames and her allies mirrored the circumspect rhetoric of southern journalists, who expressed shame about lynching by abandoning any sensational treatment of the topic. Indeed, the ASWPL sought to undermine lynching by convincing southern news editors to change the language and tone of lynching coverage to give less credence to mob violence.[64]

In this way, southern lynching opponents frequently expressed a sense of shame not for the blighting of national ideals but for the dishonor that lynching had brought to the South. Lynching "cheapens human life and lessens respect for human liberty and personality. It defeats the ends of justice," wrote sociologist and later CIC president Howard Odum in the *Nation* in 1931. "It violates all the better traditions of southern honor and ideals. . . . It negates the South's claim for excellence and genius in the science of politics." These arguments were repeated in editorials throughout the

South, as southern elites, like those in Waco, increasingly recognized lynching as a stain on the reputations of their states and communities. These voices became more frequent and amplified as the threat of federal anti-lynching legislation intensified throughout the 1930s—legislation that most southerners, including southern liberals, resisted as an attack on both states' rights and their honor.[65]

Although race and white supremacy were largely omitted from these discussions, most Americans in the 1930s would have been well aware that African Americans were the primary victims of lynching. As Ames stated at one early ASWPL meeting, "The word 'lynching' suggests race because one race almost exclusively is the victim of lynchers." This rhetorical shift was made possible in part because of the work of early activists like Ida B. Wells, who had successfully transformed the term "lynching" from one that, in the nineteenth century, denoted extralegal punishments to one that, by the twentieth century, denoted a mechanism for enforcing white supremacy.[66] Yet the consistent rhetorical absence of the black victim—and, in fact, his displacement by the "victimhood" of American ideals—together with the conspicuous absence of lynching photographs in the white-owned press, suggests that many white Americans preferred to keep race in the shadowed background of public discussions about lynching.

Southern news editors seemed to welcome the San Jose lynchings for precisely these reasons, especially because they drew attention away from the South and its "race problem." A number of southern newspapers broke with their standard visual suppression of lynching and, like their northern counterparts, printed photographs of Holmes's and Thurmond's lynched bodies.[67] To be sure, although they condemned the lynching, some editors did offer the familiar defense that the lynching occurred because most Americans were frustrated with the inefficiency of the legal system and outraged by the crime of kidnapping, which, as the *Jackson (Miss.) Clarion-Ledger* noted, aroused "passions . . . as strong as—and . . . akin to—those aroused by rape." But most southern editors denounced the lynching and Rolph's defense of it with an almost palpable relief that the South was not, this time, the object of national scorn. "Alabama has had its lynchings, but our governors have not condoned them," crowed the editors of the *Birmingham News*. The *Meridian (Miss.) Star*'s editorial on the San Jose lynchings likewise asserted almost gleefully that they had occurred "not in Mississippi or some other section of the country which eastern, northern, and western press delight to describe as the 'benighted south.'" Rather, "this so-called 'travesty on law' is perpetrated in the highly educated, well-behaved 'cul-

tured' and smug complacent San Jose in California," the editor wrote, adding that he hoped Californians would now be more tolerant of "occasional rope outbreaks throughout the South." Overall, he concluded, the lynchings in San Jose demonstrated that "primal feelings know neither section, creed nor boundary line. All of us are in measure savages beneath a thin so-called veneer." In editorials like these, editors did backbends to denounce lynching as "savage" and a "travesty" while defending the national reputation of their section.[68]

The San Jose lynchings allowed many white southerners to adopt the rhetoric of the national antilynching movement without feeling attacked as a region. By the mid-1930s, southern editors and politicians regularly condemned lynching as a barbaric and outmoded custom, one that threatened the social and economic progress of their states and communities. While they still at times attempted to explain why mobs felt compelled to lynch, as the above editorials did, they no longer openly applauded the violence, nor did they consider mobs to be members of an orderly and restrained citizenry.[69] By focusing on the language of lawlessness and civility, these southerners also could distance themselves from lynching without abandoning their white supremacist convictions, including the belief that African Americans were, by nature, less civilized and more prone to crime. In fact, these convictions gave antilynching rhetoric added force. The notion that whites were more restrained and law-abiding than blacks only made images of frenzied, lawless white mobs more embarrassing.

Coverage of lynching accordingly became more circumspect in the southern press, as editors recognized that sensational accounts, including the printing of photographs, would only compound the shame. Some smaller papers in the South stopped covering lynchings—even the most spectacular lynchings warranted no mention in small-town and county newspapers. Just as lynching opponents were appropriating media sensationalism to make lynching atrocities as visible as possible to the nation, southern papers that had previously lingered over the most grotesque details of lynching violence began to cloak that violence in a veil of invisibility. Images that were tolerable, even celebrated, on a local level became unacceptable when they were transferred beyond local boundaries.

Consequently, as lynching photographs were increasingly used in the service of lynching opposition, they became harder for opponents to obtain. As the remark in Waco that the photographs might bring "bad publicity" reveals, white southerners were well aware of the ill consequences when photographic recordings of their actions circulated outside their

localities. They thus became more protective about whom they showed and gave images to. (These concerns, surprisingly, did not stop them from posing for such pictures.) As noted in chapter 3, photojournalists at times met with resistance from mobs who physically attacked them or broke their cameras. Although some lynching photographs made their way to national wire services, the majority of images were taken by local photographers and remained in the lynching locality. After the 1917 lynching of Ell Person in Memphis, Tennessee, the *Chicago Defender* noted that, although photographs of Person's decapitated head were hawked on the streets of Memphis for twenty-five cents each, they were "sold only to whites." The paper boasted, "No one had a picture, but the combined efforts of the *Defender* force landed the above."[70]

In this climate, the NAACP and the black press obtained photographs through the resourceful practices of investigators, like Elizabeth Freeman, and from local sympathizers. In one instance, a traveling salesman—an outsider—took a photograph of a lynching in Florida and gave a copy to an African American police officer, who sent it on to the NAACP.[71] The photograph of Rubin Stacy used in the 1935 antilynching pamphlet shown in figure 6.6 was obtained, according to assistant secretary Roy Wilkins, through "a round-about way" from a staff photographer, H. Willoughby, at the *Miami Daily Tribune*. A Chicago man had written to Willoughby for a copy of the photo and then passed it on to the NAACP. Presumably the photographer would not have given the image directly to the organization. In 1937, the NAACP tried in vain to obtain the images of the Duck Hill lynching, but it was stymied by the national attention the lynching had received. The photographs of Townes and McDaniels's lynching were distributed by Campbell's Studio in Grenada, Mississippi, the largest town near Duck Hill. Yet the NAACP was told it could not purchase any. *Life*, which did print the photographs, wrote to the NAACP that "the pictures which we had were taken by someone who does not care to become a storm centre and has accordingly instructed us to refrain from giving his name to anyone." In fact, no pictures of the Duck Hill lynching ever appeared in the black press.[72]

That white southerners went to such great efforts to control the circulation and display of lynching photographs makes evident just how successful activists were in transforming their meaning. By the 1930s, these images came to represent, with iconic power, the most grotesque and egregious aspect of lynching, substantiating the notion that lynching was more than crude vigilantism—it was an atrocity. In this respect, the very spectacle of lynching, so vital to the construction and perpetuation of white supremacy,

carried with it the tools of its own dismantling. Yet, just as many white southerners were attempting to obscure this spectacle as much as possible from public view, Hollywood turned its cinematic gaze on lynching, making a series of liberal attacks on extralegal violence that dramatized and popularized the rhetoric of antilynching activists to a degree that the news media could not begin to match.

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