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# THE MOB STILL RIDES

A Review of the Lynching Record,  
1931-1935

COMMISSION ON INTERRACIAL COOPERATION  
710 Standard Building  
Atlanta, Ga.

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## FOREWORD

The twenty-one lynchings of 1930—as many as took place in the two previous years combined—gave rise to an exhaustive case study of the lynchings of that year by the Southern Commission on the Study of Lynching, an association of well-known citizens of the South who undertook the task at the request of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation. The results of that study were summarized in an eighty-page pamphlet, "Lynchings and What They Mean," and later in a 500-page volume entitled "The Tragedy of Lynching." These were written and compiled by Dr. Arthur F. Raper, Research Secretary of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, who directed and in large part conducted the studies.

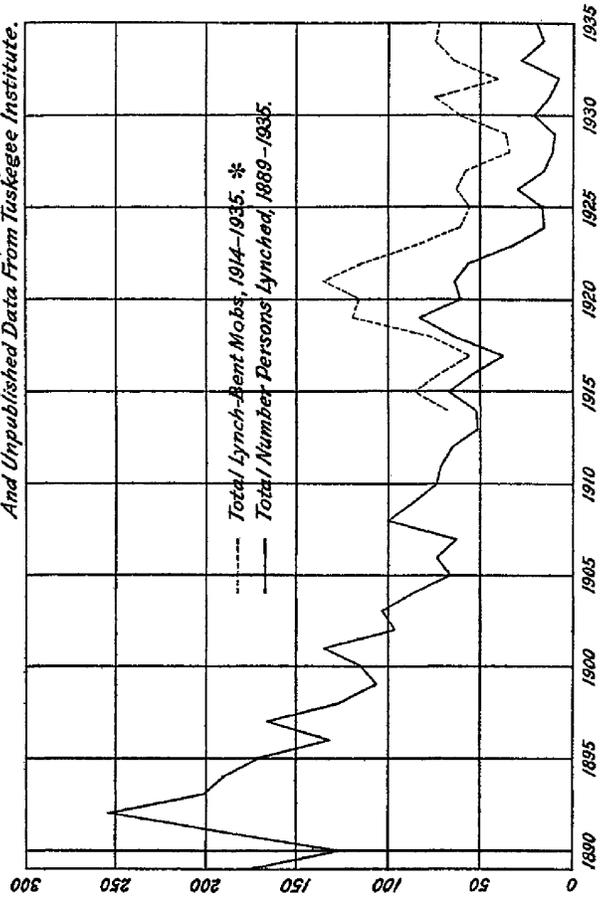
Five years have passed and the lynching habit seems as strongly entrenched as it was in 1930. The record, which meantime showed a most encouraging decrease to the "low" of eight in 1932, went up to twenty-eight the next year, and to twenty in 1935. Whatever the cause of this trend, it is most disquieting and indicates that the mob is still potentially and often actually in the saddle in large areas of our country.

Confident that society continues to endure these barbarities chiefly because of misapprehension as to their nature and results, we are convinced that the fundamental remedy is to bring the facts into the limelight and keep them there. That, in brief, is the purpose of this little volume, in which Dr. Raper summarizes the results of careful studies, made by himself and Prof. Walter Chivers, of the eighty-four lynchings of the past five years. It is confidently commended to all who wish to know the truth regarding these tragic occurrences.

Commission on Interracial Cooperation.

# MOB VIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES, 1889-1935

*Data From Negro Year Book, 1931-32,  
And Unpublished Data From Tuskegee Institute.*



\*The space between the two lines indicates the number of threatened lynchings prevented.

# THE MOB STILL RIDES

## A Review of the Lynching Record, 1931-1935

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A study of the eighty-four lynchings of the past five years reveals the following facts:

(1) A larger proportion of the lynchings of this period occurred in the South than ever before, and a larger proportion of the victims were Negroes.

(2) Eleven per cent of the mob victims were not accused of any crime; an additional thirty per cent were accused only of minor offenses. Of the other fifty-nine per cent, many were not guilty of the crimes with which they were charged.

(3) Contrary to the general impression that rape is the chief cause of lynching, only eleven per cent of the victims were even accused of this crime. Scarcely one-fourth were accused of rape and attempted rape combined.

(4) Courts rarely indict lynchers, more rarely convict, and almost never impose sentences commensurate with the crime. Indictments have been returned in but one lynching in twelve, and convictions in scarcely one in thirty.

(5) There is evidence that peace officers participated in several lynchings, and connived at many more.

(6) Over nine-tenths of the lynchings occurred in the open country, and a little over four-fifths in counties where the per capita income and taxable wealth were below those of their respective states. Over three-fourths of the threatened lynchings prevented were also in the poorer rural counties.

(7) When a mob does not lynch it sometimes dominates the court, and so brings about a "legal lynching."

(8) Nearly twenty per cent of the persons lynched and threatened by mobs were mental defectives.

(9) The number of lynchings declined from a yearly average of 124 between 1895 and 1905, to seventy between 1905 and 1915, to fifty-three between 1915 and 1925, and to seventeen between 1925 and 1935. The past decade, however, shows more lynchings in the latter half than in the first half—the only decade in which this was true.\* The number of attempted lynchings also rose during the latter half of the decade.

The optimism of ten years ago is waning; lynchings are not fading naturally from the American scene; the mob still rides.

### I. GEOGRAPHIC AND RACIAL FACTORS

The typical lynching is in the rural South, the mob victim is a Negro, the lynchers are native-born whites, and the courts punish no one. Though some lynchings occur outside the South and some victims are white, lynching is increasingly a Southern and a racial phenomenon. In the last decade of the last century nearly one-fifth of the nation's lynchings were outside the South and nearly one-third of the victims were white; during the past five years scarcely one-twentieth of the lynchings have occurred outside the South and adjacent states, and scarcely one-tenth of the victims have been white.

The facts are clear to anyone who sits before a map of the United States and studies the record: Of the eighty-four persons lynched in the last five years, seventy-two were in the Southern States and eight in states adjacent—

\*This is for 1925-1934, inclusive. The record of twenty lynchings for 1935 exceeds the average for the preceding decade, or for either half of it.

two in Maryland, two in West Virginia, two in Missouri, one in Ohio, and one in Kansas. Of the other four, three were in California, one in North Dakota.

All but nine of the victims were Negroes. Three of the nine white victims were lynched in California, two in Tennessee, and one each in North Dakota, Kentucky, Kansas, and Florida.

## II. LYNCHED ON MINOR ACCUSATIONS

Nine of the eighty-four mob victims in the past five years were not accused of any crime, and twenty-five others were accused only of minor offenses. The following cases from the 1935 lynching record are illustrative:

On October 16, ten miles from Moultrie, Georgia, "Bo" Brinson, an unaccused Negro, was killed in his home by a mob looking for John Henry Sloan, who had killed a white man the evening before. Just before killing the unarmed Brinson, the mob had tortured another innocent man, an old feeble-minded Negro falsely suspected of knowing where Sloan was.

In De Soto County, Mississippi,<sup>1</sup> the body of T. A. Allen, a Negro preacher, was found in a creek. On his coat was an "Every Man a King" button, and he was said to have been an organizer of Share-the-Wealth Clubs.

At Tampa, Florida,<sup>2</sup> Joseph Shoemaker, white, alleged communist, died of injuries inflicted by a mob which flogged, tarred, and feathered him.

Near Calhoun City, Miss.,<sup>3</sup> Bodie Bates was lynched, accused of having appeared at a girl's bedroom window, threatening to break in. The mob justified this lynching on the ground that the Negro's offense was not serious enough to justify a severe court sentence.

In Dooly County, Georgia,<sup>4</sup> Louis Harris, Negro, was lynched. He was accused of being drunk and drawing a gun on the sheriff who was attempting to arrest him. As Harris was being transferred by the sheriff from Vienna to Cordele, a mob took him and lynched him.

At Maringouin, Louisiana,<sup>5</sup> Anderson Ward, Negro, was lynched for defending himself with a knife against a white man who was trying to shoot him.

Near Columbus, Mississippi,<sup>6</sup> Bert Moore and Dooly Morton, accused of attempted attacks on a white woman, were lynched. Investigation of this case leads to the belief that the intruders were looking for money.

Near White Bluff, Cheatham County, Tennessee,<sup>7</sup> Baxter Bell, Negro, was lynched for slapping a white woman who was drinking beer in a Negro store.

The accusations against persons lynched between 1931 and 1934 also show many minor offenses. In the five lynchings which occurred in Georgia during this period, three of the victims were not accused of any crime, and one other was charged with a minor offense: In Baker County, in June 1933, a Negro killed a white bootlegger at a Negro dance. When the "right man" could not be found, two unaccused Negroes were lynched as object lessons. In October, 1933, Sevis Davis, Negro, a victim of shell shock, was lynched at Richland, Stewart County,<sup>8</sup> accused of resisting arrest. A year later,<sup>9</sup> Curtis James, Negro, was lynched in McIntosh County, for implicating others in the bootlegging of turpentine from a local still. The one remaining lynching in Georgia during this period occurred at Warrenton,<sup>10</sup> when William Kinsey was lynched for killing a white man in self-defense.

Of the four Negroes lynched in South Carolina in 1933—the only lynchings in that state during the last five years—two were not charged with any crime whatever and the other two were accused only of minor offen-

1. March 29, 1935.  
2. December 1, 1935.  
3. August 5, 1935.  
4. September 28, 1935.  
5. March 3, 1935.

6. July 15, 1935.  
7. November 4, 1935.  
8. October 23, 1933.  
9. October 7, 1934.  
10. May 12, 1933.

ses. Benjamin Thompson was lynched at Ninety-six<sup>11</sup> as the result of an argument with white men concerning his relations with a Negro woman. George Greene, a farm tenant of Greenville County, was shot to death in his home at midnight by a masked mob;<sup>12</sup> the only apparent reason was that he had repeatedly asked for a settlement for his crop. Norris Dendy, lynched at Clinton on July 4, was accused of reckless driving when leaving the scene of a Negro picnic where he had gotten into an altercation with a white truck driver over the merits of their respective trucks. George Jeter, lynched in Aiken County,<sup>13</sup> was accused of stealing liquor from white bootleggers.

Of the twelve Negro mob victims in Mississippi between 1931 and 1934, six were lynched for minor offenses: James Sanders, Hinds County,<sup>14</sup> for writing an insulting letter; Henry Bedford, Rankin County,<sup>15</sup> for talking disrespectfully; Reuben McCou, Winston County,<sup>16</sup> for slapping a white boy; a Negro man, in Lowndes County,<sup>17</sup> for "insulting" a white woman; Richard Roscoe, Leflore County,<sup>18</sup> for wounding a white man in an altercation; Coleman Franks, Lowndes County,<sup>19</sup> for slightly wounding a white man. The remaining six persons lynched in Mississippi during these four years were accused of serious crimes: two of murder and four of attempted rape. At least one of the latter, however, was falsely accused.

ACCUSATIONS AGAINST PERSONS LYNCHED\*  
1930-1935, 1889-1930

| Year        | Homicide | Felonious Assault | Rape | Attempted Rape | Robbery & Theft | Insult to White Women | Other | Total |
|-------------|----------|-------------------|------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------|-------|
| 1931        | 5        | —                 | —    | 5              | —               | —                     | 3     | 13    |
| 1932        | 2        | 1                 | 1    | 1              | —               | 1                     | 2     | 8     |
| 1933        | 10       | —                 | 3    | 3              | —               | 1                     | 11    | 28    |
| 1934        | 2        | —                 | 2    | 4              | —               | 1                     | 6     | 15    |
| 1935        | 7        | 1                 | 3    | —              | 2               | 1                     | 6     | 20†   |
| Total       | 26       | 2                 | 9    | 13             | 2               | 4                     | 28    | 84    |
| 1889-1930   | 1,399    | 214               | 622  | 249            | 267             | 66                    | 897   | 3,714 |
| Grand Total | 1,425    | 216               | 631  | 262            | 269             | 70                    | 925   | 3,798 |

\* Data secured from "The Negro Year Book, 1931-1932," p. 294, and from materials subsequently secured from the Department of Records and Research, Tuskegee Institute.

† This is a tentative figure for 1935; it does not include any one of the five Negroes reported to have been killed in Alabama in connection with the Share Croppers Union, the cotton choppers' strike, and the cotton pickers strike. The proper classification of these cases is now under consideration by Tuskegee's Department of Records and Research.

Other persons lynched for minor offenses between 1931 and 1934 include Sonny Griggs, Negro, in Newton County, Texas,<sup>20</sup> for associating with a white woman, who was also taken into custody and held for questioning; James Wilkerson, Negro, in Coffee County, Tennessee,<sup>21</sup> for striking a white man; Rex Scott, Negro, in Perry County, Kentucky,<sup>22</sup> for wounding a white man in an altercation; an unidentified Negro, in Jefferson County, Alabama,<sup>23</sup> for "insulting" a white woman; Dock Rogers, Negro, in Pender County, North Carolina,<sup>24</sup> for slightly wounding, by accident, the wife of a white bootlegger with whom he was quarreling over a purchase of liquor; Fell Jenkins, Negro, in Claiborne Parish, Louisiana,<sup>25</sup> for no crime; Luke Murray, Negro, in Lawrence County, Ohio,<sup>26</sup> for threatening a white man with a knife.

11. October 9, 1933.
12. November 17, 1933.
13. February 19, 1933.
14. July 16, 1934.
15. July 25, 1934.
16. April 16, 1933.
17. July 22, 1933.
18. September 18, 1933.

19. November 7, 1931.
20. June 23, 1934.
21. June 24, 1934.
22. January 24, 1934.
23. August 23, 1934.
24. August 27, 1933.
25. January 10, 1933.
26. June 11, 1932.

Lynchings on minor charges are not peculiar to the last five years. During the past half century more persons have been lynched on such charges than for any other cause, with the single exception of homicide. The fifty-year record runs thirty-seven per cent for homicide, six per cent for felonious assault, sixteen per cent for rape, seven per cent for attempted rape, seven per cent for theft, two per cent for insult to white persons, and twenty-five per cent for miscellaneous minor offenses, such as trying to act like a white man, bringing suit against a white man, refusing to pay a note, seeking employment in a restaurant, being boastful, and taking sides with a Negro in a fight with a white man. It should be noted that contrary to the common impression, less than one-sixth of the 3,798 persons lynched since 1889 have been accused of rape, and less than one-fourth have been accused of rape and attempted rape combined.

### III. UNFOUNDED ACCUSATIONS

It should be observed also that there is often a marked difference between the reported and the real accusations against the person lynched. The following cases from recent years are by no means unique:

The lynching last fall of Elwood Higginbotham, Negro, at Oxford, Mississippi, forcibly illustrates this difference. According to the newspaper reports Higginbotham had "murdered" a white man. Higginbotham's trial, however, showed clearly that the charge against him should have been "justifiable homicide"—he had killed the white man in self-defense when the latter, in company with others, came to his house at night, broke down his door and pushed into his bedroom with a flashlight in one hand and a pistol in the other.

At Franklinton, Washington Parish, Louisiana, in January 1935, Jerome Wilson was lynched. Accused of shooting an officer, he had been tried, found guilty and sentenced to death. The case was then appealed to the Louisiana Supreme Court, which ordered a new trial. Three days later the mob took Wilson from the jail and lynched him. The original trouble had arisen when a range rider went to the home of the landowning Wilsons to check on the report that one of their mules had not been dipped. Since he made no explanation of his mission and exhibited no evidence of his legal right to inspect the stock, the Negroes demanded that he get out of the lot. He resented this independence, went away angry, and returned later with a number of armed officers. Shots were fired and returned and in the fusilade one of the officers was killed. There is reason to believe that he was shot by a fellow officer, since the Wilsons had only shotguns and the officer apparently was shot with a pistol. Nevertheless Jerome Wilson was accused of the crime and lynched for it before the courts had a chance finally to pass upon his guilt.

On the night of May 12, 1933, William Kinsey, Negro tenant farmer, was lynched in Warren County, Georgia. He was accused of "murder"; actually he had killed a white man in self-defense. The trouble had arisen during the day when a young white landlord upbraided the Negro for not plowing the cotton properly. The Negro, several years older, maintained that he knew how to plow cotton; the young man left the field, threatening to come to the Negro's house that night. This he did, accompanied by two cousins and his uncle who had a reputation for "putting niggers in their place." The four arrived shortly after dark and demanded that Kinsey come out. When he refused to do so the uncle fired into the house and killed Kinsey's brother. Kinsey returned the fire and killed the uncle, but was himself wounded by the young landlord. The white men fled; Kinsey crossed the field to the home of a white neighbor who took him to a doctor in Warrenton. Soon after his arrival he was taken from the doctor's office and lynched.

In December 1933, Cordie Cheek, Negro, was lynched in Maury County, Tennessee. He had been accused of attempted rape, but the grand jury investigating this charge found no ground for indicting him. An hour after his release from the Nashville prison, where he had been held for safekeeping, he was kidnapped and lynched.

There is reason to suspect that the Negro lynched at Caledonia, Mississippi, in July 1933, accused of insulting a white woman, had been falsely accused by persons desiring to get possession of his good cotton crop. Perhaps the most preposterous accusation of the whole five years was that against Dennis Cross, helpless Negro paralytic, who was lynched at Tuscaloosa, Alabama, in September 1933, on the charge of attempted rape.

#### IV. LYNCHERS SELDOM PUNISHED

Though lynching is obviously a crime, violating both the Federal Constitution and the laws of the several states concerning murder, riot, assault, and the like, in many communities it is still regarded as an expression of popular justice. Hence only a few lynchers have been punished and most of these have received light sentences.

On the morning of November 13, 1935, following the double lynching of Ernest Collins and Bennie Mitchell, Negro juveniles, in Colorado County, Texas, the county attorney was quoted as saying, "I believe the lynching of these two youthful Negroes by a mob of seven hundred persons, including several women, was an expression of the will of the people." The county judge, after saying he was "strongly opposed to mob violence," declared: "The fact that the Negroes who so brutally murdered this girl could not be adequately punished by the law because of their ages prevents me from condemning the citizens who meted out justice to the ravishing murderers." The principal difference between official attitudes in this lynching and in most others is that in this instance the court officials announced publicly that they were sympathetic with the mob.

In most lynching cases it is impossible to find witnesses who will go before the grand jury with testimony fixing responsibility for the crime. When there are witnesses willing to testify, they are not always called. Even when witnesses appear before the grand jury and name members of the mob, it is often impossible to secure indictments. This is clearly illustrated by the unsuccessful attempts to indict persons identified by witnesses as participants in the Cordie Cheek and Norris Dendy lynchings.

On December 13, 1933, Cheek was released from the Davidson County jail at Nashville, and went immediately to the home of his uncle, near Fisk University. Shortly after he arrived there, a group of white men in two automobiles from Maury County came to the house and took him back to Maury County, where he was lynched. The license numbers of the cars were written down by witnesses to the abduction. A half dozen persons were located who were willing to give testimony to the grand jury. One of them, a Negro woman who had formerly lived in Maury County, was acquainted with two of the men in the kidnapping party. The principal witnesses in this case were willing to assume the personal risk incurred by giving their testimony to the grand jury. The prosecuting attorney of Maury County took no notice of this evidence, while the Davidson County prosecutor failed to cooperate when the grand jury took up the case. The outcome was that no one was indicted.

On the evening of July 4, 1933, Norris Dendy was lynched in Laurens County, South Carolina. A number of eye-witnesses to the crime made affidavits as to the lynching and those responsible for it. Finally some of these witnesses, who had left the state for safety, were called back before the grand jury, but no indictments were returned. The attitude of the public prosecutor is suggested by the fact that he drew up a technical indictment against the weapons used by the lynchers, rather than against the persons using the weapons. A recent investigation as to the possibility of securing indictments

in this case indicated that the prosecuting attorney is still unsympathetic with such efforts. The three lynchings at Tuscaloosa, Alabama, in 1933, further illustrate the unwillingness of court officials to utilize evidence available for the indictment of lynchers. Even when the judge and prosecuting attorney favor indictment, it is difficult to get a grand jury to act.

Indictments have been brought against lynchers in but two of last year's twenty lynchings—at White Bluff, Tennessee, and Tampa, Florida. Those at Tampa were not forthcoming until William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor, threatened to cancel plans for a national convention there next summer unless responsibility was placed for the fatal flogging, tarring, and feathering of Joseph Shoemaker, white.

The case at White Bluff is also unusual, in fact unique, even in the checkered history of lynchings. A Negro man was accused of having slapped a white woman who was drinking beer in a Negro store. In broad daylight five white men took him from the custody of officers, at the same time taking a gun from one of the latter. They drove a few miles into another county and shot the Negro to death with the officer's gun. Then they came back to town and returned the gun to the officer, with the statement that they had meant only to whip the Negro, but had been forced to kill him when he attempted to pick up a rock.

Without delay the five were indicted, tried, and acquitted. The presiding judge was indignant. "I am astounded at your verdict," he told the jury. "By your action you will make Cheatham County the dumping ground for lawlessness in the future." He immediately issued a bench warrant and had the five defendants held on the charge of conspiracy to inflict corporal punishment. In Dickson County, where the abduction took place, the grand jury indicted them for interfering with officers. Unable to make bond, the five are in jail awaiting trial. In the other eighteen lynchings of 1935, no one has been arrested, indicted, or otherwise made to answer to the courts.

In the five years under review arrests were made in only thirteen of the eighty-four lynchings. Indictments were returned in only seven cases<sup>27</sup> and convictions were secured in only three.<sup>28</sup> It is obvious that in most communities where lynching occurs, it is not considered a crime, by public opinion or by the courts; state laws against murder, riot, assault, and abduction go for naught when lynchers are the offenders. Even South Carolina's legal provision of an indemnity of \$2,000 for the family of a lynching victim has been denied to every one of the six families eligible for it in the last six years.

The Federal Kidnapping Law also has proved inoperative where lynchers are involved. This was clearly demonstrated in the case of Claude Neal, who on October 26, 1934, was taken by a mob across the state line from the jail at Brewton, Alabama, to Marianna, Florida, where he was lynched. Considerable publicity was given this interstate kidnap-lynching over the radio, which informed the public in advance relative to the proposed itinerary and plans of the mob. The lynching early in 1935 of Abe Young at Slayden,

27. The instances with indictments, arrests, or persons held for questioning were as follows: In 1935, at White Bluff, Tennessee, and at Tampa, Florida, already mentioned; in 1934, at Manchester, Tennessee, eight white men were indicted for lynching a Negro; at Newton, Texas, the white male escort of a white woman allegedly raped by a Negro was held in jail for questioning; at Hazard, Kentucky, seven white men were indicted for lynching a Negro. In 1933, at San Jose, California, one white man was arrested, but not indicted, for lynching two white men; at Princess Anne, Maryland, four white men were arrested, but not indicted, for lynching a Negro; at Greenville, South Carolina, seventeen white men were arrested, but not indicted, for lynching a Negro; at Ninety-six, South Carolina, four white men were indicted for lynching a Negro; at Louisville, Mississippi, seventeen white men were indicted for lynching a Negro. In 1932, under West Virginia's anti-lynch law, Greenbrier County was ordered to pay \$5,000 to each of two Negro families. In 1931, at Ironton, Ohio, seven white men were indicted for lynching a Negro.

28. Lynchers have been punished for only three of the eighty-four lynchings in the past five years, and in not one of these cases was the punishment commensurate with the crime: at Manchester, Tennessee, 1934, eight lynchers received sentences of three to five years; St. Joseph, Missouri, 1934, one lyncher received one year; Ironton, Ohio, 1931, one lyncher (a minor) received one to ten years in an industrial school.

Mississippi, following his abduction from Rossville, Tennessee, also came under the Federal kidnap law, but the Federal courts took no notice of it. This lynching, too, was advertised—news hawks drove from Memphis, sixty miles away, to witness it. In both cases the interstate kidnapers have gone unpunished.

The punishment of lynchers between 1900 and 1930, as shown by Chadbourn in *Lynching and the Law* is as follows: In Texas, 1930, two lynchers received sentences of two years; Georgia, 1930, two lynchers, life; Georgia, 1926, two lynchers, four years to life; Virginia, 1923, two lynchers, one and two years; Oklahoma, 1922, seven lynchers, life; Georgia, 1922, three lynchers, one to four years; Alabama, 1920, three lynchers, fifteen years to life; Alabama, 1920, three lynchers, \$100 to three months; Minnesota, 1920, one lyncher, sentence unknown; Texas, 1920, three lynchers, two years—suspended; Alabama, 1919, twenty-eight lynchers, \$100 to fifteen years;<sup>29</sup> Illinois, 1903, eleven lynchers, indeterminate sentences; Missouri, 1903, one or more lynchers, ten years; Alabama, 1900, three lynchers, ten years to life.

Thus goes the record over the decades: only a few convictions, and sentences seldom commensurate with the crime.

## V. WHY LYNCHERS GO UNPUNISHED

Lynchers go unpunished because punishment of their crime depends upon the same peace officers and court officials whose impotence they demonstrated when they lynched; the officers of the law have already shown their unwillingness or inability to administer justice; and lynchers, in most cases, are responsible only to the local courts.

Expecting these officers and courts to arrest and punish lynchers is like expecting a dethroned government to punish those who overthrew it. It is a grim fact that lynching mobs which burn courthouses are not wholly illogical. They and their sympathizers constitute the effective majority in the community where a lynching occurs. The disapproving minority, white and colored, is deterred from taking steps against the mob by fear of personal violence, incendiarism, and boycotts.

Many a white planter, teacher, physician, doctor, merchant, or banker actually sympathizes with the Negro when a lynching occurs, but sooner or later finds himself compelled to subordinate his sympathy for the victim to his fear of the mob. The wealthier white families are often inconvenienced by the disorganization of Negro labor which usually occurs as the result of a lynching. For example, in the fall of 1935, near Moultrie, Georgia, a plantation owner suffered considerable financial loss when his Negro laborers left the neighborhood after the lynching of "Bo" Brinson. The planter demanded that the sheriff restrain the mob from further violence against his workers, and at first thought that indictments against the lynchers were highly probable. In such cases, however, the white man soon decides that he cannot afford to risk the ill will of the lynchers and their friends. So nobody takes an aggressive part in the prosecution of the lynchers, and they go undicted and unpunished.

A South Carolina attorney who had helped to indict a number of lynchers thus described the means by which they were acquitted: "To see jury lists packed, witnesses swearing lies, and defense lawyers capitalizing upon a lynched Negro as a potential rapist—all in a planned effort to acquit known lynch-murderers—leaves one with a feeling of helplessness." Said a Mississippi Baptist preacher about the lynchers in his community, "There would be no use to call them to the witness stand—any man who will lynch will lie!"

## VI. PEACE OFFICERS AND MOBS

Very few peace officers defend their prisoners to the point of endangering themselves. The last case on record was that of the Sheriff of Oconee

29. No records are available for the period 1903-1919.

County, South Carolina, who was clubbed into unconsciousness by the mob that lynched Allen Greene in 1930. On the other hand, not a few officers cooperate in the lynchings, in some instances conniving, in others participating.

Now and then the sheriff is merely ignored, as at Wiggins, Stone County, Mississippi, last June, when a mob apprehended R. D. McGee, a Negro accused of rape, conducted a mock trial, found him guilty, and lynched him in broad daylight a short distance from the edge of town. When asked where the sheriff was while this was going on, a citizen replied, "He was around some place, but the mob just ignored him." A similar case was that of the lynching of Abe Young at Slayden, Mississippi, last spring—people came all the way from Memphis to witness the affair, but the county sheriff, a woman, arrived only in time to cut the body down.

The sheriff was ignored also by the mob which lynched Bodie Bates at Calhoun City, Mississippi, last fall. The sheriff was with the bloodhounds following a trail through the swamp when the accused Negro was apprehended in town and taken to the square, where he was publicly questioned by members of the mob. In the late afternoon the sheriff took the Negro to the county jail at Pittsboro, only to have the mob take him out and lynch him soon after dark.

In many instances peace officers connived with the mob or neglected to take obvious precautions against it. A recent example was the lynching of Elwood Higginbotham at Oxford, Mississippi, last September. In this case the Negro prisoner, who had killed a white man in self-defense, on order of the court had been placed in jail at Jackson for safekeeping. The court also ordered the sheriff to place extra guards around the defendant when he was brought back to Oxford for trial. However, after the evidence had been presented and the jury was deliberating, with two of the jurors holding out for acquittal, a mob went to the jail and, without meeting any determined resistance, took the prisoner out and lynched him. The officers said they were so "taken by surprise" that they were unable to identify any member of the mob.

A few days later, near Vienna, Georgia, a Negro, accused of drunkenness and of defying the sheriff, was taken from the latter while being transferred to a jail in an adjoining county. The circumstances were such that the *Vienna News*, of October 3, suggested official connivance in these words: "It is unfortunate that an officer of such importance should be placed under the stigma of being unable to prevent the lynching of a prisoner whose crime is against the person of that officer. . . . If the affair were engineered by enemies of the sheriff, seeking to arouse suspicion of complicity and destroy him politically, then it is even more a diabolical plot."

There is good reason to believe that peace officers have participated actively in many lynchings, as in those of A. T. Hardin and Dan Pippin,<sup>30</sup> near Tuscaloosa, Alabama; in that of Cordie Cheek at Nashville-Columbia, Tennessee;<sup>31</sup> and in that of Norris Dendy at Clinton, South Carolina.<sup>32</sup> In the Tuscaloosa case a third intended victim, who was left for dead but recovered, swore that the three deputies who had the prisoners in charge actively participated in their lynching. This charge and supporting evidence were given to the district prosecuting attorney, to the Governor of Alabama, to the Attorney-General of the State, and to the Justices of the Alabama Supreme Court, but nothing ever came of it. In the case of Cordie Cheek, kidnapped in Nashville and carried to Columbia to be lynched, the participation of at least one peace officer was sworn to by an eye witness. In the lynching of Norris Dendy witnesses testified before the grand jury that a Clinton policeman took an active part.

Several Tampa policemen have been indicted for the death of Joseph

30. August 2, 1933.

31. December 15, 1933.

32. July 4, 1933.

Shoemaker, previously referred to; and officers shot to death two Negro prisoners in their jail cells at Gretna, Louisiana.<sup>33</sup> Thirteen of the twenty persons lynched in 1935 were taken from officers of the law. Apparently to be in the hands of officers very often affords little or no protection from the mob.

The generally sympathetic attitude of sheriffs and other peace officers toward lynchers is explained by the pressure of community excitement, the presence in the mob of their acquaintances and friends, the actual physical danger involved in effective efforts to oppose the mob, and the final fact that the political situation in the typical lynching community is such that the desires of the lynchers who are voters or potential voters are virtual instructions to the officers, while the enforced political impotence of the Negro leaves him without any effective claim upon them.

## VII. PREVENTED THREATENED LYNCHINGS

From the chart on page four it will be seen that since 1921 the number of threatened lynchings prevented has exceeded the number of persons lynched, with the number of preventions tending to be larger when lynchings are most numerous and in the year immediately following, and smallest when lynchings are fewest.

Of the 243 preventions of threatened lynchings since 1930, over three-fourths were accomplished through the removal of the accused persons from the areas where the crimes occurred. Determined force was used in most of the remaining cases. In forty-two of the fifty-three reported preventions in 1935, "the prisoners were removed or the guard augmented or other precautions taken. In the eleven other instances, armed force was used."<sup>34</sup>

In a few cases the officers "out-talked" the mob. The sheriff of Pike County, Mississippi, pointed out that it is very difficult to defy a formidable mob, but not very difficult to outwit it. During the past year this sheriff, with the assistance of his deputies, prevented two threatened lynchings. On September 19, at Summit, a Negro boy was accused of attempted rape. The sheriff questioned the boy, found that his alibi was false, and then came face to face with the mob which demanded that the accused be handed over. The sheriff told them he was sure he had the guilty man, but that the Negro had not yet made a confession and he believed they would like for the accused to do so. He reassured the mob of his belief that the Negro was guilty and that he would confess as soon as he was placed in jail. Thus the sheriff retained custody of the accused, took him to the local jail, secured a confession from him, and promptly removed him to the "mob-proof" jail at Jackson, where he remained until secretly brought back for trial. Immediately after he had been given the maximum sentence, twenty years, the sheriff whisked him away again to the strong jail at Jackson.

Shortly after this a Negro boy at McComb, in the same county, wounded a white man with a knife and was placed in the county jail at Magnolia. When the sheriff heard that a mob was forming, he put the accused in his car, eluded the mob and rushed him away to Jackson. A few days later the Negro was brought back to the county for trial. After receiving the maximum sentence for wielding a knife, he was held in the local jail. One evening two men came to the sheriff's home, one a relative of the injured white man and the other a sort of professional lyncher, who has accumulated a prized collection of ghoulish souvenirs of his numerous lynching exploits. They demanded the keys to the jail but were refused. Unable to get the keys, they said they would take the prisoner anyway. The sheriff reminded them that two heavily armed men were standing guard at the entrance of the jail, with

33. At Gretna, Louisiana, on November 1, 1935, according to newspaper reports two Negro prisoners fired out of their cells on peace officers and were subsequently killed by them. As reported in the newspapers, these killings perhaps were incorrectly listed as lynchings by the Tuskegee reports.

34. From a news release given out by Tuskegee's Department of Records and Research at the close of 1935.

instructions to shoot anyone who attempted to enter. "Well, when are you going to send the prisoner to Jackson?" they asked. The sheriff did not know the exact day. The men left saying, "We'll get that nigger anyway." Shortly after they were gone, an officer from the state prison arrived and arrangements were made to transfer the prisoner to the penitentiary early next morning. Soon after sunrise a car carrying him sped away toward Jackson. At nine o'clock the sheriff learned that the road to Jackson had been blockaded at several points since seven-thirty—but the car with the prisoner had gone through half an hour before the blockades were set up. Said the sheriff, late in 1935, "If I can out-think the mob for two more months my four years in Pike County will record no lynching."

In each of these cases, it will be observed, the threatened lynching was prevented by the merest margin. The sheriff frankly admitted that if the professional lyncher referred to above had been on hand in the first case, he doubted seriously whether he could have retained custody of the accused Negro.

Many other threatened lynchings in 1935 were barely prevented. At Blackshear, Georgia, on April 24, a Negro charged with attempted rape was moved to a jail in another county, after a relative of the woman involved had sent a mutual friend to the sheriff demanding the prisoner. The sheriff replied that he could not let him be taken from the jail. The man then suggested that they could take the prisoner while he was being transferred. The sheriff obligingly told him to which jail the Negro would be taken and by what route, and was surprised, he later reported, to find the road open all the way. What he would have done had a mob appeared he did not say. When he reached the designated jail, however, he decided that another move would be safer, so he took the prisoner to another county, whence he is to be brought back for trial.

Two threatened lynchings were barely prevented in Jackson County, Georgia, during the past year. On June 23 an escaped Negro convict raped a white woman. The sheriff, on the way to the scene, came upon a strange Negro riding a bicycle. The Negro was taken back to the house of the victim and was identified. The men of the family, according to local reports, were given "ample opportunity to dispose of him." They failed to act, however, so the sheriff took charge of the prisoner, removed him to a distant county jail for safekeeping and brought him back for trial under the protection of the National Guard.

The second case was on the afternoon of August 2, when a Negro was accused, falsely it seems, of attempting to enter a white girl's room. He was taken in custody by local people who notified the officers. The sheriff placed him in the county jail. On the following evening a number of men came to the jail demanding the Negro. The sheriff steadfastly refused; he secured the active cooperation of the county and town peace officers; his wife hid the jail keys in a neighbor's stove. He then told the mob quite frankly that they could not take the man except over his dead body; that he had taken an oath to protect his prisoner, and that if they had wanted to lynch the Negro they should have done it before they asked him to take charge.

Two other threatened lynchings were barely prevented in Georgia during the year. In Oglethorpe County, in June, a demented Negro, accused of fatally beating and robbing two white farm women, was rushed by an alert deputy to the jail at Athens, then to Winder, then to Fulton Tower, Atlanta. Only then did the pursuing mob turn back. The other was at Moultrie, in November, when a mob came near taking from the National Guard a feeble-minded Negro who had just been given the death sentence for killing a white man.

The chief factors accounting for the prevention of threatened lynchings are: first, the determination and alertness of the peace officer to protect the prisoner in his charge, including his request for and use of the National Guard; second, local leadership, best illustrated in 1935 by the case at Cleve-

land, Mississippi, where the President of the Delta State Teachers College used his influence in averting a threatened lynching; and third, the influence which local Negroes may exercise, as at Moultrie where the defendant's counsel requested National Guard protection for the accused in response to the urgent appeal of a group of local Negroes, and as at Sparta, Georgia, a few days ago, when members of the Hubert family exercised effective tact in securing the cooperation of the leading white people to keep a Negro murderer from being lynched at his trial. In this latter case the presiding judge, the veteran James B. Park, instead of using the National Guard appealed to the crowded courtroom for support of the orderly process of law and received a unanimous standing vote.

The narrow margin by which many threatened lynchings have been prevented indicates that with any widespread agitation of the race situation, whether by politicians to gain votes or by secret organizations to secure paid memberships, the number of lynchings might easily have been doubled.

#### VIII. THE DISTRIBUTION OF LYNCHINGS AND THREATENED LYNCHINGS

A casual glance at a map showing the lynchings and the threatened lynchings of 1935, or those of the last five years, shows that they occur in the same areas, and are concentrated in the lower South. But what differences in economic and cultural conditions are there between the communities where lynchings have occurred and those where threatened lynchings have been prevented?

It has become common knowledge that lynchings occur most frequently in the most rural and poorest communities in the South. The single city lynching in 1935, at Tampa, Florida, was not representative: the victim was a white man, accused of being a Communist; he was flogged, tarred, and feathered and died from exposure. Six other lynchings occurred in counties which had towns of eight to fourteen thousand population, but in every instance the lynching took place in smaller towns or in the open country.<sup>35</sup> With the exception of Tampa, the largest urban community involved was Oxford, Mississippi, with a population of 2,890. The other thirteen lynchings of the year took place in counties in which the largest towns have a population of 2,500 or less. In the seventy counties where occurred the eighty-four lynchings of the last five years,<sup>36</sup> the only cities appearing are Vicksburg, Jackson, Birmingham, Tampa, St. Joseph, and San Jose.

Specific measures show that most of these seventy counties are economically below the average of their respective states. The per capita value of products from farm and factory combined was below the state average in four-fifths of the counties, and in nearly four-fifths of them the per capita value of taxable property was below the state average. The per capita bank deposits and revenue receipts were below the state average in nine-tenths of the counties, and the per capita retail trade in over four-fifths. Three-fourths of the counties had relatively fewer automobiles than their states, four-fifths had fewer electric subscribers, five-sixths had fewer income tax returns and fewer telephones.

Most of the eighty-two counties with prevented lynchings in 1934 and 1935 are also below their state averages. In nearly three-fourths of these counties the per capita value of agriculture and industry was below the state average; about four-fifths were below the state average in per capita value of taxable property and per capita bank deposits; three-fourths were below the state average in per capita retail trade and nine-tenths in per capita revenue

35. Bogalusa, Louisiana, population of 14,029, with the lynching in this county occurring at Franklinton, which has a population of less than a thousand; Columbus, Lowndes County, Mississippi, 10,731, with the double lynching in this county occurring six or eight miles from the town; Fort Lauderdale, Broward County, Florida, 8,666, with the lynching staged five miles away; Moultrie, Colquitt County, Georgia, 8,027, with the lynching ten miles from the town.

36. Fourteen of the eighty-four persons lynched were in counties where two or more persons have been lynched in the past five years.

receipts; four-fifths had relatively fewer income tax returns, two-thirds had fewer automobiles and fewer homes with electricity, and nearly three-fourths had fewer automobiles.

Thus it is seen that counties with lynchings and those with prevented lynchings were much alike in economic status, with the prevention counties in general making a slightly better showing. A number of counties, in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and Maryland, had both lynchings and preventions.

It is significant that practically all the counties outside the South with mobs fell below their state averages, while most of those within the South which reached their state averages were in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and Arkansas—the lowest ranking states in the Union in wealth and culture.<sup>37</sup>

The figures emphasize a truth arrived at through case study of the mob outbreaks in the several states; namely, that in most of Mississippi and in considerable areas in other deep-South states the community leadership still considers lynchings necessary. These areas may be characterized as not yet above the lynching level. Here the leadership of the mob is commonly made up of the leading people of the community, as was the case in the recent Mississippi lynchings at Wiggins, Calhoun City, Slayden, and Oxford. On the other hand, in the areas where community leadership does not condone lynching, the mob is led by and composed of the less responsible elements of the community.

The mob in the "lynch-level" area is usually small, comparatively orderly, going about its task in a businesslike way under recognized leaders, seldom mutilating its victim beyond hanging him by the neck and shooting the body full of holes. The mob in the community above the lynch-level is composed of scores, hundreds, or thousands of excited people with no recognized leaders, a seething mass which in milling about generates its own sense of power until some insignificant happening sets it in reckless motion. Then it is capable of destroying public and private property and of torturing the victim with extended mutilation or slow burning. The same sadistic savagery readily occurs in the lynch-level area if the recognized leaders of the community fail to maintain their leadership of the mob. Relatively, at least, there are orderly and disorderly mobs: an "orderly" mob supplants peace officers and the courts; a "disorderly" and leaderless mob recklessly defies peace officers and courts. The former is bourbon and plutocratic; the latter is proletarian and anarchistic.

Thus the economic and cultural factors of an area determine not only the probability of the emergence of a lynch-bent mob, but also the general character of the mob which forms. There is little comfort for good citizens in the realization that the "nicest" lynchings occur under the restraining hands of the best people of the community, and that the "worst" lynchings occur when the community leaders abdicate and the substrata elements come into power. This points to the real tragedy—the mob itself.

#### IX. THE HIGH COST OF LYNCH-BENT MOBS

Mob members readily and naturally repudiate the peace officers and court officials. Whether of the "orderly" or "disorderly" type, the mob insists upon its own desires. As a logical thing it either lynches the accused, or stands as a referee over his court trial, with the frank threat of lynching should the court fail to carry out its desires: no questioning of guilt will be countenanced, no element of mercy tolerated. Such mob-dominated court sentences are, of course, properly called "legal lynchings." In the instances in which the lynch-bent mob does not lynch and cannot dominate the court, it often exercises a galling surveillance over the Negro community, with fre-

37. See Vance, R. P., *Human Geography of the South*, p. 422 (U. N. C. Press, 1932).

quent intimidations and ready threats of death. Once a mob has formed, the best thing that can happen is bad.

A lynching comes at a high price to the community: irresponsibility is winked at when deadly weapons are carried without license and used without reason; dogmatism is enthroned when mob members assume that the accused is guilty of the alleged crime, and that the man they have is the one they are looking for; prejudice dominates, for mob members do not weigh evidence, and do not deliberate, but proceed upon pre-conceived notions.

Lynchers kill and then defend their murderous action against any who would make them responsible for their deed. The typical lynching literally forces the local institutions and articulate persons to condone it. The local community pays the bill when it defends lynchers.<sup>38</sup> The court, in pretending that it is unable to find out who did the lynching, degrades itself to the point of protecting murderers. The ministry and members of the church, by their failure to be effective advocates of justice, compromise the church's position into practical protection to the mob members. Educational leaders, civic leaders, business men, in fact the whole community, by pretending that the lynchers cannot be identified, accommodate the community to their protection. Thus the institutions and leaders of the community become confederates in the high mockery of the court's inability to punish, and confederates in the debasement of citizenship which occurs when the mob forms, when it lynches, and when its members are allowed to go unpunished.

Just as the community in its very being pays for the formation of the mob, it also pays for what the mob does. Financial considerations alone are far from negligible. It costs money to replace courthouses—as at Sherman, Texas, in 1930, and at Shelbyville, Tennessee, in 1934—to repair jails, to replace private property destroyed, and to maintain martial law. The financial costs are smallest where the moral costs are largest—that is, where the “best people” are the mob members.

#### X. THE THREAT OF LEGAL LYNCHINGS

Convinced of the terrific price which the community pays for a lynching, it is sometimes felt that lynchings should be prevented by any possible means, even to the point of legal lynching by court sentences. Such a decision was frankly acknowledged by a jurymen in the Jerome Wilson case at Franklinton, Louisiana, late in 1934, when the death sentence was imposed to prevent the mob from lynching the accused and other members of his family. Subsequently the case was appealed to the State Supreme Court, and when a new trial was granted early in 1935, the mob, fearing that it might be deprived of its intended victim, took him from jail and lynched him.

A mob may make a difference in the demands and methods of the state prosecutor. At Cleveland, Bolivar County, Mississippi, in 1935, the prosecuting attorney, hearing the hundreds who stood just outside the barbed wire enclosure of the National Guard around the courthouse, picked up a burlap sack under the table and exhibited to the jury what he claimed were chunks of flesh from the body of the woman the Negro on trial was accused of having murdered. Since when have prosecuting attorneys in Mississippi, or anywhere else, needed to bring human flesh into the courtroom to convict a Negro accused of murdering a white woman? Was it not the presence of the mob which led to this ghoulish exhibition?

Even the judge sometimes feels it is his duty to recognize mob pressure. In the recent trial of John Henry Sloan, at Moultrie, Georgia, the judge is

38. The whole region, too, pays for lynchings and mobs, for institutions which do little or nothing to punish lynchers naturally work out formulas to justify their actions, and so the wider community pays for defending mob violence. It becomes hypersensitive and resents comparisons with other areas. The result is that the majority of the people in the lynching area tend to turn from the disturbing facts of the present to the glamor of the past for status and security. And so a whole region fails to get at the fundamental causes which underlie the formation of the mob—the first and greatest factor in the lynching pattern.

reported to have requested a promise that the defense attorney would not move for a new trial, threatening otherwise to adjourn the court immediately after the trial to prevent such a motion. The promise was refused, and two days after the trial the judge adjourned the court, contrary to his usual practice of letting the term run until it expired by law. The defendant in this case, a mental defective,<sup>39</sup> was sentenced to die on December 10, 1935. In the meantime the United States District Court granted a writ of habeas corpus and the case is now pending.

It is, indeed, a question whether a community is worse off when it has a lynching and defends it, or when it prevents a threatened lynching by prostituting its citizenship and institutions to the demands of the mob. Which would have been the better, for instance, for the jury sitting on the Elwood Higginbotham case in Oxford, Mississippi, in September 1935, to have agreed that they would send Higginbotham to the electric chair in order to prevent a lynching, or to attempt, as did some of the jurors, to give a verdict on the basis of the evidence and thus to precipitate a lynching?

Seemingly, the National Guard would have been the surest way to provide protection for the prisoner when in Oxford for his trial. Many able jurists, however, maintain that it is most difficult to have a fair and impartial trial in a community where the National Guard is necessary, holding that the very necessity for the Guard indicates that the community is unable or unwilling to deal with the case judicially.

It is straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel for a community to console itself with the fact that the mob was led by the "best people" and the lynching was "orderly," or that the court officials and leading citizens prevented a lynching by promising the mob that the man would be tried immediately, sentenced to death without fail, and executed just as soon as the law would permit.

#### XI. SOME SUGGESTIONS

There is urgent need that effective means be worked out for the punishment of lynchers, for the constructive prevention of threatened lynchings, and especially for the eradication of lynch-bent mobs.

It is self evident from the facts presented above that a community which will have a lynching will seldom punish its lynchers, while a community which would punish lynchers will seldom need to. The punishment of lynchers, in the very nature of the case, can be realized only by applying in the local community the standards of the wider community which does not countenance lynching. This may best be effected, first, by placing the responsibility for the apprehension and arrest of lynchers in the hands of state or federal police; second, by holding the trial of the lynchers outside the affected area; third, by arranging for state or federal prosecutors to share the responsibility of the prosecution. The added cost of these services are

<sup>39</sup> The defendant's low mentality was common knowledge and, except for the fear that such testimony might have caused a lynching, numerous witnesses would have given such testimony at his trial.

The Negro threatened by a mob near Lexington, Georgia, was definitely of low mentality; said the *Oglethorpe Echo*, September 19, 1935: "Forbearance of the public upon apprehension of the Negro and at his trial, as commendable as it is, may be attributed to some extent to the known low mentality of the Negro. . . . He is evidently hardly of sufficient mental capacity to know right from wrong." The Negro lynched last year at Louisburg, North Carolina, was mentally deranged.

The case of John Henry Sloan, at Moultrie, Georgia, also demonstrates the cost to the community of the Negro's defenselessness. This half-witted Negro could readily be "chased like a rabbit" by white people, even white boys. Such was the case leading up to the tragedy on the night of October 16, when he shot and killed Otis Gay, a young white man. "He had borrowed a gun from a white man," runs an account of his crime, "and he was returning home down the road and was set upon and chased by some white men and boys who threw rocks and sticks at him. He was thoroughly frightened and ran as hard as he could, finally outdistancing his pursuers. About a mile farther down the road Otis Gay, the man he killed, and a girl were sitting by the side of the road. Sloan was still thoroughly frightened. As he passed the place, the man suddenly rose. Sloan thought he was about to be attacked again and being scared he raised the gun almost involuntarily and shot and killed Otis Gay."

legitimate state or federal expenditures, since neither the state nor the federal government can afford to permit the collapse of the judicial system in any local area.

The application of state or federal authority to the problem of lynching raises several interesting questions: Would the community accept the state or federal assistance, or would it pit itself against the "outside" agency attempting to administer laws out of harmony with the local ideas of justice? In short, would the activities of a state or federal agency succeed in punishing the lynchers, or would they precipitate a miniature civil war? Would an organized local opposition to "outside" prosecutions, as at Princess Anne, Maryland, in 1933, be repeated in other lynch communities under similar circumstances? Even if lynchers can be punished, will their punishment tend to reduce the violence of white people toward the Negro, or will it merely shift the plane of violence from that of lynchings to premeditated private murder, which crime would be handled by the local court? Even so, might there be some gain in shifting the violence from lynching, which is commonly condoned, to private murder, for which there is public condemnation of long standing?

There is need, too, of devising effective means by which mobs that have formed can be kept from lynching, and from dominating the courts. The first and greatest need is for adequate police service, which means state policemen with authority as state officers rather than as assistants to local peace officers, to facilitate the immediate removal of the accused to a place of safekeeping. A second need is for strong jails, equipped and manned to withstand the onslaught of a mob; they could be built at strategic points throughout the state. A third need is that the trial of the accused person be conducted outside the affected area, lest it be dominated by the mob.

More adequate police service, stronger jails, and effective court procedures can be at best only restraining factors. In the long run, the real value in punishing lynchers, and in keeping mobs which have formed from lynching, will be measured largely by their influence in preventing the formation of mobs.

The more fundamental approaches will have to do with raising community standards above the lynching level in the areas of low economic and cultural rating, while in the areas with higher wealth and cultural rating the greatest need is that responsible employment and community participation be provided for the substrata elements of the population. The economic approach, to be effective, must include the reduction of the rural handicap, which now leaves the average rural dweller at a distinct disadvantage. In most Southern communities, where the relationships of man to land have been worked out on a basis of racial factors, it seems next to impossible to correct the rural handicap without extending to Negroes as well as to whites opportunities for the ownership of productive land. So long as the vast majority of rural dwellers, white as well as Negro, are forced to fit themselves into the chronic dependency of the present farm tenant pattern, they will have little incentive to apply themselves diligently and intelligently to their agricultural tasks.

An extension of the ownership of farms would facilitate the greater participation of the people in community affairs. In a large proportion of communities with lynchings and threatened lynchings practically no Negroes vote, and in many instances less than one-sixth of the whites. With such a centralized control, it is comparatively simple and almost natural for education, health, police, and other essential public agencies to render their services with such partiality as to perpetuate the present racial and class differentials out of which lynchings naturally come.

It is necessary, too, for city dwellers to realize that the impoverishment of rural people inevitably means an increase of unemployment and decreased wages for city dwellers. It is equally important that the white man, with or without property, in town or country, understand that enforcing dependence

and subservience upon the Negro means that the great majority of white people, who by the very nature of the situation are in competition with the Negro, will occupy a place but little above him.

The religious approach, too, can be productive. Many of the most outspoken enemies of lynching are editors of religious papers, denominational leaders, and ministers in the largest and wealthiest churches. These church leaders will need to devise ways of infusing their abhorrence of mob violence into the local ministers and church leadership. This is a difficult task, for the local minister is under the same pressure to conform as are local editors, bankers, educators. Church study courses, conferences, and summer schools can help churchmen understand the causes and consequences of mob outbreaks. "The pastor," said a leading Southern churchman some time ago, "in the absence of passion and excitement should instill into the minds of his hearers reverence for human life and personality and the danger and crime of mob rule."

Fundamental to all these means is the educational approach, which has the responsibility of discovering and interpreting the conditions out of which mobs arise, the facts about lynchings, and the role of peace officers, court officials, and the general public in these breakdowns of law and order. The vastness of the educational task is suggested by the fact that the typical white Southerner, even of high school and college level, still assumes that the Negro is innately inferior, that he is predisposed to commit certain crimes, that most of the persons lynched are accused of rape, and that mob violence is necessary for the protection of the white woman. It is distressing to take a poll of college seniors in some of the better schools in the South and learn that the majority of them still believe these fallacies. The approach of the Southern Association of Women for the Prevention of Lynching is strategic—Southern white women are studying the facts about lynchings and by thousands are repudiating the mob and pledging themselves to its eradication.

The teachers in elementary and high schools, no less than in colleges, can do much to break down the unfounded prejudices and fears which fire the mind of the mob. Teachers of literature and the natural sciences, as well as of the social sciences, can readily integrate into their courses the facts about the accomplishments of Negro authors, artists, athletes, educators, patriots, and scientists.

Church and school programs can be effective in proportion as they help the people of the South, Negro and white, to understand the backgrounds out of which mob violence emerges, and the good sense of correcting these conditions. The teachers and preachers of the South would do much to free the region of mob outbreaks if they could make it clear that lynching is an outgrowth not only of the South's peculiar historical past, but also of an army of dependent farm tenants, low incomes, inadequate diet, disorganized plantation economy, depleted soil, and a tangled racial situation with its threads reaching in and paralyzing every effort of the white man to raise his own status, while keeping the Negro down.

## XII. FACTUAL NEWSPAPER REPORTS NEEDED

The whole educational approach to the reduction of lynching is seriously handicapped by incomplete and frequently distorted reports of why lynchings occur. There is need for factual newspaper accounts in every case.

It should be borne in mind that lynchings occur most frequently in the poorest and least populous communities, where press service is least adequate and news writers are under the greatest subjection to local opinion. The local paper, except in rare instances, does the "safe" thing: it handles the story so as to remain acceptable to the community; it withholds facts unfavorable to the lynchers and paints the person lynched as the worst possible enemy of the community.

The central press services, in turn, nearly always receive the story from a local correspondent, frequently a person identified with the home paper. The result is that distant readers, as well as those at home, usually have opportunity of reading only the pro-lyncher's explanation of the affair.

The Higginbotham case at Oxford, Mississippi, serves to emphasize the need for factual reports. Said the local weekly, the *Oxford Eagle*, on May 23, 1935: "Capture of Elwood Higginbotham, negro, brutal murderer of Glenn D. Roberts, was thought to be near Thursday morning. . . . The slaying of Mr. Roberts, which occurred about ten o'clock Tuesday night, has shocked the entire community. Mr. Roberts had had some difficulty with the negro a few weeks previous but nothing serious was expected when he accosted the negro, who is a tenant on the farm of Glenn Baird, a near neighbor of Mr. Roberts. However, in an argument, the nature of which has not been disclosed, Higginbotham shot Mr. Roberts in the face at close range with a shotgun killing him instantly."

The news items in the *Eagle* on May 30, and again those on September 12 and 19, which appeared immediately before and after Higginbotham was lynched, did not mention the well-established facts that the white man had started the trouble by driving cattle across the Negro's field; that he had armed himself and with other white men had gone to the Negro's house at night; that he had broken down an outside door to get into the hallway and then had knocked open the door of the bedroom where Higginbotham and his wife had retired, and that it was under these conditions that the Negro had shot him. When the editor of the *Eagle* was asked why he had not carried the actual facts, he answered frankly that he lived in Oxford, and that the race situation made it practically impossible to do so.

An Associated Press release appearing in the *Montgomery Advertiser* and other papers on September 18, 1935, said, ". . . Witnesses testified at the trial that the white man was 'shot down in cold blood' when he went to Higginbotham's door to 'have a talk' with him." This story also made no mention of the unchallenged facts recited above.

Thus the people who read the *Oxford Eagle* and those who read the central press stories had no opportunity to know the really essential facts in this case.

On the other hand, the local paper and the press services might have carried the defense counsel's charge to the jury: "The court charges the jury for the defendant that if you believe from the evidence in this case that the deceased went to the home of the defendant on the night of the homicide and entered the home of the defendant in a rude and angry manner and then and there held a pistol pointing toward the defendant, and the defendant then and there had reasonable grounds to believe and did believe his life to be in immediate danger at the hands of the deceased, the defendant had the right to shoot and kill the deceased in his necessary self-defense, and the jury should find him not guilty." They might have included the comments of an ex-prosecutor of a near-by court, who expressed the opinion that no jury would convict the Negro on the known evidence, and that if one did the court would set aside the verdict, or an appeal to a higher court would bring a reversal. If the papers and press services had given these facts to the public, the people of Oxford, and of the South, could better have judged whether the community was protected or betrayed by the seventy-five men who smeared their faces with mud, took the law into their own hands, and lynched the accused.

In reporting the lynching of Bodie Bates at Calhoun City, Mississippi, the local paper carried the headline, "Attacker Is Hung by Mob," in spite of the fact that the Negro was accused only of threatening to break into a girl's room. The lynchings at Slayden, Wiggins, Hernando, and Columbus in Mississippi, at Franklinton, Maringouin, and Gretna in Louisiana, at Columbus in Texas, at Louisburg in North Carolina, and at Yreka in California were

all reported by the local papers in routine pro-lyncher fashion—the lynching had occurred, the mob victim deserved his fate, the lynchers had expressed the will of the people.

At Fort Lauderdale, Florida, the newspaper “neither condemned nor condoned” the lynching; it merely pointed out that it had been caused by legal delay in the punishment of four other Negroes in the county. The small daily at Moultrie, Georgia, carried factual reports of the lynching of the unaccused “Bo” Brinson, but made no editorial comment. So the record shows that in seventeen out of twenty lynchings last year, the local newspapers justified or implicitly condoned them.

With the possible exception of the weekly papers of Dickson and Cheatham counties, Tennessee, the *News*, of Vienna, Georgia, has the distinction of being the only small town paper to speak out editorially against a local lynching in 1935. On the other hand it should be noted that the daily papers of Raleigh, Nashville, and Miami vigorously denounced the lynchings at near-by Louisville, White Bluff, and Fort Lauderdale, and that the year’s single city lynching, at Tampa, was roundly condemned by the press of that city.

Most of the larger Southern dailies are definitely committed to the eradication of lynching, and they are not without responsibility to effect some arrangement with the press bureaus by which their readers may become acquainted with what actually happens when a lynching occurs in a remote rural community, rather than being permitted to read only what the lynching element in that community wants the public to know. This could easily be done if the press bureaus, representing the South’s leading newspapers, would send a special correspondent into each community where a lynching occurs or is threatened. Thus a service of the greatest importance could be rendered.

### XIII. LYNCHING AND RACIAL EXPLOITATION

With most lynchings occurring in the South and the Negro, “America’s tenth man,” furnishing ninety per cent of the victims in recent years, one logically looks to the Southern racial situation for the underlying causes of lynchings. Formerly an instrument of popular justice in frontier communities, and still retaining something of its frontier character, lynching and the threat of it are now primarily a technique of enforcing racial exploitation—economic, political, and cultural.

Economic exploitation of the Negro by the American white man is as old and as continuous as the Negro’s presence on American soil. Slavery, peonage, low wages, restricted work opportunities, and inferior educational and other public welfare facilities record his principal economic handicaps in the developing American scene.

The exploitation of the Negro extends from its broad economic base into all the vital phases of political life. State, county, and municipal governments—the legal instruments of the whites—secure more money for white schools by diverting to them a portion of the public monies which belong to the Negro. For much the same reason the Negro has poorer public health service, poorer police protection, and frequently a smaller pauper allowance or relief order. He seldom sits on a jury, and almost never has a voice in the allocation of public funds.

Most insidious of all has been the cultural exploitation of the Negro. The typical popular story, from political platform and pulpit, commonly represents him as an amiable simpleton, lacking in morals, intelligence, and ambition. Black-faced characters are good drawing cards for white audiences, perhaps because white people like to see Negroes dependent and docile, and in ridiculous roles. All this rests on certain rationalizations, chief of which is the assumption that the Negro has been ordained to a position of subservience and servitude. Thus his political impotence and economic helplessness are enforced.

The exploitation of the black folk has been something of a profession. Many business men and politicians have capitalized race prejudice to gain larger profits through lower labor costs or to make their political and institutional leadership secure. The South's Watsons, Bleases, Heflins, and Vardamans in politics and other fields have not been mental dwarfs. They saw a harvest for themselves and reaped it. The success of the professional Negro-phobe has rested in no small degree upon conditions which he has been instrumental in creating and maintaining.

In most communities of the South the role of the Negro is rigorously defined. He has the poorer schools and a disproportionate share of illiteracy, fewer public health nurses and greater morbidity, fewer parks and a higher juvenile delinquency rate, smaller houses and more unmarried mothers, limited employment and longer bread lines, longer hours, smaller wages, and a higher death rate. The whites who thus define "his place" insist that he stay in it and promptly suppress any revolt against his economic dependence, political impotence, and cultural subservience.

The whole spotted fabric of lynching has one thread running through it: The Negro must be kept in his place. Lynchings and threats of violence are but the more extreme expressions of the white man's determination to continue his exploitation of the Negro, which is most thorough when the Negro knows that he chooses between subservience and annihilation. Rural whites may point out that it is about time for another lynching when they think the Negro no longer fears one.

To understand why the mob emerges most often in the rural Southern community with a low economic and cultural rank, it is well to remember that exploitation, prevalent in practically all communities, is often carried out by cruder methods in poorer communities than in richer ones. To maintain their control over Negro labor, the leading white people lynch in some communities. But it is the poorer rural whites, who live on about the same plane as the landless Negroes near-by, to whom man hunts, mock trials and lynchings prove most attractive. The racial dogma is precious to them because it is proof that they are superior. They find a welcomed reassurance in the color of their skins and the license it affords. Momentarily they escape the boredom of their restricted lives; for a time they are people of importance—they assume the role of society's protectors; they flourish weapons; they hunt down the accused; they determine his guilt; they destroy him, sometimes with protracted torture. In reality, lynchings come out of the state of mind of white people much more than out of the crimes committed by Negroes, just as witches were burned in Boston, not because there were witches in Boston but because of the state of mind of the people in Boston.

So Negroes are lynched, some accused of capital crimes, others of little or nothing. Most of the victims are hanged and then riddled with bullets, some are dismembered or burned; some of the bodies are removed at once, others are left as gory spectacles for men, women, and children to view—a topic of conversation in shop, sewing circle, and home. And native-born white lynchers, some with property and more with none, are seldom indicted and almost never convicted.

#### XIV. IN CONCLUSION

Local civilization has broken down when a mob forms; and there is no simple substitute for local civilization.

It should be emphasized that activities for ridding the American scene of lynching involve not only more adequate police service, stronger jails, more efficient court procedures, and the proper custodial care of mental cases. It is fundamentally important also that the poorer rural areas of the South be brought to share more equitably in the economic and cultural

wealth of the nation. Any effective program must be geared to the task of lifting above the lynching level the poorest rural areas and the poorest elements in a yet larger region. In this task the county, state, and federal governments all have responsibility. It is, of course, the part of wisdom that the contributions of each be so correlated that whatever responsibility can be borne locally shall be left there. At the same time, in no instance should the local community be permitted to lynch and then protect its lynchers from punishment, and thus violate the essential nature of the state and nation of which it is a part.



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