

Whiteness from Violence: Lynching and White Identity in the U.S. South, 1882-1915

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1. INTRODUCTION

Lynching has in the last couple of decades moved into the center of scholarly attention and much recent sociological research and theorizing on lynching converges on understanding it as southern whites' reaction to real or perceived threats from blacks to their dominant position and privileged access to scarce resources, above all economic or material ones. That is to say, to explain why lynching occurred in particular times and places recent research relies on theories of intergroup relations and conflict, above all Blalock's seminal work on intergroup relations (Blalock 1967), that consider lynching a mechanism for racial social control aimed at reducing the competition from free African-Americans and maintain their position as subjugated labor in the post-bellum South (for an exemplar study in this tradition, see Tolnay and Beck 1995). Research in this vein has generated important insights and substantially furthered our knowledge about lynching, but its strong focus on economic and material conditions causes it to downplay relevant cultural and ideational dynamics, causes, and consequences of lynching, rendering certain highly significant aspects of the phenomenon inexplicable—one of which is its occasionally salient ritual and symbolism.

The difficulties of accounting for and make sense of the social organization of lynch mobs and the nature of lynching violence within received frameworks of inquiry suggest areas in need of further exploration, and my aspiration here is to open up comparative (quantitative) sociological research to the cultural significance of lynching and make our analysis adequate at the level of meaning and impart our explanations with an interpretative understanding rooted in the sociocultural order in which lynching took place (cf. Stovel 2001). To appreciate what drove lynchers we must thus situate their actions within the context of their own sense of reality and understanding of social life, including themselves and others, and not analyze lynching as an objective event, but an intersubjective experience of the lynchers and their communities alike. Most importantly, given the racial caste structure of southern society and the salience of notions of honor, it is important to complement the dominant perspective on lynching as social control rooted

in material interests by exploring the role of whites' racial status concerns and the formation of white racial identity in the development of black lynching in the U.S. South in the decades around 1900. To that end, I use the remainder of this paper to explore how the motivation, organization, and practice of lynching acted out social relations and identities embedded in matters of social status and the prerogatives of race.

2. A MICROSOCIOLOGICAL THEORY OF INTERGROUP CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE

2.1 IDENTITY AND NARRATIVE

Identities are fundamentally features of social relations as perceived from the vantage point of one actor or another and emerge from actors' experience of recurrent interactions and transactions with a recognizable set of other actors. One particularly important form of identity is based upon socially and historically constituted categorical pairs, representing a distinctive form of social relation: black/white, male/female, citizen/non-citizen, Jew/gentile, Christian/infidel, heterosexual/homosexual. Identities—collective, group-based ones, as well as individual social identities seen as embodying certain categories—based upon categorical principles do not form apart from or prior to social interaction, but are uniquely socially constituted by residing in relationships that link a certain categorical identity to its opposite from which it derives its continuing significance and meaning. Paired social categories and associated boundaries and identities are thus appropriately understood as something actors spend considerable social effort on to create, maintain, and inhabit; not as fixed or static conditions but as relatively stable and changeable constructs that are continually represented and communicated, performed or otherwise symbolically displayed through context- and situation-specific transactions in ongoing, dynamic, and contingent interactions across as well as within groups and categories (Tilly 2005).

Social categories and identities based thereupon have four constituent parts: a boundary differentiating the ingroup from the outgroup; relations within the boundary; relations across the boundary; and collective stories about the boundary, about intraboundary relations, and about interboundary relations and interactions. These stories provide answers to “identity questions” such as “Who am I?”; “Who are you?”; “Who are we?”; “Who are they?”; “What are my/our rights and obligations?”; “What are your/their rights and obligations?” (Tilly 2005). Drawing upon culturally available “tools” (Swidler 1986) to answer these kind of

questions through their actions, interactions, and relations people establish the meaning complexes of “what it means” to be whom they, as well as others, are and so narrate the story of their becoming and social existence (Burke 2004; Polletta 1998). Identities are, thus, integrated with the collective narratives through which people share awareness and understanding of appropriate inter- and intragroup relations and practices. These “identity stories” (Tilly 2005) or “public narratives” (Somers 1994) are crucial in making social action intelligible because not only do narratives to some degree constitute actors and their social worlds, they endow actors with knowledge of what to do and what is expected of them. “[P]eople are guided to act by the structural and cultural relationships in which they are embedded and by the stories through which they constitute their identities.... [P]eople act in particular ways because *not* to do so would fundamentally violate their sense of *being* at that particular time and place” (Somers 1994: 624, emphasis in original).

2.2 IDENTITY, STATUS AND VIOLENCE

The reason people orient themselves towards status and dominance and the reason it breeds conflict, occasionally compelling people to commit the most gruesome acts of violence against others, is that status and dominance play crucial parts in the formation of collective identities, as well as individual social identities, within social structures that hierarchizes forms of difference based upon categories such as race/ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality. Status and dominance represent defining elements of the identity formation processes that take place in such hierarchical social arrangements. For one way identities get contested and negotiated is through status and dominance and, as Gould told us (2003), one way status and dominance get negotiated is through violence. Violence may, then, be used to construct and maintain identities founded upon notions and relations of superiority and dominance.

Physical violation of the human body is furthermore a powerful source of metaphorical material to symbolize boundaries, status, and power relations. Shows of strength and superiority are expressed most forcefully and clearly through the medium of the human body, for example, by mutilations, decapitations, torture, flogging, and public display of corpses (Blok 2000; Foucault 1977; Scarry 1985). The conspicuous cruelty of overt brutality is thus not incidental, but its main purpose as forms of communication usable for claims of complete domination. These forms of cruelty are often practiced by one group against another typically subordinate group to enforce submission and dramatize the fact that its community and solidarity

extend only to a certain limit, that persons outside are alien and inferior, and that the status and integrity of the dominant group is not to be violated, lest there be a forceful response invoking and restoring the relevant boundary and intergroup relation of domination “Mutilation and other public punishments are above all violence to one's social image, and hence are pre-eminently usable for up-holding inter-group stratification” (Collins 1974: 422).

Collective narratives may also inform the individual-level by promoting models, “intersubjective webs of relationality” (Somers 1994: 618), for sociocultural understanding, experience, and behavior that shape social identities by providing templates for affirming one’s quality as member of a certain category or group and for distinguishing individual members of one social category from those of another. The formation of individuals’ social identities is thus bound up and aligned with elements of collective stories and identities, especially the construction of categories and the drawing of symbolic boundaries. Recognizing how category-based identities operate in much the same way across different levels of analysis, combining relations, boundaries, and stories, with similar processes of meaning control and identity-verification at work (cf. Burke 2004), allows us to move from collective category-based identities to categorized individual social identities and explore how violence can be implicated in the formation of the latter as well.

2.3 THE FORM AND NATURE OF IDENTITY-BUILDING VIOLENCE

Unfolding from conflicts about status, dominance, and the control of social relations on different levels, violence stemming from interpersonal conflicts and the social identities implicated therein takes on a different quality and meaning from that of intergroup strife and collective identity concerns. Thus, while issues of social status and dominance are at stake in both forms of identity-building violence, their respective interactional structure and character depend upon what collective narrative is told; for whom it is told; what boundary is primarily being upheld; and whose status and dominance is promoted against whom. The nature and significance of this divergence is specified in Figure 1 which display ideal typical models of the interactional structure of collective and social identity-building violence, respectively, together with that of violence as social control.

- Figure 1 about here -

While social identity-based action is directed toward the people in the group or category to which the actor belongs or claims membership, it is not perpetrated on behalf of the group, but rather to uphold the status or protect the integrity of a particular individual or cluster of individuals, for example, a family or group of friends. Social identity-based violence therefore has the character of a performance that the actor stages for her peers and is so analogous to the classical duel in representing a status contest involving, at least for one of the parties, similar stakes and principles: status, honor, reputation, enduring relationships, social identity, and the group membership implied in them (cf. Blok 2000). Not carried out primarily on behalf of the group as a whole, this type of violence does typically not represent an attempt to uphold or restore the sacred values, transcendent principles, or boundaries of a particular group. In contrast to collective identity-building violence—which are not primarily enacted on behalf of specific individuals, but the group as a whole in collective rituals likely involving high levels of ritual and ceremony—it therefore tends to be less severe and rarely involve elaborate ritualistic or ceremonial elements.

The interactional structure of violence as a means of social control is, finally, drastically different from the other two types of violence because the perpetrators' ingroup does not figure as audience in this model. The intended audience of the violence is rather the group or social category of the victim(s). The violence does not primarily represent a performance for significant others or attempt to promote within-group cohesion, but an effort to generate a widespread sense of fear and vulnerability among victims and members of the victims' group, community, or category. This is the model most commonly applied in comparative sociological lynching research, but it is the task of this chapter to establish that lynching represented more than an instrumental tool for social control; that it as well was a sociocultural practice by which individuals and communities communicated among themselves in processes of social and collective identity construction. In order to expound on that argument, the next section reviews the relevant historical context of the post-Reconstruction period within which the connection between lynching, status, and white racial identity must be understood, concluding with drawing out a number of empirical expectations regarding the spatial variation and situational fluctuation of different types of lynching that we should expect given the historical context and the above theoretical discussion.

3. HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND EMPIRICAL EXPECTATIONS

3.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The emancipation of former slaves not only completely disrupted antebellum patterns of interracial relations in the South, throwing the terms of relations between whites and blacks and their relative social standing to one another into serious question, it also tore down the boundaries upon which whites had meaningfully distinguished and set themselves apart from blacks, as well as the foundational, asymmetrical categories upon which white identity rested in the antebellum era: white freedom/black unfreedom and, concomitantly, white (male) citizenship/black non-citizenship. As Reconstruction came to an end in the late 1870s and “home rule” returned to the South, one of the most important issues facing the South was therefore the so-called “Negro question”, that is, the question of blacks’ sociopolitical status in southern society. While the 1880s was an important period in the history of the South, witnessing whites reassert control of the region, it nonetheless represents somewhat of an interlude between the end of Reconstruction and the onset of disfranchisement, segregation, and fierce and systematic racial oppression in the 1890s. The decade following upon the return of home rule did not see an immediate violent reaction in the sense of drastically increased repression of blacks, but was a period of continual redefinition and renegotiation, and of unresolved questions and tensions, as race relations remained comparatively flexible and indeterminate throughout the decade as blacks and whites sought to redefine their relationships to one another (Ayers 1992). “It was a time of experiment, testing and uncertainty—quite different from the time of repression and rigid uniformity that was to come at the end of the century. Alternatives were still open and real choices to be made” (Woodward 2002: 33). As such, the 1880s were “unsettled times” (Swidler 1986) as there were no well-established social institutions available to offer identity anchors for white southerners seeking order and trying to make sense of the new circumstances; identity questions abound but answers were harder to come by. “Cataclysmic disruptions triggered by the Civil War, Reconstruction, and their aftermath produced the need to envision new foundations of identity” (Hoelscher 2003: 663).

While the 1880s saw much uncertainty and bargaining, forays and retreats, the following decades witnessed a determinate, forceful, and successful effort of southern whites to build a new system of race relations, reimposing racial subordination in the region. The New South that emerged during the decades straddling the turn of the twentieth century, with its one-party Democratic politics, one-crop, rural cotton

economy, and system of racial exclusion and oppression, as well as the newly invented racial categories and boundaries that underlay it—most notably the rigid color-line and the absolute, dichotomous racial categories embodied in the one-drop rule—resulted from the determination and conscious decisions and actions of whites southerners engaged in struggles amongst an range of interests in an environment created by the destruction of slavery (Woodward 2002).

One such struggle was the one between competing factions of whites, particularly between southern conservatives and extreme, radical racists. This struggle was decided in the early 1890s in favor of the latter and for the next quarter of a century their interpretation on the contested “Negro question” and how to organize the region’s race relations had priority. The perspective of the conservative southern Democrats—in power since the collapse of Reconstruction—was based upon the belief that blacks were inferior to whites, but did on the whole not pose a serious threat to whites or the larger social order. The conservative ethos of race relations carried in many respects on the antebellum paternalism of slavery, recognizing blacks as an integral part of southern society, as long as they remained in a subordinated position, assuming no natural antipathy between the races and denying that public degradation, exclusion, and humiliation of blacks was a necessary condition of white security and supremacy. Emphasizing whites’ paternalistic guardianship of blacks, the conservatives found no justification for the barbarity of lynching in hysterical and shrill cries for white supremacy, but feared that widespread mob violence would disrupt social stability and lead to lawlessness (Williamson 1984; Woodward 2002).

In stark contrast, the doctrine of the extreme racists, infused with ideas from scientific racism and social Darwinism, designated no place for blacks in southern society and saw no possibility of whites and blacks living peacefully together (Williamson 1984). The radical racists believed that slavery had had a civilizing influence of blacks without which they were “retrogressing” toward their natural state of precivilized savagery. Perceived as posing a serious threat to the white community, blacks had to be contained and the solution the racists opted for involved, in combination with the permanent segregation and subjugation of African-Americans, their demonization, terrorization, and humiliation. The most important and potent symbol of this perceived retrogression and increasingly uncontrollable black population was embodied in the image of the “black beast rapist”—an image that for all intents and purposes did not exist before the Civil

War but rose during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century—depicting blacks as driven by urges and instincts closer to those of animals than humans. Concomitant with the rise of the notion of the “black beast rapist”, was the idea of the sanctity and purity of white womanhood, which in the late nineteenth century became invested with somewhat of a Durkheimian sacredness, whose protection from defilement through contact with “impure” blacks played a central role in the domination of blacks, connecting it intimately with the construction and policing of the color line and so formed a major plank in the foundation of white identity. White womanhood had above all to be protected from the perceived savage and primitive sexuality of black men, and a taboo on sexual contact between black men and white women was a central tenant of the racial boundary, whose violation represented the ultimate defilement of not only the individual white woman and her family, but also an extraordinary threat to the integrity of the whole white community (Harris 1995; Williamson 1984).

The competing alternatives of Bourbon conservatism and extreme, radical racism were not simply opposing political agendas competing for electoral success, but conflicting *Weltanschauungen*—collective narratives—representing fundamentally different understandings of human nature and the social world, proposing very different answers to the kinds of identity questions related above, reflecting differing conceptions of the Negro question and how to attain white superiority and suppress blacks, including the place and viability of violence in race relations. As the racial extremists gained momentum in the early 1890s and led the South down the path of rigid, exclusionary, and repressive racial relations, they drew on a dominant collective narrative that capitalized on and resonated with the collective memories, fears, hatreds, and everyday experiences and understandings of social life of many southern whites, thereby marshalling, if not their support, at least their acquiescence (cf. Ayers 1992). It was consequently upon this collective narrative that the South sought to organize its racial relations and unite what was in fact a heterogeneous region into the bastion of white supremacy that it became in the early twentieth century for at least half a decade to come.

3.2 EMPIRICAL EXPECTATIONS

In order to re-establish white supremacy the racial boundary and the unequal paired racial categories white-black had to be redrawn and recreated and it had to be so by symbolic means, for it is not the existence of

two races that creates a boundary but the boundary that creates the two races (Harris 1995). One way this was achieved was through brutal violence. Insofar as the above theoretical analysis and historical interpretation of southern race relations would have any merit, what event-level and community-level patterns in black lynching should we then expect during the present period of investigation, namely 1882-1915?¹ The present theory suggests that alleged crimes with implications for the racial boundary and the collective, community honor of whites, thereby threatening the collective integrity and superiority of whites, transforming it from a private affair to the responsibility of the whole white community, were followed by lynching events involving collective violent rituals. Thus, alleged sexual assaults against a white woman by a black man and murder of a white person at the hands of a black person—both representing an extraordinary violation of the racial boundary and threat to the integrity of the white community as a whole—should more likely be followed by lynchings involving communal participation and elements of ceremony and ritual (e.g. torture and mutilations) than other precipitating events, for example, violations of the informal rules of racial etiquette governing face-to-face interactions between whites and blacks, whose implications would not reach beyond violating the status, honor and social identity of particular white individuals, and should consequently take the form of social identity-building violence, involving fewer participants and non-ritualistic, non-ceremonial violence.

However, to the extent the critical turning point in southern race relations occurred around 1890 and lynching playing a central role in racial categorization and identification in the decades thereafter, we should expect it taking a narrative and performative turn around that time. This turn should manifest itself in a higher proportion spectacle lynching after 1890 than before generally and more spectacle lynchings triggered by alleged sexual assaults against white women by black men particularly, because the purity of white womanhood did not emerge as a trope of white status and identity until the 1890s, and neither did the image of the “black beast rapist”. Finally, to the extent that my line of argument that lynching was an important

¹ The beginning of the period was motivated by practical concerns of data availability—1882 is the first year for which reliable data on lynching are available—whereas the choice of endpoint was based upon substantive historical considerations. The “Negro question” had for all intents and purposes been solved by the mid-1910s when a state-sanctioned, institutionalized racial order of white hegemony had been firmly established in the South, providing a solid foundation upon which to base white racial identity, endowing whites with a sense of “racial self-confidence” and security that had been lacking at the beginning of the period. By 1915 the times had, in Swidler’s terminology, gone from “unsettled” to “settled” (Swidler 1986).

arena for the construction of racial categories, boundaries, and identities after 1890 holds, these latter patterns should *not* be observed in white-on-white lynching events, as its significance should not primarily lay in creating or upholding a racial hierarchy through collective violent rituals (cf. Brundage 1993; Tolnay and Beck 1995).

Regarding the impact of community-level on lynching, we should, insofar as there was a decisive shift in the rhetorics and substance of race relations in the 1890s, on the one hand, expect that the stronger a community was committed to the conservative ethos of white supremacy and race relations—espousing paternalistic sympathy for African Americans, emphasizing social stability, tranquil race relations, law and order, and berating lynching as lawless savagery—the lower its lynching rate in the 1880s. And to the extent that lynching represented an important arena for the construction of whiteness after 1890, we should on other hand expect localities where the white population was more strongly committed to the vehemently racist notions of white supremacy emerging in the 1890s to have higher levels of lynching. On the one hand, lynchings taking the form of collective identity-building violence should be more common in white communities that were strongly committed to white supremacy, because we can assume that the motivation to assert racial superiority, draw racial boundaries, and display within-group identification and solidarity was strongest in such places. This relationship should, on the other, be curvilinear, because proceeding from the view that the vagueness and transitional character of racial boundaries placed stress on solidarity among whites, highlighting the importance of their own sense of group cohesion, we can speculate that whites in order to claim superiority and unity staged the most spectacular and elaborate performances in circumstances of uncertain and fragile solidarity.

The notion of social equality between the races was especially unacceptable to many white southerners because the relative standing of whites and blacks was, in their view, a zero-sum game in a Darwinian struggle for scarce material and nonmaterial resources. Consequently, the social elevation of blacks would in the process, by iron necessity, result in the social degradation of whites. This was probably most strongly felt at the lower end of the social rung and especially so during the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when an increasing number of rural whites found their position relative blacks cumbersome due to the steady decline of white yeomanry, leading to an erosion of observable status

differentials between poor whites and blacks in rural areas. Widespread landlessness and farm tenancy among whites thus not only constituted a significant deterioration in their material conditions, but also put significant strain on their trying to uphold a stable and secure social standing above blacks, without a solid economic foundation to back up their status claims (Ayers 1992; Tolnay and Beck 1995). As poor rural whites risked losing their elevated social standing vis-à-vis blacks previously enjoyed by all whites, they attached considerable value to their “whiteness.” The unrelenting quest for status among poor whites and heightened sense of threat thereto from (perceived) increasingly assertive black claims to social equality created a volatile social environment in which many whites likely were more sensitive to violations of the informal rules governing interracial interaction than if they had possessed the means to securely protect their social standing and place themselves above blacks. To the extent my theorizing on violence as serving motives of status display is valid, violence should have allowed poor whites to protect their social status relative blacks and that they were most likely to engage in violence to preserve their racially privileged position when they were more vulnerable to suffer status threat from blacks, suggesting that lynching was more likely to occur in times and places where the interracial status gap, net of economic factors, was comparatively small. However, we should expect this pattern to hold for lynching espousing social identity- rather than collective identity-building violence, because it is unlikely that low status differences between whites and blacks generated the kind of collective sense of threat within the whole white community required for collective identity-building violence.

4. DATA, MEASURES, AND METHODS

4.1 DATA

I analyze data from a partly new inventory of lynching events in Georgia and Louisiana from 1882 to 1915. This inventory builds and expands upon the information contained in the comprehensive ten-state lynching inventory constructed by Tolnay, Beck, and associates (for a description of the Beck-Tolnay inventory, see Tolnay and Beck 1995, appendix A; cf. Bailey et al 2008). The Beck-Tolnay inventory records for every lynching event it contains the name, race, and gender of each victim; date of the lynching; county in which the lynching took place; alleged reason for the lynching; and racial composition of the lynch mob. The present inventory expands upon the Beck-Tolnay inventory primarily by classifying each lynching event

according to its degree of community participation and support. Based upon the typology of lynching events developed by Brundage (Brundage 1993) and the information in contemporary newspaper accounts in the *Atlanta Constitution*—the most important and widely read paper in the state—I have coded each lynching in Georgia as either a spectacle lynching or a private lynching.²

Space constraints prevent me from describing the coding procedure in any greater detail here, but suffice it to say that I coded events in which the victim was summarily killed in or in close proximity to his home by a small group of people, and events without any indication of torture, mutilation, or burning of the victim, or signs hung on the body as private lynchings. I coded as spectacle lynchings all events for which the newspaper reported more than fifty participants, and regardless of size, events involving participants beyond those directly affected by the alleged crime, that is, family members, friends, and neighbors, and events in which the mob engaged in torture, mutilation, burning, riddling the body with bullets, or hanging signs on the corpse. Finally, events involving alleged black criminals killed while pursued by a larger group of whites—a posse—are considered spectacle lynchings.

4.2 MEASURES OF FOCAL INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

The burden of this investigation is to demonstrate that whites' individual as well as group level status concerns and concomitant processes of racial boundary, category and identity formation played an important part in the lynching phenomenon and that it can be used to understand spatial, county-level variations in lynching. One methodological problem is, then, to produce a community-level measure of whites' racial solidarity and commitment to the principles of white supremacy. To measure the local salience of contemporary narratives of race, racial relations, and white supremacy, I use county-level electoral support for the Democratic Party in presidential elections. Democratic electoral support serves as a marker. This measure includes the two elements required by the measure of ethnically or racially based commitment and solidarity proposed by Nielsen, that is, the promotion of specific claims defined on basis of membership of

² Events for which I lack sufficient information to classify as either a spectacle or private lynching, I assigned to a third category of "unknown". These events are not included in the following analyses. For Louisiana lynchings I rely on Pfeifer's coding, which also is based upon the Brundage typology. However, to achieve sampling consistency and data comparability between states, the analyses here include only Louisiana lynching events identified by Pfeifer that also have been confirmed by and included in the Tolnay-Beck inventory.

an ethnic or racial group as opposed to other groups (such as social classes) in the social system, and a measure of the ideological and organizational mobilization of the group membership for the implementation of these specific claims (Nielsen 1980).

Considering that the Democratic Party was a status-group party organized around notions of race and racial hierarchy, that true and faithful white men were supposed to vote Democratic, and that whites voting otherwise and promoting, for example, class-based or biracial politics were seen as racial traitors and risked social ostracism or violence, many commentators have observed that Democratic support on the county-level was indicative of local interracial relations: “[A]rdent supporters of the doctrine of ‘white superiority’...cling to the Democratic party for protection from ‘nigger-lovin’ administrations in Washington and for a guarantee of ‘pure white’ rule at home” (Raper 1933: 170; Tolnay and Beck 1995). Thus, although the underlying conceptions of race and race relations, as well as the substance and expression of its racially based goals and claims, changed over time, the Democratic Party was undoubtedly the “White Man’s Party” and the organizational backbone of white supremacy throughout the period of investigation.

To measure status competition between whites and blacks, I use information on occupational status differentiation between whites and blacks, based upon the Duncan socioeconomic index (SEI). This index measures the overall social status of a range of occupations given average occupational education and average occupational income in 1950 (Blau and Duncan 1967). I generated a county-level measure of status competition and by using census data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) containing individual and household level information on broad range of characteristics, for example, age, race, sex, and, if applicable, occupational standing measured by Duncan’s Socioeconomic Index. In order to obtain county-level measures of status competition between whites and blacks, I generated race specific county-level occupational status averages by aggregating and averaging for each sample the SEI scores of males at least 16 years old.³ Second, in order to obtain the requisite measure I subtracted the mean occupational status of whites within a county from that of blacks. Thus, the higher the value of this measure, the lower the status gap between whites and blacks, which, in turn, would indicate a higher level of interracial status

³ This study includes persons 16 years and older because IPUMS designates this as the population that is legally allowed to work (Horton, Allen, Herring, and Thomas 2000).

competition.⁴

4.3 METHODOLOGY: EVENT HISTORY ANALYSIS

To ascertain whether there was an association between focal independent predictors and lynching, I apply event-history analysis.⁵ I chose to estimate Cox hazards models because they do not make as strong assumptions about the data-generating process as parametric alternatives and they also allow for model checking diagnostics currently unavailable for parametric models regarding identification and accommodation of violations of the proportional hazards assumption. All models presented below were tested for violations of the proportional hazards assumption and violations were corrected by interacting the offending covariates with the natural log of time. Furthermore, to avoid the potential problems associated with unobserved heterogeneity caused by a lack of independence among repeated events within the same subject, all models cluster on county and use robust variance estimation of standard errors and stratify the data according to event rank—that is, first lynching, second lynching, third lynching, and so on.

5. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

This section reports the results of three separate sets of analyses. First I present and discuss the results of analyses on the level of lynching events. Then I review county-level models focusing respectively on the effect of white supremacy and interracial status competition on lynching. To begin, then, was there an association between the immediately precipitating circumstances of a lynching and its symbolic form? Did the pattern in 1882-1889 differ from that of 1890-1915? Turning to Tables 1 and 2, we see that instances of lynching involving the murder or attempted murder of whites by blacks, which whites throughout the whole period of investigation strongly perceived as challenging the racial hierarchy, in both time periods were more likely spectacle than private lynchings, whereas the opposite was true of other non-sexual offences.

⁴ This procedure generated some cases of missing values, because I did not calculate county-level occupational status averages for counties with less than ten individuals meeting the above stated criteria. Furthermore, following standard practice, yearly values of this and all other independent variables in intercensal years were approximated using linear interpolation. As the original enumerators' manuscripts of the 1890 census were almost completely destroyed in a fire in 1921, I could not interpolate between 1890 and 1900, leading to further missing values for this variable. Similarly, since the census does not contain information on farm operators by race before 1900, the values between 1890 and 1900 for another independent variable in one model—proportion white tenant farmers—cannot be approximated by interpolation either. In order to accommodate the missing data, I adopted a multiple imputation strategy (for details on this method, see e.g. Allison 2002).

⁵ The following review of event history models is, unless otherwise stated, based upon Box-Steffensmeier and Jones (2004).

- Table 1 about here -

More important, however, is that the data reveal the predicted diverging patterns in the two time periods regarding the character of lynchings triggered by allegations of black men sexually assaulting white women. A lynching following upon such allegations was in the latter period more likely to take the form of a spectacle than a private lynching, whereas it in the earlier period was as likely to take either form.⁶

- Table 2 about here -

Table 3 displays these patterns more clearly and confirms that lynching events triggered by allegations of black men sexually assaulting white women changed character from one period to the next such that it after 1890 was more likely to involve narrative violence and take the form of a collective violent ritual, that is, spectacle lynching.

- Table 3 about here -

To further evaluate whether lynching took on a more narrative, collective identity-building quality after the 1880s, we turn to Table 4 that displays the proportion of spectacle lynchings of all lynchings in 1882-1889 and 1890-1915, respectively. Comparing the proportions in the table confirms that the expected narrative turn in the practice of lynching actually took place—spectacle lynchings were relatively more common after than before the turn of the 1890s.

- Table 4 about here -

On the event level we thus find evidence that the changing notions of white supremacy and the emergence of a virulent Negrophobia in the 1890s, including the notion of the “black beast rapist”, influenced whites’ perception of the threat posed by blacks and the appropriate way to deal with it,

⁶ While the overall association in Table 1 between precipitating event and lynching type is statistically significant, it is important to note that this result is not driven by the response to allegations of sexual assault. A formal one-sample test of proportion fails to reject the null hypothesis that the proportion of spectacle lynchings (0.51) is equal to the proportion of private lynchings (0.49) of all lynchings following upon allegations of sexual assault in the period 1882-1889.

something that in turn transformed the nature and significance of lynching.

Concluding this set of analyses, the results of Table 5, while based upon a comparatively small sample of events, are in line with our expectations, showing that events involving whites lynching other whites do not embody the same kind of patterns as white on black lynchings, as there is no similar consistent association in the former type of lynching between the nature of triggering events and ensuing lynchings as found in the latter.

- Table 5 about here -

The next set of analyses examines the impact of different racialized *Weltanschauungen* or collective narratives in the form of southern conservatism and radical racism, respectively, on the level and form of lynching in the time periods before and after 1890. Looking first at Model 1 in Table 6, we see that the main effect of our white supremacy measure is a (nonproportional) negative, non-linear though statistically insignificant predictor of the lynching rate for the period from 1882 through 1889, with its interaction with time positive and statistically significant.⁷

- Table 6 about here -

This finding weakly supports the view that the conservative, paternalistic ethos of white supremacy reduced the likelihood of lynching, and also that its temporal variation had a stronger impact on lynching than its spatial variation. Thus, in conclusion, while the remaining predictor variables in Model 1, failing to reach statistical significance, do a relatively poor job overall of accounting for the county-level lynching rate before 1890, the findings partially meet our expectations in indicating that it was negatively, or at least not positively, associated with the strength of southern conservatism. This finding supports Woodward's thesis of Southern conservatism as a restraining force on extreme antiblack fanaticism and violence before 1890 (Woodward 2002).

To probe the link between lynching and notions of white supremacy in the period from 1890 to 1915

⁷ I do not report separate models for private and spectacle lynching in this period, because unreported analyses, in all likelihood due to data containing too few events of each type, failed to yield statistically tractable or probative models.

and assess to what extent different forms of lynching had different determinants, Table 7 present results from analyses differentiating between spectacle (Model 2) and private (Model 3) lynching.

- Table 7 about here -

As predicted, the strength of racist white supremacist ideology had a strong positive, nonlinear effect on the rate of spectacle lynching, whereas private lynching seems to have been insensitive to the prevailing virulent Negrophobia. The negative coefficient on the interaction term with time in Model 2 indicates that the impact of white supremacy on spectacle lynching declined over time. These findings align with the theoretical and empirical framework advanced herein, stressing, for one thing, the importance of ideational factors and intersubjective understandings of social life such as ideologies, narratives, and frames in the construction of purposive actors' interests, and, for another, lynching as a vital device for (re)establishing a system of oppressive race relations in the South.

Furthermore, the number of previous lynching events of the opposite type has a strong impact on the rate of private lynching within a county, whereas this does not apply to spectacle lynching. This finding is perhaps best understood in terms of providing opportunity for white people to handle private grievances against blacks by violent means. Being the form of violence that above and beyond everything else caught the attention of black and white southerners alike, episodes of spectacle lynching may have furthered an atmosphere favorable to racial violence in general, making white people feel authorized to seek violent resolution to their primarily personal or familial conflicts and grievances with blacks (cf. Brundage 1993: 44). For private lynchings were in fact, and in contrast to spectacle lynchings, not always met with community support or approval, but were every so often harshly condemned by white elite representatives, for example, community leaders and newspaper editors. Members of private lynching mobs were consequently more likely than spectacle lynching participants to be objected to social sanctions and community disapproval, and, while a rare occurrence, they were also more likely to suffer legal punishments for their deeds (Brundage 1993). But in localities that experienced the massive racial violence of spectacle lynching, violence with, as well as without, community approval may have flourished as heterogeneous forms of violence began to break through the social fabric of intergroup as well as interpersonal relations (cf.

Martin 2000: 162). Thus freed from the constraint of customary surveillance, social control, and constraints whites may have found opportunity to use physical force in pursuit of ends otherwise forbidden or unavailable to them, for example, enacting violent private revenge on black adversaries by committing mundane murder with impunity (cf. Tilly 2003).

The final set of analyses estimate the influence of status threat on lynching. In Table 8 we find results aligning with our predictions that the level of private lynching, but not spectacle lynching, should be higher in communities with a relatively narrow interracial status gap where poor whites had difficulties to easily feel superior to blacks and enjoy the status whiteness conferred.

- Table 8 about here -

Thus, while the level of status differentiation between whites and blacks in does not appear to have affected the rate of spectacle lynching (Model 4), Model 5 shows that lower levels of racial status differentiation, net of relevant economic conditions, were associated with higher rates of private lynching, suggesting that private lynching was a response to the interpersonal status threats of everyday life and quest to achieve and maintain racial privilege in a for many poor whites difficult, disorienting, and threatening formative period of time.

In conclusion, taken together with the foregoing event-level analyses, the event-history models provide a series of consistent and clearly interpretable empirical results that strengthen our confidence that the collective-identity building violence of spectacle lynching and the social-identity building violence of private lynching were in fact driven by different underlying microlevel social processes and embodied different meanings. These differing effects occurred because the different expressions of lynching violence were conditioned by and responded to different forms of (perceived) threat to whites—individual or familial versus collective or community threat (cf. Stovel 2001).

6. CONCLUSIONS

The charge of this study has not been to contest the arguments or contributions of previous research, but complement it by resuming where it has halted and develop a theoretical framework that lets us entertain the role of sociocultural factors in tandem with economic ones in the phenomenon of lynchings of blacks in the post-Reconstruction South. Taking an approach that seriously considers how social action and interaction are driven and shaped not only by material conditions and factors but also nonmaterial, ideational ones, I have probed certain salient aspects of lynching not easily addressed or accounted for within traditional theoretical frameworks and provided theoretical grounds as well as empirical evidence to support the claim that rather than considering lynching the result primarily of economic competition between well-defined and preexisting racial groups, we may benefit from understanding it as part of the very group-making process itself. That is to say, lynching was not only an instrumental means of controlling blacks or furthering the economic interest of different classes of whites, but also a crucial aspect of the formation of racial boundaries, categories, and identities in the South in the decades around 1900. In other words, lynching in general and spectacle lynching, with its self-conscious and reflective communal ritual and symbolism, in particular, represented an important site for the articulation of whites' self-understanding, binding and bounding whites who shared a sense of belonging together and constituting a distinctive group with common stakes in what happened in southern society, allowing them to come together and collectively map and imprint their culturally grounded categories and shared definitions of race onto the social world through violent displays of collective identification and solidarity. In that regard, lynching was “[A] ritual that both brought out and created the white community, that made whiteness” (Hale 1998: 211).

By actively defining and forging the racial categories and identities upon which the coming system of southern race relations ultimately rested, lynching represented one “piece in the puzzle of Southern social transformation” (Stovel 2001: 852) and the coming of the “New South”, characterized by a one-party political system, a one-crop rural economy, and rigid, exclusionary racial repression. Representing one aspect of the broader developments in southern society generally and southern racial relations particularly, we may consider lynching part of a coherent “racial project” (Omi and Winant 1994). Considering racial projects in terms of efforts to simultaneously define and represent the meaning of race in particular times and places and

organize and distribute material resources along racial lines makes clear how the goals, theoretical-analytic framework, and conclusions of this study do *not* compete with, but complement that of recent lynching scholarship—upon whose shoulders this work very much stands.

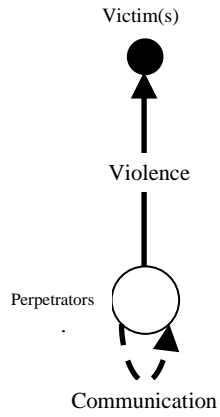
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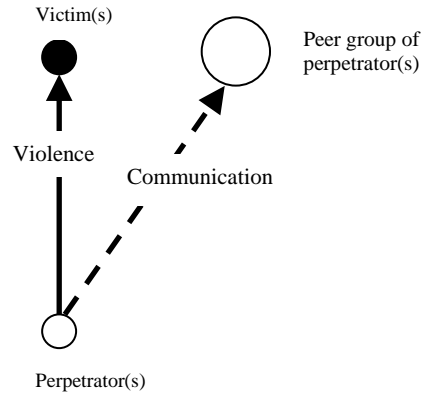
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Figure 1: The interactional structure of different forms of intergroup violence

Interactional structure of collective identity-building violence



Interactional structure of social identity-building violence



Interactional structure of violence as social control

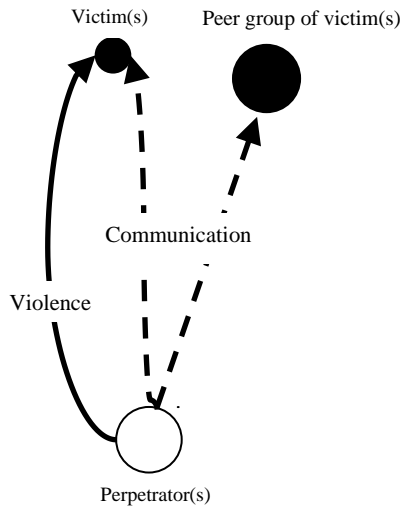


Table 1: Black Lynching Type by Alleged Offence in Georgia and Louisiana, 1882-1889

Alleged offence	Lynching Type		Total % (N)
	Private % (N)	Spectacle % (N)	
Sexual assault	49 (20)	51 (21)	100 (41)
Murder and attempted murder	33 (4)	67 (8)	100 (12)
Other offences	86 (18)	14 (3)	100 (21)
Total	57 (42)	43 (32)	100 (74)

Pearson χ^2 (d.f.= 2)= 10.92; $p < 0.01$ (one-tailed test).

Table 2: Black Lynching Type by Alleged Offence in Georgia and Louisiana, 1890-1915

Alleged offense	Lynching Type		Total % (N)
	Private % (N)	Spectacle % (N)	
Sexual assault	34 (49)	66 (95)	100 (144)
Murder and attempted murder	33 (51)	67 (105)	100 (156)
Other offences	76 (51)	24 (16)	100 (67)
Total	41 (151)	59 (216)	100 (367)

Pearson χ^2 (d.f. = 2) = 41.46 ; $p < 0.001$ (one-tailed test).

Table 3: Proportion of Black Spectacle Lynchings Precipitated by Allegations of Sexual Assault in Georgia and Louisiana, by Time Period

Time period	Lynching Type		
	Private % (N)	Spectacle % (N)	Total % (N)
1882-1889	49 (20)	51 (21)	100 (41)
1890-1915	34 (49)	66 (95)	100 (144)
Total	37 (69)	63 (116)	100 (185)

Pearson χ^2 (d.f.= 1)= 2.97; $p < 0.05$ (one-tailed test).

Table 4: Proportion of Black Spectacle Lynchings in Georgia and Louisiana, by Time Period

Time period	Lynching Type		
	Private % (N)	Spectacle % (N)	Total % (N)
1882-1889	57 (42)	43 (32)	100 (74)
1890-1915	43 (165)	57 (216)	100 (381)
Total	45 (207)	55 (248)	100 (455)

Pearson χ^2 (d.f.= 1)= 4.52; $p < 0.05$ (one-tailed test).

Table 5: White Lynching Type by Alleged Offence in Georgia and Louisiana, 1890-1915

Alleged offense	Lynching Type		
	Private % (N)	Spectacle % (N)	Total % (N)
Sexual assault	83 (5)	17 (1)	100 (6)
Murder and attempted murder	67 (12)	33 (6)	100 (18)
Other offences	100 (7)	0 (0)	100 (7)
Total	77 (24)	23 (7)	100 (31)

Fisher's exact test = 0.221.

Table 6: Estimates of the Effect of White Supremacy Support on Hazard Rates for all Types of Black Lynching in Georgia and Louisiana, 1882-1889

	1882-1889
Independent Variable	Model 1
White supremacy measure	-0.046 (0.047)
White supremacy measure ²	0.0005 (0.0004)
Percent black	0.022 (0.032)
Percent black ²	-0.0003 (0.0003)
Log size of black population (in 1000s)	0.254 (0.172)
Average farm size	-0.0002 (0.0014)
Percent of farms owned	-0.0007 (0.012)
Cotton dominance (percent improved farmland in cotton)	-0.014 (0.0099)
White supremacy measure x ln(t)	0.061* (0.026)
White supremacy measure ² x ln(t)	-0.0004* (0.0002)
Wald chi-square	25.11*** (d.f. = 10)

$p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors clustered on county.

Table 7: Estimates of the Effect of White Supremacy Support on Hazard Rates for Spectacle and Private of Black Lynching in Georgia and Louisiana, 1890-1915

Independent Variable	Spectacle	Private
	Model 2	Model 3
White supremacy measure	0.175* (0.087)	0.056 (0.054)
White supremacy measure ²	-0.001* (0.0006)	-0.0004 (0.0004)
Percent black	0.044* (0.021)	0.005 (0.037)
Percent black ²	-0.0005* (0.0002)	-0.0003 (0.0005)
Log size of black population (in 1000s)	0.267* (0.124)	0.324* (0.137)
Average farm size	0.0005 (0.001)	0.004** (0.001)
Percent of farms owned	0.005 (0.008)	-0.007 (0.009)
Cotton dominance (percent improved farmland in cotton)	0.011 (0.007)	0.009 (0.009)
Number of previous lynchings of the opposite type	-0.013 (0.085)	0.274*** (0.063)
White supremacy measure x ln(t)	-0.079* (0.036)	-0.029 (0.026)
White supremacy measure ² x ln(t)	0.0005* (0.0002)	0.0002 (0.002)
Percent black x ln(t)	—	0.036* (0.014)
Percent black ² x ln(t)	—	-0.0003 (0.0002)
Wald chi-square	28.83** (d.f. = 11)	77.22*** (d.f. = 13)

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors clustered on county.

Table 8: Estimates of the Effect of Status Threat on Hazard Rates for Black Spectacle and Private Lynchings in Georgia and Louisiana, 1890-1915

Independent Variable	Spectacle	Private
	Model 4	Model 5
Black/white SEI difference	0.011 (0.022)	0.041* (0.021)
White farm tenancy	-0.038 (0.021)	-0.018 (0.01)
Percent black	0.044* (0.021)	-0.160 (0.054)
Percent black ²	-0.0005* (0.0002)	-0.0003 (0.054)
Log size of black population (1000s)	0.301* (0.150)	0.591*** (0.159)
Average farm size	0.005 (0.087)	0.002* (0.0009)
Percent of farmland improved	0.0001 (0.001)	0.017* (0.008)
White farm tenancy x ln(t)	0.016* (0.008)	—
Percent black x ln(t)	—	0.038** (0.014)
Percent black ² x ln(t)	—	-0.0003 (0.0002)

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors clustered on county.