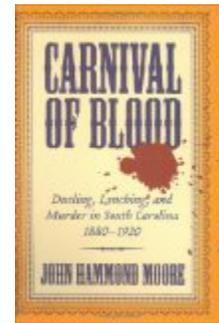


John Hammond Moore. *Carnival of Blood: Dueling, Lynching, and Murder in South Carolina, 1880-1920.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006. x + 304 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57003-620-0.

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Human Life is Cheap in South Carolina

A headline from a Florence newspaper in 1903—“Human Life is Cheap in South Carolina”—could just as easily have been the title of John Hammond Moore’s new survey of lethal interpersonal violence in South Carolina around the turn of the twentieth century. *A Carnival of Blood* demonstrates this proposition in great detail, providing some explanations of why it was the case. Beginning with the unsettled period immediately after Reconstruction and continuing to the beginning of the modern era after World War I, Moore examines the passing of the dueling tradition, the rise and fall of lynching, and the persistent problem of homicide (fueled by drink and an abundance of easily available pistols). The book’s topic, and especially its lively and enjoyable style, should give it appeal to a readership well beyond the academy, but it also addresses issues that will interest scholars studying violence and the legal system in the United States in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.

One of the strengths of this book is that it provides what will long be the definitive accounts of several famous violent episodes from the Palmetto State. The first of these is the Cash-Shannon duel of 1880, which arose out of complex financial and legal dealings, themselves typical of the economic changes associated with the New South. In addition to the primary cause of the dispute, Moore explains the political context of the duel in detail. Another interesting factor here is the importance of family members: one reason William M. Shannon took part in the duel was to shield his sons, and E. B. C. Cash’s son Boggan was an integral part of the affair. In fact, Bog-

gan Cash went on in the next few years to become ever more violent, ending his career as an outlaw in a shootout with a posse in 1884.

The third and fourth chapters of *Carnival of Blood* deal with lynching. After a standard history of the origins of the practice, Moore argues that during Reconstruction there were some killings but that “whites had not yet embraced public displays as a means of social control” (p. 48). This happened after Reconstruction, though, significantly, the first two lynchings discussed in detail occurred in 1876 in the context of Redemption. The great strength of Moore’s study of lynchings is his exhaustive knowledge of the sources; if he has not read every issue of every local newspaper in South Carolina during this period, a reader would never know it. Obscure items from the state archives and local courthouses also provide invaluable information. Moore makes a couple of interesting observations regarding the trends for lynchings within South Carolina. First, he argues that the creation of new counties in the western part of South Carolina during this period created weak county law enforcement structures. Second, disapproval of lynching increased noticeably around 1900, tentatively linked to a “general exodus of blacks” that began at that time (p. 81). While not presented as an argument for the decline of lynching, the evidence shows that lynchers did face legal repercussions for their actions with surprising frequency, even if these cases seldom resulted in actual convictions.

Half of this book is devoted to non-lynching homi-

cides. Two chapters provide definitive accounts of the 1889 murder of Charleston editor Francis W. Dawson by Dr. Thomas McDow and the 1903 assassination of Columbia editor Narciso G. Gonzales by Lieutenant Governor Jim Tillman. Both of these cases are examples of a phenomenon Moore suggests is distinctively South Carolinian: “murder by educated men prominent in the world of commerce and government” (p. 3). Chapter 7 provides an analysis of homicide in South Carolina during the period. Using H. V. Redfield’s *Homicide, North and South* (1880) as a starting point, Moore looks for broad insights about the next forty years. Redfield attributed the South’s high level of violence to the after-effects of slavery and the prevalence of handguns. Adequate laws that remained unenforced were also a significant factor. The solution, according to Redfield, was a combination of more vigorous law enforcement and improvement in the general educational level. Moore generally concurs with these points, but adds that liquor was a significant factor in many cases between 1880 and 1920 and that the person most likely to shoot you in South Carolina during this period was probably your brother-in-law. Moore’s careful review of not only the cold statistics but the lurid prose in which the newspapers described these murders points him toward other interesting observations. Whites, he suggests, “often were killed in stores and law offices,” whereas blacks “often were killed at social gatherings such as dances, hot suppers, card games, and church services” (p. 128). Though not presented with statistical evidence, the anecdotal evidence Moore supplies seems to back up this observation, though it is left to others to draw broader conclusions from this point. Another of these intriguing nuggets is that locales which had more lynchings also had more homicides, which might point toward a general weakness of law enforcement.

The next few chapters attempt to provide some order to this lack of law and order by dividing murders into categories. The first, “One-on-One” presents “the specter of a well-educated, even office-holding white—a man who had taken an oath to uphold the law—shooting an unarmed adversary and then going straight to the sheriff with a seemingly contrived claim of self-defense” (p. 142). Moore’s claim that this is somehow distinctively and almost uniquely South Carolinian seems a bit of a stretch, though the cases he presents here are egregious almost beyond belief. Of the fifteen killers in this chapter, only five went to prison, a clear indication that South Carolinians at this time were more committed to a system of “personal justice” than the staid mechanisms of

the legal system. One of these killers was the father of South Carolina’s long-serving senator, Strom Thurmond, and another was Eugene Blease. In 1905, Blease shot his unarmed brother-in-law on the street in Saluda, South Carolina. He was acquitted, and in 1931 became Chief Justice of the South Carolina Supreme Court. Some of the liveliest incidents in the book are in the “Shoot-Outs, Western Style” chapter. From the descriptions, simply walking down the street in South Carolina in this period could be life-threatening, especially if anyone nearby had been involved with politics, liquor, or both. In the 1915 “Battle of Winnsboro,” a sheriff who insisted on bringing an African-American prisoner to trial for an alleged assault rather than allowing him to be lynched was met on the courthouse steps with a hail of bullets; the sheriff, the prisoner, a deputy, and the assailant all died. Another chapter covers the “Weird, Bizarre, and Insane,” including some material on children who committed murder and the law’s response to them.

This book is the product of many years’ work, and it has both the strengths and the flaws of that long period of formation. Moore’s command of the sources is unmatched, and he has both fleshed out complete accounts of incidents often given cursory treatment elsewhere and has brought to light for historians any number of events that would have otherwise remained buried in the microfilm of obscure newspapers. The writing throughout is a model we could all learn from: serious and sophisticated, yet readable, exciting, and witty. The only real weakness, and it is substantial, is that the book misses many opportunities to engage with recent relevant scholarship. It would have been enlightening, for instance, to see whether Moore thought his conclusions on lynching matched those of Michael Pfeifer, whose 2004 study posed lynching as one form of “rough justice” in competition with modernizing influences, or whether the decline of lynching in South Carolina was part of the national trends discussed by Christopher Waldrep in *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch*. The statistics on lynching in South Carolina repeat work done a decade ago by E. M. Beck and Stewart Tolnay and do not take into account the refinement of that data by Project HAL in recent years. In using Redfield’s book on homicide, the new edition with an introduction by Douglas Eckberg would have been useful. Without this engagement with recent literature on the topic, this book sits a bit apart from the mainstream of renewed interest in the perennial topic of southern violence.[1]

Note

[1]. Michael J. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1847-1947* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Christopher Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch: Extralegal Violence and Punishment in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck, *Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Project HAL: Historic American Lynching Data Collection Project <<http://people.uncw.edu/hinese/HAL/HAL%20Web%20Page.htm>>; H. V. Redfield, *Homicide, North and South: Being a Comparative View of Crime against the Person in Several Parts of the United States*, introduction by Douglas Eckberg (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000).

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