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James H. Madison. *A Lynching in the Heartland: Race and Memory in America.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000. ix + 153 pp. $24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-312-23902-2.

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The dust jacket's testimonials for this monograph allege, with characteristic hyperbole, that James Madison's *A Lynching in the Heartland* "takes the mask off the American crime we call lynching," with "the skills of a historian and the artistry of a journalist." None other than Darlene Clark Hine praises Madison for his skillful unraveling "of the conundrum of race, sex and violence on the one hand, and myth, memory and history on the other to illuminate the darkness in the heart of a community and in our nation." Don't believe the hype. In truth, Madison's monograph is none of these things, but merely a narrative "about race" which–by his own admission–"masquerades as a book about a lynching" (p. 1).

Unfortunately, Madison even fails at the task he sets for himself. Beginning with the horrific act of a lynching in Marion, Indiana on August 7, 1930, which claimed the lives of two African American men and almost resulted in the death of a third, Madison describes the event using matter-of-fact prose that is as predictable as any Hollywood B movie script. Three black teenagers "ambushed a young white couple parked along lover's lane… Claude Deeter, aged 24," a white male Marion factory worker "fought the three assailants heroically but could not resist the bullets fired from a revolver by one of the three" teenagers. "His companion, 18 year-old Mary Ball, was pushed down in the weeds and thorns along the riverbank and raped…" (p. 3). Aroused by the alleged rape of Ball and the subsequent death of Deeter from his gunshot wounds a white mob, righteously united in its fury, stormed the Grant County jail where the alleged assailants were being held. Two of the prisoners–Abraham Smith and Thomas Shipp–were dragged from the jail by members of the mob and tortured before receiving an extreme dose of vigilante justice; a third, James Cameron, narrowly escaped the same fate.

Madison then extends his narrative backward in time in an attempt to understand the social and political causes for this crime as well as its remembrance in local, state, and national culture. He devotes an entire chapter to the history of Grant County, where Marion is located, which he describes as "an ordinary place in time" (p. 27), and its Midwestern frontier roots. Subsequent chapters explore historical patterns of racial segregation and community in Marion, Indiana; the unsuccessful efforts of the NAACP and the State Attorney General's office to bring members of the mob to justice; and the lines of color which continued to have an important influence on the lives of Grant County and Marion residents during the civil rights movement of the 1960s and throughout the rest of the twentieth century.

Of particular note are chapters five and six, which discuss the evolution of popular narratives about the lynching along with a detailed account of the origins of photographer Lawrence Bietler's famous photograph of Smith and Shipp's bodies hanging from the tree in Courthouse Square. Along the way he discusses James Cameron's attempt to memorialize the event in his memoir, *A Time of Terror*,[1] and as part of his "Black Holocaust" museum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Madison also documents the tireless, if largely ineffectual, efforts of Mrs. Flossie Bailey, an African American resident of Marion and local NAACP official, to bring the murderers of Shipp and Smith to justice. It is a testament to the tenaciousness of both Cameron and Bailey that they continued their lengthy and lonely struggle despite the white community's concerted effort put the lynching behind them and consign it to the dustbin of history. "No one today can be sure exactly what happened August 6 and 7, 1930," Madison concludes. Over time there "would always be the memory of the battered bodies" of the victims, together with the "more and more haunting" image of "the white crowd standing below" Shipp and Smith's "bare dangling feet." At the dawn "of the twenty-first century that crowd of shameless spectators was no longer just Grant County's memory, but all of America's. Americans would continue to decide what to do with that memory and what stories it evoked" (p. 153).

Unfortunately, that white crowd is not the only shameless witness to the Marion lynchings. Madison's inadequate research design and analysis as well as reliance on the case study method fail to do justice to the complexity of this important subject. "From 1880 to 1930 angry mobs lynched 4,697 fellow Americans," Madison informs the reader. "Of these victims 3,344 were African Americans" (p. 13). True enough, if one relies solely on aggregate statistics. There is no mention or use whatsoever, however, of the painstaking record keeping of the scholar Monroe Work who compiled and published annual lynching statistics for decades at the Tuskegee Institute Archives. Consequently, Madison cannot explain why the annual number of African American lynching victims during this fifty year period in the United States did not actually begin to exceed that of whites nationally until 1886, a harrowing statistic that continued unabated to 1930 and beyond.[2] Why was this the case? Madison's lack of thorough research and over-reliance on the case-study approach cannot answer this question because its focus is too general in its statistical analysis and too narrow in its geographical focus to provide an answer.

Nor does *A Lynching in the Heartland* truly help us understand the connection between race, sex, and violence. Madison's over-simplistic attribution of lynching to white myths of black male sexuality and lust for white women creates a paradigm which cannot recognize that African American women, children and entire families could be victims of lynch law, too–as Leon Litwack's heart-rending essay in *Without Sanctuary* attests.[3] The actual raison d'être of white lynch mobs was to make an example of the target of their violence, for the purpose of social control, knowing that one black body hanging from a tree–irrespective of gender or age–served as well as another to terrorize and dominate the African American community.

Madison challenges the widely held popular view that the Ku Klux Klan was responsible for the deaths of Smith and Shipp. Although he admits that there were probably former Indiana Klan members in the mob and among the jail staff charged with guarding the prisoners, as an organization the Klan was little more than a receding memory in Indiana by 1930. "The Indiana Klan was guilty of much evil and much foolishness," he writes, "but it was innocent in the Marion lynchings, or rather no more guilty than many others in this ordinary place in America's heartland who continued to believe in 'us' and 'them"' (pp. 41-42). Such a dismissal of Klan involvement not only fails to understand that the KKK was national in scope during the 1920s, but also the longevity, resonance, and systemic nature of its ideology and vigilante tactics in American culture. As a result, Madison's analysis cannot help us extract the meaning from two cryptic inscriptions on a double-matted framed copy of Bietler's photograph which read: "Bo pointin to his niga" and "Klan 4th Joplin, Mo. '33."[4]

These are not the only problems with Madison's book. Although he is correct in asserting that historians have only recently "begun to explore the complexity" of lynching, Madison ignores the wealth of twentieth century sociological scholarship on this subject ranging from Gunnar Myrdal to A. D. Grimshaw.[5] His most glaring omission in this respect is Oliver C. Cox's *Caste, Class & Race*. First published in 1948, Cox's monograph provided one of the first social-psychological analyses of lynching and its causes. Cox even identified a recurring pattern of white behavior connected with such mob violence that he labeled the "lynching cycle." In fact, the event described in *A Lynching in the Heartland* bears an uncanny resemblance to Cox's cycle: the precipitating incident involves a violation of the sacred code of white supremacy; there is non-resistance by African Americans or at most only minimal and ineffective efforts at self-defense; and finally, the reestablishment of earlier accommodative patterns, with whites firmly in control again.[6] The characteristics of the 1930 Marion, Indiana lynching gives credence to the prescient observation of the late Malcolm X, who once noted that for African Americans the South was any place in the United States that was south of the Canadian border.

As the sociologists Stewart Tolnay and E. M. Beck note in their far superior monograph, *A Festival of Violence*, mob actions such as that perpetrated by the upstanding white citizens of Marion, Indiana "served four functions: (1) to eradicate specific persons accused of crimes against the white community; (2) as a mechanism of state-sanctioned terrorism designed to maintain a degree of leverage over the African American population; (3) to eliminate or neutralize African American competitors for social, economic, or political rewards; and (4) as a symbolic manifestation of the unity of white supremacy."[7] While the first of these was the manifest function of lynching, the other three latent functions, note Tolnay and Beck, are critical for understanding why this crime was perpetrated so extensively against African Americans after emancipation.

Madison's retelling of the events in Marion that hot August night gives credence to Tolnay and Beck's analysis. Although he focuses on the manifest relationship between lynching and gender in the racial universe, the official reports suggest that it was the murder of Deeter

that contributed as much as Ball's alleged rape, if not more, to the fury of the mob. Marion police displayed his bloody shirt in a City Hall window, which even Madison describes as "a red flag over Boots Street" (p.6). If gender was the precipitant of mob rage in lynchings, then why didn't they hang Ball's soiled and torn dress in the window? The answer is simple: Smith, Shipp, and Cameron had violated the most sacrosanct of all of the commandments of white supremacy–African Americans can never shed the blood of a white male, even in self-defense. To do so is the American equivalent of regicide or the murder of God himself. That this symbol of the three young African American men's racial heresy was displayed in a government venue by members of the city's duly constituted law enforcement agency sent a clear message to the white community that whatever action it took against the alleged perpetrators was acceptable to the state.

*A Lynching in the Heartland*is a great disappointment to the serious scholar of race and memory in America. In perusing its pages the reader is left with the uneasy feeling that its author is not a genuine explorer of America's bloody racial landscape, but little more than an incidental tourist whose account of his visit tells us little beyond what we already know or want to believe about the real America. The Marion, Indiana lynchings are part of an important story that needs to be told. It is a story that must be understood for the sake of present and future generations of Americans, if they hope to avoid a repeat of such tragedy; and in this respect, Madison's book fails to deliver.

Endnotes

[1]. James Cameron, *A Time of Terror: A Survivor's Story* (Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 1982).

[2]. http://www.law.umkc/edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/shipp/lynchingy . January 19, 2002; 18:30 hours. "Lynchings: By Year and Race." Statistics provided by the Tuskegee Institute Archives.

[3]. James Allen, Hilton Als, et al., *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Twin Palms Publishers, 2000).

[4]. Allen, et al., photograph 32. It is also worth noting that this particular photograph contains a lock of hair under the frame that supposedly belonged to one of the victims.

[5]. See, for example, Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944); A.I. Waskow, *From Race Riot to Sit-in* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1967); A.D. Grimshaw, (ed.), *Racial Violence in the United States* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1969).

[6]. O.C. Cox, *Caste, Class & Race* (New York: Modern Readers paperback, 1970, pp. 550-551.

[7]. Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 50.

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