

"Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America." Photographs from the Allen-Littlefield Collection, Special Collections, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA 30322-2870.

Four somewhat different exhibitions (listed below) have presented photographs from the collection, which is on loan to Emory University. The owners of the collection made the decisions for the first three. A university-wide committee at Emory, chaired by William M. Chace, president, was instrumental in making the Atlanta exhibition possible. The Atlanta exhibition, which is still up, is reviewed here.

Temporary exhibition, "Witness: Photographs of Lynchings from the Collection of James Allen and John Littlefield." Jan. 13–Feb. 12, 2000, Roth Horowitz Gallery, New York, N.Y. 78 lynching images. Andrew Roth, organizer.

Temporary exhibition, "Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America." March 14–Oct. 1, 2000, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y. 65 lynching images. James Allen, curator.

Temporary exhibition, "Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America." Sept. 22–Jan. 21, 2002, Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, Penn. 98 lynching images. James Allen, curator; Margery King and Jessica Arcand, organizers of related exhibitions.

Temporary exhibition, "Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America." May 1–Dec. 31, 2002, Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site, 450 Auburn Ave., Atlanta, GA 30312. Daily 9–5 except Thanksgiving and Christmas; admission free. 42 lynching images. Joseph F. Jordan, curator; Douglas H. Quin, exhibition designer; Frank Catroppa, Saudia Muwwakkil, and Melissa English-Rias, MLK Site team.

Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America. By James Allen, John Lewis, Leon F. Litwack, and Hilton Als. (Santa Fe: Twin Palms, 2000. 209 pp. \$60.00, ISBN 0-944092-69-1.)

Atlanta: introductory video, 12 min., dir. Matt Dibble, 2002.

Conference: "Lynching and Racial Violence in America: Histories and Legacies," Oct. 3–6, 2002, Emory University, Atlanta.

Atlanta: related programming includes weekly forums for community discussion, educational curricula, and a film series at Emory University.

Internet: Emory University <www.emory.edu/WithoutSanctuaryExhibit/> (Sept. 19, 2002); Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site <<http://www.nps.gov/malu>> (Sept. 20, 2002). Both sites link to the JournalE presentation of 81 images from the book, *Without Sanctuary* <<http://www.journale.com/withoutsanctuary/>> (Sept. 20, 2002).

In 1931, Matthew Williams was taken from a hospital bed in Salisbury, Maryland, by over two hundred white men and hanged from a tree by the courthouse in front of a thousand spectators. In a piece called "The Sound and the Fury," H. L. Mencken condemned the Williams lynching in the *Baltimore Evening Sun*. Referring to the typical collection of body parts, pieces of chain and charred wood, and photographs

common when black men were lynched for entertainment across the South, Mencken wrote, "What has become of these souvenirs the *Marylander and Herald* [Salisbury's local paper] does not say. No doubt they now adorn a parlor mantelpiece of some humble but public spirited Salisbury home. . . . I can only hope that they are not deposited eventually with the Maryland Historical Society."

Mencken understood the purpose of those lynching "souvenirs" in the early-twentieth-century South, their role as the most visible symbols of the threat of violence that undergirded segregation. What he feared has, of course, happened, and today spectators in Atlanta can see a framed piece of burnt wood, a lock of hair, and lynching photographs that had been sold as postcards. By all accounts, Emory University and the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site's presentation of the Allen-Littlefield Collection of lynching photographs is already a smash success—over fifty thousand people saw "Without Sanctuary" within the exhibition's first two months. Photographs from the collection, which is on deposit at Emory University, have never been seen in the South, although they have already been shown in New York and Pittsburgh. There is also a glossy *Without Sanctuary* book of photography and two Web sites.

Finding a place to mount the exhibition proved highly controversial in Atlanta—both the Atlanta History Center and Emory University carefully explained why they could not house the show in the near future. The King Historic Site solved this impasse by offering its space, and the setting, although small, adds a great deal of important historical context to the presentation. Just outside the entrance to "Without Sanctuary," Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous words fill up a wall: "It is no longer a choice, my friends, between violence and nonviolence. It is either nonviolence or nonexistence." King's words evoke an integrationist dream, not just black and white but humanity all together, the only sane choice in a warring century. The lynching exhibition, in contrast, offers a very different vision, of a segregated world where black and white are absolute opposites, the difference as stark in the images as who is smiling and who is dead. The juxtaposition asks the viewers to think hard about the contrast between two very different ways of organizing society.

The "Without Sanctuary" exhibition, despite the inclusion of some antilynching material, presents a world in which integration is unthinkable. In the entrance hall, one hears the classic recording of Billie Holiday singing the words printed on the wall, "Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze / Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees." The music hushes the crowd, reinforcing a tone of quiet, respectful reflection that posted signs suggest is appropriate (why not screaming and outrage?) for viewing photographs of corpses. A map of the southern United States gives the county-by-county body count, nearly five thousand documented victims, a geography of murder. On another wall Claude McKay's 1919 poem "If We Must Die" asks, "If we must die, let it not be like hogs / Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot."

The exhibition room is quite small, the walls a claustrophobic black, the carpet of course red, the photos, about forty, lining three walls. Spirituals play in the background. Six display cases sit in the center, full of related items such as international

coverage of the particularly gruesome lynching of M. William Potter in 1911 in Livermore, Kentucky, where people were charged fees to enter the town opera house and watch or take a shot. Another display case fills the fourth wall and presents documents generated by antilynching activism. Painted above the case are the 1895 words of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, perhaps the most famous crusader: "for every lynching humanity asks that America render its account to civilization and itself."

Both infamous and obscure lynchings are documented here. There is a photograph of the corpse of Leo Frank, a Jewish factory manager lynched in Atlanta in 1915. Another image shows the bodies of the labor organizers Angelo Albano and Caste-nego Ficcarotta, lynched during the cigar-makers' strike in Tampa in 1910. Those are the only photographs on display that present the murders of people who are not black (and yet, in the terms of their time, are also not quite white). A photograph of the lynching of multiple victims in Russelville, Kentucky, on July 31, 1908, appears on a postcard printed and presumably distributed by Jack Morton, Salesman, Nashville, Tennessee. One 1933 photograph, framed by the Fourth Klan of Joplin, Missouri, includes a hair sample of the victim. A postcard of the corpse of a clothed black man, Lige Daniels, hanged in Center, Texas, on August 3, 1920, includes a note: "This was made in the court yard, In Center, Texas, he is 16 year old Black boy, he killed Earl's Grandma, She was Florence's mother. Give this to Bud. From Aunt Myrtle."

This exhibition is smaller than the 98 photos presented in Pittsburgh and the 78 and 65 shown at the original exhibitions in New York. The Atlanta exhibition includes few of the most gruesome images. A postcard of the burned body of Jesse Washington, lynched in a particularly well attended 1916 event next to the City Hall in Waco, Texas, contains the following message hand-written across the back: "This the barbecue we had last night my picture is to the left with a cross over it your son, Joe." Also on display is a photograph of the naked and tortured body of Claude Neal, murdered in Marianna, Florida, in 1934 in one of the last spectacle lynchings. The most moving series of images, however, presents the killing of George Hughes in Sherman, Texas, on May 9, 1930. In one photo, Hughes, very much alive, stands chained in his overalls and looking at the camera. For once we get to see the person before the corpse, burned and legless in another image, erases the fear and defiance dancing in Hughes's eyes. The crowd of spectators and participants, the burning courthouse, and the buildings of a substantial town appear in two other photos. Hughes died in the vault inside the burning courthouse, where he had been placed to protect him from the mob, and a final image shows the chunk of his charred corpse, the strange fruit, hanging from a tree.

"Without Sanctuary" does hint at the larger history that left most of those pictures. From the late 1880s through the 1930s, lynching in America became an increasingly southern crime in which whites killed African Americans. Statistically, most of those murders were rather secretive affairs, conducted silently by small groups of white men in dark woods, particularly in the Deep South. Some acts of vigilante violence, however—spectacle lynchings—became very public events, and their victims were almost always black. White men, women, and children filled town

squares and ate picnics as they waited for the show and later gathered or bought souvenirs as they headed for home. Those mass entertainments were essential both to the construction of a new, post-Reconstruction social order in the South, a culture of segregation, and to defining the meaning of white and black in a world without slavery. In the late nineteenth century, African Americans refused to concede as segregation spread across public transportation and the franchise. They fought the new laws in the courts and defied them in practice. Lynching, which peaked during the early 1890s, was the violent underside of this "New" South, the threat that forced many African Americans to accept the growing restriction of their freedom.

Lynching continued into the twentieth century because segregation implied at least a limited autonomy, a black space distinct from the spaces of whites. That much of the southern world belonged to whites suggested that less desirable places, neighborhoods by the tracks or in the floodplain or jobs in the turpentine camps, for example, belonged to blacks. But lynching denied African Americans even the small degree of control that segregation promised. African American homes and even bodies could be violated at will. And nothing defined racial identity, that fiction made real, in more stark terms than a lynching. Whites were people who could torture and kill with impunity. African Americans were people who could be tortured and killed.

Many of the photographs that make up the Allen-Littlefield collection originated as souvenirs of spectacle lynchings. Less frequently, the images served as mementos of more private murders, transformed by photography into secondhand spectacles. Increasingly, those souvenirs extended the work of lynching far beyond the time and place of the actual murder. Even as the number of lynchings decreased, more people read about them in newspapers, saw photographs, or examined souvenirs such as the fingers displayed in a jar in the window of a store in downtown Atlanta after the 1899 lynching of Sam Hose.

In the late nineteenth century, local and regional papers in the South helped create a way of reporting lynchings, a kind of apocryphal story, a standard lynching narrative, that one hundred years later still seems to exert a great deal of power. This pattern, in turn, became something of a script for future lynchings and spectators. Opening with a chase or jailhouse attack and the public identification of the captured man or occasionally woman by the alleged white victim or the victim's relatives or friends, the preliminaries continued with announcement of the upcoming event to draw the crowd, selection and preparation of the site, and detailed descriptions of the alleged crimes that justified white vengeance. The main event then began with a period of mutilation—often including castration—and torture to extract confessions and entertain the crowd and then built to a climax of slow burning, hanging, and/or shooting to complete the killing. The finale consisted of frenzied souvenir gathering and display of the body and the collected parts.

Lynching photographs, taken throughout the activities but especially of the presentation of the corpse, increasingly became a part of the pattern of the event. Those images, however, are evidence of a history beyond the standard lynching story, not just of alleged crimes against whites but of actual crimes against blacks (and Jews and

Italians). The history of lynching on display in "Without Sanctuary," however, is almost entirely silent about the whites involved in the atrocities. In many of the photos—the image of Leo Frank's corpse and of the less well known Rubin Stacey lynched in Florida in 1935, for example—the whites, adults and even children, stand smiling with the corpses and the ash. Why do we learn the names of the dead in those images and not the names of the living? Why do we learn very little about the people who participated in the tortures, took the photographs, and sent the postcards? Why do we learn nothing about the people who saved the images down through the years and the people who sold them to James Allen, the antique and junk dealer who purchased the photographs in recent years and assembled this collection? Whose desk was it, after all, where Allen has claimed he located his first lynching photograph, an image of Leo Frank he bought for thirty dollars?

In many cases—Jesse Washington's lynching in Waco, Texas, in 1916, for example—NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) investigators' reports are readily available in that organization's papers at the Library of Congress. There, in a series of letters from Waco, Elisabeth Freeman, a white woman posing as a suffragist so locals would dismiss her "strange" behavior, named names. She described the involvement of the mayor and other city officials and the location of the lynching, a tree right beside the city hall, which gave those men the perfect view. Freeman reported that Gildersleeve, the photographer, had connections to the mayor and knew ahead of time where and when to set up his camera: "it was a crooked business between the Mayor and himself. The getting of the pictures was a certain amount of rake-off." Gildersleeve quickly printed the photographs and sold them for ten cents apiece for those spectators unfortunate enough to have missed acquiring their own pieces of Washington's body. Freeman, however, wrote the NAACP head, Roy Nash, that she had to pay fifty cents each for the postcards she bought to send with her report. Although only one is on display here, the set that Freeman and the NAACP acquired (many of them are available in the book and Web versions of "Without Sanctuary") capture the entire spectacle: the mob chaining Washington to the tree and setting him on fire, and Washington still alive (his movement blurs the image) fighting the flames. The story of Mayor Dollins and Mr. Gildersleeve explains why the photographs of the Washington lynching are so "good," why they capture so completely the lynching spectacle. For many spectacle lynchings that occurred after Washington's death, NAACP files document an alternative lynching story, of white barbarity and murder.

"We have to know our history," James Allen has said in defense of the creation and circulation of his collection. True, but who, today, gets to decide what this history will be? Without the information that the people who collected the photographs chose to ignore, viewers are left with an exhibit that is too close to the spectacle created by the lynchers themselves. "Without Sanctuary's" focus on blacks as victims rather than whites as murderers, torturers, or at best spectators—its refusal to ask the hard questions about race and violence in American history—produces an updated version of that old segregating story. Martin Luther King Jr., with his commitment to

nonviolence and his vision of a common humanity, seems sadly as radical today as he did when he died. How much does our moral revulsion change the fact that these photographs still, as their creators and original purchasers intended, present victimization as the defining characteristic of blackness? A much more accurate exhibition, far closer to Wells-Barnett's challenge to (white) America, would foreground violence as a defining characteristic of whiteness.

Grace Elizabeth Hale
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia

Editorial note: The JournalE Web site *Without Sanctuary* <<http://www.journale.com/without-sanctuary>> was reviewed in the June 2001 *JAH*, pp. 319–20.

Museum of Mobile, 111 South Royal St., Mobile, AL 36652.

Permanent exhibition, opened Sept. 27, 2001. M–Sa 9–6, Su 1–5; adults \$5, senior citizens \$4, students \$3. 20,000 sq. ft. George Ewert, museum director; Sheila Flanagan, associate director; Terri Price, curator of exhibits; Dave Morgan, curator of collections; Todd Kreamer, curator of history; Charles Torrey, research historian.

Internet: brief information about the museum <<http://www.museumofmobile.com/>> (Sept. 3, 2002).

Founded in 1702 as the capital of French Louisiana, Mobile, Alabama, has rarely attracted the historical attention accorded other American towns with a colonial past. Over the last two decades, however, a number of intellectual and political developments have raised the historical profile of the Gulf Coast's second largest port city. In academic circles the community studies movement of the 1960s and 1970s converged with the post–Cold War internationalization of scholarly discourse to place the study of Mobile and other Gulf of Mexico ports within an “Atlantic world” paradigm. Outside the academy historical awareness was heightened, and often distorted, by a new politics of cultural symbolism in which ethnic, religious, regional, and generational identities were mobilized through appeals to group memory. Faced with bitter disputes over the legacy of Christopher Columbus, the morality of the atomic bomb, and the treatment of Japanese Americans after the attack on Pearl Harbor, curators at the nation's leading museums might have profited from the experience of southern colleagues who regularly rose to the challenge of mounting exhibits in a polarized environment. At times, to be sure, southern museums have behaved supinely, confusing history with therapy and shrinking from honest engagement with the ugly realities of slavery and segregation. But times change. During the 1990s, despite racially charged debates over rebel flags and neo-Confederate symbolism, there were signs of a new political calculus at work when black and white civic leaders struggled to rejuvenate the economies of historic southern cities. History typically became a building block in the work of urban development and, in the process, historical museums acquired a strong incentive to depict a past that was authentic and