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Between the Mob and the Noose: The Lynching Intercessor in American Literature and Film

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by

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INTRODUCTION

I. *Colonel Sherburn*

"The pitifulest thing out is a mob" (162), declares Colonel Sherburn to the mob that threatens to lynch him in Mark Twain's novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). Sherburn is a white man in the town of Bricksville, Arkansas, and Huck watches him shoot and kill a white man named Boggs in the town's main street. A lynch mob soon gathers in front of Sherburn's house, planning to avenge Boggs's murder. Sherburn steps outside and confronts the mob. He holds a shotgun in one hand but points it at no one. Though he is overwhelmingly outnumbered, the solitary Sherburn scoffs at the idea that the mob will actually lynch him. Described by Huck as "a proud-looking man about fifty-five … the best dressed man in that town too" (*HF* 157), Sherburn repeatedly pronounces his vast superiority to those who plan to kill him. He dismisses the mob members as far too cowardly to lynch a man in broad daylight. Sherburn refers to himself as a "*man*" and proclaims the leader of the lynch mob (and those who follow him) to be merely "*part* of a man" or "*half* a man." He subdues the mob, and they disperse without doing him any harm.

In Twain's seminal work of American literature, an individual white man with ambiguous moral principles but prominent social standing—as indicated by his rank and clothing—, successfully convinces a mob not to lynch him. Sherburn's defiant stand is not a call for law and order, a protest against prejudice, or even a clever use of humor to diffuse a volatile situation.[1] Sherburn is unafraid to stand alone against a mob, but he is loyal to the violent, white masculinity that motivates and perpetuates a lynching culture.

[1] As the project continues, I will discuss these different tactics as reoccurring patterns and blatant absences within a literary tradition of lynching intercessors.

The threat of mob violence haunts the narrative of *Huckleberry Finn* at every turn.[2] Framed as a sequel to *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *Huckleberry Finn* is set in the slaveholding south of the 1840s. Twain writes *Huckleberry Finn* after the Civil War and Reconstruction, and he publishes it in the United States in 1885. The following year, for the first time in the nation, more blacks than whites are recorded as lynched.[3] Twain anticipates the rise of lynching as a racist system of terror, oppression, and extermination of black Americans by crafting a novel in which lynching is a constant threat and Huck simultaneously grapples with what is right and what is wrong in regards to race. With the defiant Colonel Sherburn, Twain also sets the stage for the trope of a fictional white character who opposes a lynch mob single-handedly, often standing in front of a doorway that he alone prevents the mob from crossing.

II. *The Intercessor Defined*

In her preface to the book *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), Toni Morrison discusses the discordant position that Twain and other American authors must occupy: "Living in a nation of people who *decided* that their world view would combine agendas for individual freedom *and* mechanisms for devastating racial oppression presents a singular landscape for a writer" (xiii). A deeply

[2] Before Huck and Jim begin their journey together, Jim reads Huck's fortune and insists that Huck is going to "git hung" (*HF* 30). Mrs. Judith Loftus tells Huck that both Pap Finn and Jim were almost lynched for supposedly killing Huck (*HF* 68). The raftsman Ed tells a story about a man named Dick Allbright, who is almost lynched for bringing a curse onboard a raft (*HF* 106). The Duke and the King repeatedly run from and evade mobs that want to tar and feather them and run them out of town on rails, the fate that eventually catches up with them and that Huck almost experiences as well (*HF* 213, 239). Finally, some of the men who gather at the Phelps plantation want to hang Jim when he returns after running away (*HF* 287).

[3] Seventy-four blacks and sixty-four whites were recorded as lynched in the year 1886. These numbers were obtained from the document "Lynching, Whites & Negroes, 1882-1968" in the Tuskegee University archives available online and included in my Works Cited. The Tuskegee Institute, which began keeping track of lynchings in the United States in 1882, is widely considered to have the most accurate lynching statistics, and all subsequent lynching statistics are from this source.

troubling aspect of American life and history, the lawless torture and murder of black citizens exists alongside national ideals of democratic equality and individual responsibility. Emerging from this uniquely American paradox is the artistic tradition of an individual character that stands against a lynch mob and attempts to stop them from committing the crime. Colonel Sherburn is an early incarnation of this trope, defying the Arkansas mob in the first years of prevalent, white-on-black lynching.

Colonel Sherburn, though, is also an anomalous representation of this tradition, because his anti-mob stance is on behalf of a white man: himself. Sherburn is both white and socially prominent, so when a mob descends on his house, he already possesses the authority to perform his own self-defense. As a system of specifically anti-black terror and oppression in the United States, lynching is an attempt to negate both the black body and the black voice by denying the value of both. By working to silence black speech, white supremacy also creates a new role for the white individual: to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. I use the term "intercessor" to refer to the individual white character who stands between a lynch mob and its intended victim and speaks on behalf of that intended victim. From a secular perspective, an intercessor means "One who intercedes or interposes on behalf of another; a mediator" (*OED*). I prefer this term as opposed to "intervener" or "interposer" because intercession implies action on behalf of someone else, and the person who comes between a lynch mob and a potential lynching victim implicitly intervenes on behalf of the potential victim.[4]

[4] For example, even if the intercessor's motivation is solely to uphold the law, he or she acts on behalf of the potential lynching victim's rights under the law. While it could be considered problematic to bestow the title intercessor on a sheriff who is fulfilling the expectations of his job by protecting his prisoner, few sheriffs were ever fired or prosecuted for failing to protect a black prisoner, so there were usually no consequences for choosing not to intercede.

By navigating the space between blacks and whites at moments of heightened conflict, the lynching intercessor acts as a figure of racial reconciliation. More abstractly, the intercessor works to mediate between, on the one hand, national ideals of freedom and democracy, and on the other hand, a national past and present that is inextricable from violent, racial oppression. The lynching intercessor often negotiates a compromise that immediately stops the lynch mob and presents a version of white masculinity that is founded on rationality- not violence. However, the lynching intercessor is not necessarily overtly or even covertly anti-*racist*. In fact, the intercessor re-imbues the professional, white, and (almost always) male individual as the rightful embodiment of law and citizenship. The intercessor attempts to be a peacemaker, but that peace is dependent on whiteness as the naturalized and nationalized authority.

In this project, I limit my analysis to those literary and cinematic characters that perform a clear and direct act of lynching intercession by asserting themselves publicly, physically, and rhetorically. The intercessor is public when he substitutes the spectacle of himself for the spectacle of the lynching. The intercessor is physical when she risks endangering her body by publicly associating it with the body of the intended victim. Finally, the intercessor is rhetorical when he attempts to dissuade the lynch mob from carrying out the murder. The lynching intercessors in this study are not necessarily always successful at stopping racial violence, but they take immediate action that is evident to both the mob members within the texts and to the audiences of readers and movie-watchers. While the acts of intercession in these texts challenge the immediate murders that are being threatened, they do not challenge the racist legacy of which lynching is a part.

Perhaps the most culturally iconic lynching intercessor is Atticus Finch from Harper Lee's Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960). Published seventy-five years after *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, a white lynch mob in *Mockingbird* approaches the jail that houses Tom Robinson, a black man falsely accused of raping a white woman. Sitting outside the jail, though, is Robinson's white lawyer, Atticus Finch. He calmly marks his place in the book he is reading and stands up to face the mob that wants to murder Robinson and deny him a trial. Finch does not step aside from the door when he is threatened by the mob, and, along with his children, he convinces the mob to walk away and leave Robinson unharmed.[5] Finch successfully intercedes publicly, physically, and rhetorically. Two years later, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences awarded Gregory Peck the title of "Best Actor in a Leading Role" for his performance of Finch in the film adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Finch is a beloved American character, "the image of the modern hero," as Carolyn Jones writes in *The Southern Quarterly* in 1996, and "This stance, this putting himself between the innocent and danger, characterizes the man" (53, 54). The heroism of Lee's character Atticus Finch has been debated by numerous literary, legal, and cultural critics, but Lee's literary deployment of the lynching intercessor trope has, nevertheless, not yet been addressed in the terms of this specific tradition.[6]

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[5] Finch is initially unaware that his children—Jem and Scout—and their friend Dill are hiding and watching him. After the lynch-mob arrives, the children run out of their hiding place to join Finch on the steps. They help Finch dissuade the lynchers, as Jem refuses to follow Finch's instructions to go home, and Scout greets the only man in the mob that she knows, Walter Cunningham (Lee 152-4). In my Coda, I will further discuss the lynching intercession in Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and in the film adaptation released in 1962.

[6] For studies of the racial politics in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, especially as they are expressed and modeled by the character Atticus Finch, see the following: "Blues for Atticus Finch: Scottsboro, Brown, and Harper Lee" by Eric J. Sundquist in *The South as an American Problem* (1995) and "The Strange Career of Atticus Finch" by Joseph Crespino (2000).

In his history of lynching, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (2003), Philip Dray considers why lynching has remained, in many ways, unacknowledged in the national imagination and memory:

> Lynching, as everyone knows, has always had a special power to make us want to look the other way. This is because it possesses none of the ennobling features or redeeming sentiment that have popularized other aspects of America's violent past, such as the Civil War, Custer's Last Stand, Old West gunslingers and riverboat brawlers, or even the world of organized crime. (xii)

Dray is certainly correct in assessing that lynching is an oft neglected aspect of American history, but many American artists did look at lynching and asked their readers, viewers, and listeners to do the same. The intercessor facilitates the literary acknowledgment of lynching by inter-textually challenging the mob and thus evoking those ennobling features or redeeming sentiments that Dray sees as key to popular national stories. A white intercessor provides an affirming vision of racial progress that counters the violent racism exhibited by the white lynch mob. At the same time, the fictionalized lynching intercessors that succeed at deterring the mobs provide a cultural chronicle of lynching as "a practice of racial domination"—as described by Jacqueline Goldsby (3)—that threatened and terrorized American lives even beyond what can be accounted for in death records.

In the article "To Kill a Prejudice: Racial Relations and the Lynch Mob in Twain, Faulkner, and Harper Lee," M. Thomas Inge begins to examine Atticus Finch in connection with other intercessors such as Twain's Sherburn in *HF* and William Faulkner's Eunice Habersham in *Intruder in the Dust* (1948). Inge, though, speaks less to the characters' specific, anti-lynching acts and more to their general representations of gradual enlightenment in race relations and democracy (*Southern Ethnicities*, Kornelia Sfakianak, 2008). I wish to build upon the connections between these characters to include characters from other texts and to explore the works as both attempts at progress and reinforcements of the white supremacist status quo.

The practice of lynching has a long and unique history in the United States, with its definition and social impact shifting significantly over time. Proposed federal anti-lynching legislation in 1922 defined lynching as "five or more persons acting in concert for the purpose of depriving any person of his life without authority of law" (qtd in Dray iii). Lynching in the U. S. has also largely been understood as occurring with impunity, often recorded as death "at the hands of persons unknown" to protect the perpetrators (hence the inspiration for the title of Dray's work). In one of the first historical studies of lynching, "Lynch-law: An Investigation into the History of Lynching in the United States" (1905), James E. Cutler writes that lynching is aptly referred to as the "country's national crime," and that the "frequency and impunity of lynchings in the United States is justly regarded as a serious and disquieting symptom of American society" (1). The term "legal lynching" refers to the preclusion of a fair trial due to pronounced racial bias against the defendant (such as all-white juries), but I do not investigate characters who intervene in legal lynchings, because my focus is specifically on the intercessor's confrontation with the lawless mob. Lynching did not first emerge in the country as a racial practice, but the term is now impossible to disassociate entirely from anti-black violence.

In the late 1760s, the term "lynch law" originated with Charles Lynch, a justice of the peace in Chestnut Hill, Virginia. He was a patriot during the Revolutionary War, and neighbors would bring suspected Tories and horse thieves before his informal court. The suspects would be publicly whipped if found guilty (Dray 21). The term "lynching" then expanded to apply to different forms of extra-legal punishment, which were not necessarily fatal. The public humiliation of being tarred and feathered and carried out of

town on a rail, as portrayed in Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, is a kind of lynching. In the short story "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" (1832), author Nathaniel Hawthorne writes about a young man named Robin who witnesses one of these lynchings. Set in the colony of Massachusetts before the Revolutionary War, Robin has only just arrived to town from the countryside when he sees his uncle, Major Molineux, carted out of town—covered in tars and feathers—by a large mob.[7] In the early nineteenth century, lynching and vigilantism in general became more often associated with newly settled lands, especially in the West, where courts of law were not yet established. Still, lynching was not then a specifically racist practice and did not necessarily culminate in death (Dray 22).

Lynching began to take shape as a murderous instrument of white supremacy in the 1880s and 90s. Besides vigilantism, lynching also has its roots in the violence and public intimidation imposed on black slaves. Spectacle punishment, in the form of whippings and even murders, would be used by slave owners to scare other slaves into obedience (Dray 43). Beginning in the 1830s, the threat of abolitionism occasioned a new "lynching hybrid," as Dray calls it: "part rustic self-governance, part caste-oppression" (18). This form of lynching emerged again immediately following the Civil War, when the first chapters of the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist groups terrorized freed men and women so as to combat their post-war gains in voting and property rights (Dray 45-6). It was not until after the federal government withdrew from the South, though, in 1876, that lynching became increasingly frequent, torturous, and targeted at

[7] See *Selected Tales and Sketches* (1987). In his article "Democratic Terror in 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux' and 'The Man of the Crowd'" (2004), Paul Downes contends, "'My Kinsman, Major Molinuex'…culminates in a terrifying incident of tarring and feathering that coincides with the protagonist's rebirth as a democratic American" (31).

black Americans.[8] More blacks were recorded as lynched in 1892 than in any other year, with a total of 250.

In his book *Slavery By Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (2008), Douglas A. Blackmon identifies lynching as just one component of an extensive system of "neo slavery" that was "embraced by the U.S. economic system and abided at all levels of government" (5). Debt peonage, criminalization, and forced labor went hand in hand with new provisions for vagrancy laws (that were only enforced with blacks), the Supreme Court decision to uphold segregation in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896), and voting mandates aimed at black disenfranchisement (Blackmon 53, 7). Lynching was both an expression of and a vehicle for racial coercion. As Robyn Wiegman writes in *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* (1995), "the transformation from slavery to 'freedom' was characterized by a rearticulation of cultural hierarchies in which terrorism provided the means for defining and securing the continuity of white supremacy" (91). The historicizing tendency, though, has been to view lynching through the lens of Southern "backwardness," which, Jacqueline Goldsby argues in *Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (2006), does not account for the continuation of the practice into the mid-twentieth century. Instead of understanding lynching as "anomalous, aberrant, local, and anti-modern," Goldsby contends that anti-black mob murders were "culturally logical"

[8] Lynching is not strictly a southern history of "black" and "white" men. Amy Louise Wood clarifies in her book *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (2010), that lynchings occurred across state, sectional, racial, ethnic, and gendered lines: "Mobs also attacked white men; Native Americas; Chinese, Mexican, and other immigrants; and African American women in significant numbers" (3). However, I will mostly work within a historical narrative of southern whites perpetrating mob violence against black men, because this was the race and gender make-up of both the majority of lynching cases and the cultural narrative that was known (and that continues to be known) to most Americans - of which the intercessor is a part. Part of my aim, then, is to show how the intercessor tradition participates in and helps disseminate this particular cultural narrative.

for a *national* culture engaged in rapid developments that are generally considered "modern," such as immigration, industrialization, urbanization, and the rise of corporate capitalism (27, 24). Local and national newspapers announced lynching deaths for decades, and while the frequency of lynching began an overall descent after 1892, it was not until 1952 that an entire year passed without a single recorded lynching.

This grim historical portrait, then, prompts an important query regarding lynching intercessors: were they ever a reality in the United States, or were they solely a fictional construct? It turns out that records of lynching intercessors exist along with records of lynchings, but the historical presence of intercessors points to the expanse, not the diminishment, of lynching's threat. The possibilities and actualities of lynching intercessors have been studied to some extent in the fields of American sociology, legal studies, and history. According to Larry J. Griffin, Paula Clark, and Joanne C. Sandberg in their study "Narrative and Event: Historical Sociology and Lynching" (1997), prevented lynchings were not as rare as some might initially think; in fact, many lynchings were stopped by white authorities, whites without official authority, or by the collective defensive action of black men and women.[9] Griffin et al insist that they do not bring forth these recorded instances of thwarted lynchings to imply in any way that "life in the Jim Crow South was somehow less brutal for African Americans than is typically portrayed" (40), but to remind their audience that "White supremacy did not unalterably script or encode what southerners would do when confronted by racial conflict or potentially lethal racial situations" (25). Griffin et al also remind their audience that

[9] Included in *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (1997) edited by W. Fitzhugh Brundage. For a study of collective black protest to lynching, see "The Roar on the Other Side of Silence: Black Resistance and White Violence in the American South, 1880-1940" written by Brundage and also included in *Under Sentence of Death*.

lynchings, like all historical events, "are inherently contingent because they did not have to happen as they did" (30).[10] This contingency is confirmed by reports of lynchings that were stopped by intercessors and reports of lynchings that occurred *even though* intercessors tried to stop them.

In many ways, though, our knowledge of lynching and intercession history will always be notably incomplete, because "Lynch mobs rather pointedly do not keep accounts; in a sense, they seek to negate history itself" (Dray iii).[11] It is quite likely that many more lynchings occurred than we can ever know. Furthermore, a full sense of the lynchings that were threatened but did *not* occur—perhaps because of intercession—is even more inaccessible. After all, the successful intercessor, to a certain extent, renders the lynching attempt a *non-event* by thwarting it. The records of lynching intercession, like the records of lynching deaths, stand in for a larger history that must be acknowledged even if it cannot be fully known. In the chapters that follow, I refer specifically to the lynching of Sam Hose in Georgia in 1899 and the lynching of Nelse Patton in Mississippi in 1908; in both of these instances, the mob followed through with the lynching despite the public protests of white intercessors.

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[10] Legal scholar Barbara Holden-Smith makes a similar point in her article "Lynching, Federalism, and the Intersection of Race and Gender in the Progressive Era" (1996). She argues that recorded incidents show that, when it was enforced, the law was effective at preventing lynchings, but "the Southern states' consistent failure to respond to lynching at any level of law enforcement or government persuasively indicates that the South was unwilling to protect black life from mob violence, rather than incapable of doing so" (42). Holden-Smith does not perceive lynchings as the inevitable outcomes of social institutions and attitudes, but as something that American institutions chose to allow, even though choosing to forbid a lynching had a reasonable chance of being successful.

[11] The difficulty of understanding lynching intercession historically attests to the importance of studying the representations of lynching intercession in art. As Robert Jackson writes in "A Southern Sublimation: Lynching Film and the Reconstruction of American Memory" (2008), "Because the official record was so indifferent to lynching's presence and influence, mass culture became an increasingly important site where lynching was represented and contested, often in innovative and surprising ways" (103), and I see this applying to lynching *prevention*, as well.

In his collection of newspaper articles entitled *100 Years of Lynchings* (1988), Ralph Ginzburg chronicles lynching from April 17, 1880 to May 27, 1961. He condenses some articles, but he does not alter the facts of the events from how they were reported in the press.[12] Of approximately 190 fatal lynching events, some of which included multiple victims, approximately thirty of those accounts mention someone who makes a full and clear attempt to stop the lynching but ultimately fails.[13] In addition to these reports, Ginzburg also includes thirteen accounts of lynchings that were successfully prevented by an intercessor. For Ginzburg, a complete historical portrait of lynching also includes the protests against it, some preventive and some not.

One of Ginzburg's articles recounts an act of intercession that resembles many of the fictional portrayals that I explore in subsequent chapters. A reporter for the *Atlanta Constitution* (the same newspaper that Joel Chandler Harris began writing for in 1876) writes on September 10, 1930 that "a nervy police captain with courage, a sense of humor and gift of gab used all three Tuesday night to disperse an angry mob of several hundred men" (Ginzburg 188). Captain Grover C. Fain apparently confronted a mob that had

[12] Of course, this does not mean that the information in the reports is perfectly accurate. The white press and the black press had their own reasons for presenting lynching in specific ways. Several scholars have shown that the white press actively participated in the perpetuation of the "black beast" stereotype used as a justification for lynching. The white press even directly facilitated some lynchings, calling on white citizens to participate in an upcoming lynching and printing revised train schedules so that more people could attend the violent spectacles. Newspaper articles must then be read as a particular construct of a certain event, which does not negate the record of death or near-death by an extralegal mob but considers the details as part of a particular perspective. For studies of lynching and journalism, see Chapter Five in *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1880-1940* (1998) by Grace Elizabeth Hale; and "Lynching Coverage and the American Reporter-Novelist" by Jean M. Lutes (2007).

[13] If an article merely reports that the law officer was "overpowered" without any further development, I did not count that as an attempted intercession. Many black Americans were lynched by mobs that "overpowered" sheriffs, which euphemistically meant that the sheriffs simply gave the prisoners up or did not make every effort that was rightfully theirs under the law to defend the prisoners. I realize that some of these law officers might have done everything possible and still been overpowered by a mob, and thus it would have been reported as such, but I think that some of the reports about law officers doing everything in their power could also be exaggerated by a press that wanted to avoid bad publicity for local law enforcement. There is a potential for error on both sides that hopefully balances out in relatively accurate approximation.

gathered in front of Grady hospital, planning to lynch the wounded Robert Glaze, a black man suspected of being involved in the robbery and murder of a white street car operator. According to the report, Fain indicated an imaginary line in front of the hospital, made an appeal to law and order and professional duty, and assured the mob that any man who crossed the line would be dealt with as a law-breaker. When a young man spat in front of Fain to show disrespect, Fain teased the affronter for acting senselessly, prompting most of the mob members to laugh (Ginzburg 189). As the *Constitution* tells it, Fain took a public stance against a lynch mob, risked physical harm to himself, and rhetorically appealed to the mob to give up the lynching.

I consider lynching intercession to be a specific form of *immediate lynching prevention*, which encompasses any efforts made to curtail a lynching that is being threatened or seems to be imminent (as opposed to long-term lynching prevention, which I will define shortly). There are several other possibilities for immediate lynching prevention besides intercession, and though these methods are not the focus of my project, I want to outline them briefly, because they are also represented in cultural texts and warrant further study. Lillian Smith's novel *Strange Fruit* (1944) is set in a small town in Georgia in the 1920s and illustrates several different kinds of immediate lynching prevention, most of which are private acts (unlike intercession). After a young black man named Eddie Anderson murders a young white man named Tracy Deen, Eddie's sisters—Nonnie and Bess—and his friend Sam Perry immediately prevent Eddie's lynching by helping him leave town.[14] When a young black man named Henry, who works for

[14] Tracy impregnates Eddie's younger sister, a young black woman named Nonnie, and Tracy pays his black servant Henry to marry her. Enraged by Tracy's treatment of Nonnie and the injustice of Southern race relations, Eddie shoots and kills Tracy.

Tracy's family, becomes the prime suspect for Tracy's murder, white characters named Miss Sadie, Laura Deen, Jane Hardy, and Tom Harris all conspire to help hide Henry from a lynch mob.[15] Black and white characters in *Strange Fruit* work privately to immediately thwart an anti-black lynching.[16]

The last attempt at private and immediate lynching prevention in *Strange Fruit* is again made by Sam Perry. Sam fears that the white men who are looking for Henry will find him and lynch him, so Sam goes to his employer, Tom Harris, and asks him to speak publicly against lynching. While my project focuses on public intercession, I recognize that the public and private spheres are inextricable, overlapping, and mutually implicating. In several of the texts that I explore, there is a black character like Sam who acts privately to motivate the public intercession of a white character. In Smith's novel, Sam says to Tom that, "Things are likely to be bad around here unless … you and Cap'n Rushton and some of the other good white folks can do something about it." Tom has hidden Henry and is convinced that the mob will not find him, especially since the would-be-lynchers are "Riff-raff! No counts! Always no-counts!" because "No decent

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Richard Wright portrays this same tactic of lynching prevention—a consortium of black family and friends orchestrating a quiet escape from town—in his short story "Big Boy Leaves Home" in *Uncle Tom's Children* (1940). Ginzburg also includes an article from the *New York Herald-Tribune*, March 27, 1933, that describes a successful, private intercession. In Lowell, North Carolina on March 26, a physician by the name of Dr. James W. Reid supposedly saved a black man from a lynch mob by hiding him in a cellar and then driving him to the Meckler County jail in Charlotte.

[15] Miss Sadie uses her job as a telephone switchboard operator to notify Laura Deen, Tracy's younger sister, about the danger that Henry faces. Laura then works with two other white characters—Jane Hardy and Tom Harris—in an attempt to secretly protect Henry: they dress him as a white woman and take him to hide at the local jail. They conceal Henry with signifiers of white, female "respectability": a gingham housedress, a big, floppy leghorn hat, a veil, and white powder (Smith 324-5).

[16] These white characters who try to surreptitiously ensure Henry's safety—Miss Sadie, Laura, Jane, and Tom—perform private acts of immediate lynching prevention like Nonnie, Bess, and Sam did, but the tactics are also somewhat different. The white characters capitalize on the power and security afforded to middle-class whites—like Miss Sadie's job, the "costume" of white womanhood, and Tom's connection with the local jailor—to enable their actions.

white man takes part in a lynching" (Smith 337-8). But Sam disagrees, and he insists to Tom that the "respectable white folks" and "respectable colored folks" who shut their eyes and assume that a lynching will not happen are just as complicit in lynching deaths as the people who participate directly (Smith 339). Sam insists that professional leaders in a community cannot dismiss lynching as a practice of the lower classes to which they are not responsible. He calls upon Tom to capitalize on his whiteness and social prominence and voice his objections. Tom does eventually try and fail to publicly thwart the mob, but Smith does not explicitly narrate that moment of attempted intercession. Instead, after hearing that Henry was burned to death, characters vaguely refer to Tom's futile attempt to stop it.[17] In Smith's novel, privately hiding Henry is not enough, and Tom's public intercession is too late. As a black man whose voice is denied by the white community, Sam tries to prompt a white man of high social standing to make an impact in the local white discourse. Sam and other characters like him portray a form of black resistance to lynching that compels the responsibility of the white intercessor.

I have briefly outlined forms of lynching protest other than the white intercessor to stress that intercession is not the only incarnation of lynching prevention in history or art. Considering the intercessor's particular role helps bring to light the many political and narrative possibilities surrounding this violent failure of America democracy.

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[17] Tom's son Charlie mentions his father's attempt to stop the lynching, but does not recount the event itself, saying to his father, "I don't think many men would have done what you did." Tom laments that, "It didn't do any good" (354). Tom's daughter Harriet soon joins them on the porch, and they continue discussing Henry's murder:

> 'In all this town no one had the courage to try to stop it.'
> 'Except your own Dad—'…
> 'What did he do, Charlie?'
> Charlie hesitated, glanced at his father, told her briefly.
> Harriet sat without speaking; then quietly went over to her father and kissed his bald head.
> 'I was too late,' Tom said softly.' (355-6)

The actual details of what Tom says and does when he tries to intercede at Henry's lynching are not included in the text—only referred to obliquely—so I do not pursue an analysis of *Strange Fruit* in the following chapters.

Lynching intercession attempts to stop a mob that has already formed, but intercession is also bound up in long-term prevention that tries to change the cultural environment in which anti-black lynch mobs are permitted and even rewarded. For example, black female journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett was a powerful anti-lynching voice in the country with many and varied strategies. One of her aims was to dispel the myth that black men were usually lynched because they raped white women.[18] Through editorials, pamphlets, and lectures, Wells-Barnett strove to awaken white audiences from their tacit complicity of lynching by proving that it was not the valiant defense of white womanhood that many claimed it was.[19] In many ways, the goal of long-term lynching prevention, such as Wells-Barnett's public challenge to the rape-myth, was to alter the social dynamics so that white intercessors would no longer be needed. Still, the idea of the intercessor played a part in the well-known and multipronged activism of both Wells-Barnett and the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). In particular, the sheriff or jailer whose job was to protect all prisoners—regardless of race—was an avenue of lynching prevention that already existed under the law, so Wells-Barnett and

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[18] In a letter to the Anti-Lynching Bureau, Ida B. Wells-Barnett wrote, "We can only change public sentiment and enforce laws by educating the people, giving them the facts" (qtd in Wells 102). As Jacqueline Goldsby has recently put forth, Wells-Barnett utilizes the value of objectivity—a reliance on the "facts"—in fields such as journalism and social science to parody those critical lenses in her own writing and bring attention to the ways in which "objectivity" obscures the reality of lynching's horrors. Her statistics and investigative accounts of lynchings that refute the racist conventions of the white press underscore the paradox of lynching as "an intolerable act worth reading about" (Goldsby 96).

[19] For example, in *A Red Record*, Wells-Barnett informs her readers that black men who are lynched for "raping" white women were actually involved in consensual sexual relationships, but that white men consider all sexual relationships between black men and white women to be "rape":

> It is certain that lynching mobs have not only refused to give the Negro a chance to defend himself, but have killed their victim with a full knowledge that the relationship of the alleged assailant with the woman who accused him, was voluntary and clandestine. As a matter of fact, one of the prime causes of the Lynch Law agitation has been a necessity for defending the Negro from this awful charge against him. This defense has been necessary because the apologists for outlawry insist that in no case has the accusing woman been a willing consort of her paramour, who is lynched because overtaken in wrong. It is well known, however, that such is the case. (Royster 117-8)

Wells-Barnett then proceeds to report specific cases that validate her claims (Royster 118-130)

members of the NAACP sought to promote full adherence to this duty on the part of white officers.

While a federal anti-lynching law was never passed by the United States Senate, some states passed their own laws. Ida B. Wells-Barnett lived in Chicago in 1905 when anti-lynching legislation was ratified in Illinois. One of the provisions in this legislation enforced full protection of all citizens by law officers. It stated that the lynching of any person who was in the sheriff's custody signaled that the sheriff failed to do his duty and should be removed from office (Wells 309). This law meant that Mr. Frank Davis, the sheriff who allowed Will James to be lynched in Cairo, Illinois in 1909, was immediately ousted from office. When Wells-Barnett heard that Davis was probably going to be reinstated, even though he allegedly cooperated with the mob that pursued James, she went to Cairo and spoke with different organizations of black citizens in the town, learned exactly what happened at the lynching, and urged black men and women to sign a resolution against the reinstatement of Sheriff Davis. Governor Deneen eventually proclaimed that Frank Davis could not be reinstated "because he had not properly protected the prisoner within his keeping and that lynch law could have no place in Illinois" (Wells 319). Wells-Barnett is primarily remembered for her efforts in debunking the myth of "black beast rapist," but she also helped make official demands that the men who were elected to take action and intercede at threatened lynchings should do so.

Beginning with the inception of the NAACP in 1909, leaders and members of the organization campaigned against anti-black mob violence from a variety of different angles. With anti-lynching leaders such as W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, and Walter White as top officers in the Association, the NAACP staged protests, wrote

investigative reports, formed interracial alliances, and supported cultural works that had anti-lynching message, among other activities.[20] Most significant to my project, the Association recognized the failure of local white officials to protect black prisoners from lynch mobs and the lack of repercussions for these officers from the local and state governments. The Association countered this failure of intercession by turning to the Constitution and calling for greater adherence to the Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees due process and equal protection of the law to all citizens (Zangrando 19-20). As an affirmative tactic, the Association actively encouraged—through publicized praise and awards—those white officers of the law who successfully defended black prisoners from lynch mobs (Dray 220). In 1916, when Sheriff Sherman Ely of Lima, Ohio prevented the lynching of black prisoner Charles Daniels, "the NAACP … arranged a gathering in Columbus to present Sheriff Ely with an award … The governor, Frank B. Willis, assured the honoree that the world 'appreciates a man who stands squarely with a heart unafraid and his face to the front at times of stress'" (Dray 223). Though merely fulfilling the parameters of his job may hardly seem like occasion for effulgent praise, it indicates the rarity of law enforcement officers who actually fulfilled their professional role as intercessors for black Americans.[21]

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[20] W.E.B. Du Bois was one of the founders of the NAACP, and from 1910-1934, he edited the monthly magazine *The Crisis* and was director of publicity and research. James Weldon Johnson served as executive secretary (head of the organization) from 1920-1930. Walter White succeeded Johnson and led the NAACP from 1931-1955. All three men wrote fiction that conveys anti-lynching messages: Du Bois's short story "Of the Coming of John" in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Johnson's novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), and White's novel *The Fire in the Flint* (1924).

[21] The Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL) organized by Jessie Daniel Ames in 1930 also advocated for lynching prevention that utilized existing legal structures. When citizens began mobilizing for a lynching, members of the ASWPL would call sheriffs and mayors and insist that the authorities intercede, or else the women of the ASWPL would hold elected officials responsible for that failure at the polls (Hale 235).

Additionally, the NAACP sought to pass federal anti-lynching law that would enforce punishment of law officers who did not do everything within their duty to protect prisoners from mobs. The Association succeeded in securing passage of a federal anti-lynching measure in the House of Representatives three different times, but each time the measure was shot down in the Senate with a filibuster or the threat of a filibuster (Zangrando 19). In 1918, the Dyer bill mandated that lynchers be held liable to prosecution in federal court for a capital crime, and that "[D]elinquent officials who allowed a lynching to occur or failed to prosecute lynchers" could be imprisoned for up to five years and pay a fine up to $5,000. Also, the county in which the lynching occurred would have to pay a fine ($5,000-$10,000) that would go to the victim's heirs (Zangrando 43).[22] A significant aspect of this legislation was holding individuals and communities responsible for not just what happened but for what a lack of intercession *allowed* to happen.

The Costigan-Wagner bill in 1934 was very similar to the Dyer bill, except that it dropped the provision that designated mob murder a federal crime, which meant that it focused almost entirely on punishing the law officers and state or local officials who allowed lynchings to occur (or failed to prosecute the lynchers). The Gavagan bill, which was introduced in 1937, then mirrored the mandates in the Costigan-Warner bill (Zandango 114-5, 141). These bills were "[D]esigned to upset the normally complacent acceptance of mob murder and to make lynching too hazardous a pastime for local mobs to practice" (Zandango 114). The intent was to create national conditions in which white sheriffs and law officers would be expected to oppose white lynch mobs, which would

[22] An additional element of the Dyer bill was that "[M]embers of lynch mobs and those sympathetic to lynching were barred from serving on federal juries trying any cases under the act" (Zangrando 43).

also set a precedent that prevented mobs from forming in the first place. As an integral component of anti-lynching activism, the concept of intercession allowed for men and women to oppose anti-black mob murders under laws that already existed in the United States. Intercession is a part of lynching history, and it helped many Americans imagine an alternative national narrative in which lynching ceased to occur. However, the failure of the federal government to ever ratify the anti-lynching laws and the ongoing struggle to enforce real intercession connect the lynching intercessors in literature and film to a history that could and should have happened more often than it did.

III. *The Intercessor Imagined*

The power of literary and cinematic texts to potentially alter the course of lynching in the U.S. was embraced by many of the activists who also worked to enact meaningful legislation. Officers in the NAACP wrote novels, short fiction, plays, and poetry that fostered anti-lynching feeling.[23] The NAACP led protests against D.W. Griffith's pro-lynching film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and attempted to make its own film that would counter Griffith's (Dray 204).[24] The Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching sponsored a contest for one-act plays that dealt with lynching and sought to promote attitudes against it, and the Writer's League against Lynching formed in 1934 to help foster anti-lynching opinion (Perkins and Stephens 6-7). These creative efforts entered the cultural landscape along with fictional texts such as Griffith's

[23] W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, and Walter White all wrote literary texts that convey anti-lynching messages. Three examples are Du Bois's short story "Of the Coming of John" in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Johnson's novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), and White's novel *The Fire in the Flint* (1924).

[24] Though it was not the product of the NAACP, the film *Within Our Gates* (1920) directed by Oscar Micheaux responds to *The Birth of a Nation* and presents a powerful denunciation of anti-black violence.

film, which upheld anti-black mob murders as defensive, righteous acts. While the intercessor is a concept that anti-lynching activists incorporated into their agendas, the intercessor is not limited to anti-lynching literature. A lynching intercessor, by definition, attempts to *stop* a lynching, but the trope of lynching intercession does not emerge from a specific political viewpoint. I contend that the intercessor is less about ideological position and more about the act of rhetorical persuasion. The intercessor interprets the lynch mob's desire, imagines an alternative ending, and attempts to present this perspective in a way that will affect the mob. The lynch mob is the intercessor's audience, and the intercessor is about what it means to be an author.

In a 1955 interview with Jean Stein vanden Heuvel, author William Faulkner discusses his perception of the relationship between art and lived experience:

> Life is not interested in good and evil … Life is motion and motion is concerned with what makes man move—which are ambition, power, pleasure. What time can man devote to morality, he must take by force from the motion of which he is a part … The aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that 100 years later when a stranger looks at it, it moves again since it is life. (Meriwether and Millgate 253)

Faulkner's description of the artist's aim—"to arrest motion"—is the aim of the intercessor's as well- to arrest the forward motion toward a lynching. The intercessor's address is perhaps more direct, but the artist and the intercessor both present a particular, strategic rhetoric to an audience. The lynching intercessor forces the plot to stay still for a moment, so that words or weighted silence can fill the story space and perhaps compel change. The progression of events does not resume until the mob decides upon a "right"

course of action, and the terms of right and wrong within which the characters negotiate remind the audience what is at stake.

For example, lynching intercessors in American literature and film are almost always male characters, revealing the construction and projection of masculinity as a key term of negotiation. The professional obligation of law officers to defend their prisoners creates an inevitable connection between the male-dominated career of law enforcement and the intercessor tradition. Furthermore, scholars such as Robyn Wiegman and Jacqueline Goldsby argue that an anxiety of white masculinity spurred by the development of male "equality" among the races after black emancipation was a significant catalyst in the lynching of black men. Wiegman terms the extension of citizenship to black men after the abolishment of slavery to be a "masculine sameness" so terrifying to white supremacy and patriarchy that "only the reassertion of a gendered difference can provide the necessary disavowal," and lynching (which sometimes also included castration) thus functions "as both a refusal and a negation of the possibility of extending the privileges of patriarchy to the black man" (*American* 90). Goldsby seconds this perspective and also considers the more modern and independent possibilities for women that began to emerge at the end of the nineteenth century as another source of white male unease:

> Challenged by infidels on each side—heretical New Women and damnable emancipated blacks—white men could recover their lost sense of authority through violence. In the perceived breach of tradition, lynching could be culturally logical because 'the manliness of the lynch mob' promised to fulfill white men's hopes to recover their social dominance. (56)

A strong impetus for lynching was a desire to reclaim masculine power, and so the intercessor functions to renegotiate that masculine power for the lynch mob without incurring a black man's death. The lynching intercessors in literature and film represent intercession as a specifically manly predicament: a decision to lead through "masculine" rationality instead of "masculine" violence. The intercessors that I will analyze consistently pose arguments against lynching that are based on the law and the logic of consequence. They call on the white men in the lynch mobs to act according to the behaviors of civilization and to think ahead to the future effects of mob murder. The men in the mob initially consider lynching a manly act of vengeance and protection, but the intercessor works to reassign masculinity from the virtue of physical strength to the virtue of intellect. Male intercessors do not necessarily dismiss violent action, but they prompt mob members to *rethink* whether lynching is the right solution for a particular situation.

The masculine virtue of the intercessor, though, is almost completely limited to *white* men in these works.[25] To briefly return again to the novel *Strange Fruit*, the black character Sam Perry desires to join Tom Harris in opposing the lynch mob, but he also knows that embodying a black and masculine defense of Henry in a white supremacist community will probably result in the mob murdering him, as well. Upon arriving at the ball park where Henry is about to be lynched, Tom runs out of the car but insists that Sam drive away. Smith does not narrate Tom's confrontation with the mob, but she narrates Sam's frustration as he stays in the car:

[25] The only exception is Uncle Pleas in Ford's film *The Sun Shines Bright* (1953). An elderly black man, Uncle Pleas sits on the porch and holds his nephew's hand through the bars in the jail window as Judge Priest speaks directly to the lynch mob. Uncle Pleas does not address the white mob, but his stance on the porch, at great risk to his own life, is a partnered intercession with Judge Priest.

> Surely he was man enough to take a chance[…]if he couldn't make it, what matter? Lord God[…]what matter! He'd have tried[…]shown he had a little manhood[…]*You'll make it worse for the rest of us*[…]That's what they always say[…]*you'll turn it into a race riot*[…]That's what everybody tells you[…]Manhood's for powerful folks, you can't afford it, they mean. (343)

Smith shows that a white man who stands up to a violent, anti-black mob is considered a brave man, but a black man who stands up to a violent, anti-black mob is either considered suicidal (he might not "make it" or survive the confrontation) or a fan to flames of further racial violence ("*you'll turn it into a race riot*"). Sam knows he is brave enough to risk his life defending someone else, but he also believes that an attempted intercession on his part will not save Henry's life—who the white mob will kill regardless—and will not position Sam as a leader in his community. The white male intercessor has the best potential to stop racial violence, because he unites both patriarchy and white supremacy; he can act as a powerful substitute for the might of the white lynch mob.

By reinforcing white, masculine, and individual leadership, the lynching intercessor maintains the dominant discourse of American citizenship. In her book *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (1998), Dana D. Nelson's term "national manhood" refers to "an ideology that has worked powerfully since the Constitutional era to link a fraternal articulation of white manhood to civic identity" (ix). Nelson contends that this ideology "works to relocate men's affiliations away from more locally conceived identities" and brings those identities into focus "as a supraclass ideal for guaranteeing national unity" (ix). The

masculinity and whiteness of the intercessor, willing to stand alone and on the side of democracy, personifies this national ideal. In opposition to anti-black violence, though not necessarily anti-black *feelings*, the intercessor naturalizes his own authority to speak for the black man in danger of being lynched. The lynching intercessor symbolizes a stability of national manhood even when the violence of the white lynch mob is poised to undermine it.

Lynching intercession as an alternative vision of white masculine authority only partially explains the dominance of male authors and filmmakers in the intercessor tradition, though. Women were never absent from the public violence of lynching or the public debate surrounding it. In fact, like anti-lynching activism, women (especially black women) have played a formative role in artistic portrayals of lynching.[26] However, in my research I found that women were far less likely to explicitly represent lynching intercession in their portrayals. One possible reason for this trend is that many women artists chose to incorporate the traditional women's domain—the domestic sphere—into lynching discourse, instead of narrating the public confrontations. As Judith L. Stephens writes about women-authored lynching dramas, "As women's writing, these plays connect lynching to the experiences of women," so the setting is most often the home

[26] Scholars such as Kathy A. Perkins, Judith L. Stephens, and Koritha Mitchell illustrate that the lynching drama—"*a play in which the threat or occurrence of a lynching, past or present, has major impact on the dramatic action*" (Perkins and Stephens 3)—is a genre that was innovated by women. On several levels, though, the development of this art form was not compatible with the character of the lynching intercessor. Stephens writes that women-authored lynching dramas were contemporary with the rise of social realism and folk drama in American theater, and one of the ways that lynching dramas exemplify this correlation is by "presenting lynching as a serious social problem that is not given resolution or closure" (8). Lynching dramas are not characterized by individual action, such as intercession, that restores unity or solves an immediate problem by the story's end.

(9).[27] For many women artists, the implications of lynching for domestic life and kinship networks were a primary interest, so stories, plays, and poems show the extensive human consequences of anti-black mob murders—consequences that expand well beyond those who are present at the murder itself. Additionally, as Koritha Mitchell writes in her book *Living with Lynching* (2011), women were especially involved in the genre of lynching dramas, and "In contrast to mainstream photographers, dramatists who lived and wrote in the midst of lynching often refused to feature physical violence" (2). The lynching intercessor interrupts an extremely violent event, and if the intercessor is not successful, the brutality happens anyway. The proximity of the intercessor to incidents of torture, burning, and hanging (among other atrocious physical acts) often precludes this figure for those artists who wish to avoid narrative returns to mob violence.

The literary and cinematic intercessors in this study are repeatedly portrayed as working professionals, and—like the gender dynamics—this can be partially, but not entirely, explained by an overlap with law enforcement. Several interceding characters that are sheriffs, lawyers, and judges incorporate professional duty into their appeals to the lynch mob, so that being an officer of the law is not just an implied motivation to intercede but an overt tactic in the anti-lynching rhetoric. The intercessors request that they be allowed to do their jobs of keeping a prisoner safe, trying an accused person in court, or legally meting out the deserved punishment, and none of these obligations can be fulfilled if the suspect is killed preemptively. As elected or educated professionals who bring further attention to the standards that they must uphold, these lynching intercessors

[27] For example, Alice Dunbar-Nelson's play *Mine Eyes Have Seen* (1918) is about the effects of racial violence on the black home, as the father of the main characters was lynched several years prior.

are often depicted as representing a higher social class with more sophisticated concerns than those who comprise the mob.[28]

The socio-economic difference between intercessors and members of lynch mobs is not without a historical basis. Numerous activists and scholars have noted economic success as the central reason that many black men were lynched. A black man who was accruing property or managing a successful business would be met by a white mob pushing back against those gains. In the book *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (1995), Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck conclude that "economic forces were clearly the most important undercurrent that carried southern society to such outrageous extremes of brutality … Blacks were most vulnerable to the rope and faggot when lynching had the potential to benefit most of white society, for example, during periods of economic distress" (257). While a desire to economically suppress blacks and economically bolster whites was certainly part of lynching culture, lynch mobs were not solely comprised of the poorest whites. Countless lynching reports discuss the prominent town leaders, including well-educated professionals, who were among the mob and participated in its violence.

Local economic health influenced anti-black murders, but Goldsby challenges the widely-held assumption that "Poor white trash did it," and prompts her readers to

[28] For the anti-lynching writer or filmmaker, there could also be a desire to negatively impact the popularity of lynching by portraying lynch mobs as low class and intercessors as high class. In his study of moral revolutions, Kwame Anthony Appiah was initially surprised to realize that "[w]hatever happened when these immoral practices ceased, it wasn't, so it seemed to me, that people were bowled over by new moral arguments" (xii). Instead, Appiah notes that something called "honor" played a central role in each of these transitions, and bound up with notions of "honor" were notions of class. In an examination of dueling, which was—like lynching—a way "of literally getting away with murder" (22), Appiah argues that, "the adoption of dueling by 'base men' had led to its relinquishment by the aristocracy … As long as the institution was merely condemned, as mad or bad, it could flourish; only when it was contemned did it falter" (47). However, attempting to elicit contempt of the mob from the audience exists alongside an elevation of the intercessor and what he represents. This strategy also does not account for the presence of elite intercessors in pro-lynching texts, such as Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots*.

reconsider how these assumptions have been learned (8). She reiterates and then questions a typical perspective of lynching as a problem of rural poverty, isolation, and ignorance:

> Regarded as a 'southern' problem, lynching confirms the extent of rural 'backwardness' compared with urban sophistication. It reifies the feudalistic power dynamics of agrarian politics against the hierarchical instabilities produced by technologically driven industrialization. Lynching lays bare the neuroses shaping the ideologies of white supremacy against the humanism of democratic liberalism. However, the lynching murders of Mexicans and Chinese in the West, Southwest, and far North ought to be a first clue that we need to develop sustained analyses that posit lynching to evince more than the South's economic provincialism or its perverse will to racial dominance. (21)

Lynching is often explained as solely the practice of extremely racist and behind-the-times farmers in the South, but this explanation is not historically satisfactory. Furthermore, representing lynchers as lower class whites and intercessors as upper class whites allows the educated, white professional to be further naturalized as the ideal citizen. The mob members, contrasted with the restrained and socially elite intercessor, are displayed as blood-thirsty brutes. Blacks and poor whites are pitted against each other, while the prominent and educated white intercessor rises above in caste and class and reinforces his privilege. The texts suggest that the lynching intercessor must be locally powerful if he is to potentially influence the mob, but this also means that the highest rung on the economic and racial ladder is the highest rung in morality, as well.

A potential risk of studying the lynching intercessor is that it will draw attention, yet again, to white and mostly male subjects at the possible expense of attention to black subjects. In her article "Whiteness Studies and the Paradox of Particularity" (1999), Wiegman reaches the conclusion that considering particular iterations of white identity does not necessarily "divest whiteness of its universal epistemological power" (150). Just pointing out the trope of the white lynching intercessor does not inherently destabilize its cultural authority. My aim, though, is to develop a critical study that explores how the intercessor's representation of white opposition to lynching is not necessarily a representation of white opposition to racism. By unhooking the intercessor from an assumption of anti-racist politics, I strive to uncover the political statements that are actually present and the implications of those statements. In her historical study of segregation in the South, Grace Elizabeth Hale opines that whiteness must be addressed as *a racial* discourse so that it is not assumed to be *the national* discourse:

> Central to the making of whiteness is a broad, collective American silence. The denial of white as a racial identity, the denial that whiteness has a history, allows the quiet, the blankness, to stand as the norm. This erasure enables many to fuse their absence of racial being with the nation, making whiteness their unspoken but deepest sense of what it means to be an American. (xi)

As long as the lynching intercessor is not recognized as a specific white trope, then it continues to stand in for universal appeals to democratic citizenship and racial reconciliation and reinforce its own white authority.[29]

[29] As Richard Dyer writes in *White* (1997), the aim of whiteness studies should be "to dislodge [whiteness] from its centrality and authority, not to reinstate it" (20).

Additionally, an analysis of lynching intercessors contributes to a contemporary, critical engagement with lynching, which is a forceful but often overlooked aspect of national history. In his article "A Southern Sublimation: Lynching Film and the Reconstruction of American Memory" (2008), Robert Jackson writes that, "Because the official record was so indifferent to lynching's presence and influence, mass culture became an increasingly important site where lynching was represented and contested, often in innovative and surprising ways" (103). The lynching intercessor is one of these surprising sites of negotiation, and literature and film are the central mediums of mass culture that incorporate intercessors into lynching narratives. Literary and cinematic intercessors are mutually informative, especially when a filmmaker adapts a literary work with an intercessor to the silver screen. The narrative work of the white intercessor is best understood when it is examined as a white body than be both read and seen.

As Amy Louise Wood writes in *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (2009), the spectacle lynchings with thousands of attendants, rituals of torture, and visual replications—such as photographs—demonstrate excessively graphic significations "of white power and black degradation, of white unity and black criminality" (3). Anti-black mob murders and the newly enhanced production of visual imagery capitalized on a mutual power to enthrall in the first half of the twentieth century.[30] Wood describes this correlation: "The spectacle of lynching emerged from and coincided with other practices and forms of spectacle and spectatorship at the turn of the century, and it drew cultural force from them. These other forms included …

[30] For example, In 1909, moving picture theaters in New York City charged people a penny to see pictures of Henry Smith being "burned at the stake" and simultaneously hear his "moans and groans" through a gramophone (Everett 19-20). This "show" attempted to simulate the motion picture experience of simultaneous sight and sound.

modern visual media, like photography and cinema" (3).[31] The white intercessor in a movie is an opportunity to not just *tell* a story of anti-lynching activity that preserves white supremacy but *show* an anti-lynching image that celebrates the white, male individual. Wood and Jackson both investigate the complex (and sometimes contradictory) anti-lynching arguments that emerge in motion pictures, but neither of them identify the white intercessor as a trope that reoccurs in different films with different filmmakers.[32] My project is distinct in its investigation of this specifically American character in the fictional lynching narratives of both film and literature.

Literary scholars have also neglected to note the presence of a white lynching intercessor in disparate texts. In her groundbreaking work, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals* (1984), Trudier Harris suggests that the narration of lynching stories has itself become a tradition or a ritual with certain conventions, but she does not identify the trope of the intercessor in her tracing of those lynching story conventions.[33] Sandra Gunning, in *Race, Rape, and Lynching: The Red Record of American Literature, 1890-1912* (1996), centers her study on the stereotype of the black rapist in literary works of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. I am particularly influenced by her discussion of converging traditions on both "sides" of the

[31] In fact, Goldsby argues that the innovation of visual production, including the development of motion pictures, was one of the "mechanisms of modernity" that rendered lynching cultural logical (15).

[32] In *Lynching and Spectacle*, Wood explores how photography and motion pictures became "[t]he most public and sensational manifestations of lynching that had made the violence so terrorizing also became the tools through which lynching opponents could deflate that terror … if lynching rested on spectacle, it also fell on spectacle" (4). As I will discuss in my third chapter, her analysis of anti-lynching films significantly informs my analysis of films with lynching intercessors.

[33] The conventions include but are not limited to: a crowd of white men, women and children; a festive atmosphere; an innocent black man or woman victim; a castration or some other kind of mutilation before the killing; the taking of souvenirs of the body by the crowd; "Values, status quo, and perpetuity are identified with the whites, while insignificance and expendability are identified with the Blacks" (Harris xi).

lynching debate, and thus her demonstration "that each 'side' was anything but uniform in terms of its goals, membership, and strategies" (138). Gunning believes that the variability of lynching stories cannot be accounted for in a single narrative tradition, but she does not discuss lynching intercession as a discursive possibility.

In his essay "The Shudder and the Silence: James Baldwin on White Terror" (2002), Steven Weisenburger says that *Exorcising Blackness* generated two main paths of lynching studies:

> One line of inquiry examines literary and testamentary representations of lynching that show how the violence itself may be seen functioning as a recuperative fantasmatic for an American white manhood perennially depicting itself—despite mountains of contrary evidence—as diminished and besieged. The other line considers lynching spectacles as sacrificial rites producing a similar recuperative effect but in a different symbolic register, chiefly in their emphasis on the scapegoat as a means for achieving white solidarity. (3)

Differentiating himself from these two lines of thought, Weisenburger discusses "another, unspeakable purpose for racial violence: its eliminationist and exterminationist agenda" and calls for more specific attention to the historical contexts of lynchings (3). Jacqueline Goldsby answers this call for historical context in her book *A Spectacular Secret* (2006). She analyzes literary texts that help illustrate "anti-black mob murders as a networked, systemic phenomenon indicative of trends in national culture" (5). However, by omitting the pattern of white characters who stand against white lynch mobs, Harris, Gunning, Weisenburger, and Goldsby neglect what the intercessor can reveal about pro- and anti-lynching rhetoric that is authorized by and through white assertion.

I aim to fill a gap in literary and film scholarship by critically interpreting the trope of the character who tries to stop a lynching, and what this character can teach us about political and artistic interventions. I limit my analysis to authors and filmmakers who include an attempted lynching intercession in at least two different works, thereby revealing themselves as particularly invested in the possibilities of this trope. In my first chapter, I examine a short story and a novel written by seminal black author Charles W. Chesnutt: "The Sheriff's Children" (1889) and *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901). Both narratives include white lynching intercessors who successfully stop a lynching, but the two works have surprisingly not been studied in direct conversation. By analyzing the interceding appeals to civic equality—not social equality—in "The Sheriff's Children" and *The Marrow of Tradition*, I gauge that Chesnutt employs the trope of the white lynching intercessor to immediately petition to white southern moderates to end anti-black mob murders. The white intercessor is not his only approach to ending racial violence, but he maintains it can work in concert with his long-term, anti-racist aims.

In my second chapter, I focus on a writer who was contemporary to Chesnutt but wrote from an opposing end of the political spectrum: Thomas Dixon, Jr. An ardent white supremacist committed to extolling the white race and justifying anti-black lynching in historical fiction, Dixon features a white lynching intercessor in his first novel *The Leopard's Spots* (1902) and his final novel *The Flaming Sword* (1939). Dixon utilizes white intercession to create a narrative opportunity in which to dispute anti-lynching rhetoric and align lynching with tenets of American democracy. In Dixon's texts, the white male characters who attempt to intercede are easily discounted and overwhelmed, further implying the righteous inevitability of the white mob. The interceding characters

must move past their merciful impulses to become masculine leaders of an Anglo-Saxon nation.

My third chapter attends to the reoccurrence of successful lynching intercessors in six films directed by white, Irish-American filmmaker John Ford: *Just Pals* (1920), *Judge Priest* (1934), *Steamboat Round the Bend* (1935), *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939), *The Sun Shines Bright* (1953), and *The Horse Soldiers* (1959). Using letters and shooting scripts obtained from the John Ford Papers at the Lilly Library and the Will Rogers Memorial Museum Archive, I identify a correlation, unique among American films in the first half of the twentieth century, between Ford's near-lynching scenes and prominent evocations of historical and racial oppression. However, I observe that the rhetoric of the white lynching intercessors in his films permit the evoked historical and racial oppression to go unannounced and uncontested, which, therefore, reinvests in the white male citizen as the representative American. Ford's lynching intercessors emerge as a cinematic articulation of the American conscience in crisis.

The work of the white, southern author William Faulkner is the subject of my fourth chapter. I study the lynching intercessors in *Light in August* (1932), "Pantaloon in Black" from *Go Down, Moses* (1940), *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), and the film adaption of *Intruder in the Dust* (1949) directed by Clarence Brown. The lynching intercessor in *Light in August*, the Mottstown Sheriff, is consistent with other white male intercessors in this project, but, beginning in "Pantaloon in Black" and reaching an apex with Miss Habersham in *Intruder in the Dust*, Faulkner presents female lynching intercession that manipulates the southern rape-myth. The character Miss Habersham has not produced a large body of critical scholarship, but her intercession on behalf of Lucas Beauchamp is

an atypical representation of white lynching prevention that displays the inextricability of gender oppression and racial violence. Miss Habersham is also a white, southern aristocrat, and though Faulkner's portrayal of her lynching intercession interrupts the gendered tradition of the lynching intercessor, it also reinstates the authority of elite white southerners in a narrative of racial progress.

In conclusion, I look to the most culturally iconic white lynching intercessor: Atticus Finch in Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960). Atticus and his children intercede on behalf of the black character Tom Robinson—accused of raping a white woman—but neither the mob nor the intercessors mention race during this confrontation. Atticus Finch as intercessor personifies a faith in idealized white male citizenship and an assurance of "colorblind" racial progress. The white lynching intercessor articulates a compromise of resisting racial violence without tarnishing the myth of American equality, but this is not a compromise that every artist is willing to make.

CHAPTER 1

Few Earnest Words: The Lynching Intercessor in the Works of Charles W. Chesnutt

I. *Acting on the Truth*

In 1894, less than a year before his death, Frederick Douglass published a short pamphlet entitled, "Why is the Negro Lynched?" In the essay, Douglass laments that lynch mobs are permitted to abandon due process and commit murder "unchecked and unchallenged by law or public opinion" (492). He expresses great disappointment in the majority of southern whites, who do nothing in the public sphere to contest these mob murders: "There are but few earnest words ever uttered against [lynchings]. Press, platform and pulpit are generally either silent or they openly apologize for the mob and its deeds" (493). In 1899, W. E. B. Du Bois decided he needed to revise his perspective on anti-black lynching. Du Bois was deeply disturbed by the spectacle lynching of a black man named Sam Hose in Newnan, Georgia. Hose had been tortured and set afire in front of a crowd of approximately 2,000. As Du Bois walked to Joel Chandler Harris's Atlanta *Constitution* office to discuss the lynching, Du Bois was informed that the grocery store down the street had Hose's knuckles for sale. Du Bois had previously believed that most white Americans lived in ignorance of lynchings, which was why they rarely voiced public opposition to the practice. Hose's lynching, though, prompted Du Bois to conclude that "the cure wasn't simply telling people the truth, it was inducing them to act on the truth" (qtd. in Dray 15). Thinking along the same lines as Douglass and Du Bois, black American author Charles Waddell Chesnutt wrote at the turn of the

century to induce his readers to speak and act against lynching and other forms of racist violence.

Chesnutt envisioned his 1901 novel *The Marrow of Tradition* as a political successor to Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and Albion Tourgée's novel *A Fool's Errand* (1879), "the two works that were his idea of America's most influential literature" (Sundquist 406). Chesnutt believed in the power of literature to effect social change, and he wrote "to move his readers, and his country, toward a more humane state of race relations" (Finseth 3). Many scholars have pointed to Chesnutt's journal entry on May 29th, 1880, in which he explicitly states his plans to combat racial oppression through literary endeavors:

> I think I must write a book … The object of my writings would be not so much the elevation of the colored people as the elevation of the whites—for I consider the unjust spirit of caste … a barrier to the moral progress of the American people; and I would be one of the first to head a determined, organized crusade against it … (Helen Chesnutt 21)

Chesnutt desired to influence white readers and thus influence race relations in the United States, and scholars widely regard *The Marrow of Tradition* as his most fully realized effort to impart that influence. As Sandra Gunning states in her work, *Race, Rape, and Lynching: The Red Record of American Literature, 1890-1912* (1996), "*The Marrow of Tradition* was written with a view to reforming black social conditions by addressing white racial attitudes" (63), and anti-black violence was a key issue that needed addressing at the end of the nineteenth century.[34]

[34] The publishing history of *The Marrow of Tradition* also indicates Chesnutt's desire to have this novel read by white Americans; "Chesnutt wanted to be heard by white readers at America's racial nadir: they

Chesnutt bases the riot that erupts in the fictional town of Wellington, North Carolina in *The Marrow of Tradition* on the well-known and large-scale attack made by the white citizens of Wilmington, North Carolina on the city's black population in November 1898.[35] Chesnutt traveled to Wilmington to research the riot, and *Marrow* was a way for him to tell the story of calculated and repellant racial violence that was not told by the white press. Chesnutt's concern proved prescient, as just one year later, Thomas Dixon, Jr.'s novel *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden, 1865-1900* (1902) glorified the anti-black violence in Wilmington. When Chesnutt heard that members of Congress had been sent Dixon's novel, he sent copies of *Marrow* to those same Congressmen to offer them a different lens through which to interpret southern race relations (Sundquist 427). Samira Kawash accurately surmises that the "fictionalized but accurate account of the Wilmington, North Carolina, race riot of 1898 has been, for Chesnutt's contemporaries and for readers ever since, the emotional and political center of the novel" (89).

The riot, however, is not the only form of racial violence in *Marrow*. Before the white citizens in Chesnutt's Wellington begin rioting by arresting and shooting black citizens at will, one of the black characters is threatened with a spectacle lynching.[36] A

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needed the uplift" (Price 265). Chesnutt proposed *Marrow* to Houghton, Mifflin—the parent company of the *Atlantic Monthly*—which was considered a prestigious publishing company that could reach a large and predominantly white audience, and Houghton, Mifflin agreed to publish it (Price 260).

[35] For full discussions of Chesnutt's fictionalization of the Wilmington Race Riot, see "Fusion: *The Marrow of Tradition*" in Eric J. Sundquist's *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (1993); "Violence, Manhood, and Black Heroism: The Wilmington Riot in Two Turn-of-the-Century African American Novels" by Richard Yarborough in *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy* (1998); "Charles Chesnutt and the Epistemology of Racial Violence" by Bryan Wagner (2001); and "*The Marrow of Tradition*: Living to Tell the Tale" in Matthew Wilson's *Whiteness In the Novels of Charles W. Chesnutt* (2004).

[36] Chesnutt suggests that if this lynching were to occur, it would greatly resemble the torturous and highly attended lynching of Sam Hose:

servant named Sandy Delamere is almost lynched for murdering a white woman, a crime he is framed for by the white Tom Delamere—the grandson of Sandy's employer, Colonel Delamere. Through the intercession of the white Colonel Delamere (and the facilitation of that intercession by the black character Doctor Miller), Sandy is eventually cleared of the murder and the lynching is stopped. Perhaps because Sandy is *not* lynched, critical scholarship on violence and politics in *Marrow* has tended to pay only cursory attention to this aspect of the novel.[37] What has also gone unexplored is that *Marrow* is not the first work in which Chesnutt portrays a lynching intercessor. His short story "The Sheriff's Children," which first appeared in the magazine *Independent* in 1889, begins with the white character Sheriff Campbell successfully defending his mixed-race prisoner from a lynch mob (*Conjure Tales* x).[38] Scholars such as William L. Andrews, Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., and Henry B. Wonham have commented on how the story's overtly political subject and dark tone resemble and perhaps plant the seeds for Chesnutt's later protest fiction, most significantly expressed in *Marrow*. However, the conversation between "The Sheriff's Children" and *Marrow* has gone no further. In this chapter, I argue that the moments of lynching intercession in both "The Sheriff's Children" and *The*

> From one he learned that the railroads would run excursions from the neighboring towns in order to bring spectators to the scene; from another that the burning was to take place early in the evening, so that the children might not be kept up beyond their usual bedtime. In one group that he passed he heard several young men discuss the question of which portions of the negro's body they would prefer for souvenirs. (*MOT* 178)

[37] In her study of literary lynchings, *Exorcising Blackness* (1984), Trudier Harris only discusses Sandy's near-lynching as an example of a freed black man who is nonetheless defined by slavery: "When he is wrongly accused of a crime, he is not looked upon as an individual who has judged himself by certain standards and who has served his 'white folks' faithfully. He is instead identified with the masses of Blacks" (33). Sandra Gunning, in her work *Race, Rape, and Lynching* (1996), focuses not on how Sandy's lynching is stopped but instead on how "the preparation for the execution that might have been points to the development of increasingly gruesome social rituals in Wellington that bind whites together across classes and generations" (68).

[38] "The Sheriff's Children" was later republished in Chesnutt's short story collection *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line* (1899).

Marrow of Tradition illustrate Chesnutt's exhortation to his white readers to publicly and immediately take a stand against the lynching of black Americans. He ends his narratives with unresolved concerns so as to stress the dire importance of future lynching intercession in print, speech, and deed.

In many ways, Chesnutt's anti-lynching message in "The Sheriff's Children" and *The Marrow of Tradition* relies on what George Washington Cable termed the "Silent South." In 1885, Cable argues that there are many white southerners—like himself—who do not believe in social equality but believe in civic equality: the equality of the races under the law. He maintains that many southern whites are moderate in their racial politics but remain silent so as to avoid conflict with the white radicals:

> I say the outraged intelligence of the South; for there are thousands of Southern-born white men and women in the minority in all these places … who see the wrong and folly of these things, silently blush for them, and withhold their open protests only because their belief is unfortunately stronger in the futility of their counsel than in the power of a just cause. I do not justify their silence; but I affirm their sincerity and their goodly numbers. (347)

In his fiction, Chesnutt demonstrates to the "Silent South" that one need not argue for social equality in order to publicly denounce lynching. He charges the white southern moderates with the responsibility of interceding on behalf of a black citizen's right to due process. With secession defeated, southerners must now re-join the nation by honoring its Constitution, and he looks to southern moderates to lead the way. "The Sheriff's Children" and *The Marrow of Tradition* are also stories of tragic loss, illustrating that the

future of race relations in the country is at a critical juncture. Chesnutt aims to compel his readers to break their silences.

In his article, "The Dangerous Marrow of Southern Tradition" (2000), Christopher C. De Santis writes about *Marrow* that, "Dr. Miller's rhetoric of gradual change indicates that [Chesnutt] had no clear agenda in mind to correct Reconstruction's failures" (93). I contend, though, that Chesnutt *did* have a clear agenda in mind with regard to lynching, specifically: Chesnutt illustrates in his fiction that complete adherence to the law can stop lynching right away, even if white Americans cannot immediately relinquish their racial prejudices.[39] Chesnutt knew the American legal system exceptionally well. He passed the Ohio bar examinations with high scores in 1886, joined a law firm in 1887, and set up his own office as a court reporter in 1888 (Duncan xvii-xviii). In Chesnutt's stories, the law has not escaped the corruption of racism, but recommitting to its ideals and its formal procedures is the remedy for that corruption. In "The Sheriff's Children" and *Marrow of Tradition*, Chesnutt includes white intercessors to suggest that whites can and should stop anti-black lynching by fully honoring the principles of American democracy. Alongside his legal appeals, Chesnutt also points out that white men would not need to intercede if racial prejudice did not distort the legal system and preclude black men from full participation in the public sphere.

II. *Sheriff Campbell*

[39] In her book *Frantic Panoramas: American Literature and Mass Culture, 1870-1920* (2009), Nancy Bentley identifies a similar discursive complexity in Chesnutt's *The Conjure Tales*: "The local color tales Chesnutt began publishing in 1887 bespeak a literary tact so finely tuned as to cross over into the tactical" (191). It is not unusual for Chesnutt's writing to have multiple connotations, and his anti-lynching discourse exemplifies this.

Despite the inclusion of a threatened lynching in both "The Sheriff's Children" and *The Marrow of Tradition*, this literary correlation has not yet been addressed. In his article "W. D. Howells and Race: Charles W. Chesnutt's Disappointment of the Dean" (1997), Joseph R. McElrath, Jr. charts the abrupt shift in Howells's responses to Chesnutt's writing from 1900 to 1902. In 1902, Howells's review of *The Marrow of Tradition* included the "now widely quoted comment that the novelistic exposé of white racism was flawed by Chesnutt's 'bitter' tone" (McElrath 475). McElrath notes, though, that the "bitterness" or "anger" that Howells read in *Marrow* already existed in Chesnutt's short story "The Sheriff's Children," which was part of the collection of stories that Howells had applauded just two years ago: "The Sheriff's Children" is a "ruthless indictment of Southern whites," but "Howells appears to have chosen not to respond to this story, filtering it out as he saw in *The Wife* [*of his Youth*] what he wanted to see" (McElrath 484).[40] According to McElrath, Howells preferred stories in which black American authors and the black characters they created were not notably resentful toward whites. Howells wanted to illustrate the problem of the color line as the problem of the black race, whose gradual "improvement" would result in increased acceptance from white Americans (McElrath 484). However, the reproach of white America that Howells disliked in Chesnutt's *Marrow* had actually been there all along. In "The Sheriff's Children," individual white Americans are implicated for racial wrongdoing through the story's central protagonist: Sheriff Campbell. In this story, as Andrews writes, "Chesnutt's pessimistic reaction to the rise of white supremacist attitudes and the

[40] In his 1900 essay "Mr. Charles W. Chesnutt's Stories," in which he commends Chesnutt's two volumes of short stories—*The Conjure Woman* and *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line* (1899)—, Howells dubs Chesnutt's work as part of "the good school, the only school" of American Realism (700).

eclipse of black opportunity in the 'New South' of the 1890s became manifest" *(CT* xv). I think Andrews and McElrath are correct in noting Chesnutt's strong criticism of racist white southerners in "The Sheriff's Children," but I also contend that this story is not as one-sidedly pessimistic as those readers deem it to be.

Chesnutt describes the name of his protagonist in this short story as, "Colonel or Sheriff Campbell, as he was indifferently called, as the military or civic title happened to be most important in the opinion of the person addressing him" *(CT* 139). Chesnutt, however, is not indifferent to the protagonist's title and pointedly titles the story "The Sheriff's Children"—not "The Colonel's Children"; Chesnutt establishes that his protagonist's civic role as sheriff takes precedence over his military role as former Confederate. Sheriff Campbell's civic title also proclaims his position as a representative embodiment of the law. At the beginning of the story, the sheriff is notified by a black man named Sam that a lynch mob is fast approaching the jail, intent on killing the mixed-race prisoner being held there as a suspect in Captain Walker's murder.[41] The sheriff barricades himself inside the cell with the prisoner—physically placing himself between the mob and the prisoner—and eventually persuades the mob members not to follow through with the lynching. Through the sheriff's intercession, Chesnutt insists that white men in the South are capable of preventing a lynching. The racist inheritance of slavery certainly permeates the South, but it does not preclude democratic responsibility.

Sheriff Campbell is an exemplary protagonist for modeling lynching intercession, because Chesnutt characterizes him as an ideal representative of southern male leadership. Chesnutt describes the sheriff as physically strong—"tall, muscular"—and

[41] Sam's crucial role in the lynching intercession corresponds to the crucial role that Dr. Miller will play in *The Marrow of Tradition*. I will return to the character of Sam later in this chapter.

mentally perceptive, possessing a "pair of keen, deep set gray eyes" and "a masterful expression" *(CT* 137). A member of the formerly slave-holding, white aristocracy, the sheriff is a graduate of the state university, "a man far above the average of the community in wealth, education, and social position" *(CT* 139). The sheriff is loyal to his roots, however, as he both serves in the Confederate Army and returns to his hometown, where he is elected to the position of sheriff without any opposition. He is not ignorant to the world outside the South, though, because he "kept up some acquaintance with current literature and advanced thought" and "had traveled some in his youth, and was looked up to in the county as an authority on all subjects connected with the outer world" *(CT* 139). Before narrating the confrontation at the jail, Chesnutt establishes his protagonist as an elite example of white, masculine citizenship.

Sheriff Campbell first tries to redirect the lynch mob from their violent intentions. When the mob approaches the jail and asks to see the prisoner, the sheriff speaks through a wicket in the jail door and suggests a possibility for avoiding the confrontation. He indicates that if the men refrain from breaking the law, he will not officially report any of them: "You are all strangers to me and I don't know what business you can have'" *(CT* 140). His first attempt at thwarting the lynching is to physically intercede and to give the men a legal escape from the situation. When the men press on, saying they want to get into the jail, the sheriff replies, "What for? It ain't much trouble to get into a jail. Most people want to keep out" *(CT* 140). He both continues to evade direct conflict and attempts to lighten the severity of the situation. By portraying a clever sheriff who uses a variety of rhetorical appeals, Chesnutt imagines different strategies of white lynching intercession.

Sheriff Campbell ultimately stresses the principles of the law—both due process and his professional duties as an officer—as the primary basis of his lynching intercession. He says, "You can talk to that nigger in the court-house, when he's brought out for trial. Court will be in session here next week" *(CT* 140). With this statement and his use of the word "nigger," the sheriff portrays himself as like the white members of the mob and unlike the mixed-race prisoner, while also recalling the correct procedure of a courtroom trial. He does not express sympathy or loyalty to the prisoner, indicating that his challenge to the mob is not a challenge to white superiority. When the men insist that they will bust open the door, Chesnutt's sheriff stresses his responsibility within the law to defend his prisoner with violence, if necessary: "'Bust away,' answered the sheriff, raising his voice so that all could hear. 'But I give you fair warning. The first man that tries it will be filled with buckshot. I'm sheriff of this county; I know my duty, and I mean to do it'" (*CT* 140-1). He both declares his legal authority and appeals to the men on the basis of professional responsibility.

Though racism certainly motivates the mob, the sheriff does not attempt to challenge that racism in his intercession. The would-be lynchers say to the sheriff that the prisoner will probably be executed through the legal system anyway, and that they fear for the safety of white people if black people are not taught their place (*CT* 141). The sheriff does not disagree with the mob's assumptions of guilt—of either the specific prisoner, or of black people, in general—or the likely outcome of the legal proceedings. At no point in the confrontation does he try to persuade the men to think differently about black Americans or about the moral implications of lynching. Chesnutt even omits any of the sheriff's interior thoughts or feelings when he is speaking to the mob, so the reader

has no reason to suspect that the sheriff's personal perspective differs from his interceding speech. Chesnutt conveys that an officer of the law does not need to be anti-racist in public or in private to fulfill the duties of his job and fully defend a prisoner.

In fact, Chesnutt shows the reader that the sheriff is truly as unconcerned with this particular prisoner as his statements to the mob suggest. With the lynch mob outside the jail, and the sheriff and the prisoner inside, the prisoner beseeches him, "For God's sake, Sheriff … don't let 'em lynch me; I did n't kill the old man." In response, "The sheriff glanced at the cowering wretch with a look of mingled contempt and loathing" (*CT* 141). Sheriff Campbell clearly shares the racial prejudices of the men in the mob. His determined stance to prevent a lynching has nothing to do with his sympathies for this man and everything to do with his own legal, professional duties. He says to the prisoner, "You will probably be hung sooner or later, but it shall not be to-day, if I can help it … If I'm shot, I'll consider my responsibility at an end" (*CT* 142). The sheriff fully expects a white judge and jury to convict and execute the prisoner, and he seems more than willing to participate in that process, but he is still determined to follow through on his "responsibility" until he is incapacitated. Chesnutt wants to change the minds of racist white Americans, but by portraying a racist sheriff's intercession, Chesnutt also showcases due process as an immediate reason and means to stop lynching.

In fact, Sheriff Campbell makes his loyalties to white supremacy abundantly clear in his final proclamation to the mob:

> There's no use talking, boys … I'm a white man outside, but in this jail I'm sheriff; and if this nigger's to be hung in this county, I propose to do the hanging. So you fellows might as well right-about-face, and march back to Troy … You

> know *me*. I've got powder and ball, and I've faced fire before now, with nothing between me and the enemy, and I don't mean to surrender this jail while I'm able to shoot. (*CT* 141)

He articulates shared race and racism with the mob members by again using the word "nigger" and stating that he's a "white man outside." He makes a further petition to professional responsibility in his statement, "but in this jail I'm sheriff." He even builds on his status as a white southern insider by saying, "You know *me*," and by recalling his Confederate service with military language such as, "right-about-face," "march," "facing fire," "the enemy," and "surrender." The sheriff connotes that he is perfectly willing to execute the prisoner, but only if the man is first proven guilty in court. Sheriff Campbell presents his intercession as stemming from, not in conflict with, his role as a southern soldier who does not shy away from a violent attack.

Chesnutt presents the sheriff's tactics as effective, because the mob's certainty and force of purpose at last begin to waver. They slightly retreat from the jail and converse in low tones with one another:

> The lynchers had not anticipated any determined resistance. Of course they had looked for a formal protest, and perhaps a sufficient show of opposition to excuse the sheriff in the eye of any stickler for legal formalities. They had not, however, come prepared to fight a battle, and no one of them seemed willing to lead an attack upon the jail. (*CT* 142)

Chesnutt does not portray this mob as an inevitable force but as a group of people who can be stopped. If a law enforcement officer truly fulfills the duties of his position and does not merely pay those duties lip service, Chesnutt suggests that it is completely

possible that a group of would-be-lynchers can be dissuaded from carrying out their plan. After realizing that they do not want to risk their own lives by attacking the jail and the sheriff, the mob disperses. Shortly thereafter, however, a bullet is fired at the jail from somewhere in the distance. Sheriff Campbell answers a possible challenge to his resolve by quickly firing twice in the direction of the bullet's origin; he does not hesitate to defend his prisoner with violence if necessary. After the sheriff fires, no other assaults are made on the jail (*CT* 143). The sheriff's professional competence affirms his position as an ideal southern citizen, and he succeeds in preventing a lynching. Chesnutt illustrates to his readers that southern white men who do not believe in black social equality still can and should stop the lynching of black Americans.

The sheriff's lynching intercession is not the end of Chesnutt's story, though. After the mob leaves, the mixed-race prisoner reveals himself as Sheriff Campbell's own son, a young man named Tom whom the sheriff fathered with a slave of his named Cecily. The sheriff then sold Cecily and Tom down the river. While the sheriff was willing to perform his professional responsibility and protect a prisoner, his entrenchment in the institution of slavery and anti-black racism prevented him from fulfilling the responsibilities of fatherhood. Tom confronts him on this point: "What *father's duty* have you ever performed for me? Did you give me your name, or even your protection? Other white men gave their colored sons freedom and money, and sent them to the free States. *You* sold *me* to the rice swamps" (first emphasis added, *CT* 145). Through Tom's articulation of these other choices that Sheriff Campbell could have made, Chesnutt makes it clear that the sheriff could have created a different and probably better life for

his son than the one they are currently confronting.[42] Tom then asks the sheriff to finally fulfill his fatherly duty and allow Tom to run away, because although he did not kill Captain Walker, he cannot prove it, and so he will certainly be executed through the state's racist legal system (*CT* 144-146). Despite his intercession, the sheriff cannot escape the taint of past and present-day racial injustice.

This turn in the story to revelations of miscegenation dramatically complicates the idealized white masculine citizenship that the sheriff previously represented. As Harmut K. Selke writes, Chesnutt "induces the individual white reader … to identify with the sheriff who is presented in very positive terms … and the reader is [thus] made to share in [the sheriff's] fall" (32). The sheriff is forced to realize that the unbearable situation he now faces is of his own making. "The Sheriff's Children" thus confirms William M. Ramsey's contention that "The misfortunes of [Chesnutt's] mixed-race protagonists are not, reductively, the failure to become white but the tragic failure of American democracy" (38). The mob, the sheriff, and Tom all acknowledge that southern men use the law as an instrument of white supremacy. Tom's right to due process has been temporarily preserved, but he will not receive the fair trial that he is supposedly guaranteed under the Constitution. Tom says to his father, "you saved my life, but for how long? When you came in, you said Court would sit next week. When the crowd went away they said I had not long to live. It is merely a choice of two ropes" *(CT* 144). The sheriff interceded to stop a mob murder, but he must now decide if he will act as a father and let Tom escape or act as a sheriff and permit a "legal lynching."

[42] It is also worthwhile to note that by providing the sheriff (and the reader) with an alternative to selling Tom down the river, Chesnutt shifts his story away from the "tragic mulatto" tradition. Chesnutt suggests that Tom's tragic end is not his inevitable fate but the outcome of unjust circumstances and the choices of others.

Sheriff Campbell ultimately decides that the law *can* provide justice for Tom if the sheriff demands a full and veritable trial. Before he reaches this decision, the sheriff's white daughter Polly comes upon the jail, sees Tom pointing a gun at the sheriff, and shoots Tom—whom she does not know to be her half-brother. The sheriff binds Tom's gunshot wound in his arm and leaves him in the jail for the night. The sheriff spends the night trying to decide how to act toward his son and prisoner, and he concludes that he cannot go against his duty as sheriff and allow Tom to escape. He does, however, believe that a different course of action could possibly still save Tom's life: "[The sheriff] could, however, investigate the circumstances of the murder, and move Heaven and earth to discover the real criminal, for he no longer doubted the prisoner's innocence; he could employ counsel for the accused, and perhaps influence public opinion in his favor" *(CT* 149). In short, Sheriff Campbell decides to honor his duty as a father by adhering to the equal rights that *already exist* for black and white alike under the Fourteenth Amendment. Fully scrutinizing the murder of Captain Walker, providing legal defense, and utilizing his position of leadership in the community to influence just proceedings does not go against his duty as a sheriff; in fact, these are the actions he surely would take if the prisoner were white and the sheriff believed he was innocent. Chesnutt exposes the failure of the South to live up to the "national democratic" ideal (Byerman 102). A full commitment to non-white prisoners may not be part of the sheriff's social tradition, but it is now the nation's legal tradition and a path to justice.

By informing his readers of the sheriff's plans to prove Tom's innocence, Chesnutt proposes that a full commitment to democratic law can perhaps prevent both lynchings and "legal lynching." It is crucial that Chesnutt grants his audience access to

the sheriff's thoughts and intentions at this point in the story, because Chesnutt does not depict the sheriff acting out these plans. When the sheriff goes to wake Tom in the morning, he finds that Tom has been dead for several hours, a result of taking off his bandage and purposely bleeding to death in the night. Instead of undoing the sheriff's previous success as a lynching intercessor, however, I read this tragic ending as Chesnutt's own way of compelling a Du Bois-like realization in his readers, an inducement to action. Chesnutt does not want his readers comfortable and complacent but awake and appalled at the legacies of slavery and the present forms of racial violence. He insists that southern moderates can stop lynchings, and he implores them to act before any more sons die.

III. *How Not to Prevent a Lynching*

Like "The Sheriff's Children," the lynching intercession in *The Marrow of Tradition* does not result in eliminating anti-black violence altogether. Polly shoots her half-brother Tom in "Sheriff's Children" and the riot in *Marrow* causes the known deaths of four black characters (Jerry Letlow, Mammy Jane, Josh Green, and the Millers' son) and only one white character (Captain McBane). However, like my reading of "Sheriff's Children," I do not read the resulting violence in *Marrow* as undoing or nullifying the import of lynching intercession earlier in the story. Jacqueline Goldsby writes in her book *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (2006) that "Lynching would have us believe through the sheer force of its viscerality, that African American life was so expendable and white supremacy so incontestable that the possibilities of deriving meaning from the violence were both endless and pointless" (218). She sees

anti-lynching writers as working directly against this meaninglessness, and Chesnutt is part of that fellowship of writers who writes about violence and loss as rife with both meaning and possibility for change. Good people die and hospitals burn down in *Marrow*, but Chesnutt continually contests the notion that such suffering is the inevitable fate of black Americans. In *Marrow*, Chesnutt maintains that deliberate decisions to commit anti-black violence can be thwarted by deliberate decisions to speak and act against lynching and in favor of democratic equality under the law.

The riot that erupts in Wellington at the end of the novel is not a spontaneous explosion of violence, but a direct result of the campaign for white supremacy orchestrated by the white characters Major Carteret, General Belmont, and Captain McBane. Throughout the narrative, the three men gather for meetings and organize specific strategies for how to best utilize their public influence. Designating themselves the "Big Three," these men decide that they "must have the crowd with [them]" for their anti-black campaign; they plan to use Carteret's paper, the *Morning Chronicle*, to garner support and recruit followers (*The Marrow of Tradition* 95). They decide to republish in Carteret's paper an inflammatory article from the local black press when it will have the greatest political impact. The article proclaims that the popular defense in the South for lynching black men—to prevent and punish the rape of white women—is false, because many of the supposed rapes are actually consensual relationships (*MOT* 97).[43] McBane is in favor of immediately lynching the author and destroying the black press, including

[43] This article seems partly based on the editorial written by Alexander Manley and published in the *Wilmington Record* in 1898. Sundquist discusses the role of Manley's article in the circumstances leading up to the Wilmington Race Riot on pages 411-413 of *To Wake the Nations* (1993).

burning down the newspaper office, but Belmont and Carteret persuade him to wait. [44] They recognize that the article will spark ire in Wellington's white citizens and decide to republish it closer to the upcoming local Election Day (*MOT* 100). Chesnutt makes it clear to his readers that the riot in Wellington is not the inevitable clashing of two races but part of a political campaign specifically instigated by powerful, white individuals.[45]

Chesnutt also shows that the blame for Polly Ochiltree's murder does not just happen to fall on Sandy; actually, Tom Delamere plots and carries out his robbery and murder of Mrs. Ochiltree so that his black servant will be the presumed suspect. Tom disguises himself as Sandy by blackening his face and wearing Sandy's recognizable suit when he commits the crime. He uses Mrs. Ochiltree's gold coins (and her silk coin purse) to repay money that Sandy loaned him, and he quickly leaves Wellington the morning after the murder to go fishing (*MOT* 149). Therefore, when Mrs. Ochiltree's body is discovered, and when a few of her gold pieces are found in Sandy's possession, Tom is not there to explain the circumstances or defend Sandy.

Once Sandy is suspected in the murder of a white woman, the "Big Three" aim to seize this opportunity to advocate white supremacy and black criminality through a lynching. The men consider re-publishing the lynching editorial from the black paper to "render more effective" the influence of Sandy's lynching on the white citizens of

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[44] With McBane's threat, Chesnutt is likely also referencing the real life and work of Ida B. Wells-Barnett. In the *Free Speech* paper in Memphis in 1892, she published an editorial similar to the one in *Marrow* (and similar to Manley's)—in which she rebuked "the old threadbare lie that Negro men rape white women." The newspaper office was soon destroyed, and she was threatened with death if she did not leave town (Royster 79).

[45] The 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission recently released a report in 2006 that corroborates Chesnutt's fictional portrayal of the event. In the news release following the draft report on December 8, 2005, Dr. Jeffrey Crow, deputy secretary of the N.C. Office of Archives and History stated, "This research demonstrates that unequivocally that the Wilmington Race riot was not a spontaneous event, but was directed by white businessmen and Democratic leaders to regain control of Wilmington" ("Wilmington" 1).

Wellington, but they refrain once more, because Mrs. Ochiltree's murder will surely provide plenty of journalistic material to outrage the white readers (*MOT* 158). Carteret's paper announces the murder and the suspicion of Sandy, and proceeds to urge its readers to obey a "higher law" and enact a "swift and terrible punishment which would fall, like the judgment of God, upon any one who laid sacrilegious hands upon white womanhood" (*MOT* 158). Utilizing the press, the "Big Three" urge the readers to discard the law of the courts and answer to a "higher law" of white supremacy and white female purity. They shrewdly set a lynching of Sandy into motion, claiming divine judgment—and not themselves—as the inspiration for the murder.

While the systematic orchestrations of the "Big Three" in *The Marrow of Tradition* have been well noted, the complex proceedings that stop Sandy's lynching have not yet been discussed.[46] Perhaps the full extent of the lynching prevention in *Marrow* has been largely overlooked, because while Chesnutt proposes strategies for white intercession, he also bemoans the necessity of white intercession in the first place. Chesnutt portrays honest and community-minded black men who are denied a legitimate place in the public sphere and thus cannot defend Sandy themselves. After the "Big Three" publish their article designed to fan the flames of lynching, three black male characters—the lawyer Mr. Watson, the physician Mr. Miller, and the laborer Josh Green—converge at Dr. Miller's house to discuss how to protect Sandy. Since Sandy was with Josh Green at the time of the murder, Green says he is willing to testify to Sandy's innocence, but the three men recognize that this would be futile, as the white citizens will

[46] The previously mentioned scholars who focus on the novel's fictionalized account of the Wilmington Race Riot all connect the "Big Three" with the leading white Democrats in Wilmington who called themselves the "Secret Nine" (see fn 4).

not believe any of them to be credible (*MOT* 159-160).[47] The reader knows that Dr. Miller is an accomplished doctor and a principled citizen, but to a group of southern whites, his words would fall on deaf ears. Furthermore, Chesnutt depicts both a lawyer and a man who can corroborate Sandy's alibi that can and want to defend him, but because of their race, they can make no direct impact on the legal system.

Josh Green is also ready and willing to stage a physical defense of Sandy. He suggests that they assemble armed black men to guard the jail, but Miller and Watson want to avoid any violent clash between the races, because then, "instead of one dead negro there'd be fifty" (*MOT* 160). Chesnutt acknowledges that armed resistance is an option for lynching prevention, but the words of Miller and Watson (and the deadly results of Green's physical defense of the black hospital during the riot) point out that such a preventive tactic is still a great risk of black life. For these black men, two courses of direct and traditionally masculine action—public discourse and physical resistance—are stymied by white racism.[48] Ultimately, the three men decide to solicit a white man who will publicly object to Sandy's lynching and perhaps dissuade the other whites from carrying it out: in other words, they decide to find an intercessor. At the chapter's conclusion, however, a willing white intercessor has yet to be found. Chesnutt titles this chapter "How Not to Prevent a Lynching" (*MOT* 158), implying the futility felt by these

[47] In his article "Who Has the Right to Say? Charles W. Chesnutt, Whiteness, and the Public Sphere" (1999), Matthew Wilson writes that the outrage produced by the black-authored, anti-lynching editorial in *Marrow* dramatizes "how African-Americans are seen as having no rights in the public sphere even when their own political status is under discussion" (19). This is also evidenced by the inability of Green, Watson, and Miller to publicly testify in Sandy's defense.

[48] In his chapter on Chesnutt's novel *The House behind the Cedars* (1900), Van Thompson describes the racial climate at the turn of the century and the aggressive white policing of black masculinity/femininity: "a black person (regardless of age) was considered by the language of white racism a boy or girl. Consequently, for black individuals to assert their manhood or womanhood, 'to act white,' to attempt to be white (free, pass, or cross over), or to express equality to whites was, in the eyes of many whites, to commit dangerous and criminal acts that were often met with violence" (23).

men in the face of a local white population that does not want to challenge a racist lynch mob and will not peacefully permit black men to challenge it, either.

Calling upon a white intercessor is not the work that Green, Watson, and Miller want to perform, but they deem it their best option in their racial climate. Through his characters' reasoning, Chesnutt shows that the severity of circumstances for blacks in the South renders a white intercessor the safest method of lynching prevention. In a conversation among the "Big Three," Chesnutt further illustrates that anti-black lynchings are themselves "representational, conveying messages about racial hierarchy and the frightening consequences of transgressing that hierarchy" (Wood 2).[49] McBane is the most unabashed proponent of anti-black violence in the novel, and he declares that it does not matter if the black man who is lynched is guilty of the crime: "The *example* would be all the more powerful if we got the wrong one. It would serve notice on the niggers that we shall hold the whole race responsible for the misdeeds of each individual" (emphasis added, *MOT* 156). McBane openly recognizes lynching as an argument for white dominance and black expendability. He does not mask his motives behind a pretense of individual punishment but revels in the larger terrorism of the act.[50] Therefore, stopping the lynching of Sandy does not just mean sparing an individual life: it means stopping an illustration of white racism that reinforces and perpetuates racial injustice. Dr. Miller's and Mr. Watson's quest to find a white intercessor may not be a

[49] In his book *Legacies of Lynching* (2004), Jonathan Markovitz corroborates this view, writing that "Lynching was always intended as a metaphor for, or a way to understand, race relations … lynch mobs typically worked to ensure that black audiences were aware of the strength of white supremacy and the costs of violating the boundaries of the racial order" (xvi).

[50] McBane's willingness to lynch any black person directly contradicts the version of lynching that southern citizens of Wellington told northern visitors earlier in the novel: "no negro was ever lynched without incontestable proof of his guilt" (*MOT* 116).

public demand for political equality, but it is an attempt to halt both Sandy's death and the public message of racial inequality that his murder would convey.

In their quest to find a willing white intercessor, Green, Miller, and Watson look to men who are professional representatives of the law or leaders in the community. As Miller and Watson either discuss these men or appeal to them outright, Chesnutt identifies those democratic systems that should protect all citizens but do not protect southern blacks. Miller first suggests going to the sheriff who could call the state militia to protect Sandy's jail cell. Watson, though, has already approached the sheriff and states that he has a "white face and white liver" and "does not dare call out the militia to protect a negro charged with such a brutal crime" (*MOT* 161). The local sheriff is a logical line of defense, but in Wellington, the sheriff is too racist and cowardly to risk interceding. Miller then suggests the federal government and even the President, but Watson reminds him that the federal system will not work fast enough to save Sandy's life (*MOT* 162). Only a local can be effective *immediately*. Chesnutt insists to his readers that white southerners must take responsibility for the mob murders that happen in their particular neighborhoods, towns, and cities. With an utter lack of dependable law enforcement, Dr. Miller admits that the "outlook is dark," but he insists that they should persevere, because "There must be *some* white men in the town who would stand for law and order" (*MOT* 162). Josh leaves to talk to local blacks in the hopes of acquiring more information, and Miller and Watson leave to speak directly to white individuals who might end their silence.

The chapter resumes with Miller and Watson returning to Miller's house half an hour later, both unsuccessful in finding a white intercessor. Watson tries the mayor and

Judge Everton, while Miller tries his friend Dr. Price, but all three white men either avoid the situation or refuse to speak against it (*MOT* 162-163). Miller and Watson discuss with each other and Green the irrationality of the white men's inaction. Judge Everton says to Watson, "If a negro wants the protection of the law, let him obey the law," but Watson retorts to Miller and Green that, "If this were the law, there would be no need of judges or juries" (*MOT* 162). With Watson's response, Chesnutt forcefully contends that the law is in place precisely so that guilt can be proven in a fair and orderly manner and not by mobs. Everton's racism has distorted his commitment to democracy. Miller states to Watson and Green that, regardless of participation or approval, the white people who do not try to stop racial violence are consequently contributors to it:

> Their friendship for us, a slender stream at best, dries up entirely when it strikes their prejudices. There is seemingly not one white man in Wellington who will speak a word for law, order, decency, or humanity. Those who do not participate will stand idly by and see an untried man deliberately and brutally murdered. Race prejudice is the devil unchained. (*MOT* 163)

Through the failure of these various white men, Chesnutt reveals the complete breakdown of democracy that occurs when a black man is lynched. With one last statement of faith in the intercessor—"one good white man, if he choose, may stem the flood long enough to give justice a chance" (*MOT* 163)—Miller leaves for Belleview to seek Colonel Delamere, Sandy's employer.

In "Acting without the Father: Charles Chesnutt's New Aristocrat" (1997), Todd McGowan contends that "Miller's advice is always to accommodate rather than act," and that "Miller clearly desires some kind of 'good,' but his words indicate that he conceives

of no possible connection between any act on his part and the realization of that good" (68). McGowan brings attention to Delamere's anti-lynching contribution but does not acknowledge the essential and *active* role that Miller plays in that contribution. Without Miller's efforts to travel to Belleview, notify Delamere of Sandy's arrest, and insist on Delamere's return to Wellington, Delamere's intercession is not possible. Briefly returning to "The Sheriff's Children," Sheriff Campbell is also able to intercede because a young black man named Sam notifies him of the approaching lynch mob. Sam reminds the sheriff of a previous pronouncement he made about protecting his prisoners and holds him accountable to that pronouncement: "I hearn you say down ter de sto' once't dat you would n't let nobody take a pris'ner 'way fum you wid-out walk' over yo' dead body, en I thought I'd let you know 'fo' dey come, so yer could pertec' de pris'ner" (*CT* 137). Chesnutt stresses the importance of white intercessors in both "Sheriff's Children" and *Marrow*, but he also acknowledges the role that black men can play in exerting private influence.

IV. *Colonel Delamere*

The character who ultimately acts as a public white intercessor for Sandy is Colonel Delamere, whose military title is another echo of Sheriff Campbell in this novel.[51] McGowan notes Delamere's success in stopping the lynching, but he interprets Delamere's actions through the lens of aristocracy, not anti-lynching rhetoric. Delamere is often overlooked in scholarship on *Marrow of Tradition*, or, even more frequently, he is noted but quickly dismissed as an "anachronism" (Hamilton 56), or an "exemplar of

[51] The connection between Sheriff Campbell and Colonel Delamere is further strengthened by Chesnutt's choice to name each man's wayward progeny "Tom."

the Old South" (Danielson 82). Michelle Wolkomir views Colonel Delamere as a character who illustrates that the traditions and philosophies of the Southern aristocracy "belong to the past and are dying out because they have no place in the present" (249). Mammy Jane, the Carterets' servant and former slave, and Sandy, Delamere's own servant and former slave, are considered other members of that dying past. The eventual deaths of Delamere and Mammy Jane in the novel certainly support Wolkomir's reading, and I do not disagree that Delamere evokes the slave-owning aristocracy of the South. However, I think his lynching intercession, like Sheriff Campbell's, also shows Chesnutt's insistence that upholding due process can immediately prevent anti-black lynchings. Gunning describes Delamere as "the aging, ineffectual white aristocrat who belongs to a lost generation of honorable and fair-minded men" (64), but Delamere *is* effectual in thwarting Sandy's lynching.

At first Colonel Delamere demonstrates his naïve reliance on the old codes of the slave system. He clings to a sense of aristocratic status and believes the white people of Wellington will never lynch anyone associated with the Delamere family. When Miller tells him of Sandy's situation, Delamere simply insists, "tell them I say Sandy is innocent, and it will be all right" (*MOT* 165). Miller eventually convinces Delamere to return to town, and he immediately visits Sandy in the jail. He believes Sandy's claims of innocence, and despite Sandy's refusal to name who framed him, Delamere intuits that his grandson Tom is involved. Before leaving the jail, Delamere demands that the sheriff give Sandy the complete protection that the law ought to grant him:

> There should be no force too strong for an honest man in your position to resist,—whether successfully or not is beyond the question. The officer who is intimidated

> by threats, or by his own fears, is recreant to his duty, and no better than the mob which threatens him. But you will have no such test, Mr. Wemyss! I shall see to it myself that there is no violence! (*MOT* 172)

As a white male citizen, Delamere is in a secure position to demand that the sheriff honor his professional and legal responsibilities. He asserts the duty of sheriffs to stand against lynch mobs and proclaims his own determination to make a dramatic impact on this situation.

As the "Big Three" previously did, Delamere tries to use Carteret's newspaper to influence public opinion. Chesnutt includes another discussion among his characters about the ethics of lynching with a brief debate between Delamere and Carteret. Carteret insists that when freed black people disobey the law, they are rightly punished by the lynch mob, but Delamere responds that, "The law … furnishes a sufficient penalty for any crime, however heinous, and our code is by no means lenient" (*MOT* 173). Delamere also draws attention to the negative effect that lynching has upon white lynchers who become "a mob of primitive savages, dancing in hellish glee around the mangled body of a man who has never been tried for a crime" (*MOT* 174). Sandy is, as Delamere proclaims, "honest, faithful, and trustworthy," but instead of continuing an argument with Carteret about a black man's morality, Delamere returns to a focus on due process: "All this, however, is apart from my errand, which is to secure your assistance in heading off this mob until Sandy can have a fair hearing and an opportunity to prove his innocence" (*MOT* 174). Along with this anti-lynching rhetoric, though, Delamere still insists on his aristocratic status. He believes his family's good name should be enough to convince Carteret to publish a notice calling off the lynching. Carteret shatters this reliance when

he says Delamere's word is not enough, and that the "good name" of the Delameres has been tarnished by the grandson Tom, who owes money for gambling and is caught cheating at cards (*MOT* 174-175). Delamere's aristocratic laws no longer work in the new South.

However, when Delamere's old-fashioned attempt to use his "good name" fails to garner the support of the press, Delamere shifts his strategy of intercession back to the law. With his suspicion of Tom somewhat confirmed by Carteret's report, Delamere then pursues an alternative explanation to Mrs. Ochiltree's death by searching Tom's room. He consequently finds evidence of Tom's disreputable character and gambling problem, as well as evidence of Tom's guilt in Mrs. Ochiltree's murder: one of Mrs. Ochiltree's gold pieces and a piece of burnt cork that Tom used to blacken his face and disguise himself as Sandy (*MOT* 180). Delamere takes the steps that a full legal investigation would surely take if the prime suspect were not black. De Santis argues that "Sandy's life is finally spared not because of the protection of his white benefactor, whose argument for the black servant's innocence is taken little more seriously than Sandy's own pleas that he is guiltless, but rather because the real perpetrator of the crime *is eventually discovered*" (emphasis added, 81). In his phrasing, De Santis presents the guilty party as ambiguously and passively discovered, whereas Delamere actually takes concrete action to uncover the evidence that proves Tom's guilt.[52]

Delamere follows up his private investigation with a public declaration of intercession. With evidence of Tom's guilt, Delamere informs Carteret that he would like to issue a statement clearing Sandy of the charges and naming Tom as the perpetrator.

[52] Joyce Pettis makes a similar oversight when she writes that Colonel Delamere "is impotent in confrontation with charged racial attitudes" (40). Though initially flustered and thoroughly distressed, Delamere still navigates a course of lynching prevention.

Carteret refuses to openly implicate Tom, who is a white man and thus, according to Carteret, deserving of the opportunity to defend himself. The two men reach a compromise and gather "thirty or forty of the leading citizens of Wellington" in the *Morning Chronicle* office (*MOT* 184). Delamere publicly declares to these men that Sandy has an alibi for the murder, because he was with Delamere. As an intercessor, Delamere perjures himself so that his version of events, printed on a handbill by Carteret, can be widely disseminated. With Sandy's safety secured, Chesnutt makes it clear that Delamere's actions are responsible for stopping the lynching: "Thus a slight change in the point of view had demonstrated the entire ability of the leading citizens to maintain the dignified and orderly processes of the law whenever they saw fit to do so" (*MOT* 186).

Delamere does not need to convince every white citizen in Wellington that Sandy is the moral equal, if not superior, to most white men in order to intercede; however, he does need to change the public story of Sandy's presumed guilt and see to it that the counter story is told widely and with authority. The great tragedy that remains, however, is that Delamere has to lie and violate the letter of the law to see the spirit of the law observed. This tragedy and his grandson's immorality prove to be more than the elderly Delamere can endure, and he dies soon afterward. Chesnutt conveys that lynching not only menaces black Americans but also endangers the sanctity of the law and the honor of southern white men.

At first glance, Chesnutt seems to perpetuate class elitism by dubbing only prominent and educated white men as intercessors. Colonel Delamere is a wealthy member of the Old South's aristocracy, and he acts to stop Sandy's lynching, while

Captain McBane has "sprung from the poor-white class" (*MOT* 64) and personifies repugnant racist violence. I maintain, though, that even as Chesnutt features a white aristocrat as his lynching intercessor, he does not divide racial ethics cleanly along class lines. Delamere may be an effective intercessor, but the moral inadequacy of his grandson Tom signals that wealth and name can offer no reassurance of racial enlightenment. Similarly, the successful intercessor Sheriff Campbell in "The Sheriff's Children" is an educated man of high social status, but his fall shows the reader that any number of sins can lurk in the pasts of white slaveholders. Regarding the instigators of racial violence, the "Big Three," McBane is grossly racist and violent, but Belmont and Carteret are professionals and socially prominent white men who conspire with McBane to achieve the same results. McBane is frank about his intentions, but Belmont insists that they must "avoid even the appearance of evil" (*MOT* 95). Belmont's and Carteret's seeming sophistication is a mere veil for base motives. Colonel Delamere's success as a lynching intercessor ultimately has little to do with his wealth and lineage and a great deal to do with both his attention to the evidence and his public testimony, both in speech and print.

V. *Major Carteret*

With the death of Colonel Delamere, Chesnutt disallows white readers from assuming that men like Delamere are always out there and will always save them from their violent and prejudiced selves. Once Delamere is gone, the question becomes, who will now be the one to stop the "Big Three"? In the course of the anti-black riot at the end of the novel, Chesnutt presents an attempted intercession on the part of Major Carteret—

he tries to stop a white mob from burning down Dr. Miller's hospital. Carteret's intercession fails, and Chesnutt utilizes this failure to confront his audience with the urgency of the situation and the inextricability of language and deed.

Carteret's newspaper and printing press play a major role in first encouraging white men in Wellington to attack Sandy and then using Delamere's false alibi to suppress that attack. The newspaper is still in the hands of the "Big Three," though, and a few weeks after the thwarted lynching, they decide to reignite their campaign. Carteret uses the *Morning Chronicle* to champion "the doctrine of 'White Supremacy" and gives speeches in which he cites black suffrage and black political advancement as cause for alarm. He again evokes the "higher law" of white supremacy to promote extralegal activity: "The provisions of the Federal Constitution, it was maintained, must yield to this 'higher law,' and if the Constitution could neither be altered nor bent to this end, means must be found to circumvent it" (*MOT* 191). Carteret aims to promote "reform" that will weaken the authority of the Fourteenth Amendment and suppress the black vote. However, change is not happening quickly enough for the "Big Three," so before the local elections, Carteret re-publishes the article from the black press that avers that instances of "black rape" are more often than not just cover-ups for consensual relationships. Carteret adds "inflammatory comment" to the article, and its publication is a success for the white supremacy campaign as it "touch[es] the Southern white man in his most sensitive spot" (*MOT* 196). The groundwork is laid for the political coup that Carteret desires, but he has also lit the fires of an anti-black riot.

Ian Finseth considers the role that the *Morning Chronicle* plays in rousing the racist hysteria of the riot:

> What Chesnutt accomplishes at such a moment of detailed realism is to ground the discourse of 'Negro criminality' in a concrete social practice and thus to reveal its contingent nature … this form of racial discourse depends on identifiable, potentially alterable mechanisms of cultural production. (5)

The cultural production of the press sways white public opinion first against and then for Sandy, and it then spurs a race riot that spins entirely out of Carteret's control. His long-time black servant Mammy Jane is killed (among others), and the armed white men soon set their sights on Dr. Miller's hospital. Josh Green has assembled a group of armed black men to help him protect the hospital, and the result is a violent clash between black and white that Miller predicted and that Carteret cannot stop.

Chesnutt insists upon the critical role that the written word must play in intervening against racial violence. As McBane and Green exchange fire at the hospital, Carteret and his junior editor Lee Ellis begin to push their way to the front of the white mob. Carteret shouts to Ellis that they "must try to stop this thing!" (*MOT* 231). Ellis replies that stopping this "fever" is "[e]asier said than done" (*MOT* 231). It seems as though Ellis is right, and quelling the riot at this point is beyond the power of a single individual, but Chesnutt reminds his readers that the riot was not unavoidable. In fact, the riot was set in motion by the choices of a few powerful individuals. Ellis continues in a defeated and resigned tone, "We have advised the people to put the negroes down, and they are doing the job thoroughly" (*MOT* 231). Ellis reminds Major Carteret that their words called for the suppression of the black race and that is what the white mob is doing. The riot is the direct result of the manipulation of the press.

Chesnutt stresses the power of language again in the mob's reaction to Carteret's intercession. Carteret continues to push to the front of the crowd, and once he stands there—in between the white mob and the black hospital—he cries out to them, "Gentlemen! … I implore you … this is murder, it is madness, it is a disgrace to our city, to our state, to our civilization!" (*MOT* 232). In his references to "madness" and the disgrace of "civilization," Carteret recalls the anti-lynching rhetoric of Delamere: "a mob of primitive savages, dancing in hellish glee around the mangled body of a man who has never been tried for a crime" (*MOT* 174). The advocate for white supremacy has now become an intercessor, but he is too late. Instead of hearing his appeals to stop the riot, the white men remember Carteret's rallying calls of white supremacy in his newspaper, and misinterpret his objections for encouragement: "'That's right!' replied several voices … 'It is a disgrace, and we'll not put up with it a moment longer. Burn 'em out! Hurrah for Major Carteret, the champion of 'white supremacy'! Three cheers for the Morning Chronicle and 'no nigger domination'!'" (*MOT* 232). The white mob proceeds to set fire to the hospital so as to drive out and kill the black men who defend it from the inside. Even the servile black character Jerry Letlow is lynched due to the white mob's eagerness for bloodshed. Geordie Hamilton notes the importance of the press in fomenting the race riot: "Within the world of the text, an editorial policy hostile to the practice of lynching would do a great deal to promote peaceful relations between whites and blacks" (65). Carteret fails at intercession, because his own textual production creates a "fever" that he cannot contain.

Carteret's junior editor Lee Ellis seems like a potential intercessor during the threat to Sandy's life, but his alliance with Carteret and the *Morning Chronicle* ultimately

render him a failed intercessor, as well. Ellis is the son of a Quaker who "[does] not believe in lynch law," but Ellis has also never thought it necessary to vigorously oppose lynch law publicly (*MOT* 176). However, he knows that Sandy is innocent and Tom is guilty, and decides that if it becomes necessary, he will point the finger at Tom. When he sees Colonel Delamere, he speaks to him about the threat to Sandy: "I mean to stop it if I can. The negro did not kill Mrs. Ochiltree" (*MOT* 178).[53] However, since Delamere intercedes, Ellis does not have to, and he does nothing to change the public discourse about lynching and racial violence afterwards (*MOT* 189). Ellis exemplifies Miller's earlier characterization of moderate white men who stand idly and quietly by and are thus complicit in racial violence. McGowan concurs that, "Through Ellis, Chesnutt depicts the fecklessness of the white liberal, his inability to act despite his moral opposition to the violence of the Big Three" (67). Ellis even acknowledges his own role in the riot—saying to Carteret, "*We* have advised the people to put the negroes down, and they are doing the job thoroughly" (emphasis added, *MOT* 231). By revealing Ellis' failure, Chesnutt tries to induce his readers to redeem themselves from previous silences.

The final words of *Marrow* are spoken by Dr. Miller as he rushes to save the life of Carteret's son: "there's time enough, but none to spare" (246). Chesnutt does not want his readers to become complacent in cynicism but to be spurred to act immediately. By insisting that speech, action, and the written word all play a part in preventing racial violence, Chesnutt also reiterates faith in his own book to compel social change. If the right words spoken by the right individual can redirect the nation's course, then literature can help provide those words. Black characters like Sam in "Sheriff's Children" and Dr.

[53] I disagree with Hamilton who writes that "The narrator holds Ellis up to the reader as an example of how a promising moral student can be successfully educated into better behavior" (65). While Ellis does seem to be a "promising moral student," his failure to make any kind of public impact is not an improvement.

Miller in *Marrow* alert white characters to impending danger and prompt them to take productive action; Chesnutt similarly positions his own fiction to rhetorically compel those white, moderate southerners to speak against racial violence. Chesnutt's story "The Sheriff's Children" and his novel *The Marrow of Tradition* expose the gulf between democracy's ideals and democracy's realities and entreat white intercessors to bridge that gulf.

However, *Marrow* was not the popular and influential text that Chesnutt hoped it would be. Deemed a "bitter" book by Howells and "propagandistic" by black critics like Benjamin Brawley and J. Saunders Redding, the reviews of Chesnutt's expansive assessment of race relations at the turn of the century were largely unfavorable (Sundquist 275). Perhaps even more dispiriting for a writer who had hoped to follow in the footsteps of Stowe's ubiquitous *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the sales of the book were low and highly disappointing (*MOT* 26). Cable had assured the nation of the "goodly numbers" of the "Silent South," but those numbers did not manifest widespread support for Chesnutt's novel. On the other hand, Thomas Dixon, Jr.'s novel *The Leopard's Spots*, published a year after *Marrow*, depicted anti-black violence as justified and necessary in maintaining a white supremacist nation, and it was met with great commercial success. Chesnutt's call for white intercessors was not answered in the form of readers.

VI. *Colonel French*

Following a frustrating reception of *Marrow*, Chesnutt wrote one more book set in the South: *The Colonel's Dream*, published in 1905. The central protagonist is another Colonel, like Sheriff Campbell and Delamere. He is a white man who makes a great

fortune in the North and then returns to the southern town of his childhood, called Clarendon. Upon seeing the poverty of his ancestors' community, he decides to open a mill that will provide the town's citizens, both black and white, with livable wages and a sustainable economy. His fair-minded business practices with black workers, however, result in significant resistance from Clarendon's Ku-Klux-Klan-like vigilante band of white men. When the black laborer Bud Johnson is arrested for shooting a white man who tortured him as a convict-lease overseer, the Colonel, along with the local white doctor and several ministers, work to secure Bud's protection from lynch mobs (*The Colonel's Dream* 147).

Unlike *The Marrow of Tradition*, though, Bud is lynched anyway a few days later, and no one is there to intercede. The Colonel finds out about Bud's murder after the fact, and he asks not to hear the details: "A rope, a tree—a puff of smoke, a flash of flame—or a barbaric orgy of fire and blood, what matter which? At the end of the day there was a lump of clay, and a hundred murderers where there had been one before" (*CD* 164). Even after Bud's murder, the Colonel is hopeful that he can help create change that will prevent lynchings from occurring in the future, but then he receives a final blow that compels him to leave his southern hometown and return to the North. The Colonel's young son named Phil had previously requested that he and Peter—the longtime, black family servant—be buried next to each other. When Peter quickly follows the young Phil in death, the Colonel grants Phil's wish and buries Peter alongside him in the white cemetery. Peter's coffin is then exhumed during the night and left on the Colonel's front porch. The Colonel is so appalled by this defamation that Clarendon's best chance for an intercessor decides to "turn back" to the North (*CD* 173).

Chesnutt's narrator does not condemn the Colonel's choice to return North and instead rhetorically asks the reader if leaving the South is, "after all, the only way?" (*CD* 173). In his book on whiteness in the novels of Chesnutt, Matthew Wilson sees the Colonel's choice to abandon the South as a demonstration of Chesnutt's deeply diminished faith in the South's potential to be moved to change. Wilson argues that *The Colonel's Dream* "is a novel of economic life that exposes the racist undergirding of the New South ideology at the same time that it doubts the efficacy of fiction to effect instrumental reform" (*Whiteness* 148). The Colonel does not make an impact on the racial violence of his hometown, and *Marrow* did not compel white moderates to effect significant change. After Colonel French discovers Peter's grave on his porch, his neighbor Miss Laura exclaims to him that the "best people" would not approve of the violation of Peter's grave. Chesnutt's Colonel French replies, "The best people, Laura … are an abstraction" (*CD* 168). Just four years after publishing *The Marrow of Tradition*, the lynching intercessor is no longer Chesnutt's call to action; instead, it is an empty idea that allows for endless inaction.

CHAPTER 2

Righteous Mobs and Mistaken Men: The Lynching Intercessor in the Works of Thomas Dixon, Jr.

I. *Secret Structures*

As I mentioned in my previous chapter, when Charles W. Chesnutt heard that members of Congress had received copies of Thomas Dixon, Jr.'s novel *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden 1865-1900* (1902), Chesnutt sent copies of his novel *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901) to those same Congressmen, so as to provide them with a different perspective of racial violence in the South (Sundquist 427). In her book *Race, Rape, and Lynching: The Red Record of American Literature, 1890-1912* (1996), Sandra Gunning explores how authors with opposing viewpoints of lynching, such as Chesnutt and Dixon, are actually "conditioned by and in dialogue with the very discourses they work to challenge." Gunning considers how anti-racist writers like Chesnutt strove to counter white supremacist ideology, but also tended to draw on "common nineteenth-century racialized and gendered discursive patterns shared by white supremacist fiction." Similarly, she analyzes how the novels of white supremacist Thomas Dixon, Jr. demonstrate that the ideology he touted could "unravel and contradict itself" along those same discourses of race and gender (51). Gunning does not explore, however, how Dixon's work was also shaped by those anti-lynching arguments—put forth by Chesnutt and others—that he aimed to disprove. In Chapter One, I examined the intercessors in "The Sheriff's Children" (1898) and *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901) as assuming the complexity and urgency of Chesnutt's anti-lynching appeals. In this chapter, I will investigate the lynching scenes in Dixon's novels *The Leopard's Spots* and

The Flaming Sword (1939) as dialogues in *pro*-lynching narratives that are concerned with some of the same values espoused by Chesnutt—such as democratic law, masculinity, and professionalism.

At the turn of the century, white southerners such as Dixon did not need to read tracts and novels written by Charles Chesnutt or other African Americans to be exposed to anti-lynching supplications. Before Sam Hose was lynched in front of a crowd of thousands in Newnan, Georgia in 1899, two white men implored the mob to reconsider their plans for violence. Former Governor William Gates Atkinson was the first to speak to the huge crowd holding Hose outside the courthouse square. With the gun of a mob member pointed directly at him, Atkinson urged the men and women in front of him to peacefully follow the process of the law:

> My fellow citizens and friends, I beseech you to let this affair go no further. You are hurrying this Negro on to death without an identification. Mrs. Cranford, whom he is said to have assaulted, and whose husband he is said to have killed, is sick in bed and unable to be here to say whether this is her assailant. Let this Negro be returned to jail. The law will take its course, and I promise it will do so quickly and effectually. Do not stain the honor of this state with a crime such as you are about to perform. (qtd in Dray 11)

Addressing the mob as his "fellow citizens and friends," Atkinson identified himself as an insider and a member of the white community. He tried to convince the crowd to follow the principles of a trial: namely, to receive a positive identification of Hose by the

victim. Atkinson reminded his audience that lynching Hose was a crime itself and one for which they would be judged by others.[54]

Atkinson's entreaties, though, ultimately did not succeed in stopping the spectacle lynching of Sam Hose. The mob paused long enough to listen to Atkinson, but when another individual white man, Judge Alvan D. Freeman, began to plead with the mob to return Hose to jail, members of the mob began yelling over Freeman's voice, urging the lynching on with shouts of "Think of his crime!" and "Burn him!" (qtd. in Dray 11). Likely prompted by Atkinson's plea for the victim's corroboration, the mob carried Hose away from the courthouse and took him to be identified by Mattie Cranford. Mattie's mother informed the mob that Mattie was too sick to identify her assailant, but the mob proceeded to take Hose to a nearby field. Trains filled with additional spectators from Atlanta soon arrived in town, and those passengers joined even more crowds abandoning their buggies and wagons to run to the field. Sam Hose was tortured and dismembered for half an hour. He was then set on fire. Over four thousand people watched him die (Dray 12). The Sam Hose lynching, including Atkinson's objections, was covered extensively in *The Atlanta Constitution* and in newspapers across the country, such as the *Springfield Weekly Republican* in Massachusetts (Dray 479, n. 4, Ginzburg 12-15).

Despite his earnest attempt to stop the lynching, afterwards, former Governor Atkinson seemed determined to secure public approval for the mob's acts and avoid the stain of which he previously warned. According to Grace Elizabeth Hale's study of newspaper reports in *Making Whiteness*: *The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-*

[54] This was not the first time that Atkinson had spoken out publicly against lynching. As governor, he had supported an anti-lynching law that went into effect in 1893, and while he was in office, the number of lynchings in the state of Georgia decreased from an average of twenty-eight a year to fourteen a year (Dray 10).

1940 (1998), Atkinson bragged to reporters that he had at least managed to convince the lynchers to move the affair out of the town center and away from women and children. He testified that, "The crowd was a marvel of coolness and determination and … was remarkably orderly" (qtd. in Hale 213). This assurance of preserved innocence and civilized decorum seems ludicrous alongside historical records of over four thousand people watching a man castrated and burned alive and then claiming parts of his body as souvenirs. Similarly disconcerting is that this massive assemblage of people committed Hose's murder even after pausing to hear reasonable objections from a civic leader. Atkinson, though, was ultimately an inconsistent intercessor for Hose because he later defended the mob's behavior.

In Charles Chesnutt's novel *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901)—which was largely motivated by racial violence like Hose's lynching—the attempts of individual white intercessors (both successful and not) are occasions for Chesnutt to express what can and should be done to prevent lynchings and why black men should receive the full rights of American citizens under the law. Dixon's novel *The Leopard's Spots* (1902) is similarly motivated by current events but imagines anti-black violence as a just means to restoring white supremacy in the South after the Civil War. In *Leopard's Spots* and in Dixon's last novel, *The Flaming Sword* (1939), the successful and unsuccessful acts of lynching intercessors are opportunities for Dixon to attempt to paper over the contradiction of preserving white, southern civilization by violently acting outside of that civilization's laws. Similar to Atkinson's defense of the lynch mob's actions, Dixon insists that order is still preserved when thousands of white Americans forego due process and commit murder.

Both Chesnutt and Dixon were deeply influenced by the same work of American literature: Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). In his autobiography *A Small Boy and Others* (1913), Henry James characterizes *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as "a wonderful, 'leaping' fish" (159-60); his description conveys "the almost unfathomable popularity and ubiquity of a work that once seemed to leap freely about the American cultural landscape" (Williams 45). In her book on racial melodramas, entitled *Playing the Race Card* (2001), Linda Williams states that a significant part of the novel's cultural ubiquity were the "Tom Shows," or stage adaptations that followed the novel's publication. Tom Show productions proliferated in the 1870s, and by the 1890s approximately five hundred of them were touring the country (Williams 85). In 1901, Dixon attended a Tom Show and was so incensed by "what he saw as the injustice of the play's attitude toward the South, [that] he vowed to tell what he considered to be its true story" (Williams 101).[55] Both Dixon and Chesnutt imagined themselves as inheritors of Stowe's literary influence, but while Chesnutt wanted to build on Stowe's influence, Dixon wanted to redirect that influence entirely.[56] Stowe and Chesnutt sought to evoke white identification with and empathy for black Americans; conversely, Dixon wanted to incite his white readers to disdain and fear black Americans, especially black men.[57] His narratives put forth "a passionate refutation of the main line of romantic racialist feeling

[55] Raymond A. Cook also recounts this incident in his biography of Dixon: *Fire from the Flint: The Amazing Careers of Thomas Dixon* (1968), pp. 105-6.

[56] As mentioned in my previous chapter, Chesnutt envisioned *The Marrow of Tradition* as a political successor to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Sundquist 406).

[57] Judith Jackson Fossett corroborates the distinct social goals of Chesnutt and Dixon in her article "The Civil War Imaginations of Thomas Dixon and Charles Chesnutt: Or, North Carolina, 'This Strange World of Poisoned Air'" (1999): "Just as Dixon sought to redress the wrongs suffered by white Southerners during the war and Reconstruction, so Chesnutt desired to effect some measure of social change for black Americans" (110).

generated by Stowe," so that "Stowe's antebellum, feminized 'good Negro' is sexualized and demonized into the postbellum, hyper-masculine rapist who can only be stopped by lynching" (Williams 102-3). In his fiction, Dixon advocates anti-black lynching as the best strategy for protecting and avenging the sanctity of southern white women.

Jacqueline Goldsby, in *A Spectacular Secret* (2006), discusses the anti-lynching works of James Weldon Johnson, Stephen Crane, and Ida B. Wells in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: "they wrote with the reckless, brave hope that writing did matter in the world, that writing could change the world insofar as language could reveal those secret structures that made reality appear to be beyond artifice" (218). Dixon did not write to reveal the structures of racism and white supremacy but to further mystify and bulwark those structures. He may not have shared the political imperatives of his contemporary, anti-lynching writers, but he shared their perspective of literature as a catalyst for social change.[58] In her article "Slouching toward Beastliness: Richard Wright's Anatomy of Thomas Dixon" (2001), Claire Eby argues that "Thomas Dixon's novels constitute practically a shrine for worship of the color bar while illustrating the rationalizations for white lawlessness" (454). She solely locates those rationalizations, though, in his descriptions of white female virginity and black male "beastliness."

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[58] Much like Chesnutt, Dixon wanted his individual voice to be an instrument of change, so he argues for the political power of language in his stories. In *Leopard's Spots*, he poses an argument between Mrs. Durham and Allan McLeod about the principled stand of one person. Mrs. Durham chastises McLeod for politically allying himself with northerners and blacks:

> "Why don't you come out like a man and defy this horde of fools?"
> "Martyrdom has become too cheap…What could one man do against these millions?"
> "Do!" she cried, her face ablaze. "The history of the world is made up of the individuality of a few men. A little Yankee woman wrote a book. The single act of that woman's will caused the war, killed a million men, desolated and ruined the South, and changed the history of the world." (*Leopard's Spots* 264)

In this exchange, Dixon not only poses his book as a direct challenge to that book written by a "little Yankee woman"—*Uncle Tom's Cabin*—he reinstates the power of books and individuals to alter the course of history. Significantly, though, his individual voices that challenge "righteous" white lynch mobs fail to change the course of events, because the white lynch mob furthers his own agenda.

I contend that Dixon's rationalizations for white lawlessness are also rhetorically embedded in his portrayals of the white mobs themselves and the white men who intercede to challenge those mobs. The two novels that bookend his fiction-writing career—*The Leopard's Spots* and *The Flaming Sword*—contain his most thorough and graphic scenes of anti-black lynchings. These lynching depictions also include impassioned objections from key, white, male protagonists: Charles Gaston, Jr., who intercedes at the torture and murder of Dick in *Leopard's Spots*; and Phil Stephens, who intercedes at the torture and murder of Dan Hose in *Flaming Sword*.[59] By directing a critical gaze at these white subjects, the dialogue between the lynch-mobs and the intercessors reveals that the oppositional intercessor is actually a vehicle for Dixon's pro-lynching "rationalizations."[60] Dixon uses interceding characters to create a narrative pause in which a brief, public debate about lynching can conclude in lynching's favor.[61]

In his brief section on Dixon in *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America* (1992), Richard Slotkin asserts that "Successful myth-making in the United States requires bridging or covering-over ideological dichotomies"

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[59] Later in the essay I will discuss Dixon's direct evocation of the Sam Hose lynching through his fictionalized lynching of Dan Hose.

[60] My use of the terms "critical gaze" and "racial subject" is a direct reference to Toni Morrison's work *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992). She writes, "My project is an effort to avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served" (90).

[61] In her analysis of black "beastliness" in Dixon's novels, Eby also notes how Dixon includes differing perspectives on race relations than his own in his work: "Shockingly, rather than condemn or even ignore the extensive history of couplings of white men and black women—extending back through slavery and the much more common sort of miscegenous relationship in American history—Dixon rationalizes it" (444-5). Eby then recounts the instance in *The Leopard's Spots* when Reverend Durham answers a query from a Boston deacon about the mixed race children of white men and black women. Durham responds that these instances of racial mixture have "no social significance …It is all the result of the surviving polygamous and lawless instincts of the white male" and racial integrity remains intact as long as white women are not the mates of black men (*LS* 336). In this scene, Dixon ventriloquizes a challenge to the sanctity of white racial purity (like the intercessor's challenge to lynching) and provides a calculated (though debatably persuasive) response.

(185). In *Leopard's Spots* and *Flaming Sword*, the moments of lynching intercession are crucial components of Dixon's attempt to justify the ideological contradictions of preserving democratic society through a direct violation of democracy's laws. He describes the mobs as unstoppable, mythical forces, and the white male characters who intercede as mistaken and unsuccessful. The intercessors' appeals to law, rationality, and civilization are trumped by claims to emotion, masculine prowess, and the preservation of the white race. Through the inter-textual discussion, though, Dixon imitates the verbal exchange of democratic decision-making and insists that lynching is actually the spirit of the law by another means. By including intercessors who fail, Dixon attempts to build a myth for his white readers that the lynchings of black men happen because a lynching on behalf of white womanhood should not and cannot be prevented.

II. *Dixon's White Mobs*

In *The Leopard's Spots*—the first novel of what would become his *Klansmen Trilogy*—Dixon glorifies the Ku Klux Klan.[62] He portrays Klan members as benevolent protectors of a South under the attack of black men who have become violent and rampantly sexual since emancipation. He positions his novel as a temporal sequel to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, with the first part of *Leopard's Spots* set during Reconstruction and the second and third parts set approximately fifteen years later and in Dixon's present-day.[63] Dixon himself was born during the Civil War in early 1864 in Shelby, North Carolina, and this first novel is a semi-autobiographical portrait of himself. As a child

[62] The other two novels in the trilogy are *The Clansman* (1905) and *The Traitor* (1907).

[63] Dixon even goes as far as to appropriate a few characters from Stowe's novel into his own. For example, the villainous overseer Simon Legree from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appears in *Spots* as a corrupt politician during Reconstruction.

during Reconstruction, Dixon claims that a widow of a Confederate soldier came to his parents' home one day and tearfully told the Dixons that an escaped black convict had raped her daughter. Dixon says he was awoken by the sound of galloping hooves, looked outside and saw the Klan hanging a black man and shooting him repeatedly (Cook, *Thomas* 23). Dixon does not report that this incident frightened him; instead, his future portrayals of white mobs and the Klan express a deep veneration for white men who murderously enforce the color line.

At the turn of the century, southern race radicals such as Dixon believed that blacks and whites could not peacefully coexist in the same nation.[64] In his portrayal of the Reconstruction-era South in *Leopard's Spots*, not all racial violence includes an intercessor, but all racial violence presents an opportunity to forward the agenda of racial radicalism. For starters, white racial violence is always committed in self-defense, because it is always precipitated by black violence. The first attempted lynching in the novel occurs when a group of mostly black men try to kill the white Reverend Durham. Dixon first victimizes a white southern man, reversing the typical race roles of a postbellum lynching. Mrs. Durham relates the attempt to Tom Camp, a poor white Confederate veteran and good friend of Charles Gaston's:

> As he came home last night from a visit to the sick, he was ambushed by a gang of Negroes led by a white scoundrel, knocked down, bound and gagged and placed on a pile of dry fence rails. They set fire to the pile and left him to burn to

[64] Joel Williamson in *The Crucible of Race* (1984) describes the rise of Radicalism beginning in 1889: "Ultimately, Radicals believed, there would be no place for blacks in the South or in America. The end might come in a kind of race war, not always physical, that the superior whites would win, or blacks might be transported to some foreign parts, but the two races together would not last" (111).

death. It attracted the attention of Doctor Graham, who was passing. He got to him in time to save him. (*LS* 128)

Notably, the black mob is led by a "white scoundrel," so the black people in this story are rendered as not only prone to violence but also lacking leadership. Durham is saved, furthermore, because the black mob does not stay to see the job done, and another white man is willing and able to interfere at his own personal risk. Dixon presents an anti-white lynching that fails, because it does not anticipate white solidarity; the failure itself works to verify black inferiority and white superiority to Dixon's readers.

In this instance of anti-white violence, Durham has committed no crime to motivate the attack. He is, in fact, benevolently visiting the sick when he is ambushed. The attack fulfills the threat of a previously-received anonymous letter that condemned Durham's politics and urged him to leave the county (*LS* 120). The attempt on Durham's life also occurs immediately after others episodes of black violence: the attack on Nelse, an ex-slave and loyal servant to the Gaston family; and the failed kidnapping of the young, white Annie Camp. Dixon's temporal clustering of these events suggests to the reader that they are inter-related and part of a violent trend among black men. Nelse is attacked for his loyalty to the white family that enslaved him and his political commitment to the southern Democrats (*LS* 121). Annie is carried away by a black mob on the day of her wedding. Her father Tom commands the wedding guests to shoot the black kidnappers even at the risk of hitting Annie. He is willing to endanger her life, because, "There are things worse than death!" (*LS* 126). Annie is subsequently killed.[65]

[65] Tom is grateful to the white men who shot Annie and "saved" her from the shame of sexual violation by black men. Tom exclaims, "I want to shake hands with you and thank you. If you hadn't been here— My God, I can't think of what would 'a' happened. Now it's all right. She's safe in God's hands" (*LS* 127). Tom considers the fate that presumably awaited Annie—sexual contact with a black man—so appalling

With the assault on Reverend Durham, Dixon frames the first attempted lynching in the novel as part of a spree of black terrorism motivated by political greed and lust for virginal, white women.

The first lynching of a black man in *Leopard's Spots,* then, is characterized as a just and admirable response to black aggression. Soon after the assaults on Durham, Nelse, and Annie, the black and politically ambitious character Tim Shelby makes a sexual proposal to the white Mollie Graham: he offers her a job teaching at the black school, but only if she will give him a kiss. Mollie responds by screaming and fleeing to her mother. A few days after Shelby's offense, his house is surrounded by "two-hundred white-robed silent men whose close-fitting hood disguises looked like the mail helmets of ancient knights," with a full moon casting upon them a light of "silver glory" (*LS* 151). By describing them as illuminated "ancient knights," Dixon explicitly connects the Klan to traditional imagery of valor and chivalry. He also portrays the lynching party as highly competent and composed, as seizing Shelby and binding him across a horse's back is only "the work of a moment" and the "grim procession" then slowly moves to the courthouse square (*LS* 151). This white lynch mob deliberately carries out the murder in an orderly manner. Shelby does not actually receive his legal rights as a citizen, but by locating the murder in the space of the courthouse, Dixon likens the Klan's activities to formal, democratic procedure.

Tim Shelby's death is so naturalized within the novel that the physical lynching itself is actually excised from the story; his murder is framed as a foregone conclusion. After Dixon's "procession" of lynchers heads to the courthouse, the very next sentence

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that he cannot even articulate it. For an in-depth consideration of the sexual politics of Annie's death scene, see pp. 143-6 from "Chapter Five: White Sex: Thomas Dixon, Jr. and the Erotics of White Supremacy" in Mason Stoke's book *The Color of Sex* (2001).

refers to the morning *after* the lynching: "When the sun rose the next morning …" (*LS* 151). According to Dixon, the Klan is a disciplined and dignified order of men who perform a task because they must. The brevity of the lynching within the text suggests that the murder is a duty that performs itself automatically. Dixon further characterizes Shelby's lynching as inevitable in his description of its aftermath:

> When the sun rose the next morning the lifeless body of Tim Shelby was dangling from a rope tied to the iron rail of the balcony of the court-house. His neck was broken and his body was hanging low—scarcely three feet from the ground. His thick lips had been split with a sharp knife, and from his teeth hung this placard: "The answer of the Anglo-Saxon race to the Negro lips that dare pollute with words the womanhood of the South. K. K. K." (*LS* 151)

Dixon removes any agency from Shelby's death with the passive characterization of "was dangling," as opposed to "was hung" or some other verb that would imply not just the effect of the lynching but the lynching act itself. The lynching is phrased in the note as if it were a speech-act—an "answer"—to Shelby's request for a kiss. Such euphemistic wording further deemphasizes the physical murder. The focus on Shelby's verbal "crime" also extends to his body, as the Klan splits his lips to mark his particular transgression and literalize his punishment. As the Klan leaves Shelby's body hanging from the balcony rail of the courthouse, Dixon continues to signify the murder as within the bounds of the law. The location of the lynching, and the place where Shelby's body can be viewed and re-viewed, is in a space reserved for democratic justice.

In the narrative world of *Leopard's Spots,* any lynching that succeeds is vindicated *because* of its success. After Shelby's murder, a group of young men who are

not part of the original Klan decide to imitate the Klan's work. Reverend Durham is notified by a black man named Sam that a lynching is in the offing:

> de Ku Klux is gwine ter kill ole Uncle Rufus Lattimore to-night. I come ter see ef you can't save him. He ain't done nuthin' in God's worl' 'cept he wouln' pull his waggin clear outen de road one day fur dat red-headed Allan McLeod ter pass, en he cussed 'im black and blue en tole 'im he gwine git eben wid 'im. (*LS* 167)[66]

Sam asks that Uncle Rufus be protected, because Uncle Rufus has not committed an actual crime. Furthermore, Uncle Rufus seems to be a desexualized figure, as he is elderly and possesses a nickname that is reminiscent of the days of slavery. Dixon makes it apparent to his reader that Uncle Rufus is not a threat to white womanhood, and his only offense is that he does not move entirely out of the way of a young and arrogant Allan McLeod.

Reverend Durham validates Sam's reasoning by agreeing that a lynching of Uncle Rufus must be prevented. He rides his horse at a "killing speed" to a nearby town and informs Major Dameron of the imminent attack:

> …that young McLeod and Hose Norman have a crowd of desperadoes organised to kill old Rufus Lattimore to-night. You must get enough men together and get there in time to stop them. Sam Worth overheard their plot, knows every one of them, and there will be a battle if they attempt it. (*LS* 169)

[66] This moment in the narrative is, in some ways, strikingly similar to another black character named Sam notifying Sheriff Campbell of the impending lynching in "The Sheriff's Children" and Dr. Miller notifying Colonel Delamere of Sandy's imminent lynching in *The Marrow of Tradition*. However, unlike Dixon's Sam, the black characters in Chesnutt's works speak of lynching as wrong in principle and not just wrong because the accused is innocent. Sam in "The Sheriff's Children" reminds the Sheriff of the promises he made to fulfill the duties of his profession and defend all prisoners (*CT* 137), and Dr. Miller says about Sandy, "They ought not to lynch him, even if he committed the crime" (*MOT* 159).

From a different generation, McLeod and Hose are not part of the Klan and are therefore "desperadoes" acting outside of a unified white community. Dixon reiterates that these are boys masquerading as men by titling the chapter "The Danger of Playing with Fire" (*LS* 167). The word "playing" suggests a child-like and irresponsible engagement with violence, which Dixon differentiates from the morally righteous violence undertaken by the Klan, who are the real leaders of the South.

The plan to kill Uncle Rufus is not undertaken to protect white women and children, so the official Klan intercedes to stop the lynching. The young men convene as planned that evening, but they are promptly interrupted: "Suddenly a pistol shot rang out from behind the schoolhouse, and before McLeod and his crowd knew what had happened fifty white horsemen wheeled into a circle about them. They were completely surprised and cowed" (*LS* 170). In this attempted lynching, the Klan intercedes against a false version of itself and is easily victorious. According to Dixon's portrayal of racial violence in the Reconstruction-era South, the original Klan is willing to intervene and prevent a lynching that is motivated by "dishonorable" reasons. After stopping the young imposters, the true Klan decides it has served its purpose and ought to now disband, avoiding any future corruption (*LS* 171). Dixon insists that the white community can discipline its own anti-black behavior. Therefore, a lynching that succeeds—and that overcomes any efforts made against it—proves itself to be just.

In the second section of the novel, the story resumes fifteen years after the Klan's disbandment. Charles Gaston, Jr. has become a young man, and he is good friends with the poor but valiant Confederate veteran Tom Camp. Fifteen years after his daughter Annie's death, Tom's wife has died, too, and his only remaining family is his young

daughter Flora. When Flora goes missing, Gaston directs the thousand white men and women who gather in only half an hour to help search for her (*LS* 372). This mob is not the Klan, but their purpose is to protect innocent white womanhood, and so Dixon describes this turn-of-the-century mob as possessing the same righteous unity as the Reconstruction-era Klan once did:

> In a moment the white race had fused into a homogenous mass of love, sympathy, hate and revenge. The rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, the banker and the blacksmith, the great and the small, they were all one now. The sorrow of that old one-legged soldier was the sorrow of all; every heart beat with his, and his life was their life, and his child their child. (*LS* 372)

Dixon ensures his readers that when an innocent, white girl is in danger, white Southerners rise above any differences among themselves and become a great force of racial unity. Even more importantly, since Flora is now "their child," the white community becomes a family that wants to avenge and defend a loved one.

Thirty-seven years after publishing *Leopard's Spots*, Dixon portrays another white community that powerfully unites against a black man in the novel *The Flaming Sword*. Much as Dixon frames *Leopard's Spots* as a counter to Harriet Beecher Stowe and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, he frames *Flaming Sword* as primarily a response to W.E.B. Du Bois and his book *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935). Dixon even uses a line from *Black Reconstruction*—"Across this path stands the South with flaming sword" (Du Bois 705)—as his epigraph to *Flaming Sword*. While Du Bois argues that the white men and women in the South are hindrances to full political, social, and economic emancipation in America (706), Dixon perceives southern whites as the last bulwarks against

Communism and racial amalgamation, which he believes is Du Bois's true goal. In Dixon's last published novel, he "confirms the merger in the white supremacist mind of fears about communism and anxieties about black male-white female couplings … Thus for Thomas Dixon, 1930s radicalism illustrates the follies of the Reconstruction period all over again" (Eby 449-50). The *Flaming Sword* is Dixon's imagined, final stand against blacks and politically liberal whites.

For his last novel, Dixon returns to his own characters from his novel *The Clansman* and imagines the life of Ben Cameron and Elsie Stoneman's eldest daughter, Angela Cameron. Ben Cameron and Elsie Stoneman are also central characters in the film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), directed by D. W. Griffith and based on both *The Clansman* and *Leopard's Spots*. By imagining the same fictional family in *Flaming Sword,* Dixon attempts to capitalize on the immense popularity of his *Klansmen Trilogy* and *Birth of a Nation*. He also tries to invoke, in 1939, the more pronounced anti-black fervor that characterized white American attitudes in the beginning of the century.

Another way that Dixon attempts to reignite racial antagonism is by returning to the Sam Hose lynching. He identifies a black murderer and rapist in *Flaming Sword* as Sam Hose's brother, Dan. The fictional character Dan Hose refers directly to the real event of Sam Hose's murder in 1899. He says to Marie Cameron, "Dey got mah brother, Sam Hose, down in Gawga. But he git what he wanted fust. I'se a gittin' what I come atter, too. But de white debbils won't catch me! I knows dat swamp. Dere aint no dog in dis county kin trail me. I'se fixed er place" (*FS* 137). Lynchings had dramatically decreased by 1939 and were increasingly held in low regard by more Americans. By naming the black criminal "Dan Hose," Dixon tries to connect the uncertainty of lynching

as a southern practice in 1939 to the "eerie certainty" of Hose's lynching in 1899 (Hale 210).

Dan Hose's violent crimes are committed against the family of Angela Cameron in *Flaming Sword*. Angela has married the poor but honorable Dave Henry, and the two of them live in a country cabin with their very young son and Angela's younger sister Marie. When Angela is out one evening, Hose kills Henry and the son, and rapes and beats Marie. Marie identifies Hose as her attacker right before she dies, and as soon as this news reaches the town, the white community responds overwhelmingly. Within a couple of hours, five hundred men gather to help find Hose (*FS* 142), and this is only the beginning. The search party for Dan Hose soon tracks him to a lake, circles the lake, and starts wading in to look for him in its trees (*FS* 143). The mob can accomplish all this, because "there'll be a thousand more [men] here fore night comes again" (*FS* 144). Dixon evokes a constantly growing force of white men who will work against the black criminal. It seems as if the town cannot even physically contain the response to Hose's crimes, because the sidewalks become almost impassable with crowds, "And still cars poured in from every direction" (*FS* 144).[67] There is ostensibly no end to the number of white people who want to aid in the capture and murder of Hose.

Dixon conveys the growing lynch mob as the reaction of a community in crisis; in the wake of tragedy, every available white citizen becomes part of a resourceful and cohesive citizenry. At the beginning of the lake search, a hundred men volunteer to wade into the deep water and look into the tops of the trees. They "plunge[d]" into the lake, and the rest of the crowd follows their progress from the shoreline (*FS* 144). These men

[67] Though Dixon does characterize the crowd in the town as "excitable," "aimless," and "frenzied" (*FS* 144)—words that connote potential disorder—he is careful to always describe the efforts of the lynch party as organized, efficient, and determined.

willingly and enthusiastically perform the necessary tasks. The size and eagerness of the crowd only increases as the search continues, and on the third day the mob has grown to six thousand people: "Some of them had field glasses with which they swept every pine top" (*FS* 144). Dixon's lynch mob looks more like an army of fervent citizens. In both *Leopard's Spots* and *Flaming Sword*, Dixon creates unified white communities against which an individual appears to be no match.

In both novels, Dixon additionally connects the powerful and committed white lynch mobs to divine origin and purpose, imbuing white supremacy with a triumphant destiny that cannot be thwarted. He references inexplicable origins as part of their mythology: "The origin of this Law and Order League, which *sprang up like magic in a night* and nullified the programme of Congress, though backed by an army of a million veteran soldiers, is yet a mystery" (emphasis added, *LS* 151). He persistently imagines the Reconstruction-era Klan as somehow beyond the explanation of reality, and so there can be no real challenge to their acts. For Dixon, the Klan that "saves" the South from Reconstruction is a grand and mystical manifestation of pure, Anglo-Saxon history-making: "The simple truth is, it was a spontaneous and resistless racial uprising of clansmen…and it appeared almost simultaneously in every southern state, produced by the same terrible conditions" (*LS* 151). By suggesting that this widespread terrorist organization possesses coordination and power that is essentially supernatural, Dixon maintains that the Klan is a greater force than any person or group who dares oppose it.[68]

Dixon overtly describes the Klan that emerges in the 1870s as a particular manifestation of endlessly righteous white heroism:

[68] I agree with Slotkin's contention that the rise of the Klan in *Leopard's Spots* "… is presented as a literal recrudescence of an ancient race-'civilization' from the threat of savagery" that is both specific to the moment of Reconstruction and eternal to racial struggle (189).

> This Invisible Empire of White Robed Anglo-Saxon Knights was simply the old answer of organised manhood to organised crime. Its purpose was to bring order out of chaos, protect the weak and defenseless, the widows and orphans of brave men who had died for their country, to drive from power the thieves who were robbing the people, redeem the commonwealth from infamy, and reestablish civilisation. (*LS* 152)

Through his use of words like "*re*deem" and "*re*establish" and phrases like "the *old* answer of organized manhood," Dixon directly ties the Klan's objectives to retrieving a previous way of life in which whiteness was deservedly at the top of the hierarchy. He also suggests that the white mobs of the Klan are actually just extensions of the family: men who protect husband-less wives and father-less children. In this regard, the violence committed by the Klan restores gender order as well as racial order.

By resuscitating a white lynch mob in the second section of the book, fifteen years after the original Klan's disbandment, Dixon supplies "evidence" for his own argument that white men will always triumphantly protect white women and children.[69] This mob's aim is to torture and kill Dick, a black childhood friend of Gaston's, who has returned to town after many absent years. Dick is tracked by the search party and presumed to be the person who raped and beat Flora Camp.[70] Waiting for the return of

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[69] I disagree with Jeffory A. Clymer's contention that telling the story of the post Reconstruction Klan first "allows [Dixon] to disown the more random violence of lynching that occupies a pivotal scene in the post-Klan era of *The Leopard's Spots*" (105). Instead of disowning the post-Klan lynch mob, I argue that Dixon builds upon his previous Klan mob descriptions in this later description so as to further connect these anti-black mob murders. Dixon acknowledges a critical perspective on the post-Klan era lynch mob, but he still argues for its necessity.

[70] I use the word "presumed" here, because at no point in Dixon's novel does Dick confess to the crime. See a reading of the phallic suggestions of Dick's name in *The Color of Sex* (2001) by Mason Stokes, pp. 143-150. See a reading of the autobiographical resonances of the character Dick in *The Crucible of Race* (1984) by Joel Williamson, pp. 169.

the search parties, Gaston hears a sound that initially puzzles him, but then he recognizes the source: "Ah! He knew now. It was the searchers returning, a grim, swaying, voiceless mob with one black figure amid them. They were swarming into the court-house square under the big oak where an informal trial was to be held" (*LS* 381). Dixon's descriptions craft a complex image, as the mob is both calm and clinical, suggested by its silence and the word "grim," but also hauntingly animalistic, suggested by the words "swaying" and "swarming." Less ambiguous, though, is the mob's location—the courthouse—and the use of the word "trial." Dixon again tries to assure his readers that the mob is enacting a familiar democratic process: assembling at a courthouse and adhering to the spirit of courtroom procedure. He characterizes lynching as both instinctual and decorous. This description of a mob is not particularly rational, but it is consistent with Dixon's previous descriptions of the Reconstruction-era Klan as both magical and in line with American democracy. In *Leopard's Spots*, white unity is a force that is earthly, mystical, and lawful all at once, which renders its power beyond challenge or reproach.

The significatory excess of the white lynch mob in *Leopard's Spots* becomes especially apparent as the members of the mob watch Dick being burned alive: "Under the glare of the light and the tears the crowd seemed to melt into a great crawling, swaying creatures, half reptile, half beast, half dragon, half man, with a thousand legs, and a thousand eyes, and ten thousand gleaming teeth, and with no ear to hear and no heart to pity" (*LS* 384). Sandra Gunning and Kim Magowan both read this mob that is "half reptile, half beast, half dragon, half man" as a fissure in Dixon's arguments for racial purity. Gunning argues that this mob resembles Dixon's own fears about blackness:

> Like the threat of both miscegenation and interracial male contact, then, regenerative violence against blacks not only threatens to taint white morality and humanity, but also resembles the very bodily distortions threatened by black rape as the white avengers merge with the beast they originally set out to destroy. (40)

Magowan concurs with Gunning and says that, "in spite of himself, Dixon unravels the very notion of difference upon which his white supremacy is based" through animalistic portrayals of whiteness, such as this hybridized lynch mob (79). I agree that this beastly white lynch mob seems inconsistent with Dixon's appeal for white racial purity, but I also think Dixon repeatedly embraces inconsistencies to imbue his perspective with a mythical largesse. He includes this description of the beastly lynch mob—just as he includes the objections of the intercessors—to encompass other perspectives within his narrative. He acknowledges the other side of the argument so as to impart his conclusion, which is the necessity of anti-black violence, with triumphant authority.

In his article "Dixon and the Literary Production of Whiteness" (2006), Scott Romine writes against what he sees as a critical trend in Dixon scholarship "to expose or deconstruct his contradictory, illogical, and fragile construction of whiteness" (125). He calls on scholars to begin from an agreement that "whiteness does not make sense" and then work to understand how "Dixon does not so much *represent* whiteness as a stable, fixed essence, but *tells* it as a story of traumatic origins, heroic defense, and grandiose recovery" (125-6). The lynch mobs in Dixon's narratives embody contradictory characteristics, but Dixon tells the stories of mythical lynch mobs to increasingly bestow the white race with destructive power. After Dick's lynching, Gaston decides that the growing political power of blacks has led to the increasing number of crimes committed

by blacks, each crime "swiftly followed by a lynching" (*LS* 385). When Gaston imagines a future in which political power for blacks continues to grow, he recalls the white mob that lynched Dick:

> What would happen to these fools when once they roused that thousand-legged, thousand-eyed beast with its ten thousand teeth and nails! He had looked into its face, and he shuddered to recall the hour.
>
> He knew that this power of racial fury of the Anglo-Saxon when aroused was resistless, and that it would sweep its victims before its wrath like chaff before whirlwind.
>
> And then he thought of the day fast coming when culture and wealth would give the African the courage of conscious strength and he would answer that soul-piercing shriek of his kindred for help, and that other thousand-legged beast, now crouching in the shadows, would meet thousand-legged beast around that beacon fire of a Godless revenge! (*LS* 386-7)

Gaston foresees an epic battle between white and black if blacks continue to assert their civil liberties. Though the white race possesses a dangerous strength that is "resistless," the black race has its own "thousand-legged beast," and only a violent confrontation will decide whether the future American is "an Anglo-Saxon or a Mulatto" (*LS* 387). With evocations of epic white lynch mobs, Dixon maintains that civil rights for blacks should not be protected by intercessors but feared as the instigations for a coming racial apocalypse.

III. *White Mobs on the Big Screen*

Thomas Dixon's formative role in D. W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation*—"the most popular and influential film of the twentieth century" (Williams 97)—contributed to how lynching was presented onscreen and thus witnessed by millions of Americans for years to come. The film was based on Dixon's play *The Clansman*, which he wrote by cobbling together both *Leopard's Spots* (1902) and *The Clansman* (1905) (Wood 149). Dixon also produced the film and defended it from its critics, such as the NAACP. Though scholars of *Birth of a Nation* dispute exactly who was more to blame for the film's racist ideology—Dixon or Griffith—, Dixon's influence is apparent in "the exaggerated suffering of the white woman at the hands of the hypersexual black man" (Williams 111).[71] In *Birth of a Nation*, much like in *Leopard's Spots* and *Flaming Sword*, a lynching committed in defense of Southern white womanhood is framed as a just and civilizing act. There is no white character who intercedes to defend Gus from the Ku Klux Klan, but the lynching of Gus resembles the lynchings of Dick and Dan, in which an extralegal murder that overrides due process is portrayed as enacting the spirit of democratic law.

Dixon and Griffith depict the anti-black lynching in *Birth of a Nation* as a righteous and reasonable response to a black criminality. Two hours and ten minutes into Griffith's infamous epic, the sweet and innocent young Flora (played by Mae Marsh) is menacingly pursued by a black man named Gus (played by Walter Long wearing

[71] A popular legend is that Dixon also came up with the film's title, yelling to Griffith across the auditorium after the film's first screening at New York's Liberty Theater that the title "The Clansman" was "too tame for such a mighty work and that is should be called *The Birth of a Nation*" (Williams 109). It is more likely that "The Birth of a Nation" was a potential name already being floated around, and Dixon only confirmed its appropriateness (Williams 109).

blackface).[72] He says to her, "You see, I'm a Captain now—and I want to marry—" which references a previous scene showing a black-dominated state legislature passing a law that allows racial intermarriage (*BON*). Gus's aggressive pursuit is implied to be both violent and sexual. Flora eludes him in the woods until reaching a stone cliff, and she jumps off the cliff rather than be captured. Dixon and Griffith applaud her suicide with a subsequent inter-title that reads, "For her who had learned the stern lesson of honor we should not grieve that she found sweeter the opal gates of death" (*BON*). The film echoes Tom Camp's declaration in *Leopard's Spots* that "There are things worse than death!" (126).[73] Like his textual narratives, Dixon's cinematic narrative establishes black and white sexual contact as that which should be feared and prevented above all else.

The inter-titles in *Birth of a Nation* describe the Klan that lynches Gus as following the steps of due process, even though due process is exactly what they disregard. Ben arrives just a moment too late to rescue Flora, his younger sister. When he discovers her, she is still alive and speaks to him, presumably identifying Gus as the impetus for her jump. She soon dies in Ben's arms, and he subsequently meets with several other white men. An inter-title describes the men with whom Ben converses as "Townsmen enlisted in the search of the accused Gus, that he may be given a fair trial in the dim halls of the Invisible Empire" (*BON*). The men are "enlisted," which suggests that forming a lynch party is like enrolling men in service to the military, and Gus is "the

[72] Naming the victimized, virginal white girl "Flora" in *The Birth of a Nation* directly references the victimized, virginal white Flora in *The Leopard's Spots* and the lynching of Dick that follows Flora's violation and death.

[73] This scene also echoes Marion and Margaret Lenoir's decision to commit suicide by jumping off a cliff together in *The Clansman*. However, Marion and Margaret commit suicide after the occurrence of sexual violation by a black man (Marion was raped and Margaret was forced to witness her daughter's rape). Therefore, Flora's death is both preemptive—like Annie's—and self-sacrificing—like Marion's and Margaret's—which displays both the bravery and the nobility of this child-like, virginal, and visual representation of southern, white femaleness.

accused," which suggests that he is not yet considered guilty, as would be the case in a legal trial. The title-card even says that Gus will receive a "fair trial" in "dim halls," as though this Dixon lynch mob is once again situated at a courthouse. Dixon and Griffith attempt to morally buttress the Klan's violence with the language of democratic law. The narrative events of the film, though, are actually that a group of outlaws in disguises lynch Gus under the cover of darkness in the woods, out of view of the nation's government officials.

Through the onscreen depiction of Gus's lynching, Dixon and Griffith represent his death as sanctioned by both the law and (white) human emotion. An inter-title that simply says, "The trial," precedes a red-tinted shot of Gus being dragged before a gathering of robed and masked Klansmen. Williams corroborates that Griffith utilizes democratic terminology to legalize the Klan's violence: "In this regard, the Klan does not 'lynch' Gus at all; rather it places him on 'trial' and 'executes' him" (153). The "trial" also insists that familial grief is the only evidence required to justify an "execution." As the Klansman in the right foreground of the shot begins to raise his hood, Griffith cuts to a shot of Flora's dead body and Dr. Cameron, Mrs. Cameron, and Margaret Cameron sitting in their home. The Cameron family is in the background of the shot and mournfully looking at Flora's body in the foreground. Griffith cuts back to the shot of the Klansman removing his hood and revealing himself as Ben Cameron. With these three shots, Griffith visually narrates Ben's testimony: the fact of Flora's death and the grief of the Cameron family. This testimony is the extent of the trial, as two Klansmen immediately raise their arms and Gus is dragged away. Dixon and Griffith convey that lynching Gus is the ethically and emotionally proper response to his fatal pursuit of Flora.

Gus's lynching in *Birth of a Nation* is also quite similar to Tim Shelby's lynching in *Leopard's Spots*. Following the "trial" is another inter-title: "On the steps of the Lieut. Governor's house./The answer to the blacks and carpetbaggers" (*BON*). The following shot sequence is of a dead Gus being left on Silas Lynch's front steps by robed Klansmen.[74] Gus has a white note on his body, and the note is emblazoned with a skull and the letters "KKK." As in *Leopard's Spots*, the physical act of the white mob killing the black man is excised from the narrative. Both Shelby's and Gus's bodies are rendered as texts that signify the Klan's purpose and power, which allows the audience to skip over the moments of murder and focus on the Klan's "message." Williams notes the absence of any scene or shot that actually shows Gus being killed by the Klansmen, and she surmises that Griffith probably withheld a filmic illustration of the murder as a preemptive response to potential censorship.[75] Still, she argues that the effect of his withholding is that "*Birth* cleansed the act of lynching of any gruesomeness or impropriety … By omitting the actual scene of violence, the film visually projected for spectators prolynching rhetoric, which itself imagined white men not as bloodthirsty and frenzied mobsters but as determined, stoic heroes" (152). Projected on the movie screen, Dixon's white lynch mobs seemingly preclude objections based on law and sympathy, as

[74] As part of the climactic ending of *Birth of a Nation*, the mixed-race character Silas Lynch attempts to assault the white Elsie Stoneman (which is also what transpires in Dixon's novel *The Clansman*). I agree with Michael Rogin's assessment that naming this character "Lynch" allows Dixon to "turn[s] the black victims of lynching into aggressors" (*Ronald Reagan, the Movie, and Other Episodes in Political Demonology*, 1987, pp. 208).

[75] Williams thinks it most likely that Griffith omitted Gus's lynching to enhance the chances that his film would not be banned, especially because violence was a major concern of film censors. In fact, the first motion picture censorship ordinance, passed in Chicago in 1907, "prohibited exhibition of any film that 'purports to represent any hanging, lynching or burning of a human being,' a prohibition that was surely repeated in cities across the country" (152).

democracy can extend to an anti-black murder, and sympathy can only lie with the white Flora's family.

IV. *Dixon's White Intercessors*

Thomas Dixon, Jr.'s racial beliefs may seem extreme to a modern reader, but they were not particularly unique at the time he published *The Leopard's Spots*. As Gunning writes, "Because whites could allege that the struggle was really one of racial survival, not democracy, black men would not simply be disenfranchised, they would rightfully be exterminated" (7). Dixon promotes racial radicalism and anti-black violence in his fiction, and part of his promotional strategy is a direct engagement with the critiques he expected he would face. In his essay "Shadow and Act" (1964), Ralph Ellison reflects on the ideological conflicts between white supremacy and American democracy:

> After Reconstruction the political question of what was to be done with Negroes, "solved" by the Hayes-Tilden deal of 1876, came down to the psychological question: "How can the Negroes' humanity be evaded?" The problem, arising in a democracy that holds all men as created equal, was a highly moral one: democratic ideals had to be squared with anti-Negro practices. (276)[76]

In other words, how could a people who lived under a constitution that pronounced all men equal before the law continue to subject members of the black community to violent oppression? Along with his evocations of southern white women in peril and an

[76] Historians largely concur that the Hayes-Tilden deal (also referred to as the Compromise of 1877) marked the end of Reconstruction. The political compromise was that the Republican Rutherford B. Hayes could assume the presidency over Democrat Samuel J. Tilden as long as incumbent President Ulysses S. Grant removed federal troops from Florida. President Hayes subsequently removed troops from South Carolina and Louisiana. With the removal of troops, Democrats regained control of the government in the South and began challenging the civil liberties that had been granted to blacks during Reconstruction.

unavoidable race war, Dixon's fictional portrayals of anti-black mob murders suggest that the democratic process has not been deserted. By including interceding objectors at both Dick's lynching in *Leopard's Spots* and Dan Hose's lynching in *Flaming Sword*, Dixon dramatizes public debates about lynching in the United States. He crafts the verbal exchanges between the intercessor and the mobs as resembling the spirit of a courtroom trial while simultaneously suggesting that the formal law should not interfere with a community's wishes. Furthermore, as none of the men who challenge the mobs ultimately prevent the deaths of the accused blacks, Dixon depicts these lynchings as the legitimate will of white citizens.

In *The Flaming Sword*, Dixon begins to undermine formal legality and professionalism with his portrayal of the local sheriff. The sheriff wants to intercede, but his commitment to the letter of the law is rendered futile by the powerful and organized white mob. Before beginning the search for Hose, the men who previously worked for David Henry's railroad construction crew choose their old foreman Anderson as the leader for the search-and-lynch party. John Lovelace, who was a friend and neighbor to Henry, says he does not want the Sheriff to "butt in." Anderson's reply is that "The Sheriff's a good man. But he won't bother us none" (*FS* 140). This response encapsulates the role that Dixon's sheriff plays in the novel's pivotal lynching scene: he is ineffective when he acts against the will of the white mob. Furthermore, the sheriff is at a nearby town when the rape and murders occur, and by the time he returns and receives the coroner's verdict, a thousand men are already working to find Hose and have tracked him to the lake (*FS* 143). In this novel, formal justice is repeatedly outmatched by Dixon's version of *racial* justice.

The emergence of "natural" white leaders in the lynch-mob leaves no place for an interceding sheriff in *Flaming Sword*. Anderson is elected "Captain" by the first members of the search party, because "He's six foot three and can lick his weight in wild cats…We'll follow him ter hell and back" (*FS* 131). Anderson's physical prowess is his qualification for leadership, and Dixon's subsequent narration validates this qualification, as Anderson succeeds in all his violent endeavors. As men in the mob prepare to cut down the tree in which Hose is hiding, the sheriff tries to maintain due process and tells the men that Hose, once he is out of the tree, will be the sheriff's prisoner and under his protection. Anderson has a calm but fierce response: "'We'll remember that,' Anderson said with a deadly quiet that was not lost on the official" (*FS* 144). The sheriff attempts to assert his authority, but the natural leader is clearly the one in control. The sheriff plays no part in felling the tree that holds Hose, and Anderson says to him, "All right, Mr. Officer of the Law that didn't work, my men will take you back to dry land and we'll bring the Nigger to you" (*FS* 145). Anderson's reassurance is both mocking and deceptive, as the sheriff is physically overtaken, disarmed, and tied to a tree by two mob members as soon as he returns to shore. By calling him the "Officer of the Law that didn't work," Anderson rationalizes the choice to physically restrain the sheriff; he claims that the law did not prevent Dan Hose from raping and killing white people, so the representatives of that law are clearly unfit for the task of meting out Hose's punishment. The leader of the lynch mob dismisses the attempted physical and legal intercession of the sheriff with seeming ease.

The sheriff is not the sole representative of the law in *Flaming Sword*, though. The character Phil Stephens is a lawyer who intercedes and makes various appeals to the

lynchers, as does the character Charles Gaston, Jr.—also a lawyer—in *Leopard's Spots*. The interceding stances of Gaston and Stephens open up space and time in the narratives to present anti-lynching rhetoric, but each objection is met with a counter from a mob member. The white community that the mob represents is not frenzied and unthinking but capable of disputing the intercessors' arguments. At the same time, Dixon's intercessors are like Charles Chesnutt's intercessors in that they are white men of education and status in their respective communities. However, Dixon presents the legal profession of both Gaston and Stephens as a strike *against* their credibility as white men, while the "common men" understand what must be done and do it. In Dixon's fiction, the intercessors' personal relationships with the white victims are valued above anything else.

Gaston's first rhetorical strategy is to identify himself as a close friend of Tom's and Flora's. As soon as he turns to face the crowd, he says, "Men, there's not one among you that loved that old soldier and his girl as I did. But you must not do this crime" (*LS* 382). Gaston recognizes and legitimizes a love for Tom and Flora as the driving impetus for the mob's actions.[77] He does not identify himself as a lawyer and claim his authority as an intercessor on that basis, but objects to the lynching *even though* his emotional connection to the Camp family is strong. Still, through Gaston's use of the word "crime," Dixon includes an anti-lynching position that is first based on law. According to the members of the mob, however, Gaston's profession and his appeal to legality is a reason

[77]In *A Red Record*, Ida B. Wells directly challenges the claim that lynchings are direct responses to blacks who rape and murder whites. Many southerners explained and justified lynchings by insisting that they were driven by overwhelming (and understandable) grief and desire for vengeance. Wells notes, though, that information from reports in the Chicago Tribune (a white newspaper) in the year 1893 indicate that black men were lynched for reasons as minor as "Insulting Whites" or for no known offense at all (Royster 85).

not to trust his intercession. One man calls out, "That's a lawyer talking now … We know that tune … The lawyer has things their own way in a court-house" (*LS* 382). Instead of acknowledging Gaston as someone trained to navigate procedures of crime and punishment, the mob member identifies him as a representative of a formal system that serves itself and not the feelings of the people.

In *Flaming Sword*, published thirty-seven years later, Phil Stephens's emotional authority is also challenged because he is a lawyer. Anderson, concedes to Phil that, "You're the one man I'll let talk to this crowd," because of Phil's friendship with the murdered David Henry. Phil begins his interceding petitions with a claim of fellowship to the white mob, saying "My friends." However, members of the mob do not trust his motives and begin yelling insults about lawyers who might "stall for time" (*FS* 146). Anderson again asserts Phil's right to intercede based on his emotional connection to Dave and his leadership in the community (through his railroad project, not his law practice): "This lawyer you're yelling at was the best friend the dead man ever had. He loved him. He gave him a job that made his fortune. He gave me and my men a job. We'll hear him" (*FS* 146). Dixon suggests that the acts of lynch mobs are rightly personal and emotional, and there is reason to listen to family and friends of the victims of black violence, but there is no reason to listen to legal counsel. Gaston and Stephens are granted less authority, not more, because of their education and profession.

In their pleas, Gaston and Stephens both try to use the language of democratic law, but the lynch mobs insist that whiteness and masculinity trump everything else. In *Leopard's Spots*, Gaston implores, "If this Negro is guilty, we can prove it in that court-house, and he will pay the penalty with his life. Give him a fair trial—" (*LS* 382). Gaston

aligns himself with the white mob by acknowledging Dick's racial Otherness, saying "this Negro." He never suggests that racial prejudice has led the mob to perhaps wrongly assume Dick's guilt. Gaston frames his intercession on behalf of the white law, not the black man. Still, the leader of the lynch mob, Hose Norman, sneers at the words "fair trial" and provides Gaston with his own case against Dick:[78]

> "Look at the black devil's clothes splotched all over with her blood. We found him under a shelvin' rock where he'd got by wadin' up the branch a quarter a mile to fool the dogs. We found his track in the sand some places where he missed the water, and tracked him clear from where we found Flora to the cave he was lying in. Fair trial—hell! We're just waitin' for er can o' oil. You go back and read your law books—we'll tend ter this devil." (*LS* 382)

Norman disputes the necessity of a fair trial by insisting that the white mob has already obtained enough "evidence" against Dick: the blood on the clothes, the trail from Flora's body, and Dick's decision to hide in a cave. Norman asserts an instinctual understanding of human behavior—that only a guilty man would hide in a cave and only someone who was trying to fool tracking dogs would wade in the water. The leader of this lynch mob has his own brand of testimony and dismisses Gaston's formal law—the law books—as overly erudite and insufficiently masculine for avenging the crimes of a "black devil."

In *Flaming Sword*, Stephens reminds the crowd of the procedures through which Hose can be lawfully punished. He goes so far as to remind the mob that the formal law is also dominated by whites and will favor conviction and execution: "The courts can only protect your homes. This Negro will be tried before a white jury, a white judge. A

[78] As with "Silas Lynch" in *The Clansman*, naming the leader of the mob "Hose" turns a well-known lynching victim (Sam Hose) into a lynching aggressor.

white solicitor will ask for his life and get it. Surely with these safeguards you can let justice take its course" (*FS* 146-7). Objections to Phil's views come from unnamed sources, identified simply as distinct voices. But as anonymous mob members, these voices can stand in for the community as a whole and express a unified desire (as opposed to Phil's perspective, which is only ever his own). One voice shouts, "We're not here to ask for justice. We're asking vengeance. The vengeance of an outraged race—," refuting the philosophical aim of the courts in favor of emotional satisfaction. Another voice counters Stephens by saying, "We are defending our women. To hell with lawyers!" (*FS* 147), which further disregards civil and professional duties in favor of racial, familial, and gender duties. Though the *Flaming Sword* and *Leopard's Spots* are thirty-seven years apart, Dixon's lynchers, spurred by the intercessors, dismiss due process as an inadequate articulation of the white, male protector, who can realize his race and manhood regardless of wealth or education.

In addition to the claims of formal, legal procedure, Gaston and Stephens both present the anti-lynching opinion that lynch mobs do not act according to the values of civilized people.[79] When Gaston sees that Norman means to burn Dick alive, he implores, "Don't disgrace our town, our country, our state and our claims to humanity by this insane brutality. A beast wouldn't do this. You wouldn't kill a mad dog or a rattlesnake in such a way. If you will kill him, shoot him or knock him in the head with a rock—don't burn him alive!" (*LS* 383). In his intercession, Gaston insists that the manner of killing Dick is a particularly barbaric act. The leader of the lynch mob does not argue against

[79] In his article "Why Is the Negro Lynched" (1895) Frederick Douglass argues that lynching is an affront to American civilization: "We claim to be a highly-civilized and Christian country. I will not stop to deny this claim, yet I fearlessly affirm that there is nothing in the history of savages to surpass the blood-chilling horrors and fiendish excesses perpetrated against the coloured people of this country, by the so-called enlightened and Christian people of the South" (492-3).

Gaston's rationale, but calmly and resolvedly disregards it. Dixon writes, "Hose glared at him and quietly remarked: 'Are you done now? If you are, stand out of the way!'" (*LS* 383). Dixon presents Hose as willing to let Gaston have his say but unmoved by further pleas for civility. The mob has heard Gaston's protests and is still determined to act.

Dixon again poses an anti-lynching appeal for more civilized behavior with the interceding efforts of Stephens in *Flaming Sword*. Stephens insists to the huge lynch mob that, "if you do this awful thing you disgrace our community, our Country, our State and proclaim the end of civilization" (*FS* 146). He stresses the importance of the town's regional, national, and international reputation, and he reminds the mob that this violence is outside of the legal boundaries within which they have agreed to live as citizens. In response, "a voice," angrily yells, "Civilization, hell! ...That ended in Dave Henry's house three days ago!" (*FS* 146). The mob refutes Stephens's argument by asserting that the black murderer-rapist is responsible for any barbaric reactions to his crimes. Stephens continues to argue for enlightened restraint that will benefit everyone in the long run: "…can't you see that you are reducing our community to barbarism, where no human rights can be respected" (*FS* 147). But the mob members reject Stephens' logic with the terror of a race war: "The beast who killed Dave Henry and his baby and raped Marie Cameron has already brought barbarism. We're in it. There is no law, no peace, no religion, no civilization. It's race against race. And we're going to fight to a finish!" (*FS* 147). The lynchers insist that only a more powerful, white violence can put a stop to black violence.

Through the interceding rhetoric that Gaston and Stephens exercise, Dixon dramatizes the arguments made against lynching and employs his mob members to

dispute them. Stephens concedes that, "The crime committed was horrible beyond the power of words to describe it," but then asks, "What good will come of your trying to match it with another?" (*FS* 146). Stephens reminds the mob that killing Hose cannot undo the suffering of the Henrys and will only produce more suffering. But one of the mob members answers the question by yelling, "We'll protect our homes, by God!'" (*FS* 146), which asserts that killing Hose will prevent future crimes against other white people. Dixon ventriloquizes one of the central arguments of Ida B. Wells's pamphlet *A Red Record* when Stephens directs his appeals away from the Henrys specifically and points out that "more than half of these lynchings are for murder not rape" (*FS* 147).[80] Stephens explains that the rape of white women, which infuriates the mob the most, happens less than the white mythology of lynching would suggest. However, an immediate refutation from a voice in the mob is that any kind of black-on-white assault is part of a race war and signals that black-on-white rape will shortly follow: "It's the same thing! … The Nigger who kills a white man strikes at our race. He's on the way to rape a white woman" (*FS* 147). Nothing that Stephens says will sway the minds of the mob members. As Dixon tells it, anti-lynching perspectives are powerless when they stand in the path of righteous white men.

Eventually, the lynch mobs in both *Leopard's Spots* and *Flaming Sword* tire of Gaston's and Stephens's intercessions and physically overpower them, respectively. Dixon reveals that neither of his intercessors are capable of stopping the violence. Gaston attempts to exert physical influence by knocking the match out of Norman's hand, but he is immediately restrained by several members of the mob and his arms are tied behind his

[80] With statistics garnered from the *Chicago Tribune*, Wells documents that "Murder" outnumbered "Rape" as the reason given for lynching in both 1892 and 1893 (Royster 86, 87).

back, where he stands "in *helpless* rage and pity" (*LS* 384, emphasis added). Gaston is rendered completely immobile, his objections futile. In *Flaming Sword*, Anderson eventually says to Stephens, "*It's no use*. You'd better go. They're going to rush you in a minute. They'll trample you to death" (emphasis added, *FS* 147). Stephens is forced to drive away from the scene, "muttering" about getting the governor and troops, who never actually materialize (*FS* 147). The intercessors create a moment of public debate and deliberation, but Dixon shows that their arguments are not compelling or strong enough to stop a determined mob. In these lynching scenes, the fates of the black men are decided by a large group of whites who are both willing and capable of enacting their own vision of justice and preservation.

V. *The White Intercessor Grows Up*

The Leopard's Spots is, in many ways, an exercise in autobiography for Thomas Dixon. In *The Crucible of Race* (1984), Joel Williamson contends that Dixon primarily represents himself through the character Charles Gaston, Jr., and that *Leopard's Spots* is really the story of Gaston's education in matters of race (151); "[*The Leopard's Spots*] is [Dixon's] life as seen by himself looking backward from the high ground of Radicalism" (165). When Dixon first introduces Gaston as a young man, Gaston's position in regards to Southern race relations is fairly conservative but not extreme at the turn of the century; by the end of the novel, he is fully committed to radically segregationist and white supremacist beliefs. The character Phil Stephens undergoes a similar racial education in *Flaming Sword*. Dixon first introduces Stephens as a young man with a liberal perspective on black political advancement, but at the novel's conclusion, he is willing to

stand with Angela against an armed insurrection of Communists and blacks. The growth of the leading male character, Gaston and Stephens, is from young lynching intercessors to wiser men who are willing to use violence to combat racial equality.

At the beginning of Gaston's political development, he is torn between joining Allan McLeod in the Republican Party and remaining loyal to the Southern Democrats. Aligning himself with McLeod would almost certainly result in mutual political success, and Gaston perceives the Democrats as standing "for no principle except the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon" (*LS* 199). Gaston partly thinks that agreeing with the Republicans and accepting black suffrage is the most practical course, but the internalization of Reverend Durham's warning—"*My boy, the future American must be an Anglo-Saxon or a Mulatto*"—compels him to remain with the Democrats (*LS* 199-201). Gaston's journey in *Leopard's Spots* leads him to eventually relinquish any consideration of political equality between blacks and whites, so that Durham's voice for white racial purity becomes Gaston's voice, speaking at the state Democratic convention and winning the Governorship of North Carolina (*LS* 438-447). The lynchings and attempted lynchings that transpire in the novel play a critical role in directing Gaston towards racial extremism.

As a young man, Gaston is initially not as concerned about black men as his older, fatherly mentors—Reverend Durham and Tom Camp. When Tom sees his daughter Flora talking to an unknown black man, Tom prepares to punish her by whipping her. Gaston, however, intercedes and assures Tom that Flora has learned her lesson. He insists, "I don't believe anybody would hurt Flora, Tom—she's such a little angel" (*LS* 370). Dixon conveys that Gaston's surety is naïve and dangerous, though,

because two days later (and within the same chapter), Flora is found nearly dead, with a bloody wound in her skull and implications of rape: "her clothes torn to shreds and stained with blood" (*LS* 375). Dixon's message is clear: Flora did not fully learn her lesson, and the result is that she was raped, beaten, and left for dead by an unknown black man. Dixon prompts his reader to interpret Gaston's momentary plea for mercy as tragically harmful in the long-term.

Gaston again makes a plea for mercy when he intercedes and tries to stop the lynch mob from burning and killing Dick. While Dick is being led to the oak tree in the courthouse square, Gaston and Dick recognize each other as childhood playmates. Dick begs Gaston directly, saying, "Save me, Charlie! I nebber done it! I nebber done it! For God's sake help me! Keep 'em off! Dey gwine burn me erlive!" (*LS* 382). Immediately following Dick's supplication, Gaston turns to the crowd and begins to make interceding appeals; Dixon establishes a causal relationship between the direct request of a long-lost, black friend and Gaston's intercession. However, the reader knows that Gaston's attachment to Dick stems from guileless childhood affection. In the first section of the novel, Mrs. Durham and Reverend Durham discuss the character of the young Dick, saying he's "the greatest liar," a "little scoundrel," and "his influence over Charlie will be vicious," but they also note that Gaston seems to love Dick, and Gaston's heart would be broken if Dick were sent away (*LS* 179). Everyone else can see Dick's "brute nature," but to Gaston, "[Dick's] rolling, mischievous eyes, his cunning fingers and his wayward imagination were unfailing fountains of life" (*LS* 178, 179). When Dick does run off at the end of the first section, Gaston cries, believing that Dick will never come back (*LS*

186). Dixon suggests that Gaston loves Dick with a child's obliviousness to the dangerous consequences of racial difference.

Dick does come back, though, and Gaston's personal fondness for Dick seems to influence his intercession. Gaston's outburst of tears while watching Dick being murdered recalls those earlier, boyish tears when Dick ran away. Dixon presents Gaston in a severely emasculated position when his intercession fails: he is crying and reduced to physical impotence by the mob members that restrain him. His intercession on behalf of Dick is a weak moment which Gaston must overcome as the narrative progresses. Gaston's transformation in the novel from boy to man is thus signaled by his willingness to respond with manly violence when the white race is threatened. In the final chapters of the novel, Gaston begins to lead the white citizens of the town to rise against the blacks and liberal whites. A committee led by Gaston demands that the black newspaper editor leave town and close his office, and when he does not, the committee burns the office to the ground. The editor is "paid its cash value, and, with a rope around his neck, escorted to the depot and placed on a north-bound train" (*LS* 417). Gaston tells the editor, "I have saved your life this morning. If you value it, never put your foot on the soil of this state again" (*LS* 417). Dixon's leading white male protagonist does not become an outright murderer, but he is willing to threaten lynching to a black man who does not obey white orders. Gaston is not yet a lynching participant, but he is no longer a lynching intercessor. In *Leopard's Spots*, anti-black violence is an integral component of the radical, Anglo-Saxon education.

Similarly, in *Flaming Sword*, a white intercessor like Phil Stevens is depicted as an obstacle to protecting the white race. Captain Collier—former Confederate, town

leader, and "man of the people" (*LS* 29)—dislikes Phil's "liberal" ideas about race: "[Phil Stevens] hopes to do something to stop lynching. I hope he can. The real way to do it is to stop the crimes which lead to lynching" (*FS* 35). Collier establishes black crime—not white racism—as the true cause of lynchings, which Stevens's "liberal" notions of race do not address. Collier's perspective is confirmed by the novel's central protagonist, Angela Cameron, who discredits Stevens's opinions on race early on in the story. Stevens is a man of means, but according to Angela, his wealth actually renders him unfit as a leader for the South. During the parade of black schoolchildren, Angela reflects:

> Their great leader at Tuskegee planned a black industrial revolution that would make the life of poor white people harder than ever if it succeeded. She wondered vaguely what the end of the conflict was going to be. It was all well enough for Phil Stephens, secure in his aristocratic inheritance, intent on amassing a fortune to preach the new "liberalism" which meant "Let the Negro Problem alone. The Negro is here. We'll use him for all he's worth, give in a square deal in our Courts and Schools and let the future take care of itself." (*FS* 83)

Viewing blacks as competition for poor whites in the marketplace, Angela believes that Stephens is out of touch with the concerns of impoverished white men and women. Like the works of Charles Chesnutt, white intercession correlates with education and high social status in *Flaming Sword*; unlike Chesnutt, though, Dixon frames Stephens's wealth as a major reason that he is *not* the right leader for the South.

Phil Stephens follows through on his liberal attitudes by attempting to stop the lynching of Dan Hose and by also helping the investigator from the NAACP, Craig Willis, leave town before he is lynched (*FS* 171-2). However, after moving to New York

City and beginning to work with the Inter-Racial Commission, Stephens sees a growing alliance between blacks and Communists that seeks "Negro World Supremacy" (*FS* 376-7), and he increasingly believes that Angela and her rich and powerful friend Tony Murino are correct to fear a violent rebellion against the white race and American democracy. When Angela is kidnapped by Russians, Stephens conspires with Murino to rescue her. Stephens and Murino shoot and kill the two men who are guarding Angela (*FS* 441). In the end, Stephens and Angela (Murino is fatally wounded in the crossfire with the guards) must work with the United States military to combat the black and Communist insurrections that have exploded all across the country (*FS* 452). Stephens progresses from a lynching intercessor and legal advocate for blacks Americans to a leader in the violent suppression of allied black and Communist rebellions.

In the first and last of Dixon's novels, the evolution of these two male characters *away* from the position of lynching intercessors is rewarded by the romantic match of their desires. In *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (1993), Nina Silber writes that white masculine norms in the nineteenth century were highly different in the North than in the South:

> … southern white men relied on a code which counseled both chivalry and violence … Northern middle-class men, in contrast, lived in what Edward Ayers has called a "culture of dignity," in which institutions figured more prominently than notions of honor and community. These men abhorred many of the vices of southern men and committed themselves to individual self-improvement, to economic responsibility, and most of all, to self-control. (8)

When the Civil War was over, northerners increasingly expunged southern masculinity from narratives of reunion and instead identified the South with femininity. Silber explains that, "The image of marriage between northern men and southern women stood at the foundation of the late-nineteenth-century culture of conciliation and became a symbol which defined and justified the Northern view of the power relations in the reunified nation" (6). Dixon's novels differ from the reunion romances that Silber describes, though, in that Dixon aims to both unite white America *and* redeem the southern man. Therefore, the romantic narratives in *Leopard's Spots* and *Flaming Sword* reward traditional southern norms of masculinity, such as chivalry and violence, by urging Gaston and Stephens toward anti-black violence.

Gaston and Stephens are both southern men who eventually prove themselves to be worthy partners of the southern women whom they love—Sallie Worth and Angela Cameron/Henry, respectively—by adopting more radical white supremacist beliefs. In *Leopard's Spots*, Sallie Worth's father initially denies Gaston's request to propose marriage to Sallie, saying that Gaston lacks financial security, as he is "not in a position to make a suitable home at present for a wife" (*LS* 292). Allan McLeod has actually poisoned the General's mind against Gaston (*LS* 361), and as Gaston denies the rumors the General has heard and continues to correspond with Sallie, the General further rejects the match on the grounds of Gaston's defiance (*LS* 408). However, it is Gaston's speech for Anglo-Saxon supremacy at the Democratic convention that completely changes the General's mind. As Gaston descends from the podium, General Worth immediately grants his permission to the engagement: "My boy, I give it up. You have beaten me. I'm proud of you. I forgive everything for that speech. You can have my girl. Let us forget

the past" (*LS* 447). Every previous concern and dispute is forgotten in the wake of Gaston's radical "Speech that made History" (*LS* 435), and he becomes Sallie Worth's husband.

Phil Stephens loves Angela Cameron and wants to marry her from the very beginning of *Flaming Sword*. However, she chooses to marry David Henry instead, and, after Henry's death, she favors Tony Murino over Stephens. The characters David Henry and Tony Murino have little in common (Henry is poor with a white American ancestry that can be traced to Patrick Henry, and Murino is a rich, Italian immigrant) except that they both agree with Angela that the black race constitutes a severe threat to the future of the nation. On this point, Angela and the liberal Stephens disagree. Throughout the novel, Angela repeatedly denies Stephens a full partnership with her, until the final line, in which, "The two clasped hands in a warm pledge of faith, courage and love" (*FS* 453). Stephens receives Angela's love and commitment only after he has discarded his sympathy to the black race and joins Angela in working against them. Charles Gaston, Jr. and Phil Stephens transition from lynching intercessors who plea for restraint and adherence to the law to white supremacist radicals willing to do whatever it takes to suppress black Americans. Through the progression of romantic love in these novels, Dixon ultimately portrays intercession as version of masculinity that is not sufficient for protecting the white women of America.

It is tempting to not study Dixon at all. In many ways, nothing seems better than to allow his cultural texts that defend lynching and incite racial hysteria to fade into obscurity. After all, his writing has been generally judged as less than mediocre, even "terrible" (Eby 441), and by the 1920s his "extravagant romanticism, so popular and

acceptable in the turn of the century decades, had become a subject for snickers" (Williamson 140-1). The great popularity that followed *Leopard's Spots* did not follow *Flaming Sword* thirty-six years later. Du Bois did not even bother responding to the book, as the greater American public viewed Dixon as isolated and out of touch (*FS* xxv). Unfortunately, the immense success of his *Klansmen Trilogy* and his subsequent contribution to Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* means that "Dixon probably did more to shape the lives of modern Americans than have some presidents" (Williamson 140). Unlike Chesnutt—whose novelistic portrayal of race relations in the South, *The Marrow of Tradition*, was a commercial disappointment—, Dixon was tremendously influential at the beginning of the twentieth century. Within a few months of the publication of *Leopard's Spots*, it had sold over 100,000 copies, and nearly a million copies were eventually printed—approximately one copy for every eight Americans (Williamson 158). Dixon was a white supremacist "who was frighteningly successful in disseminating his ideology" (Magowan 77-78), and interpreting *how* he disseminates his ideology remains imperative to studies of literary history and race.

In his self-published pamphlet, "As to *The Leopard's Spots*: An Open Letter to Thomas Dixon" (1905), African American mathematician and intellectual Kelly Miller aptly describes Dixon's part in fanning the flames of racial violence:

> You preside at every crossroad lynching of a helpless victim; wherever the midnight murderer rides with rope and torch in quest of the blood of his black brother, you ride by his side; wherever the cries of the crucified victim go up to God from the crackling flame, behold, you are there; when women and children, drunk with ghoulish glee, dance around the funeral pyre and mock the death

> groans of their fellow-man and fight for ghastly souvenirs, you have your part in the inspiration of it all. (20)

Miller's condemnation indicates the unfortunate import of studying Dixon's work. It is difficult to acknowledge a national history that includes the lynching of black Americans, and it is easiest to acknowledge that history obliquely and abstractly. Dixon's work puts in print those white supremacist currents of thought that are inextricable from the frameworks of American cultural history. By throwing light on "those secret structures that made reality appear to be beyond artifice" (Goldsby 218), the structures of white supremacy can be revealed as having been artifice all along.

CHAPTER 3

"He saved us from ourselves":

The Lynching Intercessor in the Films of John Ford

I. *The Threat of Lynching*

The 1960 western film *Sergeant Rutledge*, directed by John Ford, centers around the army's investigation of charges brought against a black cavalryman. The film also undermines the myth of black rape that pervaded and attempted to justify anti-black lynching in America. Set in a military outpost in 1866 Arizona, black soldier [Woody Strode as] Braxton Rutledge is falsely accused of raping and murdering a white girl. Ford opens the film at the courthouse where throngs of white men and women eagerly await the beginning of the hearing. As Rutledge is led inside and up the aisle to the defense table, the men and women in the audience begin to resemble a lynch mob: they shout disparages at him, call for him to be killed, and one man menacingly shakes a rope in his direction.

The verbal attacks on Rutledge are not allowed to continue, however, as the presiding officer calls everyone to order. [Constance Powers as] Mary Beecher, a young white woman, gives the first testimony, and the film shifts to a flashback that narrates her memory.[81] She arrives at a train station one night and discovers that the stationmaster has been murdered. She panics and runs out of the station, directly at the camera, until a black hand emerges from off-screen to cover her mouth and hold her still. The flashback ends abruptly and flashes forward to Rutledge's hearing, because the prosecuting officer

[81] Ford evokes the history of race relations in the United States with the name "Beecher." A white woman named Beecher who testifies to the good character of Braxton Rutledge recalls Harriet Beecher Stowe and her novel that argued for the good character of many black slaves in the South: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

has bidden Beecher to cease her testimony at that exact moment. The prosecutor wants to plant the image of Rutledge as an aggressive "black beast" in the minds of the white officers, and he stops Beecher before she can explain why Rutledge covered her mouth. The officer defending Rutledge, [Jeffrey Hunter as] Lieutenant Cantrell, objects to the prosecutor's tactics, and Beecher is allowed to finish her testimony. As it turns out, the station was under the attack of Apache Indians, and Rutledge covered Beecher's mouth to stop her from screaming and inadvertently revealing their location. Ford presents the viewer with an image that epitomizes the most popular justification for lynching—a black man attacking a white woman—only to reveal that the aggressive threat of the "black beast" is just a manipulation of the white prosecutor.

Ford evokes anti-black lynching in *Sergeant Rutledge*, but the plot of the film technically resides within a legal realm, as Rutledge receives his right to due process.[82] Ford made *Sergeant Rutledge* at the tail end of his career, and critics frequently identify it as one of a few, late Ford films that overtly draws attention to the oppression of social others—blacks in *Sergeant Rutledge*, American Indians in *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964), and women in *Seven Women* (1965). The resemblance of the courtroom audience to a lynch mob at the beginning of *Sergeant Rutledge*, however, ties in to a Ford film tradition that spans almost the entire length of his career: the threatened lynching. Ford includes a near-lynching in six films between 1920 and 1954: *Just Pals* (1920); *Judge Priest* (1934); *Steamboat Round the Bend* (1935); *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939); *The Sun Shines Bright*

[82] I do think, however, that a fruitful study awaits *Sergeant Rutledge* and other films that first pose the danger of a "legal lynching" and then resolve that danger through the efforts of a white character who is involved in the trial. In *Sergeant Rutledge*, the white characters Lieutenant Cantrell and Mary Beecher help clear Rutledge's name. Similarly, in *12 Angry Men* (1957), [Henry Fonda as] juror #8 is at fist the solitary objector to a guilty verdict, but the rest of the jurors eventually change their minds and acquit the defendant.

(1953); and *The Horse Soldiers* (1959). In each of these six films, the lynchers are thwarted by an intercessor. A few critics have noted the reoccurrence of lynch mobs in Ford's work, and Robert Jackson writes that *Judge Priest*, *Steamboat Round the Bend*, and *The Sun Shines Bright* "feature protagonists whose heroism is derived in great measure from their success in persuading lynch mobs (who are often their friends and neighbors) to put down their weapons and go home" (114).[83] However, what has gone unexplored is how these protagonists who stand against lynch mobs intervene in critiques of racial injustice. By analyzing the reappearance of a white lynching intercessor in Ford's films, I argue that Ford exposes lynching as a racist form of violence but then avoids challenging that racism with the white intercessor's rhetoric.

Amy L. Wood presents a case study of three anti-lynching films in her book *Lynching and Spectacle* (2010). In her analysis of *Fury* (1936), *They Won't Forget* (1937), and *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1943), she argues that the filmmakers present lynching as primarily problematic because of the damage it inflicts on white psyches and democracy.[84] All three of these films feature white lynching victims and white lynching perpetrators, and thus they posit lynching "as a largely random act whose principal victim is law and order rather than as a mechanism and expression of white dominance" (Wood 225). In a sense, these fictional films position themselves apart from the racist history of

[83] Jackson includes this observation in his article "A Southern Sublimation: Lynching Film and the Reconstruction of American Memory" (2008). In his book *John Ford* (2001), Brian Spittles briefly discusses the lynch mobs that show up in films like *Judge Priest* and *Young Mr. Lincoln*, but he does not mention that every Ford lynch mob is thwarted in their plans (95).

[84] According to Wood's definition of anti-lynching films—films that "place an anti-lynching message at their center" (228)—Ford's films do not qualify as such. The near lynchings staged in Ford films are not the driving forces of the narratives or the primary concerns of the characters. However, I think Wood is too quick to dismiss the lynching and near-lynching scenes in other films as present only for "local color" or to define the film as a western (228), because it is very productive to read Ford's anti-lynching scenes in conversation with her analysis. Still, I avoid referring to Ford's motion pictures as "anti-lynching films" and instead focus on the anti-lynching sequences and the anti-lynching sentiments.

lynching in America. Wood reaches the conclusion that "depicting lynching on-screen was not itself controversial but that doing so within a context that pointed an accusatory finger at the South most certainly was" (229). Setting anti-lynching films in locations other than the South and excluding black characters from the roles of lynching victims were ways that filmmakers tried to appear less condemnatory of southern racism while simultaneously attempting to send anti-lynching messages.

Wood argues that the three anti-lynching films she analyzes only address racism obliquely through the inclusion of black characters who observe and comment on the lynching. She contends that both the significant and marginalized black figures "were meant to be seen and noted" and that "This kind of coding was not lost on contemporary African American viewers" (Wood 239). However, the focus of the films is still not on a racist culture but rather on "the irrationality and recklessness of mobs and their potential to corrode both democracy and civilized order" (Wood 225). Anti-lynching messages in Hollywood films are not simultaneously anti-racism messages. Ford's depictions of near-lynchings reproduce one of the problematic patterns that Wood identifies in *Fury*, *The Ox-Bow Incident*, and *They Won't Forget*: within the narratives of these Ford-directed films, none of the characters explicitly connect lynching to racism or white supremacy. More specifically, Ford's intercessors never appeal to the lynch mobs to reevaluate the specifically racist motivations of their violent attacks.

Unlike the filmmakers that Wood analyzes, however, Ford does not always avoid casting black victims or using southern settings. Instead, Ford's tendency is to situate his near-lynchings in fictional contexts that evoke the very real national history of racial violence. Ford establishes an onscreen connection between racial difference and mob

murders, and his films build connections between a regional history of enslavement, caste oppression, and lynching in the South. *Judge Priest*, *Steamboat Round the Bend*, and *The Sun Shines Bright* are all set in the South and include black characters as the intended victims. In his article "A Southern Sublimation: Lynching Film and the Reconstruction of American Memory" (2008), Robert Jackson writes that, "Ford's attack on lynching is somehow more effective because it is mounted from within southern white culture" (115). However, Jackson does not discuss the near-lynching sequences that are *not* set in the South as participating in an American racial discourse, as well. I maintain that while the intended victims in *Young Mr. Lincoln* and *The Horse Soldiers* are white, Ford steeps these narratives in the implications of the Civil War and places the history of race in the U. S. at the forefront of the viewing experience.

Ford distinguishes himself from other American filmmakers in the first half of the twentieth century by locating his near-lynching sequences in the context of racist, institutionalized oppression, such as the history of slavery. The intercessors that stop the lynchings, however, do not explicitly acknowledge the violence as racist and instead appeal to the mobs on the basis of individual civic responsibility. Ford connotes the specifically anti-black implications of lynching but then circumvents a condemnation of anti-black prejudice by focusing on white intercessors who exemplify democratic ideals. His intercessors allow the white American viewer to acknowledge racial violence, but the would-be-lynchers are also re-incorporated into the white American community.

II. *Ford's History*

Ford's decision to locate an onscreen, threatened lynching of a black man in the South may have been a bit too racially confrontational for Fox Studio in 1934. The version of *Judge Priest* that the studio exhibited then and that continues to be available today does not contain the thwarted lynching sequence that Ford filmed. In this sequence, [Stepin Fetchit as] Jeff Poindexter is being held in jail as a criminal suspect, and a group of white men decide to storm the jail, seize Poindexter, and lynch him. However, the mob is stopped by the interceding [Will Rogers as] Judge Priest, who confronts the mob on the jailhouse steps with his nephew (and three friends who soon join him) and convinces the mob to walk away. Fetchit believes this sequence was cut, because it was an honest portrayal of lynching that the studio was not ready to exhibit. In an interview with Joseph McBride in 1971, Fetchit discusses the excised scene:

> We had a lynching scene in there, where I, as an innocent Negro, got saved by Will Rogers. They cut it out because we were ahead of the time. In 1953 we did a remake of that picture, called [*The Sun Shines Bright*]. And John Ford, he did the lynching scene again. This time the Negro that gets saved was played by a young boy—I was older then. But they kept it in. That was my last picture. ("Stepin" 425)

According to Fetchit, the editors and executives at Fox, such as Sol M. Wurtzel, thought that white audiences would not want to see their most racist and violent selves displayed on screen. Though it is possible that the near-lynching scene was cut primarily for other concerns, such as running time, scholars such as Gilberto Perez and Tag Gallagher

confirm Fetchit's perspective that the decision was motivated by fear of audience disapproval.[85]

Ford's decision to remake *Judge Priest* as *The Sun Shines Bright* seems significantly motivated by the desire to place this racially accurate anti-lynching sequence on screen. Fetchit's interviewer, McBride, writes in his biography of Ford, that "According to Stepin Fetchit … the reason Ford remade *Judge Priest* was that Fox cut a scene from the film in which the judge rescues Jeff from a lynching" (*Searching* 211). Jeff Poindexter is not the threatened victim in *The Sun Shines Bright*, but the threatened victim is again a young black man, and the film is still set in the South at the end of the nineteenth century. I include the excised sequence from *Judge Priest* in my analysis, because it is a Ford-directed sequence with a lynching intercessor, and the studio, not Ford, made the decision to cut it. I base my analysis on one of the original shooting scripts and what can be reasonably ascertained through continuity with the other films.[86]

Ford's repeated filming of lynch mobs and his determination to present a near-lynching sequence like the one cut from *Judge Priest* attests to a more conscious approach to race and ethnicity in his films than many critics have previously credited him. In his essay "The Margin as Center: The Multicultural Dynamics of John Ford's Westerns" (2001), Charles Ramírez Berg notes a scholarly tendency to reproachfully analyze Ford's cinematic treatments of people of color, largely motivated by the portrayals of American Indians in Ford's westerns (75). Berg does not dispute that Ford's films sometimes display paternalism and stereotyping toward people of color, but he

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[85] Perez writes that Fox "cut the scene for fear of displeasing audiences in the South" (47). Gallagher says the scene was cut, "to Ford's chagrin, for lynchings were frequent during the thirties" (*John* 103).

[86] The shooting script of *Judge Priest* is located at the Will Rogers Memorial Museum in Claremore, Oklahoma.

argues that "counterbalancing Ford's stereotyping is a richly textured multicultural vision that is nuanced in comparison with the broad strokes that characterized much of classical Hollywood's ethnic representation" (75). Berg contends that throughout Ford's career, he was prone to root for the "marginalized outcasts" because of his own Irish heritage and the discrimination and hatred that Ford and his own family faced because of that heritage (75-77). Born John Feeney, Jr. in 1895 to Irish immigrant parents in Portland, Maine, John followed his older brother Francis Ford to Hollywood and adopted his brother's more Anglicized stage name (Dan Ford 5). Ford's scenes of lynching intercession throughout his career corroborate Berg's analysis, as Ford celebrates those intercessors who are willing to speak and act on behalf of social outsiders.

In fact, a letter written by Thomas Dixon, Jr. to Ford on September 22nd, 1934 suggests that Ford strove to be attentive to the ways that he included characters of color in his films, even in the earlier stages of his filmmaking career.[87] As a young stuntman in Hollywood, Ford worked as an extra on the D. W. Griffith film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), a film famously entrenched in racist stereotypes and inspired by the writings of Dixon. The letter Dixon wrote to Ford in 1934, however, implies that Ford wanted to resist the racist depictions of black Americans that Dixon promoted. Ford seems to have previously inquired about adapting to the screen a work of Dixon's set in the South in the nineteenth century.[88] Dixon's reply begins, "Dear Mr Ford:- In this dialogue for stage presentation I have not outlined the big spectacular Klan riding scenes of the two

[87] This letter is included in the John Ford Papers at the Lilly Library in Bloomington, Indiana, referred to as JFP throughout this chapter.

[88] The idea for a film project set at the end of the nineteenth century in the South is consistent with other Ford film projects that did get made in the mid-1930s, such as *Judge Priest* (1934) and *Steamboat Round the Bend* (1935).

factions," and proceeds to say that these scenes can be developed as much as Ford desires (JFP). Based on the middle paragraph, one can infer that Ford previously expressed concern that Dixon's material was offensive to black Americans:

> There is no attack on the Negro. He is treated sympathetically and humorously throughout – in three good comedy characters. The role of HENRY is admirably fitted to STEPIN FETCHIT if you wish to use him. You could get a hundred laughs out of that part with him. (JFP)

Dixon attempts to assure Ford that a film based on this material will not evoke anti-black sentiment or anger black audience members.[89] While Dixon's notions of treating black characters "sympathetically and humorously" are likely to strike contemporary readers as stereotypical and paternalistic, Ford's implied inquiry demonstrates his intention not to reproduce Dixon's racist portraits of black men and women.

Additionally, a letter Ford wrote to William Wellman in 1942 suggests that Ford understood lynching as a tool for ethnic oppression. Ford strongly praises Wellman's anti-lynching film *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1942) as "the best direction of these recent years" and "the best picture I have seen for longer than I like to remember" (JFP). In a post script, Ford writes that the only part of the film that does not strike him as "real" is when the character played by his brother Francis Ford is "refusing the drink and making

[89] A dust jacket of Dixon's novel *The Black Hood* (1924) was catalogued with this letter in the John Ford Papers, and since that novel features both the Ku Klux Klan and a black character named Henry, this is probably the text to which Ford and Dixon are referring. Furthermore, *The Black Hood* is generally considered the least racially offensive of Dixon's works, because the story fosters a more cautionary regard for the Ku Klux Klan. Though Dixon still presents the original Ku Klux Klan of the 1860s and 70s as honorable and just, he tells a story in which the power of the Klan is corrupted by less righteous men. It appears that Dixon was not in full agreement with the Klan that grew in power in the early 1920s and which was anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic, and anti-immigrant (in addition to being anti-black). Dixon includes an author's note to *The Black Hood* that "suggests to the five million members of the new Ku Klux Klan that they read this book" (v), and he advocates religious tolerance in the story. His portrayals of blacks, though, as seen in the characters Henry, Laura, and Julius, are still extremely degrading, which explains Ford's concerns.

such a fuss about getting hung." Ford explains, "After all, most of his ancestors have been hung and I just can't see Frank refusing a drink" (JFP). In addition to making a joke at his brother's expense, Ford associates a lynching in a western film with his brother's—and his own—Irish heritage. In *The Ox-Bow Incident*, three men (including Francis Ford's character) are lynched on suspicion of murder and cattle theft, but Ford connects this fictional lynching to the British executions of Irish rebels, and thus, to political suppression. The letter from Thomas Dixon suggests that Ford strove to be just in his portrayals of black Americans, and the letter to William Wellman indicates that he recognized lynching as a form of political coercion, not just a breakdown of law and order. His cinematic contextualization of lynching with an American history of racial oppression brings both of those ideas together.

III. *Race and American History on the Big Screen*

The intercession in Ford's first film with a threatened lynching—*Just Pals*—is very brief, and Ford does not portray a black man as the lynch mob's target or integrate the Civil War into the narrative. Still, *Just Pals* initializes Ford's onscreen correlation between lynching threats and social marginalization. A silent film, *Just Pals* tells the story of [Buck Jones as] Bim, the town bum, and his friendship with a homeless boy. In the town of Norwalk, "on the borderline between Wyoming and Nebraska," almost every white adult in town holds Bim in complete disdain as lazy and worthless (*Just Pals*). Therefore, the townspeople have no trouble believing Bim to be guilty when a series of events place him under suspicion of stealing the school memorial fund and leading a robbery of the Express Company. The sheriff has Bim in handcuffs outside the Express

Company, but a mob grabs him away from the sheriff and takes him to a tree to be lynched. The following inter-title says, "The never-to-be-forgotten rumble of Judge Lynch's law" (*Just Pals*). Bim's young friend rushes to the sheriff, tells him that he knows who and where the real guilty man is. The sheriff and the boy then run up to the mob, the sheriff holds up the boy so he can take the noose off of Bim's neck, and the sheriff says, "Hold on, boys! The kid says the real culprit is hiding in the school" (*Just Pals*). Almost a victim of circumstance and prejudice, Bim is revealed to be innocent.

In his commentary on *Just Pals* in the book *John Ford: The Man and his Films* (1987), Tag Gallagher contends that the film is "Typically Fordian" in regards to "*the lynch mobs, hypocritical social strata,* pompous churchgoers, busybodies, and *the unobtrusive blacks (unnecessary in a story set in Wyoming, yet ignored by whites and drama*)" (emphasis added 27). Gallagher recognizes that lynch mobs and injustice are a Ford story pattern, but he does not consider the possibility that a black character who is not featured extensively in the plot might be thematically connected to the lynch mobs. As Wood argues, black characters that appear in the background of a film can serve to prompt the viewer to recognize the subject of lynching as racialized (239). Before the threatened lynching, the only two adults in Norwalk who do not disregard Bim completely are Mary Bruce, the white schoolteacher, and an unnamed black chef. When Bim and his young friend are hungry, they visit the chef and ask if there is anything they can do for him. The black chef strikes the deal that if they do the work of killing the chickens, they can both eat (*Just Pals*). They end up not taking the deal, as the boy does not want Bim to kill the chickens, but the chef's offer stands in contrast to a later moment in the film when Bim tells a couple white men that he is looking for a job, and they both

laugh at him. Bim is a white character played by a white actor, so the first near-lynching that Ford films is not overtly about the lynching of black Americans. However, Bim is a social outcast associated with a black character, and he is almost lynched because of prejudicial misconceptions, so Ford obliquely evokes denounces anti-black lynching.[90]

Ford's final film with a threatened lynching—*The Horse Soldiers*—also depicts a very brief moment of lynching intercession. Set during the Civil War, *The Horse Soldiers* also exemplifies Ford's technique of locating near-lynchings in a history of American racial conflict. The leading female character is southern white woman [Constance Powers as] Hannah Hunter. Hunter is loyal to the Confederacy, but she and her slave [Althea Gibson as] Lukey are forced to travel with a northern troop. At 36:44, the troop comes upon two deserters of the Confederate army who plan to lynch the southern acting-sheriff [Russell Simpson as] Henry Goodbody. Hunter runs up to the men and physically removes the noose from around Goodbody's neck while shouting "Don't you dare!" at the two men who planned to lynch him (*The Horse Soldiers*). She then turns to [John Wayne as] Colonel Marlowe, throws the noose at his feet, and ridicules him for cooperating with "scum" (*HS*). While telling a story about the war that ended slavery in the United States, Ford portrays a southern white woman who stops a lynching. Ford thwarts the sectional expectations of southern whites lynching black people, and, thus, also triggers that initial expectation; he reminds his audience that they are most familiar with southern, anti-black lynching by rendering an unfamiliar image of southern lynching

[90] It's also worth considering that an audience in 1920 might associate lynching with black Americans even without provocation. In 1900, reportedly 106 blacks were lynched in comparison to nine whites. In the year 1920, when *Just Pals* was released, 56 blacks compared to eight whites were reportedly lynched ("Lynching, Whites & Negroes, 1882-1968").

intercession. Furthermore, this attempted lynching is woven into a narrative about the institution of slavery, which connects lynching to a history of racist practices.

Young Mr. Lincoln is unique as a Ford-directed film in that it does not have any black characters. It does, though, have a memorable scene of lynching intercession, and it is deeply entrenched in the history of American race relations. In this story of Abraham Lincoln as a young man, John Ford constantly imagines him through the lens of his future: President of a nation divided on the issue of slavery and the "Great Emancipator." The editors of the *Cahiers du Cinema* journal famously argued in 1970 that the subject of the film is not actually Lincoln's youth, but, instead, "it is the reformulation of the historical figure of Lincoln on the level of the myth and the eternal" (502). In an article entitled "Passage: John Ford's Young Mr. Lincoln" (2006), Tag Gallagher agrees with the *Cahiers* editors and writes that, "Although the movie's thrust is passage … history, like God's omniscience, puts everything outside time, into the static determined" (163). He sees Lincoln's character as haunted by his past (such as losing Ann Rutledge) and haunted by his future, as "Time in various ways contributes a mystic determinism that pervades the film" (163). The film is set in Springfield, Illinois during Lincoln's first years as a lawyer, but the story is also in direct conversation with that defining moment of American history: the Civil War.

Foregrounding his future role as President during the War Between the States, Lincoln repeatedly presides over warring factions in the narrative of *Young Mr. Lincoln*. He helps two embroiled clients realize that their financial demands of each other actually allow them to break even. He tries to judge between two different pies for the pie contest and prolongs his deliberation so he can continue eating. He defends the Clay brothers,

both of whom try to spare the life of the other, and whose mother will not choose one son by implicating the other. Young Lincoln's reoccurring role as a mediator who refuses to choose compels the audience to imagine Lincoln's future as the president of a nation at war with itself.

The audience also knows that Lincoln will issue the Emancipation Proclamation and thus dramatically reorder race relations in the South. The legend of Lincoln is so bound up with the fate of black Americans that racial implications in the film are not dependent on black bodies. The threatened lynching is directed at two young white men, the Clay brothers, but, like Bim, they are white men who are not accepted members of the community. The Clay family lives on a rural farm and only passes through town now and then. The audience knows that they are poor, because when Lincoln first meets [Alice Brady as] Abigail Clay, the only items of value she can trade are old law books. Lincoln's willingness to defend the marginalized Clays, both at the threatened lynching and in court, attests to his future willingness to free the enslaved. Gallagher notes the underlying themes of racial inequality in a film with an all-white cast:

> … implicit in the movie's call to virtue is how far from equality blacks in 1939 were from Lincoln's evocation at Gettysburg … lynchings still occurred monthly in this Land of Lincoln. Thus, implicitly, but nevertheless, Ford's subject is slavery and equality, which is what 'Abraham Lincoln' meant to a State of Mainer. ("Passage" par. 7)

By telling a story about Abraham Lincoln that also includes a near-lynching, Ford forcefully recalls America's history of racial oppression alongside the racial violence of anti-black mob murders.

The intended lynching victims in *Steamboat Round the Bend* are the crew members of the Claremore Queen steamboat, which includes both black and white characters, and Ford makes both tragic and humorous connections between this threatened lynching and a national history of anti-black practices. The opening credits of *Steamboat Round the Bend* include the notes, "Time: Sometime in the early '90s, Place: Somewhere on the Mississippi River" (*Steamboat Round the Bend*). The 1890s were a decade of turbulent race relations when lynching rates were exceedingly high.[91] Peter C. Rollins contends that the underlying emotion of *Steamboat Round the Bend* is nostalgia for a less complicated and less modern time. I think Gallagher is more accurate, though, when he calls the film a morality tale that speaks to the "unspoken horrors of rural Southern life" (*John* 125), though he does not explain exactly what those horrors are. I argue that this film employs a southern setting, black characters, the history of the Civil War, and a narrative of social marginalization and injustice to associate lynching with racial oppression.

Starring Will Rogers as Doctor John Pearly, *The Steamboat Round the Bend* centers on a legal lynching that awaits Doc's nephew, [John McGuire as] Duke. Duke tells his uncle that he fought a man named Big Steve, because he was "goin' after" Fleety Belle, Duke's fiancé (*Steamboat Round the Bend*). Big Steve drew a knife in the fight, so Duke hit him on the head and killed him. Doc insists that Duke should turn himself in, since the murder was clearly in self-defense, but Fleety Belle protests and says they have heard the judge is "a hangin' judge" who will surely execute Duke (*SRTB*). Doc still believes that Duke will not be unduly punished and convinces Duke to confess. The

[91] Setting the film "Somewhere on the Mississippi River" also has deep connections to the history of race in America, such as the slave trade and the famous American novel about a black man and a white boy who travel down the river on a raft: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) by Mark Twain.

judge lives up to his reputation, though, and sentences Duke to die by hanging.[92] The term "hangin' judge" evokes the phrase "Judge Lynch," a popular euphemism for lynching (and a phrase previously employed by Ford in the near-lynching scene in *Just Pals*). Duke's situation is legal in performance, but it evokes the injustices of lynching that confronted many black Americans living along the Mississippi River at the end of the nineteenth century and up to the film's release in the 1930s. As the story continues, Doc and Fleety Belle must travel the river in an attempt to raise money for a lawyer and to find [Berton Churchill as] the "New Moses" who can testify to the judge on Duke's behalf. In many ways, the central plot is the quest for a legal intercessor.

Through the scenes of Duke in the jailhouse, Ford further conveys an association between the unjustly sentenced Duke and black Americans. At 37:30, Duke plays the saw for Fleety Belle who is visiting him at the jailhouse window, and the rest of the inmates begin to hum along. The shot of the jail's interior shows two white men in the foreground, one of whom is sewing, and then five black men in the background. All five of the black men face the camera, and two of them have their hands on a fence-like barrier, indicating their desire to be released. Since the audience already knows that Duke was sentenced unfairly, it seems plausible that some of these men are unjustly imprisoned also. The black men in the jail appear to be segregated from the whites with the barrier, but they all hum along to Duke's saw. Ford repeats this shot after cutting back to Duke, and one of the white men in the foreground puts his head in his hands, a visual indication of his despair. Instead of viewing the scenes of black men and white men in the jailhouse

[92] Notably, Ford also does not show Duke's trial. While there is a brief scene with Fleety Belle, Doc, and Duke's lawyer in the courtroom after the trial, neither the judge nor the activity of the trial is ever presented, which further suggests that Duke's sentence of death is closer to a lynching. The audience never actually sees a full demonstration of due process.

as an indication of "the social harmony of an organic society" (Rollins 91), I see these scenes as stressing the shared lack of justice that Duke and the other men, both black and white, have encountered. During the jailhouse wedding of Duke and Fleety Belle, the black prisoners become part of the audience. While the sheriff performs the ceremony, Ford includes a shot of the black inmates, who are singingly softly and standing behind Fleety Belle and Duke, allied with their fellow prisoner. Ford makes it clear that the threat to Duke's life is a threat that many black men must also face.

In addition to Duke, the other protagonists in *Steamboat Round the Bend* are also social outcasts who live on the margins of society. Initially, it seems as though Fleety Belle is the representative of the white underclass, because Doc is angry that Duke is involved with "swamp trash." But when Fleety Belle's father and brothers come to the steamboat to beat her and take her back home, her father admonishes her for attaching herself to "river trash" (*SRTB*). It is no longer clear to the viewer exactly which group of people is the lowest rung on the social ladder. What is clear, though, is that Doc, Duke, and Fleety Belle are poor people who live literally on edges and borders instead of ensconced in town centers. Doc might have been wealthy once, since he loans Fleety Belle a nice dress that his wife wore when she was alive, but he now travels up and down the river as a trickster salesman and showman. It takes everything he and Duke own to buy the *Claremore Queen*, which does not stop other steamboat captains like [Irvin S. Cobb as] Eli from mocking the *Queen*'s poor condition.

The other crew members of the *Claremore Queen* further exemplify the riverboat as a space for social outcasts. After being rebuked by the New Moses and taking a liking to Doc Pearly's "Pocahontas" remedy, the white [Francis Ford as] Efe joins Doc on the

Queen. An elderly drunk with seemingly no place else to go, Efe becomes a valuable member of the steamboat crew. Completing the *Claremore Queen*'s crew is [Stepin Fetchit as] Jonah. When a collection of wax figures is abandoned, Doc decides to take the figures onboard his steamboat and charge people in the towns along the river to see them. Stepin Fetchit's character soon emerges unexpectedly from the waxen whale, prompting Doc to start calling him Jonah (*SRTB*). When a lynch mob descends on the *Claremore Queen* and its crew later in the film, the mob is not specifically targeting the black character Jonah, but Jonah's presence alludes to the racist dimension of most lynch mobs in late nineteenth and early twentieth century America. McBride notes the connection between the *Steamboat* mob and anti-black lynch mobs: "In *Steamboat Round the Bend*, set along the Mississippi River in the Deep South of the 1890s, there's a terrifying and altogether unfunny reaction shot of Stepin Fetchit running from an armed mob of angry whites" (*Searching* 212). Named after Will Rogers's hometown of Claremore, Oklahoma, the *Claremore Queen* is a home of outcasts and underdogs that Ford and the audience root for as they confront challenges from the outside world.

Even the wax figures in the steamboat show recall a history of American race relations and reinforce the southern locale of the river towns. Doc decides that if he wants to make money from the wax show, he needs to change the old-fashioned figures to ones that "folks on the river want to see" (*SRTB*). In a question ringing with the American democratic tradition, he asks "What do I know about a king and queen anyhow?" and decides to change those wax figures to represent Pocahontas and Captain John Smith (*SRTB*), famous early Americans and legends of an inter-racial encounter. Doc determines that King George III will become George Washington, and two prophets will

become Frank and Jesse James, because no one cares about prophets anymore and everyone wants to see the James boys (*SRTB*). McBride writes, "By improvising more popular new personalities for their pantheon figures, Doctor John and Jonah farcically mock the schisms in the national character and demonstrate the resilience of a heterogeneous country whose motto is 'E Pluribus Unum'" (*Searching* 212). Doc casts off the history of the Old World and asserts a new American culture of non-whites, puritans, patriots, and outlaws.

The New World is not without its vices, though, and Jonah plays a significant role in connecting these figurines of American history to racial oppression. After admonishing an unnamed black crewman (played by Matt Abel) for putting a figure of Topsy with Napoleon and not with Uncle Tom, Jonah brings in a wax figure of Ulysses S. Grant. The inclusion of characters from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) references slavery and the abolitionist movement, and Ulysses S. Grant epitomizes the war that freed the slaves. Doc notes the Grant figure but also comments that the steamboat has to go through the town of Vicksburg. Efe agrees that "they haven't forgot" in Vicksburg. He says he knows a fellow who got "run out of Vicksburg just for looking like him" and he points his thumb to the wax figure of Grant (*SRTB*). Apparently, the men of Vicksburg are still haunted by the Civil War; the loyalty to the Confederacy is so strong in Vicksburg that looking like Grant is met with outrage. Jonah stands right beside the figure of Grant, though, and when Efe points to Grant, he could also be pointing to Jonah. In this sly way, Ford suggests that Vicksburg is a southern town that could expel someone who looked like the Union general or could expel a black man simply for being black. Jonah further aligns himself with Grant and the northern army that freed the slaves by saying, "if ya'll

don't want 'im, the uniform just about fits me" (*SRTB*). The history between whites and blacks, North and South, is a history that must be contended with if Doc wants to avoid any violence. Thus, he decides to change the figure of Grant into Robert E. Lee. American history—particularly as it concerns race relations—is inescapable on the *Claremore Queen*.

In Ford's film *Judge Priest*, the intended lynching victim is a black character, and Ford also insists that the black character *does not just happen* to be the target of the lynch mob. Set at the end of the nineteenth century in a small Kentucky town, where the past of the Civil War constantly intrudes on the present, Ford stages the threatened lynching of Jeff Poindexter along a historical timeline that includes both slavery and contemporary racial injustice. The near-lynching sequence begins at 29:35 when [Stepin Fetchit as] Jeff Poindexter leaves [Will Rogers as] Judge Priest at their fishing site so as to retrieve beef liver for bait. In the studio's version, the film then cuts to a cake and ice cream fundraiser in the evening. In Ford's original version, though, Poindexter's errand for the beef liver creates an unfortunate coincidence. The next shot is of Poindexter in the woods at night. He is pursued by baying hounds and arrested by the sheriff and his posse, who think the blood on Poindexter's hands from the beef liver is blood from the crime. The sheriff does not say what the crime is, and it goes unmentioned in the entirety of the script (*Judge Priest*, Will Rogers Museum). Perhaps Ford wanted to avoid a conflict with the censors by not naming the crime that precipitated the lynching. Regardless of the intent, the effect is that the audience is left to fill in the blanks, and an audience in 1934 would probably assume that a black man who is arrested and almost lynched is suspected of raping a white girl. Also, by denying the audience any knowledge of the crime for which

Poindexter is arrested, the focus of the sequence is entirely on the crime that is almost inflicted on *him*.

Judge Priest is deeply immersed in visions of the South and memories of the Civil War. The film's opening note from Irvin S. Cobb, the author upon whose "Judge Priest" short stories the script was based, says "The War between the States was over, but its tragedies and comedies haunted every grown man's mind" (*JP*, WRM). Veterans argue about battles, women belong to the Daughters of the Confederacy club, and the Judge imagines himself as a young soldier with his wife. Ford also uses the same ironic difference he would later use in *The Horse Soldiers*: he features southerners who are loyal to the Confederacy as lynching intercessors.

Judge Priest is a veteran of the Confederate Army, as are several of his friends in the community, such as [Hyman Meyer as] Herman Felzburg, the Jewish owner of a clothing store, [Paul McAllister as] Doc Lake, the town physician, and [Charlie Grapewin as] Jimmy Bagby. When these men hear that a lynch mob is after Pointexter, all three immediately drop what they are doing and spring into action to help Priest. The stage directions in the script indicate the arrival of Priest's friends who intercede with him and his nephew [Tom Brown as] Rome: "At that moment we hear a Rebel yell and pushing their way through the thin edge of the mob come the three old soldiers. The mob quiets with astonishment as the trio marches over and takes its stand beside the Judge and Rome on the jail steps" (*JP*, WRM). These three men are so closely associated with their status as Confederate veterans, that the "Rebel yell" announces their arrival beforehand. Felzburg, Lake, and Bagby point shotguns at the mob, and Bagby is even willing to charge the mob on the Judge's orders (*JP*, WRM). Four men who are strongly connected

to an army that fought for the preservation of slavery are now defending the life of a black man. The irony of the situation reminds the audience of the link between southern history and racial oppression.

Even if Wurtzel and others at Fox studio did not cut the near-lynching sequence because it was too frank an indictment of racial violence, a brief exchange between Judge Priest and Jeff Poindexter nods to this sequence nonetheless. At 1:04:30, Priest begins to organize a dramatic testimony by Reverend Ashby in court the next day. He tells Poindexter that he has the chance to earn the coonskin coat he wants, and asks him if he can play "Dixie" on his harmonica. Poindexter says he'll play "Dixie" for the coonskin coat but adds that he can also play "Marching Through Georgia" (the Union Army's song) (*JP*). Poindexter clearly prefers to play the song of the northern Army—the army that freed the slaves. Priest indignantly yet dryly responds, "'Marchin' Through Georgia?' Yeah, I got you out of one lynching. Catch you playin' 'Marchin' Through Georgia' and I'll *join* the lynchin'" (*JP*). In a joke that recalls the Priest's fierce loyalty to the Confederacy, the irony of the intended lynching intercession remains in the film anyway.

John Ford repeatedly casted controversial actor Stepin Fetchit, a directorial decision that has been widely criticized. Lincoln Perry developed the comic persona Stepin Fetchit in vaudeville shows, and then took this persona to Hollywood, where he eventually became one of its highest paid black performers (Watkins 33, 93). However, his persona depicted the black "coon" stereotype: lazy, unintelligent, and excessively servile (Bogle 8). His roles in Ford's films are not deviations from this persona. As "Smokescreen" in *Salute* (1925), "Jonah" in *Steamboat Round the Bend*, and "Jeff

Poindexter" in *Judge Priest* and *The Sun Shines Bright*, Fetchit uses a "squeaky voice, bent head, and bumbling gestures of the comic darkie" (Gallagher, *John* 287). When Ford includes Fetchit in a film, he inescapably conforms to certain racist traditions in American theater and film. I do not challenge the notion that Fetchit's roles and performances convey deeply damaging black stereotypes, but I think it is also important to recognize that Ford's willingness to cast a black lynching victim in *Judge Priest*—and Fetchit's willingness to play a black lynching victim in *Judge Priest*—is an incisive criticism of specifically *anti-black* violence.[93]

By casting Fetchit as late as 1953, in *The Sun Shines Bright*, Ford seems racially unenlightened, to say the least. However, Ford was determined to again film Fetchit as Jeff Poindexter, and including Fetchit in the remake of *Judge Priest* strengthens the continuity between the two films. According to McBride, "The remake [of Judge Priest] had been on Ford's agenda ever since Fox cut the anti-lynching scene from the original film," and "Ford's loyalty to [Stepin Fetchit] was probably one of the reasons he couldn't convince Darryl Zanuck to let him remake *Judge Priest* in 1945, for Zanuck didn't even want Stepin Fetchit to appear in *My Darling Clementine*" (*Searching* 521). 20th Century Fox producer Darryl F. Zanuck thought that Stepin Fetchit's acting was too racially

[93] Another critical perspective maintains that Fetchit's work with Ford ought not to be entirely dismissed as a "coon" stereotype lacking in any complexity. Referring to *Judge Priest*, Gallagher writes, "No doubt that Ford captures the spirit of a racist community—Priest uses Jeff to fetch croquet balls, blacks sit in gutters, are called 'boy,' and treated like pets," but the film's advocacy of tolerance, and Priest's interactions with both Poindexter and [Hattie McDaniels as] Aunt Dilsey resist simplistic characterizations of racism (*John* 103). In regards to *The Sun Shines Bright*, Gallagher says that something is lost when a viewer "sees Stepin Fetchit's character as merely a comic darkie and misses the man" (*John* 287). Peter C. Rollins makes a similar case for Fetchit's role in *Steamboat Round the Bend*, arguing that "the attentive observer will note that Fetchit is actually satirizing Uncle Tomism by exaggerating it," and notes that Fetchit improvised many lines that referenced black history (Rollins 89).

insensitive.[94] Ford made *The Sun Shines Bright* through the production company that he and Merian C. Cooper co-owned—Argosy Pictures—and with Republic Pictures studio, and thus avoided this conflict with Zanuck. Fetchit's presence in the remake of *Judge Priest* seems to have been quite important to Ford, and I propose that this was at least partly because Ford hoped to build an anti-lynching correlation between the two films, despite the absence of the near-lynching sequence in the studio's version of *Judge Priest*.

Ford illustrates this correlation in an early scene in *The Sun Shines Bright* that directly references the exchange in *Judge Priest* between Priest and Poindexter regarding the anthems of the Civil War—and Priest's mention of the (excised) threatened lynching. When the black character [Elzie Emanuel as] Ulysses S. Woodford (named for Ulysses S. Grant) begins to play "Marching through Georgia" in the film's opening courtroom scene, Fetchit's Poindexter promptly urges him to play "Dixie" instead, so as to win the approval of [Charles Winninger as] Judge Priest, a Confederate veteran. It is as if Poindexter learned how to best appease and manipulate Priest in the first film and is now passing that information along to other black characters in the remake. Ford tells the story of Judge Priest's intercession on behalf of a young black man for the second time in *Sun Shines Bright*, but it is the first time that audiences actually see it. With Fetchit playing Jeff Poindexter in both films, however, Ford can imply that an anti-lynching message was there all along.[95]

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[94] The John Ford Papers include an InterOffice Correspondence from Zanuck to Ford on February 5, 1946 in which Zanuck writes that to put Stepin Fetchit on screen now would, he fears, "raise terrible objections from the colored people."

[95] Fetchit is the only actor who plays the same character in both films. The only other actor who worked on both *Judge Priest* and *The Sun Shines Bright* was Francis Ford, John's brother. He played juror #12 in *Judge Priest* and "Feeney" in *Sun Shines Bright*.

Ford does not repeat *Judge Priest* exactly, though, because Jeff Poindexter is not the black character who is threatened with a lynching in *The Sun Shines Bright*. While the irony of a Confederate veteran, Judge Priest, acting as a lynching intercessor is again present in this film, Ford also presents lynching explicitly and dramatically as a form of anti-black terrorism. U.S. Grant Woodford is wrongfully accused of sexually assaulting a young white woman, because he—like Poindexter in *Judge Priest*—is identified as the culprit by bloodhounds.[96] Before the sheriff takes Woodford to the jail, Priest says to him, "Boy, you'll have a fair trial. Race, creed, or color, justice will be done in my courtroom" (*SSB*). With Priest's statement, Ford directly connects Woodford's arrest to racial bias.

The next day, while the lynch mob is approaching the jail, Ford shows a sequence of shots of black people in the community visually responding to the encroaching mob. Without any dialogue, Ford evokes the alarming presence of the mob through footsteps, shadows, gunshots, and the terrified responses of black characters. The sequence begins with a medium shot of a black man holding his hat and staring slightly to the left of the camera, while a black woman, presumably his wife stands in a doorway to the right and in the background of the shot. The next cut is to a medium shot of that same woman, who stares intently in the same direction as her husband. The following shot is of a black woman holding a basket of laundry and crossing in front of the camera from the left side,

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Ford also saw Fetchit as an old friend with whom he wanted to work: "Ford saw Fetchit and Muse as old companions on the back lot, but civil rights spokesmen saw them as shameful symbols of a discredited past" (Sarris 147).

[96] Again, the word "rape" is not used in the film, but the crime of rape is heavily alluded to. When the mob storms the jail that houses U.S., one of the men says he does not want to have a trial that will "drag [his] little girl's name through the mud in open court" (*TSSB*). The notion that a trial would somehow be shameful for female victim of this crime suggests that the crime is sexual assault. The girl, named Mindy, appears later in the film when her father and brother bring her to town after to identify Buck Ramsey as the attacker.

but she stops abruptly and looks over her shoulder to the same off-screen space to the left of the frame. Her mouth slowly opens in fear and realization. The camera cuts again to a low-angle shot of a black woman holding a baby and walking up to the front, left side of the frame, also looking off-screen. Then, the next shot is of a black man with an earring leaning out of his window and looking in the same direction as the preceding black characters. Ford introduces the viewer to each of these members of the community, and by giving these men and women their own shots, with body language and facial expression clearly visible, he stresses their individual humanity. By repeating the direction in which they all stare, though, he also unites them in a common fear of the lynch mob.

As Ford cuts to shots of different black residents in this town, he also includes a low, percussionist, non-diegetic music that builds up the intensity and drama of the sequence, along with the source sound of marching footsteps. He returns to the first black character holding a hat that he showed at the beginning of the sequence, and this man hears a gunshot, turns, and runs into his house, gesturing for his wife to go in, too. Ford then presents the other men and women in the same order as before, showing each person responding to the sound of gunshots by running away from the camera and to the right. The woman holding the laundry basket drops it and sprints to her house in the right background of the shot. The woman holding the baby screams in horror and runs back in the same direction, protectively huddling over her baby. The black man with the earring pulls himself back inside the window and slams it shut. The next shot is of a new, young, black woman, who looks directly at the camera through the window of her house and then quickly pulls down the shade, blocking herself from view. This sequence directly

confronts lynching as a form of racial intimidation. The men and women in these shots know that a lynch mob means that a black person will be killed, and that any black person is a potential target. By filming this sequence of frightened responses, Ford shows, without any words, that lynching in the United States is inextricable from anti-black terror and oppression. The last shot of the young woman looking directly at the camera is an indictment of the audience: she is scared of and hiding from them.

After the shot of the young woman closing her shade from the inside, the film cuts to Jeff Poindexter, who is shaking in fear and looking in the same direction as the previous black characters. Instead of running into a house, though, Poindexter turns and runs away from the camera, back into the center depth of the shot. Poindexter is not the intended lynching victim in this film, but his fearful performance shows that he still feels the danger of the racist mob. The next shot looks at Woodford through the window of the jail cell. He clutches the window bars and tears run down his panicked face, because he knows that the mob is coming after him. Then, a shot shows the white Sheriff Bynum standing on the jailhouse steps, realizing what the sounds of the mob mean, and running away off screen. The white man whose job is to intercede on Woodford's behalf forsakes his post. Poindexter, though, was apparently running to the judge's house, because the following shot shows him frantically entering the judge's bedroom, telling him that men who have "gone plumb lynchin'" are approaching Woodford in the jail (*SSB*). As the judge moves to a dresser drawer, Poindexter shakily insists that the judge needs to "telegraph the governor and get soldiers down here, a whole lot of soldiers," but the judge takes a revolver from his dresser drawer and grimly says, "We ain't got time for soldiers" (*SSB*). Fetchit's character, Jeff Poindexter, summons the judge, and his act of

seeking out someone with legal authority makes the white character's intercession possible.

U. S. Woodford's uncle, [Ernest Whitman as] Uncle Pleas, also plays an important role in the near-lynching sequence. Uncle Pleas and his nephew were introduced to the audience in the film's opening courthouse scene. Now, with a lynch mob approaching and Judge Priest preparing to confront the mob on the jailhouse porch, Uncle Pleas tells Priest that he would like to stay on the porch with him, and Priest solemnly agrees. As Priest stands centered and in front of the jail, Uncle Pleas sits in front of the jailhouse's left window and holds U. S.'s hand through the bars (*SSB*). On the one hand, Uncle Pleas's intercession is not as empowered as Priest's. The paternalistic practice of referring to black men as "Uncle" already places Uncle Pleas in a degraded position, and, unlike Priest, he does not stand upright and face the mob head-on. As Ellen Belton writes in "Ceremonies of Innocence: Two Films by John Ford" (2006), "The chivalrous and paternalistic tradition to which Judge Priest subscribes does not teach that men and women are intrinsically equal, if 'equal' means 'alike,' but it does teach that they are entitled to equal protection not merely under the law of the state but under the moral law of humanity" (21). Uncle Pleas's stance is not one of authority, but his sacrifice of placing himself in harm's way to defend his nephew—and holding his hand through the bars—is a brave act and a poignant moment in the film. In *The Sun Shines Bright*, Ford shows that lynchings affect not just the individuals who are murdered but families, friends, and communities. Lynching is clearly a racialized threat in this film, and black characters play a role in resisting it, as the white intercession is prompted by Jeff Poindexter and supported by Uncle Pleas.

The choice of U. S. Woodford's name also locates lynching in a particular, national history. While U. S.'s initials officially stand for Ulysses S., the constant referral to him as U. S. also suggests the United States. When Judge Priest and Uncle Pleas intercede on behalf of U. S., they are seemingly interceding on behalf of the entire nation, defending it from its own racism. Ford makes this connection especially clear in the film's final sequence, when different groups march past Priest's house so as to honor him and his reelection. The "boys from the Tornado district," who Judge Priest prevented from lynching U. S., voted in favor of Priest, and now march in front of his house carrying a banner that reads, "He saved US from ourselves" (*SSB*). Capitalizing the "US" suggests that the threatened lynching victim was not the only person "saved" by Priest's intercessor, but it also highlights reinforces the idea of a larger "us," a United States. While this is a highly optimistic portrayal of a reformed lynch mob, it also reinforces the idea that lynching is part of a specifically American problem.

In an interview with Peter Bogdanovich in 1965, director Fritz Lang stated, "If a picture is to be made about lynching, one should have a white woman raped by a coloured man, and with this as a basis, still prove that lynching is wrong" (32). Lang contrasted that scenario with the scenario of his own film, *Fury*, in which a lynch mob burns down a jail to murder a white man named Joe Wilson, who is falsely accused of kidnapping. Lang recognized that his film evades two major issues regarding lynching in the United States: first, lynching is primarily a racist act done to black men; and second, it is against the law even if the lynched person is guilty of the crime. None of Ford's films answer Lang's call for a film with an anti-lynching message built around a black

character who is *guilty* of raping a white woman, because all of Ford's near-lynching victims are innocent of the crimes of which they are accused.

However, Ford moves a little closer to Lang's ideological standard by portraying black men in the South who are threatened with lynchings and by positioning these near-lynching scenes in the context of historical racial oppression in the United States. However, Ford also proceeds to back away from his indictment of white Americans, because he features white intercessors who never directly address racism itself and advocate for a vague (and not specifically racial) vision of American tolerance. Gilberto Perez, in his article on rhetoric and comedy in *Judge Priest*, observes the limits of Ford's message: "If *Judge Priest* is an apology for a racist society, it's an apology that doesn't dissemble the racism of the society. It puts its finger on the problem even though it leaves it unsolved" (47). *Judge Priest* and the other Ford films with threatened lynchings challenge the viewer to recognize lynching as a contemporary form of anti-black violence (of which the United States has a long history), but the white intercessors ultimately do not hold the would-be-lynchers accountable to their prejudices.

IV. *Ford's Intercessors*

In *Just Pals*, the sheriff and the young boy who intercede on behalf of Bim simply inform the mob that a different man is guilty, and the mob disperses (*Just Pals*). In *The Horse Soldiers*, Hannah Hunter yells at the two deserters who plan on lynching Sheriff Goodbody and yells at Colonel Marlowe for siding with the deserters, but she soon learns that Marlowe planned to spare Goodbody all along (*Horse Soldiers*). In the first and final Ford films with threatened lynchings, the intercessors do not need to exert much (or any)

rhetorical persuasion to stop the murders. While these two films help illuminate Ford's patterns of racial association, the moment of physical and rhetorical intercession is quite short and simplistic, and so the films are less consequential for understanding the intercessors' significance. In *Judge Priest*, *Steamboat Round the Bend*, *Young Mr. Lincoln*, and *The Sun Shines Bright*, though, the lynching intercessors do not immediately convince the mobs to abort their plans. In the subsequent exchanges between intercessors and mobs, Ford's intercessors appeal to abstract notions of freedom, and they shame the mob for moral hypocrisy and thinking as a group instead of as individuals. What the intercessors do not do is directly address lynching as racially-motivated or try to sway the mob members toward a different social perspective. The critique of white supremacy that Ford evokes is seemingly absolved by heroic white men who know and can empathize with the individual white lynchers.

In the excised near-lynching scene in *Judge Priest*, Priest intercedes on behalf of Jeff Poindexter. His foremost rhetorical strategy is to personally address the men in the mob and reveal their individual, ethical shortcomings. When a man in the mob calls the judge "Old High and Mighty" and orders him to move if he does not want to get hurt, the judge retorts, "Howdy, Buck. Last time I seen you, you was headin' for the chain-gang – for beatin' up your wife" (*JP*, WRM). Priest points out that Buck is a wife-beater and violent criminal himself; it is hypocritical of Buck to decide to murder someone else for supposedly breaking the law. Priest speaks to Buck directly and calls him by his name—he does not treat the mob as a unified group but as temporarily wayward individuals. Priest calls two other mob members by their full names and challenges their present personas as moral defenders. In a joke that almost repeats verbatim the joke that Charles

Chesnutt uses in his short story "The Sheriff's Children" (1889), the judge says it is the first time he has ever seen Tom Haskins break into the jail, since he is always breaking out of the jail instead.[97] Following a response of laughter, a different mob member threatens to show the Judge "who's runnin' things tonight" (*JP*, WRM). Priest acknowledges the voice as belonging to Chuck Henry and then asks if Henry is "Still nursin' that buckshot wound you got when a certain unnamed gentleman come home unexpected-like?" (*JP*, WRM). In mocking the men for their illegal and immoral behavior, Priest shows the mob members that they do not have the authority to judge others and punish them accordingly.

Even as individual mob members grow more threatening towards Judge Priest, he maintains his tactic of humorously exposing the righteous mob as a collection of errant individuals. Other men threaten Priest or challenge him, and he both identifies the sources of the threats and recalls that man's tendency to drink, or this man's history of robbery (*JP*, WRM). The last person Priest singles out is a younger man, and Priest's tone shifts to stern and somber. He sees and calls to a young man named Willy Carter, scolds the boy, and tells him he's in "bad company." Priest orders Willy to go home, or Priest will tell his "ma." The stage directions say that, "A young fellow of eighteen slides out of the mob and cuts out for home with a sheepish look" (*JP*, WRM). Priest plays the part of a disappointed father, and thus, portrays himself as part of the same family as the men in the mob. Soon after Willy walks away, the judge succeeds in prompting the rest of the mob to disperse.

Joseph McBride writes that, "For Ford, Rogers plays an insider who is also an outsider, a leader who acts for society in ways it cannot see, a mediator who eventually

[97] See Chapter One, pp. 9.

helps a recalcitrant populace to a better understanding of its basic values" (*Searching* 208). In Roger's role as Judge Priest, he is certainly an insider. He knows each one of the would-be-lynchers, he knows their personal histories, and he does not challenge the borders of "us" and "them." Instead, he teases them, makes them laugh, and directly disputes Buck's mockery of him as "Old High and Mighty." Priest speaks in casual, colloquial language, with phrasing such as "you was" and "unexpected-like," implying his camaraderie with the men. He does not appeal to the mob using his knowledge of the law or his professional authority as a judge. He does not assume "the position of a king or lord: his authority has the democratic cast of a man of the people" (Perez 42). He is one of them, and he does not question the racial prejudice that prompts a group of white men to target a black man for murder. In likening himself to the men in the mob and letting their racist beliefs go unchallenged, Priest recuperates the mob members as men in his community. He scolds their hypocritical act, but he does not dismiss them from social acceptance. With Priest's success at stopping the lynching, the white men in the mob cease to be racist aggressors and return to being "Buck" and "Chuck Henry."

The character Abraham Lincoln, in *Young Mr. Lincoln*, uses some of the same interceding tactics as the 1934 Judge Priest. Lincoln's stand against the lynch mob does not have any comic overtones, but the young and tall [Henry Fonda as] Lincoln presents himself as similar to the men in the mob, as one of them, because he is just as willing to fight physically as they are. After pushing his way to the front of the mob, blocking the door with his body, and kicking back the tree trunk with which the men are trying to break down the door, Lincoln announces that he is willing to "lick any man here" (*Young Mr. Lincoln*). A large man argues that Lincoln cannot best him in a fight, so Lincoln

addresses him personally and says that "Big Buck" can go ahead and try to fight him (*YML*).[98] Like Priest, Lincoln calls out men by their names and undermines their individual authority, which is effective against "Big Buck" who wavers under the attention and backs away. As Lincoln attempts to rhetorically dissuade the mob, he does not expose their hypocrisy—as Judge Priest did—but he does speak to them as friends and asks them to consider *his* needs, the needs of an insider, before they lynch the Clay brothers.

He first beseeches the men in the mob to consider his situation as a new lawyer. He says that the Clay brothers were to be his first clients, and that they might deserve to hang. He adds, self-deprecatingly, that since he is defending them, they probably will hang (*YML*). The young Lincoln appeals to the mob to understand his position, and he does not place himself on a higher intellectual or moral plane, as he concedes that he will probably lose his case anyway. He also does not express concern for the Clay brothers or suggest a moral alliance with them, but instead acknowledges the possibility of their guilt and the likelihood that they will die. He then tells the men that all he is asking for is a little "legal pomp and show" (*YML*). Even though he is a representative of the legal system, he does not try to talk to the men about the importance of due process or a fair defense; instead, he is willing to undermine the law and act as if it is only a performance, so that the men will consider his request and grant him a personal favor. He never suggests that the men are wrongly motivated by prejudice against the Clay brothers.

As Lincoln continues to treat the mob as personal friends, he assures them that he knows they would act better if they were not in group. In a calm and controlled

[98] By again using the name "Buck" for a leader of the lynch mob, Ford calls attention to the affiliation of these near-lynching scenes in different films and portrays the physical danger that the intercessors risk, as "Buck" is traditionally a nickname for men who are big and strong.

performance by Fonda, Lincoln addresses the mob with the pronoun "we": "We seem to lose our head in times like this. We do things together that we'd be mighty ashamed to do by ourselves" (*YML*), and further asserts himself in a community with the mob. After casting his eyes around the group, his gaze settles on a single man, and he publicly pronounces the virtues of this man, suggesting that he is acting out of character by being part of this mob:

> For instance, take Jeremiah Carter yonder. There isn't a more decent, God fearing man in Springfield, Illinois than Jeremiah Carter. And I wouldn't be surprised if when he goes home he takes down a certain book and looks into it. Maybe he happens upon these words, 'Blessed are the merciful for they shall attain mercy.' (*YML*)

Lincoln builds on his knowledge of a particular mob member and appeals to both Carter and the other men through shared Biblical language. He suggests that this man is just one example, but every one of the mob members could be a "Jeremiah Carter": a good citizen who has only temporarily strayed from his moral compass. Lincoln's final words to the lynch mob are, "That's all I got to say, friends. Good night" (*YML*), and the mob slowly walks away. In his stand against the lynch mob, Lincoln does not speak to the would-be-lynchers about the virtues of the Clay brothers but about the virtues of the lynchers themselves. He equates himself with the mob, and by preventing the lynching, he and the mob are both redeemed.

When Ford returns to the character of Judge Priest in his 1953 film *The Sun Shines Bright*, the 1953 Priest—like the 1934 one—singles out individual members of the mob, recalls personal knowledge of them, and presents himself as part of their

community during his lynching intercession. Priest begins his rhetorical appeals to the mob by saying, "Boys, you're all my friends. I eat vittles in your home when I'm campaigning" (*SSB*). He attests to their friendly intimacy, and he draws upon his advanced age to speak to them as "Boys," as a father or grandfather would. When a large man who stands at the front of the mob says "We come after that boy, judge. We don't mean to do you no harm," Priest replies, "I know you don't, Buck, I know you don't" (*SSB*), while drawing a line in the sand with a stick.[99] He assures an individual in the crowd that he knows them and understands them completely.

Priest's most personal appeal occurs in his exchange with the father and brother of the girl who has been assaulted. The father calls out that he does not want his daughter's name to be "dragged through the mud" in a trial, and Priest answers, "It's being dragged more this way, Luke. You can see that, can't you?" (*SSB*). Priest interacts with Luke directly and suggests that the two of them already see things from the same perspective. Then Priest asks the girl's brother, standing right beside her father, "Is that the Greg Jerguson that Teddy Roosevelt gave you?" When the brother proudly responds that it is, Priest continues: "And you used it at San Juan Hill defending liberty. Now you want to destroy it" (*SSB*). Priest shows that he knows the personal histories of these men and can even recognize the guns that they own. Furthermore, referencing the brother's participation in the Spanish-American War recalls a proud moment for the brother, and suggests that he would mar this heroic act by following through on the lynching.[100] He is

[99] Re-using the name "Buck" for a would-be-lyncher in *The Sun Shines Bright* both continues the association between *Judge Priest*, *Young Mr. Lincoln*, and *The Sun Shines Bright*, and highlights *The Sun Shines Bright* as a remake of the near-lynching scene that was excised from *Judge Priest*.

[100] Notably, the battle of San Juan Hill led by Theodore Roosevelt is also famous for the participation of black soldiers. This reference to black heroism covertly contests the anti-black prejudice of the mob.

sympathetic to the father and brother, insisting that they are about to make a mistake that is beneath their true integrity.

Priest does not suggest that liberty is imperiled by the men's racism but by their mistaken decision to trust a bloodhound's nose. He refers to the line he made in the sand: "I don't want to threaten you with this dead line. I just want to reason with you. That boy ain't been identified yet. All you've got is the word of a fool dog. It's been my experience that the bloodhound is the foolishest dog there is" (*SSB*). Judge Priest does not speak in sophisticated language, using the terms "aint" and "foolishest," and he does not present his own legal authority. Instead, he offers his knowledge of the bloodhound, a knowledge likely gained through his job but available to every southern man, regardless of education or profession. Priest tells the men that *the dog* is a fool, while the foolishness of their racist violence remains unaddressed.

Priest's rhetoric is not completely convincing to the mob, though, and Priest must show his willingness to mirror the mob's violence with his own. As the mob begins to push forward, Priest yells, "I'll kill the first man that crosses that line! I don't know which one of you is gonna kill me! But I know which one of you I'm gonna kill!" (*SSB*) and points his gun at Buck Ramsey. The men insist that they do not want to kill Priest, and with his response he further identifies himself with the would-be-lynchers: "I don't wanna kill anybody. But so help me, God, I'll kill the first man that crosses that line. Even if it was my own brother I'd kill him" (*SSB*). Priest clearly conveys to the mob that his anti-lynching stance is not a stance against who they are; he acts toward the mob members the same way he would act toward a member of his family. He does not condemn the men's violence—he is capable of violence himself—and he does not indict

the men's prejudices—he simply thinks they are following the bad advice of a "fool dog." Judge Priest prevents another anti-black lynching in a Ford-directed film, and Priest again emerges as heroic white man who preserves his own community as the American democratic ideal.

The lynching intercession scene in *Steamboat Round the Bend* is the closest that Ford's films get to a direct denunciation of racism and its role in lynching. While traveling on the river, the *Claremore Queen* passes Captain Eli and the *Pride of Paducah*.[101] Eli warns Doc that the people of Salt Creek lynched a "hoochie koochie" show last week, but Doc insists on going to Salt Creek anyway. Jonah, Doc, and Fleety Belle prepare for a crowd to attend the wax museum show, but a lynch mob shows up instead. Holding pitchforks and lanterns and axes, the men in the mob threaten to chop up the boat, burn up the pieces, and tar Fleety Belle. A fearful Jonah runs back inside the boat and tells the other black crewman and Efe, the old white drunk, about the lynch mob. As Doc attempts to shield Fleety Belle and the boat from the slew of axes, the film cuts to Efe looking at the wax figure with the placard "Jesse James 1847-1882 Famous Kansas Outlaw" and widening his eyes as he thinks of an idea. He and the third crewman roll the wax figures up to the balcony overlooking the mob and fire a shot from the pistol in the hand of the Jesse James figure. Efe says, "Stand back there!" and the unnamed black crewman says, "Put up your hands!" Jonah's voice soon threatens, "I'm gonna shoot!" (*SRTB*). In this film, Ford is playful with the idea of lynching intercession, and, though the situation seems almost fantastical, the scene also undermines white supremacy. The interceding authorities are two wax figures that are ventriloquized by

[101] Just as Claremore, Oklahoma was Will Rogers's hometown, Paducah, Kentucky was Irvin S. Cobb's hometown.

two black men and a drunken white man. As long as Efe, Jonah, and the other crewman pretend to be these notorious white outlaws, their objections are obeyed, but the film audience knows that the notoriety and even the whiteness is a performance. The men from Salt Creek are not specifically targeting a black man, but with this intercession, Ford comically destabilizes the authority of white violence.

McBride describes the lynching intercession in *Steamboat Round the Bend* as "an ingenious plot that manages to make the mob seem both venal and ridiculous." He continues to say that, "This film goes so far in its satirical take on racial and historical themes that it sometimes verges on surrealism" (*Searching* 212). The intercession of the "James Boys" stalls the lynch mob and gives Doc the opportunity to convince the mob members that his show is "educational" and completely worth the price of admission. As Doc leads the mob on a tour of the museum, extending the rhetoric of intercession into his presentation of the show, Ford intercuts shots of Jonah and Fleety Belle manipulating the museum's "life-like" elements, such as a stream of water from the waxen whale's blowhole. While the mob men believe the historical wax figures are real bodies, the film audience is aware of the charade. One mob member even goes so far as to request a lock of "George Washington's hair" to take home to his wife (*SRTB*). The show's grand finale is specifically designed to appeal to a crowd of former Confederates. When the figure of Robert E. Lee is unveiled on the stage, Fleety Belle pulls a rope that brings the figure's hand up in a salute. Meanwhile, Jonah sings "Dixie" and turns a crank that moves black puppets playing instruments. The men from the mob immediately raise their hands in a salute and stand at attention to Lee, and their faces show solemn and tearful expressions. By showing the audience that the show is not real but orchestrated by Doc, a "swamp

girl," and a black man, Ford undermines the southern history of racist oppression to which these men continue to cling. The steamboat crew undercuts the morally righteous lynch mob, but, still, the interceding rhetoric does not explicitly contend with individual or institutional prejudices. Ford's lynching intercessors repeatedly infer a challenge to white supremacy (some more strongly than others), but those inferences never produce a direct address of America's historic and present-day failures.

V. *The Fordian Hero*

John Ford directorial vision surfaces in the patterns that link distinct Ford films, but he also had to create these visions within the film industry. The racial injustice of lynching might not have been a popular topic with Hollywood studios in the first half of the twentieth century, but the trope of the white intercessor was very conducive to classic Hollywood cinema. For starters, as a heroic individual, the intercessor cooperates fully with the star system. Shooting a scene in which an individual stands between a mob and an intended victim generates a focus on that one, oppositional character (similar to the way that a close-up shot directs focus on a single character). The intercessor's repeated addresses to the mob also build on the audience's identification with that singular character. The moral contrast between the mob and the intercessor emerges as a visual contrast with the mob on one side and the intercessor on the other. The lynching intercessor who stands between different factions creates a visual representation of the brave, iconic individual.

When Ford cast specific actors to play lynching intercessors, he utilized and contributed to their star personas as admirable, leading men. Gaylyn Studlar writes that,

understanding films as "texts that impact each other and become an intertextual chain" means that a "star's appearance is always being renegotiated by his audience in light of earlier films" (6). As the title character in Ford's 1933 film *Doctor Bull*, Will Rogers plays a small-town doctor who fights the prejudices of his community. Casting Rogers as the lynching intercessor in *Judge Priest* utilizes and perpetuates the audience's acceptance of Rogers as a moral leader in small-town America. Ford's heroic lynching intercessors draw upon the expectations of the star system and satisfyingly reinforce them.

A lynching intercessor that successfully stops a lynching also meets the requirements of censorship codes against cinematic violence. Since a graphic depiction of a lynching was apt to come under review by the Production Code Administration (PCA, from here on), Ford's scenes of near-lynchings allow his film to evoke this particular form of violence without actually portraying the violence coming to fruition. The Production Code was officially adopted by the movie industry in 1930, but regional censorship boards exerted considerable influence even before then. The nation's first movie censorship ordinance was passed in the city of Chicago in 1907, and it prohibited the showing of any film that was "'immoral or obscene, or portrays depravity, criminality or lack of virtue…or tends to produce a breach of the peace of riots, or purports to represent any *hanging, lynching or burning of a human being*'" (emphasis added, qtd. in Prince 13).[102] Even before the official code came into effect, filmmakers were pressured to exclude lynching from their films, and the intercessor's success at thwarting a lynching—such as in *Just Pals*—preempts the possible demands of local censors.

[102] Prince writes that even if the enforcement of local restrictions and ordinances is difficult to ascertain, the "*symbolic* dimension" of the threat of censorship was great (19).

With the adoption of the Production Code in 1930, the extremity of lynching's violence was officially a matter of concern for filmmakers who wished to portray this aspect of American life on screen. In the code's section on "Crimes Against the Law," it decrees that "Brutal killings are not to be presented in detail" (qtd. in Prince 294). By repeatedly telling stories in which lynchings are avoided, Ford evades the disapproval of the PCA and the necessity of conforming shot choices to the code's prescriptions. Stephen Prince mentions that the PCA also restricted attention to the victims of violence, so displays of "pain or anguish" were excluded from the screen. Thus, filmmakers made shot choices that conveyed the death of the victims without actually revealing the dead bodies. Prince explains the repercussions of these exclusions:

> Possibly the censors and the PCA felt that expressions of pain would be disturbing for viewers and would be in poor taste and therefore should be suppressed. If so, they were acting with the best of intentions, but they wound up helping to instigate a trend toward whitewashed violence—toward a screen violence that provided pleasant entertainment rather than an honest depiction of the consequences of fights and shootings. (27)

Of course, in the context of lynching, Prince's use of the term "whitewash" takes on a second meaning. Ford's lynching intercessors prevent any characters from becoming lynching victims, which again precludes any necessary negotiation with the code. However, by always portraying lynch mobs that are stopped, Ford shields his audience from the violence that lynch mobs can actually inflict, particularly on black American individuals and communities. The focus on the intercessor directs attention away from the characters who are almost murdered.

As an individual character that reconciles a larger social conflict, Ford's lynching intercessor works in tandem with classical Hollywood narrative. Amy Wood writes that classical Hollywood films "always interpreted and resolved larger social problems through individuals, that is, through the actions and reactions of the central characters with whom viewers were to identity" (226). Ford's lynching intercessors stop the mob violence from occurring, and their rhetoric seemingly absorbs the racial tension into American individuality. The most exemplary of those individuals is the intercessor himself, both a protagonist and a representative of the national promise. Ford's scenes of near-lynchings both complicate and conform to Robert Ray's contention, in *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema* (1985), that, "American history's major crises appear in American movies only as 'structuring absences'—the unspoken subjects that have determined an aesthetic form designed precisely to conceal these crises' real implications" (31). The racism of lynching certainly remains "unspoken" in Ford's films, but he displays those unspoken, racist implications lucidly enough that traces of them resist the intercessor's concealment. The ideal of American tolerance remains intact, but history is still murky territory.

Ultimately, Ford "occupies a special status as both an American artist and an American consciousness" (Girgus 19), and I think his lynching intercessors illustrate American consciousness as rife with moral contradictions. Sarris writes that Ford's narratives contain "existential escape hatches" as opposed to the "determinist designs" of directors like Fritz Lang (41), and this opposition is evident in the two directors' different renditions of lynching scenes. In Lang's film *Fury*, an angry mob descends on the jail that houses [Spencer Tracy as] Joe Wilson, who is suspected of kidnapping. Even though

the sheriff and three deputies uphold their duties and attempt to keep the mob at bay, the mob succeeds in setting fire to the jail. The intercessors in Lang's film do not try to rhetorically convince the mob not to lynch, but they do defend the jail with guns. The mob simply overwhelms them; it is a seemingly unstoppable force. Lang expressed a deterministic view of mob behavior in an interview with Bogdanovich: "Masses lose conscience when they are together; they become a mob and they have no personal conscience any more. Things that happen during a riot are the expression of a mass feeling, they are no longer the feeling of individuals" (31). From Lang's perspective, individuals cease to be individuals who can be reasoned with or persuaded to act differently when they come together in a "mass feeling."

The "existential escape hatches" of Ford's narratives, conversely, insist that mobs and intercessors are really just individuals at war with themselves. The lynching intercessor is an opportunity to show these characters at the moment that they stand between different choices. Sarris writes about Ford that, "His art comes to life most vibrantly at the very moment when the plot pauses or even stops entirely" (60), and the intercessor creates this pause, this possibly transformative moment in a jailhouse doorway. Gallagher notes, "As always, it is the Fordian hero who mediates community tensions, searching for a middle way between chaos and repression" (*John* 287). The middle way does not permit his intercessors to admonish the mob but merely to redirect them. The intercessor stands against lynching but does not identify with the one who might be lynched. Joseph McBride and Michael Wilmington discuss Ford's authorial vision:

> The thread which unites Ford's work is what he described as the "tragic moment", the crisis of an individual conscience which is also, by extension, the turning point of the society it represents: "It enables me to make individuals aware of each other by bringing them face-to-face with something bigger than themselves. The situation, the tragic moment, forces men to reveal themselves, and to become aware of what they truly are. The device allows me to find the exceptional in the commonplace." (21)

Ford's intercessors must face a historical legacy and perpetuation of racism, and they ultimately decide that it is too big for them. The moment of lynching intercession truly is a "tragic moment," but Ford seems to have preferred the exceptional tragedy to the ordinary mastery.

CHAPTER 3

Sewing at the Jailhouse Door: The Lynching Intercessor in the Works of William Faulkner

I. *Women and Lynching*

In the previous chapter, I mentioned the film *The Horse Soldiers* (1959), directed by John Ford. In this film, a southern white woman named [Constance Towers as] Hannah Hunter removes a noose from the neck of acting sheriff [Russell Simpson as] Henry Goodbody. Angrily and indignantly throwing the noose off Goodbody's neck, Hunter is the only female character that plays the part of a lynching intercessor in Ford's films. Hunter's intercession, though, is a quick moment in the narrative that includes none of the poignant speechmaking of young Lincoln or the clever banter of Judge Priest. In the films directed by Ford, lynching intercession is almost completely the enterprise of white men. A different film, though, released in 1949 and directed by Clarence Brown, portrays an elderly white woman who sits and sews in a jailhouse porch, placing herself between the large lynch mob that waits in the town square and the black man suspected of murder that waits in one of the jail cells. This film is called *Intruder in the Dust*, and it is based on the novel of the same title, written by William Faulkner and published in 1948. In this chapter, I will explore the lynching intercessors in the fiction of prominent southern novelist Faulkner and the cinematic adaptation of *Intruder in the Dust*. Faulkner is ultimately distinct from the other authors in this project, who repeatedly imagine the prevention of anti-black violence as the domain of men. In *Go Down, Moses* and *Intruder in the Dust*, Faulkner presents women as the apt embodiments of lynching intercession.

Charles W. Chesnutt and Thomas Dixon, Jr. portray lynching intercession as a specifically masculine endeavor in their works. Both authors depict the historical connection between what Wilbur J. Cash termed in 1941 the "rape complex" of the South and the lynching of black men.[103] Deborah Barker explains that the story of the Southern rape complex assumes a black male rapist and a white female victim in which "the victim is transformed into a symbol of a threatened white southern culture while the black male symbolizes the threat" (142).[104] Lynching black men is thus cast as a justified response—an understandable white counter—to the violation of white women, and assaults on white women are purported to be the cause of most lynchings.[105] Chesnutt strives to challenge the rape complex in *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901) by showing white characters who manipulate this mythology to instigate anti-black violence, such as lynching and rioting. Dixon takes a different approach in both *The Leopard's Spots* and *The Flaming Sword*, and he strives to affirm the rape complex with the lynching and immolation of the black characters Dick and Dan, respectively. He frames these mob murders as the inevitable and unstoppable responses to assaults on white women and girls.[106]

White women and girls are the victims and instigators of racial violence in Chesnutt's and Dixon's stories, but—as in the majority of John Ford films with attempted

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[103] Cash coined this term in his historical study *The Mind of the South* (1941).

[104] Barker elaborates on the far-reaching implications of the rape complex: "Not only is the logic of the Southern rape complex integrally linked to the lynching of innocent black men, its distorting lens has also made white female sexuality socially unacceptable and rendered sexual violence against black women socially invisible" (142).

[105] Robyn Wiegman further explains the mythology of the rape complex as "a primary disciplinary tool that took on over time an ideological narrative" and sketches out the narrative: "that of the mythically endowed rapist, the flower of civilization (the white woman) he intended to violently pluck, and the heroic interceptor (the white male) who would restore order by thwarting the black phallic insurgence." (93)

[106] In fact, the narration of *The Flaming Sword* that follows Marie's death explicitly articulates the symbolic stand-in of white women for the white race: "The deed done was a blow of race. A challenge to the existence of the white man and his people. As such it was faced" (142).

lynching scenes—they are not active, public resisters to lynching. Regarding black female characters, *The Marrow of Tradition* shows them as victims of racial violence (Mammy Jane is killed in the riot), but they are not involved in the attempted lynching of or the intercession on behalf of Sandy.[107] Black women are not part of the lynching or attempted lynching scenes in Dixon's novels or Ford's films, either. A dearth of black female intercessors corresponds with the exclusion of black females in the southern rape complex. Sandra Gunning contends that a diagram based on the rape complex shows the white woman as "the basis for a homosocial, interracial triangle of desire in which the body of the white female victim mediates between the oppositional pairing of the black beast and the white protector," but the black woman "gets lost in the shuffle over black and white male articulations" (9). Robyn Wiegman also addresses this loss in her argument that the rape complex "carries an inherent negation of the African American woman through the very absence of her significatory role in the psychosexual drama of masculinity" (462). In the southern mythology of anti-black lynching that is told and retold after Reconstruction, white women are its cause and black women are forgotten, but neither are capable of acting against it.

This mythology exerted an enormous amount of cultural sway; it circulated widely and with great popularity in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century in stories such as the film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). The notion that women were only either the impetus for lynchings or absent from them, however, was completely at odds with the historical realities. Women participated in lynch mobs, and black women died at the hands of lynch mobs: 130 black women were lynched between 1880 and 1930

[107] The character Janet Miller, a black woman, plays an especially significant role in the conclusion of *The Marrow of Tradition*. Black women are certainly not excluded from Chesnutt's larger narrative, but they are excluded from the conversations and deliberations concerning Sandy's near-lynching.

(Simien 2). Some women, like the first female Senator Rebecca Latimer Felton of Georgia, publicly espoused the rape myth as the reality of lynching. Felton argued to lynch "these ravening beasts a thousand times a week if necessary" to protect white women from being raped.[108] Not all white women agreed with Felton, and some even participated in organized anti-lynching efforts. For example, Elizabeth Freeman was a white journalist who worked with the NAACP to investigate the murder of Jesse Washington in Waco, Texas. Her report was published as a supplement to the *Crisis* magazine in 1916.

Black women, especially, were at the forefront of both anti-lynching activism and anti-lynching cultural production. Frances E. W. Harper's poem "An Appeal to My Countrywomen" (1896), Mary Church Terrell's editorial "Lynching from a Negro's Point of View" (1904), and Angelina Weld Grimké's play *Rachel* (1914) are just three examples of artistic protests to lynching written by black women. The most widely-recognized anti-lynching activist in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century was the black female journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett, who committed herself to challenging exactly those attitudes that Felton advocated. She investigated lynchings, wrote and distributed anti-lynching pamphlets, and traveled extensively—both domestically and abroad—to raise awareness about the problem of lynching and the falsity behind the claim that black men were raping white women at record high numbers.[109] The rape myth continued to be pervasive, though, and in 1930, a white woman named Jessie Daniel

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[108] Felton made this statement in the summer of 1897 in a widely reported address to the State Agricultural Society (Hall 306-7n66).

[109] The writings of Freeman, Harper, Terrell, Grimké, and Wells-Barnett are all featured in the collection *Witnessing Lynching: American Writers Respond* (2003) edited by Ann P. Rice. Also, for a full study of anti-lynching plays written by black women, see Koritha Mitchell's book *Living With Lynching: African-American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (2011).

Ames founded the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching. One of the ASWPL's cited reasons for forming was to combat the still popular belief among white southerners that black men were lynched to protect white women.[110]

Mostly on a gradual decline since the turn of the century, lynching was a less frequent means of racial murder and oppression at the end of the 1930s than it had been at the century's beginning. A best-selling author in 1902, Thomas Dixon, Jr. was largely ignored when he published a pro-lynching novel, *The Flaming Sword*, in 1939. Cultural texts that were popular among white readers and viewers were becoming more likely to convey disapproval of lynching than its endorsement. A year after *The Flaming Sword*'s publication, another southern white author, William Faulkner, cast a critical gaze on anti-black lynching with "Pantaloon in Black," one of the seven interrelated stories that comprise his novel *Go Down, Moses* (1940). This literary depiction of resistance is markedly different from his previous fiction, like *Light in August* (1932), which only envisions male law enforcement officers as potential lynching intercessors.[111] In "Pantaloon in Black," the black character Rider is under threat of lynching for killing a white man, and his aunt publicly and bodily aligns herself with her nephew by riding with him in the sheriff's car and joining him in his jail cell. Her presence does not dissuade the mob, and Rider is lynched anyway, but her character's stance acts out a public black female challenge to lynching on behalf of her nephew. In *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), the

[110] In her book *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (1979), Jacquelyn Dowd Hall writes, "The dimension of the problem that most concerned [Jessie Daniel Ames and the women she led], the basis for their campaign and its chief motive force, was the association between lynching, sex roles, and sexual attitudes" (145).

[111] Though the white barber Hackshaw Stribling opposes the lynching of Will Mayes in "Dry September," I do not consider him an intercessor, because he ultimately stands on the side of the white lynchers, instead of in between the lynchers and Mayes. He does not help the men lynch Mayes, but he also does not fully intercede.

character Miss Habersham, an elderly white southern woman, physically places her body between a white mob and a black prisoner named Lucas Beauchamp. Miss Habersham sits in front of the jail, works on her mending, and succeeds in keeping the mob at bay while other characters uncover the evidence that proves Beauchamp's innocence and identifies the guilty party.

Clarence Brown's film adaptation of *Intruder in the Dust* was released just one year after the novel's publication. In the film version, written by Ben Maddow and under the advisement of Faulkner, Miss Habersham's intercession is expanded into a more prominent scene of intense and dangerous confrontation than it is in the novel.[112] Brown creates a screen image of a heroic, white female lynching intercessor and widely circulates this image throughout the nation.[113] Faulkner and Brown show an elderly white woman who uses her own body as an obstacle between Beauchamp and the members of the lynch mob, who cannot publicly assault a white "lady" and remain within the fold of southern "gentleman." Miss Habersham manipulates the intertwining southern codes of race, class, and gender to prevent an attack on Beauchamp. Through the public dissent performed by Rider's aunt and Miss Habersham, Faulkner and Brown portray racial violence as preventable, challenge the rape complex, and characterize women as particularly well-suited to combat racial violence.

In 1948, when Faulkner published *Intruder*, there was only one recorded lynching of a black man in the United States. As lynching was no longer a frequent and

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[112] Along with screenwriting advice, Faulkner helped coach Juano Hernandez, who played Lucas Beauchamp, on his southern accent. Faulkner was not paid for his work on the film at the time, though, because he was still under contract to Warner Brothers (Aiken 199).

[113] *Intruder* was more widely played in Southern theaters than other "message movies" about race, as it premiered in Oxford, Mississippi and passed the strict Memphis censorship board. It also tended to fill out double features as a B film, causing more people to see it than they would have as a single feature (Aiken 201).

widespread practice, Faulkner's story is an early contribution to constructing a national memory of lynching. Fittingly, Faulkner claimed that he set the novel around 1935 or 1940 (Aiken 188), when lynchings were more likely to occur than they were a decade later. However, I think there is good reason to interpret Faulkner's approach to lynching in *Intruder* as invested in both the past and the present. The perpetual and inescapable influence of the past on the present was and continues to be a significant aspect of Faulkner's authorial persona. In a letter Thomas McHaney wrote to Charles Aiken in 2005, McHaney describes Faulkner's relationship with the past in his fiction: "Faulkner set the great majority of his books when he began to write them, in the immediate present and portrayed dramatically the effect or impact or enduring weight of the past upon these present moments" (qtd. in Aiken 188). The threatened lynching of Lucas Beauchamp in *Intruder* may seem slightly anachronistic for a 1948 audience, but the threat of lynching stayed alive in peoples' minds long after the documented occurrences of lynchings drastically dwindled.[114] The impact of lynching, its enduring weight, continued to be felt by Americans for many years to come, and the threatened lynching in *Intruder* implicates itself in both the memory of lynching and the contemporary negotiation with that memory.

Furthermore, in 1955 the murder of Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old black boy, by two adult white men in Money, Mississippi (for supposedly whistling at or making a

[114] Richard Wright and James Baldwin have both articulated in their non-fiction the profound effect that the *threat* of lynching had on their lives. In his book *Black Boy* (1945), Wright describes the impact of racial violence about which he heard: "I felt completely helpless in the face of this threat that might come upon me at any time…My fantasies were a moral bulwark that enabled me to feel I was keeping my emotional integrity whole, a support that enabled my personality to limp through days lived under the threat of violence" (86-7). In his book-length essay on film, *The Devil Finds Work* (1976), James Baldwin writes about watching the film *A Tale of Two Cities* (1937): "I did not really know who these people were, or why they were in the streets—they were white: and a white mob can be in no way reassuring to a black boy (even though, or if, he cannot say why)" (13).

sexualized comment to white woman Carolyn Bryant) clearly indicated that lynching had not ceased to be a white supremacist weapon of destruction and terror in the mid-century. Racial violence in general had certainly not vanished from the national landscape at this time. In June of 1943, twenty-five blacks and nine whites were killed in a race riot in Detroit. That same year, there was a riot in Harlem after a white policeman shot and wounded a black soldier. President Truman formed a civil rights committee in 1946 in response to increased southern racial violence after World War II. After fighting a war against fascism in Europe, the eyes of the nation were increasingly turned towards institutionalized racism in the South that undermined the U.S.'s international reputation. The threatened lynching in *Intruder*, therefore, carries a weight beyond lynching specifically: it reflects on all forms of racial violence while the world looks to see if the U.S. can foster peace within its own borders.

With *Intruder*, Faulkner suggests that racial violence in the U.S. can be stopped. The white male characters that work to prevent Beauchamp's lynching—Chick Mallison and Gavin Stevens—have engendered a large body of critical scholarship. However, the white female character Miss Habersham—who is the most public intercessor in both the novel and the film—is studied far less. This is a significant oversight that both neglects a crucial anti-lynching strategy within the story and misses a moment of Faulknerian engagement with race and gender as interlocking signifiers in a tradition of southern violence. By writing a woman into this lynching story as a heroic challenger—and not just as a passive victim—Faulkner undermines the rape complex and commends the continuing contributions of women to anti-lynching and civil rights activism. However, his character Miss Habersham also reassures readers that the South is capable of

reforming itself, and that socially prominent white southerners are the rightful actors for combating anti-black violence. Faulkner and Brown attempt to allay the atrocities of racial oppression and white terrorism—both past and present—through the figure of a southern, aristocratic, and female lynching intercessor.

II. *The Mottstown Sheriff and Rider's Aunt*

When William Faulkner was eleven years old, a black man named Nelse Patton was taken from the town jail and lynched in the public square of Faulkner's home town: Oxford, Mississippi. Faulkner's childhood home was no more than a thousand yards from both the jail and the square. Patton was accused of killing the white woman Mattie McMillan, and though both Judge Roane (a neighbor of Faulkner's) and a minister interceded and attempted to dissuade the mob, former U. S. Senator W. V. Sullivan led approximately 2,000 people in overpowering the sheriff, taking Patton from the jail, and killing him. The next day, Sullivan publicly declared his pride in leading Patton's lynching, and no charges were pressed against him (Williamson 157-61).[115] Between 1889 and 1909, at least 293 blacks were lynched in Mississippi, which was more than in any other state in the Union (Williamson 157). Regardless of whether or not Faulkner personally witnessed the public murder of Patton, anti-black lynching was entrenched in the folklore and everyday culture of his community. Accordingly, the lynchers in Faulkner's stories are not prosecuted under the law for murder. With historical accuracy,

[115] An interview conducted by Harvard historian Albert Bushnell Hart shows the intense lynching fervor of many white Mississippians during Faulkner's childhood and young adulthood. Hart traveled to Mississippi in 1908 and recorded a young white man who said, "You don't understand how we feel down here…When there is a row, we feel like killing a nigger whether he has done anything or not" (qtd. in Williamson 392).

he illustrates an environment in which lynching is tolerated and even sanctioned. Faulkner himself was deeply troubled by racism, especially racist violence, but he was a product of his place, time, and station in Southern society, and his racial consciousness was significantly limited.

Faulkner did not publicly approve of lynching, but in the early 1930s, he also did not condemn it or believe it could be stopped. On February 2nd, 1931, a "Letter to the Editor" by Mr. W. H. James of Starkville, Mississippi was published in the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* newspaper. In the letter, James commends the formation of a Mississippi chapter of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL):

> …I feel that we have some friends who will protect us against the crime which has been perpetrated against so many of us without even a possible chance to prove our innocence or guilt. But through the efforts of these good ladies, when we flee for protection to the strong arm of the law, we won't be met with the rope and torch. (qtd. in McMillen and Polk 8)

Demanding the right of due process to all under the "strong arm of the law" was integral to the organization's anti-lynching efforts. Among other approaches (such as raising awareness and surreptitiously investigating lynchings), the women of the ASWPL urged law enforcement officers to fully protect all prisoners, publicized the incidents in which officers did not perform this protection, and, on several occasions, even confronted mobs of prospective lynchers (McMillen and Polk 8). James praises this group of white southern women who will both urge law officers to intercede and are willing to intercede themselves, so that the law may serve its just purpose for black and white citizens. The

caption to James's letter reads "THEY CAN STOP LYNCHING," which directly challenges the attitude that lynching is an inevitable counter to black assaults on white womanhood.

James's letter was met with a response published in the same newspaper thirteen days later, bearing the caption "Mob Sometimes Right" and the signature of "William Faulkner, Oxford, Miss." Though Faulkner claims early on in his letter that "No balanced man can, I believe, hold any moral brief for lynching" (*ESPL* 339), the bulk of his letter runs directly counter to James's approval of lynching prevention. Faulkner argues that he has never heard of any actual instances (as opposed to incidents in novels or stories) in which the mob lynched the wrong man or someone "with a record beyond reproach" (*ESPL* 343). He thus dispels sympathy for lynching victims by suggesting that, on some level, every person who is lynched actually deserves it. In 1931, Faulkner apparently did not view lynching as a tactic of terror and oppression to all black Americans, but only as something that happened to individual black Americans who were, somehow, already criminal. In his assessment, mob violence "serves nothing," but it also apparently harms nothing. Lynching may be, as he describes it, a "muddled" course of action, but he believes it runs in the direction of—not counter to—the law of the land: "Like our juries, [mobs] have a way of being right" (*ESPL* 343).

Furthermore, instead of acknowledging the immorality of violent, white supremacist practices, Faulkner incorporates racist violence into essential, biological competition. While he concedes that blacks are lynched more often than whites, he maintains that this imbalance is part of a "natural human desire" to take advantage of one's circumstances (*ESPL* 340). In his letter, Faulkner contradicts the idea that lynching

should be stopped and the notion that it even *could* be stopped. He claims to be against lynching in principle, but he also stitches it into the national fabric, deeming it an "American trait, characteristic" that "requires a certain amount of sentimentality, an escaping from the monotonous facets of day by day" (*ESPL* 340). According to his opinion at this time, white Americans turn to mob violence as part of their *national and natural* impulses for excitement, emotion, and exploiting another person's weakness, regardless of race.

As surprising as Faulkner's 1931 perspective of lynching may seem to a contemporary reader, his views represented a moderate stance of southern white opinion on race relations. He did not advocate lynching, but he also did not think it merited the preventive efforts of the federal government or organizations like the ASWPL. The women of the ASWPL did not evoke Faulkner's praises in 1931, but nine years later, he imagines a black woman who admirably demonstrates public lynching resistance. Eight years after that, he creates a white, female intercessor who successfully holds off a lynch-mob.

Go Down, Moses and *Intruder in the Dust*, though, are not the first works by Faulkner that include a lynching or a threatened lynching. In fact, lynching plays a prominent part in Faulkner's fiction, as it did in the world in which he came of age: early-twentieth century Mississippi.[116] In *Light in August* (1932), the sheriff in Mottstown effectively intercedes and prevents Joe Christmas's lynching. He appeals to the crowd of approximately two hundred to "respect the law" and reminds them that he took an oath to

[116] The white Lee Goodwin is tortured before being immolated by a lynch mob in the novel *Sanctuary* (1931). A black man named Will Mayes is accused of attacking a white woman and subsequently lynched in the short story "Dry September" (1931).[116] In *Light in August* (1932), the racially-ambiguous Joe Christmas is castrated and shot by national guardsmen Percy Grimm. In *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), the white Wash Jones is killed by the posse that arrives to arrest him for murder.

defend his prisoners, even if he has "no more sympathy for nigger murderers than any other white man here" (*LA* 335-6).[117] The sheriff also reminds the crowd that the man Halliday, who captured Christmas, will not receive his reward if Christmas is killed before standing trial, and it is in the mob's best interest that the reward money is spent in Mottstown (*LA* 336).[118] His appeals to both the law and to a shared interest with the white mob—with absolutely no challenge to racial prejudice—portray a classic example of white lynching intercession in American literature and film.

Faulkner also shows cooperative law enforcement officers effectively outsmarting a mob. The Mottstown sheriff is not a solitary intercessor, as he is assisted by other officers from Mottstown, the sheriff from Jefferson, other officers from Jefferson, and the man Halliday. Once the Mottstown sheriff has momentarily stalled the mob, five or six deputies quickly escort Christmas, who is handcuffed to the Jefferson sheriff, into a waiting car (*LA* 337). In this instance of a threatened lynching in *Light in August*, Faulkner illustrates a violent mob that can be dissuaded: "Folks are funny. They cant stick to one way of thinking or doing anything unless they get a new reason for doing it ever so often. And when they do get a new reason, they are liable to change anyhow" (*LA* 336-7). However, Faulkner also slightly qualifies this lynching prevention by suggesting that the members of the Mottstown mob had their minds only "half-made-up" to lynch Christmas (*LA* 336), and Mottstown is, after all, not the town in which Christmas committed his crime. Law enforcement succeeds in Mottstown, but fails in Jefferson.

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[117] I will use abbreviations to indicate the works written by Faulkner, such as *LA* for *Light in August*. I will use the first word of the title to indicate films, such as *Intruder* for *Intruder in the Dust* (1949) directed by Clarence Brown.

[118] The sheriff's appeals greatly resemble another sheriff's intercession: Sheriff Campbell in Charles Chesnutt's story "The Sheriff's Children" (1889), discussed in Chapter 1.

The Jefferson sheriff shows cunning and commitment in removing Christmas from Mottstown, but he cannot control the determination of State national guardsman Percy Grimm in Jefferson. When Grimm does not obey the sheriff's orders and carries a gun during his patrol in town, the sheriff does not punish him but instead acquiesces to Grimm by making him a "special deputy" (*LA* 431). Even though the Jefferson sheriff is the official authority, people in town say about Grimm that, "He's the head of the whole thing," and "Sheriff aint got no say in it today" (*LA* 433). Grimm ultimately blames Christmas's escape on the Jefferson sheriff, who only assigns one deputy—who is not handcuffed to Christmas—to escort him out of the jail. In this novel, Faulkner shows officers of the law who can protect a prisoner from a mob, but he also shows officers who are inept at handling both citizens and prisoners.

Law enforcement officers and mob members become less and less distinguishable as *Light in August* progresses. In the end, "special deputy" Grimm is as dangerous as a mob, shooting Christmas and torturously castrating him before he dies. When Grimm pursues Christmas into Gail Hightower's house, Hightower makes a last-minute, desperate attempt to prevent Christmas's murder: "Men! ... Listen to me. He was here that night. He was with me the night of the murder. I swear to God—" (*LA* 439). Hightower is far too late, though, and Grimm kills Christmas anyway. Hightower does not go to the sheriff earlier and lie about Christmas's whereabouts, as Byron Bunch suggests; he does not provide the fake alibi until the violence is actually within his own walls. It is not surprising then that Hightower's ill-timed intercession is unsuccessful. Different forms of attempted intercession are at work in *Light in August*, but public

lynching prevention is entirely the work of male characters, and Joe Christmas is still cruelly lynched.

The story "Pantaloon in Black" in *Go Down, Moses* diverges from previous Faulkner lynching stories, because it portrays the subjective experience of a lynching victim who is unambiguously raced as black.[119] "Pantaloon" is Faulkner's first attempt to approach a lynching from the perspective of a victim who is part of a black community:

> …unlike "Dry September" it offers an extended portrait of the lynched victim. In contrast to practically all of Faulkner's stories, the important events of the plot of "Pantaloon" are isolated from white influence; only after Rider's death are we presented with a callous white deputy and his racist wife who provide a further perspective. (Taylor 434)

Part one of the story depicts the events leading up to Rider's lynching. In part two, the sheriff's deputy narrates the events to his wife after Rider is lynched. Warren Akin, IV argues that part one works to generate sympathy for Rider on the part of the reader, and part two "distances and objectifies our feelings through the conversation between the deputy and his wife and presents directly those attitudes of the white society which perpetuate the inferior place of blacks" (398). The sympathetic portrait of Rider that Faulkner paints is one of a man experiencing painful grief following his wife's death. Buckling under this grief, he slits the throat of a white man who cheats him at a dice game. Rider is lynched for a crime that he does commit, but the access to Rider's

[119] Joe Christmas's racial lineage is unclear in *Light in August*, which allows Faulkner to question the biological reality of race and illustrate its social construction. The reader has no access to the interiority of Will Mayes's character in "Dry September."
"Pantaloon in Black" is also an anomaly within *Go Down, Moses*, because it is the only chapter that does not deal directly with the McCaslin family. Cleanth Brooks proposes that Faulkner included "Pantaloon" "because it reveals one more aspect of the world in which 'The Bear' takes place" (257), and I think "Pantaloon's" portrait of racial violence and white misinterpretation and callousness towards black suffering does contribute to understanding Isaac McCaslin's repudiation of the plantation.

thoughts and feelings shows that the crime is part of an acute crisis of emotion. When the white sheriff and deputy in part two assume that Rider acts out of a *lack* of feeling, the reader knows that these white characters are deeply mistaken.

Rider's feelings of grief are so overwhelming, in fact, that he utilizes the extreme likelihood of anti-black lynching in the postbellum South to indirectly commit suicide. In Faulkner's portrayal of Rider's emotional agony, Rider states a desire to join his wife in death. He imagines his wife Mannie standing at the kitchen door, and when that vision begins to fade, he says, "Wait…'Den lemme go wid you, honey" (*GDM* 136), wishing to leave behind a life without her. The deputy later informs the reader that the white man Birdsong who ran the dice game had been cheating with a second pair of dice for fifteen years (*GDM* 151). The deputy is mystified that Rider would suddenly decide to kill Birdsong for cheating, when presumably Rider and everyone else who played the game had known for years that they were being swindled. In her book *Games of Property: Law, Race, Gender, and* Go Down, Moses (2003), Thadious M. Davis writes about the murder of Birdsong: "Fueled by his recognition of the consequences of his breaking out of the racial and social codes, Rider acts aggressively, certain of white retaliation and punishment for attacking a white man" (73). The reader knows from the previous section that Rider is hoping for death, so his decision to attend the dice game, grab the white man's hand that holds the second set of dice, and slit the man's throat, reveals itself as a way to both retaliate against white oppression and set the wheels of his own death in motion.

Faulkner does not narrate the lynching event itself, so the behavior of the law enforcement officers once they were confronted with the lynch mob is open to the

reader's imagination. Still, the officers' attitudes suggest that they will likely succumb to the mob without protest. The officers express confidence that Rider will be lynched, instead of promoting the law and due process. When Rider's aunt asks the jailer to not "let the white folks get him," he replies, "You and him ought to thought of that before he started barbering white men without using no lather first" (*GDM* 153). According to the jailer, a black man slitting a white man's throat can only end one way, and he offers no reassurance that a black man can be safe from white mobs once he is locked in jail. In the deputy's narration, he states a preference that Rider not be lynched, but it is unclear whether or not that preference is strong enough to outweigh hopes for reelection: "after all interference with the law cant be condoned even if the Birdsong connection did carry that beat for [Sheriff] Maydew last summer" (*GDM* 152). Defending Rider from a lynch mob is the sheriff's and the deputy's professional duty, but they do not want to lose the votes of the men in the mob, and Rider ends up being murdered before standing trial. The details of Rider's murder are unclear, but it is evident that he killed a white man in a racial climate that will both demand his immediate death and not demand that white law enforcement fully defend him.

The only character that acts outside of prescribed racial codes to strive for a different fate for Rider has been widely overlooked in "Pantaloon" criticism: Rider's aunt. She does not have a name, which is perhaps part of the reason that she has been overlooked. While Rider explains that she is his aunt and his closest equivalent to a parent (she is the person who raised him, and he cannot remember his mother and father), he does not call her by a name (*GDM* 132). The deputy characterizes her as an old woman, but Faulkner offers no further description of her (*GDM* 152). Much about

Rider's aunt is unknown, but she is a very persistent presence in the story. She first approaches Rider at his wife's funeral and tells him to come home with her instead of returning alone to the house that he and Mannie shared (*GDM* 132). He declines, but she continues trying to convince him to stay with her instead of grieving by himself. She sends her husband to find Rider in the woods and later to take food to him at the mill. When Rider does finally visit her, Faulkner shows a strong connection between the two of them. She entreats him not to lie to her, as he has never lied to her before, and she calls him by the nickname "Spoot" that she gave him in his childhood (*GDM* 146). Though he refuses to heed her spiritual advice and runs away from her house, she continues trying to help him. Her deep commitment to her nephew is repeatedly made clear to the reader. Along with the love and grief that Rider feels for Mannie, the love and commitment that Rider's aunt shows for him refutes the sheriff's claim that black people lack the "normal human feelings" (*GDM* 150). On the contrary, Faulkner illustrates powerful feelings within black families.

Rider's aunt ultimately displays both familial devotion and public resistance to lynching by risking her own life in the hopes that Rider's will be spared. When the sheriff arrests Rider for murdering Birdsong, Rider's aunt asks to go with him in the sheriff's car. The sheriff informs her that she could be killed, too, but she insists on going anyway (and, presumably, a black woman would have been fully conscious of that possibility well before a white sheriff notified her). She knows that placing her body—which is also a black body—alongside her nephew's is a tremendous risk to her safety, but she still takes that stance. It seems that the aunt risks accompanying Rider, because she hopes the influence of her gender will redirect the mob's racist behavior. This is exactly the

sheriff's reasoning in letting her come with them, as explained by the deputy: "her being in the car too might be a good thing if the Birdsongs did happen to run into us" (*GDM* 152-3). The sheriff and his deputy think that maybe the Birdsongs will not want to lynch Rider in front of his aunt, who is an elderly woman; they consider the possibility that southern gender codes for protecting women will overpower southern racial codes. If the aunt's presence does happen to stop the mob, then the officers are spared the dilemma of whether or not to fully intercede and defend Rider themselves.

The aunt's anti-lynching stance continues once they all reach the jail. She both persists in allying herself with Rider and tries to convince the jailor to intercede and defend Rider from the imminently arriving mob. She asks if she can go into the cell with her nephew, and she testifies to his good character, telling the jailer that Rider has never before been in trouble. She acknowledges that "he will suffer for what he done," but she compels the jailer not to let him die at the hands of white lynchers. The aunt acknowledges that Rider ought to and will be punished for his crime, but she is not willing to consider his immediate death a foregone conclusion. Like the sheriff before him, the jailer allows her to stay with Rider in the cell, as the deputy recounts, "because he felt like Maydew did, that her being in there with him might be a good influence on the Birdsong boys" (*GDM* 153). The jailer also entertains the possibility that a female figure could deter the mob from carrying out the lynching. Even if the aunt does not believe her presence can prevent the lynching, her desire to stay with her nephew while he is in danger demonstrates loving self-sacrifice that disputes the sheriff's presumption that black men and women lack a full range of humanity.

Faulkner's story develops the reader's identification with Rider and his aunt, who are two complex black characters. Mark Winchell contends that Faulkner's work "disparages the knee-jerk white supremacy that has all too often dehumanized American blacks" (83), and "Pantaloon in Black" certainly supports this characterization. However, it is still significant that Rider does not survive the story's narrative; as Walter Taylor writes, "the most obvious thing about Rider, in fact, is that he does *not* endure" (441). The prevailing assumption is that Rider will be lynched, and the fact that he *is* lynched, despite the aunt's presence, suggests inevitability to this violent, racist practice and little to no sense of how it might be stopped. In his work "Man in the Middle: Faulkner and the Southern White Moderate" (1987), Neil Polk argues that the deputy's confusion as he grapples with his assumption that black people are unfeeling is the kind of limited racial progress that the story represents:

> I suspect Faulkner would hold that the surer, the long-range solution to racial problems, if there is a solution, lies in the direction the deputy is facing, even if he hasn't yet begun to move forward; and I suspect that, at least as regards the question of race in his real South and in his fictionalized one, that deputy is nearer to Faulkner's position than any other character: he doesn't have any answers, but at least he is beginning to ask the right questions. (150)

Faulkner is critical of lynching in "Pantaloon" and imagines a challenge to it in the actions of Rider's aunt, but he does not portray that challenge as concretely effective. In this story, Faulkner is invested in undermining the racist *feelings*—and not necessarily the actions—that promote white supremacy: "…as a novelist, he could and regularly did dramatize those problems without being obliged to solve them" (Polk 146). In his novel

Go Down, Moses (1940), Faulkner admires the elderly, black aunt who stands beside her endangered nephew and imagines a fate other than lynching, but he does not imagine her gendered presence as a sufficient deterrent to a mob of white men.

III. *Intruder in the Dust*

At the time that Faulkner was writing *Intruder in the Dust*—the winter and early spring of 1948—southern democrats were breaking away from the national Democratic Party, due in large part to the civil rights program that President Truman was urging. The founding of the Dixiecrat Party and its nomination of Governor Strom Thurmond of South Carolina for president soon followed, and Thurmond carried eighty-seven percent of Mississippi voters (and also won in South Carolina, Louisiana, and Alabama) (Polk 130-1). By voting for Thurmond, white Mississippians supported a platform of racial segregation that relegated black Americans to second-class citizenship. Faulkner repeatedly claimed a moderate position, not advocating strongly for or against segregation but assuming that the South would eventually have to change its racial politics (Polk 135). Mostly, though, he did not want the national government to intervene in the South, at least partly because he believed such an intervention would surely lead to violence. If violence did erupt between the South and the rest of the U. S., he made it clear in an interview with Russell Howe in 1956 exactly where he would stand: "As long as there's a middle road, all right, I'll be on it. But if it came to fighting I'd fight for Mississippi against the United States even if it meant going out into the street and shooting Negroes" (Meriwether 261). As in his response to James's praise of the

ASWPL, Faulkner asserts his loyalties with other southern whites.[120] He did not publicly condone lynching or segregation, but he mostly discouraged any organized opposition to those white supremacist practices.

Instead, in fictional works like *Intruder in the Dust*, Faulkner explored and commended *individual* action. Polk writes that in addition to his allegiance to white southerners and his wish to avoid violence, Faulkner's resistance to intervention from the national government also stemmed from his concern about the fate of the individual in the modern world: "Part of his anxiety about the modern world was caused by the degree to which social, economic, and political phenomena seemed to be conspiring to rob individual man of his capacity to act and even think as an individual" (138). In *Intruder*, Faulkner presents an unlikely alliance between two southerners with divergent ideological ties: the man Lucas Beauchamp, who is the son of slaves and of mixed racial heritage, and the young Charles or "Chick" Mallison, who is the son of southern white aristocrats and nephew to the white lawyer Gavin Stevens (educated at Harvard and in Heidelberg). Beauchamp is an idealized individual, beholden to nobody besides himself, stubbornly self-defined, and repeatedly described in the novel as "intractable."[121] Chick's

[120] Faulkner soon disputed and qualified his extreme pronouncements in this interview, saying in a letter to the editor of the *Reporter* in April 1956 that they were statements that, "no sober man would make, nor, it seems to me, any sane man believe" (*ESPL* 225). However, his insistence to northern liberals and African Americans activists that they "Go slow now" (*ESPL* 87) and "Be flexible" (*ESPL* 108) still indicates a deep discomfort with significant change to race relations in the South at the time. He did not give the civil rights organizations his unadulterated support.

[121] The character of Lucas Beauchamp first appears in the novel *Go Down, Moses*. In the story "The Bear," an explanation of his name illustrates his sovereign individualism:

> …not *Lucius Quintus*…but *Lucas Quintus*, not refusing to be called Lucius, because he simply eliminated that word from the name; not denying, declining the name itself, because he used three quarters of it; but simply taking the name and changing, altering it, making it no longer the white man's but his own, by himself composed, himself selfprogenitive and nominate, by himself ancestored, as, for all the old ledgers recorded to the contrary, old Carothers himself was…" (269).

interactions with Beauchamp lead him to break away from the traditional thoughts and actions of his white community and his uncle Stevens.

Faulkner initially conceived of *Intruder* as a "mystery story, original in that the solver is a negro, himself in jail for the murder and is about to be lynched, solves murder in self defense" (qtd. in Bassett 207). The story thus originates with the character Beauchamp, but it is actually narrated from Chick's perspective. Beauchamp's predicament motivates the plot, but the point-of-view does not remain with Beauchamp in his jail cell; instead, the narrative stays with Chick as he twice journeys to the Gowrie cemetery and returns to town, eventually proving Beauchamp's innocence. It is a story in which Beauchamp's life and Chick's moral fate are in peril; as Polk explains, "What is novelistically at stake in *Intruder*, then, is Chick Mallison and his efforts to find his own way through the tangle of Southern race relations" (135). For Faulkner, Chick must change as an individual and inspire this growth in others. In 1931, Faulkner challenges the ASWPL organization in his letter to the Memphis Commercial Appeal, but in this 1948 novel, he tells the story of unorganized individuals, like the protagonist Chick, who successfully prevent a lynching and resist racial violence in their community.

The character Gavin Stevens—initially believed to be a mouthpiece for the author himself—has received a great deal of critical attention, but more recent scholarship acknowledges Chick's development as the thematic center of the novel.[122] In his book on Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County stories, Cleanth Brooks states, "Gavin Stevens occupies no privileged position in Faulkner's novels," and such is the case for *Intruder*

[122] When the novel was initially published, most reviewers and scholars assumed that the character Gavin Stevens spoke for Faulkner. Edmund Wilson's review in the *New Yorker* on October 23, 1948 said that the novel was "descended to the level of a tract whenever Gavin Stevens opened his mouth" (qtd. in Polk 131). Faulkner soon clarified, though, that Stevens spoke for liberal Southerners in general, and I agree with Polk that the novel itself invites its reader to question Stevens's opinions about race (131).

(279): the privileged perspective in the novel belongs to Chick's first-person narration and "what is going on inside his head" (288). Stevens's voice is a significant influence on Chick's interiority, but Chick does not always agree with or obey him.[123] He changes from a boy who requires "reaffirmation of his masculinity and his white blood" (*ID* 26) to a young man who feels shame for his town's white lynch mob and acknowledges that shame as his own, too (*ID* 204-5). Even the nickname of "Chick" draws attention to this character as the youthful protagonist of a *bildungsroman*.[124]

A major way in which Chick departs from the codes of his uncle and the majority of the southern white community is by taking purposeful action. As described by Jay Watson in his book *Forensic Fictions: The Lawyer Figure in Faulkner* (1993), Chick is "a southern adolescent struggling against the inertia of his elders to translate moral awareness into moral action" (110).[125] Though Chick's uncle Stevens tells him that "no

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[123] Jay Watson corroborates that Chick Mallison is the novel's "central consciousness" (110). He thinks the negative scrutiny of Gavin Stevens's "set speeches" is deserved, as the text itself "force[s] the issue of their own inadequacy," but that there is also "an entire set of episodes throughout the novel in which the county attorney encourages rather than hinders Chick's progress toward maturity" (118). Stevens serves an important role in the novel, as his "spoken stories and anecdotes instruct Chick in communal values and assumptions even as they sometimes kindle in him an urge to challenge these values and assumptions" (127).

[124] In their "Introduction" to a collection of essays on *Intruder in the Dust*, Michel Gresset and Patrick Samway, S. J. state that the reader should not discount the potential influence of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (among other possible influences) (xi), and I think the name "Chick," like Dickens's "Pip," similarly calls attention to the novel as a coming-of-age story, like the classic Dickens novel. Work remains to be done on the connections between Chick and Pip as well as "Miss Habersham" and "Miss Havisham."

[125] In his article "Signifying, Ordering, and Containing the Chaos: Whiteness, Ideology, and Language in *Intruder in the Dust*" (2006), Masami Sugimori interprets Chick's decision to act out change—instead of merely talking about change—as an inherently racial act: "Chick Mallison's attempt to save Lucas from impending lynching corresponds with his struggle with ideo-linguistically charged whiteness which, as exemplified by Gavin Stevens's talkative acquiescence to mob violence, limits one's thinking to that of racism" (56). In her article "Intruder in the Past" (2006), Lori Watkins Fulton also sees Chick's decision to act as a departure from the ways of his uncle:

> Those who forget history may very well be doomed to repeat it, but a view of the past such as Stevens's can also have a paralyzing effect. Chick instinctively has a better grip on the potential for individual action than his uncle can ever hope to have. For some reason, perhaps simply because of his youth, the idea of the past does not trap Chick quite so fully as it does Stevens, and he defies it through a type of direct action that totally eludes his uncle. (70)

man can cause more grief than that one clinging blindly to the vices of his ancestors" (*ID* 48), Stevens also rationalizes the lynching fervor of white men like Mr. Lilley and immediately discounts Beauchamp's claim that someone else's gun shot Vinson Gowrie (*ID* 48, 78). Chick, on the other hand, seriously considers Beauchamp's testimony and works to (literally) unearth the evidence that can prove Beauchamp is telling the truth. Instead of passively inheriting racist violence, Chick searches for the information that can give Beauchamp a more fair public hearing. If a racist lynch mob were not threatening Beauchamp, he could, by way of due process, possess the time and opportunity to attempt to prove his own innocence. With a lynching imminent, though, Beauchamp must turn to a sixteen-year-old white boy and insist on what the law is supposed to already provide: to be considered innocent until proven guilty, or not, with evidence. Chick's decision to investigate Vinson Gowrie's grave sets him on a path that diverges from his uncle's complicity in anti-black lynching, but this decision is not possible without the character Miss Habersham.[126]

Several critics have briefly noted the indispensable role that Miss Habersham plays in the quest to prove Beauchamp's innocence, even if they have not considered her in a tradition of lynching intercession. Brooks states that "Charles Mallison would, of course, have been unable to perform his mission without the aid of Miss Habersham … He had to have—though he did not then know it—her pickup truck, but he needs even more than that her counsel and her moral backing" (286). The character of Miss Habersham is integral to the course that Chick charts in the novel, diverging from the

[126] Chick is also aided by his black servant, the sixteen-year-old Aleck Sander, and I think that much more scholarship remains to be done on this character in *Intruder*. However, as a character who eventually places herself between the lynch mob and the jail in which Beauchamp is being held, my interest lies primarily with Miss Habersham.

racial ethics of his white, southern ancestors. Furthermore, this moral course departs from the white characters in previous Faulkner novels and stories, in which the prevailing white attitude toward racist injustice "is largely passive, despondent, and ineffectual" (Aiken 191). In his article "*Go Down, Moses* and *Intruder in the Dust*: From Negative to Positive Liberty" (2003), Carl Dimitri argues that "With Miss Habersham, Alec Sander, and Chick, Faulkner points to the virtues of engagement, and reveals his own notion of the 'good community' as one willing to take direct action for a worthy cause" (20). Previous Faulkner novels and short stories may have portrayed the complexities of lynching, but they did not present communal engagement against it as a path worth taking.

As I contended earlier, I think the actions of Rider's aunt in *Go Down, Moses*, indicate Faulkner as moving closer to an ethics of lynching resistance. I agree with Dimitri, though, that *Intruder* decidedly marks the beginning of Faulkner's "late period," in which his work shifts from a modernist aesthetic to an "aesthetic of engagement," characterized by "the explicit explication of moral alternatives" (Dimitri 12, 11). In *Intruder*, Faulkner explores moral alternatives to anti-black lynching by showing characters, like Miss Habersham, who work and risk their personal safety to successfully prevent Beauchamp's murder. Faulkner does not call on people and organizations from outside the South to intervene in southern racial politics; significantly, he depicts southern individuals—including a southern white woman—who actively strive for an ending other than Beauchamp's death at the hands of persons unknown.

IV. *A Different Ending*

In *Intruder in the Dust*, Faulkner illustrates white-on-black lynching as deeply imbedded in the local culture. As the novel progresses, some of the characters resist this presumed inevitability and insist that individual action can impact the firmly entrenched social codes of racial violence. The novel begins with a single sentence establishing that everyone in the town and even the county knows that Lucas Beauchamp has killed a white man (*ID* 3). By identifying the dead man—and only the dead man—as white, Faulkner implies that the man who killed him is not white. This implication is quickly verified, as Chick recalls that Beauchamp is descended from southern slaves, connecting his heritage to black Americans (*ID* 7). Simply establishing that a black man has killed a white man in the South could suggest to some readers that an extralegal retaliation is imminent. For those readers who do not immediately expect a lynching, Chick soon provides more details that immediately connect the murder that Beauchamp has committed with the murder that surely awaits him:

> …and he heard that Lucas had killed Vinson Gowrie out at Fraser's store; word had come for the sheriff about three oclock and had been relayed on by another party-line telephone down into the opposite corner of the county where the sheriff had gone this morning on business and where a messenger might quite possibly find him some time between now and tomorrow's sunup: which would make little difference since even if the sheriff had been in his office he would probably be too late since Fraser's store was in Beat Four and if Yoknapatawpha County was the wrong place for a nigger to shoot a white man in the back then Beat Four was the last place even in Yoknapatawpha County a nigger with any judgment—or

> any other stranger of any color—would have chosen to shoot anybody least of all one named Gowrie before or behind either… (*ID* 27)

Depicting Chick's reasoning, Faulkner immediately transitions from the message about the murder that is sent to the sheriff to the unlikely possibility that the sheriff will return in time to prevent the subsequent lynching: "…where a messenger might quite possibly find him some time between now and tomorrow's sunup*: which would make little difference*…" (emphasis added). Everything about the situation—who Beauchamp killed, where he killed him, how he was killed, and the sheriff's temporary absence—causes Chick to be certain that Beauchamp will soon be lynched. From Chick's cultural perspective, a black man killing a white man is reason enough to expect a violent response, and the details of this particular instance render that suspicion—as it was for Rider in "Pantaloon in Black"—into a foregone conclusion.

Chick is not the only person in Yoknapatawpha County who presumes that Beauchamp will be murdered by a mob before he can stand trial. In the same lengthy sentence that explains the particular danger of Beauchamp's situation, Chick describes the jobless men already parked in front of the constable's house, where Beauchamp is handcuffed to a bedpost and the constable is sitting over him with a shotgun (*ID* 27). The law officer in town has already interceded, and he seems to think that this complete physical protection is necessary for keeping Beauchamp alive. The congregating men expect that the constable will be overpowered by a mob as soon as the Gowrie family arrives, and the men position themselves to witness—and perhaps participate in—the lynching. The men who later watch Beauchamp as he is escorted into the town jail have the same expectations. Before entering the jail, Beauchamp asks Chick to give his uncle,

a lawyer, a message, and one of the watching men scoffs, "Lawyer hell. He won't even need an undertaker when the Gowries get through with him tonight" (*ID* 44). This unnamed member of the white crowd voices the widely shared presumption that Beauchamp will be killed and burned by a lynch mob sometime in the night. The white community is merely waiting for the murder victim's family to initiate the attack.

Furthermore, as Chick waits in the town square for Beauchamp to be brought to the jail, he realizes that, with the exception of his family's maid, Paralee, he has not seen a black person since the previous afternoon (*ID* 38). Members of the town's black community also expect that Beauchamp will be lynched, so they are keeping themselves out of sight until the threat of violence has passed. Faulkner shows that lynching is part of a larger system of anti-black violence, because the black people who are not Lucas Beauchamp recognize a threat to him as a threat to all black men and women.

With the presumption of a lynching firmly established, Chick tries to think of an influential individual who could potentially intercede and stop Beauchamp's lynching. He believes that Mr. Edmonds, who is a white man and Beauchamp's employer, could help the constable protect Beauchamp, but that "the Lord Himself would have to stop to count the Gowries and Ingrums and Workitts and if Edmonds was busy eating supper or reading the paper or counting his money or something the constable would be just one even with the shotgun" (*ID 28*). Chick expects a mob of innumerable size, comprised of many families, to descend on Beauchamp, and even the slightest bit of bad luck will overpower the constable's intercession. Chick thinks Edmonds is the only man "white or black…out of all Yoknapatawpha County or Mississippi or America or the world too for that matter who would have had any inclination let alone power and ability … to try to

stand between Lucas and the violent fate he had courted," but then Chick remembers that Edmonds is in New Orleans for a gallstone operation (*ID* 30, 35-6). As Chick sees it, killing a white man is a suicidal act for a black man to commit, as it was for Rider in "Pantaloon," so Beauchamp has "courted" his own death at the hands of a mob. Only a white man with both immense influence in the community and a strong connection to Beauchamp could possibly be a successful intercessor. The wheels of Beauchamp's lynching have been set in motion, and Chick struggles to imagine anything or anyone that could stop the wheels turning.

As the story continues, Chick considers other possible intercessors only to dismiss the notion that any of these men could fully prevent the onslaught of a violent mob. The sheriff has hired Will Legate, who is a very good marksman, to guard the jail while Beauchamp is in it. Legate, though, admits to Chick and Stevens that he does not expect to stop a lynch mob by himself. Legate suggests that the jailer could help him defend Beauchamp, but the jailer dismisses the idea that he would "get in the way of them Gowries and Ingrums for seventy-five dollars a month" (*ID* 52). Every time that Faulkner presents a white man besides Edmonds with a personal or professional duty to stand in between Beauchamp and a lynch mob, that white man is just as quickly determined to be ineffectual. Gavin Stevens is an influential white man, but Chick's appeals to his uncle about Beauchamp's possible innocence and impending death do not move Stevens to take any action. Stevens does not doubt that Beauchamp is guilty of murdering Vinson Gowrie, and he excuses himself and anyone else who is not a law enforcement officer from trying to prevent Beauchamp's lynching. Stevens responds to Chick's continued concern by replying that, "Lucas should have thought of that before he shot a white man

in the back" (*ID* 79). Stevens repeatedly rationalizes his choice to stand aside and not act: it is not his professional duty to hold a lynch mob at bay; the men with those duties might be successful (particularly if the mob is not that large or violent); and the sure response of a lynching should have stopped Beauchamp from committing the crime in the first place (*ID* 79). In Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, even a highly educated representative of the law has resigned himself to anti-black lynching.

Clarence Brown and Ben Maddow also convey Beauchamp's lynching as seemingly inescapable in the film version of *Intruder in the Dust*. By portraying a local culture deeply entrenched in racial violence, Faulkner and these filmmakers create the need for an intercessor and illustrate the inherent risk of that position. In the film, a crowd of white men watch Beauchamp as he is escorted into the jail and make the same menacing remarks that were in the novel ("Lawyer? He ain't even gonna need an undertaker" (*Intruder*)) that imply Beauchamp's swift and certain death. The character Will Legate again does not think he will be much of an impediment to a mob, and the jailer in the film echoes the novel by stating that he does not want to place himself in the mob's way (*Intruder*). [David Brian as] Stevens, called John Stevens in the film, does not believe Beauchamp's story and tries to persuade [Claude Jarman, Jr. as] Chick not to worry himself with Beauchamp's predicament.

Also, the widespread fear in the black community resulting from Beauchamp's arrest is fully illustrated in the film. A white man in the film's opening scene in a barbershop remarks that he "ain't seen one darkie on the road since yesterday" (*Intruder*), and the other men explain these absences by telling him about Beauchamp. Beginning at 39:55, Brown adds to Faulkner's story a few shots of black men and women trying to

stay out of sight. A black family hides from the lights of Miss Habersham's car. A black man nervously watches through a crack in a door as Miss Habersham, Aleck Sander, and Chick pass by in the night on their way to the cemetery. Everyone is sure that the Gowries will be after Beauchamp, and the black men and women believe that their own lives are at risk, as well.[127]

Brown, Maddow, and Faulkner convey the presumed inevitability of Beauchamp's death, so the decision of Miss Habersham, Chick, and Aleck Sander to investigate Vinson Gowrie's grave emerges onscreen (as it does in the text) as both an attempt to spare Beauchamp from a lynching and a resistance to the local culture. In her article, "Intruder in the Past" (2006), Lori Watkins Fulton writes that, "In the process of helping Lucas, Chick inadvertently destroys his world as he knows it by putting the events into motion that sever the philosophical and emotional ties binding him to it … he intrudes into this conflict at what, for him, becomes quite a high price" (68). Readers and film viewers alike are presented with characters that disrupt a system of white supremacy and violence by disturbing a familiar story of anti-black lynching.

V. *Miss Habersham*

In Faulkner's novel *Intruder in the Dust*, the elderly, white woman Miss Eunice Habersham facilitates all acts of lynching intercession; without Miss Habersham, none of the other characters could effectively work to prevent Beauchamp's lynching. She urges and enables the first expedition to Vinson Gowrie's grave. The following day, she intercedes at the jail so that the mob will not lynch Beauchamp while other characters,

[127] This is, of course, another reason why the character Aleck Sander, who risks even more than being seen, is especially intriguing and deserves further study.

like Chick and Gavin Stevens, acquire the evidence that clears his name. In his literary and legal study of *Intruder,* Rob Atkinson contends that Miss Habersham is a complete individual, "of essentially the same heroic substance as Lucas himself," and she mentors Chick in much the same way that Beauchamp does (659).[128] Miss Habersham does not doubt that Beauchamp is innocent of murdering Vinson Gowrie, and she assuredly acts upon that conviction without hesitation. Beauchamp's dress and manner remind Chick of his grandfather, and Miss Habersham's dress and manner remind him of his grandmother, further implying the likenesses in Beauchamp's and Miss Habersham's characters (Atkinson 659-60). Atkinson also points out that Beauchamp is beholden only to Miss Habersham at the end of the novel (659), which Beauchamp acknowledges by agreeing to take flowers to her (*ID* 236). Drawing upon Atkinson's observations about Miss Habersham as a mentor, I consider her active resistance in the specific context of gendered lynching intercession.

Faulkner's young male protagonist—Chick Mallison—must adjust his internalized image of hapless southern white ladies to account for Miss Habersham's indispensable role in the quest to stop Beauchamp's lynching. Initially, Chick marginalizes women so completely that he struggles to remember or even recognize Miss Habersham. Upon first seeing her pick-up truck parked outside his family's house, he does not realize whose truck it is, though he later thinks he should have recognized it (*ID* 75). When he sees her in his uncle's study and apologizes for interrupting their

[128] In his comparative study *Liberating Lawyers: Divergent Parallels in* Intruder in the Dust *and* To Kill a Mockingbird (1999), Atkinson discusses Miss Habersham in conversation with Lee's foremost white female character, Miss Maudie. Miss Habersham is also at the center of the article "Eunice Habersham's Lessons in *Intruder in the Dust*" (2004) by Ikuko Fujihara and included in the collection *Essays on William Faulkner's* Intruder in the Dust (2004). Fujihara notes Habersham's "significant role as a mentor for Chick Mallison," but he focuses on Habersham's mentorship regarding race and family, manifested especially in acts of eating and language of repetition (38). My interest, instead, lies in Habersham's mentorship regarding southern gender roles and their connection to violence, white supremacy, and resistance.

conversation, he then immediately excludes her from his conversation with Stevens: he speaks only to his uncle, as he "had already forgotten Miss Habersham, even her presence" (*ID* 77). He acknowledges how easy it was to completely eradicate her from his thoughts: "He had dismissed her; he had said 'Excuse me' and so vanished her not only from the room but the moment too as the magician with one word or gesture disappears the palm tree or the rabbit or the bowl of roses" (*ID* 77). Chick disregards the presence of a woman as easily as he disregards decorative objects. He feels as though Lucas Beauchamp—who is miles away in a jail cell—is present in the study, but it does not occur to him to register the relevance of the white woman who sits in a chair opposite his uncle (*ID* 77-8).

Faulkner conveys Chick's repeated "forgetting" of Miss Habersham by structuring the narration as a memory upon which Chick is reflecting. Chick describes his first perception of Miss Habersham—or, more accurately, his perception of his lack of perceiving Miss Habersham—as something that will change. After Stevens dismisses Beauchamp's claim of innocence, Chick notes his own dismissal of Miss Habersham from a future moment: "And it was only later that he would realise his uncle was speaking to Miss Habersham too now; at the moment he was neither rediscovering her presence in the room nor even discovering it; he did not even remember that she had long since ceased to exist, turning, closing the door" (*ID* 79-80). The reader knows both that Chick is overlooking Miss Habersham and that he will remember her in the future.[129] He

[129] The future perspective also provides what he knows about Miss Habersham but does not acknowledge at the time that he walks into his uncle's study, and this knowledge gives the reader background information about Miss Habersham. He knows she is a "kinless spinster of seventy" living in a deteriorating colonial house with two black servants, he knows her name is the oldest in the county, and he even knows details such as her style of dress and the fact that she peddles vegetables in town. Something about Miss Habersham's life and personal history "nagged" at his consciousness, but he dismisses the nagging thought as quickly as he dismisses her (*ID* 75-76).

thinks of her truck as a means to reaching the Gowrie cemetery, but "not Miss Habersham; he never thought of her again. He just remembered a motor vehicle sitting empty and apparently unwatched on the street not fifty yards away" (*ID* 81). Faulkner shows that Chick will later be critical of his initial and complete dismissal of Miss Habersham. Even if Chick does not realize her significance at first, the reader is informed that Miss Habersham is part of his education.[130]

Miss Habersham does not adhere to Chick's gender expectations. He tells her that he is going to the Gowrie cemetery, and he believes she will be an obstacle to this task, as she will surely "cry, protest, ejaculate and bring the whole house down on him" (*ID* 87). The mythology of the fragile southern lady has shaped Chick's assumptions about how Miss Habersham will behave, and so he assumes that she will be deeply disturbed and dramatically emotional. She does not behave accordingly, though, as her reaction is to say "Of course" with such "immediate murmurous and calm" that Chick's first thought is that she does not understand the implications of his suggestion (*ID* 87). Miss Habersham quickly shows, though, that she fully grasps the implications, and she better understands the material necessities of the expedition than Chick does. She states that they will need a pick and a shovel and flashlight (which she already has in her truck), and they will need to take her truck if they want to return to town with enough time to stop the lynching. She is active, practical, and shrewd, as she recognizes that it will be suspicious if Mr. Stevens, Mr. Mallison, and Mrs. Mallison do not hear her truck starting soon (*ID* 88-89). When Chick mentions that Aleck Sander will come, too, Miss Habersham does not ask more questions and simply states, "'Then we'll have three'" (*ID* 89). She knows that time is

[130] Faulkner shows that Chick better perceives Miss Habersham as the quest progresses. After the first trip to the Gowrie cemetery with Aleck Sander and Miss Habersham, Chick no longer fails to remember Miss Habersham: "…then Miss Habersham spoke and he remembered her" (*ID* 109).

limited and that the stakes are high, and she acts quickly and efficiently. The verbal and emotional excess that Chick expects on her part never actually occurs, and he is instead presented with calm and direct statements that enable the whole group—Chick, Aleck Sander, and Miss Habersham—to take concrete action.[131]

Faulkner shows, though, that the cultural ideal of a delicate southern lady continues to trouble Chick. In his quest to thwart Beauchamp's lynching and resist the prejudicial assumption that Beauchamp is guilty, he must also resist his assumption that Miss Habersham is weak and ineffectual. After discovering a different body in Vinson Gowrie's grave and driving back to town, the group of three plus Gavin Stevens discuss the mystery of Vinson's murder with the now-returned Sheriff Hampton. At the sheriff's house, Chick watches Miss Habersham, who continues to urge the group of men into action: "and he looked at her too, straight, thin, almost shapeless in the straight cotton dress beneath the round exactitude of the hat and he thought *She's too old for this* and then corrected it: *No a woman a lady shouldnt have to do this*" (*ID* 110). Initially worried about her physical wellness, Chick imagines a voice that corrects him and insists that Miss Habersham's status as a white woman—ever more so than her advanced age—ought to preclude her from midnight trips to graveyards and early morning confrontations with sheriffs. Chick has internalized the cultural attitude that southern white ladies must

[131] Brooks also mentions how Miss Habersham enables Chick's and Aleck Sander's efforts. He writes that after Stevens dismisses Chick, he struggles to take the next step, but "Miss Habersham herself is not at all at a loss" (286). If not for Miss Habersham and her practical and forthright initiative, we are led to suspect that Chick's plan likely would have failed or never even been put in motion.
Miss Habersham only once expresses a distaste for the task of digging up Vinson Gowrie's grave. As she, Aleck Sander, and Chick approach Vinson's grave and see the flowers that lay on top of it and the headstone of Vinson's mother adjacent to it, she says simply, "I hate this." Aleck Sander immediately responds, "You aint the one…It's just a half mile back to the truck. Down hill too." Miss Habersham's distaste seems to be an ethical repugnance of disturbing someone's grave, since it is prompted by the visual markers of a sacred family space. Faulkner suggests that her repugnance is not necessarily a gendered response, as Aleck Sander hates the task, too, and even reminds her that they could easily decide to forego it and return to town. Miss Habersham does not retreat, though; in fact, "She moved; she was first" (*ID* 100). Faulkner is clear to show that Miss Habersham takes the lead at this critical juncture.

be protected by southern white men, and this is the same attitude used to condone and defend the lynching of black men.

Faulkner shows that Chick's assumptions about white women are shared by other white men in his community. Sheriff Hampton assumes that a night without sleep is too taxing for Miss Habersham and insists that she go home to rest instead of returning to the cemetery with them. She dismisses this idea: "'Pah.' That was all. She didn't curse. She didn't need to. It was far more definite and final than just cursing" (*ID* 114). Chick's assessment of Miss Habersham indicates that while men seem determined to treat her as particularly vulnerable, she refuses to cede to this treatment and instead demonstrates determined yet effortless resiliency. However, the events of the night have not been consistent with the southern gender axioms, as Chick acknowledges to himself that "it was only after Miss Habersham came around the house and spoke to him that he knew he was going to go through with it" (*ID* 110). Chick's journey in the novel moves him away from the simplistic characterizations of both southern race relations and southern gender relations.

Ultimately, Gavin Stevens calls attention to the widespread, entrenched determination of southern white men to protect southern white women and posits that this attitude could be the best possible defense for Lucas Beauchamp. Stevens does not think that the sheriff's deputies will successfully hold back the mob while the rest of them return to the cemetery for the evidence that proves Beauchamp's innocence. He says to Sheriff Hampton that, "They're just men with guns … Legate himself told Chick and me last night that if enough men made up their minds and kept them made up, they would pass him and Mr. Tubbs both in time." The inadequacy of these individual men as

intercessors is again broached, but Stevens believes there *is* an individual intercessor that could hold off a lynch mob. He suggests that men with guns can be overpowered by physical force, "But if a woman, a lady, a white lady … just to sit there, in sight, where the first one that passes can have the word spread long before Beat Four can even get the truck cranked up to start to town […..] while we go out there and finish it for good, for ever—" (*ID* 115-6). Stevens implies that a white woman only needs to sit in front of the jail to effectively intercede. Her presence—and even just the knowledge of her presence, as "the word" will quickly spread to the anticipated mob leaders in Beat Four—will keep at bay southern white men who will not publicly lay an aggressive hand on a white lady. None of the characters request that Stevens explain his unstated reasoning because Faulkner's characters in Yoknapatawpha County in the 1930s and 40s already understand him. Stevens proposes that the desire to keep a southern white woman safe on her pedestal renders a southern white woman the sturdiest defense against a racist and violent mob.

In her acts of intercession, the character Miss Habersham both challenges the rape complex that posits southern white women as passive victims and demonstrates a manipulation of those same gender codes in her pursuit of justice for Beauchamp. Chick's most important job is finished once he tells his uncle about the body in Vinson Gowrie's grave, but Miss Habersham continues to risk her personal safety by taking a public, interceding stance outside the jail where Beauchamp is being held. After the first trip to the Gowrie cemetery, Chick and Aleck Sander are either at home or in the protective company of an older male, such as Stevens or Sheriff Hampton. Miss Habersham, on the other hand, sits in full view of the town square until the immediate

threat to Beauchamp's life has passed. She expresses an initial annoyance at the task of public intercession, but her annoyance is not due to the task's physical danger. She is indignant that these influential white men—Sheriff Hampton and Gavin Stevens—were not willing to give enough time to Beauchamp earlier and now demand even more from her:

> So I'm to sit there on that staircase with my skirts spread or maybe better with my back against the balustrade and one foot propped against the wall of Mrs Tubb's kitchen while you men who never had any time yesterday to ask that old nigger a few questions and so all he had last night was a boy, a child— … Drive me home first. I've got some mending to do. I aint going to sit there all morning doing nothing so that Mrs Tubbs will think she has to talk to me. (*ID* 116)

Miss Habersham is not pleased that she must, in some ways, temporarily conform to the southern ideal of idle femininity on display, with her "skirts spread" and "one foot propped against the wall." She consents to the task, but not without ordering the men to drive her home so that she can retrieve her sewing materials. Miss Habersham "is eminently practical … If she is going to have to sit there at the jail all morning, she wants something to do with her hands" (Brooks 287). She does not relish this opportunity to utilize the mythology of passive southern white ladies, but she is willing to do so if it will help Beauchamp, and if she can get some kind of work done in the meantime. In bringing her sewing to the jail, Miss Habersham further highlights the gender role that will hopefully protect both her and Beauchamp; she brings domestic work into a public space, and thus calls attention to herself as a woman.

Faulkner portrays Miss Habersham's lynching intercession as particularly effective because she turns the southern rape complex of vulnerable white ladies into a means of lynching prevention. Faulkner also suggests that Miss Habersham is well suited to be an intercessor, because—as a woman—she has mostly been an outsider to the public sphere. He implies that being an outsider fosters greater flexibility, and this flexibility is necessary for combatting entrenched ideologies. Miss Habersham is not surprised when Chick tells her that Beauchamp gave him—and not his uncle—the instructions to unearth Vinson Gowrie's body. She remarks, "Naturally he wouldn't tell your uncle. He's a Negro and your uncle's a man … Lucas knew it would take a child—or an old woman like me: someone not concerned with probability, with evidence. Men like your uncle and Mr. Hampton have had to be men too long, busy too long" (*ID* 88). Miss Habersham believes that women and very young and very old men are better prepared than white, middle-aged men to do those tasks that appear to be beyond the realm of possibility. She characterizes Chick and herself as more capable of negotiation and imagination, while working white men live within a world of fixed schedules and predetermined truths.

Accordingly, the leaders of change in Faulkner's *Intruder* are not the white men. Gavin Stevens and Sheriff Hampton later join the quest to prove Beauchamp's innocence, but the first, dangerous step is taken by the three outsiders—the white teenager, the black teenager, and the old, white woman. Chick reflects on the great risks all three of them are taking as they make their way to the Gowrie's cemetery:

> but that it remained for them, a white youth of sixteen and a Negro one of the same and an old white spinster of seventy to elect and do at the same time the two

> things out of all man's vast reservoir of invention and capability that Beat Four would repudiate and retaliate on most violently: to violate the grave of one of its progeny in order to save a nigger murderer from its vengeance. (*ID* 93)

Chick acknowledges a degree of absurdity in the seemingly least powerful members of the community challenging the most dangerous. Still, he also affirms Miss Habersham's notion that only the least powerful would be willing to act so far afield the ordinary realm of behavior. Twice in the novel—before the first expedition to the cemetery and afterwards—Chick recalls advice given to him by an elderly black man named Ephraim. The first recollection focuses on the outsider's flexibility with time: "Young folks and womens, they aint cluttered. They can listen. But a middle-year man like your paw and your uncle, they cant listen. They aint got time. They're too busy with facks" (*ID* 70). With the second recollection, he further considers that working outside of tradition requires a flexible view of the truth: "If you ever needs to get anything done outside the common run, don't waste yo time on the menfolks; they works on what your uncle calls the rules and the cases. Get the womens and children at it; they works on the circumstances" (*ID* 111). The character of Miss Habersham proves Ephraim and herself correct, as she personifies a flexibility and willingness to work the circumstances, facilitating a challenge to the lynching tradition.

Miss Habersham is willing and able to play different roles depending on what is needed at the moment. She plays the inviolable white woman in front of the jail only hours after digging in the dirt of a man's grave, disliking both tasks but acknowledging their necessity. She hurries Chick and Aleck Sander along when there is not much time to dig up the grave, but she insists that the two boys handle the flowers on the grave with

slow and careful respect. As the intercessor at the jail, Miss Habersham provides the white community with the chance "just to pause, just to stop, just to wait," as Chick describes it, and thus learn the error of their prejudice (*ID* 88). Atkinson argues that the greatest lesson Miss Habersham teaches Chick is in regards to time: "As Chick himself comes to understand it, her time requires the attention in which access to truth is available universally, to anyone: '[A]ll they had to do was just to pause, just to stop, just to wait…' This is the very element lacking in the men's time, which is why she says they miss the truth of Lucas's story" (662). Similarly, Robert Jackson in "A Southern Sublimation: Lynching Film and the Reconstruction of American Memory" (2008), contends that the pause before any real violence occurs "allows [Faulkner] to meditate on lynching critically yet unobtrusively" (112). As an intercessor, Miss. Habersham is the source of this pause in the violent action. She does not approve of wasting time, but she is willing to slow down if that slowness results in greater respect (such as with the graveyard flowers) or greater knowledge (such as who really killed Vinson Gowrie). Her willing negotiations with time grant her greater access to the truth, however unexpected and unconventional it might be.

VI. *Mrs. Mallison and Molly Beauchamp*

Mrs. Mallison, Chick's mother, goes largely unmentioned in criticism of the novel, though she also acts as a lynching intercessor, sitting and sewing next to Miss Habersham in front of the town jail. Her character is similar to Miss Habersham in many ways, and she further illustrates the invaluable flexibility that the narrative associates with women. When Chick returns from the Gowrie cemetery in the night and tells his

mother and uncle that Miss Habersham, Aleck Sander, and he discovered a different body in Vinson Gowrie's grave, Chick's mother tries to convince him to go to sleep instead of going to Sheriff Hampton's house. Chick almost stops to obey his mother, but his uncle chastises him:

> Come on. What's the matter with you? Dont you know she's tougher than you and me both just as old Habersham was tougher than you and Aleck Sander put together; you might have gone out there without her to drag you by the hand but Aleck Sander wouldn't and I'm still not so sure you would when you came right down to it. (*ID* 104-5)

Stevens warns Chick against underestimating his mother because she is a woman, reminding him that the gumption of an elderly woman is what made the trip to the cemetery possible in the first place. Mrs. Mallison's concern for Chick exerts a powerful influence on his behavior, but Stevens reminds him that her concern is not synonymous with weakness. Chick recognizes his mother's infinite capacity to adapt, and thinks that men are constantly defeated by women, "because of their fluidity which was not just a capacity for mobility but a willingness to abandon" (*ID* 104). Mrs. Mallison's fluidity and "willingness to abandon" soon becomes apparent: she not only changes her mind about Chick needing to sleep—instead giving him coffee so he can stay awake and return to the Gowrie cemetery with Stevens and Sheriff Hampton (*ID* 125)—she also decides to join Miss Habersham and intercede at the jail.

Chick recalls another example of his mother's flexibility and willingness to fully adapt to different circumstances. He remembers wanting to play in a game of high school football, and his mother virulently objecting, pleading with him not to risk his safety, and

dramatically reminding him that he is the only child she has. Chick plays anyway, but he feels "as he imagined a soldier might feel wrenching out of his mother's restraining arms to go fight a battle for some shameful cause" (*ID* 121-2). Her entreaties do not change his mind, but they powerfully affect him anyway. However, while playing in the game, he realizes that she has come to cheer him on, "running up and down the sideline following each play," and even asks after the game if his arm is hurt with "a voice as proud and serene and pitiless as his own could have been" (*ID* 122). Mrs. Mallison is willing to display sentimental fragility—traditionally associated with southern white women—in her to attempt to dissuade Chick from playing. After losing that argument, though, she is willing to adopt an entirely different persona: engaged sports fan and stoic, supportive mother. The incidents that surround the threat of Beauchamp's lynching show that both Mrs. Mallison and Miss Habersham are willing to assume the different roles that are most advantageous to each situation.

When Chick returns from the Sheriff's house and is determined to return to the Gowrie cemetery, he anticipates that a "fluid and implacable attack" from his mother will try to prevent him from doing so. Instead, Mr. Mallison is furious, but Mrs. Mallison is calm and "her voice not really hurried and impatient: just brisk." She tells Chick to drink his coffee quickly because "We're already late," and Stevens thinks that she intends to accompany them to the Gowrie cemetery (*ID* 125). He insists that she cannot go, and Mrs. Mallison—holding her basket of sewing work—promptly interrupts him:

> 'I dont intend to…This time you men will have to do the digging. I'm going to the jail:' already in the kitchen now and only her voice coming back: 'I'm not going to let Miss Habersham sit there by herself with the whole county gawking at her.

> As soon as I help Paralee plan dinner we'll—' not dying fading: ceasing, quitting: since she had dismissed them though his father still tried once more (*ID* 126)

Her brisk efficiency and sensible assessment of a dangerous situation mirror traits previously exemplified by Miss Habersham.[132] Mrs. Mallison understands that the interceding white lady is on display at the jail, so she resolves to add her own white, female body to the spectacle and provide company to Miss Habersham. The domestic authority of white women like Miss Habersham and Mrs. Mallison—who makes dinner plans before leaving and takes her sewing work with her—is strategically inserted into the public sphere to keep violent white men at bay. Also like Miss Habersham, Mrs. Mallison briefly shames Stevens by reminding him that two teenagers and an elderly woman—with no help from a grown man—dug up the grave the first time, so "you men" ought to do the digging this time. Faulkner suggests that these white, southern women are critical actors in stopping racial violence.

In the novel *Intruder*, Chick does not seem to fully comprehend the risk involved in Miss Habersham's interceding position until Mrs. Mallison takes the same position. Mrs. Mallison, though, betrays no fear of her own and presents herself in a matter-of-fact and habitual manner:

> … and then he could see her too in the second chair besides Miss Habersham; a car drew up to the curb behind him and stopped and now without haste she chose a sock from the basket and slipped the darningegg into it; she even had the needle

[132] Interestingly, Mrs. Mallison's dismissal of Chick, his father, and his uncle at this moment recalls Chick's initial dismissal of Miss Habersham. Chick did not think that Miss Habersham had anything to offer the task of digging up Vinson's grave, and now Mrs. Mallison decides that the men cannot help Miss Habersham hold off the mob. The generalization that Chick makes, though, is based on his acceptance of gender roles while Mrs. Mallison's generalization is based on her knowledge that the roles can be manipulated for the circumstances.

already threaded stuck in the front of her dress and he could distinguish the flash and glint of it and maybe that was because he knew so well the motion… (*ID* 136)

His mother appears calm, choosing a sock to mend "without haste" and sewing just as she does at home. Carl Dimitri writes, "And those upper class whites who later help Lucas, such as Chick's mother, do so only after the life-threatening risks have been taken" (24), but I disagree with his assessment that the "life-threatening risks" do not apply to Mrs. Mallison. Chick is, in fact, so nervous about leaving town while his mother sits in front of the large crowd that he almost does not go back to the cemetery. He tells Stevens that he will not go, and feels his uncle's gaze on him, the "quizzical eyes" which "as long as he had known them never missed anything until last night." Stevens states, "Ah … Miss Habersham is of course a lady but this other female is yours" (*ID* 139). Stevens was mistaken about Beauchamp's guilt, but he is not mistaken about this: Miss Habersham is a southern white lady that Chick feels inclined to shield from harm, but Mrs. Mallison is his mother, and thus Chick's desire to defend her is even stronger. He wants to stay so that he can try to protect her if the mob begins an assault. Stevens tries to assure Chick that his mother is safe because the crowd is just there to see what happens, but Chick replies "No … More than that" (*ID* 140). Stevens tries to dismiss the crowd as nothing more than a waiting audience, but Chick reminds him that the crowd is waiting to watch and maybe even help a man be killed—the crowd is really a lynch mob. Slowly learning from his nephew, Gavin concedes this point: "'All right,' his uncle said, quite soberly too now. 'Granted'" (*ID* 140). In the novel, the danger of Miss Habersham's intercession only becomes fully real to Chick—and thus made fully evident to the reader who is guided by Chick's narration—when Mrs. Mallison becomes an intercessor, too.

There is another female character that cannot join Miss Habersham and Mrs. Mallison in front of the jail but still plays a part in the intercession: Molly Beauchamp, Lucas Beauchamp's deceased wife. The group of three that investigates Vinson Gowrie's grave—Miss Habersham, Chick, and Aleck Sander—is actually the same triangulation of raced and gendered characters represented in the southern rape complex: a white female, a white male, and a black male. Faulkner, though, resists the mythological lynching narrative in *Intruder* by depicting them as lynching resistors instead of assault victim, lyncher, and lynchee. Still, with this configuration, Faulkner omits the same figure that is conspicuously absent from the southern rape complex: a black female. Robyn Wiegman and Sandra Gunning maintain that though black women are not materially present in the lynching myth, they are "profoundly present in the dimension of the symbolic" (Gunning 10).[133] In her study of black female women specifically in Faulkner's novel *Light in August*, Beth Widmaier posits a similar argument: "The white female body cannot be understood without considering its obverse, the black female body. Each constructs the other in a dialectical relation, defining and delimiting through the assignment of separate spaces and roles in the cultural matrix" (24). Widmaier does not discuss *Intruder* in her study, but, in this novel, Faulkner directly identifies a black female absence that is signified by a white female presence. Through his portrayal of the relationship between Molly Beauchamp and Miss Habersham, Faulkner obliquely involves a black woman in the anti-lynching efforts.

[133] In her book *American Anatomies* (1995), Wiegman writes that the reproductive value of African American women that was appropriated by white men as property during slavery could not be appropriated in the same way in the post-Emancipation era. She continues: "Instead, the African-American woman was condemned to a position of negativity as the symbolic excess of white womanhood. At the same time, of course, her negation and devaluation made possible the narrative casting of white women as both prize and pawn" (102). The white woman could only be considered inviolable because the black woman was considered always already violated.

In all likelihood, Faulkner's character Miss Habersham in *Intruder* is the same character as Miss Worsham in *Go Down, Moses*. As Edmund Volpe argues, both women are white and have near-sister relationships with Molly Beauchamp, and the two different names are probably an inadvertent mistake on Faulkner's part (259).[134] Miss Worsham's close-knit bond with Mollie is made evident in *Go Down*, as she works to bring home the body of Mollie's grandson and grieves with Mollie about the boy's death (*GD* 356-63). In *Intruder*, Chick remembers the relationship between Molly Beauchamp and Miss Habersham when Miss Habersham approaches him outside his parents' house:

> and now he knew what it was that had nudged at his attention back in his uncle's office when he had recognized her and then in the next second flashed away: old Molly, Lucas' wife, who had been the daughter of one of old Doctor Habersham's, Miss Habersham's grandfather's, slaves, she and Miss Habersham the same age, born in the same week and both suckled at Molly's mother's breast and grown up together almost inextricably like sisters, like twins, sleeping in the same room, the white girl in the bed, the Negro girl on a cot at the foot of it almost until Molly and Lucas married, and Miss Habersham had stood up in the Negro church as godmother to Molly's first child. (*ID* 86)

It is certainly possible to interpret Faulkner as romanticizing the bonds between slave families and slave-owning families in the old South in his description of the relationship between these two female characters. Still, Faulkner also seems to convey this relationship as particularly unique, which is why Chick knows about the connection and

[134] In his book *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1964), Edmund L. Volpe argues that Faulkner simply forgot the character's name in the six years between the novels (259), and I am not aware of any evidence to the contrary. Faulkner also spells Molly's name as "Mollie" in *Go Down, Moses*.

about such details as Miss Habersham becoming a godmother in a black church. Romanticized or not, Chick recognizes the link between Miss Habersham and Molly as the motivation for Miss Habersham's involvement because he recalls their relationship the moment she becomes his co-conspirator in his quest to prove Beauchamp's innocence. Molly is ultimately implicated in the efforts to prevent Beauchamp's lynching because Chick acknowledges that Molly is the reason Miss Habersham believes Beauchamp and wants to help him.

Molly Beauchamp is not alive for the majority of the story, but her presence permeates the entirety of the narrative (similar to how Rider's aunt permeates the story "Pantaloon in Black" despite the fact that Faulkner does not give her a name). Chick meets Molly when he is in Beauchamp's house after falling into the icy creek, and he gives Beauchamp a dress for Molly in their competitive exchange of goods. It is when Chick learns that Molly has died that he thinks about Beauchamp's recent behavior and decides that, "*You dont have to not be a nigger in order to grieve*" (*ID* 25). This realization is an example of how Chick's interactions with Beauchamp continue to challenge Chick's racist assumptions about black men and women. Atkinson reads Miss Habersham's connection to Molly Beauchamp as an articulation of genuine communal morality:

> That superiority, Miss Habersham has shown us, is not the enforced elevation of genteel white ladies, into which Chick originally and repeatedly tried to dismiss her. Nor is it an untenable, isolating self-reliance of adult men. It is, rather, an organic, almost familial network of both friendship and practical, effectual virtue,

> a fellowship to which even the heroic Lucas belongs only by proxy, through his wife. (664).

The characters of Miss Habersham and Lucas Beauchamp do not mention Molly during the events surrounding Beauchamp's arrest, but Faulkner suggests that she is and has been present all along. A foundational network among women is another reason that Faulkner imagines female lynching intercession as a powerful, ethical alternative to racial violence.

VII. *Miss Habersham on the Big Screen*

In his article, "*Intruder in the Dust* and the Southern Community" (2007), which focuses on the film version of *Intruder*, Mark Royden Winchell says the politics of lynching was a high priority in adapting this novel to the screen. He writes that director Clarence Brown was "intent on filming an anti-lynching polemic" (88). Screenwriter Ben Maddow's assessment of the director's motives supports Winchell's contention:

> [Brown] had witnessed when he was a young man of perhaps sixteen or seventeen, a so-called 'race riot' in which blacks were shot down on the streets and piled onto a flatcar at the railway stations, and then dumped in the woods miles away from the scene of the slaughter. To him the film was a kind of payment of his conscience, and the fact that Faulkner, too, was a disturbed Southerner was not irrelevant to this choice. (qtd in Degenfelder 138)

By filming a story in which white southerners act against and successfully prevent a lynching, Brown both addresses the problem of anti-black violence in the South on a national platform and celebrates individual white southerners. He projects intercessor

characters like Miss Habersham onto the movie screen, rendering her heroism into an image that is larger-than-life. His allegiance to Faulkner as another "disturbed Southerner" is apparent in the faithfulness of the adaptation.[135] Brown maintains the sense of an overwhelmingly violent atmosphere that Chick, Aleck Sander, and Miss Habersham risk provoking in their initial trek to the cemetery. Furthermore, Brown also brings the role of southern gender roles and assumptions to the fore of his film about racial violence. Brown largely maintains the characteristics and actions of Miss Habersham that are present in the novel, and he also visually interrogates southern female virtue and adds a scene that further dramatizes Miss Habersham's intercession.

Chick's narrative perspective in the novel *Intruder* provides access to the incongruities between his expectations of emotionally and physically fragile white women and Miss Habersham's tough, practical resiliency. In the visual medium of film, however, Brown subverts the traditional expectations of southern white ladies through images of white women and girls who hopefully await the violence of a lynching. At approximately 1:00:35, Brown cuts from the discovery of Vinson's body in quicksand to the lynch mob in the town square, dissolving from a shot of Mr. Gowrie's grieving face and the sound of howling dogs to a shot of a loudspeaker that is blaring loudly.[136] The camera tracks down from the loudspeaker to a view of the town square and then pans to show cars lining the plaza streets and countless people filling he sidewalks. The atmosphere is festive, and the film then cuts to a shot of a young white girl wearing

[135] Clarence Brown said, "That Mr. Faulkner was well pleased with it has been one of the most gratifying rewards I have received in thirty-five years of making movies" (qtd in Phillips 100).

[136] The loudspeaker plays at a high volume a fraction of a moment before the image of Mr. Gowrie dissolves, which jolts the viewer, and intrudes on Mr. Gowrie's grief with a harsh, electronic sound. In this dissolve, Brown exemplifies his pattern of connoting disjunction and unease without using dialogue.

glasses and spinning a noise-maker. She is sitting on a car, elevated slightly above the crowd. There is no dialogue to identify this crowd as a lynch mob, but the viewer knows from an earlier scene that cars were flooding into the town with the expectation that Beauchamp was going to be lynched. This young white girl looks like she could be at an outdoor pageant or carnival, perched at a good view of the main stage and spinning a noisemaker while waiting for the show to begin. Her view, though, is of the jail, and she is waiting to watch a lynching.

In Brown's visual depiction of the lynching mob, not only are white women present, but young white girls and white women with infants are eager for the lynching to begin, becoming bored and antsy as they wait for the Gowries to begin the violent spectacle. The shot after the girl with the noisemaker follows men disembarking from a bus and walking to the left and continues tracking left to show a young boy standing on the base of a lamppost and eating an ice cream cone. As the tracking shot continues, the audience sees a woman reapply her lipstick in a car rearview mirror, and two young white girls in white dresses sit in a wagon, one eating an ice cream cone and the other playing with a yo-yo while resting her head in her hand. The ice cream and the noisemaker indicate a holiday-like atmosphere, while the women and children are clearly becoming bored and restless. The tracking shot continues moving to the left, passes by a group of white men huddled in a circle and talking about a card game, and then lands on a young white woman carrying a baby. The camera follows her as she walks toward the left. The tracking shot ends by cutting to a medium shot of the woman with the baby pausing next to a car and asking, "Well, Mr. Gowrie, when you reckon you goin' to get started?" (*Intruder*). In this sequence, young white boys eat desserts, white women fuss over their

appearance, and white girls in pristine dresses try to fill the time before they can watch Lucas Beauchamp being burned alive. This portrayal of southern white women and children as casually bloodthirsty creates a direct challenge to the southern mythology of white female innocence and virtue that must be protected at all costs.

In Brown's film version of *Intruder*, he evokes a strong fear for Miss Habersham's life in front of this crowd, even though Mrs. Mallison does not join her and thus make the danger fully real to Chick. While Chick, Stevens, and Sheriff Hampton are back at the Gowrie cemetery, Brown stages a dramatic confrontation between Miss Habersham and Crawford Gowrie. Brown portrays a direct physical threat that garners a brave response of stalwart, female, lynching intercession. The scene at the town square is already deeply unsettling, as an immense crowd of white men and women eagerly anticipate a cruel attack on Lucas Beauchamp. Crawford Gowrie is the only member of the Gowrie family who is present, and when mob members mock him for delaying the lynching—presumably, because the rest of the Gowrie family has not arrived or because Miss Habersham is in the way—he decides to begin. He purposefully carries an empty gasoline tank to the filling station and pays for it to be filled to the brim. Brown creates an eerie silence in this large crowd, since only the diegetic sounds of the distant loudspeaker and the gasoline pouring into the tank are audible. The camera cuts between a high-angle shot of the tank and low-angle shots of men watching Crawford fill it, showing an elderly man who smiles slightly and drools at the sight of the gasoline filling the tank. With mob members literally salivating with excitement at the prospect of Beauchamp being set on fire, Crawford picks up the full tank of gasoline and walks

aggressively toward the jail. Brown creates a steady pace of action that builds to the climactic confrontation between prospective-lyncher and intercessor.

In this dramatic confrontation, Brown chooses shots that intensify both Crawford's menace and Miss Habersham's vulnerability. As Crawford approaches Miss Habersham, the camera tracks backwards into the jail, pausing at a point that is slightly behind and to the right of Miss Habersham's right shoulder. The viewer thus sees what she sees: the mob outside the screen door is illuminated by the daytime sun and contrasts with the darkness of the jail foyer, and Crawford's dark figure stands just outside the screen door with the full gasoline tank in his hand. The camera follows the verbal exchange between Crawford and Miss Habersham with shot/reverse-shots, placing the viewer both in Miss Habersham's position of intercession and Crawford's viewpoint that sees nothing between him and the jail cells but a small, elderly white woman in a rocking chair. Crawford orders Miss Habersham to get out of the way, and she exemplifies no-nonsense intercession by looking up and saying in a polite and measured tone that she is quite comfortable where she is and then looking back down at her sewing. A mob member standing behind Crawford suggests that they could pick up Miss Habersham in the chair and move her, but Crawford menacingly answers, "Or I could do this," opens the screen door, and pours out some gasoline at Miss Habersham's feet (*Intruder*). Brown creates a suspenseful and fearful moment by pausing the shot on the gasoline at Miss Habersham's feet. She leans forward, realizes what the threat is, and looks up at Crawford. Brown continues to employ no sound except for source sound effects, the dialogue, and the faint loudspeaker. With tense expectation, a low-angle, close-up shot of the threatening Crawford frames him looming over the viewer. He takes a match out of

his front pocket and lights it, holding it above the gasoline-covered floor. Miss Habersham's heroic willingness and resolve to keep the mob at bay becomes forcefully evident as she responds, "Please step out of the light so I can thread m'needle" (*Intruder*). Crawford blows out the match, extinguishing the immediate threat to Miss Habersham's life. He insists that even though he is not going to touch her, she is in the wrong and fighting the whole county, represented by the mob behind him. Brown both cultivates an atmosphere of suspense and dramatizes the bravery of the solitary, white, lady intercessor.

Miss Habersham's intercession is gendered female, and it is also a form of southern heroism that counters southern villainy. Crawford informs Miss Habersham that when she becomes tired and leaves her post, he and the rest of the mob are going to enter the jail and take Beauchamp. Her response, "I'm goin' for eighty, and I'm not tired yet," while still sewing, challenges his assumption that a fragile southern white woman cannot meet the physical demands of ideological resistance. The sheer absurdity of the situation also destabilizes the southern values of chivalry: a large group of white men and women are willing to burn a black man alive in the presence of women and children, but they are not willing to pick up an elderly white woman in a chair to move her out of the way. In this scene, Brown and Faulkner reveal the southern rape myth as ludicrous in its inconsistency and illogic.

Unlike in the novel, the character Miss Habersham in the film *Intruder in the Dust* also attempts to rhetorically dissuade the lynch mob. After telling Crawford that she is not tired yet, she stands up, opens the screen door, and looks out into the square. A shot from Miss Habersham's point-of-view pans from left to right to show row-upon-row of

white men standing in front of the jail, looking directly at her, as cars and other people fill up the frame in the background. The camera then cuts back to a medium shot of Miss Habersham, who calls out, "Go home! Every one of ya! Go on home! You ought to be ashamed!" (*Intruder*). One person standing in the way of many, Miss Habersham is unafraid of directly voicing disapproval of the white men and women in the crowd. She does not explicitly challenge their racial prejudices; her lack of specificity in her shaming allows for any number of interpretations. Furthermore, by using the term "ashamed," Miss Habersham again draws on a gendered, domestic authority that utilizes her advanced age: she resembles a white grandmother scolding her grandchildren. She is the defiant figure in the community, but her shaming casts the mob as a collection of petulant children as opposed to a meaningful source of authority. The film version of *Intruder* is not narrated by Chick's interiority, and thus it loses a great deal of the development of Miss Habersham's character that Chick mentally negotiates. However, Brown adds this scene of confrontation between Miss Habersham, Crawford Gowrie, and the rest of the mob to fully preserve—and even capitalize on—her heroic, interceding stance.

. In regards to the actor who portrays Miss Habersham in the film, Browns casts this role to Elizabeth Patterson, who was both from Savannah, Tennessee and had played the elderly "Aunt Jenny" in the film *The Story of Temple Drake* (1933), based on Faulkner's novel *Sanctuary* (1931). As Degenfelder notes, the role in *Temple Drake*, and other similar roles, had "established her as the incarnation of the elderly genteel Southern lady" (139). Brown builds on a previous association of Elizabeth Patterson with southern women—even, specifically, southern belles as characterized by Faulkner—, and so her performance further subverts audience expectations of southern women and personifies

anti-lynching heroism as a southern occupation.[137] However, Brown does not indicate that Miss Habersham acts out of loyalty to Molly Beauchamp in the film, so her involvement seems to stem "solely from her desire for justice" (Degenfelder 141). With this slight change in the film version, Miss Habersham's heroism is entirely her own and fails to speak to interracial community among women. The relationship between a white woman and a black woman is no longer the ethical standard; it belongs entirely to the white woman.

VIII. *The Aristocratic and Southern Miss Habersham*

Miss Habersham's effectiveness as a female intercessor is contingent on her whiteness and her femaleness, as she utilizes the status of the southern white lady to protect both herself and Lucas Beauchamp. However, as Widmaier notes, the southern "lady"—which is Gavin Stevens's exact wording: "a woman, a lady, a white lady" (*ID* 115)—is a designation "dependent on both race and class" (28). Miss Habersham is a white woman, and she is also considered a uniquely elite member of the community. At seventy-years-old, she lives in near poverty, but she is descended from a wealthy family of the highest local status. Just as Chick notes similarities between Lucas and his grandfather (*ID* 6, 8), he notes similarities between Miss Habersham's clothing and his grandmother's, connecting Miss Habersham to an older class of plantation gentry to which Chick's family belongs. She wears a "plain cotton print dress" and a round black hat "such as his grandmother had used to wear," but she also has a small gold watch in a hunting case suspended by a gold brooch like one that Chick's grandmother wore (*ID* 74-5). Furthermore, she wears gloves "which his mother said were made to her measure in a

New York shop and cost thirty and forty dollars a pair for the one and fifteen and twenty for the other" (*ID* 76). It is unclear whether the gloves are new or inherited, but the fact that Mrs. Mallison knows the exact price suggests that these are uniquely expensive gloves. While her clothing choices seem mostly modest—the plain cotton print dress—the small touch of the gold watch and the gold brooch signals inherited wealth, family heirlooms. Even though the reader soon learns that Miss Habersham does not currently live a particularly luxurious life, her clothing denotes her membership in a family of once-great wealth and status.

Chick's narration also establishes that Miss Habersham's family has a particular prestige and history in the town, as her name "was now the oldest which remained in the county" (*ID* 75). She is descended from Doctor Habersham, one of the three white "founders" of the town from when it was "a Chickasaw trading post with a Chickasaw name to designate it" (*ID* 75). Miss Habersham's name still carries connotations of importance, even if her personal wealth has drastically dwindled. She lives in a large house she has inherited, which is itself a key marker of wealth, but the house is greatly deteriorated: "a columned colonial house on the edge of town which had not been painted since her father died and had neither water nor electricity in it" (*ID* 76). A relic of the Old South in its size and architecture, the house has no modern conveniences, and Miss Habersham makes a meager living by raising chickens and vegetables with two, long-term black servants, themselves the descendants of slaves that the Habersham family used to own. Miss Habersham no longer occupies a position of socioeconomic prominence, but her family's foundational, slave-owning, and wealthy past presents an elite status from the Old South that is faded but still visible in the modern setting.

Soon after Miss Habersham's introduction to the narrative, the reader also learns that she has familial ties, via Molly Beauchamp, to Lucas Beauchamp (*ID* 86), who is himself descended from aristocratic founders of the town. This shared aristocracy between Beauchamp and Miss Habersham is another similarity between these two heroic characters, but their connection to local aristocracy also reinvests in the superiority of the Old South's elite. Dimitri describes Miss Habersham as "something of an aristocrat" who "drives the boys to the graveyard, while wearing her white gloves and gold jewelry, helps uncover the grave and, later, sits before Lucas's jail in defiance of the mob." He does not interpret her intercession as a form of class paternalism, though, because "her desire to help Lucas stems less from a sense of noblesse oblige than from a sense of 'familial' duty to Molly and Lucas" (Dimitri 20).[138] However, Lucas Beauchamp is distinctly proud of his own aristocratic lineage, so the "familial" tie also emerges as a connection between two old and prominent families. There is no denying that Chick breaks away from the racial violence of his white southern ancestors by learning from Miss Habersham and Lucas Beauchamp. On the other hand, Miss Habersham and Beauchamp also seem to represent the economically powerful citizens of the past. Faulkner and Brown challenge the gender prescriptions for southern leadership in *Intruder*, but they also continue to locate rightful, southern authority in an elite class.

The white intercessors in Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust* and Brown's film adaptation do not disavow the poorer whites in their southern communities, but lynching is portrayed mostly as a practice of lower-class whites, and intercession is illustrated as a

[138] "[Beauchamp] is no would-be martyr; he is no crusader for civil rights; he is the tough and fearless old aristocrat who makes no concessions, who manages to keep his courage and his dignity under the most difficult of situations" (Brooks 283).

role for the educated and economically powerful. Joel Williamson writes in *William Faulkner and Southern History* (1993) that as the influence of the "black beast" image began to lessen in white southern minds, lynchings became less and less frequent, and "Previous unpleasant events were treated as curious and isolated episodes, largely the result of the particularly benighted racism of the poor whites" (163). Lynching black men and women had never been an exclusively lower-class practice, but in *Intruder*, Faulkner perpetuates the perception that it is, as the threat of lynching stems primarily from the Gowries, who are poor whites that live outside of town. It is assumed that the Gowries will lynch Beauchamp because—in addition to being white—this rural and poor family is known for being primitive, lawless, and violent. This assumption is eventually proven correct, to some extent, when it is discovered that Vinson Gowrie was killed by his own brother. In the film, the visual marker of the Gowrie's status as rural and lower class is their clothing: overalls, which are generally considered farming clothes. In comparison, the urban and educated professional John Stevens, who eventually helps to clear Beauchamp's name, wears a white suit.

This is not to say that class lines are entirely simplistic in Faulkner's and Brown's *Intruder*. Mr. Gowrie's grief for his dead son offers an education similar to that of Lucas Beauchamp's grief for his wife (and Rider's grief for his wife in "Pantaloon"). When Vinson Gowrie's body is pulled from the quicksand, Chick sees grief on Mr. Gowrie's face that he had not expected to see, and so the "enlargement of the boy's sympathies thus works in two directions to include the chief of the lynchers-to-be as well as the man in danger of being lynched" (Brooks 288).[139] The Gowries meet Chick's expectations of

[139] The exact wording of Chick's realization is as follows:

violent poor whites to some degree, but Mr. Gowrie also demonstrates a filial attachment and desire for the truth that works against Chick's assumptions of this family. However, the socioeconomic inheritance of white characters like Chick, Stevens, and Miss Habersham suggests a natural connection between their status and their work to prevent Beauchamp's lynching: "The social standing and education of Gavin Stevens, Chick Mallison, and Eunice Habersham give them authority over and protection from the Gowries and other poor whites when they intervene on Lucas's behalf" (Aiken 194). Poor whites are not completely dismissed in Faulkner's narrative, but elite whites are still the ideal embodiments of southern leadership.

Intruder in the Dust diverges from Faulkner's previous novels, not only because it favors an "aesthetics of engagement," but also because it ends, more or less, happily.[140] The knowledge that Crawford Gowrie murdered his own brother and hid the body in quicksand is certainly disconcerting—as Miss Habersham shows in her repetition of the statement, "He put him in quicksand" (*ID* 223, 225, 226)—but Lucas Beauchamp is recognized as innocent of the crime and walks away from the jail unscathed. The attempt to prevent Beauchamp's murder, initiated by Chick, Aleck Sander, and Miss Habersham, has proven successful. Writing a novel in which a lynching is threatened but does not occur due to the actions of motivated individuals was ultimately a profitable move for Faulkner. It was his bestselling novel since *Sanctuary* in 1931 (Winchell 84), and the film rights to the novel were quickly purchased. While Faulkner had been finishing *Intruder,*

> …Why, he's grieving: thinking how he had seen grief twice now in two years where he had not expected it or anyway anticipated it, where in a sense a heart capable of breaking had no business being: once in an old nigger who had just happened to outlive his old nigger wife and in a violent foulmouthed godless old man who had happened to lose one of the six lazy idle violent more or less worthless sons (*ID* 158)

[140] John E. Bassett concurs that, "the optimism of the ending is a relatively new note in Faulkner's fiction" (207).

he was in debt and unable to pay taxes without an advance from his publisher Robert Haas (Aiken 190). The immediate influx of cash generated by *Intruder*, both from book sales and the movie rights, solved his short-term financial problems. After publishing this novel, Faulkner entered a period of financial stability: "A flow of money from prizes, books, stories, speeches, and movie and television rights kept him in relatively comfortable but hardly luxuriant financial circumstances for the remainder of his life" (Aiken 191). *Intruder* was a financial success for Faulkner, and its admirable characters—such as Miss Habersham, Chick, Aleck Sander, and Lucas Beauchamp—play a significant part in its commercial appeal.

As previously discussed in the chapter on near-lynchings in the films of John Ford, on-screen heroes and heroines complement the Hollywood star system, and lynchings that do not happen comply with production code guidelines. Racial violence in the South was still considered a controversial topic for Hollywood films in the mid-century, but the prevention of Beauchamp's lynching in *Intruder* ultimately avoids the graphic violence and unadulterated indictment of the South that the film industry often worked to avoid. George Harmon of Mississippi's *Jackson Daily News* noted the optimism of the film's ending at the time of its release: "The film triumphs in that the lynching never takes place, in that the Negro improperly accused of murdering a white man is given his freedom and in that the happing ending comes about through the intelligent endeavors of a few Southern whites pitting themselves against a less intelligent mob guided by centuries of tradition and custom" (qtd. in Aiken 202). Several critics have noted that the film version concludes with more overt optimism, as John Stevens and Chick Mallison watch Lucas Beauchamp walk away and agree that he is the "keeper"

of their consciences (*Intruder*), while the final sentence of the novel is Beauchamp's completely unsentimental request for a receipt (*ID* 241).[141] It is Beauchamp's character that solidifies the merit of the film for Ralph Ellison, as he writes that *Intruder*, "could be shown in Harlem without arousing unintended laughter," because Beauchamp is the only screen image with which post-war black Americans could identify (281). However, Ellison maintains that this film should be treated with caution, since "the temptation toward self-congratulation which comes from seeing these films and sharing in their emotional release is apt to blind us to the true nature of what is unfolding—or failing to unfold—before our eyes" (280). A film that celebrates an individual woman and a few men can ultimately lead the eye too far astray from the many more men and women who wait in the town square to watch the lynching.[142]

Still, Ellison thinks the emotional reassurance of the film's ending is less resonant in Faulkner's novel. He argues that, "In the book *Intruder in the Dust*, Lucas attempts not so much to be the keeper of anyone else's conscience as to preserve his own life … Chick, in aiding Lucas, achieves that view of truth on which his own conscience depends" (281). Atkinson also notes a degree of ambivalence in the novel's conclusion, suggesting that Stevens's southern patriotism is still a problem for Chick: "Whether and how Chick can transcend this mindset is a critical issue up to the final pages of the novel

[141] In his article on the adaptation of *Intruder* from novel to screen, Gene D. Phillips writes that Faulkner attempted to modify the last scene so as "to make the movie's racial message less explicit than it was in the shootings script" (94-5). Faulkner and screenwriter Ben Maddow did not want Gavin and Chick to refer to Beauchamp as the keeper of their consciences. Maddow thought those lines rendered "the ending of the film too preachy and thus [gave] the whole picture what he called a 'falsely sentimental turn'" (qtd in Phillips 95). But, Dore Schary, "a movie executive known for his predilection for 'message pictures,'" insisted on the explicitness. Several critics agreed with Maddow and Faulkner that the "explicit moralizing at the movie's finale" is a wrong note (Phillips 95).

[142] James Baldwin in *The Devil Finds Work* was also skeptical of the film's ending, characterizing it as a "hopeful improbability" (along with the anti-lynching film *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1943)) (21).

… It is not comfortably resolved, though there is genuine room for optimism" (Atkinson 690). While the novel does seem to produce a slightly more ambiguous ending than the film, I read both versions of *Intruder in the Dust* as performing a regional reassurance. Both narratives charge white men *and* white women with taking concrete action against racial violence and interrupting a cycle of inherited prejudice. By insisting on a feminine value and responsibility to this ideological struggle, Faulkner confronts a long history of race and gender injustice yoked together in the South. However, Faulkner's admirable white characters, like the interceding Miss Habersham, position the answer to the South's racial problems solely in the South itself. Winchell discusses the end of both the book and the movie: "Chick has become part of a truly promising *southern* community. If Lucas is indeed the keeper of its conscience, that community may well be capable of finding its own way. At least in the late 1940s, that seemed a distinct possibility to William Faulkner and Clarence Brown" (89). Alongside this more concrete stance against anti-black lynching, Faulkner still insists that progressive change has come and will continue to come from heroic, individual southerners—and not civil rights organizations from the North.

Faulkner initially portrays representatives of the law in Yoknapatawpha County as insufficient to prevent Beauchamp's lynching, but he ultimately includes southern lawmen in the local community that a reader or viewer ought to trust. In the beginning of the novel, the officers of the law make genuine, if eventually inadequate, efforts to protect Beauchamp: the constable handcuffs him to a bed and stands over him with a shotgun, and the sheriff hires Will Legate to stand guard in front of the jail. Legate and the jailor concede that they would not be particularly effective (or particularly willing, in

the jailor's case) to fully defend Beauchamp from a lynch mob, but the law has not completely abandoned Beauchamp to the hands of violent whites. Attorney Gavin Stevens (or John Stevens, in the film) is willing to defend Beauchamp, but only if Beauchamp pleads guilty. Stevens does not fully listen to Beauchamp or believe that he could be innocent of the crime. Therefore, Chick, Miss Habersham, and Aleck Sander must initially act *outside of the law* in the journey to the Gowrie cemetery. However, as soon as the group of three discovers that someone who is not Beauchamp has tampered with Vinson's grave, the representatives of the law become invaluable contributors to the prevention efforts. Though Stevens is not inclined to aid Beauchamp initially, Chick is Stevens's mentee and his office assistant. Chick is not an official representative of the law, but his proximity to the law imbues the institution with some of his own moral courage.

Faulkner suggests that the lawmen in southern towns are occasionally afflicted by the same racial prejudice that afflicts the southern white community in general. When this happens, it is up to the moral leaders like Miss Habersham to guide them back to the fairness and integrity that they usually embody. As Winchell writes in his study of the film, "Beauchamp is freed not by some fast-talking civil rights attorney from Chicago, but by the combined efforts of Chick, Aleck Sander, and Miss Habersham, with the assistance of lawyer Stevens and Sheriff Hampton" (88). Stevens is initially wrong about Beauchamp's guilt, but he admits his mistake and joins the efforts to save Beauchamp's life. It is ultimately Stevens, the shrewd lawyer, who acknowledges that the law needs help protecting the jail and that Miss Habersham, the white lady, is the best hope for this protection. Sheriff Hampton himself exemplifies a "rustic professionalism" (Winchell 83)

by investigating the Gowrie cemetery and following protocol even as Mr. Gowrie points a gun at him (*ID* 159). Stevens and the sheriff need to be prompted by Chick, Aleck Sander, and Miss Habersham to consider Beauchamp's innocence, but once that happens, they work with steadfast determination to uncover the truth. In *Intruder*, Faulkner implies that if ordinary citizens call upon southern law officers to provide full due process to white and black suspects, then southern sheriffs, constables, and lawyers will rise to this occasion.

The significant intercession performed chiefly by Miss Habersham (and also by Mrs. Mallison in the novel) challenges the myth of white female passivity and looks to women to help lead the way in preventing racial violence. Molly Beauchamp's presence endures in the novel, but her death removes her from the material realities of the story world. Faulkner largely locates feminine agency in white, female characters like Miss Habersham and Mrs. Mallison, and thus reinvests in a different idealization of southern white womanhood. He presents a modern vision of the white, southern lady and reinvigorates her position as the community's moral standard. In *Intruder in the Dust*, Faulkner does not expose the failings and crassness of the idealized white southern belle, as he does in previous novels. The character of Narcissa in *Sanctuary* (1931) exemplifies his earlier portrayals of the southern belle's narcissistic core, in which her image in society as innocent and femininely beautiful is her chief concern, and she possesses no "inner ethical system" (Seidel 98, 103-104). Miss Habersham is, by contrast, completely driven by an inner ethical system that invokes the scorn of the white community and risks physical danger. She is shrewd, flexible, and capable of maneuvering the complexities of a changing world. Chick and Aleck Sander are teenagers, and as they learn from

independent-minded adults who intercede on behalf of black and white alike, Faulkner suggests that they will enact in the future the change that the rest of the nation hopes to see.

CODA

The threat of a lynch mob in Harper Lee's popular and influential novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* represents, in some ways, a problem of the past. The novel is published in 1960, a year in which there were no recorded lynchings in the United States, and the narrative is set in the 1930s. However, just five years before *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s publication, a fourteen-year-old black boy named Emmett Till was murdered in Money, Mississippi. Till was killed by two white men, Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam, for his alleged sexual advance toward a white woman, Carolyn Bryant.[143] The purported threat that black men posed to white women had been offered as cause and justification for countless anti-black murders in the previous seventy-five years of U.S. history, and the all-white jury for Bryant's and Milam's trial acquiesced to the authority of that myth by acquitting the two men. With the progression of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and into the 1960s—immediately surrounding the publication of *To Kill a Mockingbird*—resistance to racial segregation and civic inequality was repeatedly met with anti-black violence. The eyes of the nation were increasingly turned towards the South and looking for signs of change in race relations. In her narrative of lynching intercession, Lee presents signs of this change in characters from the South's fictional past: Atticus Finch—a white, male lawyer—and his children.

The lynching intercession in *To Kill a Mockingbird* starkly illustrates how white characters who oppose a racist lynching can actually stabilize the privileged citizenship of the elite white male. Lee firmly establishes that the white men who want to lynch Tom Robinson are rural and poor and contrasts them with Atticus Finch's educated

[143] In an interview featured in the January 17, 1956 issue of *Look* magazine, Bryant and Milam confessed to beating, torturing, and shooting Emmett Till in the head (Pollack and Metress).

professionalism. The reader already knows that Atticus wears glasses (Lee 89), and as a lawyer, it is likely that he wears suits to work. His educated and professional image is buttressed by his status as a local aristocrat, descended from the wealthy plantation owner (and slave owner) Simon Finch (Lee 4). While Atticus is interceding, sitting on the jail's porch and physically placing himself in the racist mob's path, he reads a newspaper, "oblivious of the nightbugs dancing over his head" (Lee 151). As Rob Atkinson observes, "Lee's aristocrats are always reading" (673), and Atticus reads even as a murderous mob heads his way. This character's consummate intellect and professionalism are also apparent in the film version of the novel, directed by Robert Mulligan and released in 1962. In the lynching intercession scene, Atticus wears a white, three-piece suit as he faces the lynch mob (*To Kill a Mockingbird*). He exhibits moral righteousness in nice, white clothing and white skin.

When the cars full of would-be lynchers arrive, Atticus's appearance contrasts dramatically with the mob members', marking Atticus as a professional and the white lynchers as lower-class farmers. The child narrator Scout does not explicitly identify this class dichotomy, but her observations and the previous events of the novel still produce those connections. Scout examines the mob:

> I looked around the crowd. It was a summer's night, but the men were dressed, most of them, in overalls and denim shirts buttoned up to the collars. I thought they must be cold-natured, as their sleeves were unrolled and buttoned at the cuffs. Some wore hats pulled firmly down over their ears. They were sullen-looking, sleepy-eyed men who seemed unused to late hours. I sought once more for a familiar face, and at the center of the semi-circle I found one. (Lee 153)

The men wear overalls, suggesting that they do rough work outdoors, and this is corroborated by their clothes and hats that are worn so as to shield their skin from the sun. These men are tired farmers who work outside in the early hours. Scout recognizes one of the men, Mr. Cunningham, and the reader already knows that Mr. Cunningham is a poor farmer. Atticus was warned that the "Old Sarum bunch" might give him trouble (Lee 145), and Mr. Cunningham and his neighbors—other poor farmers—are the men of Old Sarum who are in town to lynch Tom Robinson.[144] Atticus's high social status both highlights and re-inscribes his ethical prominence.

Atticus Finch's children—Jem and Scout—and their friend Dill join Atticus on the jailhouse steps while he intercedes. Since Scout is a girl, Lee's interceding group is not entirely male. Scout's friendly sociability with Mr. Cunningham is what ultimately leads him to change his mind about the lynching.[145] Cunningham recognizes Scout as a young-woman-in-the-making, as he says to her, "I'll tell [Walter] you said hey, *little lady*," and then tells the other men in the mob to leave with him (emphasis added, Lee 155). Scout is a pre-adolescent girl, though, and she is repeatedly rendered (in both the novel and the film) as more like a young boy than a young lady in dress and behavior. In the novel, her Aunt Alexandria strongly disapproves of her un-lady-like ways, telling Scout that she ought to wear dresses and not do any activities that require pants (Lee 81). Aunt Alexandria eventually moves in to the Finch household with the specific goal of

[144] The lynch-mob members in Mulligan's film version also wear overalls and casual work clothes.

[145] Carolyn Jones, in "Atticus Finch and the Mad Dog" (1996), writes that the children play an integral role in the lynching intercession, because their presence reminds the mob that Atticus is a part of their community, though they would never see Tom Robinson this way: "Atticus forces them men, if they cannot see Tom Robinson, to see Atticus Finch" (56).

being a "feminine influence" on Scout (Lee 127). Scout's gender is constantly in negotiation throughout the novel.

Additionally, Scout's intercession is undermined by the fact that she is unaware of the mob's danger and does not fully comprehend the confrontation until afterwards. The older brother Jem understands that Atticus's legal defense of Tom Robinson means that "Somebody might hurt [Atticus] (Lee 147). When the children and Atticus are standing between the mob and the jail, Jem refuses to leave and let Atticus face the mob alone (Lee 152). Jem performs his intercession with the knowledge that the mob intends to be violent. Dill does not say a word during the intercession, but he offers to carry Atticus's chair after the mob has left (Lee 155). Dill's offer indicates that he understands the risks of Atticus's stance and wants to demonstrate his admiration. Scout, on the other hand, runs up to the jailhouse steps not because she wants to protect Robinson or protect Atticus, but because she wants to give Atticus a "fine surprise" (Lee 152). She does not awaken to the mob's plan to murder Robinson, and the precarious position of standing in the way, until they have returned home: "The full meaning of the night's events hit me and I began crying" (Lee 156). Scout Finch is a female intercessor, but she is far from the consciously gendered authority of Miss Habersham in *Intruder in the Dust*. Lee's interceding foursome is dominated by young and grown men, and their triumph bolsters male leadership.

Every character that contributes to the lynching intercession in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is white, and none of the intercessors allude to racism when they speak to each other or the mob while standing in front of the jail. Black characters such as Reverend Sykes and Calpurnia are excluded from the narrative of lynch mob resistance.

A group of men alert Atticus to the potential threat to Robinson's life, and every one of these men is a white character: Sheriff Heck Tate, Link Deas, Dr. Reynolds, and Mr. Avery (Lee 146). In the novel, the white Mr. Underwood unobtrusively keeps a shotgun pointed at the mob from his second-story newspaper office (Lee 155). Whiteness is the only means of protection for Robinson, and race and racism go completely unmentioned in the confrontation between the mob, Atticus, and the children. When the mob first arrives, one of the men asks Atticus if Tom Robinson is inside the jail. Atticus responds that Robinson is sleeping and tells the men not to wake him, but this is the last time that anyone refers to Robinson during the intercession (Lee 151). Atticus implies that the mob should not break any laws, because the sheriff, Heck Tate, is "around somewhere" (Lee 151). Scout speaks to Mr. Cunningham about his son and his entailment (153-4). The racial prejudice of the mob is tacitly understood, but racism stays below the level of language, unspoken.

In Lee's novel, the plan for an anti-black lynching meets its demise under the intelligent gaze of an ideal, white citizen like Atticus Finch. The character Miss Maudie reasserts this vision of exceptional individuals even after the jury has convicted Tom Robinson of rape. She says consolingly to Jem, "We're so rarely called on to be Christians, but when we are, we've got men like Atticus to go for us" (Lee 215). This same sentiment is expressed by her character in the film version of the novel: "There are some men who are born to do our unpleasant jobs for us. Your father's one of them" (*To Kill a Mockingbird*). Lee and Mulligan signal to the rest of the nation that racial change is best managed by those men "like Atticus" who are "born" to undertake this task. In his article "The Strange Career of Atticus Finch" (2010), Joseph Crespino writes that Lee

imagines "a form of racial change that would occur through the leadership of people like Atticus Finch—in other words, through elite southern white liberals" (15). Lee also reassures her readers that the men like Atticus—the intercessors—are already present in American towns. She illustrates how the people of Maycomb turn to Atticus Finch in the 1930s and suggests that the town will turn to his children in the future. The ending of the novel illustrates Lee's investment in the white intercessor as the guardian of the South: "[Atticus] turned out the light and went into Jem's room. He would be there all night, and he would be there when Jem waked up in the morning" (Lee 281). Rob Atkinson states, "By the end of *Mockingbird* an innocent has seen radical evil, and she can safely forget about it, literally lulled to sleep by its denial. Scout has the last word in her story, and she seems to say that Atticus the protector will always be there" (Atkinson 695).

Harper Lee's representation of the white lynching intercessor is the most widely recognized representation of this figure. In 1982, it was estimated that *To Kill a Mockingbird* had sold over fifteen million copies. A 1991 American "Survey of Lifetime Reading Habits" by the Book-of-the-Month Club and the Library of Congress revealed that, next to the Bible, *To Kill a Mockingbird* was most often cited as "making a difference" in people's lives (Crespino 10). However, the character of Atticus Finch reveals the shortcoming of his own intercession the morning following the confrontation with the mob. He speaks to Jem and Scout: "Hmp, maybe we need a police force of children … you children last night made Walter Cunningham stand in my shoes for a minute. That was enough" (Lee 157). As white lynching intercessors who do not challenge white supremacy, the children make Walter Cunningham stand in *Atticus's*

shoes for a minute- *not* Tom Robinson's. The intercessor asks for an extension of humanity but does not require this extension to cross racial lines.

The white lynching intercessor is decidedly present in texts such as Lee's, but other American authors render the intercessor more like a constant pursuit of narrative intervention than an affirming truth. The lynching intercessor characters in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and in the works discussed in the previous chapters make clear attempts to publicly prevent mob murders, but there are other narratives about lynching that articulate the white intercessor through his pronounced and catastrophic absence. The presence of an intercessor signals an attempt, in the words of Audre Lorde, to dismantle the master's house using the master's tools (110). The intercessor employs the rhetoric of law, masculinity, and democracy to combat racial violence and simultaneously embodies the national mythology of a "colorblind" citizenry. In these stories, the intercessor personifies the freedom to act as an individual, but that freedom is imagined only for white Americans.

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