"Lynch a Thousand Times a Week if Necessary"
Lynching and Women's Rights in the American South

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Abstract

This paper posits that white women in the New South actively participated in lynchings in the American South. Although the historiography of lynching often portrays southern white women as passive, or as bystanders in lynch mobs, white women held important roles in supporting and perpetrating mob violence. If women engaged violently in a lynch mob, it has often been argued that white women had to "move towards masculinity" in order to act violently. I argue that southern white women acted violently *as* white women: claiming otherwise takes away from the public rights that southern white women were attempting to generate for themselves after the Civil War. Prominent southern women, as well as everyday women in the South, voiced their support of lynchings. It is significant that white women acted violently upon the body, and used the discourse against the subordinate group of African-American men to exert their newfound public role in the South. This paper will thus attempt to understand why, and how southern white women participated in lynchings.

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Introduction

At a Georgian Agricultural Society meeting in 1897, a prominent Georgian women named Rebecca Latimer Felton said in her famous speech "Woman on the Farm": "If it needs lynching to protect woman's dearest possession from human beasts, then I say lynch a thousand times a week if necessary."[1] This 'sensational' speech is significant as Felton advocated the lynching of African-American men to protect Southern white women's chastity in the New South. Furthermore, Felton challenged the white patriarchy in the South in the same speech: "as long as your politicians take the coloured man into their embrace on election day…so long will lynching prevail, because the cause of it will grow and increase, for 'familiarity breeds contempt.'"[2] Felton, then, draws a significant connection between women's rights to the vote and protection with lynching in the American South. Such use of lynching as a means for women to enter into the political realm through the discourse of protection is important and is often overlooked in the history of lynching.

This paper argues that lynching was a political action through which southern white women asserted agency in the post-emancipation American South. It is significant, as well, that white southern women use their better public status to act against another subordinate group – African American men. Southern white women were actors in lynching in the American South, although they are usually cast in the historical narrative as victims or bystanders. Moreover, when white southern women did participate in lynchings, their actions were considered to be masculine. Acting violently in a lynch mob is traditionally associated with

[1] "Woman Advocates Lynching: Sensational Speech by the Wife of ex-Congressman Felton, of Georgia," *Washington Post*, August 14, 1987.

[2] ibid.

masculinity, while being a spectator is usually linked with femininity.[3] It is interesting to note that if white men were spectators in the mob, as many were, they were not feminized. White men who were not properly protecting were not living up to their chivalrous duty according to southern standards. However, if white, southern women took part in the violence, they crossed the gender line into masculinity, and this seems to be because masculinity is often associated with violence, or because men are more likely to engage in violence. This study posits that southern white women did act violently *as* women, meaning they acted in lynchings, and used the discourse of protection, in order to make a public space for themselves.

Although this study cannot fully reveal the motivations behind southern white women's actions in lynchings, significant patterns emerge regarding their participation. The study of white, southern women in lynchings in the American South can help to draw conclusions about the lesser-known side to women's political rights, and moreover, a dark side to the suffrage movement, in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

The imagery of the southern belle often comes to mind when one thinks of a southern woman. However, in the postbellum period in the America South, it is clear that the characteristics of southern ladies were shifting drastically. The changes to southern culture after the war allowed southern, white women more clout in the public sphere – and they wished to take full advantage. As such, white, southern women challenged the traditional gender norms in the South, as southern gender and racial hierarchies were precariously hanging on to antebellum culture. In their new roles in the public sphere, women challenged white, southern men to protect them from the perceived threat of African-American sexual assailants and rapists.

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[3]William F. Pinar, *The Gender of Racial Politics and Violence in America: Lynching, Prison Rape, & the Crisis of Masculinity,* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2001), 156. Pinar also notes that women "occasionally" participated or incited men to "do their manly duty." However, I argue that this was not an irregular occurrence in lynch mobs

In their new and public role, however, white women did not passively stand by to watch white men defend their honor. White, southern women actively participated in public discourse by writing letters to newspapers, making public speeches and writing political articles. It would also be erroneous to say that white women in the South only wrote and spoke about lynching. Southern white women further separated themselves from traditional gender norms by participating violently in Southern lynchings. Protection was cited as the reason for lynching 'black rapists.' By using traditional gender discourse, like chivalry, and finding spaces in society to act through, white women were able to take part in lynchings in such a way that they were able to wield a position of power within the community, and in the mob in the public sphere.

Although white women were in a white, patriarchal society, this did not mean that white men policed white women, and held them to traditional gender norms in the South. White women policed black men not because of the white patriarchy, but because of their desire to move in the public sphere without the fear of an attack. In the American South, pro-lynching white women in the South manipulated the language of protection and race for their own gains in the public sphere in the postbellum era. White women wanted to be able to move freely, and used the language available in the South in order to do this. As I will discuss, historians often describe white women as acting as if they were puppets of the white patriarchy in the South. However, it is clear that white women challenged the government, and prominent men to protect them, so that they could move freely in public without fear of a sexual attack from the threat of the 'black rapist.' The fear of black men attacking them was a real fear for southern white women, as their growing public movement increased their encounters with strange, and mostly black, men whom they wanted protection from.

Southern White Women…and Lynching?: White Women in the Historiography of Lynching

The vast historiography of lynching in the United States rarely examines women's roles in lynch mobs. It is thus important to understand how women have been previously discussed in the history of lynching in the United States. Lynching has mainly been considered to be a masculine crime perpetrated by mostly men in historical literature on the subject.

This section will thus analyze how women have been portrayed in the historiography on lynching in America. First, I will begin with a brief discussion of the definition of lynching in America as a basis for the rest of the paper. Second, I will discuss the significance of the rape myth in the lynching narrative. The examination of the rape myth illustrates how women appeared to be acting under the restraints of traditional southern racial and gender hierarchies. Next, I will discuss how the historical narrative seems to lean towards white women only being able to act or speak violently if it was in racial solidarity with southern white men. However, unlike most historians, I will argue that women had an important role to play in the lynching of African-American men – especially when the charge against them was rape or sexual assault. Many historians also concentrate their efforts on the anti-lynching effort. Again white women are, usually, described as anti-lynching advocates. It is, however, equally important to study the southern white women in the South who supported lynching, and also participated in progressive movements for suffrage and women's rights.

Lynching, according to Christopher Waldrep, was used as a rhetorical tool that changed over time depending on the needs of the person using the term. In brief, Waldrep argues that the meaning of lynching took four important turns from the antebellum era to the 1950s. Lynching was used across this time period as a response to political pressures. In the 1930s, people in the North who were apathetic towards lynching were won over by abolitionists whom recounted

southerners inflicting "lawless violence" with lynching being defined as a "murder approved by the neighborhood." After the Civil War white people in the South began to understand that northerners could tolerate the lynching as punishment for protecting white women from rape. Third, in the twentieth century the term lynching was broadened by white women in the South to include different types of extralegal violence and discrimination in order to keep the rhetorical power of the term lynching as a political tool. Now, according to Waldrep, lynching has become a malleable term to suit the needs of the users and audiences.

It is important to discuss the meaning of the word lynching before beginning an in depth discussion because of the different ways the term is used by historians. In 1940, Jesse Daniel Ames and the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL) created a definition of lynching. The characteristics of a lynching, by this definition, are that "there must be legal evidence that a person has been killed and that he met his death illegally at the hand of a group acting under the pretext of service to justice, race or tradition."[4] The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) in 1940 also developed a similar definition, with four parts:

1. there must be evidence that a person was killed;
2. the person must have met his death illegally;
3. three or more persons must have participated in the killing;
4. the group must have acted under the pretext of service or justice to tradition.[5]

It is clear the Ames and the NAACP were attempting to create an encompassing definition of lynching in order to fully understand how thousands of African-Americans and some white people met their death.

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[4] Jesse Daniel Ames, *The Changing Character of Lynching: Review of Lynching 1931-1941 With a Discussion of Recent Developments in this Field* (1942; repr., New York: AMS Press Inc., 1973), 22. For information on how the definition of lynching was contested, see Christopher Waldrep, "War on Words: The Controversy Over the Definition of Lynching, 1899-1940," *The Journal of Southern History* 66, no. 1 (Feb 2000): 75-100.

[5] Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 260.

It is also of interest to note how southern proponents of lynching defined the crime. Southern newspapers generally defined lynchings as a "proper" response to protect the community.[6] The contrast in the definition of lynchings for proponents of lynchings and anti-lynching advocates is thus evident here, and important. Proponents of lynching believed that justice was being done, while anti-lynching advocates believed that it was wrongful murder. Justice was generally a response to a perceived rape or sexual attack upon a white woman.

The meaning of the word lynching is so contested by historians because most of the information collected about lynchings is from newspaper reports. As Waldrep posits: "The decisions of small-town newspaper editors close to the scene of the killing, who were usually a part of the community that sanctioned the killing, determined whether the nation regarded the killings as 'lynchings' or 'murders' or heard about them at all."[7] Waldrep suggests that lynching has many meanings, but one sure meaning is that it is "murder endorsed by community."[8] From newspaper evidence it can also be inferred that most lynching deaths seem to have occurred by hanging, and/or burning the victim. Lynching, however, does not necessarily have to be racial. Racial violence, according to Waldrep, is a subset of a larger problem.[9] In this study, lynching will be seen to have been because of racism directed towards African Americans in the South after the Civil War, though racially motivated lynchings did take place in the antebellum South.

Despite the contentious definition of lynching, historians generally agree that the words to define lynching have less of an impact than the power of the act of lynching. Christopher Waldrep argues: "The relationship between actual extralegal violence and the language

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[6]Mary Louise Ellis, "'Rain Down Fire': The Lynching of Sam Hose" (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1992), 24 cited in Christopher Waldrep, "War on Words: The Controversy Over the Definition of Lynching, 1899-1940," *The Journal of Southern History* 66, no. 1 (Feb 2000): 76.

[7]Christopher Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch: Extralegal Violence and Punishment in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 3.

[8]ibid., 7.

[9]ibid.

describing it was fundamentally arbitrary".[10] The rhetorical use of lynching is indeed significant. The language of lynching also allows for a framework to analyze the crime with respect to the definition. However, W. Fitzhugh Brundage's historical approach is also credible. He argues that the "historian's task is less to provide a definition of lynching than to try to explain the phenomenon."[11] The definition can only be used to illustrate what a lynching was, and the arbitrary meaning leaves much to be explored. The rhetoric of lynching, though, is extremely important as the word itself was significant – especially the definition in the South a the proper response to protect the community.

Lynching became a common occurrence in the South in 1880s. The NAACP notes that between 1889 and 1918, 3,224 people were killed by mob violence. Of that number 2,522 were black with all but fifty of that number being black men.[12] The record of these lynchings were largely taken from the *Chicago Tribune,* Tuskegee Institutes, and from 1912 onwards, *The Crisis,* and the NAACP.[13] As Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck assert, the term lynching was broad in previous studies that had attempted to count the amount of lynchings. Some, according to Tolnay and Beck, were murder, or without the evidence that a killing actually took place. According to them, "Any inventory of southern lynch victims is certain to include errors and emissions, especially an inventory that covers a broad geographic area over a long period of time."[14] Thus, it is difficult for historians to ascertain how many lynchings actually took place in America, specifically in the American South, because of the difficulties regarding the definition

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[10]Christopher Waldrep, "Word and Deed," The Language of Lynching, 1820-1953," in *Lethal Imagination: Violence and Brutality in American History,* ed. Michael A. Bellesiles (New York and London: New York University Press, 1999), 239.

[11]W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia*, 1880-1930 (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1993): 291-292.

[12]National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP]. *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918*. (1919; repr., New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), np.

[13]ibid., 7.

[14]Tolnay and Beck, *A Festival of Violence*, 262. For further information on different types of common mistakes in counting lynchings in America, see Tolnay and Beck, *A Festival of Violence,* 265-267.

of lynching, as well as actually properly counting the number of lynchings. Comparatively, from 1882 to 1930, Tolnay and Beck counted 2,462 male, black victims of lynchings in the American South with 2,217 black men in the South being killed by white lynch mobs.[15]

Most lynchings in America took place in the South. The Deep South, (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina) had the most lynchings with 1,368 black victims out of a total of 1,473 victims. The Border South, (Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, North Carolina and Tennessee) saw 650 black victims out of 805 total lynchings.[16] The NAACP study counts 2,834 lynchings in the South as a whole. The greatest concentrations were seen in Georgia with 386, 373 in Mississippi, 335 in Texas, 313 in Louisiana, 214 victims in Arkansas, 196 in Tennessee, 178 in Florida, and last, Kentucky with 169 from 1889 to 1939.[17] While lynchings sometimes took place in the North, the majority of racial violence perpetrated by mobs happened in the South.

Statistics also demonstrate that although the main justification for lynching was the alleged rape of a white woman, most of the lynchings were for charges against African Americans for crimes other than rape. The NAACP calculated the percentage of African Americans lynched for certain crimes between 1889 and 1918. Of coloured victims lynched, 35.8 percent were accused of murder. The second most blacks killed in lynchings was 28.4 percent for rape and "attacks upon women": 19 percent for rape and 9.4 percent for "attacks upon women".[18] Other reasons for lynching coloured peoples include crime against a person that has not already been mentioned comprising 17.8 percent of lynching, 12 percent with miscellaneous

[15]ibid., 269. Tolnay and Beck used Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

[16]ibid., 270.

[17]NAACP, *Thirty Years,* 7.

[18] ibid., 10.

crimes and 5.6 where no crime was charged.[19] Furthermore, although there was a high percentage of African-Americans accused of, and lynched for, rape, it is generally accepted that man of the black men accused probably did not commit the crime they allegedly committed.

Southern communities were especially concerned with protecting the sexuality of southern women, and this was what white southerners contended was the main reason for lynching black men. In 1929, civil rights activist and leader of the NAACP Walter White discussed the relationship between sex and lynching in *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch*. In this early study of lynching, White discusses why Southerners were obsessed with black sexuality 'contaminating' white womanhood. Significantly, he argues that there existed "the Southern white woman's proneness to hysteria where Negroes are concerned".[20] According to White, interracial rape made the South "the terrified victim of its own conjuring," and while the common explanation for lynching was sex crimes, very few of actual lynchings were a result of an attack on a white women.[21] It is important here that lynching was used as a rhetorical and active tool to protect white women's sexuality in the South.

Sociologist Arthur Raper's *The Tragedy of Lynching,* published in 1933, also outlined the significance of lynching in the South in respect to African-American men's sexual assault of white women. Raper's study of lynching in the American South is very similar to that of White. Raper argued that lynchings, as a punishment for rape, only accounted for one-sixth of the lynchings in the South. Furthermore, he accused white women of making allegations of rape in order to "cover their own derelictions, to divert suspicion from white man, to reconcile their

[19]ibid., 10.

[20] Walter White, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (New York and London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929), 57.

[21]ibid., 56.

parents, to attract attention, or 'just to have a little excitement.'"[22] This quotation indicates that women used accusations of rape or sexual attack as a way to facilitate increased sexual freedom and mobility.

Although Raper's analysis seems simplistic, it demonstrates that white women's actions in lynchings were important. There is, however, sexism evident, as Raper degrades and infantilizes white women in the South in terms of their participation. Early studies of lynching, like White's and Raper's, as well as others, describe mob violence as "primordial racism".[23] This analysis, however, demonstrates a belief that the South suffered from backwardness with perceived notions of chivalry in order to protect white women from the alleged black rapist. More recent scholarship has further looked at women's chastity in regards to the importance of white women's and rape myth.

The most common form of southern women's participation in lynchings was to defend themselves, and demand protection from the threat of African-American rapists. Dianne Miller Sommerville does a very good job of discussing the historiography of the rape myth. Sommerville traces the intellectual study of the 'rape myth' or 'rape complex' in the South to Wilbur J. Cash's *Mind of the South,* who, in 1941, first used the term "rape complex," and was the first to link the fear of rape perpetrated by black men to the antebellum period. Cash believed that white men held white women in such high regard that the southern, white women became inaccessible to white men. As such, white men turned to slave women in order to satisfy their lust.[24] Much later, but building on Cash's study, was Winthrop D. Jordan's *White Over Black* in 1968. First, Jordan hypothesized that southern, white men, who frequently terrorized black

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[22]Arthur Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1933), 37.
[23]Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 9.
[24]W. J. Cash, *Mind of the South*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941 repr. New York: Vintage, 1991), 115 cited in Dianna Miller Sommerville, *Rape & Race in the Nineteenth Century South* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 253.

women, were jealous of the stereotype of black sexual virility. This led to white southern men projecting their own sexual desires onto slave men, thus making white men fear African-American male sexuality in the antebellum South. [25] It is interesting that historians noted that there was a 'rape complex' before the Civil War. What is evident in other historical studies is that the rape myth is largely believed to have come into fruition after Reconstruction.

Ida B. Wells, the famous African-American anti-lynching advocate, notes this characteristic of black male on white female rape in the South in *Southern Horrors* (1892). Wells posited: "the world knows that the crime of rape was unknown during the four years of the civil war", which was significant to Wells because "the white women of the South were at mercy of the race which is all at once charged with being bestial one."[26] Historians have also made note of Wells' contemporary observation – specifically asking why this occurred. The main cause, according to some studies, was Reconstruction politics, which gave increased rights and freedoms to African-Americans in the South. To sum up a part of Sommerville's historiographic argument, scientists and professionals further validated the rape myth in the South during Reconstruction. Professional doctors, and popular culture (examples include the novels *Red Rock* by Thomas Nelson Page, as well as Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots,* and *The Clansman*) validated the rape myth. Their theories were compounded by economic and social problems in the South after the Civil War, which caused southern whites to become nervous with the new social and political order, especially in regards to race.[27] The study of how Reconstruction specifically affected white women in the South became a subject of interest in the 1970s.

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[25]Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro 1550-1812* (1968 repr. New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 28-39 cited in Sommerville, *Rape & Race*, 253.

[26]Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors. Lynch Law in All its Phases*, ed. Jacqueline Jones Royster (New York: The New York Age Print, 1892, repr. Boston and New York: Bedford Books, 1997), 53. Wells is not correct in asserting that the crime of rape perpetrated by African American men on white women in the South was unknown before the Civil War.

[27]Sommerville, *Rape & Race*, 232-243.

The study of women's participation in racial violence has mostly focused on how white women's sexuality was suppressed by the white southern patriarchy. Brundage claims: "the influence of modern feminism has also helped scholars to understand the place of violence in the evolution of gender roles and behavior." Brundage's assertion is demonstrated in the famous study of the anti-lynching campaign of Jesse Daniel Ames by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall. Hall argues "that the racism that caused white men to lynch black men cannot be understood apart from the sexism that informed their policing of white women and their exploitation of black women."[28] Moreover, Hall contends that she does not mean to cast white women as passive, but that white men intensified the sexual and racial hierarchy. Hall describes the southern white woman as "dependant on white men for protection and circumscribed by an image of the self as a symbol, women could not assert – sometimes could not discern – their own individuality."[29] The traditional sexual and racial order of the South, according to Hall, then, is significant to the historiography of lynching – especially regarding women's participation. Perhaps most important to the study of lynching is that Hall identified that white women in the South held an important role in the rape myth in the South.[30] The extension of the white patriarchy in the South, as Hall outlined in 1974 in the first edition of her biography of Ames, continues to permeate scholarly literature about lynching.

Vengence and Justice, by Edward L. Ayers, published in 1984 builds upon Hall's argument. Like Hall, Ayers posits that gender hierarchies, and the accusation of rape by a black man made by a white woman was the popular reasoning for lynching. However, he does not see a great enough change in the racial and gender hierarchies to account for the increased number of

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[28]Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jesse Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), xx.

[29]ibid., xxi-xxii.

[30]Sommerville, *Rape & Race*, 245.

lynching in the late-1880s and 1890s. Ayers analyzed the economic conditions in the South, and found that there was a depression at the time lynchings began to increase. The market economy had begun to enter the countryside, which in the late-1880s saw an increase in business failures, crime rates, and vagrants. This economic crisis, according to Ayers, is the "catalyst" that drove the South to an increased number of lynchings.[31] Timing is also significant. The depression of the late-1880s and 1890s coincided with challenges to traditional gender and racial hierarchies in the South. The vagrants, many presumably black, wandering around while white women gained ground in the public sphere would have created a moral panic. White women are considered to have been in need of protection by white men according to this narrative.

Again, drawing off of Hall, Martha Hodes' study *White Women, Black Men* (1996) argues that lynching subordinated white women by "terrorizing" them so that there would be no illicit sex between white women and black men.[32] Hodes continues to attempt to prove Hall's theories regarding the policing of white women's sexuality. Emancipation, for Hodes, ended a longstanding antebellum tradition of white leniency regarding interracial sex and light treatment of black men accused of raping a white woman. After emancipation, however, there was less leniency, and as such, more lynching.[33]

A second significant study regarding the rape myth in the South is Glenda Gilmore's *Gender and Jim Crow* (1996). Gilmore's monograph primarily argues that white women in North Carolina became significant actors in white supremacist politics in the South – specifically

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[31]Edward L. Ayers, *Vengence and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 242-250.

[32]Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the 19th-Century South* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 200.

[33]Footnote, Sommerville notes that Hodes' argument is misleading. Hodes' conclusions are based on government records. Light treatment of a black man raping a white woman in the South would not have been given as much effort in Congress' study as violent actions by the Klu Klux Klan would have. See, Sommerville*, Rape & Race*, 251.

North Carolina in the 1890s.[34] Gilmore found "Most white women simply could not have overcome the racial contexts in which they lived, even if they had thought to try."[35] She suggests that feminist historians who study gender in the American South should note that white women were constrained by the South's racial hierarchy, whereby white women were in need of protection from black 'rapists.' White men afforded the protection to women. Both of these studies published in 1996 argue to the same point: after Reconstruction and emancipation white women were constrained by the white patriarchy and by racial hierarchies.

Grace Elizabeth Hale's study, *Making Whiteness* (1998), similarly claims: "the lynching narrative simultaneously empowered white women as it emasculated black men and limited white women as it signified their need for protection."[36] More to this point, women's increased public role in the South, to Hale, made white men fear challenges to their status on top the South's hierarchy. As such, increased status of white southern women also had an effect on the rape myth narrative: "White women and black men were conflated so fear of and the desire to protect the white woman became fear of and the desire to destroy the black man."[37] White women, again, are cast as the victims in need of protection from southern, white men.

Southern Horrors, written by Crystal N. Feimster in 2009, is a recent text that tackles the subject of lynching, and more specifically, how white and black women associated with lynching. It pays close attention to how southern women, white and black, contributed to the discourse of lynching. While Feimster puts women in the spotlight in southern lynchings, she also discusses white women as they fit into the historical narrative of lynching in the South.

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[34]ibid., 246. This paper will attempt to show how Gilmore's theory of increased participation from different classes of southern white women can be applied to the South as a whole.

[35] Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina*, 1896-1920 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), xix-xx.

[36]Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South*, 1890-1940 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 235.

[37]ibid., 233.

According to Feimster, southern white women challenged white male's sexuality by attempting to stop rape of southern women of both races. In order to counter a perceived attack by white women on their sexuality, white men mobilized the myth of the black rapist in order to gain a "political advantage" above white women and African Americans.[38] She also argues that tougher rape laws would make it more difficult for white men to use extralegal violence in order to punish black men for allegedly raping white women.[39]

This insinuates that white women did help create, and had difficulty using the rape myth for political advantage. As such, in the historical narrative, white women seem to barely be considered able to act independently within the public sphere in the South without protection from white men, and without a voice regarding the rape myth in the South. The significance of the hierarchy should not be ignored, but should also be analyzed in how the race and gender lines were challenged by white women. For most authors, if white women did act violently, it was with men, and with little authority.

Moreover, many historians also note how white men and women acted in racial solidarity with one another in lynchings. Hale posits that the rituals of lynching created a bond that was unbroken by class and gender divisions. As such, wealthy and poor whites of both sexes in the South were brought together in their acts of white supremacy.[40] Feimster also posits that lynch mobs "brought women together across class lines on the issue of sexual violence and protection," and Brundage argues that even though "white women validated white male authority," they, as well, claimed supremacy "as partners in the millennial progress of the white race."[41] Claims of

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[38] Crystal N. Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 78.

[39] ibid., 78.

[40] Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 238.

[41] Feimster, *Southern Horrors*,145; and W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "White Women and the Politics of Historical Memory in the New South, 1880-1920," in Jumpin' *Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil*

racial solidarity should not be overlooked for significant reasons. It "allowed whites to claim themselves victims of harm and to assign blame," and thus demonstrated social power.[42] Additionally, white women were able to claim their whiteness along with white men, and, as such, moved up in the southern hierarchy. Lynching, then, put white power – for both white men and women – on high display.

White women have, usually, been cast by scholars as silent actors in narratives of lynchings in the American South. Hall suggests that "lynching drew its repressive power from the extraordinary caste solidarity it expressed," the caste suggested being poor and white.[43] It is clear from historical analysis that perpetrators of the crime, as well as supporters of lynching, cut across class lines. It is also clear that lynching also crossed gender lines, of rich and poor white men and white women.

When white women did act violently in a lynch mob, it has been argued by Hale that: "the lynching narrative moved white women toward masculinity even as it subtly shifted white men away from the maleness, embodied in the black beast, that they were trying to capture through castration."[44] White women according to Hale thus could not act violently as a woman in a lynch mob. To further her claim, Hale posits: "white women were never allowed to assume the major roles in the spectacle, to participate directly in the torture."[45] White women's role, then, must have been defined as a spectator in order to be considered feminine. They participated in the violent lynching discourse in the South, as well as being part of mob brutality, but this should not mean that they acted like men. This is where my argument differs most of the

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Rights, ed. Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore and Bryant Simon (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 200), 117.

[42]Lisa Lindquist Dorr, *White Women, Rape & The Power of Race in Virginia, 1900-1960* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 81.

[43]Hall, 139.

[44]Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 234.

[45]ibid., 235.

previous historiography: it is significant that white women acted violently *as* women. Southern women used violence and the discourse of lynching to attempt to make a better place in southern society for themselves, and it is important that they did this as women because they were attempting to better their position in southern society.

It has since been made clear by Feimster, as I will discuss at length later in this paper, that many white southern women did hold significant roles in mob violence, and were able, and did, actively participate in lynchings. White women, sometimes with no direct relationship to the victim would come to support the white cause – that of protecting white woman's purity. "In this sense," according to Feimster, "mob violence served as a perverse demonstration of the New Woman's desire for authority and autonomy."[46] White women, were, not merely bystanders in mob violence as much of the historiography suggests. White men were on top of the racial and gender hierarchies, while white women were using lynching in the South to attempt to move up in southern society traditionally dominated by white men. This is furthermore proven, as Feimster suggests that white women were most visible in lynch mobs in which the crime being punished was rape or sexual assault.[47] White, southern women wanted protection in order to move freely, and by participating publically, as well as endorsing violence against perceived African American 'rapists,' they believed they could attain a better social position.

Southern, white women often acted in solidarity with white men at lynchings, across class lines. However, this should not mean that women's actions became more masculine in lynch mobs. As I argue, southern women acted for their own reasons to better their place in the public sphere. The role of white women in southern lynch mobs is thus significant because they acted *as* women. If southern, white women's actions are seen to have moved towards

[46]Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 149.
[47]ibid., 145,

masculinity, it diminishes the power that they were able to wield in both public, and in lynch mobs. Lynch mobs were a place where women could act outside southern time-honored gender norms in the South. If women acted like men, their acting out at lynch mobs would be considered moot in terms of their public challenge to their place on the gender hierarchy.

Historians seem to have most often analyzed women's political clout in regards to anti-lynching campaigns. Hall's study of Ames is the formidable work in this brand of historical literature regarding white women's anti-lynching campaigns. With the Ames case, lynching became a women's issue – an act of "feminist antiracism".[48] The idea of women, white and black, working together to end racism has become salient in the historiography of lynching in America. Mary Jane Brown claims in her monograph, *Eradicating This Evil,* that although lynching was considered to be acceptable to many Americans, many opposed the extralegal punishment, "Among them numerous black and white women who risked social censure by publically confronting 'unladylike' issues of sex and violence" in order to create public awareness regarding lynch crimes in America. [49] Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore has noted significant intersections regarding white and black women working together in politics in the South. She argues that: "White women were overwhelmingly complicitous is shoring up white supremacy in 1898, yet they were at the vanguard of the movement for interracial cooperation by 1920." [50]

Female proponents of the anti-lynching cause in the South also receive the most attention in the narrative of lynching in their attempts to reform southern, white masculinity. Gail Bederman argues to this point in her text *Manliness & Civilization* (1995). In her monograph, Bederman convincingly posits that whiteness – specifically male whiteness – was synonymous

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[48]Hall, *Revolt*, xx.

[49]Mary Jane Brown, *Eradicating This Evil: Women in the American Anti-Lynching Movement, 1892-1940* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000), 4.

[50]Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, xix.

with civilization in Victorian America. Blackness, then, did not fit into the narrative of 'civilized masculinity.' Anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells sought to demonstrate that black men were more 'manly' than white men. Wells depicted "lynch mobs as vile, unmanly and cowardly."[51] Thus, Wells switched the discourse of race and manhood. She also laid a challenge for white men: 'manliness' could only be regained if Northern men could end lynching in the American South.[52] It must be considered, however, that there is an alternate discourse available in regards to Bederman's argument. If black and white women who supported trying ending lynching in the American South had this discourse available to them, certainly white, female proponents of lynching were also able to challenge traditional white masculinity. Southern white women manipulated this discourse to have white men defend their honour, and lynch African-American men who were seen as a possible threat.

More to this point, Feimster posits that southern white women "use[d] the threat of black rape to make demands of white men and thereby achieve a modicum of power."[53] As such, white women can be said to have used the racist atmosphere in the South in order to increase their political clout. White women, I would argue, wielded the rape myth for public status better than white men did in the South. White women used southern, white notions of chivalry in order to capitalize on racial dimensions in southern society. Also, while black and white women did work together to end lynching, many white supremacist women in the South would not have worked in coalition with black women for any cause. In fact, they did not as there were no black women admitted to the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WTCU) in the South.[54] Carroll Smith-

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[51]Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press), 58-59.

[52]ibid., 59.

[53]Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 126.

[54]Hazel V. Carby, "'*On the Threshold of Woman's Era': Lynching, Empire, and Sexuality in Black Feminist Theory*," *Critical Inquiry* 12 no. 1 "Race", Writing and Difference (Autumn 1985): 270.

Rosenberg correctly asserted in *Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (1985): "But if we reject the view of women as passive victims, we face the need to identify the sources of power women used to act within a world determined to limit their power."[55] Discursive formations of gender in the South and the challenge posed to white, southern men are examples of 'sources of power' that women used in order to increase their status in the South. Many white women in the South were proponents of lynching and their pro-lynching stance coexisted with white and black women who protested against the use of lynching.

Rebecca Latimer Felton in an exemplary historical example of a powerful female political figure who used the discourse of lynching to further her political cause. Felton fought for the ability of southern white women to move freely within the South without fear of being a victim to sexual violence. However, her stance on lynching, which can easily be described as a darker side of the women's movement in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, seems to be an uncomfortable subject for historians of southern women's history. For example, in Anne Firor Scott's *The Southern Lady,* first published in 1970, Felton is described in terms of her advocacy of education, and reform of the prison system, as well as her losing her sons in the Civil War.[56] The pattern of ignoring some southern, white women's significant role in advocating lynching seems to be commonly ignored, overlooked or briefly mentioned. While some has been written about Felton and her white supremacist politics regarding lynching, many of her white and female contemporaries who demonstrated support are written about much less, and deserve further study.

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[55]Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford Universiy Press, 1985), 17.

[56] Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930*, 25th Anniversary Edition (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 68, 148 and 93.

The focus on southern white women's movement to end lynching as a basis of study is comfortable for historians of women's history because of its 'feminist antiracism.' While anti-lynching advocates challenged white men to move towards 'proper white masculinity,' and end lynching, southern, white women (as well as some northern, white women) asked men to protect their new public status in the postbellum South. Moreover, it is important to understand that southern white women used their racial status to their own advantage, using the sexist discourse of manly protection for their own means of public power. Thus, anti-lynching was not the only means for women to assert political and public power. Lynching has also been discussed in terms of a repressive force that constrained southern white women. As such, white women's sexuality has been perceived as controlled by the white patriarchy in the American South. However, many southern women broke free of the perceived social restrictions placed on them by white men – one example being Rebecca Latimer Felton.

The historical narrative also seems to silence white, southern women in regards to the historiography regarding the rape myth and its creation. Whether lynching was a way for white men to deal with a challenge to their sexuality, or a way to control white southern women and their increased public role, white women in the South were able to use the sexist and racist discourse. Southern white women used the power of the rape myth in order to exert their increasing public role in the American South by acting out in lynch mobs. In the postbellum South, white women were becoming more prominent members of the community, as they sought better education and jobs. White women easily could have feared black men, but not because white men may have constructed the rape myth to stay on top of the hierarchy in the South. Strange men whom they may not have encountered before in public may have made white women uncomfortable.

The role of white women in mobs has, for the most part, been underestimated in the brief historiography I have discussed. White, southern women held significant roles in lynchings that have not been analyzed at length by many historians, but should be. Their roles in lynchings are worth discussing, because as women's movements became increasingly significant in America as a whole, a faction of southern white women also fought for more rights in the South using lynching as a means to their end. By discussing and exerting violence on subordinate African-American men, southern white women were able to move up the hierarchy in the South by publically displaying their desire to be protected. Understanding the significance of southern, white women who were pro-lynching, and who were part of the suffrage movement in the South, will help to create a more rounded view of white women's fight for public and political roles.

"'Woman' is Strong…'Female' is Weak": Changes in Southern White Women's Public Role

In the pages of Rebecca Latimer Felton's periodical *The Country Home*: *Timely Topics* Felton discusses in 1906 how to properly "Remember the Sabbath Day" as well as "The Crittenden Refuge Homes" for fallen women. Juxtaposed against these columns is a story titled "Increase in Rape Fiends," which examines the threat African-American men posed to white women in the South.[57] As indicated by the appearance of this report, the threat of African-American sexuality, and rape by one of these men, was understood as a white women's issue. Felton epitomizes a change in the South for white women that took place during and after the Civil War in her public outspokenness about the need for white men to protect white women from the 'black rapist'. While Felton is by far the most prominent in regards to white women's

[57]Rebecca Latimer Felton, *The Country Home: Timely Topics* (1906) Rebecca Latimer Felton papers. MS 81. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

pro-lynching stance, other white supremacist women also gave speeches and wrote that supported protection for white women and their desire for a more prominent public role.

It is important to analyze how the role of white women changed in the American South to better understand why their public participation and actions in lynchings are significant in the historical narrative of American lynching. The New South, with emancipated African-American men, challenged the traditional gender and racial hierarchies in the American South. White women sought to demonstrate their racial superiority, as well as challenging white men to support their claims to a higher place in the gender and racial hierarchies. It is significant, then, that southern white women's discourse focused on the subordinate group of African-American men. Southern white women sought to increase their public voice and move up the gendered and racial hierarchy in the postbellum South through the politics of protection, and white, male chivalry.

It is important to briefly outline how white women's role in the South became more public during the Civil War. I will argue that the postbellum period in the American South allowed for increased participation by white women in the public sphere. White, southern women were involved in challenging a 'new white man' to allow women in the public sphere, and to protect them through notions of Southern chivalry.

Antebellum, White "Female"

It is helpful to look at different ways women began to participate in the public sphere in order to contextualize the increasing public participation of women in southern culture, especially in lynchings. Before the Civil War, southern white women knew their status as white women was an important political and discursive tool that could be used to their advantage. Nineteenth-century southern commentator George Fitzhugh noted:

> So long as she is nervous, fickle, capricious, delicate, diffident and dependent, man will worship and adore her. Her weakness is her strength, and her true art is to cultivate and improve that weakness…[I]n truth, women, like children, has but one right and that is the right to protection. The right to protection involves the obligation to obey.[58]

In this quotation from 1854, Fitzhugh clearly outlines the role of white women – to obey the male head of the household. Fitzhugh also infantilizes southern white women. Furthermore, he outlines the characteristics that a proper southern white woman should possess. In other words, "women were products of a particular culture, a particular kind of conditioning – above all, they followed a particular pattern of male expectation."[59] White, southern male misogyny is further evident in the quotation the southern, white woman's weakness was her strength.

The notion of chivalry is also clearly evident in Fitzhugh's explanation of what a southern woman's attributes should be. The 'right to protect involves the right to obey' can be directly related to notions of chivalry in the South. According to Bertram Wyatt-Brown, the low status that white, southern women had was upheld through negative expressions of female characteristics: "Southern, male honor required that women be burdened with a multitude of negatives, a not very subtle way to preserve male initiative."[60] Chivalry, and honour were traits of white men, and, according the southerners, not characteristics of black men.[61] Notions of protecting white women were an important dividing line between black and white men. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese claim that white women in the South silently accepted their "inferior place in society and even within the household".[62] To do this meant white men

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[58]George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South*, (Richmond: Morris, 1854), 214-215, quoted in Anne Firor Scott, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930, 25th Anniversary Edition (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 17.

[59]Scott, The Southern Lady, 67.

[60]Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behaviour in the Old South,* 25th Anniversary Ed. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 227.

[61] J. William Harris, "Etiquette, Lynching, and Racial Boundaries in Southern History: A Mississippi Example," *The American Historical Review,* 100 no. 2 (April 1995): 387.

[62]Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in Southern Slaveholder's Worldview* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 389.

owed them chivalry. White, southern women's status had to be below white men's, and they could not challenge the patriarchy or they would forfeit their right to protection from white men.

Some white women, however, came together in order to critique social problems in the Old South, and tried to contest white men in the South. These southern women, usually from the upper class, who had received some sort of education adhering to 'polite society,' formed groups to try to deal with societal issues in the South. These problems included alcohol abuse, and the promiscuity of their husbands, or white males in general, with slave women.[63] It is also significant that before the Civil War, many elite women were sent to boarding schools to receive a good education. Although the education of southern, white women was limited to what was considered to adhere to traditional gender norms in the South, white women were able to experience some freedom at the boarding schools. The schools that these southern white women attended allowed them to build important intellectual friendships, and bonds with other white women.[64] Attempts to reform the morality of southern white men, and the education of some southern white women, allowed women a taste of freedom away from the confines of protective fathers and husbands. Arguably, this strengthened white women's public presence in the antebellum South. Southern white women's pre-Civil War causes helped them build important connections that would be used during the Civil War when there would be few men around.

As the Civil War neared, southern white women's increasing public opportunities became more evident. Indeed, "as the Civil War drew closer the 'poetical speeches' [of women] made more references to protection, the terms of the contract by which young women were willing to

[63] Alexis Giradon Brown, "The Women Left Behind: Transformation of the Southern Belle, 1840-1880," *The Historian* 62 no. 4 (Summer 2000): 762.

[64] ibid., 763.

remain atop their pedestals."[65] Women, then, voiced their opinion publically in order to rally support for white men to act chivalrously as the war neared. It is easy to infer that southern white women rallied for protection from Union soldiers, as well as from African American men. Even when confronted with Union men in the South, Confederate women were known to lecture Union soldiers about their "chivalrous obligations" because southern white woman was aware of the "strategic value of her identity as a lady".[66] The southern white woman wanted to protect her position in southern society while white men were fighting in the Civil War.

White southern women's growing independence and autonomy is further illustrated in the roles they took while white men were away. For example, in North Carolina 8 000 to 16 000 women were left in charge of plantations while the men were away fighting against the North. Although larger plantations were allowed to keep the patriarch because of the "Twenty-Nigger Law", whereby men owning more than twenty slaves were allowed to stay and take care of their plantations, many white women were given significant charge of plantations and their slaves.[67] To further reiterate this point John Andrew Rice, a man who grew up during the Civil War recalled that "In 1860 the South became a matriarchy. The men went away from home to other battlefields, leaving women free to manage the farm and plantation directly".[68] Although this account is a clear exaggeration of white women's role in the Civil War South, it is not wrong that white women's role on the farm in the South became increasingly more prominent. However, white women tending to the farms were not necessarily more 'free.' Many white women saw

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[65]Christine Ann Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 170 quoted in Brown, "The Woman Left Behind," 765.

[66]Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 98.

[67]Brown, "The Women Left Behind," 768.

[68]John Andrew Rice, *I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1942), 116-117 quoted in Firor, *The Southern Lady*, 100. This description is considered to be hyperbolic. Firor describes Rice's recollection as having "no regard for historical precision."

taking care of the farm, and plantation as another burden, having to take care of their own traditionally feminine tasks, as well as chores usually taken care of by men. In other words, there was no room in the Civil War for the delicacy, dependence and fickleness that was previously expected of white women in the South.

Furthermore, observers, whose attention was usually on the freedman of the South, also paid some attention to white women's more prominent role in society. Benjamin Truman's report to President Andrew Johnson outlines the effect of Southern white women's increased public role. Truman reported that: "of the younger generation the southern women are much superior to that of the southern men both in intellect and energy; and their ascendancy over society is correspondingly great."[69] White southern women were also becoming more interested in the politics of the war. To further illustrate this point, a southern woman named Sally Munford wrote a letter that highlights white women's interest in politics:

> I too am taking intense interest in every movement among our statesmen and the states themselves and sometimes feel surprised at myself for it, I have hitherto been so totally indifferent to all such topics. But we are all to be so intimately concerned in the threatened and irrevokable war that it is not to be wondered at all.[70]

There are aspects of this quotation that are worth further analysis: "We", which can be easily inferred to mean white women, became 'intimately concerned' with the Civil War. As well, Sally Munford was becoming increasingly interested in the 'state' and 'statesmen', which had previously been considered to be masculine interests. This clearly alludes to a more public role forming for southern white women. White women were becoming aware and educated in terms of the state and the war.

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[69]Benjamin Truman, reporting to President Andrew Johnson, Senate Executive Document 43, 39th Congress,, May 1866, 6 quoted in Firor, *The Southern Lady*, 99.

[70]Sally Munford to Katy Carbin, Jan. 17, 1861 in Munford-Ellis Family Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina quoted in Brown, "The Women Left Behind," 766.

Southern white women began to ask the Confederacy for protection during the Civil War. This was because without their husbands, and with their increased knowledge in the state, white women began to see the state as the patriarch that should protect them. White women asked for very literal forms of protection directly from Confederate State patriarchs, as women were now at the head of many southern farms. White southern women expected the white patriarch to continue to protect them during the Civil War. In other words, "State patriarchy was better than none at all. Soldier's wives could practice a very literal politics of protection: you protect us, they said, you are the head of the family now."[71] The idea of chivalry – or white women doing their part for the war for white men's protection – continued to be expected during the Civil War.

White women of many different class groups sent letters to the state, the new head of household, for help running their households while the men were at war. One white southern woman, Sarah Halford, wrote to North Carolina's Governor Vance: "As gustic [justice] belongs to the people let us have it."[72] Halford's letter infers that not only were elite or higher class women aware of the states' obligation of protection, but white, southern, yeomen class women were also aware of the states' patriarchy. This is one isolated case in which a white woman was asking for help from the state, but letters were sent to Confederate state officials in droves, across class lines, for help during the war.[73] White women of different classes, then, were able to draw attention in the political sphere, educate themselves on state politics, and call for protection from the state patriarch. Importantly, they became more proactive in their dealings with white men during the war.

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[71]McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 161.

[72]Sarah Halford to Gov. Vance, Dec. 23, 1863, box 172, Zebulon B. Vance, Governor's Papers, State Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina quoted in McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 164.

[73]McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 162-163.

White southern women, also significantly, sometimes protested against Union Soldiers in violent ways. The women in the Union-occupied South found ways to demonstrate their discontent with Union Soldiers. In Rome, Georgia, students at a school for girls emptied their chamber pots on the heads of passing soldiers. A similar incident occurred in the French Quarter of New Orleans, when a group of women emptied their chamber pots on a passing Flag Officer in full uniform. Furthermore, "polite" women in New Orleans spit in soldiers' faces.[74] White southern women also found other ways to actively illustrate their discontent towards Union soldiers including verbal insults, storming off streetcars when federal soldiers stepped on, stepping in gutters to avoid Union soldiers on the street, and turning around in disgust when a federal soldiers approached them.[75] Women were acting out as women, meaning that although it was considered to be improper, or 'unwomanly' for southern, white women to behave this way, they were using their status as women to make a political point in the public sphere against their enemy. White women's actions against Union Soldiers, when taken in context with their violent, and passive-aggressive actions, might not have exhibited disgust as a comment on their occupation, but as a strategy to fend off sexual assault.

Southern women also increasingly felt the threat of sexual violence when federal soldiers were inside of their private spaces. White southern women were not used to seeing strange men – both Union and Confederate, black, and white – and it was difficult to avoid contact with them.[76] In a sense, the strange men invading the space of the white women of the South was a raping of their space. The danger of rape, then, also helped justify white women's violent actions against soldiers. It began to be argued that white men did not perform their chivalrous duty, as "White

[74]ibid., 107.
[75]ibid., 106.
[76]Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 23-24.

women all over the South had been left unprotected, and some had suffered rape."[77] The rape of African-American women was not considered possible according to standards of sex in the South. Coloured women could not be considered victims of rape, according to southern white women, because their sexuality was considered to already be loose.[78] The concept of the threat of rape from 'others,' then, was not a new concept for white women in the discourse of lynching in the American South.

When the Civil War ended, white women did not want to return to their subordinate prewar status. Significant changes took place in the South after the Confederacy lost the Civil War that can be related to southern, white women's participation in lynchings later in the nineteenth century. Many white women were left in charge of the family farms. The 1870 census recorded that there were 25 000 more women in North Carolina than men, 36 000 more women than men in Georgia, 15 000 in Virginia, and 8 000 in South Carolina.[79] White southern women's new responsibilities were not limited to taking care of farms.

Women increasingly moved to urban areas to seek work after the Civil War. White women found jobs working in into manual labour, and factory work. There are some statistics in the 1890 census that demonstrate white women were increasingly moving into the workforce after the Civil War. The Eleventh Census made some comparisons between different occupations that women filled in the American South. Even though textile mills were growing in after the Civil War, black women were more likely to work as domestic servants or in agriculture: trade and manufacturing industries employed mostly white women[80] In Virginia in 1870, there were 5 000 women in manufacturing, a number that doubled by 1890, though the population had

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[77]ibid., 26.
[78]ibid., 29.
[79]Compendium of the Ninth Census (Washington, 1873) cited in Firor, *The Southern Lady*, 106.
[80]Tiffany K. Wayne, *Women's Roles in Nineteenth-Century America* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 2007), 39; and Scott, *The Southern Lady,* 123.

grown by less than a third. In Mississippi there were 700 professional women in 1870, and over 3 000 in 1890, with a population increase of only twenty-five percent. A last example is Georgia, with 5 000 women with manufacturing jobs in 1970, and 12 000 in 1890.[81]

In the early 1880s, the Senate Committee on Education and Labor held hearings in the South, and were told about the many women working in mills.[82] In 1893, Clare DeGraffenried, "a trained social investigator, as well as a southerner" wrote that poor southern women were still moving to cities for work in mills, laundries, as well as seamstress jobs and that:

> higher grade Southerners seek employment, over against the family wish, at clerking, dressmaking, patent medicines, binderies, textiles, box and cigarette factories…earning enough to lesson the pinch of poverty…Nowhere else in the world do so many well-bred women, bankrupt and bereft of male providers, labor at manual callings as in the South.[83]

This was often out of necessity when their farms failed, and their labour answered the growing demand for commercial industry in the South.[84] This would have increased white women's dealings with men of both races.

Furthermore, after the Civil War, white women had better educational opportunities. For example, women were sent to "normal colleges" where they were given similar education to men. These colleges were expected to raise the standards of teachers in the South. White women were allowed to attend these colleges because during the Civil War they proved themselves to be adept teachers when there were few white males to teach.[85] In the postbellum American South,

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[81]*Report of Population,* Eleventh Census, Part Two (Washington, 1897), cited in Scott, *The Southern Lady,* 123.

[82]Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 121.

[83]ibid.; and Clare DeGraffenried, "The Condition of Wage Earning Women," *Forum* 15 (March 1893): 73-74, quoted in Scott, *The Southern Lady,*

[84]Brown, "The Women Left Behind," 775. This pertains directly to lynching. For example, in 1912 a white woman was "returning to her home after a night's work in the downtown district" when "she was set upon by the negro, dragged down a steep embankment at First and Ocumulgee streets, robbed and criminally assaulted." White women in urban areas were thus in perceived danger of being attacked by strange men. "Woman Coming From Church See Negro Lynched after Victim's Death Body is Taken From Undertaker and Made Fiery Sacrifice," *Wilkes-Barre Times* (Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania), February 5, 1912.

[85]ibid., 775-776

then, many white women who sought more opening in public saw the opportunity for some independence from white men. The "New Woman" was becoming an important actor in the South, then, by the 1880s and into the 1890s.

The changes that women experienced in Southern culture in the mid-nineteenth century are significant for the analysis of women's public roles in lynching. First, the idea of chivalry, and protection was used as a discursive political tool for white women. A social contract existed between white men and white women, whereby white women were to fulfill their feminine duties and in return received protection from white men. However, the Civil War changed what white women expected from white southern men. Not only did women become more educated and interested in the state, but white women also became aware of their ability to demand change from white men. But despite their altered expectations of white men, southern white women still demanded their protection from men they perceived as threats to their chastity.

Postbellum, White 'Women'

Postbellum white women in the American South held onto the notion of protection and white, male chivalry. As many women were left to tend to the farms as widows or single women, as well as entering the growing urban South in the workforce after the Civil War, the threat of men – specifically of the newly emancipated African-American men – was a threat for the women who wanted to take on more public roles. Moreover, white women did not feel as if white men had properly protected them during the Civil War, and, as such, the contract was considered to have been broken on the part of men. White women were left at home, to take care of the farms, households, and completing the work that would have been previously done by the patriarch. The white women who had been left behind did not forget that their white counterparts did not do their duty. During the period of the 1880s, and afterwards, white women challenged

men to live up to the southern contract of chivalry, and would not forget the lack of protection from sexual threats and otherwise.

Rebecca Latimer Felton, for instance, never forgot that she, and many other southern white women, was left largely unprotected during Sherman's March in Georgia. The Civil War exposed Felton to the crime of rape, as she was a southern 'lady' of higher class. Felton rose to high political status as the campaign manager for her husband, Dr. William Felton, in the 1870s. In the 1880s, using her public prominence in the South, Felton set out to create a better South for black and white women.[86]

Felton largely blamed white men for the problems women of both races faced. She blamed men for their indiscretions with their black female slaves before the Civil War. Felton wanted to extend protection towards women of both races. The idea of the birth of mixed race children extended from the antebellum South when white women attempted to reform white male sexuality. Felton's ideas on this are demonstrated to be very strong towards ending interracial relationships and marriage:

> Marriage between a master and a slave was obliged to be debasing to both. Marriage, in its true meaning rests upon absolute equality between the sexes as to rights and privileges – legal political and social…Marriage is a partnership and the children are blessed, when the father accords to the mother every right that he claims for himself, with honest dealing and mutual respect for both partners.[87]

This quotation makes Felton's views on marriage and sexuality in the South extremely clear as they pertain to race. First, for Felton, marriage's true meaning rests upon 'equality.' White women, according to Felton's definition are equal – not subordinate to – white men. The wife in a partnership should be allowed every right the white male has. The subtext of this would include

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[86]Leeann Whites, "Rebecca Latimer Felton and the Wife's Farm: The Class and Racial Politics of Gender Reform," in *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Making of the New South* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 167.

[87] Rebeca Latimer Felton, *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth* (1919; repr. New York: Arno Press, 1980), 256.

public and political rights for which white women in the South were increasingly asking. Second, children are blessed, meaning if read in relation to Felton's beliefs, that children should not be a product of miscegenation or mixed race sex – rape or otherwise. This idea can also be related to white women's relations with black men.

Felton's mission to protect black women trapped in the southern convict-lease system can be read in direct relation to this definition of marriage. The convict-lease rented convicts to private employers or a company "in need of work to lease prisoners from the state for a small fee."[88] The convict-lease system often saw male convicts in the same environment as black women and their children. Felton wanted to end the sexual exploitation of black women in the system because rape of black women was routine – and it was interracial rape perpetrated by the white guards.[89] However, black women, according to Felton, did not deserve protection for the same reasons as white women. This is an important distinction. Felton did not want to extend protection to African-American women because she wanted to protect their womanhood. Instead, she wanted to extend protection to black women in the convict-lease system because she wanted to stop miscegenation. White supremacy was put at risk by miscegenation, and mixed race children born in the South were a constant reminder to white women of white men's sexual indiscretions.[90] Ending white male on black female sex and rape after the Civil War was white women attempting to control white male sexuality.

It was shocking that Felton, as a southern lady, would step out of her traditional gender role and critique white men. What was even more shocking is that she and other white women were speaking publically about issues relating to sex. White women, like Felton, wanted to protect their status in the segregated South that still upheld its ideologies of racial and gender

[88]Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 64
[89]ibid., 65.
[90]ibid., 65-66.

hierarchies, though they were increasingly challenged, and manipulated. Sex, consensual or otherwise, between a white man and a black woman thus undermined the role of the white woman in the South. Leeann Whites argues, convincingly, that Felton was suggesting that African-American women should be sterilized. If white women's role was empowered motherhood, then black women and their families signified the opposite and what Felton was trying to stop.[91] However, white men took notice of temperance women, like Felton, attempting to police their sexuality in the postbellum South, through white women's increased public role in southern society.

White women wanted to pass laws for protection from sexual threats, but white men noticed that their own sexuality was now being policed. The rape laws were aimed at controlling white men's extramarital affairs with black women. Feimster has posited that the rape myth was a reaction to an attack on southern white men's sexuality; thus, white men might have begun to actively mobilize the image of the black rapist.[92] Agency is taken away from women in this theory. White women had become increasingly involved in public life in the South, in both politics and the workforce. It can also be inferred that southern white women might have been fearful of sexual attacks resonating from the Civil War and freed African-Americans – in the southern cultural context, this is not far-fetched. No matter how the rape myth came into being, discourse that white women manipulated in their fight for protection from sexual threats was that of the rape myth. What is also clear is that the push for anti-rape legislation and increased protection for white women came during more pressure for better morals in the nineteenth century. Felton's column "Increase in Rape Friends" in *The Country Wife* is an indication that the fear of sexual attack was a very real moral issue for southern white women.

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[91]Leeann Whites, "Rebecca Latimer Felton and the Problem of Protection in the New South," in *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Making of the New South* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 161.

[92]Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 78; and Sommerville, *Rape & Race*, 253.

Another problem for Felton was the ability for black men to vote – a right that white women did not yet have. Felton feared that black men's ability to vote would empower them, and, as such, would cause black men to look down at white women like white men did. The more "educated, economically independent and politically empowered" black men became, Felton feared, the more likely it was that black men would rape white, southern women.[93] Again, Felton was holding white men accountable for how white women were treated. Blame was now specifically being placed on farmers for keeping their wives and daughters in a long-lasting state of poverty. To fix this, Felton asked for better education for white women.[94] The constant subordination of white women, then, had to be stopped in order for the perceived increase in rape crimes to stop. It was this set of political beliefs that Felton delivered in her "Woman on the Farm" speech to the Georgia Agricultural Society in 1897.

The speech is significant in the history of white women's public role in the advocacy of lynchings. Felton opened her speech by calling on the men of Georgia to "Wake up…to the crisis now upon you! These white girls are the coming mothers of the white race."[95] The opening lines of her speech calls specifically on white men to do their duty to protect white motherhood, and white supremacy. Moreover, it is equally significant that Felton's speech *did not* wholly condone lynching black men for the safety of white girls and women on the farm, though in historical memory it has been taken as so. Felton said of lynching:

> We must make an effort to stop lynching by keeping closer watch over poor white girls on secluded farms, and if these poor maidens are destroyed in a land that their fathers died to save, I say the shame lies with the people [white men] who fail to be protectors for the children of their dead comrades.[96]

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[93]It is also of note that the characteristics described by Felton to make black men more likely to rape were the rights that Felton wanted for the empowerment of white women. See: Whites, "The Wife's Farm," 176.

[94]Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 126.

[95]"Woman Advocates Lynching," *Washington Post*, August 14, 1987.

[96]ibid.

It is evident that Felton does not condone the lynching of black men, though she clearly challenges white men to fulfill their chivalrous duty to protect white women. Furthermore, Felton's speech highlights the importance of specifically protecting girls. In not properly protecting white girls on the farm, white men were not just failing white women, and future mothers, but also the men who fought in the war. This could easily be a challenge by Felton: white men in the Civil War did not adequately protect southern white women, so the next generation should do better. A defense of her speech was later published, in an article written by Felton, in which she wrote that she had "depreciated mob law," and asked for more religion, better faster actions by courthouses, and a more moral manhood. Compliance with these proposed changes, she believed, would lead to less lynching.[97]

What is best remembered from Felton's 1897 speech is the line "If it needs lynching to protect woman's dearest possession from human beasts, then I say lynch a thousand times a week if necessary."[98] Blame that had been assigned to white men for not being able to protect white women was quickly forgotten in place of Felton's out of context call for white men to lynch black men to protect white women. While it was taken out of context, Felton and the press repeated, "lynch a thousand times" in following years.[99] While she did not condone lynching, she certainly seems to have agreed to lynching to an extent by asking white men to lynch if they could not protect white women from the crime of rape.

Not everyone agreed with Felton's views on lynching. In December 1898, Reverend J.B. Hawthorne of Nashville, Tennessee criticized Felton in a public medium for her views. He did so in the newspaper. He did agree with Felton that it would be impossible to find a man "who

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[97]Rebecca Latimer Felton, "Mrs. W.H. Felton's Reply to Dr. Hawthorne's Attack," The Constitution, December 22, 1898 in Rebecca Latimer Felton Papers. MS 81. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

[98]"Woman Advocates Lynching," *Washington Post*, August 14, 1987.

[99]Whites, "Gender Politics of Racial Violence," 181.

would suggest a milder punishment than death for such hellish villainy [rape or assault]."[100] However, he did not agree with Felton's view on mob violence, making his point clear: "I criticize only her recklessness and desperation in advocating an unlawful, unpatriotic and revolutionary method of punishing criminals."[101] Dr. Hawthorne continued in his reply to Felton's "Woman on the Farm" speech to criticize what she was teaching future generations in the South: "They should be taught that the man or woman who advocates a resort to mob violence, in any emergency, is truly an enemy as enemy to those who mount a mutinous flag."[102].

Even though Hawthorne was a prominent man in the South, Felton did not back down from her position. She engaged in a public newspaper argument with him to defend her stance on lynching. In a rebuttal article to an answer from Felton, Hawthorne, called her argument with him "unwomanly and disgraceful abuse."[103] Because Felton was attacking a male opinion and advocating lynching, she was seen as been acting 'unwomanly.' Felton *was* writing as a woman, defending woman's rights to protection from rape.

Felton argued that she spoke "the truth" about lynching in Georgia.[104] She claimed that white women were not being properly protected against rapists. Felton maintained that she called for lynching "when churches fail to rouse their members to the dangers, when the courts fail to convict the criminals, when the authorities pardon the rapists."[105] Felton, in her rebuttal, called on fathers and husband to protect white women against lynching when rape was not properly

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[100] "Takes Mrs. Felton to Task for Speech: Dr. Hawthorne Criticizes the Lady's Advocacy of Lynching," The Constitution, December 19, 1897 in Rebecca Latimer Felton papers. MS 81. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

[101] ibid.

[102] ibid.

[103] "Dr. J.B. Hawthorne Answers Mrs. Felton," 1890 in Rebecca Latimer Felton Papers. MS 81. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

[104] Felton, "Mrs. W.H. Felton's Reply," Rebecca Latimer Felton Papers, MS 81. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

[105] ibid.

prevented, and proper punishments were not meted out to the accused. Felton argued when "women are destroyed in the vilest manner on the public highways and in their homes by drunken, lustful fiends in human form" men needed to "rebuke the crime with a short shift and a strong rope!"[106]This, according to Felton, was Georgia law. Calling Hawthorne a "crank" she ended her public defense of her speech.[107] Felton continued to justify her claims: that if the patriarchal political system in the South could not protect white women, white women would continue to challenge white men to act chivalrously. Until white men did a better job of keeping white women safe, according to Felton, lynching was the best option. This public argument about protection with a male authority figure is especially significant because it illustrates white women's power in the media and public to defend their stance and challenge men.

Felton's critics were not, however, limited to men. Women also critiqued her views. Mrs. Elizabeth Grannis, a white woman from the North, spoke during a coloured citizens meeting in New York. Grannis said to the African-American audience: "I am only here tonight to represent womanhood. Now we all know that white woman and white girls of the south are full of coloured blood."[108] Grannis' comment to her black audience was extremely provocative. She alluded to white women and girls as products of miscegenation, through rape or consensual intercourse. Grannis' contention that there would be any interracial sex at all went against what Felton, and her southern contemporaries, were fighting against. The meeting Grannis spoke at was to address attacks on African-Americans in the Carolinas.

Felton was clearly disgusted with Grannis' view of southern womanhood. Felton abhorred the way "She [Grannis] was there to play on the basest passions of that ignorant

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[106]ibid.
[107]ibid.
[108]"Mrs. Felton's Burning Answer to Mrs. Grannis' Vile Slander of the Women of the South," Atlanta Journal, November 21, 1898 in Rebecca Latimer Felton Papers. MS 81. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

audience. She indirectly excused the crime [rape] that precedes lynching in the south" by proclaiming that southern white women and girls were 'full of coloured blood.'[109] Felton argued that Grannis slandered the women of the South in order to "awaken the vilest revenge and violence in the minds of the black men and women in that audience towards the white women in the south."[110] Clearly, Felton believed that Grannis' verbal attack on white women pardoned rape of white women. Felton continued her response to Grannis' comments by discussing the perceived violent nature of black men and women of the 'ignorant audience.' The faction of white women that supported lynching was coming under attack by both men and women, and Felton participated in a very public debate with them both.

While Felton argued her position in defense of lynching to protect white women and girls of the South from rape allegedly perpetrated by African-American men, Felton also found support from another prominent white women in the South. Belle Kearney of Mississippi had lived through Civil War in the South, like Felton had. She also recognized that southern white women's status had changed significantly after the Civil War. The term "'woman'" after the Civil War, according to Kearney, was "strong and dignified and suggest courteous consideration." "'Female,'" on the other hand, "is weak and almost insulting", and symbolized the gender regime of the Old South.[111] Kearney, an important female figure, seems to not have wholly endorsed lynching, but seems to have not fully disapproved of the measure in order to protect white women. In her memoir Kearney briefly discusses lynching in the South where she notes the sense of "insecurity wherever there are many negroes."[112]

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[109]ibid.
[110]ibid.
[111]Belle Kearney, *A Slaveholder's Daughter* (New York: The Abbey Press, c.1900), 41.
[112]ibid., 96.

White women particularly felt the feeling of 'insecurity' in the South, according to Kearney, in rural communities:

> The ladies of a household – especially in rural districts – are seldom left alone day or night; and care is taken that they do not linger late upon the road when walking or driving in the afternoons or remain unprotected at any hour for any length of time.[113]

Kearney describes, like Felton did in her "Woman on the Farm" speech, fear of the 'black rapist' in rural communities. Also, like Felton, she hoped that law, and the courts would be able to deal with criminals. However, Kearney also believed white women in the South, and white southerners in general, were in a particular predicament whereby lynching was "but one phase…and sooner or later the Southern people will settle it in justice and righteousness."[114] Kearney, then, had a similar view of lynching as Felton: both women did seem to have condoned lynching until the courts, and white men, did more to protect southern white women from being attacked.

Ida B. Wells publically criticized Francis Willard, who was head of the WTCU from 1893 to 1894 when Wells was in England, attempting to raise awareness about lynching in America. British people were disgusted by the stories of the mutilation of African-American men at lynchings. The people who Wells spoke to inquired as to what Willard, "America's most famous reformer," was doing to stop lynchings.[115] Wells spoke the truth to her audience – Willard was doing nothing to stop lynchings, and publically sympathized with the white women in the South who were forced to deal with the fear of rape by black men.[116] Willard considered herself to be progressive in terms of the women's movement, but failed to see lynching as an

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[113]ibid.
[114]ibid., 97.
[115]Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 65.
[116]ibid.

"institutionalized practice."[117] Moreover, when Willard was in England, she "was asked if she believed the charges against Negro men assaulting white women and she said yes."[118] Willard, as one of the most prominent American women, was thus known to have endorsed lynching, and spoke about in openly about it.

Less prominent women in the South also shared their views in public forums. Newspapers received letters from white women who voiced their support of lynching in the South to protect their pure sexuality. The *New York Times* published a letter written in 1897 by a woman who signed it M. M's concern was the male lawmakers who seemed to be holding "women's honor so cheap." According to M, laws were "made by persons [white men] who are unconsciously influenced by the knowledge that they will never suffer from this particular crime [rape]."[119] White women's argument that lynchings took place because they did not have the vote, and, as such, did not have a say in their own protection, was not isolated in the late-nineteenth century. Fighting for suffrage, some white southern women argued that if they were able to use a political voice, there would be less lynching of African-American men. Dorothy Voshel who appears to have been an anti-lynching advocate, wrote into *The Washington Post* and argued that "Lynching statistics show that in 1916 58 lynchings occurred in man suffrage states and only one in a state where women can vote."[120] Voshel also noted that there was only one lynching where women could vote in 1915 as well.[121] Never mind that Voshnel was

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[117]Carby, "On the Threshold of Woman's Era," 270.

[118]"Doings of the Race: Some Live Political Matter Relative to Major McKinley and Others," *Cleveland Gazette,* August 29, 1896.

[119]M. "The Urbana Lynching," *The New York Times*, June 24, 1897.

[120]Dorothy Voshel, "Letters to the Editor: Few Lynchings in States Where Women Have the Vote," *Washington Post*, January 8, 1917.

[121]Women had gained the vote in Alaska, Arizona, California, Kansas, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming and Utah. In 1915, Leon Juan and Leon Jose were lynched at Lonely Gulch in Arizona for being alleged bandits. In 1916, Bert Dudley was lynched in Olathe, Jackson County Kansas for murder. None of the men lynched were African-American men and none of them were charged with rape or assault of a white woman. Also, neither was a southern state. See, NAACP, *Thirty Years of Lynching,* 48, 65.

probably an anti-lynching advocate; implicit in her argument is that white women's ability to vote would help to end lynching.

It has been argued that Felton's race issues were her own problem that she preached to the public. White women of the South clearly shared some of her views. Felton's popularity in the South regarding her pro-lynching political stance is further demonstrated in the letters she received from supporters. Writing anonymously, a woman from Virginia supported Felton's comments: "Don't let your words die nor sleep, send up the cry of Lamentation for your sisters all over our beautiful South Land."[122] The woman from Virginia further illustrates the belief that white, southern women felt as if southern, white men had not properly protected them during the Civil War. Support for Felton and her politics of protection are also illustrated in the anonymous Virginia women's letter of support. While it may have been shocking that white women were speaking of sex and killing in the public sphere, it was equally scandalous that white women actually participated in lynchings of African-American men.

The lynching of Lloyd Clay in Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1919 is one example that exemplifies white women's participation in lynchings in the American South. White women were determined to see Lloyd Clay lynched for his supposed sexual attack upon Hattie Hudson. A white woman named Emily Shaw, who was present at the lynching of Lloyd Clay, stated in a letter to the editor of the *Vicksburg Herald*: "those women who shut themselves away from the atrocious sight of the lynching were physical cowards."[123] She further added: "The day has

[122] "Correspondence 1897-1904," A Virginia Woman to Rebecca Latimer Felton, n.d., Rebecca Latimer Felton Paper, GHL quoted in Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 128.

[123] Letter to the Editor, *Vicksburg (Miss.) Herald*, May 22, 1919 quoted in Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Racial Violence in America*, 1890-1940 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 101.

passed when a woman, 'to be a lady,' must stay behind closed doors. There are times when she should come forth and she is none the less a lady for doing so."[124]

What is apparent in the lynching of Clay is that white woman openly participated in mob violence to protect white southern womanhood. Shaw's statement that women should leave the house to protect themselves, and that in doing so, a woman stays a 'lady,' illustrates the way which women had begun to see themselves in the Jim Crow South. White women no longer expected white men to be solely in charge of their protection – the Civil War clearly gave many white women an increased public presence. Southern, white women wanted white men to fulfill their chivalrous duty. At the same time, however, white women's manipulation of gender discourse increased the opportunity for them to leave the private sphere to have more public roles. In both discourse and action, the Civil War saw new opportunities for southern women of which they took advantage. Women, during the Civil War, began to recognize state patriarchy and mobilize to ask for help. This mobilization may have inspired women to continue to ask for protection after the war.

White women intended to keep their increasingly prominent public roles in the South. Freed African-American men posed an imagined – but nonetheless perceived as real – danger. As well, white women did not want to be treated as subordinate to black men. Better education and protection, Felton and like-minded white women believed, would help white, southern women move above black men in the southern hierarchy. This is not to say, however, that all white, southern women were pro-lynching, but there is no doubt that there existed a faction of white women who argued in favour of lynching. As long as men and their patriarchal institutions were unable, according to white women, to protect them, women would push for white men to

[124]"Herbert J. Seligmann, "Protecting Southern Womanhood," *The Nation*, June 14, 1919 in Tuskegee Institute News Clipping Files, "Lynching, 1899-1966" (microfilm reels 221-236) quoted in Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 147.

protect them – often by lynching. Challenging southern, white men and their duty of protection, white women were able to use power discourse and actions in very public forums in order to feel as if they could enter the public sphere without having to fear a sexual attack.

Southern, white women, significantly, also acted violently, as white women. They actively defended themselves as women, and, as such, did not move towards masculinity. During the Civil War, women acted violently against Union men whom they considered to be a threat. It should not be a stretch, then, that white women were able to act violently as women through public acts of protecting their sexuality after the Civil War, as well. They used powerful discourse to incite violence. Compounded with this, white women gained an increasingly public role. Felton was prominent enough that she argued her position publically in the papers with a white man. To argue that white women had to move towards masculinity to act violently, meaning to actually partake in lynching or other physical attacks upon another person, takes away important public and political history from women, as does the fact that white women did not have a say in their politics of protection.

"Pull Him a Little Higher": White Woman in Lynch Mobs

In 1910, Mabel McManoway stood on the top of an automobile in the middle of a lynch mob. When she could not properly see the victim, McManoway, standing on top the seat of the car, screamed to the men raising the body, "Pull him a little higher so that I can see."[125] McManoway, and other white women, as will be shown, were not simply passive bystanders in lynchings of African-American men. Not only did Southern, white women wish to see the black perpetrator's body lynched, they often had an active role in lynchings.

[125] "Woman is Held on Lynching Charge," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 25, 1910.

Many white women moved out of the traditional female role as a mere spectator, and participated actively in lynch mobs. While white women called for protection from white, southern men, they often partook in mob violence. Instead of limiting their power in a challenge to white men to act chivalrously, white, southern women acted to protect themselves by publically participating in torturing, and killing, black men accused of rape. As such, white women acted violently, as women. Often overlooked in the crime of lynching, white women, I argue, had a significant and very public role to play in lynchings in the American South. Standing around and watching white men was simply not enough for them. They often initiated mob violence by identifying the offender, let the lynch mob know that they approved of the punishment meted out to the alleged assailant, and enacted violence upon the body of the man accused of sexually assaulting a white woman.

I will begin this section by discussing the role of women in the creation of lynch mobs. White women in the South often had a very important role. Identifying the assailant was especially significant because without a 'black rapist' to properly charge, there would be no lynching. When white men failed to protect white women well enough, instances will be shown where white women created their own mobs as a means of protecting themselves. Next, I will discuss how women had a hand in lynchings in the New South, both as active spectators and as participants in the violence. I will discuss this in terms of how white women were important actors in the rituals of lynching for rape or sexual assault.

The Making of a Lynch Mob

Three broad types of lynch mobs existed with different sets of characteristics. First, "In general terms, mass mobs evoked broad participation, were spontaneous and possessed little if

any formal organization and were highly ritualized in practice."[126] Second, there were "posses" or groups of men asked by a sheriff to apprehend suspects who had fled, but often they killed the person whom they were asked to locate. The last category of a lynch mob is a private lynching, which was made up small groups of people, mostly secretive, but were acts of vengeance against someone who had allegedly hurt the victim the mob was trying to protect.[127] All of the above types of lynch mobs included white women.

It is easy to infer that private lynchings were to protect a female family member who had been harmed by an African-American man. Many African-American men fled if they believed there was a possibility that they could be accused of raping a white woman, which according to loose definitions of rape in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, may have meant a black man being too close to a white woman.[128] While white men were the ones who were asked by the sheriff to locate the accused, white woman often still identified the assailant as her attacker, and participated in the mob.

Mass mobs, however, seem to be the most popular type of mob in which woman participated in as they evoked a larger crowd, and in lynchings which punished the crime of rape, women were often part of their ritualized nature. Piecing together how southern lynch mobs formed is difficult, but there are clues to help historians try to understand their formation. First, southern newspapers often reported criminality of African-American men – in order to intentionally or inadvertently – call for a lynching.[129] The reporting of the crime would alert the

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[126]Michael J. Pfeifer *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874-1947* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 39.

[127]ibid.

[128]The definition of rape of a white woman held a very loose meaning in the American South. Rape could mean rape, suspicion of rape, and aiding and abetting a rapist. Southern conceptions of rape by an African-American male could also be defined as writing a letter to a white woman, looking in a white woman's window, being found under a white woman's bed, and asking a white woman to marry him. See, Frank Shay, *Judge Lynch* (New York: Ives Wasburn Inc., 1938), 79-81.

[129]Waldrep, "War of Words," 76.

white community to an assault or rape upon a white woman in need of punishment. For example, in 1880 a "negro man" named Page Wallace was accused of sexually assaulting a white woman in Virginia. The article describes Wallace's appearance as " a mulatto, five and a half feet high, of burly build and powerful physique," and last seen "between Point of Rocks and Sandy Hooks." The article goes on to say that Wallace had not yet been caught and some white men had since gone after him. A lynching was expected.[130] Although men had gone after Wallace, it is clear that publishing this article would expand the manhunt for Wallace, and increase the odds of his being lynched. It can be inferred that more men would have joined the manhunt to look for the attacker. Equally significant is that during a previous incarceration for larceny, Wallace was identified as a suspect, presumably by a white woman, in a previous rape.

A second example illustrates the same point. A black man in Colquitt, Georgia was accused of having criminally attacked a white woman in her home while her husband was away on business. The woman identified her assailant as being named Radney, and he was taken to prison. Despite his incarceration, the newspaper describes the lynching of Radney as imminent.[131]

A last example to help prove that newspapers might have helped initiate lynch mobs is the alleged sexual assault in Jasper, Alabama of a white woman named Mrs. Jones by Jim Sheppard, an African-American man accused the sexual assault upon Mrs. Jones. In this article, the African American man is described:

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[130]"An Expected Lynching: Hunting a Negro Who Outraged a White Woman," *Washington Post,* February 2, 1880.

[131]"Attack on Woman Made at Colquitt: Negro Alleged to Have Confessed to Making Criminal Assault and Lynching is in Prospect," *Macon Daily Telegraph*, August 12, 1918.

> The negro was very black and repulsive looking. He wore trousers very large at the bottom and large stripes, and was about 5 feet 10 inches in height. He wore a black woollen hat without coat or a vest. He wore a black or blue shirt opened at the throat.[132]

The purpose of this description was to identify the assailant. The article continues to discuss how a lynching was expected.[133]

What all of these articles suggest is that white women identified their assailants, and that the newspaper published their story. Furthermore, although all the articles expect a lynching, it is equally possible that they could be responsible for inciting the lynching by reporting the crime, as well as describing the accused. If white men in the New South were being challenged to protect white women, men already on the hunt for the rapist might have been seen as a challenge for more men to go out and find him.

White women had the power to create mass mobs. By announcing that a black man had attacked her, a white woman in the South could easily to incite a mob in her community to go looking for her alleged rapist. Thus, the white, female victim held the power of a mob's creation when the crime was rape or sexual assault. An excellent example is the lynching of an African-American man named Reuben Hudson in DeKalb County in 1887. A woman named Sarah Bush told her husband "a most accurate description of the Negro." With the information given to him, Bush's husband was able to catch Hudson with "a hundred of DeKalb's most sturdy and law abiding farmers." Once the mob had caught Hudson, a man in the crowd asked that Sarah Bush be brought forward in order to properly identify her attacker to make sure that they had caught the right man. Bush was asked, "Are you sure that you are not mistaken? Remember, this man's

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[132]"Helpless Woman Assaulted and a Lynching is Likely to Follow," *Age-Harold* (Birmingham, Alabama), June 23, 1899.

[133]ibid.

life hangs on your answer." Bush, without hesitation, answered that Hudson was her attacker and he was lynched.[134]

Bush's account of her alleged attacker clearly incited the manhunt for Hudson, which led to his lynching. Hudson was lynched because Bush's word was taken as truth, and authorized the mob's actions. As well, the description, given by a white woman, to the newspapers seems to have become the authoritative account. Men went out and used extralegal means to protect southern, white woman – with southern, white women's word.

This point can be further illustrated with a mob that was stopped by a white woman. Frank Allen was accused by the mob of attacking Mrs. Harvey Callis. Callis gave "a good description of her assailant at the time of the outrage," which was presumably like the accounts given in newspapers to identify the victims. Allen was caught, and was to be transported so that a mob would not lynch him. However, "a large crowd" gathered "at the station for the evident purpose of wreaking summary vengeance upon the man in the event that he was recognized." Callis, however, did not identify Allen until the train had left the station.[135] The ability to stop the mob demonstrates the public power that white woman had before the 'black rapist' was killed. White victims of assault had both the power to have the accused killed, or have his life spared.

Word of mouth was a significant factor in the creation of lynch mobs in the South. In the cases of Sarah Bush and Mrs. Callis, they told their husbands what had happened. Such an outrage against a white woman's purity would have likely spread around the community, and a mob would form to capture the accused 'black rapist.' Neighbors were likely contacted and

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[134] *Atlanta Constitution,* July 28, 1887, quoted in Feimster, *Southern Horrors,* 142.

[135] "Woman Prevents Lynching.: Withholds Identification of Her Assailant Until He is Safe," *Washington Post,* July 4, 1907.

search parties were made. This is also probably how newspapers were found out information regarding the alleged attacker.

If white women did not feel as if white men were fulfilling their duty of protection, white women formed their own mobs. A case worth examining took place in Illinois, but illustrates white women creating a mob to hunt down an African-American man. White women formed a mob to track an African-American man, named W.J. Boswell, who had taken a neighbor's daughter in Ladd, Illinois. The white women, or "skirted White Caps," as the *New York Times* called them, "did not succeed, but if they had, Boswell would have fared badly, for they had a rope with which to hang him."[136] This case shares characteristics with cases I will examine in the South. It also illustrates how the moral panic regarding the 'black rapist' was not solely confined to the South. Although it is clear the women of the mob did not succeed, they were able to come together, presumably by word of mouth, in order to hunt down an alleged rapist. The newspaper insinuated that the mob was really capable of lynching Boswell if they had caught him.

Also interesting to note is that the "women regulators hanged Boswell in effigy and then burned the figure."[137] Although the white women who composed the mob in Ladd did not catch Boswell, they still felt the need to act violently, illustrating the highly ritualized nature of the lynch mob. The women clearly intended to kill the man accused of taking a community member's daughter. The white women in the mob were not acting as men; they were acting as publically and violently like other lynch mobs did to protect a female community member. They took it upon themselves to protect other women, and, by doing so, demonstrated that they deserved protection from alleged attackers.

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[136] "Women Attempt a Lynching: A Mob of Illinois Females Fails to Find a Victim," *New York Times,* September 22, 1897.

[137] ibid.

There are also examples of white women participating in mob violence in the South. One example took place in Jacksonville, Florida where " a mob of several thousand" was formed to lynch five black men for the "murder of S. Silverstein and the assault on his wife and two small children". This particular mob is significant because it was "led by a plucky little German woman".[138] The white women clearly had the power to round up people in the neighborhood, more than likely including men, to seek justice for not only the man who had been murdered, but also the assault of his surviving wife and children.[139] Clearly, if white men were not living up to white women's expectation of protection, white women took matters into their own hands.

White Woman in Lynch Mobs

After the alleged black rapist had been caught by a lynch mob, women continued to have a significant role. In lynchings where an African-American man was being accused of attacking a white woman, I argue that white women – both the victim and other white women in the community – held significant public roles in the execution. More to this point, Michael J. Pfeifer posits that all lynchings in the American South were a "performance in which the white populace actively or vicariously participated." Furthermore, African-Americans in the community in which the lynching took place were warned of "the terrible consequence for breaching white supremacy."[140] The worst 'breach' was acts of miscegenation. Many whites did not believe that white women could desire a black man and with loose definitions of rape in the American South – especially regarding black men – breaking the southern codes of segregation happened often.

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[138]"Mob is Led By a Woman: Storm Jail Bent on Lynching Five Negro Prisoners," *Washington Post,* March 8, 1912.

[139]If S. Silverstein and his family were Jewish, given the family name, it is interesting that they were racially categorized as white. In 1913, Leo Frank, a Jewish man, was famously lynched in the South. If the 'plucky German woman' who led the mob was a member of the community, she may have also been Jewish. This might then be an interesting case of claiming a white racial identity.

[140]Pfeifer, *Rough Justice,* 49.

White women were did not stand idly by and watch white men exact what the mob believed to be 'justice.' The lynching of Raymond Bushrod is exemplary of this. Maggie Roberts, daughter of a prominent farmer in the community named Ben Roberts, accused Bushrod of assaulting her, beating her with an iron rod and leaving her for dead. He was taken before Maggie who positively identified him as the man who attacked her. During the entire lynching:

> Not less than two hundred women were on the hillside overlooking the public square, and when his dangling form went up, cheers upon cheers from them rent in the air. In fact, the women gave a double reassurance to the ones engaged that the proper punishment was being meted out.[141]

After Bushrod was lynched, the male leader of the mob pointed to the body and said, "Here's the protection we offer our wives and daughters."[142]

This account of lynching offers some valuable information about white women's participation as witnesses to lynchings. First, white women gave 'double reassurance to the ones engaged that proper punishment was being meted out,' which illustrates that white women's approval of the lynching was important to the white male mob. It can be supposed that white women approved of men protecting their ability to travel in the country, as Maggie was doing when she was allegedly attacked. Second, the body of Bushrod appears to have been an offering to the white women watching the lynching on top of the hill. The corpse was a symbol of their right to move freely within the community. Furthermore, the southern white women approved of the murder of Bushrod, which appears to have been both acceptance of the 'offering', as well as approval of white men's ability to protect them. As Feimster notes, some women used lynching as a way to shape men's behavior in public in regards to protecting women.[143] White women

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[141]"Hundred Women Look at Lynching: Big Mob Hangs While Sunday Sun Shines," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 27, 1897.

[142]ibid.

[143]Feimster, *Southern Horrors,* 150.

gave approval, and thanked white men for protection that had not preciously been afforded to white women.

Even if a woman was not present at a lynching, she was able to give her endorsement. Postcards were often sent as souvenirs of lynchings. Archival evidence uncovered by historians of lynching show that postcards were a means by which women could participate in lynchings without being present. As recipients of the, postcards of lynchings women were still able to view the body of the accused and that white, southern men had acted chivalrously. Amy Louise Wood argues, compellingly, that photographs "provided a bridge between the masculine acts of violence and the protected and sanctified domestic sphere."[144] Although I disagree that acts of lynching were solely acts of masculine violence because white women participated in lynching as well, postcards did allow the southern community to create racial solidarity with those who were not present at lynchings, but still felt as if justice should be done. For example, a woman named Mrs. Locklear from Rome, Georgia was too "frightened" to be present during the local lynching of George Reed, her assailant. However, she wanted to see the photograph to see that "her violation had been avenged."[145] Thus, Mrs. Locklear was able to visually see that the proper justice had been applied to her alleged attacker.

If a white woman, who was suspected to have been attacked was present at a lynching, she was sometimes allowed to decide how her suspected assailant was punished. In North Carolina in 1897, Kittie Henderson, when given the option, said: "You may hang him or burn."[146] Sarah Bush was also firm in how she wanted her 'rapist' to be killed: Reuben Hudson had choked her, so she wished for him to be choked, as well. When someone in the mob

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[144]Woods, *Lynching and Spectacle,* 101.
[145]ibid.
[146]*Daily Charlotte Observer,* August 10 and 12, 1897 quoted in Feimster, *Southern Horrors,* 149.

suggested burning the victim, she instructed that she wanted him to be hanged.[147] Both Henderson and Bush clearly played powerful leading roles in the mob, not only identifying their assailants, but also choosing how their assailants would die at the hands of the mob.

Important in the ritual of lynchings, the accused was often afforded "the opportunity to make a confession, or at least to say some final words or a prayer." This was important to the lynch mob because the confession was either "confirming the guilt of the accused or by demonstrating the accused's unworthiness through belligerent denial."[148] This was a tradition in hangings that can be seen to date from Tyburn Tree in London, England, whereby prisoners were able to make a final speech to the carnival-like crowd. This not only served as important to the white mob because it justified their violence and as a warning to other black men to adhere to southern codes of racial segregation, it also might have served as entertainment for those in the crowd. Whatever the reason for the final confession, it was clearly a significant aspect in the lynchings.

Sterling Dunham, for example, was accused of assaulting a fourteen-year-old girl, as well as the three Dunn sisters of Bellefontaine, Mississippi, who were under that age of eighteen. Before he was lynched, he was allowed to speak to the crowd, whereby he "maintained his innocence to the last." Furthermore, Dunham:

> admitted having visited Dunn's place, but denied any bad motive. His last remarks were made to 200 negroes, who were assembled about the place of execution, Dunham telling them never to go about a white man's house when women were home alone.[149]

Not only was the act of hanging Dunham a public warning to African-American men, so were his last words to them. He demonstrated his 'unworthiness' because he would not admit to

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[147]*Atlanta Constitution,* July 28, 1887 quoted in Feimster, *Southern Horrors,* 142.

[148]Pfeifer, *Rough Justice,* 45.

[149]Girl Aids Mob in Lynching Negro: Young Victim of Assailant Puts Noose About Neck," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* June 27, 1904; and "Girl Adjusted Noose About Negro's Neck: She Was His Victim," *Lexington Herald,* June 27, 1904.

having assaulted the four girls he was accused of attacking. His last speech surely would have generated fear among the black community who witnessed his lynching. White women would have been given freedom within the community, as black men surely would have feared going anywhere near a white girl for fear of death at the hands of a lynch mob.

The lynching of Raymond Bushrod is also an example of a lynching that was ritualized by a final speech given to the mob. Bushrod's final speech is starkly different from the words spoken by Dunham. As the *Atlanta Constitution* reported:

> Bushrod was given his opportunity for confession and prayer. His confession was complete. He stated that he was guilty and this was his third offense. After offering up his last supplication, a long and fervent prayer on bended knee, the signal to haul away was given.[150]

Bushrod validated the actions of the mob by admitting his own guilt in attacking Maggie Roberts, and apparently two other victims. Whether or not he was coerced by the mob into making his confession, it was nonetheless effective mob. It offered the mob a further reason to lynch, further validating the 'lawfulness' of the crime. For women's public role in particular, the confession illustrated that lynching was a justifiable means for protection. White women participated violently in the murder of their assailant, or in the lynching of an attacker of a member of their community as well. The fact that white women, and girls directly inflicted harm, and murdered the men, who attacked them, gave the white women in the South public power. White women held a prominent public role in the mob that symbolized their desire for protection in the public sphere. Examples will further illustrate this power. Dunham was hanged with the help of the fourteen-year-old girl he allegedly assaulted. The Wilson girl put the noose, "about the negro's neck," after she positively identified Dunham as her attacker. He was then "placed upon the back of a black horse," and, at the signal from the mob's leader, Wilson "led the horse

[150]"Hundred Women Look at Lynching," September 27, 1897.

from under him [Dunham]."[151] Despite her youth, Wilson was given the most important role in the mob – killing the assailant. With this powerful role, she illustrated to the mob made of white men and women, with members of the black community watching, that white women were entitled to protection in the New South. Lynching, then, strengthened white women's importance as accomplices in controlling 'dangerous' black sexuality.

The case of the lynching of Lloyd Clay is exemplary of white women as participants in mob violence. Many white women were openly reported to have participated in the lynching of Clay. "The dainty hands of young girls," were described by the *Chicago Defender* as having "guns pointed at the victim eager for a chance to be a party in this gruesome method of cannibalism."[152] Clay's body was also lit on fire, and white women had a hand in pouring gasoline on him: "His [Clay's] head was pinned beneath a man's heel and a woman, taking advantage of the opportunity, saturated his hair with gasoline."[153] Here, white women may have been making a public case fore their protection, or may have had mob mentality. The women did, however, act violently.

A similar case is the lynching of Philip Gaithers in 1920. Gaither's was reported to have confessed his crime for murdering a young woman named Miss Ansea Jaudon in Mississippi. After his body was covered in gasoline by the crowd, he was shot at.[154] Four young women were reported to have "pushed their way through the outer rim of the circle and emptied rifles into the negro."[155] Although white women were clearly not allowed, or, at least, in the inner circle of the lynching, they made their presence in the mob well known by mutilating Gauihers' burning

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[151]"Girl Aids Mob in Lynching," June 27, 1904.

[152]"Vicksburg, Mississippi Disgraces Civilization With Lynching," Chicago Defender, Big Weekend Edition, May 24, 1919.

[153]ibid.

[154]"Negro Lynched; Admitted Crime: Phillips Gaithers, Slayer of Miss Ansea Jaudon, 17-year Old Girl Killed," *Columbus Ledger,* June 21, 1920.

[155]Tuskegee Newspaper Clipping File, Reel 222 quoted in Feimster, *Southern Horrors,* 278.

corpse with bullets – again illustrating white women's participation in lynch mobs. The white women in the mob who killed wanted to illustrate their power over black men, and demonstrate that they deserved protection.

Besides actively participating in the murder of African-American 'rapists,' white women often wanted souvenirs of the murder of the black men they had helped to lynch. Clay was lynched in the yard of Ida M. Keefe, who questioned the community's desire – white men and women – to keep the tree where Clay was lynched. One man, probably a member of the mob, claimed:

> The tree is a monument to the spirit of manhood of this community who will not tolerate crimes against their women folks. What was done here last night was done for you and every woman and girl in Warren County.[156]

For this man, the tree was a symbol of white men protecting white women. For women, the tree might have also been a symbol that white women's demand for protection worked.

A second example is the lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abraham Smith in 1930. Although this lynching took place in the Indiana, there are few photographs of women participating in mob violence in the South because of the justification of lynching was to protect white women against violence.[157] As such, I will use the photograph from the Shipp and Smith lynching to deduce that white women also took souvenirs from black bodies. It is historical fact that Abe Smith's clothes were torn off as he was dragged around the town of Marion, Indiana.[158] It is, however, also clear that the white women in the photograph "divvied up the bloodied pants

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[156]Herbert J. Seligmann, "Protecting Southern Womanhood," *The Nation,* June 14, 1919, in Tuskegee Institute News Clipping Files, "Lynching, 1899-1966" (microfilm reels 221-236) quoted in Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 147.

[157]If white women were seen in photographs to have been participating in the violence, women could be seen as not needing protection from brutality.

[158]Woods, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 101.

of Abrham Smith" as one "can see the girls in this photo clutching ragged swatches of dark cloth."[159]

The meaning of the souvenirs leave something to be examined in terms of interpreting why white women would want to keep a memento of a lynch victim. Harvey Young argues that a souvenir from a black body "fix the black body within a historical moment, but also transform it into a captive object to be owned, displayed, and quite possibly traded."[160] Young's assertion that southerners wanted to again commodify the body of black men to be a 'captive object' has an example – a photograph of the Shipp and Smith lynching in Indiana, framed, with the victim's hair. Writing of the frame reads: "Bo pointn [sic] to his niga [sic]."[161] The bodies of the black men are turned into objects that can be possessed. Though Bo is a man, some white women also wanted to objectify and own parts of a lynched black male body as captured in the Shipp and Smith lynching photograph.

Young also posits that "What makes them [lynching souvenirs] so interesting is that they, much like contemporary, mass-produced stereotypical commercial images of the black body, sought to commodify the body at a time when it was gaining liberties."[162] White women wanted the vote, and to move up the racial and gender hierarchies in the South. It can be inferred that white, southern women may have wanted to own part of the black, male body in order to assert their control over a subordinate group, which was gaining increasing political rights.

Although southern women were involved in every aspect of many lynchings in the South, the press either wanted to expose that white women where being corrupted by white men, or hide

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[159]See, James Allen, et al., *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America,* ed. James Allen et al. (Sante Fe, New Mexico: Twin Palms Publishers, 2000), plate 31.

[160]Harvey Young, "The Black Body as Souvenir in American Lynching," *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 4 (December 2005): 646.

[161]See, James Allen, et al., *Without Sanctuary,* plate 32.

[162]Young "The Black Body," 646.

the fact that women were present in lynchings Here, I will briefly explore why it white women's roles in lynchings in the South were either vilified or hidden. Feimster attributes the southern press' reluctance to publish stories and photos of women's participation in lynchings after 1900 to both protect white women from criminal prosecution. She posits: "such an erasure had as much to do with protecting participants from the law as with preserving the image of dependant southern womanhood."[163] Although Feimster does not explicitly explain why there was more hesitation in reporting white, southern women's violent actions, it can be inferred that it might have been because of the growing awareness of lynching in the American South, as well as pressure from the anti-lynching movement. White women were being protected to keep up the public façade of white women needing protection from black men to justify the lynching. The southern press, "increasingly sought to soft-pedal, ignore and deny white women's participation at lynchings in this way, the black press, along with northern newspapers and anti-lynching activists continued to expose female brutality in southern mobs." Furthermore, northern newspapers, as well as black newspapers saw it necessary to show that white women were part of the mob and participants in the violence.[164]

In 1913, the *Atlanta Constitution*, published a story titled "No Women Took Part in American Lynching." The article is a rebuttal to the *Macon News,* which published a story titled "Young Women in Orgie at Americus." The *Atlanta Constitution*'s article was seeking to preserve traditional ideas of southern, white women. The community of Americus in Georgia charged the *Macon News* "as not in keeping with the high regard which manly men show women everywhere. There is not a more refined and more noble womanhood anywhere than in

[163]Feimster, *Southern Horrors,* 148.
[164]ibid., 151.

Americus."[165] The decision to come out and defend the 'womanhood' of white women is clearly in line with what can be considered to be traditional white womanhood. If white woman acted violently, it undermined the 'rape myth' narrative, in which southern, white women needed white men to protect them.

The article published by the *Macon News* also has sexual undertones in the title, with young women's participation in an 'orgie.' Amy Louise Wood argues that photographs of black male genitalia exposed at lynchings were covered up as to preserve southern white femininity. Sometimes during lynchings, "the penis was uncovered and molested or severed…It was the black man's naked body, after all, that served as a visual reminder of the alleged crime against white womanhood."[166] If white women were exposed to a black man's penis at a lynching, the purpose of protecting white women against the perceived virility of black men became moot. The men of Americus, then, believed that white women should be protected in the newspapers for the same purpose of covering up black male genitalia in photographs.

White women were involved in every aspect of lynchings in the South. From the creation of the mob to mutilating the body after the lynching, white women held prominent and powerful roles in lynching. White women's presence indicates that women not only wanted to challenge white men to protect them, but also wanted to hold positions of power in the mob. Although some of the violence was because of racial hate, protection white women demanded from white men is also an extremely important aspect that should be in the historical narrative. White women wanted to be able to assert their public role in the New South without fear of being attacked by the perceived threat black men. However, by participating in lynchings, white southern women undercut the need for protection from white men. As such, the narrative of

[165]"No Women Took Part in Americus Lynching: Sensational Reports Printed in Some State Papers Denounced at Mass Meeting," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 25, 1913.

[166]Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle,* 101.

traditional gender norms in the South was kept in order to maintain the white justification for lynching.

Conclusion

Southern white women's participation in lynchings should not be ignored in the historical narrative of lynching in America. Not only is it doing a disservice to the study of lynching, it also ignores a hard-fought battle for women's rights in the American South. White women's participation in lynching is less comfortable to confront than their involvement in the anti-lynching movement or their role as bystanders, but that should not mean that it should be studied any less.

It is significant that white women in the South undercut white men's chivalry through their involvement in lynchings. It is difficult to uncover evidence of white women's participation because the predominant notion of southern white women is that they acted in accordance with traditional gender norms. Calling for lynching, as did Rebecca Latimer Felton and other women, was one thing, but white women actively being in lynching mobs, and the violence that they perpetrated had to be kept silent in order to uphold the justification for lynching. The silence regarding white women's participation in lynchings in the South may be one of the reasons why it is understudied in the historiography. Examining and questioning how, and why, white women acted in racial violence dispels idea that the South was predominately controlled by white men, as white southern women clearly had an important public role.

Traditional gender norms were challenged in the South drastically after the Civil War. White women fought for more prominent roles in public space and wanted protection to do so. The Civil War was a significant factor in how women's position in public changed over time.

Previously established gender roles were challenged during the Civil War when white women attacked Union Soldiers, and when white women attacked black bodies that white women saw as a threat to their ability to move freely in public in the New South. Studying how white women fought hard for the right for protection is also significant in the study of the South's history because it shows another side to women's hard fought battle for suffrage. White women wanted protection, and if white men were not doing a good enough job, white women in the South wanted the ability to vote. With the vote, white women would be able to elect the candidate who would best offer white women this protection.

To argue that white women were constrained, and were unable to act as individuals, takes away from the increased public role women gained through lynching perceived 'black rapists.' White women acted *as* white women in violence in the South. White, southern women supported lynch mobs, taking part in them *as* woman, and did not necessarily take on masculine roles in doing so. In perpetrating, and endorsing violent acts in lynch mobs, white women were using their southern womanhood to pressure men to protect them, or took their safety into their own hands as women. Arguing otherwise takes away white women's challenge to masculinity in the South. By being able to protect themselves in public, white women were able to exert their power on people they considered to be subordinates. Southern white women probably knew they could not better white men in the context of the nineteenth-century South. However, white women felt that they were superior to black men, and demonstrated that women deserved a better standing than their traditional place on the southern gender hierarchy men.

The discourse of protection was a strong political tool for white women in the South. It is also an important contradiction. In many ways, white women held onto traditional notions of femininity in the New South where they were attempting to wield increased public power. The

question remains whether this helped or their status in the South. They were certainly able to manipulate the popular idea of women as weak, and use it to their advantage in a largely white, and male dominated southern culture that they felt was obligated to offer to them protection – even if they did not need it.

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