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PARIS IS BURNING: LYNCHING AND RACIAL VIOLENCE IN LAMAR COUNTY, 1890-1920

Brandon Jett

From 1865 to 1920, the United States underwent vast transformations, especially in the South. New political, social, and economic systems emerged that transformed the South from a rural, slave-based society, to an increasingly urban, industrialized, free labor society. The changes to the social, political, and economic landscape of the South prompted an unprecedented era of racial violence throughout the region. From 1890 to 1920, lynching became the most visible and prevalent example of racial violence; at least 2,522 African-Americans died at the hands of lynch mobs. Lynchings remained a continued threat for southern blacks throughout the Jim Crow era, however, the number of lynchings dropped steadily from the peak in 1892, and by 1920, lynchings became a relatively rare event. Historians identified several reasons why lynchings declined during this period, including changes in the southern economy, increased pressure from outside anti-lynching organizations, and an increased reliance on the southern legal system to enforce compliance with Jim Crow customs and laws.¹

An examination of these processes in Lamar County provide an understanding of the interconnections of these economic, social, and political transformations and the rise and decline of lynching in the New South. The county seat for Lamar County, Paris, exemplified the prototypical New South city. Paris became a major railroad hub and connected the county to larger markets for agricultural and manufactured products.

Although agricultural still undergirded the county's economy, by 1900, Paris housed a burgeoning manufacturing and industrial sector and was one of the northeast Texas' most important cities. Despite the

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outward appearance of modernization, race relations remained mired in antebellum notions of white supremacy and black subordination. White mobs in Paris lynched at least nine black men between 1890 and 1920. Most notoriously, Lamar County whites ushered in the era of spectacle lynchings in 1893 that terrorized southern blacks for the next thirty years. Lynchings continued to go unchallenged for thirty years until 1920, when prominent whites publicly condemned lynching for the first time.²

In 2001, Walter Buenger briefly discussed lynching in Lamar County in *The Path to a Modern South*. Buenger argued the change in response to lynching was indicative of a larger cultural shift that occurred between 1890 and 1930 through which northeast Texans became less concerned with promoting the traditional southern ideals of the “Lost Cause” and states’ rights. This cultural transformation, he states, acted as the main catalyst to the region’s changing attitudes regarding lynching.³

“Paris is Burning” reexamines the rise and decline of lynching in Lamar County and focuses specifically on the role of prominent whites in Paris who initially propagated the continued use of and later hastened the decline of lynching locally. Following the heinous 1893 lynching of Henry Smith, local businessmen publicly expressed their empathy for the mob and condoned their actions. Because of their support, local mob participants faced no prosecution of any kind, even though Governor James Hogg pressured locals to bring the ringleaders to justice. Lynchers continued to enjoy local support until 1920. Following the public burning of two black men before a crowd of 3,000, the negative national press tarnished the image crafted by prominent whites in Paris. After a devastating fire in 1916 that destroyed much of the city, Paris city leaders promoted Paris as a modern and progressive city. The complete breakdown of legal and social order that made spectacle lynchings possible threatened the economic viability of Paris. In addition, thousands of local blacks fled the county in the aftermath of the lynching and forced city leaders to take steps to ensure the cheap labor supply remained in the county. Responding to those specific circumstances, prominent whites in Paris condemned the lynching publicly, encouraged local authorities to prosecute the lynchers, met with prominent blacks to encourage them to stay in the county, and ensured that lynching would no longer be a problem in Lamar County.⁴

The history of escalating racial violence in Lamar County dates back to the antebellum era. During the Civil War, a lynch mob murdered a slave named Rube. Allegedly, according to the *Dallas Morning News*, “five hundred people assembled and Rube was tied to a tree, rails were piled

around him, set on fire and he slowly burned to death.” This suggests that prior to emancipation whites in the county were willing to go to extreme lengths to eliminate perceived threats to the racial caste system.⁵

Following emancipation, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands came to Texas to make emancipation a reality. The Bureau faced many problems in Texas. The central problems were a shortage of personnel and funds, bureaucratic regulations, and the violent resistance of white Texans to emancipation and black equality. During Reconstruction, white mobs murdered at least four hundred black Texans. Most of these lynchings allegedly resulted from the murder or rape of a white person at the hands of a freedman. The myth of the retrogressive and rapacious black man had begun.

In Lamar County, the Klan had organized by 1868 in response to federal efforts to help freedmen exercise their new rights. Bands of local whites resisted the Bureau’s efforts violently and attempted to kill local bureau agent DeWitt C. Brown numerous times. These cabals also patrolled the county, murdering several white Republicans and “an untold number of freedmen.” In this era, local whites realized that violence remained an effective way to limit black advancement and successfully thwarted the Bureau. By the end of 1868, Brown had resigned his post with the Freedmen’s Bureau because he lacked federal support and left the county for good. One year later, it was clear to locals that the Bureau failed because blacks remained virtually enslaved to landholders and conservative whites had regained control of local political offices.⁶

With white Democrats firmly in control of the county, violence was less overt, but tensions remained. Paris housed a sizeable and well-established black middle class, with several African-Americans serving as council members, including Harry Cunington in 1871, and Creed Taylor and Chris Johnson from 1882 through 1885. Like the national economy, Lamar County’s economy grew tremendously during the last decades of the 19th century, accompanied by rapid population growth. The county’s population more than doubled from 15,790 to 37,302 between 1870 and 1890 and the black population grew by more than 2,000 people in the 1880s. The working-class character of recent black migration produced profound effects on local race relations, because white citizens of Paris, like those of most cities in the New South, pushed for economic improvement and growth while retaining traditions of white supremacy. Economic opportunities in the cotton trade in Lamar County prompted a mass influx of new, unknown blacks, causing black-white tensions to rise.

For instance, local whites pushed for prohibition reform in the late 1880s and the early 1890s a movement that pitted them against local blacks, who tended to be anti-prohibition. To many local whites, black opposition to prohibition signaled the retrograde nature of the new black migrants. The combination of recent black in-migration and blacks' resistance to prohibition reform increased racial tension in the county. By the 1890s, as Walter Buenger suggested, such conditions turned Paris into "a lynching site."⁷

In the summer of 1890, racial violence struck Paris again. Andy Young, a local black, became the first lynching victim when local whites accused him of having "difficulty with some white boys." The *Chicago Inter Ocean* described Young as "a hard-working Negro," but listed no additional reason for his murder. Young was in his early twenties and worked as a sharecropper on Nathan Grant's farm. The night of the lynching, a small group of six or seven whites found him at his residence, "called him up," and shot him as he came out of the door. Fitzhugh Brundage suggests that small mob murders "can best be understood as a form of private vengeance." Young's murder did not fit the traditional image of spectacle lynching, but the mob sent a message to the rest of the black community by desecrating Young's dead body with a barrage of bullets. Andy Young's killing did not seem to upset the citizens of the community. Evidence of black or white reactions is either nonexistent or lost to the historical record. The lack of reaction to the slaying is symptomatic of a lack of national attention to lynching and racial violence at the time. The absence of record might also suggest that blacks and whites generally accepted the lynching or felt they could not speak out against it because they too may become victims of violent reprisal.⁸

A similar lack of reaction by county whites occurred again in 1892, when a local white man, John Ashley, murdered local black sharecropper Jarrett Burns. Allegedly, Burns purchased a horse from Ashley but, according to Ashley, did not keep up the payments. Ashley took the horse from Burns because of his inability to pay. Burns then showed pragmatism and foolishness in the same instance. He went alone and unarmed to request the return of the horse in order to till his soil. Allegedly, during an ensuing altercation, Ashley killed Burns. In southern society, the value of blacks did not exceed even the most miniscule debt. Local authorities pursued no legal action against Ashley, suggesting that unpaid debts justified the murder of a black man at the hands of a white man in their eyes.⁹

This murder, however, sparked an unprecedented reaction from the

county's blacks. The lack of legal action against Burns infuriated the black community in Lamar County and they organized the "Colored Association" to voice their frustration. They expressed their dissatisfaction in a way that frightened many southern whites, through violence. Ashley claimed to have received numerous threats against his life from members of the "Colored Association," and they allegedly even poisoned his horses. The action considered most threatening to local whites was yet to come. According to the *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, local blacks attempted to enter Ashley's house a few nights after the murder of Burns. In defiance of all Jim Crow social rules, several local blacks rode around the Lamar County streets armed with guns.¹⁰

To combat the growing tide of black assertiveness, local whites organized for their own protection. Following the attempted break-in of Ashley's residence, members of the white community stood guard over Ashley's house to ward off any further black efforts at revenge. Additionally, local whites turned to the time tested use of violence to send a message for blacks to leave the issue alone. Small groups of whites whipped numerous blacks in the ensuing days. Most disturbing to the black community was the attempted lynching of Jarrett Burns' niece, Ella Ransom. When the mob, including Ashley, attempted to lynch Ransom, she slipped the noose off and ran away while the men were "standing a little way off and while one of them was fixing the rope over a tree limb."¹¹

Following the botched lynching of Ella Ransom, local blacks again asserted their manhood. Ella Ransom returned to Paris to report the attack to authorities under protection of several armed black men. Local whites refused to accept this assertion of dignity and violently expressed their disapproval. Three of the men who guarded Ella Ransom received beatings by a group of masked men, but the worst was yet to come. The racial tensions between the black and white communities came to a tragic culmination. On September 6, 1892, John Ransom, John Walker, and William Armor, three black men who protected Ella Ransom, were lynched. These black men who defended womanhood, the very thing that white southerners held so sacred, paid with their lives. Not one local white voiced any opposition or condemnation of the action.¹²

The triple lynching was meant to send a clear message to the black community. Twenty or thirty masked men rounded up the three men, placed nooses around their necks, and marched them into the woods. The next morning two young boys discovered the bodies near a road, and found that "Ransom was swinging clear of the ground, but the mob in

its hurry had not hung [sic.] Armor and Walker clear, and had to tie their feet up to clear the ground.” According to reports, at least one of these black men belonged to the “Colored Association.” Ransom, Walker, and Armor’s bodies hung in public for all blacks to see with an oath signed by black members of the “Colored Association” attached to one of the dead bodies. This note, an obvious white fabrication, visibly linked the lynching with the recent black assertion of self-respect.¹³

At the time of the triple lynching, a new era of race relations was emerging throughout the South. Scientific racism became the guiding principle behind white southerners’ attack of black civil liberties. According to proponents of scientific racism, African-Americans were innately inferior to Anglo-Saxons and did not have the mental capability to operate effectively in civilized, white, society. In fact, these proponents posited, African-Americans had retrogressed from docile, humble, and hard working under the civilizing institution of slavery back to their savage, violent origins following emancipation. The black male propensity to lust after and rape white women was the culmination of this process, according to racist ideology. Consequently, the popular notion of the black “beast” dominated southern thought and was often the justification for the violent treatment of blacks.¹⁴

In Lamar County, the new racist ideology and the obvious lack of punishment of previous lynchers brought about a new era in lynching history: the spectacle lynching. In January 1893, Lamar County authorities found the dead body of a three year-old white girl, Myrtle Vance. Days after her death, local authorities claimed the child had been raped and then choked to death. Based on unsubstantiated evidence, authorities quickly charged a local black man, Henry Smith, with the crime. Smith personified the stereotype of the retrograde character that local whites attributed to the newly arrived black population. Smith was a recent arrival to Lamar County, having lived there for only five years. He had limited family and community ties and a reputation as a drunk and a troublemaker. The circumstances surrounding the murder, alleged rape, and involvement of Smith was contested, but one detail stood out in the case. Months before the murder, local law enforcement official Henry Vance clubbed and arrested Smith, and upon his incarceration Smith allegedly vowed revenge against Vance, who was Myrtle’s father. Upon the discovery of the young girl’s body, Smith emerged as the prime suspect based on his low reputation and his vow to seek revenge against Vance.¹⁵

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Arkansas, on January 31, 1893. These officers bound Smith in handcuffs and took the train back to Paris. Along the way, mobs of angry and belligerent whites met the party transporting Smith back to Paris and voiced their desire to see him lynched. When the train arrived at Texarkana, Texas, two thousand men gathered and expressed the desire to see Smith lynched. The mob demanded Smith be given over to them so they could lynch the "brute." However, the mob decided that the people of Paris deserved their vengeance. It was a foregone conclusion that, guilty or not, Smith was going to die.¹⁶

Whites in Paris were exhilarated at the chance to lynch Smith. In the 1890s, public burning became a popular form of lynching throughout the South. The *Dallas Morning News* reported a day prior to Smith's capture that "it is the almost universal sentiment that he will be publicly burned at the stake." On the day of the lynching, aroused citizens from all over northeast Texas and Arkansas came to view the spectacle. These onlookers filled almost every train destined for Paris. The railroad company even increased the number of passenger trains traveling to the city to accommodate the sheer number of curious whites. No one tried to stop the inevitable. Instead, locals prepared for the imminent lynching and assembled a large float box with the word "JUSTICE" painted across the front and a chair on top in order to secure Smith to the structure and parade him through the town. This spectacle would not be a quick murder. The impending lynching turned these religious, supposedly civilized people into a frenzied, insatiable mob that the entire community condoned.¹⁷

When authorities returned to Paris with Smith in hand, they quickly handed him over to the frenzied mob, and then the show began. The ringleaders paraded Smith up and down the main thoroughfares of the city. The lynching became a community event that thousands participated in, encouraged, and condoned. The mob of 10,000 men, women, and children followed the parade to a field just outside of the city center and watched as Henry Vance, his son, and two of Myrtle's uncles took their vengeance. According to the *New York Herald*, "hot irons were placed upon the soles of his [Smith's] feet, rolled over his quivering body, poked into his eyes and down his throat. A scaffold upon which he lay was then set on fire. His clothes and fetters burned off and he threw himself to the ground, he was tossed back into the flames again and again until death came to his relief." The mob watched and encouraged the torture until Smith's body burned to ashes. The *New York Herald* further stated, "Thousands looked at the death struggles with evident satisfaction and many of them with

demonstrations of delight.” For the time, civilization ceased.¹⁸

The level of brutality meted out against Smith captivated the nation and exposed millions of Americans to this unprecedented form of vigilante violence. Americans in all sections of the country had long accepted lynching as a necessary form of punishment in regions outside the control of the institutions of law and order, such as the West. Lynchings served as extralegal methods of punishment and mimicked legal executions. Victims usually admitted their crime and were hung in a matter-of-fact manner. The lynching of Henry Smith, looked more like a medieval torture than a legal execution. It also occurred at a time when sensational newspaper reporting became the norm. Newspapers across the country reported the lynching in sensationalized form that captivated millions and exposed them to spectacle lynching for the first time. The *Philadelphia Inquirer*’s headline read, “Tortured With Red-Hot Irons and Then Burned Alive-Thousands of Citizens of Paris Aid the Unparalleled Retribution.” The *New Haven Register* also focused on the heinousness of Smith’s prolonged death and printed the simple and straightforward headline, “Tortured Him [Smith] to Death.” Perhaps the most telling description of the Henry Smith lynching came from the *Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*: “The Texas Horror” ran across the headlines on February 3, 1893, and painted a violently negative picture of Lamar County.¹⁹

The extraordinary and unprecedented lynching piqued national interest and forced locals to defend their actions. Many citizens, according to an anonymous author, expected the event to come and go and “all seemed satisfied and went their way in peace.” National attention, however, did not let the lynching fade quietly into history. Responding to a request for an explanation by the editor of the *New York Herald*, *Paris News* editor A. P. Boyd replied, “I am not unmindful of the fact that such violence is a menace to the liberties of the people...and as a public journalist I do not generally indorse [sic] it.” However, Boyd still believed the “sickening outrage” of the rape and murder of Myrtle Vance vindicated the actions of the citizens of Paris, and other locals expanded upon his argument.²⁰

Prominent locals began a campaign to justify the mob’s actions in various publications. Colonel J. C. Hodges, one of the leading criminal lawyer in the county, stated in the *Dallas Morning News* that, “When I think of Smith’s fate and am disposed to protest against it I think of the little girl the torture imposed upon her when she was equally helpless, and I can find no word of condemnation for the manner in which Smith was

put to death.” Hodges statements sought to redefine the “Paris Horror” as the rape and murder of Myrtle Vance, and not the torture of Henry Smith. In so doing he appealed to white men locally and regionally by claiming, “Smith’s death was simply the will of the people... The deed has been done and as good citizens we must indorse it.”²¹

The most comprehensive defense of the lynching came in the form of a book published by prominent local businessman John M. Early, shortly after Smith’s death. Entitled *Eye for an Eye* (1893), the book defended the action of the mob and attempted to justify the mob’s incomprehensible brutality. Early emphasized that it was the sadistic rape and murder of the young girl that “incite[d]” the mob. The author blamed the brutal torture on the victim himself; Smith’s actions alone led to the lynching, not some underlying racial motivation. Early described Smith as “the chiefest among sinners” who committed the most barbaric of crimes and argued that the “tardiness and uncertainty of punishment ha[d] stripped the law of its terror” and it therefore had not acted as a deterrent for heinous criminals such as Smith. According to Early, the lynching of Smith resulted from the inadequacy of the legal system to discourage violent crimes properly, which, in turn, forced the community to defend itself through extralegal means. In the eyes of the white community, the mob did not represent lawlessness. Instead, it was viewed as having acted responsibly and in a “very refined manner.” In his attempt to save the reputation of the city, Early did not denounce the lynching but instead rationalized it as a necessary and justifiable punishment for atrocities committed by blacks against civilized society.²²

Early’s book expressed the pro-lynching defense, but it also had more personal motivations. Early was a successful local businessman with a wife and three children. More importantly, he was heavily invested in the city, so much so that in 1893 he built an elegant, two-story house complete with floor-length windows, ornate brass hardware, handmade doors, and a cherry wood stairway just one mile outside of the city center. Early did not want the lynching to discourage economic and population growth in Lamar County, and thus concluded his book with a statement describing the good-hearted nature of the community and the economic advantages of the city. Early described Paris as a place where economic prosperity was easily attainable and he encouraged Americans to move to his town. He touted the community’s economic potential and emphasized the availability of “thousands of acres of land at \$2 per acre, rich as the Nile valley.” Early explained the religious commitment of the city, its educational benefits,

and the dedication of the citizens to protecting “at all hazards, the women and children, even though it takes a little fire.”²³

Prominent whites in Paris not only defended the actions of the mob, but they discouraged any type of prosecution of the lynchers. After the lynching, Governor James Hogg wired the local county attorney B. B. Sturgeon and asked him to “do your whole duty and prosecute every person engaged in the reported lynching of one Henry Smith at Paris. By all means preserve the names of the offenders and witnesses to the end that the guilty parties may be prosecuted.” Hogg also wired the Sheriff Hammond of Lamar County and asked him to pursue a similar course. He proclaimed, “Promptly make complaint before the proper officers against every person known to have been engaged in the lynching of the negro Henry Smith at Paris.” Hogg’s appeals to local law enforcement were not well received and the *Dallas Morning News* reported that public sentiment regarded the governor’s proclamations as “a joke.” Despite pictures of the lynching and thousands of local witnesses, the county successfully avoided the issue and no prosecutions were made.²⁴

After the 1893 lynching of Smith, the citizens in Lamar County never again resorted to such a large-scale, public lynching, but small-scale lynchings continued. Mobs killed two black men in Lamar County in 1895 and 1901, but little information about the lynchings exists. The lack of local accounts makes it necessary to rely on national newspapers that paid little attention to the murders, but the persistent acts of mob violence suggest continued community acceptance of lynchings. In 1895, whites in Paris lynched a black man named Jefferson Cole in the midst of increased White Cap violence. According to the *Kansas City Times*, “many outrages [were] committed by white caps in Texas” throughout the month of August 1895, but the report gave little indication why whites in the county resorted to violence against blacks. It stated that on August 23, 1895, Jefferson Cole, “an aged and inoffensive negro, was called out of his house and riddled with bullets” by a mob of whites. No reason was given for the murder of Cole, but the article noted that Cole owned land. Whites throughout the South reacted violently against black property owners because blacks who owned property “could be deemed disrespectful to certain elements of the white population.” Local whites also attacked prominent members of the black community, including Reverend J. H. McClinton, who was murdered on December 25, 1901. The lynching did gain some national attention, but accounts only stated that the reverend was “shot to death by a crowd of men.” From 1893 to 1920 lynching in Paris declined as the subordination

of blacks hardened through legal and other less overt means.²⁵

While lynching declined in Paris, Lamar County whites utilized another virulent form of subordination. White southerners implemented new laws that legally subordinated blacks in the 1890s and early 1900s. The Texas Legislature passed stringent laws legally segregating blacks and whites in the 1890s. In 1891, for example, the Texas Legislature passed a bill that required separate railroad coaches for blacks and whites.²⁶ The Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) officially gave Southerners legal sanction to enforce segregation in nearly all public places as long as they followed the principle of "separate but equal."²⁷

Legal segregation was accompanied by the removal of black political representation through disfranchisement measures. In 1903, the Texas legislature passed the Terrell Election Law that required the payment of a poll tax in order to vote in Texas. The legislature amended the law numerous times between 1903 and 1923, and by 1908 had succeeded in eliminating almost all black voters. In that year, only one black voter attempted to vote. The Democratic Party's establishment of the white primary also played a role in eliminating the black vote. By 1910, Texans had a firmly established a system of segregation that legally placed blacks below whites. Black disenfranchisement had an obvious impact on the prohibition campaign. Earlier, in August 1902, Lamar County locals rejected a prohibition measure by a count of 4,046 for and 4,562 against. Undoubtedly, the votes of local blacks, who did not support prohibition, played an important role in this defeat. However, a year after the enactment of the poll tax prohibition passed in the county, signifying the effectiveness of the poll tax in disfranchising blacks. The total number of votes cast had fallen by 3,000 since the previous election.²⁸

Throughout the 1890s and the early 1900s, Lamar County experienced economic growth. Property values in northeast Texas steadily grew from 1900 to 1920 and Paris emerged as one of the largest cotton markets in the region. Throughout northeast Texas, farmers devoted more and more of their land to the production of cotton, especially after the outbreak of World War I in Europe. Demand for cotton seed oil, peanut seed oil, and other agricultural products grew as a result of the war and local farmers answered the call. Agricultural production more than tripled between 1910 and 1920 as the overall value of all crops produced exploded from \$5,518,581 to \$18,270,287. Investment in the manufacturing sector grew slowly between 1870 and 1880 from \$43,750 to \$74,970. However, the manufacturing economy expanded during the next two decades; by 1890

local capital investment blossomed by 600% to \$439,350, and by 1900, it had more than doubled to \$1,003,152.²⁹

Wartime demand for agricultural and manufactured goods promoted economic growth in Lamar County during the 1910s, and the manufacturing sector doubled from 1914 to 1919. A devastating fire in 1916, which caused \$11,000,000 worth of property damage, did not stop economic growth in Paris and locals came together and rebuilt the city. Economic growth encouraged population growth and both blacks and whites migrated to the area for jobs. The total population grew from 46,544 in 1910 to 55,742 in 1920. The prosperity of Lamar County and the chance to rebuild after the 1916 fire allowed city leaders to promote Paris as a city of beauty and wealth.³⁰

Despite the outward appearance of progress and growth, Paris was two different places. It was an idyllic place for whites, but underneath the veneer of progress there remained the ever-present threat of violence for local blacks. Although few lynchings occurred during this time, other, less widely reported instances of racial violence underlay race relations in the city. As historian Kidada Williams argues, rapes, whippings, assaults, and shootings became so commonplace in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century South that reports of these events rarely surfaced. Local blacks surely remembered the excessive punishment meted out against Henry Smith, thus more individualized acts of violence against local blacks probably were sufficient to ensure their cooperation within the confines of Jim Crow.³¹

World War I spawned economic prosperity, but it also profoundly affected race relations in Paris and throughout the country. Many returning black veterans vehemently opposed Jim Crow in an unprecedented assertive manner. Blacks across the country heeded the advice of W. E. B. DuBois to take up arms and join the army despite the “deep-seated feeling of revolt among negroes at the persistent insult and discrimination to which they are subject.” DuBois hoped that blacks’ loyal service in their nation’s fight for democracy abroad would persuade white Americans to return the favor and grant equal rights at home. Nearly 400,000 African-Americans followed DuBois’ advice and enlisted in the armed forces. Upon the return of the black service men, the so-called “New Negro mentality” swept the nation. The New Negro asserted himself like never before as “on the national canvas and a force in the foreground of affairs” who emphasized the importance of black culture as separate from but equally important as white American culture. This new mentality encouraged many blacks to

push for equal rights and challenge the American racial hierarchy.³²

White Texans responded violently to the idea of a New Negro who rejected racial subordination. The Red Summer of 1919 represented the most evident impact of World War I on race relations in the United States. After fighting to make the world safe for democracy, returning black soldiers created tensions through their push for better treatment at home. Race riots erupted in twenty-two cities throughout the country from April 14 to October 1, 1919. Racial tensions boiled over in northeast Texas as well. In Longview, Texas, a race riot erupted when whites responded ferociously to the push by local blacks to “migrate, to start businesses, to vote, and to strive for equal rights.”³³

Although no riots erupted in Paris, the end of WWI brought an economic recession and the New Negro mentality to Lamar County. European production of agricultural and manufactured goods rebounded after the end of the war and Lamar County suffered. The price of cotton dropped by more than fifty percent in 1920 and the demand for other goods subsided as well. Accompanying the economic downturn, local black veterans from World War I returned with new ideas that threatened Jim Crow. To southern blacks, these valiant, uniformed men were a source of racial pride. However, these veterans struck fear into many southern whites. Southern whites viewed the New Negro as a threat, and as arrogant and impudent. Many feared violent clashes between southern whites and blacks because of the New Negro’s assertion of manhood and willingness to fight for civil rights. In 1919, local whites alerted federal investigators that black veterans were conducting meetings with other black residents. Local whites feared these meetings would cause “trouble” because local black veterans urged their fellow blacks to fight for equal rights. Like blacks around the country, local blacks did not violently express their dissatisfaction with their subordination and instead many left the countryside and moved to cities to escape rural poverty and racial violence.³⁴

In Paris, two young black tenant farmers decided to escape farm tenancy and move out of Lamar County’s countryside. Herman Arthur, a twenty-six year old World War I veteran who served in France, and his nineteen-year-old brother Irving, decided to leave. Along with many other blacks, they sought an escape from Jim Crow racial violence behind, and find and new economic opportunities in the emerging urban centers. Since cheap black labor was the backbone of the southern agricultural economy, many southern whites utilized a number of tactics to stem the flow of black

migrants, and Lamar County was no exception. In the early afternoon of July 2, 1920, a wealthy farmer, J. H. Hodges, and his son Will confronted the Arthur brothers when they packed their limited belongings into a rented truck. The Arthurs allegedly owed J. H. Hodges money, but refused to acquiesce to Hodges's demands that they stay to work on his farm and an intense argument turned violent. Sometime during the subsequent altercation both J. H. and Will Hodges died of gunshot wounds. The Arthurs then took flight and headed north.³⁵

In the wake of the Red Summer of 1919 and the race riot in Longview, Lamar County whites intended to send a message to the black community—the New Negro would not be tolerated. For several days search parties fanned out over northeast Texas to capture the black fugitives. Four days after the murder of Hodges and his son, authorities in Valiant, Oklahoma, captured the Arthurs. Paris officials placed the brothers in jail to await trial, but quickly a crowd gathered, “stormed” the jail, and overpowered the authorities holding Herman and Irving. The mob quickly took the Arthurs to the fairgrounds, “where a stake and fuel had been prepared.” At the fairgrounds, a crowd of around three thousand tied the defiant Herman and Irving to a stake and watched with ominous delight as the two men slowly burned. Herman and Irving, in the true spirit of the “New Negro” met their death bravely. When the mob’s ringleaders asked Herman if he was sorry for killing Hodges, he replied, “[he] would kill any man, white or black, who assaulted [my] mothers and sisters.” The defiant black men did not utter a single word while being burned alive. In a final act of desecration, the mob chained the charred bodies of the Arthurs to a truck and a “caravan proceeded to drive them through the streets and yards of the black sections of town.” Although no blacks witnessed the lynching, the foul smell of burnt flesh, the rambunctious and boisterous crowd, and the dragging of the charred bodies through town reminded all of the city’s blacks of the lengths to which whites would go to punish perceived transgressions.³⁶

In light of the previous year’s race riots, authorities feared a violent backlash from the black community. Following the mass burning of the two black men, city officials took “extraordinary precautions” to ensure no Longview-type race riots occurred. The mayor organized groups of armed volunteers and deputized squads that he then sent into the black section of town to quash any would-be rioters. In spite of the widespread fear of black reprisal, blacks did not organize a large-scale, violent response. Local blacks had no intention of retaliating violently. As Essex Reese, a ten-year-old black boy at the time of the Arthur lynching, remembered,

“Most blacks had families and children; they weren’t going looking for trouble.” Thus, the organized bands of whites disbanded the following night with “quiet restored.”³⁷

Blacks did not respond to white violence with violence, but instead expressed their dissatisfaction through flight. Black flight was the safest and most common form of black discontent. Blacks in Lamar County fled on an unprecedented scale following the lynching. From 1920 to 1930, the total number of blacks in Lamar County shrank from 12,970 to 9,382. Authorities released the remaining members of the Arthur family and with the help of the Black Masonic Lodge and some sympathetic whites, they left for Chicago. Along with the Arthurs, “an exodus of black residents followed.” The *Chicago Defender* sent a representative to report on the events unfolding in Paris. One of the newspaper’s headlines read, “THOUSANDS OF RACE PEOPLE LEAVING BLOOD SOAKED DISTRICT.” Census records support the newspaper reports and show that the migration led to a permanent and significant loss of black population.³⁸

The exodus of blacks concerned white citizens of Paris, some of whom used a number of intimidation tactics to dissuade blacks from fleeing. The *Chicago Defender* claimed, “The only thing causing concern at the present time is the migration of hundreds of our people” from Paris. Whites understood black flight as a form of protest, but more troubling for southern whites was the threat to the southern agricultural economy that the mass migration of blacks posed. The lack of available farm labor threatened to cripple the manual labor workforce and damage an economy that, because of the devastating fire in 1916 that destroyed much of the city, was still in the process of rebuilding. Whites resorted to numerous, extralegal tactics to discourage blacks from moving out of the city. The *Chicago Defender* reported that banks “refused to allow the withdrawal of savings of the people who have already left or who are preparing to go” and hoped that blacks would not flee without their money. Whites also employed violent intimidation tactics to discourage blacks from leaving and patrolled the streets of Paris armed with revolvers and other guns to influence blacks to stay.³⁹

J. M. Crook, mayor of Paris, demanded leaders of both the black and white community meet to discuss the recent troubles and dissuade the city’s blacks from fleeing. Thirty leading white citizens, such as Judge A. P. Park, Captain J. J. Dickerson, and Professor J. G. Wooten, led the white delegation. Reverend C. N. Hampton and Reverend Brackeen, two pastors from the leading black churches in Paris, led the black delegation. The

purpose of the meeting, according to the white delegates, “was to impress on the colored people that it was very necessary for them to be discreet and temperate in speech and conduct.” Local whites, once again, placed the blame for the lynching squarely on the black community. In this meeting, local businessman J. J. Dickerson announced to the black delegates the senselessness of leaving because blacks would receive similar treatment anywhere in the United States. Dickerson stated, “If they should go to Indiana, Chicago or other places in the North, they would receive summary treatment if they did not behave themselves.” Dickerson’s attempt to dissuade blacks from fleeing the city reflected the idea that blacks in general needed to respect the authority of whites, and if blacks continued to step out of place they would receive harsh treatment regardless of where they resided. Although prominent whites did not approve of the lynching, their demeanor towards the city’s black population remained as ardently racist as in the 1890s.⁴⁰

National media attention compounded the local problems the Arthur lynching caused. The national black press and black organizations attacked the city, the state of Texas, and all American citizens for once again allowing a public burning of black men. The *Chicago Defender* blasted the city of Paris with a headline that read “Texans Rejoice as Men Burn: Paris, Birthplace of Stake Burning, Stands by Old Record.” The NAACP denounced the lynching and James Weldon Johnson criticized Governor William P. Hobby for his unwillingness to bring the members of the mob to justice. Johnson, in a public statement issued to the *Wichita Negro Star*, asked, “Christian America is there any justice within your power? How long will you burn human beings at the stake—what will be your end?”⁴¹

Most southern cities engaged in boosterism during this time, and city leaders of Paris promoted their city as vociferously as city leaders did in other major cities in the South. Groups of city leaders banded together and “sold” their respective cities to outside investors who could improve the economic capacity of their city. Boosters embellished the benefits of their city and downplayed the negative aspects, such as racial violence. Following the 1916 fire, Paris boosters sought to promote their city as modern and attractive to outside investment. The negative national attention that emerged following the Arthur brothers’ lynching forced these boosters to respond to national criticisms. Whereas in 1893 city boosters defended lynching, this time, they moderated their response.⁴²

Following the Arthur lynching, prominent whites condemned the mob’s actions. A well-known minister, Robert Shuler, led the attack on

lynching in a statement printed in the local newspaper. He claimed the lynching tarnished the city and the citizens and represented “a shameful defiance of civilized ideals and standards.” Schuler further condemned mob violence, stating “a mob never rights a wrong.” He also expressed concern regarding the negative impact the lynching would have on the reputation of Paris. His public statement declared, “That our community will suffer beyond repair is proven by the fact that Wednesday afternoon there was published all over the North and East dispatches announcing that we had burned Negroes.” Many other prominent members of Paris also worried the lynching damaged the respectability of their city during a crucial time. Focused on rebuilding their city, they worried that the unruly nature of the mob and turbulent race relations hurt chances for outside investment. As the *Paris Morning News* exclaimed, “the people of Paris will pay a heavy price for the orgy of anarchy.” In light of changed national perceptions of lynching, the city leaders of Paris finally understood that lynching was bad for business.⁴³

Following the pattern of previous lynchings, many locals deflected the responsibility for the lynching to blacks themselves. Even Schuler, the outspoken critic of mob violence, clung to the idea of racial subordination and exclaimed, “if the Negro race will show its appreciation by living as these good men [prominent white men of Paris] desire them to live, much of the errors of the past will be removed from the path of their race.” He reminded blacks that in order to ameliorate the threat of violence against them, they needed to remain in their place and act according to the racial customs of the day. Schuler went further and claimed that the New Negro mentality brought on mob violence. He stated, “The attitude of many negroes toward farm labor and other work, their seething disposition not to assist the farms in earnest fashion and at fair remuneration, had much to do with the spirit of this mob.” Shuler spoke out against lynching on legal grounds, but did not denounce the discriminatory and oppressive treatment of blacks, and instead placed the blame for extralegal violence squarely on the shoulders of local blacks.⁴⁴

In response to local and outside pressure, authorities called a grand jury to investigate the Arthur brother lynching and bring the ringleaders to justice. According to news reports, a mass meeting of white citizens adopted a resolution insisting on a “thorough investigation” to look into who led the mob. The grand jury responsible for investigating the lynching consisted of some of the most influential members of the city, “the cream of the business and Chamber [of Commerce] crop of Lamar County, with

a huge vested purpose to save the image of Paris, Texas.” The grand jury attempted to identify the ringleaders, but had a difficult time finding locals who would testify against the alleged lynchers.⁴⁵

Despite many impediments, the grand jury persevered and continued to investigate the matter diligently. After several days of interviews, the grand jury indicted local white farmers Wilber C. Clough, Ernest Coggins, Tom Dobbs, Charley Luckey, and T. D. Holderness for murder. Following a grand jury indictment, Judge Ben H. Denton decided to move the case because “the prejudice and excitement in this case in Paris would by its existence here be detrimental to a fair and just trial.”⁴⁶ The trial took place in the 59th District Court of Grayson County in Sherman, Texas. A fire destroyed most of the records in 1930, but it seems no convictions occurred because many of the people indicted continued to live in Lamar County.⁴⁷

Although it appears no convictions came out of the trial, prominent citizens of the County considered the lynching an “outrage” and publicly supported the convening of the grand jury. The *Paris Morning News* printed a resolution signed by 198 prominent locals that pledged “to render every assistance in our power” to the investigation into the Arthur brothers lynching. Although not every citizen spoke out against the lynching, prominent county whites assured the public that “There will never be another lynching in Paris.” One can deduce, however, that violence remained a persistent threat to local blacks despite the fact that no lynchings were reported following the 1920 burning.⁴⁸

From 1890 to 1920, whites in Paris consistently reaffirmed their dominance over local blacks through lynching. In response to an influx of working-class blacks and increasing black assertiveness, such as community defense in 1892 or the “New Negro” mentality in 1920, local whites utilized lynching as a method of ensuring conformity among the local black population. African-Americans in Lamar County faced the threat of violence and several local blacks who stepped out of traditional racial boundaries met their deaths at the hands of lynch mobs. Local whites used lynching to punish specific transgressions, but they also used lynching to send a message to the entire black community. Lynch mobs left their victims hanging in public, publicly tortured and burned them to death, and dragged them through black sections of town, all in an effort to intimidate the black community, remind them who ruled, and to firmly reinforce white supremacy.⁴⁹

Paris had an inveterate history of racial violence, but as white supremacist ideology grew in the 1890s, local whites became increasingly

vociferous in their acceptance of lynching. Community participation in lynching increased steadily from the early 1890s and culminated in the 1893 lynching of Henry Smith before a crowd reaching upward of 10,000 people. As the number of mob participants increased, lynching became increasingly public and organized. When citizens in Paris lynched Henry Smith, the brutality and sheer size of the mob forced locals to defend their actions. Locals claimed such extreme forms of extralegal violence were necessary to deter rapacious blacks from raping white women and to counterbalance a slow, cumbersome legal system.

The national press, however, forced locals to respond in both the 1893 and 1920 lynchings. The responses from prominent locals changed from justifying lynching in 1893 to condemning it in 1920. Local attitudes reflected a broader national pattern. Lynching in the United States reached a crescendo in the early 1890s and reports of lynchings proliferated more than in any other time in American history. Thus, when national attention focused on Paris following the lynching of Henry Smith, prominent citizens defended the actions of the mob as necessary due to the inability of the local legal system to protect the citizenry properly. By 1920, however, American perceptions of lynching had changed due to increased pressure from organizations like the Commission for Interracial Cooperation NAACP, the masses of blacks who migrated from southern states to the North, and the work of newspapers in painting lynching in a negative light. Therefore, in an effort to salvage their city's reputation and not appear backward and crude, prominent whites repudiated the actions of the mob in 1920, but by no means did they accept responsibility for mob violence. Following the lynching in 1893, locals blamed the lynching on the actions of Smith himself and not on the members of the mob. In 1920, locals blamed the entire black community for the lynching. Local whites hoped to maintain a sizeable black community for a cheap labor source and attempted to curb the flow of blacks fleeing the county, but simultaneously argued that the local black community's inability to "behave themselves," was the root cause of mob violence.⁵⁰

Following the 1920 lynching, blacks in Paris felt their vulnerability more intensely and took to flight. Their willingness to leave the county resulted in an increased recognition of the importance of the black community by local whites. In spite of Lamar County's history of lynching, the strength of the local economy outweighed the fear of violence and the black population increased from 9,378 in 1890 to 12,970 in 1920. During the 1920s, however, the agricultural economy of Lamar County receded

at an alarming rate and the total value of all crops produced during that decade dropped dramatically from an all-time high of \$18,270,287 in 1920 to \$7,155,653 in 1930. The economic downturn and the fear of violence caused black flight. The loss of a cheap source of labor threatened to damage the local economy further. This forced the local white power structure to begrudgingly recognize the local black community as a viable force in county affairs. Whereas, previously negotiating with blacks was untenable in 1893, in the midst of massive black migration, prominent local whites called a meeting with local black leaders in 1920. Although they still did not see blacks as equals, local whites acknowledged the legitimacy of the local black community by inviting black community leaders to a meeting with the still all-white Chamber of Commerce.⁵¹

In summary, from 1890 to 1920, whites in Lamar County generally accepted lynching as a form of racial control. Locals repeatedly resorted to mob violence in an effort to establish racial subordination among a growing black population in Lamar County. From 1890 to 1920, mob violence continued unimpeded, but the changed national perception of lynching and the unprecedented exodus of thousands of local blacks forced prominent locals to rebuke mob violence to protect the reputation of their city and ensure that lynching in Paris was a thing of the past.

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CAROLYN HESTER, TEXAS SONGBIRD

By: C. Ross Burns

During the early years of the folk music revival of the late 1950s and early 1960s, one of the leading female folksingers in the country was the Texas Songbird, Carolyn Hester. She used her soaring girlish soprano to breathe life into old traditional songs from the British Isles, the United States, and Mexico. She chose songs that had beautiful haunting melodies which her voice augmented. Following in the footsteps of Pete Seeger and Susan Reed, she worked with and learned from Buddy Holly, Paul Clayton, Bob Dylan, Tom Paxton, Judy Collins, Ian and Sylvia, and many of the folk singers of the period. Along with many of her cohorts, she was active in the civil rights movement as well. She has influenced subsequent female singer-songwriters, including Emmylou Harris, Joni Mitchell, and Nanci Griffith. In her native Texas, she has remained a strong supporter of folk music by serving on the board of directors and as a performer at the Kerrville Folk Festival for many years, and, at age 75, is still recording

Born in Waco, Texas in 1937, Carolyn Hester grew up in a home filled with music. From her grandparents in Austin, she first heard old traditional songs including, "Lullabies, spirituals, mountain melodies, Appalachian songs."¹ Carolyn's father, attorney James Gordon Hester, was a fan of country music balladeer Burl Ives. He encouraged Carolyn's interest in music from a young age. As a teenager in the 1940s, she heard and was inspired to become a folksinger by Pete Seeger, the Weavers, and Susan Reed. The family relocated to Dallas, Texas where she began performing with The First Methodist Church choir.

The choir director was so impressed with her natural talent that the church paid for weekly voice lessons. These lessons required a one-hour bus ride across town after dark, a daunting challenge for the times. Dur-

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