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**Black and White:
A Historical Examination of Lynching Coverage and Editorial
Impact in Select Virginia Newspapers**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Masters in Mass Communications at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

James E. Hall

Dr. Clarence Thomas

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Virginia Commonwealth University

Richmond, Virginia

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Abstract

**BLACK AND WHITE:
A HISTORICAL EXAMINATION OF LYNCHING COVERAGE AND EDITORIAL
IMPACT IN SELECT VIRGINIA NEWSPAPERS**

By James E. Hall

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Mass Communications at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2001

Dr. Clarence Thomas, Chairman of Graduate Studies, School of Mass
Communications

This is a historical examination of how select Virginia newspapers covered lynching during two time periods, 1880 to 1900 and 1920 to 1932. The newspapers include white-owned and black-owned publications. The study features the owners/editors of four papers, one black and one white from each period. They are Joseph Bryan, John Mitchell, Jr., Douglas Southall Freeman and P.B. Young. The study also examines the standards of journalistic conduct that prevailed during the time periods, and how the selected editors met these expectations.

The study concludes that white-owned papers, during the early period, reflected the racism that existed in Virginia at the time. During the later period, white papers were more neutral in their reporting and opposed to lynching in their editorials. The black papers were opposed during both periods. The study also concludes that the four editors varied in their allegiance to the journalistic standards of the day.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose

When a white man named Capt. Yancey walked into a bar in Keysville, Va., in 1890, he saw two black men playing cards. The black men were quarrelling over five cents, and Yancey told them that five cents was too small an amount to argue over. He offered the wronged man a nickel.

According to newspaper accounts, one of the card players, Thaddeus Fowlkes, became upset and rushed at Yancey. "I don't allow no damn white man to interfere with me," he said, plunging a knife into Yancey's belly and spilling his blood onto the barroom floor.

Yancey died the next day, and Fowlkes was arrested and charged with murder. Residents of the town probably would have lynched him then, but a judge ordered the sheriff to take him to the Danville jail, 60 miles away.

Later, when the sheriff brought the prisoner back to Charlotte Court House for the trial, a mob stopped them on the road from the train station. They dragged Fowlkes to a pine tree 150 yards from the road, and when their leader cried, "Draw him up, boys," they hanged him.

The Richmond Dispatch, the regional daily, reported on the lynching the next day and noted that the only cause for regret in Keysville seemed to be that with Fowlkes

dead, the prosecuting attorney wouldn't be collecting his fee. "The colored people concurred in the action of the lynchers," the paper added.¹

Not all black people, however. When John Mitchell, Jr., editor of the black weekly The Richmond Planet, recounted the incident for his readers in a front-page story that week, he pointed out that the armed guards made no attempt to defend Fowlkes from the mob. "In the darkness, only the forms of men could be seen," Mitchell reported. "Fowlkes, trembling in every limb, was led under the tree, the noose adjusted, and the last words he ever heard were 'Draw him up, boys.' The body swung to and fro, owing to the contortions of the dying man who was being slowly choked to death." Fowlkes had a wife and brother, Mitchell added.²

Fowlkes' case illustrates the differences between Virginia's white and black newspapers on the subject of lynching. In the late 19th century, the Dispatch and many other white-owned papers excused lynching and at times even encouraged it. Both their news and editorial pages displayed a contempt for blacks and a support for their harsh treatment. Predictably, the state's two major, black-owned newspapers, the Planet, and later The Norfolk Journal and Guide, opposed lynching. They described it as barbaric and labeled it as Virginia's shame. Later, in the early years of the 20th century, white papers adopted a more neutral tone in their reporting on lynching and joined black papers editorially in strongly opposing the ritual.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to construct a historical narrative which examines the significance of black and white lynching coverage in Virginia, to trace its changes, and to examine the motivations and impact of four top-level newspaper

owners/editors, as related to their coverage and ultimately to society. The study also examines these themes in the context of the responsibilities of the press as a facilitator of social justice in a free society.

Specifically, this study poses the following research questions:

1. How did select white-owned and black-owned newspapers cover lynching?
2. How and why did Joseph Bryan, Douglas Southall Freeman, John Mitchell, Jr., and P.B. Young influence and control the lynching coverage in their respective papers.
3. What were the ethical responsibilities of these owners/editors and their newspapers in terms of social responsibility and social justice?
4. Did these owners/editors meet the journalistic ethical standards of their time in terms of lynching coverage?

Plan of the Study

This study will first review the literature on lynching and the literature on how the print press covered lynching. It also will review the literature on the lives and works of the four owners/editors, and the literature on the responsibilities of newspapers to the societies they serve.

Chapter three will document the context within which these lynchings took place. It will look at the nature of Virginia's lynch coverage as it appeared in select white and black newspapers during two time periods, 1880 to 1900 and 1920 to 1932. It will show how these papers considered lynching newsworthy, how lynch stories were prominently

displayed, and how they described the events in all their horror. It also will show how the papers mirrored their communities, how white coverage excused lynching in the earlier period and then questioned it in the later period. And it will show how black coverage was consistently opposed during both time periods.

The fourth chapter will look closely at two owners/editors, one white and one black, from the earlier time period. It will show how Joseph Bryan, owner of The (Richmond) Times and founder of the modern-day Media General empire, was both an ally and opponent of John Mitchell, Jr., owner of The Richmond Planet, and how both men provided a preview of the coverage and editorial comment that eventually would become the norm in other Virginia papers.

The fifth chapter will examine two other owners/editors, one black and one white, from the later time period. As with Bryan and Mitchell, Douglas Southall Freeman of the Richmond News Leader and P.B. Young of The Norfolk Journal and Guide were similar in their views on lynching but opposed on other, broader questions of race.

Chapter six will look at the issue of the press' responsibility to society, and how that responsibility was defined at the time by critics, editors, and journalism associations. It also will show the spotty record of selected owners/editors in meeting these standards.

Scope of the Study

This study is divided into two time periods, 1880 to 1900 and 1920 to 1932. The two periods were chosen to illustrate the dramatic decline in the incidence of lynching in Virginia and the South. The years just before the turn of the century were the "killing

years,” when more blacks were lynched than at any other time. Tolnay and Beck, in their study A Festival of Violence, list 1,193 black lynch victims in 10 Southern states during the period 1882-1900.³ By 1930, the number of black victims had been cut by more than 80 percent.⁴

The two time periods also provide an opportunity to chart the changes that occurred in white newspaper coverage and editorial opinion. During the earlier period, 1880 to 1900, many of Virginia’s white-owned papers did not recognize blacks as full citizens and often supported the use of lynching as a means of punishing and controlling them. By 1932, the papers had changed little on the issue of race, but they, like many in the communities they served, had become opponents of lynching.

The four owners/editors--one white and one black from each time period—are examined, since, as historian Ann Field Alexander has said, a newspaper bears the “unmistakable stamp” of the person who runs it.

Bryan, Freeman, Mitchell, and Young were chosen since they were responsible for four of Virginia’s largest and most important newspapers. Bryan, and later Freeman, were based in Richmond at the seat of state government, and their work was reprinted by other Virginia editors. Mitchell and Young ran two of the most successful and influential weeklies in the country, black or white.

The four also help illustrate the difficulty blacks faced in their struggle for equality in turn-of-the-century Virginia. Bryan and Freeman, both white, were representative of the best of Virginia—respected, successful, educated, even progressive in their opposition to lynching. Yet they also were products of the time and opposed to

full civil rights for Virginia's blacks. Mitchell and Young, both black, were vigorous and consistent in their protests, pushing Virginia slowly away from its past and toward a recognition of blacks as the social and political equals of whites. However, it would take almost 40 years before their views would begin to be accepted.

Procedure

The historical reconstruction and interpretation presented in this study is based on data derived from the collection and evaluation of a wide variety of primary and secondary source material. Primary sources include but are not limited to more than 300 newspaper stories and editorials published in Virginia on the lynchings that occurred in the state from 1880 to 1932. These articles and editorials appeared in 22 different newspapers, including regional dailies with wide circulation, such as those in Richmond, Roanoke, and Norfolk, and small weeklies from towns like Norton and Warrenton.

Microfilm copies of these papers are housed at the Library of Virginia in Richmond in its Virginia Newspaper Project collection, at the Alderman Library at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, at the Cabell Library at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, and at the Simpson Library at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg.

Secondary sources include countless books, magazine and newspaper articles, dissertations, and journal articles on lynching, newspapers, race relations and Southern history

Definition of Terms

Lynching is the summary execution by private persons for alleged offenses without due process of law, or simply death at the hands of a mob. Lynch deaths were usually by hanging but also could be by shooting, burning, or beating.

This definition assumes a measure of community support for lynching. Tuskegee Institute, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and other researchers have defined lynching as murder sanctioned by the community. As James E. Cutler, one of the first lynching researchers, said in 1905, "There is usually more or less public approval, or supposed favorable public sentiment, behind a lynching. Indeed, it is not too much to say that popular justification is the *sine qua non* of lynching," distinguishing it from murder, assassination, or insurrection.⁵

Virginia is said to be the home of lynching in America, the practice having originated during the American Revolution. Col. Charles Lynch of Campbell County (1736-1796) is credited with being the first to use extralegal means in dealing with suspected Tories.

The Lynchburg Daily News noted this when reporting on the lynch death of suspected murderer Henry Mason 100 years later:

Although the lynching of Mason is the first occurrence of this kind in Campbell County, the very name "lynch law" was derived from a native

of the county, old Colonel Lynch who was in the habit of administering summary punishment to marauders and miscreants of every description without paying any attention to the ordinary processes of law Hence he was called "Judge Lynch."⁶

¹ "Draw Nails Out," *Lynchburg Daily News* (Dec. 1895): 3.

² "White Man Lynched," *Lynchburg Daily News* (6 Dec. 1895): 1.

³ Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995): 271.

⁴ Tolnay 272.

⁵ James E. Carter, *Lynch Law* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1905): 276.

⁶ "A Hesper Collier," *Lynchburg Daily News* (1 Dec. 1895): 3.

Notes

- ¹ "Draw Him Up, Boys," The Richmond Dispatch 3 Dec. 1890: 5.
- ² "White Men Lynch a Man," The Richmond Planet 6 Dec. 1890: 1
- ³ Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck, A Festival of Violence (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995) 271
- ⁴ Tolnay 272.
- ⁵ James E. Cutler, Lynch-Law (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1905) 276.
- ⁶ "A Hemen Collar," Lynchburg Daily News 1 Dec. 1885 3.

Historians have long studied lynching in the South in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and newspapers have played an integral role in these studies. A newspaper editor, George P. Upton of The Chicago Tribune, did the first authoritative count of lynching in 1885, and subsequent counts, such as those done by Tuskegee and the NAACP, have relied on contemporary accounts from local newspapers. Edward L. Ayers notes that much of what has been written on lynching in the post-Reconstruction South draws heavily on newspapers.¹ W. Fitzhugh Brundage said, "Stories about lynching were a staple of journalism between 1850 and 1930, and newspapers routinely devoted columns, and in a few exceptional instances, even pages to accounts of lynchings."²

In his book Race Relations in Virginia, 1870-1902, Charles E. Wynes criticizes newspapers of this era for paying too little attention to facts and writing "emotional and occasionally vituperative" editorials. Still, he says, they are the "chief source for ascertaining white Virginians' attitudes toward the Negro," because "the mass of white Virginians, like the mass of Negro Virginians, left no written records."³

Historical examinations of lynching in the South have been done by Ida B. Wells, Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, James E. Cutler, Walter White, Robert Zangrando,

Orlando Patterson, and the NAACP, to name a few. Brundage focused specifically on Virginia and Georgia in his 1933 history Lynching in the New South. He traced the variations in lynching over time, its use as a ritual to affirm Southern values, and the reasons for its decline.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Of the four editors featured in this study, Mitchell has been the most frequently examined. His early career was the subject of an unpublished 1973 biography by Ann Field.

Previous Related Research

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One of the few examinations of the Bryan family, owners of The (Richmond) Times, the Richmond News Leader, and The Richmond Times-Dispatch, was the privately printed biography of Joseph Bryan, the patriarch of the family, written by his son John Stewart Bryan. The younger Bryan attempted to reveal the motives and ideals of his father, especially Joseph Bryan's belief that "anyone can make a fortune," but it takes "all kinds of a man to found a family." The Byrans also were featured in Virginius Dabney's book on Virginia editors, Pistols and Pointed Pens.

Douglas Southall Freeman was the subject of an unpublished 1968 biography by John Lewis Gignilliat. Gignilliat wrote what he called an “intellectual biography,” which sought to analyze the thoughts and assumptions of its subject. Gignilliat traces Freeman’s career as a distinguished historian and pays particular attention to Freeman’s family and especially his father, Walker Freeman, a Confederate veteran. He believes that Douglas Freeman’s interest in his family’s history and his father’s vivid tales of the Civil War were the impetus for the prize-winning historical biographies he wrote later in life.

Ayers, Wynes, and C. Vann Woodward have examined race relations in Virginia and the South after Reconstruction. And Richard M. Perloff is one of the few to examine the relationship between newspapers and lynching.

But little research has been done on how newspapers in general, and Virginia newspapers in particular, covered lynching--the importance they gave lynching, the details offered, the words, headlines and story structures used, and the opinions expressed. And with the exception of Mitchell, no research has been done on the men behind the coverage, and how their backgrounds affected their opinions about lynching.

Social Responsibility, Social Justice, and the Press

Among those who have written about journalistic standards and social responsibility in the 19th and 20th centuries are Fred S. Siebert and Hazel Dicken-Garcia. Siebert’s Four Theories of the Press describes the realization by editors that freedom of the press also carried with it a responsibility to society.⁴ These obligations included the

need to be accurate and complete, to be a watchdog against government, to educate the public to make it capable of self-government, and to represent minorities faithfully

Dicken-Garcia, in Journalistic Standards of Nineteenth-Century America, traces the rise of press criticism by editors and others outside the industry ⁵ These criticisms included the press' tendency to sensationalize, and its failure to be accurate and unbiased.

Gerald J Baldasty in The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century shows how press standards changed when newspapers moved away from the sponsorship of political parties toward an independent, corporate structure. ⁶ And Gerald Gross in The Responsibility of the Press⁷ and Robert Schmuhl in The Responsibilities of Journalism⁸ detail the work of the Hutchins Commission and the reaction to its six principles of ethical journalistic behavior

These works do not focus on Virginia papers and editors, or apply the standards of the day to their coverage of lynching. This study will attempt to fill those gaps, both in analyzing Virginia's lynch coverage and in applying journalistic standards to that coverage.

Notes

¹ Edward L. Ayers, The Promise of the New South. Life After Reconstruction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 444.

² W Fitzhugh Brundage, Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930 (Urbana. University of Illinois Press, 1993) 293

³ Charles E. Wynes, Race Relations in Virginia, 1870-1902 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1961) 84.

⁴ Fred S. Siebert, Four Theories of the Press (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1956)

⁵ Hazel Dicken-Garcia, Journalistic Standards in Nineteenth-Century America (Madison. University of Wisconsin Press, 1989)

⁶ Gerald J Baldasty, The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992)

⁷ Gerald Gross, ed., The Responsibility of the Press (New York: Fleet Publishing Corp., 1966)

⁸ Robert Schmuhl, ed., The Responsibilities of Journalism (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984)

disagree on the number of Africans brought to the New World as slaves, though one estimate for the 250 years following the founding of the country places the number at almost 15 million. "These figures, among the most conservative estimates, may not be accurate," cautioned Franklin. "It cannot be denied, however, that the total number of Africans removed from their native land ran far into the millions."²

This flood of human cargo to America landed first in Virginia in 1619 with the arrival of 20 African slaves at Jamestown. Soon after, Virginia planters began to earnestly import blacks as slaves, and on the eve of the American Revolution, 40 percent of all Virginians were slaves.³ After the Revolution, Virginia and its neighbor, Maryland, were home to more than half the nation's slaves.⁴

The growth of the slave population in Virginia gave rise to a body of laws meant to ensure white dominance. And in these slave codes can be seen a preview of the lynching era, when whites and blacks lived together in uneasy peace, and whites demonstrated a willingness to use violence against blacks to maintain control. The slave

Chapter 3: Historical Background and Setting

Lynching was but the latest chapter in the long and troubled relationship between whites and blacks in America. As historian John Hope Franklin has noted, the early history of the Negro in America is essentially the story of the “strivings of the nameless millions who have sought adjustment in a new and sometimes hostile world.”¹ Blacks were one of the few immigrant groups to arrive in America against their will. Historians disagree on the number of Africans brought to the New World as slaves, though one estimate for the 250 years following the founding of the country places the number at almost 15 million. “These figures, among the most conservative estimates, may not be accurate,” cautioned Franklin. “It cannot be denied, however, that the total number of Africans removed from their native land ran far into the millions.”²

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codes prohibited a slave from leaving the plantation without written permission from his master. The punishment of slaves found guilty of crimes ranged from death to lashes to the removal of the slave's ears. "Before the end of the colonial period, Virginia, like her neighbors, had become an armed camp in which masters figuratively kept their guns cocked and trained on the slaves in order to keep them docile and tractable," Franklin said.⁵

This harsh relationship continued until the 1860s, when the conclusion of the Civil War and the emancipation of the Southern slaves by Lincoln brought on a brief but better era for blacks. Historian Lerone Bennett, Jr., in describing the two decades following the Civil War, said, "There had never been an age like this one before and there would never be another—not in a hundred years anyway"⁶

During this brief period of Reconstruction, blacks enjoyed unprecedented opportunities, both politically and socially. Blacks comprised a majority of the electorate in many Southern counties, and they helped elect an ex-slave to represent Mississippi in the U.S. Senate, and a black man to be governor of Louisiana. Blacks served on state supreme courts and as mayors, sheriffs, and superintendents of schools. Blacks and whites attended classes together, rode on streetcars together, and sat together to eat.

In Virginia, blacks won 27 of the 181 seats in the state's first post-war legislature. Blacks were elected to office in Norfolk, Lynchburg, Danville, Alexandria, Hampton, and Richmond. In Petersburg in 1883, three blacks were elected to the City Council, and blacks also served on that city's school board and police force.⁷

Lord Bryd, a Scottish scholar, described after travelling in the United States in 1888:

The beginning of the end of what Du Bois called the “mystic years” came after 1877, when Rutherford B Hayes was elected president. The disputed election ended up in the U.S. Senate, where Southern senators eventually swung their support to Hayes in exchange for “the right to control their own affairs,” according to the compromise worked out. Home rule meant the withdrawal of federal troops from the South, and in the words of Bennett, “The South began the long process of whipping the Negro into submission.”⁸

Historian Michael Honey describes the post-Reconstruction period as the “nadir” of the black experience in America. “It was an era during which new forms of racial and economic oppression became firmly entrenched in the South,” he said. “Share-cropping, tenantry and debt peonage were established as new forms of labor servitude replacing slavery.”⁹

Under the sharecropping system, the black farmer was allowed from one-quarter to one-half of the cotton and corn he raised. His costs were so great, however, that by the end of the year, he often owed his employer more than he made.¹⁰ The Richmond Planet printed a letter from a tenant farmer in 1895 who said that the “new masters” were harsher than the slave owners had been. Blacks were still in bondage to the company store, the landowner, and the local sheriff, he wrote.¹¹

Historian C. Vann Woodward blames the weakening of restraining forces—Northern liberalism, Southern conservatism and Southern radicalism—for the rise in fear and hatred toward blacks.¹² The result was the world that James Lord Bryce, a Scottish scholar, described after travelling in the United States in 1888.

A negro man never sits down to dinner with a white man in a railway refreshment room. You never encounter him at a private party. He is not received in a hotel of a better sort, no matter how rich he may be. He will probably be refused a glass of soda water at a drug store. He is not shaved in a place frequented by white men, nor even by a barber of his own color. He worships in a church of his own. No white woman would dream of receiving his addresses.¹³

Race relations were often better in Virginia than in other parts of the South.

Wynes credits the presence of a large number of free blacks, the absence of the great cotton plantations which, of necessity, were run by overseers rather than owners, and Virginia's reliance on tobacco, which required a skilled workforce.¹⁴

Still, Virginia slowly became two societies, one white and one black, separate and unequal, where each knew its place and remained in it. And as Wynes has pointed out, "Separation bred suspicion and hatred, fostered rumors and misunderstanding and created conditions that made extremely difficult any steps toward its reduction."¹⁵

"Race relations in Virginia markedly deteriorated between 1870 and 1900," Wynes said. "This is not to imply that they were ever in this period excellent or good but even such as they were, they steadily deteriorated."¹⁶ This deterioration was apparent in Danville in 1883, when a tense racial climate finally erupted in a melee on the city streets. Five blacks were shot and killed after a black man bumped into a white man on

the sidewalk. “The immediate cause. Negro insolence,” concluded The Richmond Dispatch.¹⁷

W. E. B. Du Bois described the two societies in Virginia as like “double stars, bound for all time.” Du Bois lived in Farmville and Prince Edward County, Va., during the summer of 1897. He described his experience in a study published the next year:

The Negroes of Farmville and the neighboring county districts form a closed and in many respects an independent group life. They live largely in neighborhoods with one another, they have their own churches and organizations and their own social life, they read their own books and papers, and their group life touches that of the white people only in economic matters.¹⁸

Throughout the state, blacks were excluded from or segregated in hotels, restaurants, bars, theaters, and hospitals. State law in 1879 prohibited mixed marriages. In 1900 it required separate seating on the railroads, and in 1906 on the streetcars. Legislation in 1894 began to exclude blacks from the electoral process, and a change in the state constitution in 1902 completed the task. With these changes, Virginia blacks lost most of what they had gained since the Civil War, except their legal freedom and the right to a minimum public education, Wynes said.¹⁹

Given this climate and the often-violent history of whites toward blacks in America, it is not surprising that whites started lynching blacks in great numbers, especially in the South. Lynching occurred in all parts of the United States during its early history, but no time or place could match the ferocity displayed by Southerners in

the late 19th century. Tolnay and Beck estimate that in the 10 Southern states, blacks were lynched, on average, almost three times a week from 1882 to 1900.²⁰

Yet, historians note that these scholarly tabulations are probably only the tip of the iceberg. Many blacks disappeared or were killed during this period, and their deaths went unreported. As historian Vincent Vinikas has noted, the past is captive to the coverage it received by contemporaries. In the case of lynching, if a death was unreported at the time, it was unrecorded later.²¹

Tolnay lists four main reasons why whites resorted to lynching: to kill those accused of specific crimes, to maintain white dominance over blacks, to eliminate black competition for social, political or economic rewards, and to encourage white unity.²² Some historians have described lynching as community spectacle or entertainment, and other researchers, such as Orlando Patterson, have compared it to religious rituals of human sacrifice.²³ Most agree that lynching was first and foremost an effective form of terrorism, a brutal expression of white hatred toward blacks and a naked and effective way for whites to maintain social control over their newly freed neighbors.

Estimates vary on exactly how many people were lynched in Virginia. The NAACP was one of the first to document lynch deaths. In 1919, it put the number of black deaths in Virginia from 1889 to 1900 at 43.²⁴ Later historians, such as Brundage, using the NAACP's list and newspaper archives, published what they believed were more accurate numbers. Brundage counted 50 black lynch deaths in Virginia for the years 1880-1900, or about one every six months.²⁵

By any estimate, the number of black lynch deaths prior to the turn of the century was much greater than in later years. For the years 1920 to 1930, Brundage lists six black lynch deaths in Virginia, or about half the number killed in one year—1893—during the earlier period.²⁶ These numbers place Virginia near the bottom of the list of Southern states. Only North Carolina and West Virginia in the South appear to have had fewer lynch deaths.²⁷ Blacks represented about one-third of Virginia's roughly 2 million residents at the turn of the century, yet they accounted for about 85 percent of all lynch victims²⁸

Given the frequency of lynching in the South, it is not surprising that some newspapers came to regard it as routine. In 1904, Mary Church Terrell, the honorary chairman of the National Association of Colored Women, wrote, "Hanging, shooting, and burning black men, women and children in the United States have become so common that such occurrences create but little sensation and evoke but slight comment now."²⁹ Vinikas cites a lynching at Saint Charles, Ark., in 1904 that resulted in eleven black deaths over four days. The incident was one of the most deadly in the nation's history, yet it merited only one story in the Little Rock Arkansas Gazette.³⁰

Critics also accused newspapers of being inaccurate and incomplete in their lynch coverage. "The facts are often suppressed, intentionally or unintentionally, or distorted by the press," Terrell wrote.³¹ W.E.B. DuBois, a black scholar and editor of The Crisis, the publication of the NAACP, said, "News agencies in the South often deliberately suppress these reports and in nearly all cases are vague as to names, places, and details."³² And Ida

B Wells, a newspaper editor and anti-lynch crusader, labeled white press reports on lynching “unreliable and doctored.”³³

It is impossible to know if the lynch accounts in Virginia papers are accurate. As Wells has pointed out, newspaper editors may have been a part of the mob or friends of those who were. It is also impossible to know if the accounts are complete, or how many lynch incidents went unreported. Even so, it does appear from the available record that many Virginia communities were spared the horror of a lynching, and that most of those that did experience a lynching had only one during the 50-year lynching era. Because of this, Virginia newspapers considered lynchings newsworthy, and as this study shows, they covered it in graphic detail.

The lynching mania in the South occurred as the region moved away from its rural, agricultural roots. The railroads brought the first change, linking rural areas with cities, and the South with the rest of the nation. As Ayers has noted, “From the end of Reconstruction to the end of the century, the South built railroads faster than the nation as a whole. Different lines raced from one subregion to another. By 1890, nine of every ten Southerners lived in a railroad county.”³⁴

The railroad lines were followed by telephone networks, electric lines, and public water and sewer systems. Southern industry flourished, especially textiles, mining, and lumber. Cities, towns and villages expanded, all at the expense of the rural areas. The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century brought large-scale factory production, an urban work force, centers of investment capital, and the marketing of

standardized products. The 1890 U.S. census said 17 percent of Virginia's residents lived in urban areas. By 1930, the number had grown to 41 percent.³⁵ Major newspapers flourished in this landscape. Brundage refers to this era as the "golden age of Southern journalism" since most cities in Virginia had competing dailies, and smaller papers could be found in all the county seats. The modern reader would recognize these papers. They had eight to 12 pages, cost a few pennies, and carried a mix of news and ads, and in later years, photos, and drawings. The dailies--white owned and operated--offered general news, sports, entertainment, and even fiction. Accounts from abroad ran beside national, state, and local information. The weeklies, as today, chronicled the everyday occurrences in the lives of their readers—at least their white ones.

In the early part of the 19th century, the white-owned dailies were organs of the political parties and appealed to partisans. After the Civil War, the papers moved away from the parties to become more advertiser-dependent and politically independent. The papers adopted a corporate structure and strove to make a profit. Their readers were typically the ruling elite—planters, professionals and business owners—and a small middle class. The editorials were widely read, often the best-written material in the paper, and they usually championed the status quo, the values long entrenched in Southern society. As historian Carl Osthaus has written, the Southern editor served three functions. He was narrator, advocate, and weathercock, to indicate the prevailing views. "The greatest of these was the last," he said.³⁶

Blacks had their own advocates in the black-owned weeklies. These papers chronicled black life and fought against the restrictions imposed by the dominant white majority. Blacks founded more than 50 weekly newspapers in Virginia between the end of the Civil War and the start of the 20th century. Towns as small as Port Royal had their own newspaper, while bigger cities such as Richmond had more than one paper. All of these publications had a limited circulation, and in every case save two, a short lifespan. Many of the papers lasted only a few months, and a few published for several years.³⁷ None matched the circulation, the reputation, or the staying power of The Richmond Planet and The Norfolk Journal and Guide. The Planet was published from 1883 to 1938. The Guide started in 1910 and is still published today. Both papers sold thousands of copies weekly and were known throughout the South and the nation.

For the most part, blacks were not included in the news pages of white-owned papers. When they did appear, they fit one of two stereotypes, the Sambo or the savage, according to historian Carolyn Martindale.³⁸ The Sambo was lazy, carefree, and intellectually limited. The savage was sexual, impulsive, and dangerous. The two images were contradictory, and, as Alexander has noted, it was “never revealed what transformed happy colored brothers into brutal criminals.” When blacks did appear in crime or “anti-social” news stories, they were clearly identified with a race tag. Papers also offered stories about black crime from distant localities.

Given this setting, it is not surprising to find that Virginia’s white-owned newspapers were vicious toward blacks and supportive of lynch violence. An analysis of the stories published in white-owned newspapers for the period 1880-1900 shows that a

majority of Virginia lynch stories were prominently displayed, graphic in their coverage, and racist in their assumptions.

Brundage lists 42 lynchings of black victims during this period, and published stories describing 27 of these incidents, or 64 percent, were located. Sometimes two or more newspapers published accounts of a single lynching, so the total number of stories examined was 65. Of these, 37 stories, or 57 percent, appeared on the front page, the most important news page. More than 60 percent of the stories were 10 column inches or longer. The average story length was 19 column inches, indicating an interest by the editors in lynching. With an adequate amount of space for their stories, reporters provided a complete account, including information about the seizure of the victim from the authorities, his alleged crime, and the lynching itself.³⁹

Reporters also had space for graphic details. As Thomas D. Clark noted in his study of rural Southern papers, reading lynch stories was like “walking through a chamber of horrors.” Wrote Clark, “The country papers apparently felt that lynching should be reported in full, and in few instances does there seem to have been any effort to suppress or tone down even the most lurid details.”⁴⁰

Critics often labeled lynch coverage as “sensational,” accusing reporters of using a wildly dramatic style to shock their readers. Actually, many of the reports in Virginia papers, and especially the eyewitness ones, were written in a spare, staccato style. It was as if the reporter understood that the details themselves, told in simple sentences, with few adjectives and adverbs, were powerful enough to engage the reader

lynched outside Winchester in 1893. “He grasped with his hands the rope above his head,

For example, when William Lavender was lynched in Roanoke in 1892, a reporter for The Roanoke Times described the incident this way:

The party hurried the negro to the bank of the river near the ore washer and just within the city limits on the north bank of the river. A long rope was found at the washer, a hangman's noose quickly tied and the noose thrown over the quaking wretch's neck.

"Now say your prayers."

Down on his knees in the light snow went Lavender. His prayer was an almost incoherent jumble of denial. He was given a quick taste of the tightened rope, It quickened his memory

He acknowledged that he was the man Alice Perry had identified. Still he denied touching her. Again the rope was tightened and he went three feet from the ground. When he came down again, he owned up. It was still a rambling confession, but he admitted being drunk and knocking the girl down.

"Are you satisfied?" the party was asked.

"Yes," came the answer from deep throats. "It is enough. Time!"

The execution took place at 1 30 a.m.⁴¹

Other stories recounted the cries for mercy from lynch victims, and how mob members swung from victims' legs to hasten strangulation. A front-page story in The (Richmond) Times recounted how William Shorter tried to save himself while being lynched outside Winchester in 1893: "He grasped with his hands the rope above his head.

The man on the limb kicked them loose, saying 'God d—n you, take your hands down.' Then a regular fusillade of shots were aimed at the swinging form, only a few taking effect. He died instantly."⁴²

One of the most gruesome accounts followed the lynching of Thomas Smith, who was accused of assault in Roanoke in 1893. After the lynching, the mob cut down Smith's body and loaded it on a coal cart. At first, they tried to bury Smith in the mayor's front yard, but they were dissuaded from doing that and headed for the river. The (Richmond) Times reported,

Arriving at the river near the palatial estate of R.H. Woodrum a halt was called. Immediately plank fences were torn down to built a funeral pyre. Planks were piled up, there covered with dry cedar boughs, and on the whole several gallons of kerosene were poured. Preparations were completed and the body was dragged to the pile and laid upon it. A lighted match was applied, and the body was soon enveloped in flames. When the fire burned low, more plank was thrown on and around it. When a member of the body became separated from the rest, it was pushed back with a pole. This performance was kept up until all that remained of Thomas Smith was a small pile of ashes.⁴³

It is possible that these accounts are exaggerated or untrue, created by their authors for dramatic effect. Yet sometimes reporters from competing papers were at the scene of a lynching, and their stories, published on the same day, generally agree on the important details.

First, Lynch stories often followed a familiar pattern, beginning with a summary lead that flashed the news quickly before the reader, followed by a transition sentence and a chronological retelling of the lynch death. The Richmond Dispatch story of Feb. 6, 1894, is an example.⁴⁴ It begins with the headlines. “Hanged To A Horse-Rack. Judge Lynch’s Quiet Performance At King William Courthouse.” The story, by an unnamed reporter, was filed from King William on Feb. 5.

About 2 o’clock yesterday morning a party of armed men entered the jail at this place, took therefrom Peter Bland, a negro under sentence of fourteen years in the penitentiary for beating Mr S.G Littlepage nearly to death, shot him, and hung him to a horse-rack in the rear of the clerk’s office. The lynchers were well organized, and the affair was conducted with the utmost secrecy and deliberation.

The following are the details of the lynching as furnished the *Dispatch* by Mr O.M. Winston, clerk of the court and jailer:⁴⁵

The story goes on to recount how a man disguised as a policeman from the nearby town of West Point knocked at the jail door and told the jailer that he had a prisoner. When the jailer opened the door, a gang of about 15 men, armed with pistols and double-barrel shotguns, took the keys from him. They removed Bland from the jail and took him into the adjacent yard, where they shot him, hanged him, and “fired fourteen buckshot into his body”

In addition to this attention to detail, lynch stories shared a common language, which revealed much about the newspapers themselves and the communities they served.

First, the stories assumed that the black lynch victim was guilty of the crime he died for. Of 65 stories published from 1880 to 1900 in white papers, 59 of them, or 91 percent, assumed that the black victim was guilty.⁴⁶ For example, after John C. Wilson was lynched in 1886, The Richmond Dispatch did not describe Wilson as an “alleged” or “accused” thief. Instead, it reported that he “stole two mules” from a farmer in Patrick County then fled to North Carolina. A lynch mob seized him from the sheriff on the return to Patrick.⁴⁷

Many lynch stories also portrayed the black victims as menacing and animal-like, almost sub-human. Of 65 stories examined, 32 of them, or 49 percent, used racist epithets to describe the victims. The terms used were brute, demon, scoundrel, ravisher, tramp, desperado, darkie, ruffian, and villain. In appearance, lynch victims were said to be “burly,” “thick-lipped,” “tough-looking,” “very black,” and “repulsive.” Black victims also were said to be “worthless,” “unsavory,” a “fiend in human shape,” and “remarkably improvident even for someone of his race.” If the alleged crime was a rape or attempted rape, it was described as an “outrage” or “the usual crime.” And, in the words of The Lynchburg Daily News, the lynching of accused murderer Henry Mason there in 1885 provided him with a new “hempen collar.”⁴⁸

The lynch victim was usually no more than a name and an age, with few other details provided. In both the Dispatch and the local weekly, The Charlotte Gazette, Fowlkes was simply “Thad. Fowlkes.”

As for mob members, reporters never identified them or appeared to make any attempt to learn their identities. In fact, their accounts often tried to justify the lynching

by pointing out that the alleged crimes of the person lynched were the “most vile this community has ever seen.” When John Henry James was lynched for an alleged assault on Miss Julia Hotopp in Albemarle County in 1898, The (Richmond) Times reporter interviewed the local commonwealth’s attorney:

He said it was one of the most atrocious cases of assault ever committed, the circumstances being of such a character and so revolting that he was unwilling to state them in detail. They were, he said, of a character to stir any community to its deepest depths.⁴⁹

Sometimes the reporters tried to make heroes of the executioners, as in an 1893 report in The Roanoke Times on a lynching in Tazewell County that claimed more victims than any other in state history:

This makes five negroes who have been lynched, and a more orderly and brave set of men hardly ever got together. No disturbance of any kind occurred, and a pistol shot was not heard. They worked quietly and with determination, giving each of the negroes time to confess.⁵⁰

Researchers such as Arthur Raper have reported that up to one-third of all lynch victims were falsely accused, and occasionally a measure of doubt did seep into newspaper stories. John Forbes denied to the last that he raped Mrs. John Moran at Crewe in 1889, and The (Richmond) Times’ story about the incident carried the headline: “A Negro Lynched. Some Doubts As To Whether He Was The Right Man.”⁵¹ When The Richmond Dispatch reported on the lynching of Isaac Brandon in Providence Forge in 1892, it quoted Brandon’s son, who was with him in the cell when the mob arrived:

The boy says that the men entered the jail with pistols in hand and told Brandon to cross his hands behind him. He asked them if they were going to hang him. They told him they were. He said, Well you are going to hang an innocent man. Whether he confessed afterwards, of course, is not known. His body was found hanging the next morning⁵²

But doubt was the exception. Many accounts conveyed a sense of certainty, a belief in the rightness of the deed. These stories reported that the white victim had positively identified the attacker (31 percent of the 65 stories published during the period 1880 to 1900), and that the accused had confessed to his crime (48 percent of the stories).⁵³ The stories also said that local blacks saw the punishment as just, and frequently refused to claim the lynch victim's body. As The (Richmond) Times reported in 1893 after the lynching of Abner Anthony in Hot Springs, "There was no uncertainty about the crime, none about the identity of the man, and none about the completeness of the lynching."⁵⁴

In this and others ways, the news stories in white papers were a measure of the community support that distinguishes lynching from other murders. The details of the event itself—the method of seizure, place of death, behavior of the mob, and the inevitable conclusion of the coroner's jury—reveal an official indifference toward lynching and its acceptance as a brutal form of popular justice.

Some mobs, as in the Bland case in King William County, used deception to seize their victims. Others accomplished their goals directly, aided by sheriffs or jailers who surrendered their prisoners without resistance. In 63 percent of the stories published

from 1880 to 1900, there was some indication of injury to the jailer or damage to the jail. In the other 37 percent of the stories, the lynchers asked for the keys to the jail and received them, or intercepted the jailer and prisoner outside the jail and took the prisoner without incident.⁵⁵

Many jailers fought valiantly to thwart mobs. A policeman named Wilkinson, who tried to prevent the lynching of Benjamin Thomas in Alexandria in 1899, was a notable example. The Washington Post credited Wilkinson with "marked bravery." After being overpowered at the jail, he followed the mob to the lynch site.

The rope was so fixed that it did not strangle (Thomas) readily and he was fully twenty minutes dying. Finally, as the mob stood back, Policeman Wilkinson with great daring rushed forward from the crowd and with his knife cut down the body. It was still twitching, and Thomas was involuntarily breathing. Standing over the form, he drew two pistols and for a moment held the crowd at bay. Then they rushed upon him, kicking and beating him.⁵⁶

Other jailers were less diligent, but newspaper stories defended them, noting that the surrender of the prisoner was the only sensible thing to do. When 60 masked men showed up at the Petersburg jail in 1880 and demanded the keys to James Black's cell, the jailer complied. Said The Richmond Dispatch, "Appreciating the fact that he was overpowered and could do nothing, the jailer surrendered the keys, and the negro was soon in the hands and custody of the unknown men."⁵⁷

However, John Mitchell, Jr. of the Planet and other critics accused local authorities of cowardice and complicity. Mitchell praised sheriffs who moved their prisoners to safety in distant jails, stationed extra guards at the jail, or asked state authorities for help. Wrote Cutler, "Most lynching mobs could be easily dispersed were the officers of the law resolute and determined men intent on protecting their prisoners and letting the law take its course."⁵⁸

Another form of official indifference can be seen in the work of the coroner's jury. Summoned to the scene after a lynch death, this group of citizen volunteers was charged with determining the cause and manner of death. Reporters frequently used the jury's official verdict to end their stories, as The Wytheville Dispatch did in 1885:

The jury reviewed the body and returned the following verdict: "That on the night of the 4th of February, 1885, Alvy Jackson was forcibly taken from the jail of this county by persons unknown to the jailer and by these persons tied to a fence post with a rope and shot, from which wounds he died."⁵⁹

Published details about lynch mobs and lynch sites also indicate community support for lynching. The lynchers usually were careful to hide their identities: News reports indicated that they were masked (56 percent of the sample stories) and worked at night.⁶⁰ But they chose public locations for their executions. Lynchings did not occur in remote, wooded sites. Instead, they were done beside busy roads, on street corners, and, as in Bland's case, in the symbolic heart of the community, at the courthouse. In 1893 outside Winchester, a mob seized William Shorter from the sheriff on a crowded train

and lynched him beside the track in view of all the passengers. In this and other cases, the lynchers sent a clear, public message of intimidation to blacks, and in doing so, did not fear legal sanction or the disapproval of their neighbors.

Another measure of community support can be seen in the fact that many Virginia lynchings were neither spontaneous nor private. Instead, they were planned in advance and done by and before large groups of people. A story in The Petersburg Index-Appeal in 1880 said of James Black's lynchers, "They came from different directions and from different portions of the county, as though in accordance with a preconcerted arrangement."⁶¹ Other stories described how local residents were "agitated" or "outraged," and how groups of people were standing on street corners discussing the need for "swift, sure and certain justice." Stories in both the Norfolk Virginian and The Norfolk Landmark in November 1885 predicted the lynching of suspected child murderer Noah Cherry in Princess Anne County. Even with these warnings, authorities did not stop the seizure of Cherry, and a follow-up story the next day in the Landmark said, "As we predicted in our last issue, the murderer paid the penalty of his crime Sunday night at the hands of Judge Lynch."⁶²

The papers estimated the size of the crowd at Cherry's lynching at 200 to 300. Published mob sizes at other black lynchings ranged from six in the case of George Towler, lynched in Pittsylvania County in 1892, to 3,000 at Thomas' lynching in downtown Alexandria in 1899. When five blacks were lynched in Buchanan County in 1893, The Roanoke Times reported that the crowd of men, women, and children was so

large--at least 500 people--that they climbed onto rooftops to see. The average mob size for the stories examined from the period 1880 to 1900 was 300⁶³

Further evidence of community support can be seen in the reports of souvenir hunters. Mob members sought mementos of the lynching and proudly displayed them. The Norfolk Landmark reported that residents of Norfolk visited the scene of Noah Cherry's hanging and brought back pieces of the tree and the rope. "One man secured the hat and shoes of the fiend and they can now be seen at his place of business on Market square," the paper reported. Hundreds of Charlottesville-area citizens plucked relics from the tree on which John Henry James was lynched. And The Roanoke Times reported that residents of that city stripped branches from the tree and clothing from the body of Thomas Smith after his lynching there in 1893

By examining details such as these in lynch stories, it can be seen that white papers in the late 1800s mirrored the majority attitude in their communities. The language used to describe the lynch victim, the seizure, the size of the mob and its advance planning, the lynch location and the collection of souvenirs all are indications that white residents of Virginia did not consider blacks as equals and did not regard lynching as a crime. Given this attitude, it is not surprising that many editorial writers for Virginia's daily and weekly papers supported lynching. Some, like Herbert J. Browne, even participated. Browne was the owner and editor of The Roanoke Times. In 1892, when a white man was accused of molesting a white toddler, Browne led a mob that stormed the city jail and tried to lynch him. The local militia stopped the mob before it could seize the

Woods on the way to his execution spot, and his eventual hanging, shooting, and burning.

prisoner Browne was arrested, convicted of rioting, fined \$100, and sentenced to one hour in jail.

Browne's action would have been inconceivable by the 1920s. By then, it was clear that Virginia's white-owned newspapers had changed the way they felt about lynching. The papers were still intensely interested in lynching, using graphic, front-page stories, as they did before the turn of the century, yet the racist language and the assumptions of guilt were gone from their stories, replaced by a measure of community opposition.

These conclusions are based on a review of stories from white-owned papers for the period 1920 to 1932. Brundage lists six lynchings in Virginia during this period, and though he does not include the death of Shadrack Thompson in 1932 as a lynching, it is included in this study, since others such as Tuskegee Institute and the NAACP counted it as a lynching. Fourteen stories describing six of the seven incidents were located.

A review of these stories showed that editors did not spare their readers the details of the mob's grisly work.⁶⁴ For example, when a group of 50 masked men, some dressed as women, stormed the Wythe County jail in 1926 and lynched Raymond Bird, the Richmond Times-Dispatch reported. "The negro's head was beat into a pulp and his body was dragged nine miles behind an automobile to the scene of his alleged crime, where it was hung to a tree and riddled with bullets, according to information reaching here."⁶⁵

The following year when Leonard Woods was lynched on the Virginia-Kentucky border, stories described the mob's entry into the jail through the roof, the parading of Woods on the way to his execution spot, and his eventual hanging, shooting, and burning.

Many of the stories also retained another feature from the earlier era. mention of the pre-execution confession. Both Lem Johnson in Tobacco in 1921 and James Jordan in Waverly in 1925 were reported to have confessed to their killers just prior to their lynchings. These confessions were reported uncritically, as if to soothe worried readers.

The stories were different, in other ways, however, including the use of racial epithets and the assumption of guilt. None of the stories contained a racial descriptor Terms like “brute” and “fiend” had vanished from the texts. And in each of the stories, reporters used phrases to show that the lynch victims were only accused of the crimes for which they were killed. When Horace Carter was lynched in King and Queen County in 1923, the News Leader account of the incident described him as being under arrest on a “charge of attacking a white woman.” If the incident had occurred 20 years earlier, Carter likely would have been described as the person who “attacked” a white woman.⁶⁶

And unlike the earlier period, stories from the 1920s reflected more uncertainty Lynching was apparently still an accepted means of punishing a controversial crime in some communities, but the voice of opposition also was being heard. More than 2,000 “infuriated farmers” took to the streets near Petersburg in 1921 to lynch Lem Johnson. A mob of more than 500 people lynched James Jordan in 1925, and more than 300 took part in the lynching of Leonard Woods in 1927 Because of these incidents, the average mob size in the stories examined from the later period was larger than the mob size from the earlier period.

And some jailers, as in the lynchings of Lem Johnson and Horace Carter, still surrendered their prisoners without opposition, or took no extra precautions to protect

them. In 1926, the News Leader noted that sheriffs “always reflect the community’s attitude toward the law and are neither braver nor less courageous in dealing with a mob than their constituents expect.” The paper also commented, “Where courage is displayed on the part of the sheriff, the chances are at least nine in ten that a lynching will not occur.”⁶⁷

But several stories revealed a changing attitude toward lynching, as reflected by the actions of state and local officials. The day after James Jordan’s hanging in 1925, Gov. E. Lee Trinkle traveled to Waverly to meet with residents. A Times-Dispatch report from the town quoted the governor as saying:

Virginia’s record has been virtually washed clean of mob actions, and I exhort you in the name of the Commonwealth not to be brought again into the limelight of such publicity as she has received from this occurrence.⁶⁸

The local sheriff and his deputies felt the need to defend themselves to the governor, saying that the mob acted so quickly that they did not have time to summon help from outside the county. The commonwealth’s attorney promised that a special grand jury would investigate the incident and indict all those responsible. When a coroner’s jury went to view Jordan’s charred remains at the lynch site the next morning, mob members had moved it across the county line to the nearby town of Windsor. Only a severed hand remained at the scene. News accounts speculated that the mob feared the governor’s visit, and by moving the body hoped to complicate any subsequent investigation.

one of its early leaders, described this campaign as “organized, intensive, intelligent, and persistent.” White also credited other organizations, such as the

The structure of the published stories also reflected a change in community attitude. The 1921 Times-Dispatch story about the Johnson lynching began not only with the facts of the lynching but also with the expected investigation by county authorities.⁶⁹ Similarly, the Dispatch's 1927 story about the Woods lynching began with the governor's involvement:

Virginia's cooperation with Kentucky in punishing the members of a mob that early yesterday lynched Leonard Woods, a negro, charged with murder on the border line between the two states, was pledged by Gov Harry F. Byrd tonight in a formal statement denouncing the act.⁷⁰

Why did white-owned papers change their coverage? Historians have offered a number of reasons, all of which combined to slowly change both the press and the communities they served. As Brundage has noted: "Just as there is no one explanation for a phenomenon with as many insidious permutations as mob violence, so, too, no single explanation can explain the opposition to or demise of lynching."⁷¹

The press changed in part because the South changed. The region had developed economically, and many editors saw lynching as a real threat to that progress. Also, statewide police systems became the norm, and these officers were more willing than local police to oppose local mobs.

Opposition from groups such as the newly formed NAACP was another reason. Founded in 1909, the organization waged a relentless campaign to stop the practice. Byrd, Walter White, one of its early leaders, described this campaign as "organized, intensive, intelligent, and persistent." White also credited other organizations, such as the

Commission on Interracial Cooperation in Atlanta, and several Southern newspapers, which he said did “notable service.” He believed that their work contributed to the nationwide decline in the annual toll of lynchings, from 166.5 per year between 1890 and 1900 to 38 per year in the 1920s.

White also believed that the migration of blacks from the South was a contributing factor. More than two million blacks moved from the South beginning in 1916, in effect protesting with their feet the way they were being treated. Historians have called it the greatest internal migration in the nation’s history, and according to White, even whites who at first welcomed their departure, soon realized that it was an economic loss to the region. “Mobbing Negroes was not the best method of retaining Negro labor,” he said.

Another factor was the introduction of state and federal anti-lynching legislation. The threat of federal intervention took the form of the Dyer bill, which passed the House in 1922 but died in the Senate because of a Southern filibuster. The bill would have made lynching a federal crime, and provided fines and penalties against states, towns, and counties that failed to use reasonable efforts to protect citizens from mob violence.

Virginia passed an anti-lynching bill in 1928, which made lynching a state offense to be prosecuted by the attorney general. No longer would prosecution of the crime be left to local initiative. The bill also authorized the governor to spend whatever money was necessary to apprehend mob members. In introducing the legislation, Gov. Harry F. Byrd, said, “Virginia is the last state in the Union where lynching should be tolerated, for Virginia contributed to America the leaders who taught that this was a government by

laws.” The Times-Dispatch supported passage of the bill, calling it “a determined blow at one of the few remaining blots on the record of Southern progress.”

The only lynching that occurred in Virginia after passage of the bill was the controversial death of Shadrack Thompson in Fauquier County in 1932. The local coroner ruled that Thompson’s hanging death was a suicide, and others, including the News Leader and former Gov Byrd, supported that view. But some blamed the sheriff’s posse, saying that it had hanged Thompson after an intense manhunt. “If this is a suicide, what’s a lynching?” asked P.B. Young.⁷² Tuskegee Institute and the NAACP both investigated the incident and included Thompson’s death in their annual lynching tallies. The Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching did likewise.

Some traced the origins of this shift in attitude in Virginia to incidents that occurred years earlier. Ann Field Alexander describes the lynching of Thomas Smith in Roanoke in 1893 as a key event. In effect, when whites started dying along with the black lynch victims, attitudes changed.

In that incident, Mayor Henry S. Trout called out the Roanoke Light Infantry Blues to protect Smith from a lynch mob. The troops shot and killed eight members of the mob and wounded 30. Trout was himself injured by shots fired from the mob. Despite the shootings, the mob was able to seize Smith and hang him. The bloodshed, according to Alexander, was the beginning of the end for lynching in Virginia.

Ironically, when white people were killed and white lives threatened, some whites saw for the first time the problem with lynching. The Roanoke riots, the white deaths, the lynching of Smith, and the treatment accorded

Trout provoked a reaction in Virginia that was in part responsible for the state's plummeting lynching statistics in the years to come.⁷³

Another lynching, which occurred almost a decade later, had the same effect. In 1904, a mob in Emporia lynched two men, Walter Cotton and Brandt O'Grady. Just prior to their deaths, the local sheriff and judge requested troops to protect the prisoners. Troops arrived within hours, sent by Gov. J. Hoge Tyler, but they departed the next day, when local authorities changed their minds and asked them to leave. Tyler ordered the militia commander to comply with the wishes of the local authorities, despite the commander's protests that a lynching would surely result. Within hours of the troop's departure, the commander was proved correct. Cotton and O'Grady were lynched.

Criticism was heaped on the governor, especially by The (Richmond) Times, for allowing the troops to withdraw. The Times carried front-page stories on five consecutive days, blasting Tyler with headlines like, "The Governor is Condemned," and "A Lame Defense." On its editorial page, it said, "Every law-abiding citizen of Virginia hangs his head in shame, for the old Commonwealth has been disgraced," and "Governor Tyler is responsible for it."

A national publication, The Independent, added, "The chief blame we put on the Governor of Virginia. He was supposed, from his official position, to rise above local passion and protect the people."⁷⁴

Nearly 20 years later the Richmond News Leader would describe the double lynching in Emporia as a watershed event. After that incident, localities used special grand juries more often to speed the progress of cases where mob violence was possible,

and governors never again refused the use of troops to protect prisoners. “Public sentiment in Virginia demanded that no matter what the provocation, lynchings should be prevented, or punished where they could not be prevented,” the paper said. Brundage, in his history of lynching in Virginia, reached the same conclusion.

The controversy over events in Emporia demonstrated that by 1900 widespread sentiment held that mob violence posed a serious threat to social order and that governors had to assume a large responsibility for the prevention of lynching. Whereas in many Southern states governors passed off the prevention of lynchings as the responsibility of local authorities, governors in Virginia did so at the risk of public censure.⁷⁵

In addition, lynching was never as firmly rooted in Virginia as it was in other Southern states. The practice offended the basic character of Virginia, what Brundage described as its “elitist and temperamentally conservative” nature. Virginians revered “law and order,” he said, and lynching was anything but that. Lynching was anarchy.

⁷⁵ Historical Inquiry,” *The Journal of Southern History* 65 (1999): 534.

⁷⁶ Tolney 30.

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Chapter 4: Editorials in Black and White, 1880-1900

Joseph Bryan

In some ways, Joseph Bryan, owner of The (Richmond) Times, was a man of two time periods. Bryan lived and worked at the turn of the century, but his opinions about lynching were more typical of those that appeared three decades later. A closer examination of Bryan provides both a look at the harsh racial climate of the late 1800s and a preview of the more law-abiding 1920s.

Bryan's strict stand on lynching was but one example of the stubborn independence that he displayed all his life. This quality is best seen in an incident from 1896, as recounted by his son John Stewart Bryan. The pressmen at his Richmond daily, The Times, demanded higher wages and threatened a strike. Bryan, a former Confederate cavalry soldier with Mosby's Rangers, told his employees that before he would yield to their demands, he would take an axe and break the press to pieces and throw it in the James River. He warned them.

After the Battle of Spotsylvania, I had no food for two days, and I found a dead Yankee who had some rotten pork in his hand. I took a ramrod and fished it out and ate it, and I can do it again. And if you can't do it, don't go to war with me.¹

The younger Bryan concludes the story by noting, "There was no strike."

Joseph Bryan was born in Gloucester, Va., in 1845. He was the eighth child of John Bryan and Elizabeth Coalter Bryan. His father attended Yale and served with the Navy for six years. He was, in the words of biographer W. Gordon McCabe, “the very highest type of country gentlemen of his time—of aristocratic lineage.” His mother also was of noble stock, from Tidewater, Va.

“Joe” Bryan, as he was called, attended Episcopal High School in Alexandria and the University of Virginia, before leaving school to fight in the Civil War. He was an accomplished horseman and found glory in Mosby’s command. Once he spurred his horse into battle alone and forced the opposing horsemen to turn tail and run. In another battle, he was shot twice. After the war he returned to University of Virginia and its law school. In 1868, he began the practicing law, first in Palmyra, and then in Richmond.

His first victory in the courtroom came in Palmyra, the county seat of Fluvanna County, as a court-appointed attorney, defending a young black man. The incident offers a glimpse at race relations in Virginia at the time. Bryan thought his speech to the jury had been the cause of his client’s acquittal, but the jury foreman told him later that the jurors felt sorry for the struggling young attorney, in part because his father, John Bryan, had been ruined by the Civil War.

“What’s one nigger more or less to us?” the foreman asked the other jurors. “Let’s let the damn black rascal off, and help the young man along.”

Three years later Joseph Bryan married Isobel L. Stewart, and they had six sons. The Bryans lived at “Laburnum,” a home just outside the city, and “Eagle Point,” his family’s plantation. Their life recalled past generations, said McCabe, when Virginia

squires “kept bright by song and hunt and open board the brave tradition of Yorkshire and of Devon.”

In 1887, Maj Lewis Ginter, one of his clients, gave Bryan The Times, a newspaper that, in the words of John Stewart Bryan, “did nothing but lose money.” At the time, Bryan’s main competitors were the popular morning Dispatch and the evening State. Within eight years, Bryan turned the Times into a profitable and powerful force in Richmond, with a circulation of 7,000. Two years later, he purchased the afternoon Leader, an apolitical, “colorless” paper that was used to capture the subscribers lost by the “crusading” Times, according to John Stewart Bryan.

In 1903, John L. Williams, the owner of the Dispatch and the afternoon News, proposed a merger with Bryan. Williams took the afternoon Leader and the News, and Bryan took the morning papers, the Times and Dispatch. With this merger was born today’s Times-Dispatch. In 1908, Bryan acquired the News Leader to give him at his death that year ownership of the city’s dominant morning and afternoon papers. It was a controlling position that continued for four generations of Bryans and endures to the present.

In addition to his newspaper career, Bryan was one of the developers of the Georgia-Pacific Railway, the owner of the Richmond Locomotive Works, a member of the Democratic Party, a churchman, and philanthropist. Tall, broad-shouldered and handsome, he had a gray beard and a simple, direct manner. Virginius Dabney calls him “probably the most admired Virginian of his day.”²

Bryan occasionally wrote editorials for his paper, and when he didn't he always directed his chief editorial writers, W.L. Royall and W.S. Copeland. Bryan's "personality and views were stamped all over the paper," wrote Dabney

As one of Richmond's ruling elite, Bryan's views on race were in keeping with his position and the times. They were based in the Virginia tradition that "gentle folk" always treated their slaves with kindness. To them, said McCabe, slavery was "wrong in principle but beneficent in practice." Bryan had a number of black servants at both of his houses, and he regarded himself as their friend and defender. Slavery had ended some 30 years earlier, yet his servants referred to him as "Mars' Joe," and eight of them bore his casket at his funeral.

Blacks in Richmond preferred Bryan's Times to its rival, the Dispatch. Yet the paper was far from liberal. Bryan supported segregation and the disenfranchisement of blacks. When one of the paper's stories described the shades and tints of the "coons" at a meeting presided over by Mitchell of the Planet, blacks were infuriated. The paper offered a lengthy apology on its editorial page.

Mitchell once said that the editor of the Times was "about as much suited for his job as a school boy would be for the United States Senate." Still, the Times was not as insulting to blacks as the Dispatch. Few papers were.

The Dispatch was the largest circulation paper in Richmond. By 1880, it was 30 years old and had become the voice of the Democratic establishment. James Cowardin founded the paper, and his son, Charles, took over in 1882 when his father died.

The Dispatch's views on lynching were an extension of its views on slavery. In the 1850s, the paper termed slavery an economic necessity. When Abraham Lincoln came to office, it described him as a "vulgar tycoon." It promised, "We will stand in a solid phalanx in defense of the independence and sovereignty and the sanctity of Southern soil."³ To the Dispatch, whites were the "master race," destined to rule the world. Eventually, it said, the Caucasian race will own "every acre of land on the globe. Negroes, Mongols, Malays, and Indians will have to fall before the all-conquering white man."⁴

Not surprisingly, Mitchell saw the Dispatch as a "Moss-back, Democratic, Negro-hating organ." In 1890, he described the paper as "an apologist for murder," and "an opponent of humanity." He added. "Hell's gates will open wide we think when the editor of the Dispatch draws his last breath and is ushered into the other world."⁵

Undeterred, the Dispatch continued to preach a gospel of racial superiority. White men should never permit the "Africans and Mongolians" to compete with their sons "for the best places and best things," the paper said. "This is a white man's country," it added. "The negro will be compelled by the superior race to occupy whatever position in the community the latter shall choose to assign him." The white man cannot be "forced or flattered" into placing the Negro on equal footing, it believed. To do otherwise would be as futile as the actions of the owner of the "blackamoor" in Aesop's fable who tried to wash his blackness away with soap and water. "Thus we are made and we cannot be made over," it said.⁶

The Dispatch voiced similar views when commenting on lynching. It believed that lynching was a sensible, even preferred, way of dealing with black “beasts.” The paper blamed the black victims when lynchings occurred. “So far as Virginia is concerned nearly all of the lynchings that occur are the result of one specially heinous crime,” it said. This was the crime of rape.

When R.T. Barton, president of the Virginia Bar Association, described lynching as “murder” and a “barbarism,” the paper disagreed.

This is what we all feel and what many of us say—until we are brought face to face with a case where one of our own women has been the victim of the man who is to be punished. Then we either join the mob and string the man up or rejoice when others have done it and left us guiltless of actual participation in the deed.⁷

To the Dispatch, lynching was suitable since it was certain, speedy, and terrible. Without it, “young white women living in lonely country places would be ever at the mercy of lustful blacks,” it said. When critics such as Frederick Douglass denounced lynching, they missed the point, the paper said: “Stop the crime and lynchings will stop—not before.”⁸

When Bryan bought the Dispatch and merged it with his Times in 1903, readers might have expected that the new paper would adopt the attitudes of the Times. But Mitchell, for one, was not pleased. Mitchell said the merger reminded him of the story of the man who owned a cursing parrot. The parrot cursed so much that the man bought a second parrot from a minister and put them together. He hoped that the good qualities of

the one would rub off on the other. After a few days, however, the man was horrified to learn that he had two cursing parrots. Wrote Mitchell. “Instead of the Times having improved the Dispatch, the Dispatch has ruined the Times. In nearly every issue now we hear the shrill cries of the cursing parrot. “Nigger, Nigger, Nigger,” all the time.”⁹

The Dispatch's views on lynching were closer to the majority view in Virginia than were those of The Times. Thirty lynching editorials published from 1880 to 1900 in 12 white-owned newspapers were located. Of these, 18 editorials, or 60 percent of those examined, supported lynching. Four editorials (13 percent) from this group were ambivalent, and eight editorials (27 percent) were critical.¹⁰

The editorials that supported lynching appeared in papers such as The Alexandria Gazette. After a mob hanged accused rapist Joseph McCoy from a lamppost in downtown Alexandria in 1897, the Gazette called the punishment “well-deserved” and blamed the victim for the mob’s action:

When the negroes shall cease to commit such monstrous crimes, lynchings in the South will cease, but not before, and if the negro preachers would instill the knowledge of that fact into the minds of their congregations instead of asking the President to prevent the lynching of members of their race, the better it will be for those whose interest they profess to have at heart.¹

Two years later, the events of the McCoy lynching were repeated when another mob stormed the Alexandria jail and lynched Benjamin Thomas. This time the Gazette said, “The public lynching here last night was only another glaring instance of the fact

that law or no law, Southern men will wreak vengeance upon negroes who outrage their women and girls”¹² The paper again blamed the lynching on “negro rowdies” in the community “who had roamed the streets the night before, threatening attacks upon the white people” if Thomas was lynched.

After the McCoy lynching, The (Fredericksburg) Daily Star said the citizens of Alexandria deserved a “well-done.” The paper said the lynching was justifiable and added,

The action was not in accordance with our statute law, but it was with the higher law of self-preservation. It was the same justifiable instinct that prompts us to shoot the mad dog or crush the serpent. It was merely the preservation of society against the attacks of the noxious beasts.¹³

Other papers excused lynching as the will of the majority. After the lynching of five blacks in Tazewell County in 1893, The Roanoke Times said: It is useless to hold up the hands in horror at lynching. Under certain circumstances the sentiment of a large majority of the community upholds it, and a majority of the people can neither be indicted nor punished for their opinions.¹⁴

To some writers, lynching was understandable, given the inefficiencies of the criminal-justice system. To them, lynching sprung from a belief that the law’s delay was worse for the community than the lynching. The Abingdon Weekly Virginian and The Roanoke Times were in this group. The Times called lynching “the court of last resort,” and said, “When the people come to believe that the machinery which they have erected

for the carrying out of justice has lost its power to right wrongs, they create new machinery”¹⁵

J. Wilder, a resident of Bristol, expressed this view in 1891 in a letter to a friend. Wilder sent his friend a clipping from The Bristol Courier, which described the lynching that Wilder witnessed in Bristol the day before. Wilder wrote:

Such a seething mob is no desirable thing to look at. Some drunk and some acted for the fun of the thing and some from the feeling that the courts were ineffective. It is a horrid thing but it is “Southern.” It is partly due from what I consider corrupt courts and officers to execute the laws¹⁶

Other white newspapers seemed less certain about lynching. Their editorials included both criticism and acceptance. Frequently, a “however” sentence, or one with a “but” in it, signaled their ambivalence. For example, The Abingdon Weekly Virginian had mixed feelings about the lynching of Martin Rollins in Russell County in 1889. It said, “The lynching was a horrible deed, but the provocation also was horrible.”¹⁷ After a mob lynched Benjamin Thomas in Alexandria in 1899, The Washington Post described the incident as hideous, deplorable, and unnecessary. “We have never advocated or defended (lynching), and we never expect to,” it said. Then the paper added.

The fact remains, however, that human nature bursts the bonds of law, convention and everyday observance. . . . When our people become convinced of the necessity of extraordinary measures for the protection of their homes, their families and their personal honor and self-respect, they will set aside the text-books and the codifications and return for one brief

and bloody moment to the primeval instincts of humanity. Nothing can restrain that frightful frenzy¹⁸

A number of other white-owned papers were neither ambivalent nor supportive. They rejected lynching completely. As Bryan's Times said, "There is no real excuse in public opinion for such a violation of the law"¹⁹ Bryan's opposition to lynching would eventually become the norm among Virginia white editors, but at the turn of the century, he was in the minority. Public indignation ran so high after some crimes that "men of all classes" approved of lynching, his paper said. Still, Bryan and The Times preferred law and order to popular approval. Besides, lynching was unnecessary, the paper said. Courts would punish the guilty.

But Bryan's respect for the "majesty" of the law had its limits. He did not recognize blacks as equals, and at times his racism surfaced on the editorial and news pages of his paper. In 1889, the Times noted that when blacks were "under the kindly control of Christian civilization," they were good citizens and workers. When the Negro was in a majority and took control of the political process, "he becomes a savage," it said. The South without white civilization was "another Haiti," the paper added. "The worst thing for the negro would be negro control, and the only thing to save and civilize him was white control."²⁰

Once, when a New York paper accused the Times of "retaining the prejudices against the black race that have been outgrown by more progressive Southern papers," it defended itself in a way that seemed to confirm the accusation. "While the Times never

has, and never will, countenance anything like social equality between the whites and black race, it has always believed in protecting the Negro in all his political rights."²¹

Bryan and other owners of white papers were opposed to lynching, and their opposition eventually became the norm among Virginia editors. But their views were selfish. To them, lynching was bad because it made the community look bad and because it threatened the rule of law. Their lynching editorials never mentioned blacks' right to life, their equality before the law, or their claim to the protections of the U.S. Constitution. It would be left to black editors like John Mitchell, Jr. to make those arguments.

John Mitchell, Jr.

John Mitchell, Jr., editor of The Richmond Planet, differed from many who opposed lynching. He was a man of action, as well as words. One incident, in particular, cemented his reputation as a man "who would walk into the jaws of death to serve his race."

The incident occurred in 1886 when Richard Walker, a black man, was lynched by a mob in Prince Edward County. Mitchell condemned the lynching in the Planet, saying that those responsible deserved to die. The next week, he received an unsigned letter from Prince Edward that said, "If you poke that infernal head of yours in this county long enough for us to do it we will hang you higher than he was hung." The letter also contained a drawing of a skull and a piece of rope.

Mitchell published the letter and replied with a quote from Shakespeare: “There are no terrors, Cassius, in your threats, for I am so strong in honesty that they pass by me like the idle winds, which I respect not.” Mitchell also armed himself with a pair of Smith and Wesson revolvers and traveled to Prince Edward. While there, he was locked in jail for several hours, then released unharmed. The idea that this 22-year-old editor would walk into the eye of the storm caught the imagination of the reading public. As Alexander, his biographer, has written:

At a time when blacks were being lynched on much flimsier pretexts, it was a daring and courageous, perhaps foolhardy act. Similar escapades followed, and soon the Planet was recognized as an important “anti-lynch” journal, and the “Fighting Editor” was venturing into the North and Midwest to address audiences on the subject of “Southern outrages.”²²

Mitchell became the editor of the weekly in 1884, one year after its founding by 13 black teachers, all former slaves. He was its leader for 45 years, until his death in 1929. In the process, he became, in the words of Joseph Pulitzer, editor of The New York World, “one of the most daring and vigorous colored editors.”²³

Mitchell was born in 1863 in Henrico County, Va., the older of two sons of John and Rebecca Mitchell, both former slaves. His father was a coachman and his mother was a seamstress. He grew up in comfortable surroundings in the home of his former master, James Lyons, a prominent Richmond lawyer. Mitchell attended the Richmond Normal and High School, founded by the Freedmen’s Bureau, the agency set up by Northerners to provide schooling for former slaves. After graduating first in his class in 1881, he

taught school for three years in Fredericksburg and Richmond and also served as a
 Richmond-based correspondent for the New York Globe, a black paper. He became the
 editor of the Planet at age 21

In the words of Alexander, “The Planet was always John Mitchell’s personal
 creation, his moods, his whims, and his prejudices, were easily detected, and the pages of
 the Planet each week bore the unmistakable stamp of his personality.”²⁴

Mitchell wasted little time in “speaking out,” as he described it. He was a
 Republican and later founded a bank in Richmond, yet he also was a reformer whose
 message of equal rights for blacks would not be accepted by the nation for another forty
 years. His job was “to howl, yes, to howl loudly, until the American people hear our
 cries,” he said, and he soon became known as a “fighting editor.” He redesigned the
 masthead of his paper to reflect this militant tone. The masthead was a simple text
 rendering, but Mitchell added a muscular black arm, bent at the elbow, with a clenched
 fist and rolled-up sleeve. Three generations later young protesters would use a similar
 salute to signal black defiance.

Mitchell was seen as a quiet, solitary figure. One often-published picture of him
 shows an unsmiling man in a finely tailored coat, slightly stout, with handlebar mustache,
 parted, close-cropped hair and an intelligent, determined look. He never married, though
 he did have a long-term relationship with Marietta Chiles, a school teacher. His nephew
 once described him as an intensely private man, “who ate dinner alone, walked alone and
 bowed to no one.” And the editor of another black paper, the Petersburg Lancet, wrote
 after meeting him that he “walked with a sort of free arrogance and independence.”

Mitchell was comfortable around white people, no doubt from his early years in Lyons' house, and he advised black people not to hate whites, even those who hated blacks. "God made him," he wrote, "and has prepared a place for him with the Devil. Give him a chance to get there." He also advised blacks to be polite, obliging, and law-abiding. But he added that blacks also should protect themselves and expect to be protected. "We have come a long way, and the end is far in the distance," he once said.

From the pages of the Planet, Mitchell railed against injustice in any form. He opposed the poll tax, gerrymandering, disenfranchisement, Jim Crow laws, police brutality, and the inequities of school funding. But he was perhaps most passionate about lynching. He termed the practice barbaric and wrote about it almost weekly, drawing attention to incidents from across the South and the nation.

He ran photos of lynchings, something the white papers never did. It was as if he agreed with the black editor in Kansas who called on black papers to print photos of lynchings so that "the world may see and know what semi-barbarous America is doing."²⁵ He kept a weekly tally of lynchings, using the photo of a multiple lynching in Clifton Forge, Va., as its standing logo. He entitled the list, "The Reign of Lawlessness," and he asked, "Shall this barbarity continue?"²⁶ The list grew longer each week and soon acquired a national reputation. Once after a lynching in Mississippi, the Mobile, Ala., Adviser said, "The Planet of Richmond, Va., will have to chronicle another Negro lynching."²⁷

After some of the most notorious lynchings in Virginia, Mitchell wrote weekly editorials about them, reminding his readers that state and local officials still had done

nothing to those responsible. It was not unusual for this drumbeat to continue for six weeks or more. As Brundage noted, “The Planet between 1890 and 1900 was one of the most effective black voices of protest in the South.”²⁸

Mitchell did little original reporting on lynch incidents, instead copying the accounts that appeared in the white dailies. As Alexander described it, “He relied heavily on the ‘scissors-and-paste’ method of journalism, which meant clipping editorials and news stories from other newspapers and printing them verbatim in the Planet.”²⁹

His story on the lynching of William Shorter outside Winchester in 1893, for example, was a word-for-word reprint of the story that appeared two weeks earlier in The (Richmond) Times. Similarly, his account of Jesse Mitchell’s hanging two months later at Amelia Courthouse was reprinted without attribution from The Richmond Dispatch. And his front-page story of the lynching of Joseph McCoy in Alexandria in 1897 was lifted from The Washington Post.

Mitchell occasionally did receive reports on Virginia lynchings from correspondents or eyewitnesses. These accounts are instructive when compared to the accounts of the same incidents in white newspapers. Differences in interpretation and detail can be found to illustrate the belief of at least one anti-lynching crusader, Ida B. Wells, who said that even though black editors lacked the means to employ “agents and detectives” to get all the facts, they were “the only ones” who would print the truth about lynching.³⁰

One notable example of how the Planet provided an alternate account occurred in 1891, when a mob lynched three black miners in Clifton Forge. At the time, the incident

was the deadliest lynching in Virginia history, and Mitchell first reported it in a front-page story on Oct. 24, one week after it happened. His initial account was headed, “Virginia’s Shame! Three Colored Men Lynched--Two White Men Killed--A Terrible Affair”³¹ The story began by explaining how the miners came into town on a Saturday morning, drinking and looking for a good time. White men “interfered” with them, the story said, but the blacks would not “submit.” From there, the story is a reprint of the account that appeared earlier in The Richmond Dispatch.

Several white newspapers reported the incident, and their accounts were similar to the one that appeared in the local weekly, The Clifton Forge and Iron-Gate Review.³² The Review’s front-page story noted that the blacks came from the Big Hill mine in Botetourt County

They were girdled around with belts in red, in each of which was suspended a brace of deadly revolvers. . They paraded the streets with a demeanor of menace, both of speech and action, and inquired for whiskey

In Clifton Forge, the men had their photo taken at a local gallery, then walked the streets of the town before stopping at a saloon. There they flourished their pistols and declared they had come to take the town and would kill anyone who tried to stop them. Said the paper: “Their language was boisterous and threatening in the extreme and their actions of the most menacing and defiant character”

At this point, a man described by the paper as a “special officer” of the town police tried to arrest one of the men, but the others pulled their pistols on him. The officer

backed away, and the miners left the saloon and started down the tracks toward Iron Gate, "firing their pistols as they proceeded."

The sheriff formed a posse and went after the men, who by that point in the Review's narrative had become "rioters." When the posse caught up with the men, a gun battle started. One member of the posse was killed, and another was severely wounded. One of the miners was wounded and escaped into the mountains. His body was discovered six weeks later. The other miners, one with a broken leg, were taken to Clifton Forge and placed in the jail. According to the Review:

As the news spread through the town and surrounding country the citizens became greatly excited, and the subject of lynching was freely discussed, and though little was said openly, the belief became general that the prisoners would be swung that night. And so it was.

The mayor of Clifton Forge tried to stop the mob, but when someone in the crowd yelled, "All who favor hanging will say I," shouts of "T" "T" "T" went up from the group. The mob rushed the jail and broke down the door with a sledgehammer. They took the four miners to Slaughter House Hollow, just outside town, carrying one of them on a cart because of his broken leg. They freed one of them when they decided he was too young, but they hanged the others and then shot them. The paper concluded:

In less than an hour the streets of Clifton Forge were as quiet as a churchyard. The moon was shining almost as bright as day. It bathed in a silvery light the ghastly faces of the three misguided men who were left hanging on the tree.

The Planet offered a different version of the incident. On Oct. 31, one week after its initial account, it published another front-page story, this one written by a special correspondent who visited Clifton Forge. The headline was an immediate indication that the story would be different from those published in white papers. It said: "Those Virginia Murders. True Facts in the Case—A Texas White Man Responsible for the Outrage—A Fearful Account."³³

The coverage included individual drawings of the lynched men--Charles Miller, John Scott, and Robert Burton—perhaps copied from the photos taken on the day of their deaths. Each was dressed in a white shirt, tie, sport coat, and hat, hardly the image of a drunken rioter. A grisly picture of the lynching, taken the next morning, dominated the front page.

The Planet's story included new details and alternate explanations for some of the facts reported by the white papers. The Planet's account was so different, the reader might wonder if he was reading about the same incident.

For example, the paper said the men came to town quietly, and that the trouble started when a small colored boy approached them in a bar and asked Miller for some chestnuts.

At the same time he made an oath to Miller. He made a second oath, whereupon Miller told him if he didn't stop using such language towards him he would "burn him." A white man recently from Texas not an officer walked up to Miller and asked him what he said to the boy, and at the same time told him to consider himself under arrest.

Miller and the white man argued, and Miller and his friends left the bar, “stating they did not want to have any fuss.” They left town on the railroad tracks, while the white man went for the sheriff, the paper said. The sheriff, seeing that the miners were gone, said there was nothing he could do. The white man, however, started after the miners, “halloing and yelling,” to attract others to his chase. The two groups met outside town and a gunfight started. One of the white men was killed, and the miners were captured and taken back to Clifton Forge.

That night at 10 o’clock, a crowd of 300 to 400 gathered at the jail. It was “nearly every white citizen in the town,” the Planet said, including the butcher who sold meat to the colored people and a “leading white doctor,” neither of whom were disguised.

The mob seized two of the prisoners without trouble, put ropes around their necks and dragged them to the hanging tree, “by colored people’s doors.” They pulled them up, said the paper, then fired bullets into the bodies. “None of the bodes had less than 26 holes in it,” the paper said.

The mob then returned to the jail for the miner with the broken leg. The story continued:

They threw him in a cart, all caught hold of it and pulled it back to the place of execution, yelling like crazy men. He said to them: “Gentlemen, you are going to hang me. I only ask you to give me a moment to pray.”

They scoffed at it, jerked his body immediately up to the tree and riddled it with bullets.

The story also told about the miner Scott, that he was single, lived in Irwins, and had a brother in Longdale. He was a “good young man, a Christian gentleman,” the story said. Miller came from Big Island, the story said, but Burton was not mentioned.

This type of coverage was typical of Mitchell. He frequently tried to place his readers in the lynch victim’s place. The victims were human beings and citizens, he argued, with a right to life, and Constitutional guarantees of the presumption of innocence and a fair trial that were being ignored. As he did in the Clifton Forge story, Mitchell frequently refused to use the word “lynching.” To him these incidents were “murders.”

In addition to this alternate view of lynching, Mitchell provided his 5,000 subscribers with a forum to comment on it, to describe what they had seen, or to solicit funds for lynch victims’ families. In 1892, after the lynching of Gorge Towler in Pittsylvania County, he published a front-page letter from a reader named “G” who lived in the county. The letter-writer said that the lynching was not due to Towler’s assault of a white woman, as the daily papers had reported. Towler and the woman had been lovers for two years, and her father and brothers hanged him when they discovered them together.

As these examples illustrate, and as Brundage has noted, the Planet was an important voice for blacks:

It ensured that white news accounts, which routinely suffocated the truth of white savagery with racist platitudes, did not become the sole historical abrasion of the skin.³⁴

record of lynchings. In a real sense, Mitchell helped blacks to compile their own history of white repression.³⁴ Mitchell's coverage also demonstrated his "intuitive understanding" of which stories made good copy, according to Alexander. This understanding was apparent in 1893, when Mitchell adopted the cause of another lynch victim, Isaac Jenkins. Jenkins was accused of burning his former employer's barn and poisoning nine horses. He was beaten, shot, and lynched by a mob in Nansemond County, near Norfolk. What distinguished this "routine" hanging was that Jenkins survived. He later told Mitchell that he regained consciousness after the mob left and was able to untie the rope around his neck. He walked 13 miles to Norfolk and surrendered to the sheriff there, hoping for protection. Mitchell heard about the case and traveled by train from Richmond to Norfolk, where he interviewed and photographed Jenkins. In a front-page story, he described what he found: Jenkins was a pitiable object. On his head were nine wounds, several of them being dangerous gashes, apparently severe enough to fracture his skull. His neck and right side of his head just below the right ear were awful. At the last named place were two bullet holes, from which matter oozed. The revolver had been held so close to him when it was fired that the powder was driven in with the ball and scorched the flesh. The rope with which he was hanged had made a dark ridge, the evidence of an abrasion of the skin.³⁵

Mitchell became convinced of Jenkins' innocence and began an 11-month campaign to have him cleared. He accompanied Jenkins back to Nansemond County, where Jenkins was indicted and tried on the barn-burning charge. He also started a fund to help support Jenkins' wife and three children.

During this time, Mitchell wrote at least 13 editorials on the subject. To him, the incident went from being "a curious case" in his first editorial to "depravity run mad" in later editorials. Mitchell found it shocking that local authorities were more interested in convicting Jenkins of the arson charge than indicting his assailants. Mitchell repeatedly told Jenkins' "tormenters" to "do your worst" to him, for eventually there would be a day of reckoning. "At God's bar, you gentlemen must answer for your sins," he wrote. A jury finally acquitted Jenkins, and after his release from jail, Mitchell brought him to Richmond for a speaking tour. "This case furnishes a striking example of the helplessness of our people," Mitchell concluded.³⁶

Helplessness was but one of the emotions that Mitchell expressed in his anti-lynching editorials. He was also shocked, despairing, defiant, and most of all, angry. He was angry at other newspapers, angry at state and local officials, angry at Virginia whites, and sometimes even angry at fellow black people. Month after month, year after year, he railed against "lynch law," which was no law at all, he said. It was simply anarchy, and because of it, the South was worse than the Wild West, where at least you didn't expect the protections of the law. If lynching didn't stop, he said, there would be more Roanokes, where nine whites died in 1893, trying to lynch a black prisoner. His favorite line, which ended many of his lynch editorials was, "Lynch law must go."

Nearly every time a lynching occurred in Virginia, Mitchell meticulously offered arguments against it. White newspapers may have been split on the topic, with some for, some against, and some ambivalent about lynching. Not Mitchell. He was completely and consistently opposed. Many of his arguments were familiar, the same ones used by white papers. For example, lynching violated the rule of law, he said. It hurt not only the U.S. victim, but also the community. If white mobs were allowed to lynch blacks, they would soon turn to killing whites, he said.

And if lynching made every man insecure, it also impoverished every man by driving capital and prosperity from the door. In addition, lynching was an embarrassment to the locality and the state. How could the home of Washington, Jefferson, and Patrick Henry do this to its own citizens? he asked.

Mitchell also rebutted many of the arguments that lynch proponents used, especially their contention that lynching was an understandable reaction to the heinous offenses committed by blacks. One crime does not excuse a second, he replied. Also, the supposed heinousness of black crime was actually an argument against lynching. The more serious the offense, the more likely that the accused would be quickly tried and hanged—legally. Even black juries sentenced black defendants to death if they molested children, he said.

Lynching also was a violation of state and federal laws, he argued. It was premeditated murder, and when state and local officials refused to prosecute it, when they “passively submitted,” they became accessories to the crime, “as guilty as those who pulled the rope.” Their refusal to investigate lynching, to offer rewards for information,

or to dismiss indifferent jailers, encouraged other lynch mobs, he said. Lynching was like a sickness that moved across the state, infecting one community after another. The best way to stop it was swift, sure punishment, he said, for it was not the severity of punishment that checked crime, but the certainty of it.

Mitchell also invoked the teachings of the Bible and the protections of the U.S. Constitution to oppose lynching. Blacks were the “civil and political” equals of whites, he said. Those accused of crimes were assumed innocent and guaranteed the opportunity to confront their accusers, to examine the evidence against them, and to plead their cases before a jury of peers. They also were “human souls,” made in God’s image, with a sacred right to life, he said.

To illustrate the inhumanity of lynching, he often tried to imagine what the lynching must have been like, what the victim saw and felt. He did this after the death of Scott Bishop in Blackstone in 1891:

You hear the rush of feet, you can almost see in the gloom the look of excitement. You hear a mourn upon the air. You hear a prayer being offered. Curses have been turned into supplication. A man is begging, pleading for his life. Go closer and you will see a rope in the crowd. It reaches on and on, while one end, in the shape of a noose is around his neck. The spot is reached, the rope is thrown over a limb. The victim pleads; he is allowed one moment, then there is a steady slow pull, a pull altogether and all that remains of Scott Bishop is suspended between the

Suppose angry heavens and the earth. But death does not come. He struggles, he writhes, lynchd him or he tugs for life.

A gurgling sound escapes. He essays to reach his throat with his

hands but he cannot. His eyes start from their sockets. His tongue protrudes. My God! The sight is sickening!

Mitchell continually advised blacks to defend themselves, saying that in “exposed Southern localities a Winchester rifle should be in every home, and a man there with the courage to use it when the occasion requires.” To do so was in keeping with human and divine law, he said. It is far more honorable and better to die bravely like a lion than to cringe and cower and shake off this earthly coil like a cur.³⁸

Yet few blacks did. Troops were sent to Clifton Forge, Norfolk, and other towns after lynchings, when blacks were said to be upset. But blacks never offered any substantive protest. In Alexandria in 1899, blacks marched downtown when Benjamin Thomas was arrested, but they dispersed and could not prevent his lynching the next night. On learning this, Mitchell wrote: “We are pleased to notice the attitude of the colored men of Alexandria in organizing to prevent a lynching. Our only regret is that they did not go further and be more combative.”³⁹ Too often blacks were just “big talkers,” he said, and their talk was “preliminary to the killing of more colored people.”

At times Mitchell seemed to despair. Lynching was a powerful expression of white hatred, he argued, and there seemed little chance that whites would change. For those who doubted the existence of this hatred, he imagined a lynching with the racial roles reversed. Suppose a white man was accused of raping a black woman, he said.

Suppose angry blacks stormed the local jail, seized the prisoner from the sheriff and lynched him on the courthouse green. Would the white authorities pursue and prosecute the blacks? Of course they would, he said. Only blacks could be killed with impunity.

At times like this, Mitchell took comfort in his religion. This life might be hell, he said, but the next one would be better. His editorials seemed directed at a despairing people, and they often sounded like sermons:

God knows best and in his promises we trust, realizing that in the end there will be no racial discrimination, no struggles for party supremacy, no misrepresentations for the sake of gain, but with the passing away of our trials and troubles, with his own lily white hand, will wipe all the tears from our eyes.⁴⁰

The awakening would come someday, he believed, as if wishing would make it so. "Our rights will be respected. White men will see in our injury their own undoing. Lynch-law will go."⁴¹

Mitchell died at his home in Richmond in 1929, about a week after being carried sick from his newspaper office. He was 66. At his funeral at Fifth Street Baptist, he was hailed as a political leader, business man and warrior, constantly battling for human rights. He was buried near his mother.

⁴⁰ "Virginia's Shame," *The Richmond Planet* 24 Oct. 1891: 1.

⁴¹ "Swift vengeance," *The Clinton Free and Iron-Castle Review* 23 Oct. 1891: 1.

⁴² "Virginia's Murder," *The Richmond Planet* 31 Oct. 1891: 1.

⁴³ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "To Howl Loudly: John Mitchell and the Campaign Against Lynching," *Canadian Journal of American Studies*, 22 (Winter 1991) 323-42.

⁴⁴ "Lynched in Newmarket County," *The Richmond Planet* 3 Aug. 1893: 1.

⁴⁵ "Isaac Jenkins' Release," *The Richmond Planet* 2 June 1894: 2.

⁴⁶ Editorial, *The Richmond Planet* 28 Feb. 1891: 2.

⁴⁷ Editorial, *The Richmond Planet* 4 July 1893: 2.

⁴⁸ Editorial, *The Richmond Planet* 12 Aug. 1899: 4.

³ Editorial, The Richmond Planet 25 Oct. 1890: 2.
⁴ Editorial, The Richmond Planet 18 July 1897: 2.

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- ¹ John Stewart Bryan, Joseph Bryan, His Times, His Family, His Friends (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1935) 109
- ² Virginius Dabney, Pistols and Pointed Pens: The Dueling Editors of Old Virginia (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1987) 160.
- ³ Earle Dunford, Richmond Times-Dispatch: The Story of a Newspaper (Richmond: Cadmus Publishing, 1995) 24.
- ⁴ Editorial, The Richmond Dispatch 27 March 1891: 2.
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- ⁶ Editorials, The Richmond Dispatch 27 July 1898: 2; 18 June 1893:4.
- ⁷ Editorial, The Richmond Dispatch 3 Aug. 1893: 2.
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- ⁹ Editorial, The Richmond Planet 28 Feb. 1903: 4.
- ¹⁰ See Appendix 3.
- ¹¹ Editorial, The Alexandria Gazette 23 Apr. 1897: 2.
- ¹² Editorial, The Alexandria Gazette 9 Aug. 1899: 2.
- ¹³ Editorial, The Daily Star 23 Apr 1897: 3.
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- ²³ "A Richmond Weekly Holding its Own in a Black-and-White War," The Washington Post, 5 Sept. 1983: B1.
- ²⁴ Alexander 132.
- ²⁵ James Allen, et al., Without Sanctuary (New York: Twin Palms Publishers, 2000) 11.
- ²⁶ An example of the list can be found in the March 12, 1898 issue on page 3.
- ²⁷ Editorial, The Richmond Planet 28 June 1890: 4.
- ²⁸ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, Lynching in the New South (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993) 298.
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Chapter 5: Editorials in Black and White, 1920-1932

Douglas Southall Freeman

Given the conflicting attitudes toward lynching in the community in the 1920s—both a willingness to participate in a lynching and a strong opposition to the practice—it is surprising to see newspapers' reaction. The community may have been divided about lynching, but newspaper editors weren't. They were strongly opposed.

Walter White, executive director of the NAACP, made note of this change in his 1929 book on lynching, Rope and Faggot. Southern newspapers were "many leagues removed" from advocating that blacks enjoy full participation in Southern life, White wrote. Still, there had been "encouraging progress." He added:

Then, as compared with the vigorous and unqualified condemnation of lynch-law today, journals that dared oppose lynching were almost unknown. Today hardly any paper of the South, save in the most benighted and rural sections, will openly defend lynching for any cause whatsoever.⁴¹

Most editors realized that lynching was not about protecting Southern women but was instead a reaction to "deep-seated fears," said Thomas D. Clark. "They gradually realized that the courts had to be protected, and more editors campaigned for the orderly procedure of the law."⁴² This change was so pervasive that Jessie Ames, executive

director of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, wrote in 1942 that, "No other public-forming agency has done more to change the public's attitude toward lynching than has the Southern press."

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director of the Association of Southern Woman for the Prevention of Lynching, wrote in 1942 that, “No other public-forming agency has done more to change the public’s attitude toward lynching than has the Southern press.”³

This opposition could be seen in many papers in Virginia. Thirty -three lynching editorials published by white papers from 1920-1932 were located, and all strongly opposed lynching.⁴ The Times-Dispatch and News Leader were among the most outspoken.

The Times-Dispatch was then owned by Samuel Slover, who had purchased the paper in 1923.⁵ The Bryan family, then led by Joseph Bryan’s son, John Stewart Bryan, owned the rival News Leader. The Times-Dispatch’s editorials were not as graceful as those written by Douglas Southall Freeman of the News Leader, yet they were just as forceful.

The Times-Dispatch’s arguments were familiar ones. that lynching beckoned “a brutal and brutalizing defiance and disrespect for the law.” It was wrong, said the paper, to meet “lawlessness with lawlessness.” Also, lynching betrayed a lack of trust in the officers of the law and the courts of justice. After the hanging of Lem Johnson in 1921, the paper said, “There was no reason to believe that legal justice would not be speedy and adequate.” And it was embarrassing to the locality and the state. After the lynching of Raymond Bird in 1926, it said, “Wytheville stands indicted before the bar of public opinion, and Virginia, because of Wytheville, stands indicted before the country”⁶

The Times-Dispatch frequently called on local officials to use special grand juries to investigate lynchings and to bring to justice those responsible. When Gov. Harry F.

Byrd denounced the lynching of Leonard Woods in 1927, calling for “drastic punishment” for those responsible to make an example of those who “commit murder in mobs,” the Dispatch replied, “This is spoken as a real governor speaks.”

Byrd pushed an anti-lynching bill through the General Assembly the next year, with an endorsement from the Times-Dispatch. The new law probably would not stop the crime, the paper said, but it would put the state on record as being strongly opposed. “Virginia has been shamed all too often in the past by the crime of lynching,” it said.⁷

As forceful as the Times-Dispatch had become, it was still but a pale copy of its cross-town rival, the News Leader. Owned by the Bryan family, and edited by Douglas Southall Freeman, the News Leader was a passionate and articulate opponent of lynching.

Joseph Bryan acquired the afternoon News Leader in 1908, and for a while owned both of the major papers in Richmond. After his death that year, however, the Bryan family sold the morning Times-Dispatch to concentrate on the News Leader. It would reacquire the Times-Dispatch in 1940 and re-establish its monopoly position.⁸

Freeman was editor of the Times-Dispatch, then switched to the News Leader when the Bryans sold it. For 34 years, from 1915 until his retirement in 1949, he led the News Leader as its editor and part-owner. When he assumed the post of editor, he inherited the editorial policies of the Bryans, but continued them “without difficulty,” said John Lewis Gignilliat, his biographer, “because they substantially expressed his own thinking on public issues.”⁹

Freeman was born in Lynchburg, Va., in 1886, the son of Walker and Bettie Freeman. His father was a merchant and a Confederate veteran, and Freeman frequently

went with him to Confederate reunions. His love of the Civil War and military history inspired several notable works, including histories of the Confederacy and its generals, a biography of Washington, and a four-volume, Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Robert E. Lee.

Freeman was a big man with the rough hands of a farmer, yet in other ways he looked like the scholar that he was. Bald, with broad face and thin lips, he wore rimless glasses and favored dark suits and bow ties. "Doc," as his friends called him, married Inez Goddin at the beginning of his career with the News Leader, and they had three children.

James J. Kilpatrick, one of his colleagues, said that, "Unlike many newspapermen, he worked in an atmosphere of complete order—his day's mail in one trim stack, his editorial notes aligned like files on parade."¹⁰ He maintained a rigorous personal schedule, rising each day at 3:30 a.m. to begin his writing. He believed, as the sign above his desk said, "Time alone is irreplaceable, waste it not." As for his writing, his two rules were accuracy and brevity. "More news and less bull," he advised his reporters.

Freeman graduated from the University of Richmond and earned a Ph.D. in history from Johns Hopkins. He traveled the world, and for 39 years conducted a weekly current events class for the bankers, lawyers and businessmen who ran Richmond. He warned them to avoid provincialism, the thinking that "Southern problems are the only problems, and Southern life the only worthwhile life in America."¹¹ He collected paintings and enjoyed sailing.

Freeman was a Democrat, yet he considered himself politically liberal, frequently challenging the Democratic Party machine, or “invisible government,” as he described it. And like his father, he considered himself a friend of blacks. Walker Freeman said that he fought for his country, not for slavery, which he considered a curse. He regretted the defeat of the former, but not the abolition of the later. Douglas Freeman made sure that blacks received favorable mention in the pages of the News Leader. In 1926, in an internal memorandum, he recommended that the paper drop all reference to suspects’ race in the headlines for crime stories, and that it be mentioned in the stories only if it was an essential fact. John Stewart Bryan agreed.¹² In 1928, the News Leader began to capitalize the word “Negro,” long before it was in popular usage.

Yet, Freeman also was a member of the ruling elite, a product of Richmond and Virginia in the early 20th century. He supported segregation, opposed interracial marriage, and accepted the disenfranchisement of blacks that resulted from the 1902 state constitution.

But he did not tolerate lynching. As Gignilliat described it, he “loosed his considerable store of scorn” whenever a lynching occurred.¹³ Lynching was an expression of racial hatred, he said, and he was sad that there seemed to be more of that hatred during the 1920s than during Reconstruction, when Virginia’s “wounds were still bleeding.”

Freeman’s editorials featured many of the familiar arguments against lynching: that one incident encouraged the next, that it showed a contempt for the rule of law, that

it was not needed to protect women, and that it was humiliating for the state. "It was not Virginia's way to put on masks, to hide individual identity in a mob, to hang some wretch in the dark of the moon, and then slink away in blood guiltiness," he said.¹⁴

But Freeman carried his opposition further than most. He favored federal intervention, and he mocked the "right-thinking" people of Virginia, including politicians and other newspaper editors, who "deplored" lynching. "What is anyone doing besides deploring?" he asked. His own solutions to the "bloody parade" were often unique.¹⁵

He favored "big rewards" to bring the "murderers" to trial. He suggested that circuit court judges investigate the conduct of every "weak-kneed" jailer who allows a mob to seize his prisoner. "If there be the slightest evidence that the jailer was negligent in any respect, or failed to resist the crowd to the limit of his strength, he ought to be removed immediately," he wrote. He anticipated what the General Assembly would do in 1928, recommending that lynching be made a state offense, similar to insurrection, so that the governor could proceed against the mob, "without regard for county lines, local prejudice and official indifference." And he resurrected the idea of the "murdrum," an old English concept, which imposed a fine on any village that did not arrest and punish the person responsible for the murder of a stranger. The governor included a form of murdrum in his anti-lynching bill, but the Assembly rejected the idea.

Like Mitchell of the Planet, Freeman banged his editorial drum often. After the lynching of Raymond Bird in 1926, he wrote seven editorials about it, comparing the mob's action to the "hurling of Christians to the lions," and pleading with local and state

Constitution or the Biblical precept that all men are precious in the eyes of the Lord. An

officials to “give them something to make them shiver in the solemn stillness of their conscious-ridden nights.”

By 1930, Freeman could celebrate that fewer blacks were dying “by the torch, noose and gun,” both in Virginia and the South. He said he was not sure why it had occurred, but he offered several possibilities:

The machinery of law is beginning to function where there were no courts before; the industrialization of the South is beginning to teach its remote districts that the half-ton truck has supplanted the ox cart; that the law of the nation is higher than tribal law; and the strongest factor of all, communal conscience and communal pride are becoming aroused.¹⁶

Another reason was undoubtedly Freeman himself. His was the largest circulation paper in Richmond with more than 71,000 subscribers.¹⁷ He was confident to the powerful in the state and the nation, and his editorials were well read. In 1947, he suggested to Gen. Dwight Eisenhower that the World War II hero consider a political career. “I am such an admirer of Dr. Freeman that I am always disposed to conform instantly to any suggestion he makes,” Eisenhower said.¹⁸ Mitchell of the Planet also was an admirer. He once wrote that Freeman had “published many able editorials, sound to the core and in keeping with great right principles.”¹⁹

Freeman was fierce in his fight against lynching and radical in some of his suggestions. But he also was a traditionalist. His editorials never advocated political and social equality for blacks. He never invoked for them the protections of the U.S. Constitution or the Biblical precept that all men are precious in the eyes of the Lord. As

in the earlier period, those arguments would have to be made by black editors like Mitchell, and frequently, a new voice, that of P.B. Young.

Freeman died of a heart attack at his home in Richmond in 1953. He was 67. As The Washington Post noted, he was a man whose heart was in the past, but whose mind was in the present.

Freeman's strong opposition to lynching illustrates how far the white press in Virginia traveled on this topic. Black editors like Mitchell and Young were consistent over time. One or both of them carried the banner against lynching in their papers for 50 years, never wavering in the slightest. But the white press changed. It went from support and ambivalence at the turn of the century to strong opposition 20 years later.

P.B. Young

Mitchell acquired an ally in his fight against lynching in 1910, when a 26-year-old black man in Norfolk, Plummer Bernard Young, borrowed \$3,050 from a local bank to purchase the Norfolk Journal and Guide. With his purchase, Young began what would be a 52-year newspaper career. He was one of the most successful black publishers in American history, editor of one of the country's largest circulation weeklies, black or white.

Young was born in 1884 in Littleton, N.C., the son of Winfield and Sallie Young. His father was a former slave who started a newspaper for blacks, *The True Reformer*, when the local white newspaper refused to place Miss or Mrs. before the names of black

women. P.B Young worked for his father as a printer's devil, or apprentice, and later after graduation from Augustine College, he was a journeyman printer and teacher

In 1907, he moved with his young wife, Eleanor, and their new son to Norfolk, where he became printer and plant foreman of the *Lodge Journal and Guide*, a four-page tabloid with a circulation of 500, published by a local benevolent organization, the Knights of Gideon. One day when the editor did not show up, Young wrote an editorial and eventually took over that job as well.²⁰

After Young's purchase, the Guide, as readers called it, grew to become the most popular black weekly in the South. At its height during World War II, its fame reached nationwide and circulation topped 85,000.

Young was a tall, fair-skinned man. Associates described him as prim and proper, always dressed in a suit, complete with pocket watch and gold chain. Frequently, he had an unlighted cigar in his mouth. What hair he had was gray. His voice was soft, and he was not a forceful speaker. However, he was widely read, almost scholarly, and carried himself in a stately way.

In temperament, Young was seen as a cold man, unemotional and demanding of his employees. He once described his approach as being akin to the "iron pipe in a silk glove."²¹ In philosophy, Young was an egalitarian and bristled at the notion that blacks were somehow inferior. He saw whites as allies, and he could be critical of blacks, writing that because of their apathy, blacks must share in the responsibility for their plight.

He was a disciple of Booker T. Washington, the Southern educator and author. Like Washington, Young believed that blacks could best achieve political equality through thrift, industry, and education. He was an advocate for and an example of the American dream of progress through hard work and individual effort.

Young also was an idealist, an optimist, and a stoic. He believed in a higher moral order and in the basic goodness of people to do the right thing. The black struggle for equality of opportunity had an inevitability and rightness about it, he argued, and those who opposed it were doomed to failure.

He cautioned blacks to restrain their appetites, to temper their feelings of outrage, and to retreat to their inner selves for confidence, security, and justice. If blacks adopted American values and lived by them, he argued, they would be the most democratic and just people in society.

Young disagreed with Washington on the issue of political involvement. He believed that blacks' political impotence was one of the causes of their economic and social problems. It was crucial for blacks, he said, to vote. Politically, Young's admirers saw him as a shrewd pragmatist, an ambassador for the black community, and one of the few blacks that whites in Norfolk would consult when trying to measure black sentiment.

Critics, however, thought of him as naïve and limited. They dismissed him as a pawn of the white establishment and a defender of the status quo. Oliver W. Hill, chairman of the Virginia legal staff of the NAACP, saw Young as part of the "old school" of blacks who advocated a go-slow approach toward integration. "They were making progress slowly, and they didn't want to do anything to upset the apple cart. They

reasoned that integration meant a lot of Negro businesses would just go out of business,” Hill said.²²

Young himself voiced a political strategy similar to that advocated by Thurgood Marshall, former Supreme Court justice and lead counsel in the NAACP’s school desegregation suits. Marshall told blacks to “urge and ask cooperation—then swing the big stick if you don’t get it.”²³ Young said, “I am definitely opposed to the frontal attack. I believe in negotiation, arbitration, conciliation, and persuasion. If that does not work, then I resort to the courts.”²⁴

On the subject of lynching, Young insisted that state and local officials pursue lynchers. He applauded when one of the persons responsible for the 1920 lynching of Dave Hunt in Wise County was sentenced to two years in jail. It was the first time in Virginia history that a white man had been convicted for a lynching. Said Young: “Sheriff A.L. Corder and Commonwealth’s attorney McCorkle have been highly commended for their stand in the matter which withstood an ancient precedent.”²⁵

But the Hunt case was the exception, and Young repeatedly criticized those who did not uphold the law. His answer was federal intervention. Slavery was not allowed to ruin the nation, he said, and “mob law” should not be allowed to do it either. He wrote. “We are citizens of the United States first and then citizens of the State in which we reside. We must exhaust all of the guarantees in the Federal Constitution to secure proper and adequate protection for our lives and property.”²⁶

Young also turned his ire toward “the good white people” of Virginia. Why didn’t they clamor for lynching’s end? he asked. Why were their churches busy with missions to China, Japan, and Asia, while America wallowed in barbarism?

All of society is affected by the actions of part of society. This is inescapable. When strong and virile Christianity fails to rise up and strike down lawlessness, it protrudes its insidious fangs into the lifestream of civilization and pollutes the whole body of human society. No man escapes its contamination.²⁷

These were “evil days,” said Young in 1925 after the lynching of James Jordan in Waverly. The state of Georgia had recently burned a man alive, Young said, and Tennessee hanged a boy of 15, but these states had to “surrender the belt” to Virginia. “The Old Dominion hanged, perforated with shots, and then burned its man,” he said.

Few lynchings disturbed Young as much as the 1926 death of Raymond Bird in Wytheville. Young described the incident in a front-page story and then commented on it for three successive weeks. He reprinted the critical editorials from 11 white newspapers. “Virginia Press Flays Bird Lynchers; Wants Members Punished,” said the headline on the story

Young commended the state’s white press for “publishing, uncolored and uncompromisingly, the full details of this diabolical mess and then editorially denouncing it.” He added. “Lynching is anti-constitutional and anti-social. It concerns, and vitally so, the foundation of free government, the security of democracy and the perpetuity of the Republic. It must be blotted out.”²⁸

Notes

- ¹ Walter White, Rope & Faggot (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929) 174.
- ² Thomas D. Clark, The Southern Country Editor (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1948) 243.
- ³ Jesse Daniel Ames, The Changing Character of Lynching (Atlanta: Commission on Interracial Cooperation, 1942) 15.
- ⁴ See Appendix 5.
- ⁵ The National Cyclopedia of American Biography (New York: James T. White & Co., 1966) 232.
- ⁶ For examples of the Times-Dispatch's editorials on lynching, see 4 Aug. 1921, 23 March 1925, 17 Aug. 1926, 2 Dec. 1927, and 18 Feb. 1928.
- ⁷ Editorial, The Richmond Times-Dispatch 17 Jan. 1928: 8.
- ⁸ Lester J. Cappon, Virginia Newspapers, 1821-1935 (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1936) 180, 188.
- ⁹ John Lewis Gignilliat, "The Thought of Douglas Southall Freeman," diss., University of Wisconsin 1968, 214.
- ¹⁰ Editorial, The Richmond News Leader 14 June 1953: 8.
- ¹¹ Gignilliat 280.
- ¹² Gignilliat 320.
- ¹³ Gignilliat 324.
- ¹⁴ Editorial, The Richmond News Leader 16 Aug. 1926: 8.
- ¹⁵ For Freeman's editorials on lynching, see 21 Mar. 1925, 29 Mar. 1926, 19 Aug. 1926, 3 Sept. 1926, 4 Sept. 1926, 14 Oct. 1926, 2 Nov. 1926, and 20 July 1927.
- ¹⁶ Editorial, The Richmond News Leader 6 Jan. 1903: 8.
- ¹⁷ N.W. Ayer & Son's Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals (Philadelphia, 1930) 1022.
- ¹⁸ Editorial, The Richmond News Leader 14 June 1953: 8.
- ¹⁹ Editorial, The Richmond Planet 20 Nov. 1920: 2.
- ²⁰ Roland E. Wolsley, The Black Press, U.S.A. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1971) 73.
- ²¹ Muriel H. Rhodes, "Black Journalism in Virginia: Plummer Bernard Young Sr. and the Norfolk Journal and Guide, 1920-1930," diss., Carnegie-Mellon University, 1976, X.
- ²² Oliver W. Hill, interview, 3 Apr. 1999
- ²³ "Marshall Outlines Next Step—Win or Lose Suits," The Norfolk Journal and Guide 6 Feb. 1954: 28.
- ²⁴ Henry Lewis Suggs, P.B. Young, Newspaperman: Race, Politics, and Journalism in the New South, 1910-1962. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988) 62
- ²⁵ "Man will Serve Two Years for Lynching," The Norfolk Journal and Guide 6 Jan. 1923: 7
- ²⁶ Editorial, The Norfolk Journal and Guide 2 Apr. 1921: 4.
- ²⁷ Editorial, The Norfolk Journal and Guide 27 Oct. 1923: 4.
- ²⁸ Editorial, The Norfolk Journal and Guide 28 Aug. 1926: 1.

Chapter 6: Meeting Social Responsibility

Bryan and Mitchell

In some ways the four men featured in this study were model owners/editors. In addition to running prosperous papers, they were respected by their peers, active in their churches and communities, and successful in other ventures. John Mitchell, Jr. once won a seat on Richmond City Council. Joseph Bryan was director of a rail line and life insurance company. P.B. Young served for 23 years on the Board of Trustees at Howard University, and Douglas Southall Freeman commuted weekly to New York City to teach journalism at Columbia University.

Yet, by some measures, the four men were less successful. In their coverage of lynching, they were blind to some of the basic standards of responsible journalism, as voiced by their contemporaries, both inside and outside the newspaper industry.

As press historian Hazel Diken-Garcia has noted, people have expressed concern about newspaper conduct since the first ones were published. "Press criticism becomes the intersection between society and journalism," she said, "for it represents how people think about and discuss journalism." This discussion reveals reference points, she added, or values by which people judge a newspaper's performance.¹

The phrase “code of ethics” began to appear in press criticism in 1840, and the first book of press criticism was published in 1859. By the end of the Civil War, critics offered lists of journalistic “rules,” “maxims,” or “duties.” These lists summarized how journalists should collect information, how they should incorporate the information in their stories, and how the stories should be presented in the paper. Increasingly, critics insisted that freedom imposed responsibilities, that if a free press was a constitutional right, then a responsible press was worthy objective.

Early critics focused on invasions of privacy, sensationalism to heighten thrill at the expense of perspective and facts, and actions that jeopardized a defendant’s right to fair trial. Newspapers were part of the triad of power, along with the theater and pulpit, said O.B. Frothingham in 1884. Papers had to be trustworthy and impart complete information, he said. Others wanted the press to provide context to raw facts, to explain, to provide tendency, and foreshadow consequences.

Charles Holden, one of the first press critics, said that the press with its crime news pandered to low taste and deterred people from reading better material. Another 19th century writer described the press as a safeguard of liberty, an antidote against corruption, the brain of the community, an informer and educator, and an aid to the economic system. Another said the press helped form public opinion, filling the void left when legislative bodies no longer held debates.

Melville Stone, editor of the Chicago Daily News, was the first to have an ethical code for his paper in the 1870s. He prohibited sensational or exaggerated coverage, anything a “worthy young gentlewoman could not read aloud in mixed company.” He

wanted his reporters to guard the privacy of a person's domestic affairs, and he insisted on accuracy.

In his code of ethics, Charles A. Dana, editor of the New York Sun, warned against attacks on the defenseless, "either by argument, by invective or by ridicule." And in 1882, George T. Rider, said that dailies were rarely fit for home reading without expurgation. "They were propagandist of all manner of indecency, unnamable outrages and crimes of the most shameful sort that breed from the very telling," he said. A newspaper had no immunity from the general laws of modesty and purity, he wrote.

Fred S. Siebert in Four Theories of the Press summarized these various beliefs under a "libertarian theory" of the press. This theory held that the press had two main responsibilities—a duty to check on government, and a duty to expose bias and discover truth by sponsoring a marketplace of ideas.² Dicken-Garcia offered a third, often-proclaimed rule: a duty to avoid publishing material that violated good taste.

If the lynching coverage of Bryan and Mitchell, the 19th century publishers in this study, is judged against these three general duties, the results are mixed. Bryan and his Times failed to meet at least two of them. Mitchell's Planet was more vigorous in its criticism of government and its denunciation of bias, but it failed to offer readers a mix of opinions on lynching.

Then and now, the press was expected to be a check on government, to point out when governmental authorities abused or exceeded their power. With lynching, however, the 19th century press in Virginia faced a different problem. It was confronted with an indifferent government, one that ignored murder and refused to enforce the law. Bryan's

Times, like most white-owned papers, tolerated this indifference. The Times was critical of lynching, but its criticism was measured. It feared lynching as an affront to the rule of law and as an embarrassment to Virginia. Lynching was usually unnecessary, it also advised, since the courts could be counted on to execute serious offenders. Yet, the paper never investigated lynch incidents or identified those responsible. It never called upon state and local officials to prosecute mob members, nor did it call upon sheriffs to defend their prisoners or face dismissal.

Mitchell of the Planet, on the other hand, did criticize indifferent government officials. He mentioned them by name in his editorials and demanded that they do their duty. He praised those who did, such as Gov Charles T. O'Ferrall, and he often wrote of officials in other states who took strong stands against the mobs.

Neither the Planet nor The Times offered their readers a marketplace for the exchange of ideas. The libertarian theory held that such an open competition among diverse ideas was the best way for the truth to emerge. Read together, the two papers did present a rich mix of thought on lynching, but individually they had but one voice. The Times represented the establishment, and the views of the black minority were seldom represented in its pages. The Planet was the voice of protest, and its black readers usually learned of white views only through Mitchell's filter.

Both the Planet and The Times were graphic in their coverage of lynching, but Mitchell and others argued that these horrible details were necessary for change to occur. Still, some of the criticism leveled against the press for its coverage of crime and gossip could be applied to its coverage of lynching. The readers' thirst for the terrible was an

acquired taste, critics argued, and detailed coverage made it too familiar. It also created the impression that evil was more widespread than it really was, they argued. Some of the coverage also could be seen as sympathetic toward crime and an inspiration for imitators.

Restrained coverage was important, editors answered, but a newspaper can't ignore or censor disreputable things. Faithful reporting will give the public needed information, they said, and the public is then free to read it if they want. Besides, said editor Charles A. Dana, a paper should not be too proud to report whatever Divine Providence has permitted to occur.

Freeman and Young

The arrival of the 20th century brought continued criticism of the press. These critics contended that the press wielded enormous power for its own ends, that it pushed its own opinions at the expense of others, that it resisted change, and that it was controlled by one class, the business class. And these criticisms, according to Siebert, brought a gradual shift away from the libertarian theory toward another theory of the press, the social responsibility theory.³ Like the libertarian view, the social responsibility theory held that the press had a responsibility that flowed from its freedom. But it also recognized a more complex world, and it charged the public and other agencies in society with ensuring that the essential functions of the press were carried out.

The American Society of Newspaper Editors responded to these pressures with the industry's first formal code of ethics. Written in 1923, this code called on newspapers to be sincere, truthful, impartial, decent and respectful of an individual's privacy. The Society of Professional Journalists and the Sigma Delta Chi professional fraternity

followed with similar codes in 1926. Two decades later, a commission headed by Robert Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago, expanded on these themes by insisting on a “truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day’s events in a context which gives them meaning,” and on “a representative picture of the constituent groups in society,” including an accurate portrayal of minorities.⁴

Siebert summarized the standards suggested by critics and those adopted by the industry into six basic themes. They were:

1. To serve democracy by providing information, discussion, and debate on public affairs.
2. To enlighten the public to make it capable of self-government.
3. To safeguard the rights of the individual by being a watchdog on government.
4. To serve the economic system by bringing buyers and sellers together.
5. To entertain.
6. To be self-sufficient and free of any controlling interest.⁵

In their coverage of lynching, Freeman and Young, the 20th century editors in this study, did meet contemporary journalism standards. Both men prodded government to enforce the law and bring indictments against lynchers. They supported officials when they did bring charges and celebrated the rare convictions. Once, when a person was indicted for complicity in the lynching of Raymond Bird in Wythe County in 1926, a jury acquitted him. Yet Freeman recommended that the investigation continue. This and every

other lynching was “unfinished business,” he said, until the “guilty murderers are put in the penitentiary”⁶

Both men also provided detailed, and at times graphic, coverage of lynch events. In 1926, Young printed a crude, five-panel drawing after the Bird lynching. The drawing was entitled “How a Virginia Mob Did a Thorough Lynching Job.” It showed how the mob entered the jail and fired shots into Bird’s head, how it beat him, dragged his corpse behind a car for nine miles, hanged him from a tree, and fired more shots at him. The final panel showed the commonwealth’s attorney at his desk, refusing the governor’s offer of aid. “No governor,” he says, “we need no assistance—everything is quiet.”⁷

Freeman and Young also warned against the consequences of lynching, and suggested ways that it might be stopped. Their coverage was complete, save for dissent. By the 1920s in Virginia, lynching had few defenders among government officials, business leaders and the press. Yet lynchings continued, almost one a year from 1920 through 1927, with large crowds participating nearly every time, and little in the way of consequences for those responsible. Freeman and Young offered no insight into this thinking. To both men, mob members were beneath contempt.

Freeman also failed to paint a complete portrait of minority aspirations. Young, like Mitchell before him, claimed equal status with whites and demanded the protections of the law as a right. Freeman did not go that far. Like Bryan before him, he saw lynching only in selfish terms, as an insult to Virginia’s proud traditions.

Notes

¹ Hazel Dicken-Garcia, Journalistic Standards in Nineteenth Century America (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1986) 6

² Fred S. Siebert, Four Theories of the Press (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1956) 7

³ Siebert 73.

⁴ Siebert 87

⁵ Siebert 74.

⁶ Editorial, Richmond News Leader, 20 July 1927 8.

⁷ "Virginia Press Flays Bird Lynchers, Wants Members Punished," Norfolk Journal and Guide, 28 Aug. 1926: 7

Readers of the white-owned press at the turn of the century learned that they needn't worry about the anarchy in their midst. The black lynch victims were guilty as charged, the stories said, and the dangerous "brute" got what he deserved.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Further Research

A historical examination of lynching coverage by the print press is revealing on more than one level. First, it shows exactly how Virginia's newspapers did their job during one of the most violent periods in the nation's history. It shows how papers represented lynching—the importance they gave it, the detail offered, the words, headlines and story structures used, and the opinions expressed. And, at least in the years before the turn of the century, the view is not a pleasant one.

Stories told of mob attacks on jails or the seizure of prisoners from indifferent sheriffs, and the selection of public lynch sites. Readers learned of advance planning by the mob, of local officials who ignored the obvious, and of murder carried out without consequence to those involved. Some of these spectacles were late-night affairs, engineered by men in masks, but others were done in broad daylight on the courthouse green.

Stories told of the hangings themselves, followed by the shooting and burning of the victims, and the taking of body parts as souvenirs. Frequently the stories described how the mob dispersed quietly, leaving the body for public display. And all of this was usually told in horrific detail.

Readers of the white-owned press at the turn of the century learned that they needn't worry about the anarchy in their midst. The black lynch victims were guilty as charged, the stories said, and the dangerous "brute" got what he deserved.

In the editorial columns, readers frequently found excuses for what was depicted on the news pages. The mob's fury was understandable, editors argued, given the inefficiencies of the criminal-justice system and the enormity of the offense. When editors criticized the barbarity, it was because it reflected poorly on the community. Still, they argued, people outside the region didn't live with blacks and didn't understand their true nature.

Virginia newspapers documented the full horror of lynching, and in the process, created some of the best and worst examples of the craft. As Richard M. Perloff, the author of one of the few studies on newspapers and lynching, notes, "There has been virtually no research examining the ways in which the mainstream American press covered the lynch epidemic that swept the South during the late 19th and early 20th centuries."¹ As a result, Perloff said, the student who reads many of the published histories of American journalism has no idea that Southern papers provided vicious coverage of lynchings and wrote editorials that defended it.²

The history texts also fail to tell of heroic editors, both black and white, who challenged this mania, men like John Mitchell, Jr., P.B. Young, and Bruce Crawford. Mitchell and Young wrote about the lawlessness almost weekly, saving their sharpest words for state and local officials in Virginia, whose indifference toward lynching, they said, made them accessories to a crime.

Mitchell and Young tried to personalize the horror with photos and drawings of the victims. The victims were human beings and citizens, they argued. Where were their constitutional guarantees of the presumption of innocence and a fair trial? Were these mob members not Christians? they asked.

Crawford, the editor of Crawford's Weekly in Norton, criticized the lynching of Leonard Woods in nearby Pound Gap in 1927 and started a fund with \$50 for the prosecution and conviction of those responsible. Readers were furious and started a petition drive to cancel subscriptions. The next week, Crawford wrote an even stronger editorial. The lynching "gives lie to our claims to Christian enlightenment," he said. "Our fund stands."³

On another level, newspaper coverage of lynching serves as a window on the language, thought, and customs of Virginia. White-owned newspapers, sometimes without intending it, articulated the harsh reality of race relations in Virginia, while black newspapers did likewise, and also pointed to a better way. In the midst of ever-worsening race relations, while blacks were subjected to systematic, statewide campaigns of segregation, discrimination, and disenfranchisement, white papers defended lynching. By 1930, however, they and the state had changed. At the turn of the century, Mitchell accused the Richmond dailies of "Negrophobia." Twenty years later, he was praising their courage and wisdom.

But still, there were subtle differences. The owners and operators of the white papers condemned lynching for selfish reasons. it reflected badly on the community, discouraged investment in the state and flouted the rule of law. Rarely did they express

any concern for the victims. In the 1920s, black people were still anonymous and apparently undeserving of society's protections, just as they were 40 years earlier. Only Mitchell and Young continued to stress the equality of rights and the sanctity of life.

The mainstream publications helped to uphold the social order and to mold public opinion. Their early support helped perpetuate the practice of lynching, and their eventual criticism helped end it. The black papers served as a source of vital information for their readers, and, for years, as the lone voice of protest. These times helped inspire the civil rights protests of the 1960s, and served as an early chapter in America's continuing struggle for racial equality.

This study has focused on the press coverage of lynching by select white-owned and black-owned papers in Virginia during two time periods. Further research could be done with more papers, or with papers from other states and different time periods. Other crusading editors, such as Louis I. Jaffe in Norfolk and Maggie Walker in Richmond, also merit further study. As Brundage has pointed out, the relationship between newspapers and lynching is long-standing but little-studied. "No careful or thorough comparative study of white and black accounts exists, as far as I know," he said.⁴

Notes

¹ Richard M. Perloff, "The Press and Lynchings of African Americans," Journal of Black Studies 30 (2000): 315

² History texts from many different eras make no mention of lynching. See James M. Lee's History of American Journalism, published in 1923, Frank L. Mott's American Journalism: A History of the News in the U.S., published in 1950; or Mitchell Stephens' A History of the News, from 1988.

³ "Mob Sympathizers Criticize Editor Who Flayed Lynching," Norfolk Journal and Guide, 24 Dec. 1927 1

⁴ W Fitzhugh Brundage, letter, 7 Sept. 2001

Abingdon Weekly Virginian

Charlotte Gazette

Clifton Forge Iron Gate Review

Crawford's Weekly

(Fredericksburg) Daily Star

(Fredericksburg) Free Lance

Lynchburg Daily News

New York Times

Norfolk Journal and Guide

Norfolk Landmark

Norfolk Virginian

Petersburg Index-Appeal

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Richmond Dispatch

Richmond Times

Roanoke Times

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Appendices

Appendix 2

Waite paper

AG-Alexandria Gazette

CG-Charlotte Gazette

FDS-(Fredericksburg) Daily Star

FPL-(Fredericksburg) Free Lance

LDN-Lynchburg Daily News

NL-Norfolk Landmark

NV-Norfolk Virginian

NYT-New York Times

PIA-Petersburg Index-Appeal

RD-Richmond Dispatch

RoT-Roanoke Times

RT-Richmond Times

WD-Wytheville Dispatch

WP-Washington Post

RE-Story contains racial epithet

n-no

y=yes

Guilt-Story assumes lynch victim's guilt

n-no

y=yes

conv.-victim convicted prior to lynching

Ident-Story reports accuser identified lynch victim

n-no

y=yes

na-not applicable

	A	B	C	D	E
1			Appendix †		
2			Lynching articles in Virginia newspapers		
3			1880-1932		
4					
5	Date	Name	Place	White paper	Black paper
6	1/19/1880	Arthur Jordan	Fauquier	x	
7	2/18/1880	Page-Wallace	Loudoun	x	
8	4/13/1880	James Black	Dinwiddie	xxx	
9	12/6/1881	William Allen	Warwick	x	
10	2/4/1884	Peter Bland	King William	x	
11	8/2/1884	John Fitzhugh	Rappahannock		
12	2/12/1885	Alvy Jackson	Bland	x	
13	11/15/1885	Noah Cherry	Princess Anne	xxx	
14	11/30/1885	Henry Mason	Campbell	x	
15	2/6/1886	John Wilson	Patrick	x	
16	4/19/1886	Kellis Moorman	Henry	x	
17	7/26/1887	Reuben Cole	Surry	x	
18	7/11/1888	William Henry Smith	Wythe	x	
19	7/27/1888	Bruce Younger	Halifax	x	
20	9/2/1888	Archie Cook	Prince Edward		
21	3/14/1889	Magruder Fletcher	Accomack	xx	
22	4/2/1889	Martin Rollins	Russell	x	
23	4/23/1889	Scott Bailey	Halifax		
24	6/8/1889	John Forbes	Nottoway	xxx	
25	9/14/1889	Samuel Garner	Tazewell		
26	11/8/1889	Owen Anderson	Loudoun		
27	11/23/1889	Robert Bland	Prince George	xxx	
28	12/2/1890	Thaddeus Fowkes	Charlotte	xxx	x
29	2/23/1891	Scott Bishop	Nottoway	xx	x
30	4/6/1891	Tom Pannell	Pittsylvania		
31	10/17/1891	Charles Miller	Alleghany	xxxx	x
32	10/17/1891	John Scott	Alleghany	xxxx	x
33	10/17/1891	Robert Burton	Alleghany	xxxx	x
34	10/17/1891	Unknown	Alleghany		x
35	1/11/1892	George Towler	Pittsylvania		x
36	2/12/1892	William Lavender	Roanoke	xx	x
37	4/7/1892	Issac Brandon	Charles City	x	x
38	7/6/1892	Joe William Anderson	Louisa	x	x
39	10/17/1892	Phillip Young	Scottsville		x
40	2/1/1893	Jerry Brown	Graham	xxx	x
41	2/1/1893	Spencer Branch	Graham	xxx	x
42	2/1/1893	John Johnson	Graham	xxx	x
43	2/1/1893	Sam Ellerson	Graham	xxx	x
44	2/1/1893	Sam Blow	Graham	xx	x
45	2/26/1893	Abner Anthony	Bath	x	
46	4/16/1893	Arthur Morgan	Tazewell		
47	5/11/1893	George Halsey	Smythe	xx	
48	6/13/1893	William Shorter	Frederick	x	
49	9/15/1893	Jesse Mitchell	Amelia	x	x
50	9/20/1893	Thomas Smith	Roanoke	xx	x
51	5/17/1894	Samuel Wood	Scott		
52	4/23/1897	Joseph McCoy	Alexandria	xxx	
53	7/12/1898	John Henry James	Albemarle	x	

	A	B	C	D	E
54	8/8/1899	Benjamin Thomas	Alexandria	xxxx	x
55	3/24/00	Walter Cotton	Emporia	xx	x
56	9/14/00	Pinkney Murphy	Nelson		x
57	12/7/00	Dan Long	Wythe	x	
58	3/19/01	Herbert Wailer	Halifax		
59	7/1/01	Joseph Walton	Lawrenceville	x	x
60	4/5/02	James Carter	Amherst	x	x
61	6/5/02	Wiley Gwynn	Wise		
62	7/31/02	Charles Craven	Loudoun	xxx	x
63	2/27/05	George Henderson	Luray	x	
64	8/4/04	Andrew Dudley	Afton	xxx	x
65	10/24/04	George Blount	Berkley	xx	x
66	11/30/10	Mack Neal	Warren	x	
67	8/16/17	William Page	Heathsville	x	xx
68	8/17/17	Walter Clark	Pittsylvania		
69	11/27/18	Allie Thompson	Culpeper	xx	
70	11/14/20	Dave Hunt	Wise	x	
71	8/3/21	Lem Johnson	Brunswick	x	x
72	10/12/23	Horace Carter	King William	xx	xx
73	3/20/25	James Jordan	Waverly	xx	xx
74	8/15/26	Raymond Bird	Wyttheville	xxx	x
75	11/30/27	Leonard Woods	Wise	xxx	xx
76	9/15/32	Shadrack Thompson	Fauquier	xxxx	x
77					
78	X = A story or set of stories about the lynching in an individual newspaper.				

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
2	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
3	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
4	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
5	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
6	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
7	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
8	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
9	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
10	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
11	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
12	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
13	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
14	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
15	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
16	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
17	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
18	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
19	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
20	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
21	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
22	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
23	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
24	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
25	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
26	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
27	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
28	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
29	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
30	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
31	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
32	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
33	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
34	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
35	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
36	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				
37	1/1/1838	Henry	VA				

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
1						Appendix 2						
2			Virginia lynchings as described in white newspapers									
3						1880-1900						
4												
5												
6	Date	Name	Wh. paper	RE	Guilt	Ident.	Conf. In.	Pg. 1	Mask	Vio.	Mob. #	
7	1/20/1880	Arthur Jordan	NYT	n	n	n	n	3	n	n	75	
8	2/18/1880	Page Wallace	NYT	y	y	y	n	10.5	y	n	200	
9	4/14/1880	James Black	RD	y	y	y	y	14.25	n	n	60	
10	4/14/1880		PIA	y	y	y	y	23.25	n	n	60	
11	4/14/1880		NYT	n	y	n	unk.	6	n	y	75	
12	12/7/1881	William Allen	NYT	n	y	y	n	8.5	y	y	unk.	
13	2/6/1884	Peter Bland	RD	n	conv.	na	conv.	16	n	unk.	n	15
14	2/12/1885	Alvy Jackson	WD	n	n	unk.	unk.	9	y	n	20	
15	11/15/1885	Noah Chery	NV	y	y	na	na	21	y	na	na	
16	11/17/1885		NV	n	y	na	y	19.5	y	y	150	
17	11/15/1885		NL	y	y	na	na	9	na	na	na	
18	11/17/1885		NL	y	y	na	y	20	y	y	200	
19	11/17/1885		NYT	n	y	na	y	7.75	y	unk.	y	150
20	12/11/1885	Henry Mason	LDN	y	y	na	n	25.25	n	y	48	
21	2/9/1886	John Wilson	RD	n	y	na	y	6.25	y	unk.	unk.	
22	4/20/1886	Kellis Moorhman	RD	n	y	na	y	9	n	unk.	unk.	
23	7/28/1887	Reuben Cole	NV	y	y	n	unk.	5.5	y	y	unk.	
24	7/13/1888	William Sfrith	WD	y	y	n	y	12.5	n	n	25	
25	7/26/1888	Bruce Youhger	RD	n	y	y	y	19.5	n	n	unk.	
26	3/15/1889	Magruder Fietbher	NV	y	y	n	unk.	5.25	y	n	75	
27	3/15/1889		RT	y	y	n	unk.	13.25	y	n	70	
28	6/9/1889	Johh Forbes	RT	n	y	n	deny	9	y	n	35	
29	6/9/1889		RD	n	y	y	unk.	10	n	y	50	
30	6/10/1889		PIA	y	y	n	deny	8.5	y	n	35	
31	11/24/1889	Robert Bland	RD	y	y	n	n	12.75	n	y	25	
32	11/24/1889		RT	y	y	n	n	15	y	y	40	
33	11/24/1889		NYT	y	y	n	n	6.5	n	y	40	
34	11/25/1889		PIA	y	y	n	n	19.5	y	y	40	
35	12/11/1890	Thaddeus Fowlkes	CG	n	y	na	n	13	n	n	unk.	
36	12/3/1890		RD	n	y	na	n	9.25	n	unk.	n	unk.
37	12/3/1890		RT	n	y	na	n	1.5	y	unk.	unk.	unk.

Appendix 3
 Editorial on lynching in white newspapers
 1880-1990
 Date Paper Support Article Critical

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
38	2/24/1891	RD	n	y	na	deny	11y	unk.	unk.	y	100
39	2/24/1891	RT	n	y	na	y	8.5 n	unk.	unk.	unk.	unk.
40	10/18/1891	RT	y	y	na	unk.	18.75 y	unk.	unk.	unk.	400
41	10/20/1891	RD	y	y	na	unk.	43.5 n	n	y	y	unk.
42	10/20/1891	RT	y	y	na	y	31 n	unk.	unk.	unk.	300
43	10/19/1891	NYT	n	n	na	unk.	3 n	unk.	unk.	unk.	unk.
44	2/12/1892	RoT	y	y	y	y	66 y	unk.	unk.	y	300
45	2/13/1892	RoT	y	y	n	y	31 y	y	y	y	unk.
46	2/13/1892	RT	n	y	n	y	10 n	unk.	unk.	y	100
47	4/9/1892	RD	y	y	n	deny	6 n	y	y	y	75
48	2/2/1893	RD	n	y	n	n	7 n	n	n	n	100
49	2/3/1893	RD	n	y	n	y	6 y	n	n	n	unk.
50	2/2/1893	RT	n	y	n	y	9.5 y	unk.	unk.	unk.	200
51	2/3/1893	RT	n	n	n	n	8 n	unk.	unk.	unk.	unk.
52	2/2/1893	RoT	n	y	n	n	6.5 y	n	unk.	unk.	200
53	2/3/1893	RoT	y	y	n	y	28 y	n	n	n	300
54	2/28/1893	RT	y	y	y	n	7 n	unk.	unk.	n	unk.
55	5/13/1893	RT	y	y	y	y	24 y	unk.	unk.	y	400
56	6/14/1893	RT	n	y	n	n	9 y	n	y	y	unk.
57	6/14/1893	NYT	n	y	n	n	6 n	unk.	unk.	y	unk.
58	9/16/1893	RD	n	y	n	deny	19 y	unk.	unk.	y	33
59	9/21/1893	RoT	n	y	n	n	44 y	n	y	y	4000
60	9/22/1893	RoT	y	y	y	n	94 y	n	y	y	na
61	9/21/1893	RT	y	y	y	deny	48 y	n	y	y	200
62	9/21/1893	RT	y	y	n	n	63 y	n	y	y	unk.
63	4/23/1897	WP	y	y	na	n	29 y	n	y	y	500
64	4/28/1897	FDS	n	y	na	y	10 n	n	n	y	500
65	4/23/1897	RT	n	y	na	y	11 y	n	y	y	500
66	4/23/1897	AG	y	y	na	y	46 n	y	y	y	500
67	7/13/1898	RT	n	y	y	y	31 y	y	n	n	200
68	8/9/1899	WP	n	y	na	n	64 y	n	y	y	2000
69	8/10/1899	FFL	n	y	na	n	12 n	n	n	y	200
70	8/9/1899	RT	n	y	y	n	29 y	n	n	y	600
71	8/9/1899	AG	n	n	na	n	35 n	n	n	y	500

Appendix 3				
Editorials on lynching in white newspapers				
1880-1900				
Date	Paper	Support	Ambiv.	Critical
4/15/1885	NL	X		
4/11/1889	AWV		X	
12/1/1890	CG			X
10/23/1891	CFIGR		X	
11/23/1893	RD	X		
9/12/1894	RD	X		
9/7/1897	RT			X
12/4/1890	RT			X
10/22/1891	VV			X
2/12/1892	RoT	X		
5/15/1892	RD	X		
2/3/1893	RoT	X		
5/4/1893	WS	X		
5/10/1893	RT			X
5/14/1893	RD	X		
9/22/1893	RoT		X	
9/22/1893	RT			X
8/3/1893	RD	X		
9/12/1894	RD	X		
4/23/1897	AG	X		
4/23/1897	DS	X		
4/24/1897	AG	X		
4/24/1897	RT			X
4/26/1897	AG	X		
4/27/1897	AG	X		
9/13/1898	RT			X
8/9/1899	AG	X		
8/10/1899	WP		X	
8/10/1899	AG	X		
8/11/1899	AG	X		

		Appendix 4				Virginia lynching stories in white newspapers				1920-1932			
Date	Name	Wh. Paper	RE	Guilt	Conf.	In.	Page 1	Mask	Vio.	Mob #			
11/15/20	Dave Hunt	WP	n	y	n	8.5	n	unk.	y	75			
8/4/21	Lem Johnson	RTD	n	n	y	26	y	y	n	2,000			
10/13/23	Horace Carter	RNL	n	n	unk.	15	y	unk.	n	10			
3/21/25	James Jordan	RTD	n	n	unk.	14	y	unk.	n	unk.			
8/16/26	Raymond Bird	RTD	n	n	y	16	y	unk.	y	500			
8/16/26		RNL	n	n	unk.	21.5	y	y	y	50			
8/16/26		ROWN	n	n	unk.	13.5	y	y	y	unk.			
12/1/27	Leonard Woods	RTD	n	n	unk.	21	y	y	y	50			
11/30/27		RNL	n	n	unk.	21	y	unk.	y	300			
9/16/32	Shadrack Thompson	FLS	n	n	n/a	22.5	y	unk.	y	300			
9/16/32		RNL	n	n	n/a	11	n	n/a	n/a	n/a			
9/17/32		RTD	n	n	n/a	11	y	n/a	n/a	n/a			
9/22/32		CSE	n	n	n/a	5.5	n	n/a	n/a	n/a			
			n	n	n/a	12	n	n/a	n/a	n/a			

Appendix 5

Editorials on lynching in white papers

1920-32				
Date	Paper	Support	Ambiv.	Critical
8/4/21	RTD			X
3/21/25	RNL			X
3/23/25	RTD			X
1/6/26	RNL			X
3/29/26	RNL			X
8/16/26	RNL			X
8/16/26	RoWN			X
8/17/26	RTD			X
8/18/26	RNL			X
9/3/26	RNL			X
9/4/26	RNL			X
10/14/26	RNL			X
11/2/26	RNL			X
7/20/27	RNL			X
12/1/27	RNL			X
12/2/27	RTD			X
12/3/27	CW			X
12/17/27	CW			X
12/20/27	RNL			X
2/18/28	RTD			X
2/18/28	RNL			X
1/6/30	RNL			X
8/20/30	RNL			X
9/22/30	RNL			X
1/5/31	RNL			X
1/20/31	RNL			X
9/20/32	RNL			X
10/7/32	RNL			X

Guilt-Story accuses lynch victim's guilt

n-no

y-yes

conv-victim convicted prior to lynching

Ident-Story reports accused identified lynch victim

n-no

y-yes

na-not applicable

Abbreviations and Definitions

Appendix 2

White paper

AG-Alexandria Gazette

CG-Charlotte Gazette

FDS-(Fredericksburg) Daily Star

FFL-(Fredericksburg) Free Lance

LDN-Lynchburg Daily News

NL-Norfolk Landmark

NV-Norfolk Virginian

NYT-New York Times

PIA-Petersburg Index-Appeal

RD-Richmond Dispatch

RoT-Roanoke Times

RT-Richmond Times

WD-Wytheville Dispatch

WP-Washington Post

RE-Story contains racial epithet

n-no

y-yes

Guilt-Story assumes lynch victim's guilt

n-no

y-yes

conv -victim convicted prior to lynching

Indent-Story reports accuser indentified lynch victim

n-no

y-yes

na-not applicable

Conf.-Story reports victim's confession

n-no

y-yes

unk.-no mention in the story

deny-victim denied his guilt

In.-Length of story in column inches**Pg.1-Story begins on page 1**

n-no

y-yes

Mask-Story reports lynch mob wore masks

n-no

y-yes

na-not applicable

unk.-no mention in the story

Vio.-Story reports lynch mob assaulted jailer or damaged jail

n-no

y-yes

na-not applicable

unk.-no mention in story

Mob #-Size of lynch mob as reported in story

na-not applicable

unk.-no mention in story

Appendix 3**Paper**

AG-Alexandria Gazette

AWV-Abingdon Weekly Virginian

CG-Charlotte Gazette

CFIGR-Clifton Forge Iron Gate Review

FDS-(Fredericksburg) Daily Star

NL-Norfolk Landmark

RD-Richmond Dispatch

RoT-Roanoke Times
RT-Richmond Times
VV-Valley Virginian
WP-Washington Post
WS-Waynesboro Sentinal

Support

Editorial voices support for lynching with no reservations.

Ambiv.

Editorial is ambivalent about lynching, both critical and supportive. Lists reasons why it is a bad idea, and reasons why it is acceptable or understandable in this or other circumstances. Ambivalence may be signaled by a “however” sentence or a “but” sentence midway through the editorial.

Critical

Editorial is critical of lynching. Lists reasons why it is unacceptable, and offers no excuses or instances where it might be appropriate.