
Book Reviews

A Lynching in the Heartland: Race and Memory in America. By James H. Madison. (New York: Palgrave, 2001. Pp. [xiii], 204. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95).

This stimulating study of the infamous 1930 Marion, Indiana, lynching is reminiscent of Kurosawa's film classic, *Rashomon*, set in feudal Japan. At a bandit's trial for murder and rape, four witnesses provide quite divergent versions of the event, thus underscoring the rather elusive nature of "truth." James H. Madison, who conducted numerous interviews and examined the available records, likewise observes that the various, often conflicting stories that emerged in the wake of the lynching of two African American youths, Thomas Shipp and Abe Smith, for the murder of Claude Deeter and the alleged rape of Mary Ball, "constituted the foundations on which people constructed their understanding of the mysteries of race in this ordinary American community" (p. 111). He concludes, "No one today can be sure exactly what happened August 6 and 7, 1930" (p. 153).

Madison places the events in Marion in a broad context, proclaiming, "This is a book about race. It masquerades as a book about a lynching" (p. 1). Relatively few pages are devoted to the actual lynching. The author discusses patterns of lynching, Grant County's sanitized understanding of its own history, and the Ku Klux Klan's visible presence in the county during the mid-1920s and its collapse by 1930. Considerable attention is given to the "lines of color" separating African Americans and whites, and black efforts to challenge those lines. Flossie Bailey of the local NAACP is lauded for her courageous, if futile, attempts to bring the lynchers to justice.

The book also examines two key aspects that have perpetuated the Marion story. One was Lawrence Beitler's widely circulated photograph, portraying the "shameless faces and everyday gestures" (p. 115) of white spectators gathered beneath the dangling victims, which has helped keep the memory of the atrocity alive long after the deaths of those photographed. Reproduced in textbooks, magazines, films, and even on a CD cover, this grisly representation has become "the generic lynching photograph, suitable to illustrate the point of white racism and violence without considering when or where" (p. 116). The photo itself has had multiple meanings, once conveying for many quick "justice" and an assertion of white supremacy. James Cameron, the second agent, at sixteen had been the youngest of the three youths apprehended. Although nearly lynched himself, and sentenced as an accessory, he survived to recount his tale vividly. In 1982 Cameron published *A Time of Terror* and subsequently launched a "Black Holocaust Museum" in Milwaukee. Madison expresses deep respect for Cameron, whom he interviewed, and acknowledges that

Cameron's account, also detailed in television documentaries, interviews, and public appearances (including one on the occasion of his 1993 pardon) has become the dominant story. Yet Madison admits that his story differs from Cameron's and that some of Cameron's "details are not corroborated in other extant, firsthand sources. . ." (p. 119). Madison, for example, could find no evidence that the Klan played a major role in the lynching and that a mysterious spiritual voice intervened to persuade the mob to release Cameron.

While the lines of color have not entirely disappeared in Grant County, Madison argues that by the century's end there were clear signs of local progress, including the election of Indiana's first black sheriff. Yet the awful image of the 1930 lynching persists in the county's and the nation's memory, its meanings still fluid.

Madison states in his introduction, "I allow the people in this book to tell their stories through their words and deeds and with less of my own analysis and interpretation than some readers might like" (p. 3). The use of multiple narratives might, for some, prove to be as frustrating as attempting to discover the "truth" in a Faulkner novel. This approach, however, does facilitate the author's objective of forcing the reader to reflect and to discern the possibility of different meanings. Others, believing the racist patterns only too self-evident, might be disconcerted by references to the "mysteries" of the color line. Yet the work effectively demonstrates that there are indeed many complexities defying simple categorization. Madison writes that the "lines of color caused the fundamental differences in the tales told" (p. 79) but contends that there has been no monolithic response among either blacks or whites. While Madison skillfully probes the Marion lynching's broader implications, comparison with other towns contending with lynching legacies might have proved interesting. The book is valuable for anyone interested in the lynching, Indiana history, race relations, and the crucial, complex role of collective memories in cultural history.

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Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals. By Kathleen A. Foster, Nanette Esseck Brewer, and Margaret Contompasis. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000. Pp. 200. Illustrations, notes, checklist, bibliography, index. Paperbound, \$29.95.)

Late in December 1932, regionalist painter Thomas Hart Benton was commissioned to paint a mural for the Indiana Pavilion at the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago, also known as the Century of Progress Exposition. The mural was to be huge—a continuous cycle,