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Representing the Spectacle of Lynching in Twentieth-Century Postcard Photography, Journal Illustrations, and Fine Art

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Abstract

After the Reconstruction period in the American South, racial violence reached its height through the prevalence of lynchings that targeted African American men. Artists used references to Christianity, a religion shared across racial and economic divides, to directly call attention to lynching as a moral injustice of the highest order. Both African American and white artists used representations of black Crucifixion scenes to link Christian martyrdom and brutality with the historical fact of lynching to create universal symbols of suffering. While an established body of scholarship exists on the relationship between Crucifixion and lynching imagery, this paper dives deeper into the visual culture of lynching narratives through a comparative analysis of different forms of imagery and their diverse audiences. Specifically, this inquiry analyzes motivating factors behind three visuals forms frequently used to depict lynchings: postcard photography, newspaper/magazine illustrations, and examples of easel painting. Photographs printed as postcards were used as memorabilia from public lynchings to immortalize the murder. In response to this spectacle, African Americans took control of the narrative by developing their own visual representations that countered the role of the lynching as a form of public spectacle and racial terror. For example, Lorenzo Harris, highlighted the brutality of the act and the apathetic response of the members of the crowd. Conversely, Fred Flemister increased the emotional response to his subject matter by portraying the aftermath of a lynching with familiar poses and compositions from Old Master paintings of the Deposition, a scene of mourning over the dead Christ. Each visual format created its own unique narrative and aimed to evoke a response from the intended audience.

1. Introduction

A state of suffering and racial injustice prevailed for many decades after the emancipation of slaves in 1863. During the period of Reconstruction in the 1870s, the American South was still filled with extensive racial prejudice and injustice. As a result, in a period known as the Great Migration, roughly six million African Americans moved out of the South; around half were unable to leave or chose to stay in the South. This movement, lasting from 1916 to 1970, was both to escape violence and to search for economic opportunities. The Reconstruction period was an attempt to "correct" the social, economic, and overall infrastructure of the American South. With their new freedom, black artists were able to create more openly and produce art that expressed their long history of brutal abuse. Though there were many activists using their words to challenge the lynching practice, images were often able to reach a wider audience and influence emotions more strongly. A few of the artists that engaged lynching subjects, and the ones that will be the predominate examples within this essay, include Lorenzo Harris (1888-1946), a popular cartoonist for *The Crisis*, and Fred Flemister (1917-1976) a painter from Georgia, one of the states with the most lynchings. Additionally, E. Simms Campbell (1906-1971) was a well-known American cartoonist, the first African American man to be published within a national platform. Hale Woodruff (1900-1980) was best known for his murals, paintings, and prints. Aaron Douglas (1899-1979) was both an illustrator and painter known to address social issues about race. Douglas was also

one of the major players within the Harlem Renaissance movement. George H. Ben Johnson (1888-1970) was an illustrator in the city of Richmond and though he is lesser known than an artist like Hale Woodruff, he was relatively accomplished in his time and region. Each of the pieces chosen from these artists represents and visualizes a depiction related to black suffering specifically in lynching that has been connected to the Crucifixion in some way. Their art was some of the first to expose the reality of lynching and they used the importance of religion to create the most political and artistic response they could. However, with every visual recreation of lynching the question becomes whether there is a proper way to display something as horrible as a lynching without turning that representation of the lynched body into yet another spectacle?

Each of the three visual forms approached a different group, the photos focused on the southern white population and were a part of the lynching system while the journal illustrations were created to fight against that image, and by extension, the actual act. The illustrations aimed to keep the heat on the issue, creating a pause in every reader's mind when it came to lynching, through critical commentary and vivid imagery, while also offering hope for the black communities reading the newspaper. Later on, paintings appealed to the middle and wealthy classes that had access to the art world. In addition, it is these pieces that are continuously and most commonly seen by all audiences today. Each of the three developed a narrative about lynching from dehumanizing photographs to redemptive fine art and aimed to influence their specific target audience. The connections artists creating the illustrations and fine art works made with religion and their own suffering, specifically, between lynching and the Crucifixion created their own powerful voice in a time when the world forced them to remain silent. The three main visual forms that represented lynching for the public eye were lynching photographs, specifically postcards, and forms of representation that offered a counterpoint and activist response to the photographs –illustrations, and paintings of the fine art world. These three visual representations each addressed the subject with a different purpose and audience. The postcards were an extremely realistic depiction, uncomfortably so, while the illustrations slowly shifted into focusing on the idea of suffering by referencing crucifixion imagery. The fine art works moved further away from the postcards by adopting the figurative poses and compositional elements from European master paintings that offered hope by reminding the pious viewer of heavenly salvation.

2. Lynching in the American South

Despite the South being a "Christian" rich environment, nearly half the black community fled to the North during the Great Migration to escape racial violence. Consequently, the practice of lynching was only increasing in prevalence in some of the southern states after the Civil war. Scholars Amy Bailey and Karen Snedker use NAACP's definition of lynching stating that it is "an extra-legal killing perpetrated by three or more individuals, who claimed their murderous actions were intended to uphold justice or tradition."[1] They go on to clarify that although lynchings occurred across racial backgrounds and throughout the U.S. history and various geographic regions there was a definite increase in lynchings in the South targeting the black community.[2] Most often these violent occurrences were led by a mob that claimed to be pursuing justice in place of the law. The most common reason the mob formed was an accusation of a black man raping or acting inappropriately towards a white woman. The community saw it as their "obligation" to protect the purity of white women and prevent any interracial relationships. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, an American historian, points out that, "Indeed, so pronounced was the penchant for lynching in the United States that early observers considered it a measure of American distinctiveness. To explain the prevalence of mob violence was to explain much about American attitudes about social order, justice, and race."[3] The act of lynching emerged from the desire to dehumanize and shame African Americans. White supremacists used lynching as a tool to crush any success and motivation the black community had during this new age of opportunity and freedom. Now that African Americans were free, white supremacists attempted to use fear, feelings of worthlessness and weakness as continued devices of enslavement and manipulation. Responding to and coping with this hostile environment artists expressed their struggles and reflected on their past within their art. As a result, many chose religious themes as subject matter.

3. Christianity and Spirituality

During the years of slavery in North America, 1619 to 1865, African American culture was deeply rooted in practices of spirituality which became an expressive outlet for suffering.[4] Most of the men and women taken from Africa would have had a native religion that emphasized the world of spirits and ancestral power. In contrast, there were some areas of Africa that had been converted to Islam, a more established religion in the world. African Americans gradually,

both through force and personal choice, adopted Christianity as their own religion and it became a lifeline in the American South. The black community was able to relate to Christianity especially with its history of oppression, suffering, and martyrdom, the biggest example being Christ's death. This group of people channeled their sorrow into the religious outlets of singing, chanting, and prayer.

Spirituality was an important part of enduring and surviving slavery. It continued to be a major part of black culture even after the end of slavery as racial oppression continued. The church became a safe place for African Americans during slavery but even more afterwards as they sought asylum from racial oppression.[5] An important part of the black community's spirituality was the idea of spirituals. Sociologist, Elmer Martin and historian, Joanne Mitchell Martin describe African American "spirituals" as songs and prayers, often consisting of moaning and crying. They use the term "moaning" to refer to the way that African American's expressed their deep sorrow, pain, and sense of loss.[6] Art was yet another form of "moaning" and an outlet for the black community. James Cone, an American theologian, made the point that both lynching, and Christianity were so deeply a part of the American South that it would have been impossible for a black artist not to address and wrestle with the connection. Christians of every race worshipped the same crucified savior.[7] In response to this Cone presents the question "What could pose a more blatant contradiction to such a religion than lynching?"[8] Many Christians stood by and did nothing despite this glaring contradiction.

Why would a group of oppressed people accept and embrace the religion of those enslaving them? Black poet Walter Everette Hawkins wrote:

> And so this Christian mob did turn
> From prayer to rob, to lynch, and burn
> A victim helplessly he fell
> To tortures truly kin to hell.[9]

Hawkins continues in the poem to highlight more of the contradictions of the Christian faith and the mob mentality. Despite this the African American community widely embraced Christianity even after Emancipation and into the first half of the twentieth century. Christianity was even argued by many to be a supporting factor of slavery.[10] Scholars Amy Bailey and Karen Snedker point out that though evidence of church involvement with lynchings varies, many scholars acknowledge a definite involvement of ministers and their congregation in certain lynching events.[11] Of course there were also ministers and lay members that were leading the anti-lynching movements and did their best to prevent more lynchings. Despite these efforts, Bailey and Snedker state:

> White religious institutions in the post-bellum South were intimately involved in maintaining the existing racial hierarchy. Indeed, the predominant Christian organizations disseminated a theology rooted in white superiority, and providing ideological justification for separation of the races became a primary function of white religious groups.[12]

The presence of the plantation as the first major institution in the American South then caused every additional institution, such as the Church, to be governed by the plantation and forced to appease the plantation ideas and demands.[13] Bailey and Snedker concede that religion within the South did not cause the racial violence directly but that Christian conviction did not lead to the stop of mob violence either. They emphasize instead that the southern church as an institution influenced "the shape of local racial conflict and thus played a mitigating or exacerbating role in the incidence of lynching."[14] Any support for anti-lynching movements and actions to prevent lynchings were rare from the white community. Bailey and Snedker found in their study that the presence of independent all black churches in a region was linked to more racial violence since the white supremacy ideals would have been under "threat" in these areas. By comparison the rare regions that had mixed-churches experienced less racial violence.[15] This difference was a result of the white ideals still having control over the institution and therefore did not feel threatened. In the same manner mixed churches created a better appreciation for the black community as human beings worthy of respect.

Frederick Douglass made an important differentiation that explains how this religion still became so important to the black community. Douglass split it into "slaveholding Christianity" and "Christianity of Christ" the second "true" religion emphasized the equality of all men.[16] The second that Douglas refers to is the Christianity of the Bible not of politics and man-made institutions. The Christianity of black slaves was a very different culture compared to the rigid white churches. Their Christianity incorporated musical tastes and traditions from Africa. Julius Bailey argues:

> For many slaves, contact between God and humans occurred in worship and praise services and the singing of spirituals. Spirituals highlighted the stages in the Christian spiritual journey from conversion, repentance, and salvation. They exhorted the sinner to change their ways and 'Go down into the lonesome valley' where the 'mourner' felt their sin before 'comin' through' to conversion.[17]

Religion, specifically Christianity, continued to offer hope along that spiritual journey as they suffered under a form of oppression that kept them fearful and weak despite their freedom.

Within the history of Christianity, there have been numerous martyrs and other biblical figures that suffered and died for the Christian cause. Christian belief supports the idea of the weak being made strong through suffering and practices of piety. Some of the most famous examples of martyrdom are from the Roman games and the ensuing persecution of Christians. Similar to lynchings, these games were free, open to the public, and treated as social festivities.[18] A driving force behind the games was maintaining the core values and institutions of the Roman Empire, which again strikes remarkably close to the Southern mentality behind lynchings-to protect their own institutions and ideals. Lynching is similar to the games even in the memorabilia aspect; scenes from the games have been found on pottery, mosaics, and glassware.[19] Leonard Thompson, Religious studies scholar, compares the Roman games to lynching yet again referring to how the crowd's sense of justice and hierarchy resembles the southern mob mentality. The ruler was subject to the whims of the masses "who claimed the stadium as their parliament."[20] Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, said the martyr was "adorned with the kindred blood of Christ."[21]

James Cone points out, "Lynched victims were transformed, by this association, into martyrs. As Cullen wrote, 'the South is crucifying Christ again,' and this time 'he's a dark of hue."[22] This rich church history in addition to Christ's crucifixion, attracted and reassured African Americans undergoing racial persecution during the twentieth century. Christ's Crucifixion involved a very public and humiliating procession to Golgotha, the place the accused were to be crucified by the Roman government. For many black artists, this humiliating, public display was akin to lynching victims being hung in front of a crowd of their accusers. The victims in both of these cases were mutilated to some degree before being put on display. James Cone states, "To say that Christ 'was the first leaf in a line of trees on which a man should swing' suggested that Christ, poetically and religiously, was symbolically the first lynchee."[23] African American artists during the twentieth century emphasized these similarities to depict their own suffering in ways that promised salvation. Furthermore, the conflation of the crucifixion story with lynching practices provided an underlying sense of meaning to a random, vicious murder. They reclaimed the religion of their oppressors and used that religion along with their art to expose injustice and cruelty.

4. Lynching Statistics

Lynching in the American South continued to rise after the Civil War until the 1920s, whereas in the northern states lynching was not a common occurrence. Georgia and Mississippi, part of the deep South, were the two states with the highest number of lynching cases. During the period of 1880 to 1930, the American South recorded 4,697 lynchings, which does not include all the cases that went unrecorded.[24] The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a civil rights organization formed in 1909, states that 79% of all lynchings occurred in the southern states. Mississippi had the most with 581 cases from 1882-1968. Georgia came next with 531 and after that Texas 493.[25] Bailey and Snedker put it another way by stating that "At least 2,500 blacks are known to have been so murdered in former Confederate States during the lynching era—a rate of roughly one mob killing every week for five decades."[26] The spectacle of lynching often involved observers taking body parts of the murdered victim, especially the genitals, as memorabilia.[27] The stolen body parts were not the only thing pilfered from the event, many times people went away with commemorative photographs. The photographs promoted lynchings by spreading the word about the killings and "inspiring" future mob violence in other communities.

5. Lynching Photography

One such photograph of lynched victim Rubin Stacy, shows the crowd, which is mainly made up of children (Fig. 1). The photograph shows Stacy in the foreground at the center, still handcuffed and hanging by a noose. This photo is one in which the victim is still fully clothed, while many victims were stripped of their clothing. In addition to being clothed, Stacy's body is still intact and has avoided the mutilation that was often a traditional part of lynching. Perhaps the most unusual element of this photograph is that the women and children outnumber the amount of men pictured.

Many of the photos include women and children but have a larger number of men that would have most likely made up the original mob. Two young girls look on complacently while the third smiles smugly in the direction of Rubin Stacy's body. The crowd is grouped behind the tree at some distance leaving Stacy's limp body as the focal point. They are arranged in this way to emphasize their achievement and highlight the "justice" that they have so proudly been able to oversee.

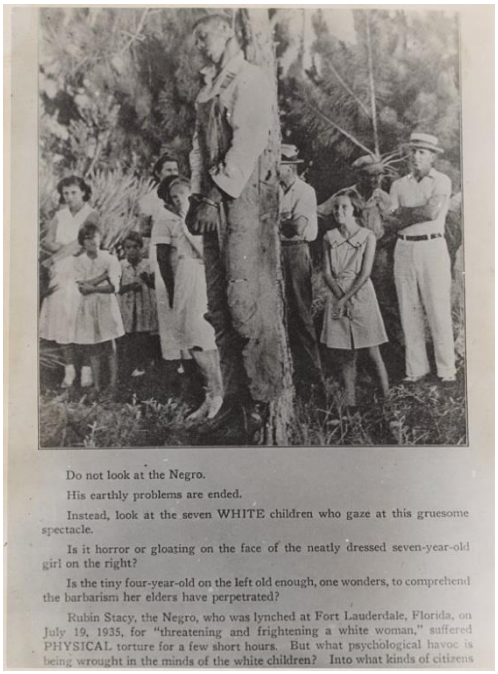

Figure 1. *The lynching of Rubin Stacy, Onlookers, including four young girls, July 19, 1935, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.* 1935. Gelatin silver print,
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/bbd81f60-c3fe-2ec6-e040-e00a18061055.

This particular murder took place in Fort Lauderdale, Florida in the summer of 1935. According to the *New York Times* "The suspect, booked as Rubin Stacy, was hanged to a roadside tree within sight of the home of Mrs. Marion Jones, thirty-year old mother of three children, who identified him as her assailant."[28] Though Stacy was taken to the county jail for alleged protection, the six deputies were soon "overpowered" by a mob. Stacy's body was riddled with bullets before and after being hung. The following investigation brought to light that Stacy, a homeless tenant farmer, had only gone to Mrs. Jones' door to ask for food and she had been frightened by his presence, enough to seal his fate. When James Weldon Johnson commented on the photo later, he "described the epidemic of whites lynching blacks as a 'problem of saving black America's body and white America's soul.' "[29] His words emphasize the detrimental effects of lynching on everyone in the South.

This particular photograph was printed in many different forms: postcard, personal photo memorabilia, and as a published image. However, in its published form the photo eventually became an anti-lynching propaganda. The photo was accompanied by the following text:

> Do not look at the Negro. His earthly problems are ended. Instead, look at the seven WHITE children who gaze at this gruesome spectacle. Is it horror or gloating on the face of the neatly dressed seven-year-old girl on the right? Is the tiny four-year-old on the left old enough, one wonders, to comprehend the barbarism her elders have perpetrated? Rubin Stacy, the Negro, who was lynched at Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on July 19, 1935, for 'threatening and frightening a white woman,' suffered PHYSICAL torture for a few short hours. But what psychological havoc is being wrought in the minds of the white children? Into what kinds of citizens.[30]

Though the rest of the caption is cut off in this photographic document, the message is clear from these few sentences. Instead of pleading for the life of the black victim this newspaper has taken the stance of appealing to the white audience's concern for their own children and concern for the future generation's minds. The audience of the postcards and similar photographs was focused on those attending the lynchings –white men, women, and children who felt there was no harm or consequences in these murders. In this case, used as propaganda, the meaning is changed and directed back at the same crowd of 'self-justified' whites and even those who were not involved with the lynching. Appealing to the concern of white parents for their children's innocence and minds and putting aside the suffering of the black body may seem odd but perhaps at that time it was more effective in provoking thought about the psychological effects of witnessing violence.

In contrast to this image of a mainly intact lynching victim, there is a postcard with an image of Jesse Washington's lynching in 1916 that shows an accurate picture of the abuse (Fig. 2). This postcard, along with all the images from *Without Sanctuary* are now in the personal collections of James Allen and John Littlefield. The postcard shows Washington's charred remains hanging over a crowd of what appears to be mostly men. The corpse has a white cloth tied around its waist and what flesh is showing is unrecognizable. Surrounding the victim is a sea of men's hats and complacent faces. Of the two men closest to the victim, one stands with his hands on his hips looking back at the camera over his left shoulder. The second leans nonchalantly against a large wooden beam that Washington has been hung from. This second man has his arms crossed and his head is laid back against the pole with his eyes seemingly closed. On the reverse side of the postcard there is a short message scrawled out by Joe Meyers, a Waco resident. Joe Meyers also marked the photo with a black cross that now appears as an ink smudge to the left of the victim.[31] The hand-written message says, "This is the Barbecue we had last night my picture is to the left with a cross over it your son Joe."[32] This kind of language referring to food or eating was common "in lynching-related correspondence, such as 'coon cooking,' 'barbecue,' and 'main fare.' "[33] The end of the note "your son Joe" also adds an important piece of information about the recipients of this postcard. Joe Meyers has marked himself proudly within this photo to boast his presence to what can be presumed to be his parents. Many postcards that have now been collected were found within family albums as if they were a treasured family keepsake.

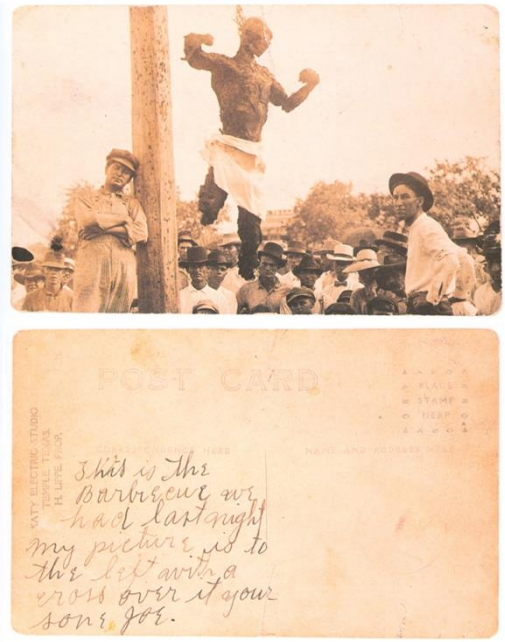

Figure 2. *The lynching of Jesse Washington, May 16, 1916, Robinson, Texas.* 1916.
Gelatin silver print, real photo postcard, 5 ½ x 3 ½ in.
Without Sanctuary Collection.
https://withoutsanctuary.org/pics_22.html.

Jesse Washington was only seventeen years old and was the chief suspect for the murder and rape of fifty-three-year-old Lucy Fryer, whose farm he worked on. Washington's case is unique in that when he was arrested in Waco and was protected by the authorities and given a fair trial. The day of his trial approximately 2,000 people from all

over the area came to the courthouse pushing past the security. After confessing to the crimes and being declared guilty with the punishment of death by hanging the mob took control. Men grabbed Washington and rushed him outside where they brutalized him and dragged his body around the city square. As he was hoisted into a tree, the mob set him and the tree on fire. Washington did not die until an hour and half of torture.[34]

African Americans were forced to stand by and watch as the mob dragged Washington through the town square and burned him. Scholar Kurt Terry claims:

> The African American community felt, of course, 'stung and disgraced' by Washington's supposed murder of Fryer, but also believed that, according to National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) investigator Elisabeth Freeman 'while they had had one rotten member of their race, the whites had 15,000.'[35]

This case was unusual in that the lynched victim had confessed to and been proven guilty for the murder and rape of a white woman. As pointed out, however, the crime of one man was met by the crimes of many more men and women who took justice into their own hands. Continuing in their barbaric sense of obtaining justice, the mob collected pieces of the victim's body and sold them for profit.[36] The body was taken to the neighboring town of Robinson, which had a large black population, there the body was hung from a pole for the community to view throughout the day.[37]

The whole occurrence of a lynching was made into a grand show that characterized some areas of the South during this era. American historian Leon F. Litwack recounts one lynching in 1899 that attracted two thousand white onlookers to the city of Atlanta. The crowds were brought into the city by a "special excursion train" to experience firsthand the lynching of Sam Hose.[38] Lynching photography became a common occurrence with photographers traveling to document the spectacles and often producing postcards of the scene as a kind of perverted souvenir. The black and white photographs usually showed the victim already dead while children, women, and men stood around and under the body smiling for the camera. Local newspapers often showed full support reminding the readers of the "true facts" of the victim's crimes that supposedly justified the murder, displayed right alongside the photograph. Litwack reiterates an Atlanta newspapers words stating, "When the picture is printed of the ravisher in flames, go back and view that darker picture of Mrs. Cranford outraged in the blood of her murdered husband."[39] Despite the atrocious murder of Sam Hose the newspaper draws attention to the "true victim" Mrs. Cranford. Other newspapers boasted headlines such as "Colored Man Roasted Alive" and went into thorough detail of the "slow and methodical agony and death of the victim and devising a vocabulary that would befit the occasion. The public burning of a Negro would soon be known as a 'Negro Barbecue,' "[40] Litwack uses a quote from *The Crisis* which states:

> Hundreds of kodaks clicked all morning at the scene of the lynchings. People in automobiles and carriages came from miles around to view the corpse dangling from the end of a rope…Picture card photographers installed a portable printing plant at the bridge and reaped a harvest in selling postcards showing a photograph of the lynched Negro. Women and children were there by the score. At a number of country schools the day's routine was delayed until boy and girl pupils could get back from viewing the lynched man.[41]

Certainly, some lynchings did not experience this amount of wide-spread attention, but, however large or small, audiences of a lynching event understood it as both a kind of popular justice and entertainment.

These photos were often made into postcards, which were sent out on occasion to African Americans who held prominent positions in the community. Many were published in local newspapers or sent to loved ones.[42] One postcard from the burning of Sam Hose ended up being sent to a Unitarian minister, John H. Holmes, in response to his sermon that condemned lynching. The postcard included the following text: "This is the way we do them down here. The last lynching has not been put on card yet. Will put you on our regular mailing list. Expect one a month on the average."[43] In contrast, Litwack points out that "a black-owned newspaper in Topeka, Kansas, in printing the photograph, wanted every black newspaper to do likewise, so that 'the world may see and know what semi-barbarous America is doing.' "[44] The newspaper intended to expose what most had wished to ignore.

The audience for the photos and postcards was predominately those whites that flocked to the area to view the lynching and the friends and family with whom they shared their experience. This demographic would have been white men, women and children of all social classes. There were also those of the black community who might be sent a postcard, see the image within a newspaper or hung somewhere for the public to view. The white mob's humiliation of the black victim was continued through the circulation of these images. The black community, which might have included the family, was forced to remember and experience the gruesome murder again. Additionally, these images acted as a continuous reminder of the threat of being lynched if you were the next individual to misstep or anger the wrong person.

At the turn of the twentieth-century, anti-lynching groups also used these images for their own political purposes, thus increasing the audiences to potential white and black supporters of anti-lynching legislation. Dora Apel when discussing George Hughes's lynching, argues, "the photograph of Hughes's lynching and others like it were meant for publication only in the southern white press" but often found their way into the northern press which used them in anti-lynching campaigns.[45] The white supremacy mentality that drove the mobs and other onlookers' curiosity and hatred is what drove the sales of photos and postcards. Despite laws forbidding the selling and sending of postcards of this nature this postcard was sent through to its recipient. There were laws forbidding selling and sending of postcards of this nature and yet this postcard was sent through to its recipient.[46] No amount of legislation would change the audience's mindset towards lynching as it was rooted deep within the culture of the South.

At least as early as the late 19th century, African Americans began to reclaim the narrative and attempt to eradicate the overt spectacle of lynching. Using a religious scene like the Crucifixion allowed for an African American artist to portray the gruesome violence without receiving backlash and brought black suffering to the same spiritual plane as Christ's suffering. In this young country, especially in the American South, the general public was aware and familiar with the stories of Christianity. Furthermore, the imagery was universally known within and outside of the art world. As Helen Langa points out, "Religious analogies, particularly themes derived from Jesus' Crucifixion, enabled these artists to develop images that avoided the explicit terror of lynching scene, highlighted emotional suffering, expressed communal grief, and also evoked black Americans' historical dependence on Christian faith to endure injustice."[47] All of these items mentioned by Langa were elements in total opposition to the projected message circulated in lynching photographs during the twentieth century. The photographs specifically focused on the terror, removing any humanity from the victim, and certainly did not relate this event to Christianity.

Cone connects these photographs to fine art and drawing created later on by African Americans by stating:

> I draw distinction between these pictures of lynched victims and the imaginative work of a black visual artist who sought to convey the underlying meaning of these events. Their photographs, a type of pornography, were initially part of the apparatus of the lynching spectacle, created by photographers at the scene who sold them for profit as souvenirs for members of the lynching party, who then displayed them in family albums and gave them to friends and relatives who could not be present.[48]

These artists sought meaning in the creation of and content of their work, sometimes through satire but often relying on spiritual and emotional responses. While African-Americans used photographs to reveal the horrible truth about America, journals began to print satirical images to also counteract the unlawful and humiliating practice of lynching.

6. Lynching Imagery Portrayed in Published Illustrations

Lorenzo Harris' illustration, *Christmas in Georgia, A.D. 1916,* (Fig. 3) was in response to a year of numerous and brutal lynchings. Harris' illustration is solely black and white and done in thin scratchy lines of pen and ink. Spread across two pages of the magazine, the left side is heavier and darker with the space filled by the depiction of a seething mob. The mass of bodies is working together with the collective goal of attacking their victim. The members of the mob have their arms raised above the horde, many holding guns of various sizes implying these are the men's own personal weapons brought out for this occasion. Their stark white arms and large hands draw attention to the power they hold in this situation.[49] The guns are all pointing directly at the already deceased victim. One gun on the right side seems to have just gone off with a tiny amount of residual smoke rising into the air above. There are several rocks hurtling towards the victim in addition to the assault of bullets. In the right portion of the drawing stands a bare tree with the victim, understood as black, being hung from one of the branches. The rope around this man's neck loops around the branch and trails back into the mob's ready hands. The two members of the mob closest to the lynched figure are buckled at the knees showing the effort they are putting into hoisting the victim. The rope connects the right side to the left side with the rope crossing back over the majority of the horde as they help in pulling. One of the only mob figures that has his back to the spectacle is doing so to better pull the rope. Art historian, Amy Kirschke points out that there is another figure of the mob that leans down towards the viewer to pick up a rock. She argues that this figure is an intentional ploy to engage the viewer and "make the viewer feel he is a part of the crowd, a witness to the event, even a participant."[50] Kirschke supports this idea by pointing out that this tactic was used often in Christian art to guarantee the viewer felt the emotion of the event firsthand.[51]

Figure 3. Lorenzo Harris. *Christmas in Georgia, A.D. 1916*. December 1916. Pen on paper, The Crisis, volume 13, No. 2. https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/workers/civil-rights/crisis/1200-crisis-v13n02-w074.pdf.

The lynched victim who hangs from the noose and is actively being hoisted by the mob hangs above a stack of logs clearly set up for a fire. This addition of a fire is a sobering reminder of the truth behind a lynching in that the victim was often abused in additional and horrific ways prior, during, and after death. This illustration is showing not only the hanging of this victim but also the mutilation of his body with rocks, bullets, and finally the implication that his body will be burned. Aside from this the most important aspect of the illustration resides in the second figure pictured with the victim. Though Harris has drawn the victim in the most defeated and lifeless position, there is a radiant message of hope and restoration in this section of the image. The victim's body is enfolded in the "haloed Christ" whom, in contrast, appears radiant. This figure of Christ faces the angry mob head on and literally supports the body of the victim. Kirschke argues:

> Christ is being lynched with the victim. The crowd continues, not thinking of their actions or the consequences. The image is horrifying and loving at the same time, reminding the reader with the passage from the biblical account of judgment day posted on the lynching tree, 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these, My brethren, ye did it unto Me.' This is the 'celebration' of Christmas in Georgia, a reminder that Southern lynchers claimed to be Christians, but they made sure their victims suffered slow and painful deaths.[52]

This illustration is directly addressing the hypocrisy and horror of the actuality and threat of lynchings that African American's dealt with regularly, even on Christmas. There is significance in this day for Christians because it is the day Christ, their savior, was born. This illustration depicts Jesus within the role he was born into this world for, to save the weak and offer a chance at conquering death.

This illustration was published in one of the most prominent journals, *The Crisis*, of the twentieth century. *The Crisis* was the well-known publication of the National Organization for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) that was publishing at the peak of Jim Crow era and sought to be a voice for and to African Americans.[53] The magazine was a national platform of discussion and addressed racial discrimination, including lynching violence, directly and convincingly.[54] Created by American sociologist and activist, W.E.B. Du Bois in 1910; one of the magazine's main goals was to sustain public discourse on social injustices, specifically lynching.[55] As a result, he incorporated art and visual commentary on the subject in his publications. Lorenzo Harris was an illustrator for *The Crisis* magazine and an eccentric, well-known sand sculptor with a formal education from Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.[56] Harris was one of the most productive illustrators that Du Bois employed from 1913 to 1922.[57] The artist was raised in a civically minded, middle class family that exposed him to political activism in Virginia and Philadelphia.[58]

The Crisis was created to be a place for African Americans to discuss and debate the meaning of art created by black artists and realize the influence this art had on everyone's life. The NAACP backed and established this magazine for its own members in 1910. Du Bois considered the arts to be "a catalyst, a means to express new social, political, and economic ideas. Art was a vehicle, a useful tool to achieve change."[59] Harris, in particular, used his political cartoons to challenge the deep-rooted racism by using elements of "historical memory."[60] Du Bois knew and made good use of the importance of art, "but only if it served the pursuit of truth."[61] His choices for *The Crisis* were all connected by his desire to portray the truth, the truth about black American life. Du Bois argued that the white audience of the lynching spectacle wanted a twisted version of the truth and revoked all other interpretations.[62] For those in his publication audience that were white, Du Bois strove to present the uncorrupted truth. It was not only the white audience that prevented growth in the black art community, Du Bois comments that the black middle class was successful enough in hindering the freedom of the black artist. The black community was putting their own artists within a stylistic box that was stunting their expression. Kirschke states, "The *Crisis* could be the resource needed for both black artists and a black audience hungry for such material which had been denied them."[63] This journal in essence was the first national platform for celebrating black identity and remembering the black past. Du Bois was the champion for black artists trying to find their place within the art world. He strove to have the best of the best and create a more sophisticated audience.[64]

Elmer Simms Campbell (1906-1971), like Harris was known as an urban cartoonist; working as an illustrator for *The Judge* and *Life* in his early career and later was hired by *Esquire* magazine.[65] E. Simms Campbell's charcoal drawing in 1935 *I Passed Along this Way* (Fig. 4) shows a version of the Passion of Christ, with Christ carrying his cross. Campbell was born in Missouri, which outside of the Deep South was one of the states with the most lynchings. This piece of his, different from his usual satirical works, was created for the exhibit "An Art Commentary on Lynching" held in New York in 1935.[66] Instead of the typical scene of Christ on the cross, Campbell depicts a figure dragging a cross along an open field. The drawing is made with charcoal which is a medium that lends itself to easy blending and a hazy appearance. Campbell has left a very small area free of shading in front of the two figures so that some of their shape can be made out clearly. There is also a lighter use of shading on the Christ figure across his shoulders to differentiate the dark cross from his back. The places that Christ's skin is showing has less shading to give the impression of lighter skin. The second figure is heavily shaded, however, to give the impression of darker skin. This second figure rests over the shoulder of Christ. It is difficult to tell where one figure ends or begins because of the blurred lines of each. This ambiguity between figures denotes a shared experience by making them appear as one, fluid figure. Christ shouldering the burden, literally, of another with darker skin might have been an accurate depiction of how African American's viewed their faith during the early twentieth century.

The second figure has been drawn with a rope around his neck which is pulled taunt and attached off to the left of the drawing. This figure does not seem responsive like the first and resembles a package being carried. The darker skin, rope detail, and the date of the production in 1935 all give the impression that this is a victim of a lynching. There is very little other detail given in this drawing besides the two figures, emphasizing the importance of their shared suffering. There are no bystanders in this Passion of the Christ scene, making the connection between the two victims feel even more intimate. Christ has something covering his face here in this depiction, which seems to be his own hand. Why his face would be covered is somewhat unclear. Covering one's face can represent shame or grief, but the latter makes the most sense in this context. Campbell has depicted a grieving Savior who is actually carrying the lynching victim.

Figure 4. E. Simms Campbell. *I Passed Along this Way.* 1935. Charcoal on paper, 40.2 x 49.4 cm. Reproduction at Library of Congress. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3109305?seq=19#metadata_info_tab_contents.

Though it was created originally for one of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's Anti-Lynching Exhibitions, *The Crisis* reproduced Campbell's drawing as their cover for the March 1935 issue that reviewed this particular exhibition.[67] Therefore this piece was first viewed in a fine art setting but then reproduced and widely spread through journals. The exhibition was presented in New York to a predominately northern audience, however, the journal distribution would have given national access to the image. Reviewers of the original exhibition were split in opinion over the effectiveness of Campbell's illustration. Though many found the moral appeal compelling there were quite a few that stated Campbell's piece was too passive in the fight to end lynching.[68] The same audience that experienced Harris' aggressive mob scene would be viewing this more subtle religious moral petition for the black communities of the South. Campbell was published in over 145 journals and magazines, additionally he was one of the first black artists to be hired by a mainstream journal.[69] His work was well-known by the public and most likely, this morally significant image was viewed by a wide audience.

Unlike the two previous illustrations, the last example depicts an African-American man nailed and bound to a cross. This piece done by George H. Ben Johnson (1888-1970) was originally published in the *Richmond Planet* "Not Kultur, but Americans Passed This Way" (Fig. 5) in the November 22, 1919 issue.[70] The *Richmond Planet* is unique in that it was first founded by thirteen former slaves in 1938 and is known as "America's oldest Negro newspaper."[71] Though the newspaper covered mainstream news their focus was pinpointed on addressing lynchings, the Ku Klux Klan, and the issue of segregation.[72] Scholar Patricia Schechter argues that this image, "suggest the centrality of gender and manhood within antilynching discourse among African Americans in the age of Jim Crow."[73] She uses Johnson's piece to point out that the black suffering of women is generally kept silent in images of lynching; despite the large number of rapes and occasional lynchings inflicted on black women of the South.[74]

Figure 5. George H. Ben Johnson. *Not Kultur, but Americans Passed This Way.* 1919.
Ink print, Library of Virginia.
http://jsr.fsu.edu/mathews2.htm.

While Johnson's print does focus on the black male as the victim alone, it is also packed full of details that leave the meaning behind the image transparent. On the right side of the print is a woman standing with her head down in her hands as if she is crying. Hidden within the folds of her dress is the following text "a black mother" immediately connecting the two figures. Her clothing and headwrap, characteristic of African women is often linked to enslavement but also resistance, perhaps inferring her lower-class position.[75] Through the use of etching, Johnson has made the woman's skin along with the other figure's skin appear darker. On the opposite side of the print is a large white cross with the second figure hung on it. At the foot of the cross just below a pile of skulls, lays a sign with these words, "Crucified, Murdered, Lynched" connecting this image to the many lynchings in U.S. history. The figure on the cross has his wrists nailed to the cross but his feet are bound with a rope. The background is empty and dark keeping the focus on the figures and the white cross. The pile of skulls at the base of the cross also extends back into the distance, implying numerous previous deaths. Though it is hard to understand several of the details in this image and there is little scholarship to be found on this artist and artwork, it vaguely looks like the man's pants have been left unzipped. Many accounts of lynchings and photos attest to the mob castrating the victim to punish the supposed "rapist" and inflict shame on the man.[76] Due to the change in coloring right around his genitalia area this is a plausible suggestion for this image. The victim's body is relatively intact besides the hands and genitalia in comparison to many lynching photographs.

The man's head is faced down towards his mother, but his eyes appear to be closed. Right behind his head is a circular plaque with the words "American Negro" carved around his head. This exactly mimics the radiant disk or nimbus that signified Christ or someone holy seen in much of the art created during the Middle Ages. Johnson uses the same symbol here with the addition of text that identifies this man as an African-American. Directly above this

plaque is a piece of paper nailed to the head of the cross. On this paper is the text "The 47th since Armistice" the most likely assumption would be that this refers to the end of the American Civil War in 1865. It is unclear if the forty-seven is referencing lynchings within Virginia or the American south as a whole. While this image was placed on the first page with marriage announcements and other news, directly below the image was an article about lynching. The title to this is article was, "63 Lynched in 10 months –11 Burned; 20 shot; 19 hanged." The article goes on to discuss the races of those 63 lynched victims and includes a chart of the "Lynched Record by States."[77]

While the *Richmond Planet* originated from the meager savings of thirteen former slaves, *The Crisis* was funded and started by the National Association for Advancement of Colored People. Additionally, *The Crisis* was based in the North unlike *Richmond Planet* in Virginia, part of the American South and mostly comprised of former slave owners. The newspaper would have been circulated through the surrounding area providing that audience with access to these powerful depictions of lynching victims, creating a comparison with the crucifixion that would be difficult to ignore

7. Fine Art Depictions of Lynching and the Crucifixion

Hale Woodruff (1900-1980) was born in Illinois but grew up in Nashville, Tennessee and was therefore exposed to the prevalent racism of the South. During his later years of teaching in New York, he was associated with Romare Bearden through a group known as "Spiral" which met to discuss how their art related to African-Americans' struggles in the South. Bearden is yet another artist, though not examined for this paper, who used crucifixion scenes to address issue of race and lynching. Throughout his career, he continued to seek out ways to promote black art and encourage the future generation of black artists.

Although Woodruff is best known for his powerful murals, he was a skilled painter and printmaker. In 1931 he took a teaching position at Atlanta University, becoming the first extensively trained black professor at a school in the Deep South.[78] One of his prints made in 1935 entitled *Giddap!* (Fig. 6) was created while he was living and teaching in the Deep South. *Giddap!* is similar to journal illustrations in that it was likely produced in multiple copies and possibly used by anti-lynching movements. In that same year that *Giddap!* was created, Rubin Stacey was lynched in Florida and the NAACP used a photograph (Fig. 1) of his lynching to gather support for their anti-lynching bill. This is just one of the lynchings Woodruff would have been exposed to at the time. The black and white linocut has nine figures placed within the setting of a dark wooded area. At the center of the print the victim, a young black man, stands perched on the back of a wagon moments from his own hanging. The remaining figures consist of two women and five men beside the wagon while the last man sits at the front of the wagon. This print captures the aggression of the mob and also shows the commonality of this practice through its casual arrangement. Unlike many similar artistic portrayals of lynchings, the victim here is shown fully clothed. Stripping the accused down was a form of humiliation and here Woodruff covers the image of the tortured black body that was so often seen in photographs. Amidst the mob's raised fists and expressions of rage, the main figure retains a sense of peace and dignity. While photographs sought to take away that dignity, Woodruff displays a resilient man who has come to a certain acceptance of his death.

Figure 6. Hale Woodruff. Giddap!. 1935. Linocut on Chine collé, 12x9 1/8 in.
Metropolitan Museum of Art.
https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Giddap/38706D620149C695.

The figure just behind the victim, with his back to the viewer, is the driver of the wagon. The driver is holding a small stick with that same arm raised above the horses' rear. In just a moment the switch will come down and the horse will lurch forward forcing the man to step off the back of the wagon. With a rope strung around his neck, the man's fate is clear. Despite the involvement of the driver, his posture and the fact that his back is to the viewer removes him from direct involvement in the scene. Despite his action that ultimately is the most important to ending this man's life, he is the least engaged and seems distant. One of the men within the mob, on the right of the painting, holds a shotgun directed at the victim as if the victim is capable of escaping. While one of the women wears a bonnet and appears to be older, the other girl has a long braid and seems to be younger in age. This difference shows the variety of people and ages that attended lynching events such as this fictitious one. Dora Apel, an art historian, points out that the presence of the older woman and young girl reveals the "role played by women and children both in accusing men of the charges that would send them to their death and participating in the lynching rituals."[79] It was such a part of culture that children were not shielded in any way from the brutality. Finally, the most important detail is on the victim's exposed chest. Though he is clothed, his shirt reveals a dark cross. Due to the nature of the linocut, it looks like it is incised into his chest as well. Apel refers to the cross as shadows that are "implying Christian redemption after death."[80] Not only is this victim connected to the redemptive idea within Christianity, he is also physically bearing the mark of a cross on his chest. Perhaps, Woodruff uses this to imply the physical burden of suffering on the cross in a manner similar to that in the work of Campbell.

Woodruff contributed two pieces, one of them being *Giddap!*, to the exhibition sponsored by the National Association for Advancement of Colored People in New York. As a professor at Atlanta University Woodruff was able to encourage black artists that were living in the harsh environment of the South. His vibrant and historically charged murals helped pave the way for other black artists. Because of his fame in the art world, his work *Giddap!* would have attracted viewers already familiar with his work. While illustrations regularly placed within newspapers and magazines would have been seen by more of the lower class and therefore perhaps more black communities, they were not analyzed in the same way a piece by a well-known artist like this would have been. Though for several years he did have a powerful impact on the city of Atlanta, he eventually moved to New York where he taught and exhibited his own art until his retirement in 1968.[81]

Aaron Douglas (1899-1979), a well-known artist whose pieces often addressed slavery and issues of race also referenced the atrocity of lynching in *The Crucifixion* (Fig. 7) painted in 1927. Born in Topeka, Kansas, he was the

first African-American to receive a degree in art from the University of Nebraska.[82] Scholar Susan Earle states, "Douglas and other artists and writers who migrated from the Midwest to New York did not carry the heavy burden of the South directly; thus they may have been freer to explore and innovate."[83] His role within the Harlem Renaissance was strongly influenced by his focus on graphic art and that influence can be seen in this piece as well.[84] Douglas employs a minimal use of color in this painting, using only various shades of purple. His use of muted colors of either one or two shades is a common characteristic of the palette in his work. Scholar Justine Gaetano suggests that Douglas's use of color works to provide "distinction" in his figures.[85] In reference specifically to Douglas' seminal piece, *From Slavery Through Reconstruction,* she points out that color is a unifying element when figures are grouped by the same tone. For *The Crucifixion,* color acts as a mechanism for grouping some of the figures but exaggerates and distinguishes the importance of certain other figures. Gaetano observes that his faded colors paired with silhouettes "disorients the viewer, almost having a fantastic–literally fantasy-like effect, in the manner of a dream."[86] It is possible that Douglas' hazy dream-like choice of colors was attempting to visualize the nightmare that the lynching era was for African Americans. It is important to note that Douglas illustrates racial distinction in his references to African and Egyptian art. Douglas used the Egyptian silhouette for his forms but African masks for the facial features.[87] Art historian, Renée Ater argues that Douglas' combination of these two elements was done so that "he created a style that would embody blackness not only through the content of the work but through the very way in which he articulate the form."[88] The most commonly known Douglas works all share the silhouetted style seen in *The Crucifixion.* The figures in some instances could be seen as shadows more than figures. By creating figures that are not readily assigned a race, Douglas engages a more diverse audience in their ability to connect to this scene. When Douglas creates his paintings with silhouettes to represent people, the viewer is responsible for assigning a race, if any, to the figure. Additionally, Douglas uses light to accentuate what characters are of importance in this scene.

Figure 7. Aaron Douglas. *The Crucifixion*. 1927. Oil on Masonite, 48 x 36in.
Collection of Camille O. and William H. Cosby.
https://emersoneggheads.wordpress.com/redefinition/aaron-douglas/.

There are two main sources of light in this painting that Douglas represents by adding in white or lighter shades of purple. The first implied light is a beam coming from the upper right corner of the painting just next to the cross. This beam of light runs from the top of the cross down to the ground highlighting the line of figures at the bottom of the painting. The second implied light is a spotlight directed at the leader of the bottom grouping of figures. There is not only a circle of light around this figure but also another on the ground surrounding him. From this first circle around the figure, there are several more concentric circles of light that grow in size radiating out to the edges of the painting. In addition, there are light rays coming out towards the viewer from the feet of this leading figure. The leader of this

group is the lightest colored figure, acting as his own spotlight among his darker colored companions. Douglas used three different methods of light, along with a halo, to show that this figure is of great importance.

The main focus of this painting is the giant figure lifting a large cross up as he visibly buckles under the weight. This could be a representation of Christ or another taking up the cross in Christ's place. In the biblical account of the Crucifixion, a black man named Simon carries the cross for Jesus after he collapses under the weight. Scholar Caroline Goeser argues that the figure is indeed Simon of Cyrene carrying the cross in Douglas' work.[89] Within Christianity, there is a metaphorical belief that suffering is a form of bearing each individual's cross. Simon, who carried the cross for Christ, was someone that people could relate to and perhaps did see themselves in this selfless act. The multiple highlights and the halo assigned to the leader of the lower group below the cross gives the impression that this figure represents Christ, not the man lifting the cross. In addition to that, as previously mentioned, Douglas clearly views this figure as one of the most significant elements in the scene. There are several spears that draw the focus upwards towards the cross. An implied additional three figures that represent soldiers are located in the corners and near the foot of the cross. Two of these figures, at the bottom left corner, have helmets possessing the same features of a galea, a Roman soldier's helmet. In addition to this possible symbol of Roman presence the features of the closest figure are very harsh and sharp in contrast to the rest of the figures faces. Douglas seems to be depicting two separate races within this scene. Several art historians have linked features of these figures, such as the slit eye, with West African Dan masks.[90]

In Douglas' painting, there is this whole other storyline happening in the foreground of the painting. Below the cross, there is a line of four distinct figures walking forwards. Douglas has made it clear that this is not just a group of four, but the group extends further back into the distance by showing indistinct shapes fading into an implied distance. The line of figures recalls the slave coffles during the Atlantic slave trade.[91] Likewise, the haloed figure appears to be bound, even dangling, like the victim depicted in photographs or the Woodruff print. The silhouette eerily echoes that of lynched men, all too familiar in images circulated in the twentieth century.

Douglas was another very well-known artist that had a huge role in the Harlem Renaissance. Scholar Kinshasha H. Conwill states, "Douglas employs his signature style of geometric forms and abstract figuration found in numerous illustrations for the magazines T*he Crisis* and *Opportunity* and in the works that accompanied James Weldon Johnson's *God Trombones*."[92] His works were in demand by many writers like Johnson for books, poems and more. Susan Earle reiterates this point by arguing:

> He was an illustrator and muralist whose work appeared in widely read books and journals, and on public walls. From these platforms not only could he speak and teach about the struggles that he and fellow black Americans faced to gain recognition, but he could also demonstrate literally his presence within an American visual culture that largely made black invisible or stereotyped.[93]

Douglas was fortunate to have gained fame and a widespread audience and he made use of that by working to affect and influence as much of his own black community within the U.S. as he could.

Similar to Douglas, Fred Flemister used scenarios and imagery that were familiar to audiences who were aware of the visual references from the story of Christ. In the same way that Campbell's piece did not depict the exact crucifixion scene, Flemister's piece is a Deposition piece. Georgia native, Fred Flemister was one of the fortunate students to learn from and work with Woodruff at Atlanta University.[94] Flemister used his knowledge of art history to create a piece that mimics the popular Baroque painting subject in order to make an undeniable connection and illustrate suffering in an art historically understood format. Flemister's *The Mourners,* 1942 (Fig. 8) is a dramatic scene of a post-lynching victim with his loved ones surrounding him. Flemister used shades of gold and blue as his main colors while inserting several pops of bright red, perhaps symbolic of the blood spilled. In the second, more removed group of mourners, a young boy is being held back while glancing over his shoulder at the victim. In the widely circulated lynching photographs, it was usually a group of the victim's oppressors—white men and women surrounding the victim; this painting is the reverse of that scene. The victim has been brought down from the tree and is surrounded by his family and friends. Flemister has created an intimate scene of mourning and this, reestablished the victim's humanity. As a result of Flemister's education he was able to make clear connections with his piece and several older European Master's works.

Figure 8. Fred Flemister. *The Mourners.* 1942. Oil on canvas, 39.75 x 31.25 in.
Atlanta, Georgia, Clark Atlanta University Museum's Art Collection.
https://tousledapostle.com/category/art/.

Anthony van Dyck's *Deposition* of 1634 (Fig. 9) is a Baroque work depicting the moments following the Crucifixion, the removing of Christ's body from the cross. Flemister's palette echoes that of van Dyck's piece with the same rich hues of red and similar earth tones for the rest of the painting. Both have utilized color to emphasize the dramatic and emotional scene of loss and mourning. The main figure, the lynching victim, is the closest figure to the viewer in the front left corner of the painting.[95] Directly behind him and holding him up is an older woman with a red cloak that covers her head in the same way Virgin Mary's head is covered in van Dyck's painting; this garment does not match the other mourners who are wearing contemporary style clothing. The victim's sprawled out body is being held by this cloaked woman in the manner that Christ is held by Mary. Likewise, the victim's body is angled and shadowed recalling other sculptures and paintings of Christ's broken body. The body from van Dyck's painting shows these traits and emphasizes the humanity of Christ's beaten body. Behind this woman stands another woman with her arms held up towards the sky in a stance of grief.[96] This image by Flemister and van Dyck reference iconography of a Deposition scene which was more dependent on the emotional impact on the viewer.

Figure 9. Anthony Van Dyck. Deposition. 1634. Oil on panel, 108.7 x 149.3 cm. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.
https://www.sammlung.pinakothek.de/en/artist/anthonis-van-dyck/beweinung-christi-1.

Van Dyck's piece has almost the same layout of figures though there are fewer people present. He made more of an emphasis on the religious aspect of this scene by inserting several angels to surround Christ. Flemister using presumed family and close friends, all African American, makes this piece more personal for those viewing it in the twentieth century and refocuses it so that it is more than a religious image. The connection of suffering and mourning are not lost in Flemister's work though. Each figure's posture gives an impression of being overwhelmed by grief in addition to their facial expressions that express mourning as well. Flemister's fallen figure bears none of the marks of crucifixion seen in van Dyck's piece; Flemister has chosen to omit the truth of what the lynched victim would look like in reality. Despite lacking any visible marks of violence, the fallen body has clearly been broken. A lynching meant so much more than just the victim being hung and because of that, the body would often not have even been recognizable much less whole as Flemister portrays in this work. A realistic painting of the brutally broken and salvaged body from a lynching may have been too traumatic and indecent for viewing in a fine art context. Moreover, it would overshadow the emphasis on Christ-like martyrdom. Another element that may have influenced Flemister portraying the victim unblemished is the influence of Christian belief in eternal life without pain and suffering. Several sections of the Bible refer to a new body after the Resurrection that could have been an influence on Flemister's choose to portray this victim as unblemished.[97] Having a visual reminder of the resurrected body in Flemister's victim would have been a powerful comfort and symbol of hope for the mourning family members as they went to retrieve what was left of their loved ones.

Several of Flemister's figures have their hands turned upwards just as in Van Dyck's painting, both a well-known sign of grief and a characteristic element of African American worship. One striking similarity is that in both paintings one of the women is holding back a child. In the Rubin Stacey photograph (Fig. 1) there are children involved in this event in a different aspect. Within the paintings, the children are being held in a way to shield them from death while the photographs show the children fully embraced into the mob mentality. The gleeful or indifferent reaction of the children has been changed into a look of horror in Flemister's work. The tree with the cut noose, stands solemnly in the background in the same way the cross often dominates the background of Crucifixion paintings. Near the noose is a vibrant red piece of fabric that is caught in the branches. The draped fabric mirrors the Christian tradition of the shrouded cross in which different colored fabric is draped across the front of the cross in remembrance that the cross is a symbol of hope and eternal life. In the background beneath the tree, there is a lone figure riding what appears to be a horse that has a wagon or plow attached. This part of the painting very subtly resembles Hale Woodruff's print. The figure's purpose is unknown but there are several possible ways this figure relates to the rest of the scene. The horse could be pulling away the wagon that would have been used in the lynching or in taking the victim's body down. It seems reasonable to assume that the figure and wagon are leaving the group of mourners, however.

One of Flemister's early exhibits was "The Art of the American Negro, 1852-1940" which was organized by the American Negro Exposition and featured at the Tanner Art Gallery of Chicago in 1940.[98] The exhibit showcased Flemister's work along with seven other students of Woodruff's.[99] Through his connections with Woodruff and Atlanta University Flemister's work was able to reach a wider audience within the art world.

8. Conclusion

While Christianity was the core hope to many individuals in the black community it was also used as an instrument for the art community to address the impossible subject matter of lynching. The comparison of Christ on the cross with the lynched black body attempted to contradict the white mentality that racial discrimination and abuse would ever be considered a good or godly thing. The visual recreations of lynching can be collected into the following three categories: lynching photographs, published illustrations, and fine art. Lynching photography acted as a form of advertising the murder and lacked any compassion for the victim. As a part of the lynching industry, this photography was a lucrative business fueled by curiosity and gruesome interest. Those that purchased the photographs did so with pride and a desire to share that they were also a witness to the lynching. In response to this industry, black artists began to draw the exact same lynching scene but with a completely different approach. The drawings and prints created were filled with compassion for the victim and showed the crowd as angry fiends instead of peaceful onlookers. These illustrations were a political and social statement attempting the eradication of lynching as a practice. References to Christ and the Crucifixion started to appear in these instilling a sense of meaning in deaths. Those references were developed even more as artists transitioned into fine art as they directly "quoted" famous religious paintings. In the fine art examples, there is a central focus on the victim as a Christ-like figure who exhibits a dignified suffering. Fine artists took their imagery one step further than the illustrations by directly conflating the victim with Christ.

Visual recreations and commemorations still use similar tactics such as religious imagery to counteract the spectacle associated with lynching. Though the practice of lynching has decreased the mentality of white supremacy and racial discrimination has persisted. The horror of lynching should not be forgotten but used to create awareness of injustices today and prevent continued racial violence in our country. How do we create visually appealing works that honor victims while preventing a complacent viewing experience, similar to the lynching spectacle of the twentieth century? What is the best way to honor those lynched victims and end the spectacle while also properly acknowledging the suffering and brutality that was done? With the exhibit "Witness: Photographs of Lynchings from the Collection of James Allen and John Littlefield" at the Roth Horowitz in 2000, visitors were faced with this issue. Art historian Anthony W. Lee made the following observation concerning this exhibition:

> In an uncomfortable sense, the crowds that gathered at Roth Horowitz and, later, at the other venues replicated the crowds that attended the original events, both groups of onlookers brought to the scene because of the spectacle of the lynched body.[100]

The idea that the crowds of a lynching are recreated should be an uncomfortable and startling warning for artists as they approach this subject.

Cities within the American South, such as Atlanta, Memphis, and Selma, have and are attempting to remember and honor those lynching victims and the dark past of the South. Writer William Anderson discusses the racial dynamics of visitors to the newly built monument commemorating victims of lynching in the South –the Equal Justice Initiative's National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Alabama (Fig. 10). He expresses the importance of understanding and "interrogating" the memorials and museums of black history while keeping in mind that they are "artistic projects" and not just "objective monuments."[101] Anderson points out that there is an "art to remembrance, and like any art form that's bought and sold, it's marketed as a commodity."[102] As with any monument, it is all too easy for the memorial to become part of tourism and economic commerce. One of the installations of the larger memorial is an attempt to honor the many lives that were lost through a room of columns etched with names of lynched victims, hang down from the ceiling. The viewer is placed in a position to look up at the suspended column. For some, this perspective places the visitor into the role of the onlookers seen so often in lynching photography. Anderson asserts:

> A collapse of historical culpability occurs when I, the relative of a lynching victim myself, am tasked with looking up at these symbolic hangings, surrounded by white spectators. I walked faster than I had to in order to outpace any white people around me who might distract me from my grief, which prevented me from taking my time with the monument. When I came upon a white man taking photos of the columns, I couldn't help but think, *They're still taking photos*.[103]

Figure 10. MASS Design Group. Lynching Memorial square. April 26, 2018. 800 Corten steel monuments with engraved names of victims.
Montgomery, Alabama.
https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/memorial.

Is it possible to appropriately display and recreate lynching visually within a carefully staged environment without recreating the spectacle? Artists have used different strategies, like referencing crucifixion imagery or accentuating the brutality of a raging mob to counteract the abhorrent, dehumanizing display of a lynched victim. Monuments that intend to respectfully commemorate the dead can also succumb to becoming a cultural tourism site and thus, a form of entertainment. There may be no easy way to prevent the spectacle other than a change of mindset of the white American, whose hand in the issue must be acknowledged. Anderson states, "It's imperative that we commit to a critical approach to these spaces that recognizes that violence can take the form of art under the logic of white supremacy."[104] Since the audience is such a part of this narrative tradition, taking pictures at a monument devoted to commemorating the victims of lynching seems to implicate the photographer in a history of victimization. This conundrum signals that the visual culture of lynching relies on what is shown, how it is shown, and to whom it is shown.

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10. Notes

1 Bailey and Snedker, "Practicing What They Preach? Lynching in the American South, 1890-1929," unpaginated.

2 Ibid.

3 W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Introduction," in *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South, (*Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 2.

4 1619 was the year in which enslaved Africans were brought to Jamestown while 1865 is the year in which the 13th amendment was ratified officially ending the legal institution of slavery in the U.S.

5 Julius H. Bailey, "The Religious Life of Enslaved Americans," in *Down in the Valley: An Introduction to African American Religious History, (*Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2016), 31.

6 Elmer P. Martin and Joanne Mitchell Martin, *Social Work and the Black Experience, (*Washington, DC: NASW Press, 1995), 51-52.

7 James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree, (*Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), 96.

8 Ibid.

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10 It was argued that the slave trade was a divine institution because it introduced Christianity to heathen nations. Additionally, references to slaves within the Bible were used as justification. For example, Abraham in the Old Testament owns slaves and in the New Testament Paul returns a runaway slave.

11 Amy Kate Bailey and Karen A. Snedker, "Practicing What They Preach? Lynching in the American South, 1890-1929," *AJS; American journal of sociology* 117, no. 3 (November 2011): doi:10.1086/661985, unpaginated.

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28 James Allen, "Notes on the Plates," in Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America, (Sante Fe: Twin Palms Publishers, 2000), 185.

29 Ibid.

30 "Rubin Stacey, lynched victim, hanging from a tree, surrounded by onlookers, including girls, Fort Lauderdale, Florida," Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division, The New York Public Library, Accessed March 31, 2019, https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/bbd81f60-c3fe-2ec6-e040-e00a18061055#/?uuid=75ff1d22-7471-750e-e040-e00a1806400b.

31 Allen, "Notes on Plates," 174.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid, 175.

34 Kurt A. Terry, "Forgetting the Lynching of Jesse Washington: Manifestations of Memory and the 'Waco Horror,'" (Master thesis, Stephan F. Austin State University, 2017), 11-16.

35 Ibid, 17.

36 Some sources reported that Washington had been castrated because it was believed that he had raped Mrs. Fryer. After the people had taken what they could, Washington's body was roped to a horse and dragged through the streets of Waco, causing the head to separate from the body. Horrifically it is reported that children ran to the severed head and pulled teeth from the skull to sell.

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38 Leon F. Litwack, "Hellhounds," in *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, (Santa Fe: Twin Palms Publishers, 2000), 8-9.

39 Ibid, 10.

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43 Litwack, "Hellhounds," 11.

44 Ibid.

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46 Allen, "Notes on the Plates,"195.

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48 Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree,* 98.

49 Amy Helene Kirschke, "The 'Crime' of Blackness: Lynching Imagery in *The Crisis*," in *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory, (*Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 74-75.

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61 Ibid, 117.

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65 Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob, (*New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 104.

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67 Ibid.

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91 A slave coffle was a group of slaves chained together, either with actual chains and bracings around their necks, to transport groups of slaves across land for the slave trade. Often lead by and guarded on all sides to prevent escape.

92 Kinshasha Holman Conwill, "Introduction," in *Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 2.

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95 The mother and son relationship pictured in Flemister's painting is similar to Old European sculptures but also Richard Barthè's *The Mother* sculpture created eight years before, a representation focused on capturing loss.

96 A similar stance can be seen in Caravaggio's piece *The Entombment of Christ* from 1603. There are two women with their hands out but the woman in the background has her hands and gaze towards the sky the same as Flemister's mourning woman.

97 Just a few examples within the Bible, that refer to the resurrected body, are 1 Corinthians 15: 35-44 and 2 Corinthians 5:1-10.

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