What Counts: Trends in Racial Violence in the Postbellum South

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> "As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain; and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality."
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> —Albert Einstein quoted in James R. Newman, *The World of Mathematics,* vol. 3 (New York, 1956), 1646

If I were to study the November 8, 1894, lynching of Lee Lawrence in Jasper County, Georgia, I would—among other things—place it within the context of our understanding of lynching trends in the South: that it occurred in the middle of the region's most lynching-prone decade and that Georgia was among the Deep South states where lynching was most prominent. I might add that it happened in Georgia's cotton belt, a region that witnessed more lynchings than any other part of the state. None of those lynching trends might be essential to my arguments about the white fixation on black rape, say, and how that fixation was represented in this violence. Yet I would feel assured that my qualitative evaluation also had a meaningful quantitative context, for this lynching seems to sit squarely within the center of our understanding of lynching trends.[1]

How do we know that Georgia's cotton belt was central to southern lynching? By counting, and lynching's numbers force scholars to confront challenges on at least three levels: definition, evidence, and interpretation. Scholars tend to leave discussions of what we count and how we count lynchings—and our qualms about them—out of the way in footnotes. There are reasons to have considerable qualms. Other evidence and other ways of counting offer a very different common sense about this 1894 lynching altogether: that

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[1] For the purposes of this study, I consider "the South" to be the states of the former Confederacy plus Kentucky. For a number of comparisons, I am forced to exclude Texas from my evaluation due to its lack of modern statewide lynching figures. I consider the Deep South to be the states of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Almost any history of the South would bolster these commonplace quantitative claims about lynching. See, for example, Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), 426–27; Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York, 1984), 238; and Amy Kate Bailey et al., "Targeting Lynch Victims: Social Marginality or Status Transgressions?," *American Sociological Review,* 76 (June 2011), 413.

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Georgia was not close to experiencing the greatest prevalence of lynching, and the cotton belt was not the region within the state with the greatest incidence of lynching.

The following pages bring our process of counting lynchings out of the footnotes and into the text. Lynching's numbers have patterns that seem to demand explanation: What factors led to a crescendo of terror in one historical moment or locale but not another? In that way, counting stands at the very foundation of the study of lynching: its trends help shape the questions we ask of the phenomenon.

Those trends first received attention in the 1880s when lynching tallies appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* and were collected at the Tuskegee Institute. Several books by sociologists and antilynching activists included lynching numbers as a part of their studies in the early twentieth century, but before 1980 few historians considered the phenomenon. The generation of historians following the civil rights era incorporated lynching into the broader story of the Jim Crow South, and in the 1990s studies particularly focused on lynching appeared. In the last twenty years the scholarship of lynching has burgeoned, including an array of statistical analyses.[2]

Much of that recent scholarship has added nuance to the idea of a well-defined era of southern lynching peaking in the Deep South's cotton belt in the 1890s—complicating our understanding of the practice geographically, say, or of its chronology. This essay likewise troubles the waters of this narrative by evaluating the methodology that has been used to arrive at this understanding of trends in southern lynching. It traces the many challenges facing scholars as they attempt to count lynchings as well as the common practices of historians as they consider the resulting trends. We already face a bounty of contrary evidence to the standard view of southern racial violence. Our best scholars have lynching lists that differ widely from one another, and it seems that each quantitative claim can be contradicted by competing claims. Far from diminishing the place of lynching in the history of the South, these complications erode several boundaries we have placed on that violence, expanding our notion of the pervasive impact of racial violence upon the history of the South.

If this methodological discussion of counting suggests the benefits of broadening our vision of racial violence in the South, it also serves to refine our understanding of the utility

[2] Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *The Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States, 1892—1893—1894* (Chicago, 1895); James Elbert Cutler, *Lynch-Law: An Investigation into the History of Lynching in the United States* (New York, 1905); National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889–1918* (New York, 1919); Walter White, *Rope and Faggot* (New York, 1929); Arthur Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill, 1933). Among the works written in the generation following the civil rights era and incorporating lynching into the broader story of the Jim Crow South are Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign against Lynching* (New York, 1979); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, 1982); Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York, 1984); George C. Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens, Ga., 1984); and Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*. For studies on lynching written in the 1990s, see George C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865–1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings"* (Baton Rouge, 1990); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Urbana, 1993); and Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882–1930* (Urbana, 1995). For a more complete review of the literature on lynching, see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Conclusion: Reflections on Lynching Scholarship," *American Nineteenth Century History*, 6 (Sept. 2005), 401–14. Among those discussed in this essay are William D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836–1916* (Urbana, 2004); Christopher Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch: Extralegal Violence and Punishment in America* (New York, 2002); Michael J. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874–1947* (Urbana, 2004); Margaret Vandiver, *Lethal Punishment: Lynchings and Legal Executions in the South* (New Brunswick, 2005); and Bruce E. Baker, *This Mob Will Surely Take My Life: Lynchings in the Carolinas, 1871–1947* (New York, 2008).

of numbers in this work: what those numbers can and cannot tell us. Lynching is central to southern history due to much more than the individual moments of violence and their victims—those things we can most readily count. It is also important because of the fear that lynchings provoked, terrorizing whole communities to keep African Americans in their place. Terror resists quantification; lynchings were in no way equivalently terrorizing, while attempts to quantify them can only count them as such: each as precisely one lynching in number. Historians approach lynching with nuance; numbers do not. That gap leaves a powerful vacuum at the center of any quantitative calculation of the impact of lynching that we attempt to fashion.

Historians have sound reasons to avoid a preoccupation with the numbers and trends of lynching. As with any facts, it is easy to overvalue historical statistics, believing that they measure more precisely than they do or that data are more telling than they are. Once we recognize that whites were using violence to terrorize blacks (and others) throughout the South for decades, then many research questions will lead away from quantitative study. And appropriately so; a discussion of numbers might simply distract from other important findings, flattening the complex and varied stories of lynchings into a series of artificially equivalent data points.[3]

Most of the historical scholarship of lynching, in fact, investigates those qualitative contexts as a way to understand why this violence occurred rather than centering on a strict accounting of numbers. But even qualitative work is implicitly or explicitly predicated upon an understanding of trends—particularly the importance of lynching in the Deep South of the 1890s. And the lynching numbers that reveal these trends are problematic on more than one level. It is a strange and difficult-to-nail-down subset of murder, and the evidence will never yield more than estimates of the numbers actually lynched.

Sources are the first problem. Official records of crime—where they have survived (an important problem, with twelve hundred counties in the South generating local records)—sometimes offer evidence of extralegal killings, but often not. Lynchings were seldom prosecuted (which might have created legal records), and local officials at times participated in the mobs. Private papers, letters, and other manuscript sources are even more rare and at least as subjective.[4]

The most readily available sources for lynchings are newspapers, whose coverage ranges from huge front-page stories to tiny notices to nothing at all. The best studies use a number of different newspapers and other sources to fill gaps left by each lone source. Coverage varied tremendously from paper to paper. In 1900 a local paper covered a Florida lynching with relative nuance: a "trifling" conflict escalated into a lynching, which was the only indisputable crime committed. A distant Tampa paper, in contrast, transformed the incident: a Negro brute committed an "atrocious murder" (complete with a fictional head rolling down the street) to which he confessed before being riddled with bullets by local citizens. This willingness of white editors to skew stories of lynching must always be kept in mind.

[3] Particularly instructive are the careful ways that the best quantitative historians frame their results. For an example that includes a section on caveats and employs the word *suggest* in robust ways, see Bailey et al., "Targeting Lynch Victims," 412–36. See also Douglas Eckberg, "Stalking the Elusive Homicide: A Capture-Recapture Approach to the Estimation of Post-Reconstruction South Carolina Killings," *Social Science History,* 25 (Spring 2001), 67–91.

[4] On the challenges of finding local records for murder, see Randolph Roth, *American Homicide* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009), 480–86. Lynching offers additional challenges.

White papers typically offered what W. Fitzhugh Brundage calls "a text that white southerners read to themselves about themselves," or, as Bruce E. Baker succinctly put it, "lynching was always entangled in lies." At the most elementary level, white editors might (or might not) call a killing a lynching; the word shifted in its meaning over time, leaving us to interpret whether an editor's understanding fits our own definition.[5]

Lynching is an expansive category comprising many different sorts of events. Some resembled legal executions, with mixed-race crowds; others were more like communal blood sacrifices. Some had thousands in attendance; others were like assassinations. That we group these divergent events together is, in part, a function of history. Contemporary opponents of lynching tended to blur distinctions in lynching events: Why diffuse the horror by exploring subtleties of differences between them? At times, defenders of lynching likewise overlooked the distinctions to better focus attention on the putative "cause" of lynching as the white communal response to black sexual predation. While scholars have a much more subtle touch, we continue to frame lynching as encompassing a range of very divergent events.[6]

Where does one draw the line around such diverse phenomena? In 1940 a number of groups sent representatives to a meeting in Tuskegee to work out a common definition for lynching; they failed. But what they were able to agree upon has become the standard for the scholarship. This definition has three parts: the victim must have died; the killing had to be at the hands of "a group," often (but not always) defined as more than two people; and the lynching had to be under the "pretext of service to justice, race, or tradition." Each of these three parts of the definition requires information that can be difficult to discern from the extant historical record. Hence the reality we face: that determined, professional, and conscientious scholars develop lynching lists that, as we shall see, diverge widely from one another.[7]

The most problematic part of the definition is the group issue, but even requiring death in the definition can lead to important questions. While the common understanding of lynching involves "a group" of lynchers, it is not clear just where, and just why, we would defend a particular defining number. The politics of this boundary to lynching were evident at the 1940 meeting: some wanted an inclusive definition as a way to emphasize the pervasiveness of racist violence, while others wanted a circumscribed definition to keep lynching

[5] The Florida case is explored in Susan Jean, "'Warranted' Lynchings: Narratives of Mob Violence in White Southern Newspapers, 1880–1940," *American Nineteenth-Century History,* 6 (Sept. 2005), 351–53. Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 17, 293; Baker, *This Mob Will Surely Take My Life,* 143. On approaching lynching data cautiously, see *ibid.*, 4–5. On the problems of white sources, see Jean, "'Warranted' Lynchings." Black newspapers in the South were rare (even fewer are preserved in archives), and were weeklies, having many fewer column inches than white dailies. Weeklies of any sort rarely covered "news" as much as dailies did. For these and other reasons, black papers were erratic in covering lynchings. On what black papers covered in this era, see Michael Ayers Trotti, *The Body in the Reservoir: Murder and Sensationalism in the South* (Chapel Hill, 2008), 111–44; and Henry Vance Davis, "The Black Press: From Mission to Commercialism, 1827–1927" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1990). Waldrep, *Many Faces of Judge Lynch.*

[6] An exception to whites overlooking distinctions within lynching would be attempts to discredit distasteful lynchings as illegitimate, while embracing those with broad popular support as acts of the commonweal. Susan Jean and W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Legitimizing 'Justice': Lynching and the Boundaries of Informal Justice in the American South," in *Informal Criminal Justice,* ed. Dermot Feenan (Burlington, 2002), 157–77; Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York, 1999), 292–93; Waldrep, *Many Faces of Judge Lynch.*

[7] Waldrep, *Many Faces of Judge Lynch,* 147–50. The groups included the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Tuskegee Institute, the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, and journalists. For examples of the same definition, see Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 17, 291; Carrigan, *Making of a Lynching Culture,* 295, 273n2; Pfeifer, *Rough Justice,* 6–7, 187n15; Tolnay and Beck, *Festival of Violence,* 260; and Vandiver, *Lethal Punishment,* 4, 8, 188–89. While the meeting agreed to these elements of a lynching—though failing to nail down just what *group* meant—lynchings were counted differently by groups both before and after the meeting.

from bleeding into other categories of violence, especially murder. The latter group hoped to trumpet a "lynch-free year" and thereby build popular support for the understanding that lynching was peculiar, declining, and out of keeping with modern American mores. To do so, the group had to clearly distinguish lynchings from crimes, such as murder, that have always been—and will always be—with us.[8]

As problematic as this "group" boundary was for the politics of this 1940 meeting, it is as troubling for researchers now. A killing by fifty men is unambiguously a lynching, but what logic—historical or commonsensical—would exclude killings committed by two men but include those committed by three? For that matter, is a killing by three men always more terrorizing than a murder committed by one?

Even more fundamentally, how can we be sure of the number of perpetrators of any particular killing? Information in extant sources is often not sufficiently detailed, putting scholars in the uncomfortable position of including or excluding a killing merely due to the unclear evidence of whether one, two, or three men shot someone down. If one white man shot a black man, but fifteen more whites were present, was it a lynching by sixteen men or a murder by one with fifteen bystanders? Can we trust how a newspaper describes the scene (if it does) or whether it used the word *lynch* correctly? See, for instance, the ruminations of Margaret Vandiver as she tried to decide whether to include Lum Ward's killing in her study (as did the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP]) or not (as did Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck).[9]

In this way, lynching has an inherently unstable boundary; it is a subset of murder awkwardly distinguished at its margins from other murders. Increasing numbers of scholars are confronting this fraught boundary by mentioning murders in the context of lynching, enriching our understanding. A growing number of local studies reflect upon murder in the South, and much of this evidence is gathered in Randolph Roth's *American Homicide*. Roth finds that homicide rates varied tremendously across the region and across time, but that they were consistently higher than lynching rates: a collection of southern cities had homicide rates three times greater than the regional rate of lynching, and rural plantation counties in Georgia's piedmont had a homicide rate that was something like ten times higher; other regions had homicide rates higher still.[10]

[8] Some lynching attempts failed to kill the intended victim but may well have been terrorizing, particularly if the lynchers went free, as was common, and the victim had a horrifying story to tell. In 1893 Isaac Jenkins was shot and left for dead, hanging from a tree, but the noose slipped and he fell free. "He Was Not Lynched," *Richmond Dispatch,* July 18, 1893; "Isaac Jenkins: 'Not Guilty,'" *Richmond Planet,* Feb. 17, 1894; "The Acquittal of Jenkins," *ibid.*, Feb. 24, 1894; "Isaac Jenkins' Lynchers," *ibid.*, March 31, 1894; "Suffering Isaac Jenkins," *ibid.*, April 7, 1894; "Isaac Jenkins Is Free," *ibid.*, June 2, 1894; "Isaac Jenkins Here," *ibid.*, June 9, 1894. The *Richmond Planet* was an African American newspaper. Jenkins and the local black community also had to endure the fact that no whites were ever charged for his lynching. These "near" or "failed" lynchings do not belong in lynching tallies, but they are clearly worthy of further study. Waldrep, *Many Faces of Judge Lynch,* 127–50, esp. 132–34.

[9] Vandiver, *Lethal Punishment,* 191–92. Lum Ward's body was found on the road and the circumstances of his death were unclear, leaving historians with an interpretive conundrum. William D. Carrigan wrote that "distinguishing which cases merited inclusion on my list of lynching victims and which did not has caused me considerable angst." Carrigan, *Making of a Lynching Culture,* 295. Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck "spent an inordinate amount of time and mental energy trying to resolve which homicides would qualify as lynchings." E. M. Beck and Stewart E. Tolnay, "Forum: Revisiting *A Festival of Violence;* A Response," *Historical Methods,* 31 (Fall 1998), 179.

[10] For a work that sets the lynching wave of the 1890s in the context of a crime wave, see Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice,* 250–52. For a work that shows particular sensitivity to the ways that murder matters as a context for understanding lynching, see Carrigan, *Making of a Lynching Culture,* 115–16, 134–36. See also John Hammond Moore, *Carnival of Blood: Dueling, Lynching, and Murder in South Carolina, 1880–1920* (Columbia, S.C., 2006). No region-wide tallies of murder in this era exist, making its study particularly challenging. As with most scholars of crime, Randolph Roth solves for population differences by comparing rates rather than counts of murder. This issue

A more substantive engagement with southern murder is warranted; even a simple murder could include a lynching-like collaboration of white society to protect whites' privileged violence. Southern white society (and its juries) seemed to consider even mortal violence against African Americans to be something akin to a prerogative, whether it was performed by an individual or by a group. "If a white man kills a colored man in any of the counties of this state," said a Florida sheriff, "you cannot convict him." This disregard for African American lives was pervasive: As a southern police officer said, "If a nigger kills a white man, that's murder. If a white man kills a nigger, that's justifiable homicide. If a nigger kills a nigger, that's one less nigger."[11]

The lack of prosecution was a vital part of how lynchings—and murders—could terrorize African Americans, because it took the measure of white society's complacence toward killing blacks. "No Justice for the Negro!" rang out multiple editorials in the African American *Richmond Planet,* railing against the nonprosecution of whites for lynchings and other crimes. In the 1880s Frederick Douglass thought that blacks

> should be about as well situated for the purposes of justice if there were no Constitution of the United States at all; as well off if there were no law or law-makers, no constables, no jails, no courts of justice, and we were left entirely without the pretence of legal protection, for we are now at the mercy of midnight raiders, assassins, and murderers, and we should only be in the same condition if these pretended safeguards were abandoned. They now only mock us.[12]

The "group" part of the lynching definition segregates terrorizing and unpunished murders from terrorizing and unpunished lynchings. How this distinction serves our understanding of the violent racial regime of the South is less than clear. We can easily imagine the lynching of a clearly guilty outsider as being less troubling to a black community—perhaps African Americans even joined in the mob—than the murder of an upstanding and respected local black leader by, say, a police officer who was then acquitted by a white jury. The former scenario, unproblematic as it might have been to local African Americans, would be a data point on our lynching lists as if it were equivalent to the most terrifying lynching in the South. The latter, no matter how it might have traumatized the local community, would not.

What are we to do, for example, with this, from William Carrigan in *The Making of a Lynching Culture*? The horrifying lynching of Jesse Washington in 1916 was the most infamous lynching in Waco, Texas. But to the black community, the shooting of Jesse Thomas six years later—and the fact that the known white killer was never prosecuted—was the incident that sparked a "fire" of resentment that "never died," even though this later killing is rarely recalled by whites and was little noticed by the national press.[13] This is merely one of thousands of instances when blacks were killed outside of—or at the unclear margins

of *how* to count lynchings is taken up later in this essay. Roth, *American Homicide,* 420, 580n74. I have found no data that breaks out white-on-black murder from the data for the South as a whole.

[11] I borrow this idea of "prerogative killing" from Don Mathews. Don Mathews, personal communication with Michael Ayers Trotti. Florida sheriff quoted in Ku Klux Klan hearings in Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York, 1988), 435. Southern police officer quoted in Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice,* 231.

[12] "No Justice for the Negro," *Richmond Planet,* Feb. 26, 1898; "No Justice in Virginia," *ibid.*, Sept. 16, 1899; Trotti, *Body in the Reservoir,* 120–23, 127–29. Frederick Douglass, *Three Addresses on the Relations Subsisting Between the White and Colored People of the United States* (Washington, 1886), 60.

[13] Carrigan, *Making of a Lynching Culture,* 198–202, esp. 201. Jesse Thomas was shot down by one man, and Carrigan calls this a murder in his text. Demonstrating the complexity of policing this boundary between murder and lynching, Carrigan still counts it in his list of lynchings, with good reason: other whites were there, a deputy brought

of—the strict definition of lynching. How many of these killings were there? Roth's work suggests that white-on-black murders in the South might have surpassed lynchings in numbers. But we do not know how many there were; we have not counted them.[14]

The scholarship on lynching approaches with nuance the distinctions within the broad definition of lynching as well as the commonalities lynching shares with other forms of racial violence; the numbers of lynching embody none of this nuance. The inherently porous definition of lynching necessitates that scholars attend to related forms of racial violence, particularly murder. All white-on-black murders—whether performed by a group or by a single perpetrator—matter to our understanding of racial violence and the terror it provoked, and they deserve the attention they are beginning to receive. To make lynching trends more intelligible, we need to know how many policemen, bar owners, employers, and drunken white men shot down blacks and then escaped punishment (and how patterns in these crimes differed over time and space). Accelerating this trend in the study of southern murder is perhaps the most promising way to further our understanding of southern lynching.[15]

This broader context is particularly helpful because, given the current definition and boundaries for lynching, it is difficult to determine just how many lynchings there were. The earliest tabulations of lynchings—compiled by the Tuskegee Institute, the *Chicago Tribune* and other newspapers, and the NAACP—included murders counted as lynchings, lynchings assigned to the wrong states and localities, and other flaws. Modern scholars appreciate these sources as valuable points of departure but do not lean upon them alone—they do not comport with modern, professional standards of evidence.[16]

The first modern lynching tallies in the 1990s demanded clear contemporary evidence of each lynching and adhered to a strict definition. The result was that our lynching lists shrank. Tolnay and Beck found 2,085 lynchings between 1889 and 1918 in the ten states they investigated (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee); that is 187 fewer than the NAACP counted. Brundage found nineteen fewer lynchings in Virginia; George C. Wright found four fewer in Kentucky. Modern scholarship's demand for verification gives us greater confidence in these tabulations of lynchings despite the compelling warnings from these authors that their lists remain incomplete. In fact, comparing their findings with each other suggests an even stronger caution. The studies by Tolnay and Beck, Brundage, and Wright were researched and written in roughly the same years and without reference to one another, providing a rare happenstance of "blind" testing of separate lynching counts. The result is two separate, independent lists of lynchings in Georgia and Kentucky: Brundage created a list for Georgia, Wright made one for Kentucky, and Tolnay and Beck compiled tallies for both states.[17]

Thomas to the victim's house, where the shooting occurred, and Thomas's body was then burned and dragged through the streets.

[14] Roth finds, for instance, that whites murdered blacks in Virginia in the 1870s at a rate of 2.4 per year per 100,000. Roth, *American Homicide,* 345. Compare this to much lower lynching rates shown in figures 3 and 5.

[15] See Kidada Williams, "Resolving the Paradox of Our Lynching Fixation: Reconsidering Racialized Violence in the American South after Slavery," *American Nineteenth Century History,* 6 (Sept. 2005), 323–50.

[16] National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States,* 43–105; Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 291–301; Tolnay and Beck, *Festival of Violence,* 259–67; Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky,* 70; Vandiver, *Lethal Punishment,* 189.

[17] The 1889–1918 date range corresponds to the study by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Tolnay and Beck's lynching list is the foundation of a Web-based project to collect all lynchings,

The results of these overlapping studies are so divergent as to draw into question our collective quantitative understanding of lynching. While they offer similar trends of a peak in lynching in the 1890s in each state, the studies do not arrive at these trends from a common set of lynchings. (See figure 1.) A stunning 31 percent of Georgia's lynchings were acknowledged as a lynching by only one of the studies and not the other. A similar 27 percent of Kentucky's lynchings are only on one list.[18] The most extreme divergence is in 1891 in Georgia. Should we conclude that Georgia had 5 lynchings of blacks in that year (the ones Brundage has in common with the Tolnay and Beck list); or Brundage's 8; or Tolnay and Beck's 11; or 14 (the two lists combined)? While the divergence is much less in other years, in only four years out of the thirty-nine between 1882 and 1920 does Brundage's list match that compiled by Tolnay and Beck. For Kentucky, Wright and Tolnay and Beck have identical tallies for only eleven of those thirty-nine years. This is a tricky issue, for we cannot assume that the solution is merely to add the lists together: a study might have been right to leave a killing off its list. Nor should we assume we can merely use the "double confirmed" lynchings that they have in common, for the "extras" could easily be valid lynchings that one study missed. Indeed, it is probable that some of these "extras" are killings that require a judgment call as to whether the available evidence fits lynching's definition: an irreducible margin of error.[19]

This is more than simply adjusting a few numbers, for many of the most important questions about lynching's history are framed by our understanding of the patterns in these numbers. We consider the 1890s to be the high point of a lynching wave because the South experienced 36 percent more lynchings in that decade than in the 1880s, leading to a host of questions about how the 1890s might be particularly important to understanding lynching. We divide our numbers of lynchings into percentages of mass, terrorist, posse,

Project HAL (Historical American Lynching Data Collection Project), people.uncw.edu/hinese/HAL/HAL%20Web%20Page.htm. Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 270–80; Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky,* 307–23; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States,* 43–105. W. Fitzhugh Brundage pointedly refused to claim that his Georgia list was complete: "My lists are not definitive; they are simply as close to definitive as feasible." Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 295. Tolnay and Beck likewise affirmed that they were not claiming to include every lynching and that new evidence will demand revision. Tolnay and Beck, *Festival of Violence,* 261.

[18] Another measure of the challenges of lynching research is that four Kentucky lynching victims (Robert Bryan, July 6, 1888; Mollie Smith, June 28, 1895; Henry Stewart, June 28, 1899; and Lawrence Dempsey, May 20, 1917) and one from Georgia (James Moore, August 13, 1886) are listed as white in one study and black in the other. See Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky,* 315–22; Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 270; and Project HAL. More recent lists tend to be based on Tolnay and Beck's data and therefore diverge from it less. Michael Pfeifer's lynching list for Louisiana includes all but one of Tolnay and Beck's 346 lynchings between 1882 and 1920 and added 20 others, yielding only a 6% disparity between the two. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice,* 155, 161–78. Margaret Vandiver confirmed only 61 of Tolnay and Beck's 72 lynchings in that era for her counties in Tennessee, adding another 5 of her own, for a disparity of 21%. Vandiver, *Lethal Punishment,* 196–99.

[19] Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 270–79; Project HAL; Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky,* 313–20. The difficulties of studying lynching via a single source were illuminated when I sought each of the 1891 Georgia lynchings in the *Atlanta Constitution* (searching the two days after each lynching—clearly not a robust research method). While both Brundage and Tolnay and Beck used the *Atlanta Constitution,* they also used many other sources, so my perusal was of only one small part of their resource bases. I was able to find 4 of the 5 lynchings their lists had in common, 3 of the 6 "extra" lynchings found by Tolnay and Beck (the *Atlanta Constitution* reported that two others—of Welcome Gold and Robert Knight, December 13, 1891—were failed attempts to lynch rather than lynchings), and none of the "extra" 3 found by Brundage, who used a broad array of smaller, local papers. Most remarkably, given that I was not attempting a broader survey, I also stumbled upon yet another lynching (Johnson Green, June 29, 1891) not listed in either study. This exercise, of course, tells us very little other than emphasizing that research techniques used, sources consulted, and, perhaps, luck affect how thorough are our lists and that it is very easy to miss lynchings in the press. "A Georgia Lynching," *Atlanta Constitution,* June 30, 1891, p. 1.

Lynchings Found in Overlapping Tallies, 1882–1920

	In Common	Only in Tolnay/Beck	Only in Brundage	Only in Wright	Added Together	% in Common
Georgia	343	80	74	-	497	69
Kentucky	165	22	-	39	226	73

Figure 1. Overlapping studies of Georgia (by Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, and W. Fitzhugh Brundage) and Kentucky (by Tolnay and Beck, and George C. Wright), each researched and written independently, provide a sort of accidental case study of how much lynching numbers vary in the historical scholarship. Only by comparing them in this way does it become apparent that, while most lynchings are counted in both studies, a substantial percentage of each study's lynching counts—around 30% of those found altogether—are not shared by the other. In only 4 years of the 39 in this period were Brundage's and Tolnay and Beck's tallies identical in Georgia; in only 11 of those years were Wright's and Tolnay and Beck's the same for Kentucky. In preparing this table, I compared the lists line by line, ignoring small divergences in dates and names, and with a consciousness that aliases were commonly used and names were often inventively presented in newspapers. If there was any reason to believe that the studies might be using different names for the same lynching, I counted it as such. SOURCES: W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Urbana, 1993), 270–80; George C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865–1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings"* (Baton Rouge, 1990), 307–23; and Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, Project HAL (Historical American Lynching Data Collection Project), people.uncw.edu/hinese/HAL/HAL%20Web%20Page.htm.

and private mobs; we focus on states—and regions within them—with more lynchings as being particularly telling. We correlate the rising and falling numbers of lynchings with cotton prices, demographic shifts, and political changes. How different would any of those trends and comparisons look if we included 10 percent or 20 percent or 30 percent more lynchings (or subtracted them)—(300 throughout the South? 600? 900?)—in our field of vision?[20]

The variability of this data not only implies that we need to look more closely at the numbers we have but also that many more lynchings are likely yet to be found. If Brundage and Tolnay and Beck each found more than seventy lynchings in Georgia that the other did not, then how many more hundreds are yet to be found across the South? A mathematical calculation—the capture-recapture method—can estimate a figure that has received two independent, varying counts ([first count] x [second count] ÷ [those in common]). This method suggests that Georgia lynchings between 1882 and 1920 could total 520, a figure higher than any state lynching count in the South for this period.[21]

[20] This compares the annual lynching numbers of the periods 1882–1888 and 1889–1899, using Tolnay and Beck's tallies for the ten stated they studied, plus Brundage's totals for Virginia. The annual lynching counts rise from 62.1 lynchings per year to 97.7 per year in these periods. The periods are designed to capture the peak of lynching numbers in the 1890s: lynching is on the rise by 1889, and after 1899 it begins its long decline. Project HAL; Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 270–73.

[21] For the use of the capture-recapture method in analyzing homicides, see Roth, *American Homicide;* and Eckberg, "Stalking the Elusive Homicide." Given the complexities of both the definition of lynching and of lynching research (each researcher with his or her own methodology and collections of sources), I am skeptical of the utility of this method in this field, finding its results merely suggestive. Extrapolating from these calculations for Georgia (still

A plausible hypothesis might be that these yet-to-be-discovered lynchings would not be evenly distributed throughout the South but rather concentrated in areas (and in eras) less well covered by the sources that have been most thoroughly mined. This might include frontier areas, for instance, with more demographic change, instability in institutions, and, crucially, more uneven coverage by newspapers. The discrepancies between Georgia's lynching lists, in fact, suggest that this hypothesis is worth pursuing; the "extra" lynchings (those found on only one list) are spread throughout the state, but not evenly.

Two frontier regions—the mountain and south Georgia regions—include a disproportionate number of the lynchings appearing in only one of the studies. These two regions stand at the state's demographic extremes; they were each frontier regions, but quite different ones. The mountain region is Georgia's share of Appalachia, former Cherokee land that had been settled by non-natives in the previous two generations. Relatively small in population and in lynching counts, this region had almost as many "extra" lynchings (thirteen) as lynchings the two lists had in common (seventeen). It was also the only Georgia region that witnessed a decline in African American population between 1880 and 1920, offering further evidence of how challenging this region was for blacks.[22]

South Georgia was at the other demographic extreme: an economic boom in the pine forests doubled the region's population between 1880 and 1900, making it one of the fastest-growing parts of the South. Along with a burgeoning population came a cascading series of administrative and institutional changes: out of eighteen Georgia counties founded between 1890 and 1920, fifteen were in the south Georgia region. This region-in-flux also had half (seventy-six) of all of Georgia's "extra" lynchings, those found in just one study. This variability in the lynching data we have for each of these two very different regions suggests that such frontiers are worth a particularly close look in terms of finding undiscovered lynchings.[23]

Another plausible assumption is that yet-to-be-discovered lynchings might be concentrated in the era before lynching became a prominent public concern. Christopher Waldrep has demonstrated just how much the public understanding of lynching shifted over time: by

more suspect) suggests that there could be more than 500 southern lynchings yet to be found between 1882 and 1920. That would be something like a 19% expansion in lynching's numbers over the current totals (2,672) from Tolnay and Beck (plus Brundage for Virginia) for that period. On the lynching numbers, see Project HAL; and Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 270–83.

[22] Brundage demonstrated how varied were different subregions of Georgia and Virginia. For the 1882–1920 period, he found the following lynching counts in five Georgia subregions: cotton belt (182), south Georgia (166), upper piedmont (40), mountain (18), and coastal (9). If Tolnay and Beck's 80 additional lynchings were added to Brundage's (and it is unclear that this is the appropriate way of dealing with this discrepancy), south Georgia surpasses the cotton belt, and mountain lynchings almost double. These totals would be: south Georgia (207), cotton belt (201), upper piedmont (46), mountain (30), and coastal (10). These numbers do not quite add up to totals shown in figure 1 because the locations for three lynchings are unknown, so they are omitted from these regional totals. Project HAL; Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 270–79. The census of 1880 has the mountain region's African American population as 13,808; by 1920, it had dropped 7.5% to 12,774. Only two Georgia counties (Dawson and Towns, both in the mountain region) in any census in this era had no black population at all, and only in the census of 1920. For the 1880 figures, see U.S. Department of Interior, Census Office, *Compendium of the Twelfth Census: 1900,* part I: *Population* (Washington, 1901), 533–34. U.S. Department of Interior, Census Office, *Compendium of the Fourteenth Census: 1920,* part III: *Population* (Washington, 1922), 207–21.

[23] Project HAL; Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 270–79. South Georgia's total population rose 112% between 1880 and 1900. No other Georgia region increased more than 50% in that era. Between 1880 and 1920, the African American population of this region grew by 340% (from 92,804 to 316,882). Census Office, *Compendium of the Twelfth Census,* I, 533–34; Census Office, *Compendium of the Fourteenth Census,* III, 207–21. Information on county formation appears in notes in the census records.

the early 1900s, lynching was noticed, counted, and discussed in ways it was not in 1880. It would be logical to assume that lynching tallies would be most complete when contemporaries were consciously collecting evidence of them and that lynchings would be undercounted most in an era before that attention became commonplace. The data from overlapping Georgia studies hints that this hypothesis is worth further study. In Georgia, the divergence between lynching lists is most acute in the early years: 40 percent of the lynchings in the 1880s and 1890s appear on only one of the lists; that portion falls to 23 percent for the 1900 to 1920 period. Similarly, Michael Pfeifer's lynching list for Louisiana is identical to that of Tolnay and Beck in twenty-nine of thirty-two years between 1889 and 1920, but in the first seven years that the two studies overlap (1882–1888), Pfeifer found twelve lynchings that Tolnay and Beck did not. William Carrigan observed that "lynching inventories do not become anything close to reliable until the last decade of the nineteenth century." One implication of this might be that many more lynchings are yet to be found before that decade.[24]

If this data turns our concern toward the earliest years of our lynching lists, what of even earlier lynchings, those before the 1880s? Only three studies have explored lynching trends back to the Civil War, and then only for small parts of the South. Each of those studies found a high number of lynchings in that earlier era. We have no such data for the South as a whole—our region-wide lynching tallies begin in 1882. This means that the early history of lynching is mostly a mystery and will likely remain so. The challenges of sources and the definition of lynching are always substantial, and they are most acute when sources are fewer. The Reconstruction era stands out in particular in this regard. Amid the disorder of that period, record keeping was even more uneven than usual, and partisanship reached extraordinary levels, further complicating research. Arguing over violence was an integral part of the postwar conflict: black and Republican papers, along with testimony before various investigations, decried the large numbers of victims, while white conservatives and their papers called these accusations partisan fictions. It is plausible that both sets of assertions were in some measure overstatements. The result is a heightened challenge to our ability to better grasp the true scope of violence in this era.[25]

[24] The end of the century witnessed a burgeoning number of newspaper stories, commentaries, and books on lynching. Christopher Waldrep shows not only that this trend expanded the volume of print material on lynching but also that toward the end of the century antilynching agitation changed the understanding of lynching in the press and for the public. Waldrep, *Many Faces of Judge Lynch,* 103–26. See also Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky,* 8. In addition, the growth of the social sciences transformed the understanding of data itself in this era. This period was steeped in empiricism, professionalization, and a new reliance upon experts. Robert H. Weibe asserts that in this era, "the meaning of data had fundamentally changed." Robert H. Weibe, *The Search for Order, 1870–1920* (New York, 1967), 147. See also Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (New York, 1991), 59–60. The evaluation of lynching was not immune to these shifting cultural and intellectual currents: lynching tallies first appeared at this moment. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice,* 161–78. Project HAL. Carrigan, *Making of a Lynching Culture,* 253n8.

[25] In overall lynching counts, Kentucky had 16% more lynchings during Reconstruction than it did in the 1890s (11.1 per year as opposed to 9.3), northwest Tennessee had 42% more (1.3 per year in Reconstruction, as opposed to 0.9 per year in the 1890s), and central Texas, 100% more (5.4 per year versus 2.6). Carrigan, *Making of a Lynching Culture,* 275–87; Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky,* 307–19; Vandiver, *Lethal Punishment,* 196–99. These periods are designed to capture the peak of lynching numbers in each era: for Reconstruction, 1866 to 1876, when lynching numbers are falling, and for the 1890s, 1889 (when lynching is again on the rise) to 1899 (when it begins its long decline). When studying intrastate regions, one must be mindful of how county boundaries change over time. Vandiver's region in Tennessee includes Crockett County, which was formed in 1872 out of two other counties in the state's northwest region, but also from parts of two counties (Haywood and Madison) that are outside that region. If there were any lynchings in this small area before 1872, we would not be able to tell whether they were inside her region or out. *Ibid.* This starting point is common because the data collected by the Tuskegee Institute began in 1882, as did the tabulations by the *Chicago Tribune.* The starting point for other data sets is 1889. See National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States;* and Raper, *Tragedy of Lynching.*

Most modern historians of Reconstruction, therefore, emphasize the widespread, general evidence of chaos and confusion in the era along with stunning and horrific episodes of racial violence. Randolph Roth found extraordinary rates of homicide during Reconstruction in each community he evaluated—the high point of killings in southern history, in fact. Between July and October 1868 Arkansas reportedly endured two hundred violent deaths; by one count Texas had 939 from the end of the Civil War in 1865 to 1868. Memphis had forty-six black deaths in one riot in May 1866; another riot in Ellenton, South Carolina, in September 1876 might have taken as many as one hundred black lives. A single incident in 1866 in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, resulted in the lynching of twenty-four blacks. While quantitative data from an era so chaotic may never prove completely convincing, the role of lynching in these early decades is undeniably worthy of further study.[26]

This data from overlapping studies of lynching suggest that we give greater scrutiny to our assumptions about the geography—and possibly even the chronology—of lynching in the history of the South, raising several fresh questions about racial violence. Should we give more attention to the role that frontier conditions play in the history of southern racial violence? Are we undervaluing the importance of lynching in the early postbellum decades? How significant is it that the young men of the violent 1890s—young men are typically the most violent members of any society—were born between the late 1850s and the early 1870s, growing up in Reconstruction's chaos, when one of the chief lessons for southern whites—taught to them by their fathers—was that violence is effective? And what of the trough between what appear to be two peaks of racial violence: Why were there fewer lynchings in the first dozen years after white conservatives "redeemed" the South (1877–1888) and had few checks upon their actions? Placing lynching in the context of legal executions may be helpful here: this trough in lynching was also the South's peak in capital punishment rates.[27]

[26] Scholars regularly address the difficulties of cataloging Reconstruction violence. See Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York, 1979), 276–77; Rable, *But There Was No Peace,* 15, 29; Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky,* 9; and Carrigan, *Making of a Lynching Culture,* 113, 295–96. Bruce E. Baker suggests that even later violence might have its roots in Reconstruction antagonisms. Baker, *This Mob Will Surely Take My Life,* 49. Roth, *American Homicide,* 326–54. Rable, *But There Was No Peace,* 86, 105, 173–74; Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long,* 281. Foner, *Reconstruction,* 119.

[27] Pfeifer has recently turned our attention to this early history of lynching. See Michael J. Pfeifer, *The Roots of Rough Justice: Origins of American Lynching* (Urbana, 2011). The South's young men might yield another reason for the region's overall levels of violence. The South in this era was not more male than other regions, although the population profiles of some lynching-prone frontiers—south Georgia, for instance—were slightly skewed toward males. But every southern state was in the nation's top 15 states in the proportion of its population that was teenagers in the 1890s and in the bottom 15 in the proportion in their thirties. Every southern state had a median age more than 5 years younger than the least violent region, New England. The only states in the nation with median ages under 19 were seven states in the South. U.S. Department of Interior, Census Office, *Special Reports of the Twelfth Census: 1900; Supplementary Analyses and Derivative Tables* (Washington, 1906), 146, 161. Whites in the late nineteenth century spoke of insolent "new issue Negroes" born to freedom's first generation. Might there have been a generation of "new issues whites," coming of age in the late 1880s and coached to violence by its successful deployment in Reconstruction? Edward Ayers posits something similar in Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice,* 241. Although skeptical of its implications, Tolnay and Beck found that between 1880 and 1889 (unlike every later era), legal execution and lynching had an inverse relationship to each other (their words are "significantly related negatively"). Tolnay and Beck, *Festival of Violence,* 110. My research finds that Reconstruction was the low point in southern capital punishment use: 16.4 per year between 1866 and 1876, yielding a rate of 0.15 per year per 100,000. Numbers from "Executions in the U.S., 1608–2002: The Espy File," *Death Penalty Information Center,* http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/executions-us-1608-2002-espy-file. Texas, for consistency, is not included. Population is from the 1870 census. Rate = (number executed in period) ÷ (number of years in period) ÷ (population) x 100,000. Among many other things, redemption meant the doubling of capital punishment rates: 46.17 per year for the 1877–1888 period, yielding a rate of 0.32 (using the 1880 census figures). Between 1889 and 1899, the region averaged 48 executions per year, yielding a rate of 0.25 (using the average of the 1890 and 1900 census figures). The rate goes down further in the early twentieth century as the South's population continues to rise. For more on the relationship between southern

While these questions about the geography and chronology of lynching might prove fruitful, the evidence we have to pursue them is suggestive rather than decisive. Our footing is not as sound as we tend to presume it is when it comes to lynching's numbers. We expect to see a divergence between lynching tallies from one hundred years ago made amid a terrorist wave of violence and the list constructed by modern historians with exacting standards of evidence. Given the challenges of studying lynching, differences between modern studies cannot be a surprise either. But such a wide disparity in counts between three of our best scholarly works demonstrates clearly the difficulties of studying so complex a subject as lynching—we do not even know how many lynchings there were. In fact, it looks like we are not even close.

Lynching's problematic definition and the differences among lynching lists each raise substantive concerns that, by themselves, should lead to a reconsideration of the place of numbers in the study of lynching. But there is yet another challenge to counting lynchings: the differing methods used to interpret these numbers. The lynching data above have been in the form of counts—numbers of lynchings in the historical record added together for different regions, states, and eras. This is the most common method used in the literature on lynching, but scholars also employ other methodologies for interpreting lynching's numbers, and their findings diverge substantially from counts.

Although practices vary widely among historians, two tendencies in the use of quantitative data are especially useful to consider. On the one hand, some historians use the raw counts to evaluate trends, viewing the tallies as something akin to primary sources: untainted by modern interpretations and techniques that would sever them from their historical moment. These historians tend to treat the numerical evidence of the past as another source to be combined with qualitative ones and interpreted. In this methodology, all sources—qualitative and quantitative alike—are embedded in a rich historical context that these historians consider fundamental to sound historical evaluation. Here, much of the analytical complexity lies in this interpretive context; the numbers are kept simple, raw. So are the questions typically asked of them, such as "How many lynchings were in this area (or era)?"

Quantitative historians, on the other hand, view the numbers of lynching from a different vantage, seeing raw counts as unrefined, requiring further distillation to be useful. For them, meaning arises from the relationships between lynching trends and other trends: numbers become significant and measurable in comparison to other numbers. With this focus on discerning particular relationships, these historians might use counts, but only as a beginning: they control for other variables to better ensure that they are not corrupting their analyses by measuring extraneous factors. Quantitative historians rarely make qualitative historical contexts so central. Their analytical complexities tend to arise more from the methods they use to refine their data. They would seldom ask merely "How many?" Rather, their questions tend to something such as: Are there statistically significant results when lynching and cotton price trends are compared by county in the South between 1890 and 1910, controlling for black population size, proportion of the population that is black, and the history of violence in each county?[28]

capital punishment and lynching in this era, see Michael Trotti, "The Scaffold's Revival: Race and Public Execution in the South," *Journal of Social History,* 45 (Fall 2011), 195–224.

[28] Another issue is whether to count each lynching *victim,* as done in this essay, or each *incident.* If a mob lynched three men, was that one incident or three? Depending on the answer, our lynching numbers shift: between

In that way, in terms of numerical data, quantitative and interpretive historians speak different languages. But that difference masks the commonalities that the two groups share. Before deploying their statistical tools, quantitative historians start with premises, such as the chronological bounds to their studies (1882 to 1920? start with 1865? compare data in ten-year increments? five year? three?), the units of analysis (states? counties? intrastate regions?), the definition of lynching, and what factors do and do not require controls in their equations. After performing their calculations, they likewise interpret the data. In this way, no matter how sophisticated the calculations or whether the analysis is framed by interpretive or by quantitative methods, all numerical data have foundations in qualitative judgments, a philosophical base upon which the simple or complex statistics operate. These premises fundamentally shape the nature of our understanding of trends.

The effects of such assumptions are exemplified by comparing the dramatic differences between two methods of measuring lynching intensity: counts and rates. Rates solve for what can be vast differences in populations. Scholars have long evaluated the patterns of crime incidence according to rates, but in the scholarship of lynching such studies are more rare than ones using counts. Still, they are not unknown. Almost every scholar of murder who turns to lynching uses rates; Edward Ayers is one of the few historians of the South to do so.[29]

Using counts to measure the geographical distribution of Georgia lynchings, Fitzhugh Brundage turned our attention to the center of the state. (See figure 2.) But Brundage's cotton belt held nearly half of Georgia's population. If one were to assume that rates serve as the best measure, then our understanding of lynching prevalence in Georgia is transformed. In the 1890s south Georgia had more than twice the lynching rate of the cotton belt. (See figure 3.) More surprising, the mountain region with its smaller population also surpassed the cotton belt when calculating by rates. As with the patterns in the discrepancies between overlapping Georgia lynching lists, rates turn our attention toward the frontier conditions of Georgia's Appalachian north and the demographic chaos of the pine forests of southern Georgia.[30]

1882 and 1920, Tolnay and Beck counted 86 lynching victims in North Carolina but 16% fewer separate incidents. Tolnay and Beck, *Festival of Violence,* 72. For a work that argues that lynching is best measured not by numbers of victims but by individual incidents, see Stewart E. Tolnay, Glenn Deane, and E. M. Beck, "Vicarious Violence: Spatial Effects on Southern Lynchings, 1890–1919," *American Journal of Sociology,* 102 (Nov. 1996), 800.

[29] Rates are so pervasive and accepted in the study of crime that it yields little commentary except when populations are very small. At issue is not the utility of rates per se (both sides of this argument agree that rates are most appropriate for evaluating lynching incidence), but merely where the boundaries are of useful data. For this debate over the "fallacy of small numbers," see Robert R. Dykstra, "Quantifying the Wild West: The Problematic Statistics of Frontier Violence," *Western Historical Quarterly,* 40 (Autumn 2009), 321–47, esp. 332; and Robert R. Dykstra, "Body Counts and Murder Rates: The Contested Statistics of Western Violence," *Reviews in American History,* 31 (Dec. 2003), 554–63. For the other side of the argument, see Randolph Roth, "Guns, Murder, and Probability: How Can We Decide Which Figures to Trust?," *Reviews in American History,* 35 (June 2007), 165–75. For examples of the use of rates, see Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South* (New York, 1992), 156–59, 495n69–497n75; Dykstra, "Quantifying the Wild West," 337–38; Jean, "'Warranted' Lynchings," 354; Roth, *American Homicide,* 421, 581n85; William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, "The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States, 1848 to 1928," *Journal of Social History,* 37 (Winter 2003), 414–15, 430–32; Terence Robert Finnegan, "'At the Hands of Parties Unknown': Lynching in Mississippi and South Carolina, 1881–1940" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1993), 58, 96; James L. Massey and Martha A. Myers, "Patterns of Repressive Social Control in Post-Reconstruction Georgia, 1882–1935," *Social Forces,* 68 (Dec. 1989), 458–88. Tolnay and Beck have more faith in counts than rates, but in an early essay they too used rates. See E. M. Beck, James L. Massey, and Stewart E. Tolnay, "The Gallows, the Mob, and the Vote: Lethal Sanctioning of Blacks in North Carolina and Georgia, 1882 to 1930," *Law and Society Review,* 23 (no. 2, 1989), 317–31.

[30] Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 103–39. In 1900, population totals in Brundage's regions were: cotton belt (941,477 total; 589,107 black), upper piedmont (523,900; 151,227), south Georgia (473,754; 208,513),

Georgia Lynchings, 1889–1899, Measured in Counts

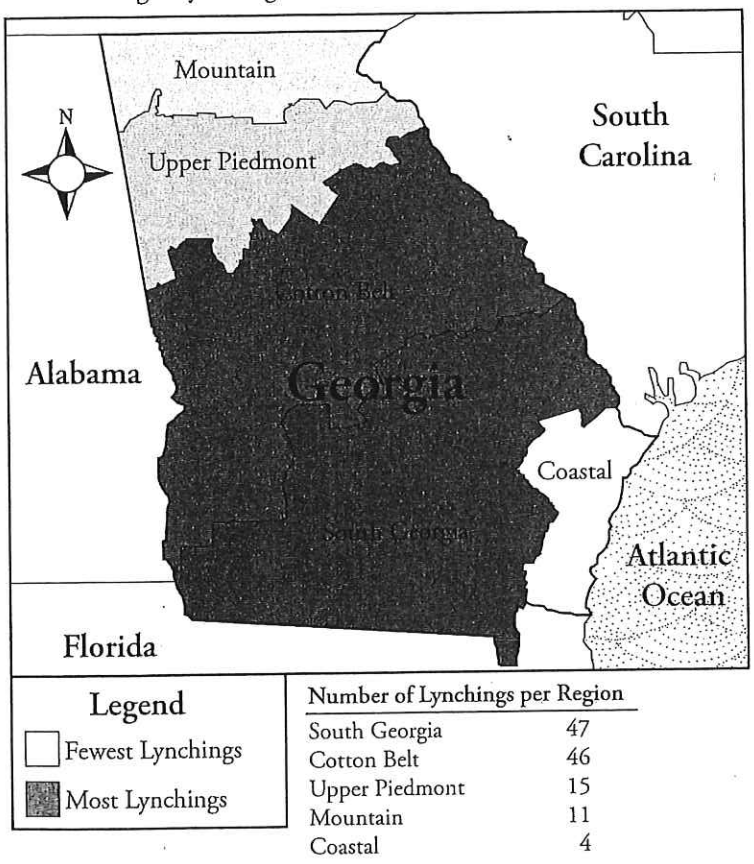


Figure 2. Counts—tallying the raw numbers of lynchings in a certain area and era—draw our attention, in this example of Georgia, to the center of the state, its staple crops, and its dense population. SOURCE: W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Urbana, 1993).

Brundage found that lynching thrived in the densely populated cotton belt: "the presence of staple crops, white landlords, and black laborers may serve as an index of mob violence," while "outside of the Cotton Belt and southern Georgia, there was only a shallow, if volatile, reservoir of fuel for mob violence." In contrast, Ayers found that lynching predominated in areas of low population densities and high numbers of African Americans moving in, describing conditions that would be common in south Georgia: "The counties most likely to witness lynchings had scattered farms where many black newcomers and strangers lived and worked.

mountain (158,223; 13,811), coastal (118,977; 67,374). Population figures for 1890 and 1900 are from Census Office, *Compendium of the Twelfth Census,* I, 533–34. These rates represent the total numbers lynched in each of Brundage's regions, using the average county populations from the 1890 and 1900 censuses to calculate the rates. The formula for calculating this and the following annualized lynching rates is: Rate = (number lynched) ÷ (number of years in period) ÷ (population) x 100,000. The mountain counties stand out even more when calculating the rates of black lynchings: the region had more than eight times the rate of the cotton belt. (See figure 3.) This rate is so astonishing due to the small population of African Americans in the mountain counties.

Figure 3. When the varying populations of regions are taken into account by forming lynching rates (lynching count per 100,000 population per year) the geography of lynching is transformed. In Georgia, lynchings in the sparsely settled mountain region and the dynamically growing south Georgia region far outpace those in the densely settled cotton belt. Due to the widely differing concentrations of African Americans in Georgia regions, this shift in our attention to these frontier regions is particularly vivid when considering African American lynchings and African American population figures: in 1900, 12 different cotton belt counties each had a larger black population than that of the entire mountain region (13,811). SOURCES: W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Urbana, 1993). Populations are averages of the 1890 and 1900 population figures for counties from U.S. Department of Interior, Census Office, *Compendium of the Twelfth Census: 1900*, part 1: *Population* (Washington, 1901).

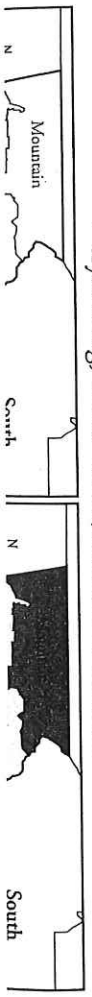
Those counties were also likely to have few towns, weak law enforcement, poor communication with the outside, and high levels of transiency among both races." By making different assumptions about how lynching's prominence is best measured (counts or rates), Brundage and Ayers offer nearly opposite conclusions about the geography of southern lynching.[31]

When looking at the region as a whole, counts draw our attention to the Deep South: Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana, and Alabama experienced far more lynchings (58 percent of all southern lynchings between 1882 and 1920) than did other states, both overall and when limited to the lynching of blacks. Much of the scholarship of lynching has focused on those states, considering them the heart of the issue. (See figure 4.)[32]

The difficulty with such raw counts is clear: they skew results sharply to larger populations. Part of the problem stems from the fact that all count totals are bounded by lines we introduce. In that way, counts are as much manufactured as discovered: We stop counting when we reach a boundary that we have decided to impose. State lines are stable and convenient, yet what is the rationale for arguing that they offer the appropriate analytical divisions to evaluate racial violence? They certainly are not barriers to either lynch mobs or to the terror those mobs provoke. Would residents of Toccoa (at the eastern end of Georgia's mountain region) be any more terrorized by a lynching in La Fayette (at the western end of that region, more than one hundred miles away) than residents of northeastern Alabama (as little as fifteen miles away from La Fayette)? We would count this La Fayette lynching as saying something about Georgia and its mountain region, when it is unclear just how much those populations, overall, would have been affected by it.[33]

Utilizing state lines and other boundaries certainly results in vastly different units of analysis. Comparing Florida with Georgia in 1890 means comparing one area with just under four hundred thousand people with another five times larger. Brundage's cotton belt in Georgia had eight times the population of the coastal region. Counties varied still more: from 2,956 in Liberty County, Florida, to Orleans County, Louisiana, ninety-seven times larger (287,104). Unless we solve for population, a comparison of lynching counts will tell us, first and foremost, that Georgia had far more people than Florida (and, consequently, far more violence overall) and that the cotton belt had more people than the coastal region.[34]

In this way, rates can be an improvement over counts when measuring the prevalence of lynching, giving all regions (no matter what the size or what bounds are introduced) a common, stable denominator (traditionally, per 100,000 in population) for comparison with others. For many questions that are readily quantifiable—such as "Where was the greatest risk of lynching for black men?" or "When was lynching most prevalent?"—rates are arguably more useful than counts.



Lynching, 1889–1899, Measured in Rates

[31] Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 138. Ayers, *Promise of the New South,* 156–57, 495n69–97n71. Ayers's work in rates predates our modern tabulations and is based on NAACP data.

[32] These and the following region-wide comparisons are built from state lynching data compiled by Tolnay and Beck for the ten states they studied, with data on Virginia added from Brundage. See Project HAL; and Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 281–83. The lack of modern lynching tallies for Texas forces me to leave that state out of the discussion. This is, frankly, terrible, for Texas may well be one of the most lynching-prone states: the NAACP placed Texas third in numbers lynched. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States,* 32. We have modern data only for the seven counties around Waco studied in Carrigan, *Making of a Lynching Culture.*

[33] This is most obvious in terms of intrastate regions. Compare, for example, the maps that describe Ayers's four regions in Georgia and Brundage's five regions there. Ayers, *Promise of the New South,* 5; Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 107.

[34] Census Office, *Compendium of the Twelfth Census,* I, 532–34, 541–42.

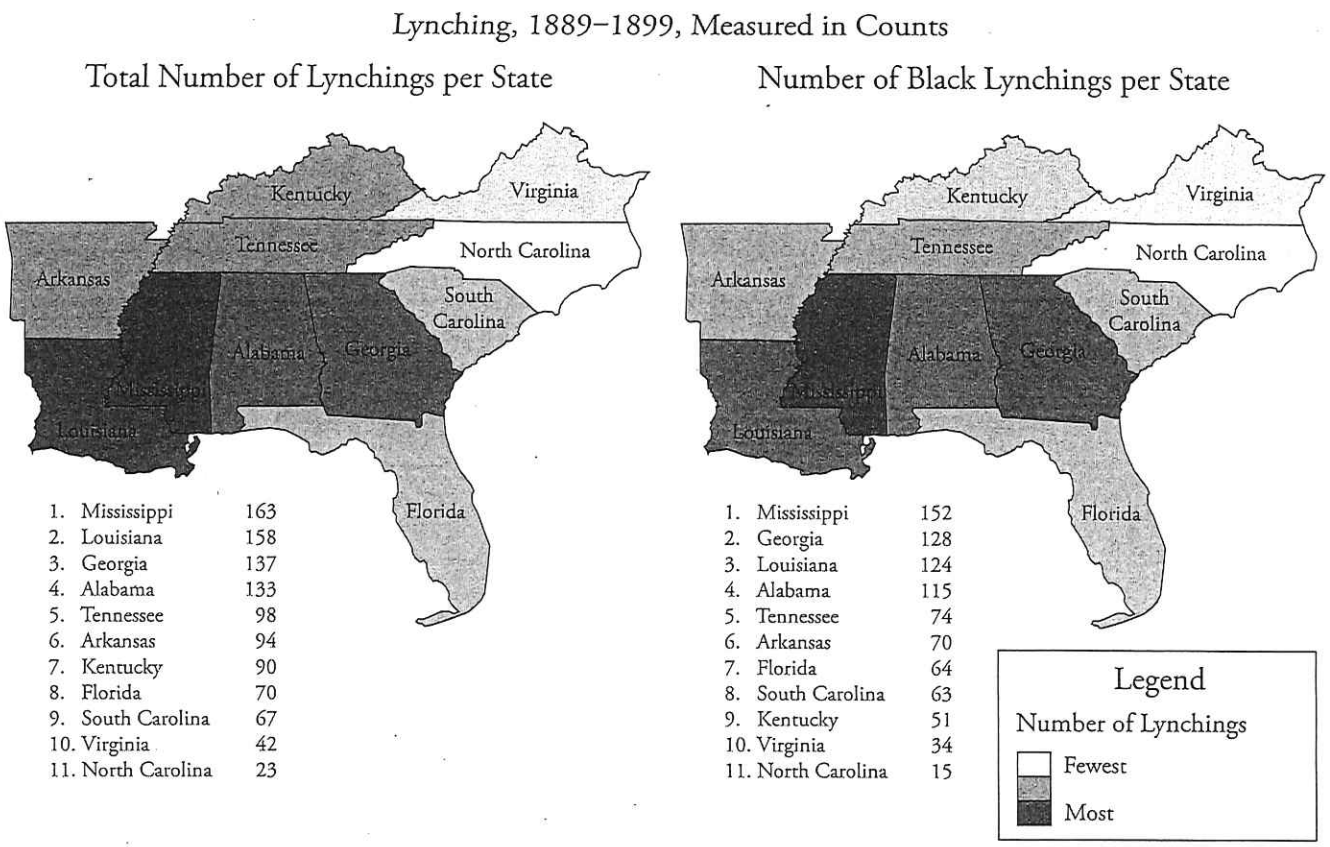


Figure 4. As is the case with Georgia, lynching counts draw our attention to the region in the South where staple-crop cultivation was intense and populations of African Americans were dense—the Deep South states. This is true whether tallying all lynchings or when limiting the study to the lynchings of African Americans. SOURCES: Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, Project HAL (Historical American Lynching Data Collection Project), people.uncw.edu/hinese/HAL/HAL%20Web%20Page.htm. For Virginia, W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Urbana, 1993).

How does the pattern of lynching in the South shift when we take populations into consideration by generating rates? If one were to grant as much authority to the geographical distribution of lynching rates as we have typically granted to counts, one would come to startling conclusions, leading to quite different historical questions. (See figure 5.) With the smallest (and fastest-growing) population of any southern state, Florida had a lynching rate 33 percent higher than Mississippi's and more than twice Georgia's rate in the 1890s. Another way of characterizing this data is that a man would have been twice as likely to be lynched in Florida as in Georgia in the 1890s. Florida and Arkansas have the highest rates of lynching blacks in the 1890s. A black man would be more likely to be lynched in Arkansas than in Mississippi; he would be more likely to be lynched in Tennessee or Kentucky than in Georgia or Alabama.[35]

As with Georgia's intrastate regions, rates of lynching in southern states in the 1890s offer a pattern that diverges from the traditional focus upon the Deep South. This is startlingly apparent when using rates built from the lynchings of African Americans in the 1890s compared to African American populations. (See figure 5.) The southern frontier states—Florida to the south and those west of the Mississippi—not only have the highest black lynching rates but are also among the most recently settled and are the three southern states with the fastest-growing populations between 1880 and 1900. In the middle range of the rates of the lynching of blacks are the states of the old frontier (Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi). The most established states—the original seaboard states of the colonial South—have the lowest rates of lynching blacks in the 1890s.[36]

This pattern is not as pronounced when we use overall lynching rates or other ranges of dates; but all rate data shift our attention away from the Deep South and its cotton belt and toward the frontier and unsettled areas, including Florida, the trans-Mississippi West, and regions within states such as south Georgia, bursting with new arrivals. This also includes regions that were frontiers not measured by population influx but rather by distance from modernity, urban life, the market economy, and all that comes with those factors. Examples include the mountain regions of both Georgia and Virginia, the most isolated parts of each state. This conclusion supports Ayers's contention that the "very scarcity of blacks" in the mountain counties of Georgia "may have encouraged violence against them."[37]

Rates thoroughly reshuffle our view of where lynching was most prevalent in the South; do they similarly deemphasize the South itself when considering the national story of lynching? No. But rates do emphasize the importance of also studying lynching in the more sparsely settled West. Of the six nonsouthern states investigated by Michael Pfeifer in *Rough*

Lynching, 1889–1899, Measured in Counts

Total Number of Lynchings per State

Number of Black Lynchings per State

[35] All state population data used in this section comes from Susan B. Carter et al., eds., *Historical Statistics of the United States: Earliest Times to the Present, volume 1* (New York, 2006), 180–359.

[36] The lack of modern Texas data is most glaring here. As a recently settled, trans-Mississippi, frontier, fast-growing, and lynching-prone state, Texas belongs in this discussion. In addition, several other intrastate regions such as Mississippi's delta region (another quickly growing part of the South in this era) are worth consideration. Ayers, *Promise of the New South,* 22, 195. The five states with the smallest overall lynching rates also have the smallest growth in population between 1880 and 1900. The percentage increase in state populations from 1880 to 1900 for these states are: Florida (total population, 96.1%; black population, 82.1%), Arkansas (63.4; 74.1), Louisiana (47.0; 34.6), Alabama (44.9; 37.9), Georgia (43.7; 42.7), Mississippi (37.1; 39.6), North Carolina (35.3; 17.5), South Carolina (34.6; 29.5), Tennessee (31.0; 19.1), Kentucky (30.2; 4.9), and Virginia (22.6; 4.6). Carter et al., eds., *Historical Statistics of the United States.*

[37] Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice,* 260. In a similar pattern to Georgia, Brundage's mountainous southwest region in Virginia had twice the lynching rate of Virginia's next highest region (0.55 lynchings per 100,000 per year in the southwest compared to the Piedmont's 0.27). Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 281–83; Census Office, *Compendium of the Twelfth Census,* I, 561–62.

	Lynchings per 100,000 Population per Year		Black Lynchings per 100,000 Black Population per Year
1.	Florida	1.38	Florida 2.16
2.	Louisiana	1.15	Arkansas 1.88
3.	Mississippi	1.04	Louisiana 1.86
4.	Alabama	0.72	Kentucky 1.68
5.	Arkansas	0.70	Mississippi 1.67
6.	Georgia	0.61	Tennessee 1.48
7.	South Carolina	0.49	Alabama 1.39
8.	Tennessee	0.47	Georgia 1.23
9.	Kentucky	0.41	South Carolina 0.78
10.	Virginia	0.22	Virginia 0.48
11.	North Carolina	0.12	North Carolina 0.23

Figure 5. With rates of lynching, the Deep South is eclipsed by more recently settled and fast-growing states with smaller populations. Again, this trend is most vivid when limited to the lynchings of African Americans and the dramatically varying African American populations across the South. The 3 states with the highest rates of African American lynchings are the trans-Mississippi states of Arkansas and Louisiana plus the southern frontier of Florida: the 3 fastest-growing states in the South. The 4 states with the lowest rates of lynching blacks in the 1890s are the settled seaboard states of the South. SOURCES: Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, Project HAL (Historical American Lynching Data Collection Project), people.uncw.edu/hinese/HAL/HAL%20Web%20Page.htm. For Virginia, W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Urbana, 1993). State populations are the averages of the 1890 and 1900 population figures from Susan B. Carter et al., eds., *Historical Statistics of the United States: Earliest Times to the Present, volume I* (New York, 2006).

Justice, only two have rates like those of the South in the 1890s. Washington, with eleven lynchings and a population of less than half a million, is comparable to the South's least lynching-prone states—Virginia and North Carolina. With only seven lynchings but a particularly small population (92,531 in 1900—about the size of four average southern counties), Wyoming had a lynching rate higher than all but the most lynching-prone southern states.[38]

Lynching in the West clearly deserves the closer scrutiny it has begun to receive. The numbers of western lynchings have the same challenges of definition, sources, and competing methodologies as those in the South. Like southern lynchings, those in the West also regularly targeted racial minorities; some people in both regions also defended lynching by pointing to weaknesses in the underdeveloped judicial systems. In overall measures of violence as well, the two regions stand out as being "staggeringly violent" in the nineteenth century.[39]

Yet there are also important distinctions between the regions in terms of racial violence, providing ample reasons to investigate each on its own terms. Proportionately more whites were lynched in the West, and, among minority lynchings, few were of African Americans: Of 352 lynchings found by Ken Gonzales-Day in California, only eight were of blacks. Instead, Native Americans, Mexicans, and Chinese were more often the victims of mobs. That trend raises several issues that are not as prominent in the history of southern lynching: anti-immigrant impulses (based on fear of economic competition) among lynch mobs, diplomatic responses to lynchings of people from Mexico (or China), and, for Mexican Americans, an added complexity regarding race and class. Mexican Americans were considered by law to be white, which helped shield elites from violence. Lower-class Mexican Americans, however, were seen as a lesser race and targeted for lynchings in great numbers. Also in contrast with the South, sexual predation was rarely a justification for lynching Mexican Americans in the West. The chronology likewise differs: The high point of western lynching came much earlier (the 1850s and 1860s) than what we consider it to be in the South, with western lynching rates falling in the decades when lynching becomes most prominent in southern history. While lynching is important to our understanding of the history of both regions, the dynamics of violence in each seem distinct.[40]

In regard to the South, rates not only shift our perspective of lynching's geography they also force us to confront the importance of lynching earlier in southern history. Because populations grow quickly over time, calculations based on population are likewise transformed over the long term. But population changes are simply not that dramatic from one decade to the next, so rates have only a modest impact upon the data we have—starting in

Lynching, 1889–1899, Measured in Rates

Lynchings per ..

Black Lynchings per 100,000 Black Population per Year

[38] Pfeifer, *Rough Justice,* 156–83. Using the same period (1889–1899) and methodology, the rates for all lynchings in Pfeifer's study are: Wyoming (0.82 per year per 100,000), Washington (0.23), California (0.10), Iowa (0.02), Wisconsin (0.01), and New York (0.001). Only New York had a lynching of a black man (1) in this era, yielding a rate of 0.11. It is worth noting that the total number of lynchings in all of these six states outside the South for the period of Pfeifer's study (1874–1947) is 173, less than half of the lynchings in Louisiana alone (421).

[39] Roth, *American Homicide,* 354, 337–85, 403–34. Both regions had high rates of not only lynching but also of homicide.

[40] Ken Gonzales-Day, *Lynching in the West, 1850–1935* (Durham, N.C., 2006), 206–28. He found that, out of 352 lynchings, the racial/ethnic breakdown of lynching victims in California in the 1850–1935 period was: 132 Latin American/Mexican (41% of those identified), 120 European descent (37%), 41 Native American (13%), and 29 Chinese (9%). See *ibid.*, 206. For the period 1874 to 1947, Pfeifer found lynching mostly targeted whites in the two other western states he investigated: 27 whites, 4 Native Americans, and 4 African Americans were lynched in Wyoming, and 16 whites, 2 Native Americans, and no blacks were lynched in Washington State. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice,* 159–60, 179–83. On lower-class Mexican Americans being targeted, see Carrigan and Webb, "Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States," 418–23, 427–28. On sexual predation rarely being the justification, see *ibid.*, 420. On the difference in chronology, see Gonzales-Day, *Lynching in the West,* 9–10.

1882—for the late nineteenth-century South as a whole. Instead of a 36 percent rise in lynching when measuring by counts, the rate of lynching in the 1890s was 25 percent higher than the rate for the 1880s.[41]

Rates have a much more startling effect on the chronology of lynching trends when considering a longer time frame. Between 1870 and 1910 the population of the South grew from under 11 million to over 24 million; the African American population nearly doubled, from 4.2 million to 8.2 million. If we were to assume that rates best measure lynching prominence, therefore, anything less than a corresponding doubling of lynching counts over this era would demonstrate a decline in the prevalence of lynching in the South. When factoring in population growth by using rates, lynching in the Reconstruction era utterly dwarfs that in the 1890s, at least given the little data we have from that era. (See figure 6.) For Kentucky and northwest Tennessee, adjusting for rising populations gives us rates of lynching in the Reconstruction era that were double that of the 1890s. In the counties of Texas studied by William Carrigan, the rate of lynching in Reconstruction was seven times that of the 1890s.[42]

If rates offer the most appropriate measure of lynching intensity, then our familiar chronology of lynching peaking in the 1890s requires revision. But there are reasons to question rates as the most reliable gauge for revealing lynching intensity, and not simply because of compelling concerns about the reliability of lynching data from the chaos of Reconstruction. Rates are most helpful when seeking the risk or hazard of lynching. But historians are rarely interested in risk alone. After all, the death of the lynching victim was not necessarily even the most important goal of lynchers. Arguably as important was the terror that lynching struck in the whole community: "one Negro swinging from a tree will serve as well as another to terrorize the community," as one black southerner put it. Terror was something felt, not something calculated, and it was felt not only by one victim but also by uncountable masses: "The spectacle of a body swinging from a limb by the roadway," wrote one white editor, "carries with it a grewsomeness which Negroes for fifty miles around do not forget for a generation." At times, white southerners appeared to consider lynching less a crime than a social policy: "It is about time to have another lynching," a white Mississippian told a visitor, "When the niggers get so that they are not afraid of being lynched, it is time to put the fear in them."[43]

[41] For the 10 states studied by Tolnay and Beck, plus Virginia (from Brundage), the rate of lynching between 1882 and 1888 was 0.48 per year per 100,000 in population. That rose to 0.63 between 1889 and 1899. Project HAL; Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 281–83.

[42] To be precise, the population of the South (including Texas) rose from 10,808,397 in 1870 to 24,682,319 in 1910. The African American population rose from 4,161,340 to 8,213,283 in those years. Carter et al., eds., *Historical Statistics of the United States.* Using the 1870 census for Reconstruction and the average of the 1890 and 1900 census figures for the era of the 1890s, George Wright's Kentucky data yields 0.84 lynchings per year per 100,000 in population during Reconstruction; during the 1890s the rate was 0.46. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky,* 307–20. Kentucky's population grew by 63% between 1870 and 1900 (1,321,011 to 2,147,174). The lynching rate for the counties in northwest Tennessee was 1.57 per year per 100,000 in Reconstruction and fell to 0.75 in the 1890s. Vandiver, *Lethal Punishment,* 196–98. The total population in 1870 for Tennessee's Crockett, Dyer, Gibson, Lake, Lauderdale, Obion, and Weakley Counties was 88,977 (19,716 black); in 1900 it was 169,222 (41,322 black). U.S. Department of Interior, Census Office, *Compendium of the Ninth Census: 1870,* part 1: *Population* (Washington, 1872), 31–33, 61–67. For 1890 and 1900 population figures, see Census Office, *Compendium of the Twelfth Census,* I, 40–41, 556–60. The lynching rate for the counties around Waco, Texas, during Reconstruction was 9.20 per year per 100,000 in population, which fell to 1.24 in the 1890s. Carrigan, *Making of Lynching Culture,* 276–86. The total population in 1870 for Texas's Bell, Bosque, Coryell, Falls, Hill, Limestone, and McLennan Counties was 58,271 (13,944 black); in 1900 it was 251,275 (40,944 black). There were no boundary changes to these counties in these years.

[43] For the "one Negro swinging from tree will serve . . . " quotation, see Litwack, *Trouble in Mind,* 290. For the "spectacle of a body . . . " quotation, see "Reaping a Whirlwind," *Chicago Defender,* April 1, 1916. For the "It is about time . . . " quotation, see Litwack, *Trouble in Mind,* 309.

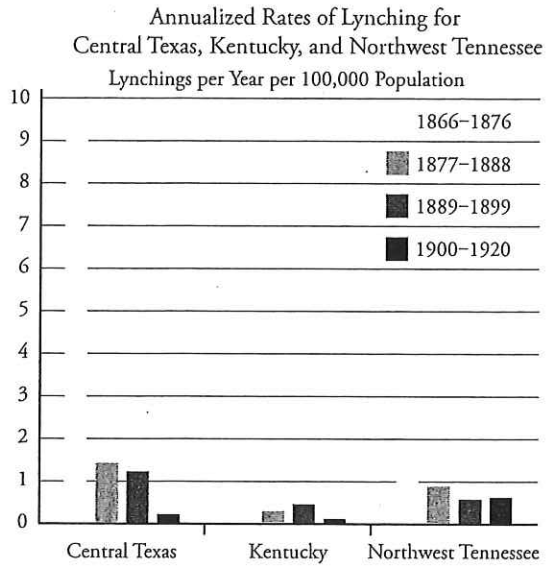


Figure 6. Because the population of the South more than doubled between 1870 and 1910, a dramatic trend emerges when using lynching rates to solve for this rise. With lower populations early in the post–Civil War era, the 3 southern subregions studied by William D. Carrigan (central Texas), George C. Wright (Kentucky), and Margaret Vandiver (northwest Tennessee) had much higher lynching rates during Reconstruction than in the 1890s: twice as high in Kentucky and northwest Tennessee, and 7 times higher in the counties around Waco, Texas. SOURCES: William D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836–1916* (Urbana, 2004); George C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865–1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings"* (Baton Rouge, 1990); Margaret Vandiver, *Lethal Punishment: Lynchings and Legal Executions in the South* (New Brunswick, 2005); U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Compendium of the Ninth Census 1870,* part I: *Population* (Washington, 1892), 31–33, 61–67; U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Compendium of the Twelfth Census 1890,* part I: *Population* (Washington, 1901), 540–41, 556–60; U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Compendium of the Fourteenth Census,* part III: *Population* (Washington, 1922), 369–80, 961–69, 990–1014.

Can this fear be measured the same way as risk, proportional to the population? There seems little reason to suppose so. This terror, a symbolic or cultural impact of lynching, has little to do with the size of a population. Brundage, using counts, believed they would better capture lynching's effects. He wrote, "the symbolic significance of lynchings cannot be measured in proportion to population": "the absolute number of lynchings in each area and the fear they generated, rather than the per capita rate, were the index of local race relations." Using counts as the foundation for their more complex calculations, Tolnay, Deane, and Beck agreed with Brundage: "we believe it was far more likely that any spatial effect for lynchings depended on the *number* of incidents rather than their *rate*. Neither blacks nor whites were likely to have 'adjusted' the number of incidents in nearby counties (or their own) to 'probabilities' based on the size of the population at risk."[44]

[44] Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 104. Tolnay, Deane, and Beck, "Vicarious Violence," 800n14. Emphasis in original.

Yet there are also reasons to pause before accepting the logic that counts offer the best measure of lynching's effects. After all, one need not calculate probabilities to sense fear. We notice acceleration on a bus without knowing its rate, and, walking into a crowded room, we can, in an instant, get a feel for a host of factors that we are not consciously calculating. Surely the residents of a small town would be more shaken by one murder than the residents of New Orleans would be by two. Does lynching follow this pattern, or is there something different about a lynching that trumps this dynamic?

Does scale, in other words, buffer a larger population from the fear caused by a lynching? In a small community, each lynching victim would surely have known a significant portion of the population, making it less "a lynching" and more "a lynching of an acquaintance." More generally, "safety in numbers" can insulate those in larger populations. But by how much? Is it more terrifying to have nine lynchings among a small population (13,735) than forty-four in a population forty times larger (554,829)? If we assumed terror was best measured by counts, this larger population would have experienced five times the terror of the smaller one. If we assumed terror should be measured by rates, however, the smaller population would have experienced nine times the terror (5.96 lynchings per year per 100,000) of the larger (0.72). Does either of these methods capture the relative terror fostered by these scenarios? I agree with Brundage, Tolnay, Deane, and Beck that it is unconvincing that rates represent adequately the measure of lynching's terror, but I have to disagree with them that counts can serve as such a measure.[45]

Instead of investing so much meaning in either counts or rates of lynching, would it not be more sound to assume that terror is one of many elements of our past that is simply resistant to quantification? Much of the past, after all, cannot be set to numbers. Counts, rates, and any calculations built from them necessarily flatten out the particulars, considering each lynching to be an equivalent point of data. Even the most sophisticated statistical calculations are based upon each lynching being one lynching: no more, no less. But a single lynching might terrorize a black community an order of magnitude more than another lynching (if fear were somehow measurable) or less than some murders. The particular numbers available to us—of lynchings and population sizes, say—measure only two of the elements of a community's lynching experience. Other factors often fostered the terror or failed to do so: how much publicity a lynching received, how gory it was, how clearly guilty of a crime (or clearly not guilty) the lynching victim was, and whether the victim was an outsider to the community or one of its own. The evidence we have of black participation in lynch mobs is convincing that lynchings had vastly divergent impacts on the African American community: They were nothing close to equivalent experiences.[46]

All of these distinctions are vital to our understanding of the terror fostered by lynchings; they are also quite apart from what is measurable through numbers. Reducing these experiences to data points for quantifiable comparison—thereby treating each as equivalent to every other—ignores our nuanced understanding of the variability of lynching experiences

[45] The black lynching counts in the example in the text are for Brundage's mountain and cotton belt regions of Georgia in the period 1889–1899; the population figures are those regions' averages of the 1890 and 1900 census numbers for African Americans. Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 270–73. Census Office, *Compendium of the Twelfth Census*, I, 533–34. As mentioned above, distance would also figure into this example, as the populations of these regions are spread over many hundreds of square miles.

[46] Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 29–30; Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky*, 102–3; Pfeifer, *Rough Justice*, 119–20; Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 303–4. Project HAL lists 154 lynchings before 1920 that at least reportedly included blacks in the mobs.

and the fear they provoked. Rates, in other words, mean less to the *cultural* or *qualitative* or *symbolic* history of lynchings—the ways the stories of lynching circulated and were invested with meaning (and terror) for both whites and blacks. Counts similarly distill each lynching to a point of data and therefore mean precisely as little to our understanding of their terror. And no amount of statistical calculations can invest these counts or rates with any measure of how terrorizing lynchings were.

For interpretive historians, this issue of rates and counts looms particularly large. These scholars prefer their numbers raw: primary sources that remain close to their historical context. In essence, these historians will need to choose either counts or rates if they wish to pursue trends, for there is no middle ground: Which best measures what they seek to measure? Neither may offer a convincing means to measure terror.

For quantitatively minded historians, the rates-versus-counts issue is less weighty, for they focus upon numerical relationships rather than raw numbers. They can control for population and thereby make this issue moot, at least in the narrow sense of population differences not corrupting particular calculations. Since it is the relationships between trends (cotton production and lynching, say) that are more telling to them than any particular numbers of lynching alone, sidestepping this problem by controlling for population ensures that their calculations remain meaningful. Tolnay and Beck, for instance, effectively capture the distinctions between rates and counts, discussing how the use of rates would transform our geographical understanding of lynching prominence. But they are chiefly concerned with whether they can control for population (their words are "remove this potential confounding") in their calculations as they pursue other trends.[47]

Quantitative historians can effectively bypass this issue of rates versus counts for their calculations, but that does not mean that they have an answer to the question of how to measure terror. Just like interpretive historians, they treat each lynching as equivalent to every other. The issue of rates, counts, and terror is, at base, about meaning in numbers; it is as much a philosophical issue as a quantitative one. And here, quantitative historians are as thwarted as interpretive ones.

Lynching is many things—it is murder and it is a pseudosocial policy of a racist society. It includes a broad array of differing experiences, making it an extremely complex subject to quantify. When strictly measuring risk, rates can help us. When measuring the relationships between lynching and other factors, we can control for population, among other things. But when we turn our attention to the multiple and varied effects of lynchings (how did lynchings foster terror?), quantitative methods avail us little.

For generations, southern whites deployed lynching as tool of terror, and it was not their only such tool: legal capital punishment also sought to cow the underclass, and white-on-black murder, rape, near and failed lynchings, and beatings certainly provoked fear as well, particularly when society condoned them as white prerogatives by failing to punish (or lightly punishing) the white culprits. We have used the rising and falling graph of an era of lynching to define a distinctive moment of domestic terrorism that required a particular explanation, centered in the Deep South. But this trend is complicated by overlapping questions of definition, evidence, and methods.

[47] Tolnay and Beck, *Festival of Violence,* 36–38. Thereafter, in their study, black population size is consistently included as a control, but it is not a focus of the work.

Lynching is vital to understanding the history of the Jim Crow South, but numbers play a complicated role in that effort. The difficulties bound up with the definition of lynching prompt us to consider other, related forms of violence in the South, particularly murder. Lynching was merely the most obvious way that whites in the South used violence prejudicially, almost as a white prerogative, and protected those who did. The disparities in lynching tallies emphasize the difficulty of studying lynching by any means of counting. This evidence urges us to follow the lead of the best quantitative historians and make overt every assumption we are using when we calculate, every caveat and methodological conundrum we face, and to be clear that the numbers are suggestive rather than authoritative.

The dramatic differences between scholars who use sophisticated statistical analyses, those who use counts, and those who use rates of lynching should caution us even more to bring our methodological assumptions to the fore, making plain why we are counting in the way that we are counting. In large part, this issue depends upon the questions we bring to the past. If our question is "How many lynchings were there in Jasper County's history?" then counts suffice. If it is "Where was the risk to African Americans greatest in terms of lynching?" then rates apply. If it is "What is the relationship between lynching and cotton prices?" then more sophisticated statistical methods must be used, controlling for a host of factors extraneous to that specific relationship.

Most historians ultimately are interested in questions still more complex, particularly in the question "*Why* was lynching deployed as a tool of terror in the history of the South?" Counts or rates or sophisticated statistical analyses might play a role in such a discussion, but they provide no answers themselves. Twenty years ago, Fitzhugh Brundage cautioned us that we remain trapped by "inherent ambiguities [that] make it impossible to compile a definitive list of all lynchings." This methodological review expands upon this insight, adding that ambiguities continue to arise and continue to persist long after a list has been compiled.[48]

Any quantification of lynching flattens our perspective, when the most important understandings of lynching often take us in quite a different direction. In Jasper County, Georgia, in 1894, Lee Lawrence was not simply a point of data to be calculated as equivalent to every other point of lynching data. He was a man ripped from society's institutions and brutally murdered by a mob. Accused of raping a white woman, he was taken from the courtroom by five hundred of the "good citizens" of Monticello who were driven to "madness" by Lawrence's "outrage" and who hanged him from a tree, riddled him with bullets, and adorned his corpse with a sign reading, "To all negroes! This is your fate if you perpetrate such a crime. We will always protect our women." There is no indication that any in the mob, none of whom shrouded their identities, were ever punished.[49]

"What counts?" is best understood as a question that fosters further study, refining our methodological understanding of the utility of evidence. It is a question that helps us consider still more substantive questions: "What do (and do not) these numbers measure?" "What else should be counted when evaluating racial violence in the South?" and, of course, "What is meaningful here?" One haunting question, however, is inevitably unquantifiable: How can such a horror as that inflicted upon Lee Lawrence ever be adequately counted at all?

[48] Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 292.
[49] "Taken from Court," *Atlanta Constitution,* Nov. 9, 1894.