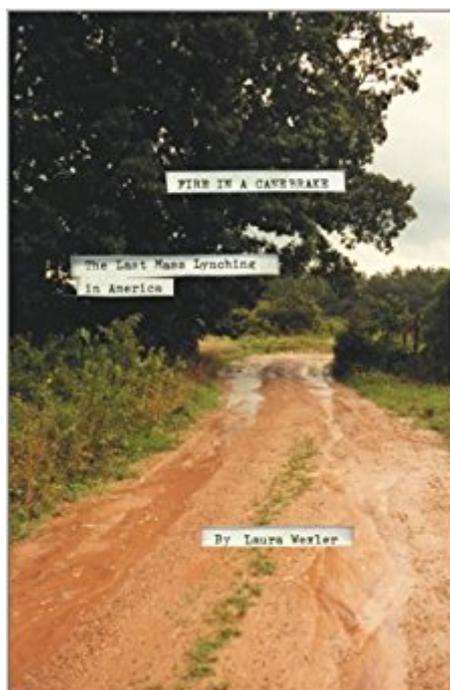


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Fire In A Canebrake: The Last Mass Lynching In America



Synopsis

On that July evening in 1946, the leader counted aloud and the mob of white men fired. Seconds later, the leader counted again, "One, two, three," and the mob fired once more. After the third and final volley of gunshots, the white men got into their cars and drove off, leaving the bullet-ridden bodies of two young black men and two young black women lying in the dirt near Moore's Ford Bridge in rural Walton County, Georgia. Since that summer evening, there have never been as many victims lynched in a single day in America. Now, more than a half century later, Laura Wexler offers the first full account of the Moore's Ford lynching, a murder so brutal it stunned the nation and motivated President Harry Truman to put civil rights at the forefront of his national agenda. With the style of a novelist, the authority of a historian, and the tenacity of a journalist, Wexler recounts the lynching and the resulting four-month FBI investigation. Drawing from interviews, archival sources, and an uncensored FBI report, she takes us deep into the landscape of 1946 Georgia, creating unforgettable portraits of sharecroppers, sheriffs, bootleggers, the victims, and the men who may have killed them. *Fire in a Canebrake* pursues the legacy of the Moore's Ford lynching into the present, exploring the conflicting memories of Walton County's black and white citizens and examining the testimony of a white man who claims he was a secret witness to the crime. In 2001, the governor of Georgia issued a new reward for information leading to the arrest of the lynchers. Several suspects named in the FBI's 1946 investigation are still alive, and there is no statute of limitations on the crime of murder. *Fire in a Canebrake* -- a phrase local people used to describe the sound of the fatal gunshots -- is a moving and often frightening tale of violence, sex, and lies. It is also a disturbing snapshot of a divided nation on the brink of the civil rights movement and a haunting meditation on race, history, and the struggle for truth.

Book Information

Hardcover: 288 pages

Publisher: Scribner (January 7, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0684868164

ISBN-13: 978-0684868165

Product Dimensions: 5.9 x 1 x 8.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 34 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #470,173 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #47 in Books > Politics & Social

Sciences > Sociology > Race Relations > General #492 inÂ Books > History > Americas > United States > African Americans #2263 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Race Relations > Discrimination & Racism

Customer Reviews

Following a spate of excellent books on lynching-Without Sanctuary; At the Hands of Persons Unknown; A Lynching in the Heartland-comes this account of the murder of two black couples in Walton County, Ga., in July 1946. According to journalist Wexler, the murders of Roger and Dorothy Malcolm and George and Mae Dorsey were the last of more than 3,000 mob lynchings of African-Americans in the United States. Following clues from published newspaper reports, FBI and legal records, and interviews conducted in 1997 with the participants who were still alive, Wexler plots a dramatic narrative involving sex, jealousy and violence, with a surprise witness to the murders who surfaces in 1991 (43 years after the killings) claiming to have lived on the run from the Klan because of what he knew. But while Wexler's sense of pacing and denouement is rousing, and her intricate, careful portrayal of the social settings and racial imaginations of the post-WWII South are just as startling. The region was rife with a new sort of racial tension spurred by the demand for basic civil rights (particularly by returning black soldiers) to the point that, under direct orders of President Truman (who was under pressure from the NAACP and the Northern press), the FBI became involved in a lynching for the first time. Smart and highly readable, if much less broad than other recent books, Wexler's account uncovers compelling personal and historic material in equal measure. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

To the numerous books on lynching and the anti-lynching movement in America, Waldrep (history, San Francisco State Univ.) now adds a detailed study of the word lynching and its changing meaning over 200 years of American history. Legend credits Charles Lynch of Virginia as the term's source, based on his suppression of loyalists during the American Revolution through extralegal beatings and killings. The term became common currency during the 19th century to describe the killing by a mob of an accused individual, regardless of race. Though some newspapers condemned the practice, others saw it as a reflection of the popular will and a necessary means of maintaining order in frontier America. Following the Civil War, white Southerners used violence and terror to suppress black freedmen. By the beginning of the 20th century, anti-lynching activists like Ida B. Wells succeeded in defining the term as exclusively white-on-black violence. However, by century's end some critics began referring to the practice of legal lynching through abuse of the criminal

justice system, and the existence of hate crimes against other nonwhites and gays suggest possible new ways to expand the definition. Waldrep's widely researched work provides an excellent overview of a horrendous practice in American society. In contrast to Waldrep's broad study, journalist Wexler's book focuses on the last mass lynching in America, when a mob shot two black men and two black women in Walton County, GA, on July 25, 1946. Though the killings became national news, law enforcement officials failed to identify the killers, and no one has yet been legally connected to the lynching. Wexler uses interviews, newspaper accounts, archival materials, and FBI reports to present the crime's background, police investigation, and aftermath. As with Waldrep's book, this reflective study is recommended for all libraries. Stephen L. Hupp, West Virginia Univ., Parkersburg Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Fire In a Canebrake is about the 1946 unsolved lynching of 4 black Georgians, George W. and Mae Murray Dorsey, and Roger and Dorothy Malcom, in Walton County, Georgia. By all accounts Roger Malcom, a tenant farmer, was the primary target in retaliation for his near-fatal knife assault on his white landlord, Barnette Hester. George, Mae Murray, and Roger's wife, Dorothy, had the misfortune of just being in the wrong place at the wrong time. However, FBI investigators uncovered where there may have been a motive to lynch George Dorsey as well; his flirtations with white women. Despite coming close to breaking the case on a number of instances, the investigator's leads in identifying suspects never fully panned out. Townsfolk were either too scared to cooperate, purposely gave misleading information, or had moved away. The horrific act, it's legacy, "the nation would never again see as many victims lynched on a single day after July 25, 1946" (p. 75), and the unsolved nature of the case, is a scar on Walton County that remains to this day; an unspoken but persistent reminder of the injustice of the past. Very good read & may be of interest to native Georgians.

"*Fire in a Canebrake*" is heartbreaking, page turning, and infuriating (in the way it's supposed to be). It's a deep dive into racial injustice and racial violence in America's not-too-distant past through the lens of the individual politicians, perpetrators, victims, and community members of a mass lynching in 1946. Each individual becomes fully human in Wexler's hands as complex motivations and differing accounts of the same events are investigated. I highly recommend "*Fire in a Canebrake*" on its own merits, but also for anyone who wants a historical background against which to consider recent racial violence.

I am a descendant of the Foster's who are mentioned throughout this book and a distant cousin of Mae Dorsey who was one of the victims in the lynching that took place. This book helped bring to light in a very intriguing way the things that I can remember overhearing as the adults whispered at the dinner table and during family reunions. This book is a must read for those who are willing to acknowledge the ugly truths that lie at the heart of Georgia's rural history, which in turn is Georgia's history overall.

While this was not an easy read, or even one of those books that you can't put down, it was a great document. There was awkward wording throughout, and the quotes and data were squished into the story at odd places, almost like the author suddenly remembered a fact and threw it out into the story so as to not forget it later on. There were far too many names to keep track of, but they were necessary to the book. Despite the oddly structured sentences and splicing of quotes or facts the material was outstanding. There must have been a phenomenal amount of work and research involved in writing this to properly document the Moore's Ford Lynching, and especially to achieve the incredible ability to remain unbiased as did the author.

This was a very good book. An eye opener for sure. You learn a lot about our government back in the 40's and the terrible way the blacks were treated. I learned so much from this book, things I'd heard but wasn't taught in school. The beatings, the cheating, the hatred whites had for blacks back then. They were given the right to vote in a particular election, then their ballots disposed of. They were threatened, thrown out of the tenant homes they lived in while working for the owner. Whether the FBI really did make as good of an effort to find the killers will forever remain unknown.

If you have any interest in the history of the South, this book will open your eyes to 1946--the year that Walt Disney released Song of the South and that a white mob lynched two black couples near Athens, Georgia. No one has ever been prosecuted for these murders, in spite of President Truman's sending FBI agents to investigate. The local belief was if you talk you are dead.

Being as I just moved to Georgia and this event happened not too far from where I'm at.... I figured I'd check it out. I am a fan of true crime and history books. This is a very well written book. Despite a lot of names it is easy to follow. Not a lot of unnecessary info like some true crime books. Sticks to the story and flows nicely. Don't wanna give anything away I'll just say if you like true crime or history.... this is a darn good book.

Sad, but true story of what has happened to African Americans for centuries. Author Laura Wexler does a great job investigating this event. How many others could she or others uncover.

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