



# African Americans Confront Lynching: Strategies of Resistance from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Era (The African American History Series)

By Christopher Waldrep

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This book examines African Americans' strategies for resisting white racial violence from the Civil War until the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968 and up to the Clinton era. Christopher Waldrep's semi-biographical approach to the pioneers in the anti-lynching campaign portrays African Americans as active participants in the effort to end racial violence rather than as passive victims.

In telling this more than 100-year-old story of violence and resistance, Waldrep describes how white Americans legitimized racial violence after the Civil War, and how black journalists campaigned against the violence by invoking the Constitution and the law as a source of rights. He shows how, toward the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, anti-lynching crusaders Ida B. Wells and Monroe Work adopted a more sociological approach, offering statistics and case studies to thwart white claims that a black propensity for crime justified racial violence. Waldrep describes how the NAACP, founded in 1909, represented an organized, even bureaucratic approach to the fight against lynching. Despite these efforts, racial violence continued after World War II, as racists changed tactics, using dynamite more than the rope or the gun. Waldrep concludes by showing how modern day hate crimes continue the lynching tradition, and how the courts and grass-roots groups have continued the tradition of resistance to racial violence.

A rich selection of documents helps give the story a sense of immediacy. Sources include nineteenth-century eyewitness accounts of lynching, courtroom testimony of Ku Klux Klan victims, South Carolina senator Ben Tillman's 1907 defense of lynching, and the text of the first federal hate crimes law.

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

I was bowled over by this study! *African Americans Confront Lynching* is one of the most engrossing and informative, yet saddening, works on this ghastly means to humiliate and terrorize a race. With great literary skill, Christopher Waldrep reveals the courage, eloquence, and passionate devotion to justice of black journalists and spokesmen when such challenges were scarcely welcome. Every reader interested in American, especially Southern and African American, history must have this remarkable, moving work and ponder its tragic meaning. (Bertram Wyatt-Brown, author of *The Shaping of Southern Culture*)

*Christopher Waldrep's accessible and incisive book offers a comprehensive history of the rhetoric and ideas surrounding the word 'lynching' and the strategies African-Americans deployed to confront racial violence. This valuable volume will be of great interest to all students of racial violence and African American history.* (Michael J. Pfeifer, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, The City University of New York, author of *Rough Justice*)

*This book should spark thoughtful inquiry on a very important topic in African American history in and beyond the classroom. (Journal of American History)*

African Americans Confront Lynching advances a new and valuable interpretation of lynching and anti-lynching activism. . . . This volume will be of great use to teachers and scholars of legal history, African American history, and Southern history. [The book] reminds us that we cannot study the history of lynching without studying those who resisted it.

(Amy Wood, author of *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890–1940* *H-Law, H-Net Reviews*)

Christopher Waldrep continues his valuable scholarship on racial violence by examining African American efforts to resist lynching. . . . Waldrep's account of unrelenting persecution, intimidation, and violence of Adams's courage and creativity in resisting provides vivid context. (Richard M. Valely *Journal of Southern History*)

With the publication of *African Americans Confront Lynching*, Christopher Waldrep builds upon his impressive and pioneering work in U.S. legal and constitutional history. Waldrep presents a compelling story of both searing reality and symbolic rhetoric. In clear and effective writing, he shows us the tension between the ideal of a nation with respect for the rule of law and power of local communities with all their personal prejudices. (Orville Vernon Burton, Creativity Professor of Humanities, Professor of History, Pan African Studies, and Sociology, Clemson University and author *The Age of Lincoln*)

Americans are fascinated with violence, a fascination that has both intrigued and puzzled our European and Asian counterparts for decades. In a society where the right to bear arms is not only protected in the U.S. Constitution but also is considered an affirmation of manhood and self-assertion, American violence reached unimaginable heights in the post-Civil War era in the wake of slavery's abolition. Christopher Waldrep has accomplished far more in his slim volume than merely recounting the grisly horror of mob violence and

lynching that reinforced white supremacy in the American South, the avowed purpose of which was to crush or stifle the aspirations of African Americans and to remind every black man, woman, and child that they occupied a separate and inferior place in the region's social and political fabric. Waldrep maintains, and I am inclined to agree, that those who opposed lynching, including African Americans and their white allies, 'sought certain protection from violence from the government and made political appeals based on constitutional principle.' (*Journal of American Ethnic History*)

No historian has contributed more substantially to our understanding of lynching than Christopher Waldrep. The latest book from this prolific academic is an accessible introductory text aimed at undergraduate and general readers. . . . An ideal volume for students seeking a short introduction to the topic that not only synthesizes the extant literature, but also equips them with the tools to conduct their own research. (*Journal of Social History*)

#### About the Author

**Christopher Waldrep** is Jamie and Phyllis Parker Professor of History, San Francisco State University and the author of *Vicksburg's Long Shadow*.

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