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Southern White Women's Anti-Lynching Struggle: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, 1930-1942

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Abstract

This article examines the anti-lynching struggle of Jessie Daniel Ames and the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL) in the 1930s, which aimed to bring an end to the practice of lynching in the southern states of the U.S. Originally a form of vigilante violence against various individuals, especially in the areas far from federal government's control, lynching became a practice based on racial superiority in the late nineteenth century. Allegations of sexual assault by African American men against white women were often used to justify the actions of lynch mobs in the southern states. In this respect, alongside northern anti-lynching organizations, southern white women standing up against lynchings, which were supposedly carried out in the name of protecting them, made a significant contribution to the anti-lynching struggle in the first half of the twentieth century. This paper analyzes the actions taken by the organization under the leadership of Ames in order to change widely held assumptions about the lynchers and their victims.

Keywords: Lynching, Anti-Lynching Struggle, Jessie Daniel Ames, ASWPL

Güneyli Beyaz Kadınların Linç Karşıtı Mücadelesi: Jessie Daniel Ames ve Linçin Önlenmesine Yönelik Güneyli Kadınlar Derneği, 1930-1942

Öz

Bu makale, 1930'larda Jessie Daniel Ames ve Linçin Önlenmesine Yönelik Güneyli Kadınlar Derneği'nin (ASWPL) ABD'nin güney eyaletlerinde linç uygulamasına son vermeyi amaçlayan mücadelesini incelemektedir. Başlangıçta özellikle federal hükümetin kontrolünden uzak bölgelerde çeşitli bireylere yönelik kanunsuz bir şiddet eylemi olan linç, on dokuzuncu yüzyılın sonlarında ırksal üstünlüğe dayalı bir uygulamaya dönüşmüştür. Afrikalı Amerikalı erkeklerin beyaz kadınlara yönelik cinsel saldırı iddiaları genellikle güney eyaletlerindeki linç çetelerinin eylemlerini meşrulaştırmak için kullanılmıştır. Bu bakımdan, kuzeyli linç karşıtı örgütlerin yanı sıra, güneyli beyaz kadınların onları korumak adına yapıldığı iddia edilen linçlere karşı durmalarının, yirminci yüzyılın ilk yarısındaki linç karşıtı mücadeleye büyük katkısı olmuştur. Bu makale, linç edenler ve kurbanları hakkında yaygın olarak kabul gören varsayımları değiştirmek için Ames'in liderliğindeki örgütün mücadelesini incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Linç, Linç Karşıtı Mücadele, Jessie Daniel Ames, ASWPL

Introduction

Lynching, a practice to strike terror and to subordinate and control racial minorities was once a defining aspect of the southern states of the United States. What started as vigilante violence for quick justice towards the individuals and groups who were assumed to disrupt local social order, especially in places far from the jurisdiction of the federal state (Pfeifer 14, 15), evolved into a strategy for upholding white patriarchal rule over African Americans for almost a century (Wood and Donaldson 11). The first lynching statistics were compiled in 1882 (Rushdy 32), and between that year and 1940, nearly five thousand people were victims of lynching in the United States (Hall, "The Mind That Burns" 329). The highest number of lynchings occurred in 1892 when 255 people were lynched by mobs (Tuskegee Institute). Although

the victims were mostly males, females were also lynched when they were found guilty of murder or had any connections to the accused person. Alongside the male suspects, some women became the target of the mobs for collaborating in committing the alleged crimes (Brown 3). Thus, contrary to popular belief, lynching was not only directed at black men, as women could also be targeted.

Beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, the anti-lynching movement gained momentum in the twentieth century in order to bring an end to this brutal practice. In contrast to the previous figures, the following years, after 1882, saw a gradual fall in the practice, and by 1929, 10 people were reported to be victims of lynching (Tuskegee Institute). This was primarily the success of individual activists and groups who worked at state and federal levels. It is a fact that the early anti-lynching efforts of prominent African American figures such as Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Tyrell, who were founding female members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), played an important role in raising awareness on the issue. Other African American women organized in the Anti-Lynching Crusaders, led by Mary B. Talbert, conducted large scale anti-lynching campaigns for a federal anti-lynching law in the 1920s.

Nevertheless, in the first year of the Great Depression, in addition to other social problems, there was an abrupt increase in lynchings in the southern states (Brown 203). As the practice was gradually being associated with the South, some southern liberals started to take action through the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC), which included women and men carrying out investigations and holding meetings in order to find solutions to the problem. In the same year, Jessie Daniel Ames, a former women's suffrage activist and director of the Women's Work of CIC, launched the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL). The organization's intention was to prevent lynchings in rural and remote areas of the South by using the social and moral influence of organized white women. From 1930 to the beginning of 1940, the members of the ASWPL, under the leadership of Ames, conducted campaigns, meetings, and educational programs in order to raise awareness in the South about lynchings by rejecting the lynching pretext which was based on the protection of the southern white women. As Henry E. Barber points out, "who could better campaign against lynching than those whom it was supposed to protect – Southern white women?"

(378). Whatever the real reasons were, claims of sexual assault were used to justify the practice of lynching. Thus, white southern women's rejection of lynching as a practice for the protection of women can be viewed as an important step in the eradication of lynching in the South.

The aim of this paper is to explore the anti-lynching struggle of Jessie Daniel Ames and the ASWPL in the 1930s which aimed to bring an end to the practice of lynching in the southern states of the U.S. Drawing on archival records and secondary sources, this paper will analyze the strategies and tactics employed by the organization in that period to change the widely-held assumptions about the lynchers and their victims. Despite the organization's anti-lynching efforts, the ASWPL was also subjected to criticism because of its whites-only organizational structure and its opposition to a federal anti-lynching law. This paper will also examine the reasons for the ASWPL's organizational structure and Ames's response to criticism from interracial organizations. The study argues that although the importance of an African American-led anti-lynching movement in the northern states cannot be underestimated, without the active involvement and mobilization of the southern white women, it would have been more difficult to fight against the approving attitude of the southern white communities towards lynching.

A Historical Overview of Lynching

The term 'lynch law' and 'lynching' became popular when Charles Lynch Bedford formed a vigilante group which practiced violence towards loyalist groups without trials during the Revolutionary War (Rushdy 41). Despite the calls from the higher-ranking military officers to deliver the accused to the officials, he continued to punish the captured prisoners and began to use the phrase 'Lynch Law' to "describe the rough justice he dispensed to those he deemed enemies of the state" (41). In the first half of the eighteenth century, the term was applied to the actions of the groups or mobs to punish the individuals accused of murder or theft (Brown 22). In this respect, before it took on a racial dimension, lynching was practiced to enforce local laws and maintain social order in the less-densely populated frontier areas of the United States, which had low population and few officials (Brown 22, Hall 130).

According to Jaquelyn Dowd Hall, in the antebellum South,

lynching was also a common practice to suppress both rebelling slaves and white dissidence. During that period, the victims of this violence were generally whites as "the planter's self-interest and the ideology of paternalism gave a measure of protection to the slave" (131). Because of slaves' monetary worth and since an act of violence against the slave would be considered an act of violence against the owner rather than the slave, the system prevented large-scale mob violence towards African Americans. On the other hand, one point must be stressed: The severity of punishment a master could impose on his slaves was essentially unrestricted. However, after the Civil War, lynching gained a feature of racial terrorism against African Americans and, to a greater degree, "it replaced slavery and supplemented disfranchisement, economic disempowerment, and Jim Crow segregation as a primary strategy of social control over African Americans" (Rushdy 70). During the Reconstruction period, white supremacist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan or the Knights of the White Camelia committed massacres to prevent black citizens from performing political activities or taking part in elections (71). Some of the most horrific criminal acts in American history were carried out by these groups. At times, attacks on individuals escalated into acts of collective terrorism and local uprisings. For example, in September 1868, members of the Knights killed over two hundred freed blacks in two days in St. Landry Parish, Louisiana, following a dispute over black political rights (79). In another instance, in 1873, armed members of the Klan attacked African Americans in the town of Colfax, Louisiana, killing many former slaves and black militiamen even though they had surrendered (Foner 576). Similar acts of terror were common in other areas of the South during this period. Although these paramilitary organizations were outlawed and disbanded by the Federal Enforcement Acts of 1870 and 1871, Klan terrorism resurfaced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and continued through mob violence against civilians. Lynchings were carried out by white supremacists as a means of political repression against African Americans. As Hall claims "lynching functioned as a means of uniting whites across class lines in the face of a common enemy" (132). Hence, through racial violence during the Reconstruction, African Americans were warned and reminded of the limits of their social, political, and economic activities.

The period from the 1880s to the end of the Great Depression can be called, in Rushdy's words, an "era of lynching" since the practice

became a subject of heated discussions by intellectuals, civil society groups, and politicians (92). Gradually transforming into a distinctive southern practice, stories on lynching began to receive more and more coverage in the newspapers. Through the considerable circulation of information, more details about the practice and the myths behind lynchings were brought to the public's attention. The lynchings of this era had ritualistic dimensions with the attendance of large numbers of people as part of a spectacle. In Paris, Texas, in 1883, thousands of people attended the lynching ritual of a black man accused of rape. He was tortured, mutilated, hanged, and burned by the mob (Rushdy 95). Similar patterns could also be seen in many other lynchings in that period in which bodies of victims were tortured and even taken as souvenirs after the event.

Although both female and male African Americans were subjected to violence and lynching for various reasons, the mythology behind the lynching of male individuals was grounded in their sexual activities. In her book *Revolt Against Chivalry*, Jacquelyn D. Hall states that

> the notion of black retrogression, which continued to influence both popular and academic thought into 1930s, was closely bound up with the question of black sexual behavior. Freed from the restraints of slavery, the 'new issue' Negro had supposedly reverted to African primitivism. The chief evidence was sexual immorality . . . above all, black men were acting upon the innate lasciviousness of the savage beast. (145)

Obviously, the extremities of violence committed by the lynching mobs were justified on the pretext of sexual assault. In many cases, the image of the black rapist was used to demonstrate how the victims had violated the purity of vulnerable white women. In this sense, violence was regarded as a measure to protect white women from sexual assaults by black men. Rather than being a shameful act carried out in secrecy, members of the white community openly participated in these violent 'rituals' to show their support. Leading figures in the mob were regarded "chivalrous, heroic champions of justice and white prerogatives" (Brown 28). The discourse which justified lynching as an act of protection and revenge enabled the lynchers to be viewed as respectable defenders of the honor of all the members of the white community, but especially white womanhood. Anyone who disagreed

with this discourse could be accused of being against morality and values of society. Consequently, the meaning of the incident was established by the discourse of lynching, as were the parameters of the discussion surrounding the event.

The Anti-Lynching Struggle

After lynching entered a new phase targeting African Americans in the South, an organized fight against it also emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. Black women were at the forefront of the anti-lynching movement in the 1890s, which grew into a significant movement in the later years. A major anti-lynching activist, Ida B. Wells, who witnessed the deaths of her friends at the hands of a mob, began to write newspaper columns, essays, and pamphlets to challenge the belief that all the victims of lynching were rapists. She attacked "the theory of white women's protection by proving statistically that most men killed by lynching were never accused of rape but died for a variety of real or concocted offenses" (Brown, "Advocates in the Age of Jazz" 380). In her pamphlet "Southern Horrors" (1892), Wells advocated 'self-help' as a solution to oppression, suggesting that African Americans should withdraw from the labor force in the South and migrate to the North in order to influence white business interests there. Wells noted that "the appeal to the white man's pocket has ever been more effectual than all the appeals ever made to his conscience. Nothing, absolutely nothing, is to be gained by a further sacrifice of manhood and self-respect" (66). Another suggestion Wells made in the face of lynching was to take up arms to use in self-defense. A rifle, according to her, "should have a place of honor in every black home, and it should be used for that protection which the lawn refuses to give" (66). Wells' tactics, which were based on "investigation and exposure," served as a model for later anti-lynching activism.

In the twentieth century, black and white activists in the northern states were involved in the fight by joining various organizations. Especially, under the banner of the NAACP, founded in 1909, male and female activists campaigned against lynching. Important female figures such as Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Tyrell, Mary White Ovington, Jane Addams, and Harriet Stanton Blatch were active members of the organization. Besides intellectual contribution to the

movement, the women also carried out on-site investigations to collect information about the lynchings and to reveal the real motives behind the violence. For example, in 1916, a female field agent assigned by NAACP was sent to Waco, Texas to investigate the lynching of Jesse Washington, and her findings were published in *The Crisis* under the title "The Waco Horror." Interviewing local individuals, sheriffs and law officials, the agent included graphic pictures in her eight-page report to demonstrate the degree of the atrocity ("The Waco Horror"). The NAACP distributed her report to every congressman and made public use of it to raise awareness of the Waco lynching and to collect funds for an anti-lynching campaign ("Advocates in the Age of Jazz" 381). After 1916, anti-lynching campaigns were aimed to have a solution to the problem through a federal legislation.

In 1922, when the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill was passed in the House of Representatives, the NAACP, with all its branches and women's clubs, led campaigns for the approval of the bill in the Senate. In June, about five thousand African American women participated in a silent protest march against lynching in Washington. That summer, the Anti-Lynching Crusaders (ALC) was formed under the leadership of Mary Talbert, with the aim of mobilizing one million women to protest and to raise funds for the NAACP's anti-lynching efforts ("Agreement"). In their initial statement, ALC urged women of different colors to take part in the campaign: "American women are realizing that until this crime is ended, no home is sacred from violence, no part of the country from race clashes, and the fair name of our country is soiled throughout the civilized world" ("Plan Organization"). As with previous efforts, the Crusaders carried out investigations, disclosures on a number of lynchings, and published statistics with detailed information about the victims (Brown 146). Despite these efforts, the Dyer Bill was not passed in the Senate because Southern Democrats blocked its approval. The campaign also fell short of having the support of white southern women who were crucial to ending the violence. As a result, the ALC was disbanded in 1923 (Player 60). However, the spirit of the anti-lynching movement began to spread to the southern states in the late 1920s as more and more southern white women, led by Jessie Daniel Ames, began to reject claims based on white women's protection and organized campaigns to end the violent practice.

Jessie Daniel Ames and the ASWPL

Jessie Daniel Ames was born on 2 November 1889 in Palestine, Texas. When she was ten, her family moved to Georgetown, Texas and, at the age of nineteen, she graduated from Southwestern University (Guffey). In 1905, she married an army surgeon, Roger Post, but five years later he left Ames for a mission in Guatemala. The death of her father in 1911, followed by that of her husband in 1914, ushered in a new phase in her life. Until then, Ames had led a life of passivity since her social activities were restricted first by her father's presence and later by her status as a married woman who was mainly recognized through her husband's identity. However, soon after that period, Ames became more involved in public matters (Hall 19). Her involvement in business life, taking over the management of her father's local telephone company, was to have an impact on her activism and growth years later. As Hall states, "whether arguing for a raise in telephone rates before the city council, or enforcing a strict bill collecting policy, she demonstrated a new-found talent for administration and organization" (29). Obviously, Ames's business activities would enable her to have an autonomy, making it easier for her to engage in the women's rights movement.

As part of her efforts to protect her economic rights, Ames joined the women's suffrage movement and founded the Equal Suffrage League in 1916 through which she was able to interact with other women's clubs and religious societies (Guffey). By 1918, "Ames could draw a crowd of one hundred women to her suffrage talks" (Hall 35). She would use her networking and inciting skills in the anti-lynching movement of the 1930s. After the passage of Nineteenth Amendment, she did not stop lobbying for the rights of women and continued to give educational talks to women on how to exercise their political rights (45). Although it is not known exactly what motivated Ames to shift her interest from women's rights to racial issues, she became the director of Women's Work for the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC) in 1929. One year later, she was leading the ASWPL to organize white southern women against the lynching of African Americans.

On November 1, 1930, upon Ames's invitation, a group of women from seven southern states held a meeting in Atlanta, Georgia,

to discuss the increasing number of lynchings in the southern states and what they could do to stop them. After the meeting, the women made a public statement that condemned lynching "in every form and under all circumstances" ("Resolutions"). After subsequent meetings in several states to get organized, the women of the ASWPL published a declaration:

> We declare lynching is an indefensible crime, destructive of all principles of government, hateful and hostile to every ideal of religion and humanity, debasing and degrading to every person involved . . . public opinion has accepted too easily the claim of lynchers and mobsters that they are acting solely in defense of womanhood. In light of the facts, we dare no longer to permit this claim to pass unchallenged nor allow those bent upon personal revenge and savagery to commit acts of violence and lawlessness in the name of women . . . We will teach our children at home, at school, and at church a new interpretation of law and religion; we will assist all officials in upholding their oath of office; and finally, we will join with every minister, editor, schoolteacher, and patriotic citizen in a program of education to eradicate lynching and mobs forever from our land. ("A Declaration")

This statement was an open challenge by white southern women to the lynchers' claims. In fact, as the pledge depicted, the alleged accusations were invented not to protect white womanhood but to cover up reasons based on 'personal revenge' and to gain the support of southern society for the act of violence. Even when claims of sexual harassment were true, women still rejected acts of violence and supported law and order in handling problems. This demand was also stated in the CIC's Southern Commission's findings in its study on lynchings: "Decrying the mob as a reversion of barbarism, leading white women re-emphasized the fact that Southern womanhood depends for its protection upon officers and southern courts, not upon the mob" (5). The pledge also demonstrated the decisiveness of women to actively get involved in campaigns and educational programs for social change in southern society. In this respect, rather than leaving the public space to men, women positioned themselves as the leading force to change the mindset of the society. Their efforts would include the social activities that had previously been carried out by African Americans to prevent lynching.

The ASWPL was not a strictly structured organization formed by a group of women working to achieve a single political and social goal. The group lacked the qualities that define a true organization; hence, it could not be considered an organization in the traditional meaning of the word: "There were no constitution, charter, or by-laws, and there were no conventions, local units, or dues. In fact, the Association did not even have a real membership or constituency" (Barber 380). Instead, having a central council, the Association heavily depended on existent women's clubs and societies. As Jack and Massagee point out, the ASWPL "served as a clearinghouse for information and strategies that other women's groups could use to change public opinion about lynching" (497). In her pamphlet *Changing Character of Lynching* (1942), Ames names the clubs and church societies that helped the Association. These include the Federation of Women's Club, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, the Young Women's Christian Association, Business and Professional Women's Clubs, the Baptist Southern Convention Women's Missionary Union, the Disciples of Christ International Convention, and similar religious groups of white women (20). As these examples demonstrate, the Association was a movement composed of cooperating clubs and religious societies which, besides anti-lynching efforts, had their own social, economic, and religious agendas. The prominent women of these organizations represented thirteen state councils of the ASWPL and carried out anti-lynching activities with the help of local individual volunteers.

In contrast to the women of African American anti-lynching societies, these white women activists were regarded as important figures respected by the members of their community. By mobilizing religious groups and clubs, the ASWPL made it easier to reach more conservative communities in rural towns where lynching was more common. In this sense, their efforts to prevent lynching had a great impact on southern society and drew attention to the issue. As John Shelton Reed expresses,

> [o]perating through existing church and civic groups in this fashion allowed the Association to isolate a very strategic population. The ladies reached by the Association were precisely those most likely to adhere to the conservative "law and order" value . . . They were utterly respectable politically, were in the habit of doing community improvement work . . . Perhaps most importantly, the social position of many of these churchwomen was such that they, their husbands, or

> their kinsmen could bring fairly powerful pressures to bear on lynchers to cease and desist and on sheriffs to uphold the law. (174)

Consequently, the women of the movement, as members of their own clubs and under the leadership of their own leaders, took a stand against lynching. ASWPL leadership only provided strategies, information, material, and direction to these women's local activities (Barber 381). The profile of the women demonstrates that the Association was not a movement led by radical political leaders who rejected the norms of womanhood. On the contrary, the effectiveness of the anti-lynching effort, in fact, depended largely on how well its members lived up to this principle. On the other hand, the members aimed to dissociate the image of women from female fragility and retaliatory violence to undermine the justifications for lynching. As Hall points out, "with even fewer reservations, they attacked the paternalism of chivalry" (194). Thus, they refused to take on the role that had been imposed on them when it came to lynching, asserting their status as independent citizens who were confident in their own morality.

The ASWPL's Tactics

As part of the ASWPL's program, numerous brochures, posters, and flyers were produced for distribution (Jack and Massagee 494). These publications included information about the Association, signatures of prominent figures to prevent lynchings, advice on what to do if there was a possibility of lynching, and debates and statistics specifically relating to lynchings and their prevention. One of the important actions was to denounce the language used in newspapers which, on several occasions, had encouraged mobs to lynch suspects. The way in which southern newspaper editors and publishers dealt with the problem of lynching and the Association's efforts to educate against it were of particular concern to Ames. In one of her speeches which she later published with the title "Editorial Treatment of Lynching" in her pamphlet, Ames emphasizes the role of southern editors as justifiers of the acts of violence. She criticizes editors:

> Editors, with few exceptions, condone lynching by offering reasons for lynchers which are in effect sympathetic excuses defending the right of citizens under provocation to take the law

> into their own hands and constitute themselves judge, jury, and executioner all the same time. The exceptions are so few, in fact, that they do not make up even a respectable minority. (51)

Hence, in parallel with the prevalent ideas in the southern white society, editors also accepted lynching as "justifiable homicide in defense of society" (51). They functioned in taking the attention away from the lynchers and in targeting other groups of people, such as communists and northern activists, as scapegoats for local crimes. By this way, the lynchers were cleared of their crimes by the newspapers, and the community was still, in Ames's words, "if not as white as snow, at least as white as it was before the lynching" (52). In another speech entitled "Can Newspaper Harmonize their Editorial Policy" (1936), Ames mentions how newspapers functioned as producers of fear and hatred towards African Americans through mostly fictional stories about sexual assault on white women. Extreme emotions of rage were directed at African Americans in order to mobilize white people. Phrases such as "young, lovely, innocent, devout in her religious life, loving, affectionate; now broken and ruined a glorious future of proud womanhood destroyed and blasted" were used by newspapers to describe the victims of sexual assault (58). Through these descriptions, all kinds of acts of brutality that a hysterical mob might conduct were justified. It would be almost impossible to start a war or carry out a lynching without forging hate and fear though such stories. By this way,

> men and women alike see in outraged womanhood their own mothers or wives or sisters, and they are moved by and invincible force to mete out punishment to the vandals Something of Arthurian chivalry stirs men's minds; they wear the colors of their own womanhood into a battle for all womanhood. (Ames 55)

Just as propaganda replaces the truth in wars, the truth was falsified in lynchings, and, in these cases where hatred dominated, society turned into a lynch mob under the influence of the story created. According to Ames, newspapers suppressed the details of the acts of the mob which demonstrated savagery rather than chivalry. Moreover, in many cases, when the facts were uncovered, there were other reasons, rather than sexual claims, that led to lynching. In other words, when white men failed to "achieve individual superiority over

their [African American] neighbors," news was feeding the ideology of racial superiority as "an attribute of birth" (58). As such, the southern women of the Association had to uncover and spread facts about lynching.

Like the women of the northern anti-lynching movement, they also went to sites where lynchings had taken place and collected the facts. At the beginning, Ames was conducting the investigations with the help of women in the local branches of the above-mentioned women's clubs and societies. In later investigations, local women started to initiate their own probes (Barber 383-384). According to Hall, from 1933 to 1935, Ames carried out twenty investigations, and the number of such cases conducted by the women of the ASWPL had reached forty-two by 1941. Initially, women frequently used the white residents of the area as witnesses in these investigations. However, they occasionally got access to the African American accounts of lynchings by overcoming their own prejudices (217). Through the information gathered, the women began to spread the actual reasons based on individual hostilities rather than the stories written in the newspapers. In other words, through their research on lynchings, the women unveiled the fact that they were being utilized as a shield to defend the violence towards helpless people. Thus, as Ames underlines, "they took the only action they could. They pledged themselves to educate against lynching in the towns where they lived and to publish by word of mouth the facts about women and lynching" (60). Consequently, it was important to reach the editors of southern newspapers to change their news coverage.

From the beginning of the movement, Ames encouraged women to voice their opposition to local editors who reported on lynchings in graphic details, presenting the lynchers as the actual victims rather than the alleged suspects murdered by the mob. They sent letters to the editors "complaining about . . . their anti-lynching editorial policies and their inflammatory reporting of the news" (Hall 219). They tried to gain the support of the newspapers through meetings and conferences that contributed to their efforts. During the annual meeting of the Newspaper Publishers' Association, Ames gave a speech (1936) to an almost all-male group which was part of her effort to "reach the men who control this power," that is, the power controlling newspapers (Ames 56). Criticizing some local newspapers for their editorial policies, Ames emphasized the significance of newspapers as possible

local allies and supporters of southern women in transforming public opinion on lynching.

Another target of the women was southern law officers, especially town sheriffs. For the members of the Association, sheriffs had an important responsibility in preventing a lynch mob from inflicting violence. They could either prevent lynching or capture the suspects to conduct a legal trial rather than submitting to the pressure of the mobs (Nordyke 3). Yet, sheriffs, as locally elected officials in southern towns, were "dependent for their livelihoods on the electoral support of the mob that confronted them" (Hall 224). In addition, as the Association's women later discovered, in certain circumstances, sheriffs collaborated with the mob and let them lynch their prisoners (225). Thus, women started to use their political influence as an association and electors to press the local officials and sheriffs to prevent lynching. In this regard, it is obvious that the women's suffrage movement had positive impacts not only on their own rights, but suffrage could also be used as a weapon for the protection of racial minorities from lynching. While expressing the importance of the suffrage movement as a process of political awareness for women, Ames also emphasizes how they "had the power to affect the political lives of local and county politicians whose bread and butter upon the will and the wishes of their constituents" (61). Women conducted campaigns against the reelection of the sheriffs and other state officials who failed to take action against lynching. They sent petitions to support or threaten the sheriffs in accordance with their attitudes. Moreover, they asked sheriffs to sign the statements and pledges that demonstrated their support for anti-lynching efforts. As a result, 1,355 state officials and sheriffs had signed these documents by 1941 (Hall 227). The impact of women was reported in a newspaper of the period:

> Southern women know local politics. No strange woman from the central state office called on a sheriff in the counties of the fifteen states. Nothing like that. A woman voter living in each sheriff's own county went to him about the lynching matters, and that is about as firm political pressure as can be applied. Each time there was a crime, or an accusation which might lead to a lynching, the women went into swift action. The sheriffs started getting calls from influential voters from prominent men and women. (Nordyke 3)

Women, accompanied by men who had anti-lynching

sentiments, used their voting power to win the support of the state governors and their executive power. In some cases, they sent letters to governors requesting the removal of sheriffs from office or the sending of state militias to prevent lynching. They also conducted surveys on the "governors and gubernatorial candidates" to learn their opinions about lynchings and publicized the results in bulletins (Barber 385). Through these efforts, they put pressure on the possible candidates for the next elections.

In addition to letters, petitions and personal contacts, the women of the Association were carrying out activities to change public opinion. In other words, they were also looking for other ways to prevent individuals that were potential lynchers. In this context, the activities of church women became increasingly important. Working through Baptist and Methodist missionary societies, the women of the ASWPL reached out small towns and communities to hold meetings in churches and Sunday schools with local religious women. Drawing on the religious and moral character of the southern women, they tried to persuade the mothers and sisters of the potential lynchers about the immorality of lynching. In this regard, Hall states that "assuming a sisterhood of believers, a church within a church fostered by women's autonomous missionary societies, association leaders appealed to women's traditional self-concepts while at the same time subtly challenging the male monopoly over the definition of public events" (231). Besides churches, the Association was involved in educational activities in which women went to high schools where they met with teachers and students. As part of these activities, in 1938, two one-act plays, *County Sunday* by Walter Spearman and *Lawd, Does Yo' Undahstan'?* by Ann Seymour, were written and staged in school drama clubs (Barber 389). Both plays were written to draw attention to the negative effects of lynching on both black and white communities.

Indeed, just like African American communities, these women were also threatened by various groups while they were in action in areas where the practice of lynching was entrenched. They were forced to abandon their anti-lynching campaigns for their own protection. Nordyke notes that "organizations which had made the terrorization of [African Americans] their main business since the Civil War turned against the women, issuing sinister warnings or sending them on their own official letterheads" (2). These statements demonstrate that women who spoke out against lynching were also closely monitored and

regarded as potential targets of fundamentalist terrorist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan. Ironically, the organizations that asserted to defend white women in the South from African American men were issuing warnings that threatened those same women. Since women were aware that lynching was a practice motivated by political and economic factors rather than their protection, they were "by no means safe at all times. They knew of the constant danger, and they didn't forget to pray" (Ames qtd. in Nordyke 2). Despite threats, they carried out their investigations and anti-lynching campaigns in communities where lynchings had taken place.

Eventually, the anti-lynching activities led by white women in the South had a major impact on society's attitude to violence. By 1939, the number of lynchings in the South had dropped to three, and the excuses were no longer based on the protection of white women (Tuskegee Institute). Ames expresses the contribution of these activities to the decreasing number of lynchings:

> These meetings, schools, the church and home, the press and Southern women as an organized bloc–are all contributing factors to a changing public opinion in the South toward lynching . . . lynching is decreasing and disappearing by the initiative and support of Southern white people. Lynchers are no longer held in esteem and they are beginning to feel it. (61)

Obviously, disregarding ridicule and threats, women became more and more confident within the movement and had leading roles in changing the mindset of their society.

Despite its efforts to end lynching, the ASWPL did not support the passage of a federal anti-lynching law while other organizations were stressing its importance. In the first half of the 1930s, there was an increase in the number of lynchings and, northern organizations, especially NAACP, were campaigning for a federal bill named Costigan-Wagner Bill. If approved, the law would impose severe fines on the counties where lynchings occurred, as well as on ineffective law enforcement officials. For that reason, the NAACP and African American women urged southern white women to endorse the bill (Jack and Massagee 502). However, the ASWPL did not support it for several reasons. First, the women of the Association believed that "if the federal government intervenes in the activities of the lynchers,

then the burden of stopping lynching will no longer rest on the South" (Ames 54). Obviously, they did not want a transferring of responsibility for eliminating lynching from local law officers and people to the federal government. Besides, as the organization was based on the support of the religious local white women, who acted as the members of their communities and devoted themselves to change the common attitudes toward lynching, they did not want to get "too far ahead of public opinion" (Nordyke 4). Rather than that, they wanted to make 'converts' through a process of education and social change. Besides, as the members of white southern communities, they did not want the federal government to have too much power over the internal affairs of the states under their jurisdiction. In order to explain the Association's involuntary attitude toward the bill, Jack and Massagee state that

> focusing on public opinion offered a more comfortable strategy to white Southern women. Because these were the very women whose delicacy and supposed superiority was used to justify lynchings, their status as all-white women's organization was an important factor in their success, enabling them to speak as insiders to other whites. (503)

Many progressive southerners supported the bill, yet the ASWPL women believed in local remedies and education to change public opinion to prevent the racial violence. As a result, the Costigan-Wagner Bill, like its predecessors, failed to pass in the Congress due to opposition from southern senators.

Conclusion

As early as 1904, when African Americans were leading campaigns to stop lynching, Mary Church Terrell called on southern women to join the anti-lynching struggle. Terrell did not expect radical actions from white women, but rather asked them to rest on their traditional image as the symbol of ideal womanhood and purity to stop lynching by imploring "their fathers, husbands and sons no longer to stain their hands with the black man's blood!" (862). Although there were some southern women who had been involved in the anti-lynching struggle in the 1920s, it was not until the 1930s that they emerged on the stage of history as an organized political force against lynching under the leadership of Jessie Daniel Ames. Indeed, Ames wanted

to conduct her work by resting on white woman's moral position in society. As Hall states, "she wore ladyhood a mask, employed evangelical language for reformist ends" (277). Since the strategy was to appeal to their communities as insiders, Ames and southern women did not support the actions that would be considered extreme by both the religious women members working for the Association and the society in general. Except for occasional meetings with African American activists, the Association did not even have African American women as active members in their struggle since, they thought, that would make it more difficult for them to appeal to their communities. Consequently, the ASWPL made its reform decisions from a set of constrained possibilities in order to avoid large-scale backlash in the South.

On the other hand, the women of the Association also demonstrated a mobility and determination that challenged the traditional image of the southern lady. They used their networks or put pressure on peace officers to prevent lynching by threatening them with their political power as voters. They were also traveling across the South to carry out investigations about lynching incidents to uncover the real reasons that led to racial violence. Most importantly, through these fact-checking investigations, they became more aware of the fact that white women were used as a shield by lynchers to justify their actions. Thus, their primary aim was to dissociate the act of lynching from white women's sexuality. The sexual connotation behind the act of lynching was a problem for white women. This myth was not only based on black men's excessive desire for white women, but also implied that white women were defenseless. Besides, lynching was also a message to both white women and black men about the dangerous consequences of an interracial sexual affair. In this sense, lynching was, on the one hand, an act that aimed at consolidating racial superiority and, on the other hand, a patriarchal manifestation that demonstrated to women their desired place in the society. The ASWPL's campaign was a women's response to these claims. It was a rejection of white man's so called chivalric act, his protection of white women. Women of the Association wanted to be treated as independent citizens, not as sexual objects.

The Association was dissolved in 1942 as lynching statistics dropped considerably and women became engaged more in the issues related to the World War II (Barber 11). For a time, Ames continued

her work as Director of Woman's Work for the CIC. Yet, in 1944, she resigned from her duties and moved to live in a village in North Carolina (Hall 261). In later years, until her death in 1972, she was involved in the local matters rather than the nationwide Civil Rights Movement. Ames's political ideas and actions may seem limited from today's perspective but her ability and success in organizing southern white women in a conservative society to oppose lynching cannot be underestimated. Although the act of racial violence towards African Americans did not stop after 1942, general public opinion was no longer in favor of lynching; and, except for occasional incidents, such as Emmett Till and Charles Mack Parker's lynchings, in years, campaigns were carried out for other civil rights issues, such as racial segregation and inequality at national and state levels.

Even today, such social issues are still a reality despite the long years of struggle to solve the problems faced by African Americans. Furthermore, it would be wrong to think that the U.S. has left behind the issues of lynching and anti-lynching. On the contrary, there have been several incidents of racist attacks in which police officers and white civilians have not hesitated to kill African Americans under the pretext of safety that caused widespread protests. These protests can be regarded as reminiscent of the anti-lynching movement. In 2012, the killing of Trayvon Martin and the release of his murderer led to powerful demonstrations under the slogan "Black Lives Matter," which would become one of the largest social movements in the following years. During the demonstrations, BLM activists exposed how U.S. legal institutions not only failed to prosecute criminals, but also indirectly encouraged potential perpetrators to commit acts of violence against African Americans as such acts often went unpunished. In 2020, five African Americans were found dead hanging from trees, which the police declared as suicides. However, the BLM activists argued that these hangings were a repetition of a historical pattern of lynching. As stated in *Washington Post,* "tree hangings [evoked] traumatic memories of America's grisly history of unpunished lynchings of thousands of black adults and children between 1880 and 1968" (Patton). That same year, alongside the shocking footage of the police killing of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old black man, was stalked and murdered in Georgia by three white men who were not arrested for two months (Fausset). Nationwide protests by BLM activists and heated debates about racial violence created a strong opinion that

there was a need for an anti-lynching legislation. This public pressure, eventually, led the Unites States government to enact a federal law to punish lynching and other racial crimes. In 2022, when the Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Bill passed the Congress and was signed into law by Joe Biden, lynching became a federal crime for the first time in U.S. history.

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