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***Lynchings: Extralegal Violence in Florida during the 1930s* by
Walter T. Howard**

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weaves a complicated subject of military personnel, vessels, and personalities into an interesting narrative of national war and local reactions to it. Beginning with a discussion of the background to secession, the author paints in broad, and sometimes fine, strokes the relevant naval strategy caused by and resulting in divided loyalties in west Florida. In the process, he introduces readers to a wide range of recognizable actions, such as the critical significance of beef running and the seemingly interminable role of Tampa's nefarious runner, James McKay, as well as the lesser-known actions of Southerner-turned Union commander, Henry A. Crane, and the role of the United States Colored Troops (USCT) in "peculiarizing" the war in the southern reaches of the peninsula.

What results from all this is an intriguing story of soldiers, sailors, and civilians in the East Gulf region, a story that is structurally similar and dissimilar from most other theaters of the war. With its fiercely divided loyalty, concerns for refugees, critical supply operations (e.g. beef cattle), and contraband (e.g. slaves), the west coast of Florida presented the unusual – some might argue unique – opportunity for the Union Navy to promote a localized inner-civil war within the larger conflict. Buker captures well the essence of his story when he states, "The militant effort of the blockaders, refugees, and contraband provided Confederate Florida with one of its most effective foes during the war" (182).

Certainly, all blockading squadrons created and maintained contact with Union sympathizers, guerrillas, and other disaffected Southerners during the Civil War; yet Buker demonstrates that the EGBS might have achieved singular success on the west coast of Florida in turning these "refugees and contraband" into Union allies. In this regard, Buker's work thrusts Florida, specifically the East Gulf region, into the center of the ever-growing body of literature analyzing the incredibly diverse impact of the American Civil War.

Careful readers will derive much of value from this story. But they may also come away a bit perplexed about the author's organization strategy, which involves chapters switching abruptly from military units and strategy to mini biographies of selected Unionists such as Henry A. Crane and deserters like William W. Strickland. Devotees of the subject may wonder further why Buker did not rely more heavily on the ground-breaking and yet unsurpassed works of Rodney E. Dillon, specifically his 384-page master's thesis and two-volume doctoral dissertation on the nature of the struggle in southwest Florida. Yet these are passing criticisms that should not detract from Buker's contribution to understanding the complex nature of the inner Civil War in west Florida, a subject that is increasingly drawing more critical appraisal.

Irvin D. Solomon

Lynchings: Extralegal Violence in Florida during the 1930s. By Walter T. Howard. Sellingsgrove, Pennsylvania. 1995. Susquehanna University Press. 207 pp. Illustrations. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Cloth. \$35.00.

In the southern tales *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Intruder in the Dust*, a local white female turns back an overwrought lynch mob to save the life of a black man. The fifteen victims of vigilante justice in Florida during the 1930s never knew such improbable heroics. In fact, just as the South was stepping back from its long and torrid romance with lynch law, Florida was ever more the

entangled lover. The place that evoked the benign image of a palm-tree paradise was ironically “the most lynch-prone state” in the 1930s (15).

In this compact monograph, Walter T. Howard reconstructs individually each of the decade’s twelve lynchings (two were double lynchings). A Florida State University graduate who teaches at Bloomsburg University in Pennsylvania, Howard is well versed in Florida and African-American history, and in *Lynchings* he shows us the darker side of that past.

The sordid ritual of lynching in Florida and the South as a whole peaked in the 1890s. By the 1930s, Howard points out in his most interesting argument, modern society was reshaping the character of lynch law. Though concentrated in the Old Plantation Belt of north Florida, extralegal violence was not exclusively rural in nature. Urban areas – Tallahassee, Panama City, Daytona Beach, Fort Lauderdale, and Tampa – hosted most of the 1930s lynchings. Furthermore, national condemnation, antilynching activity, increased federal involvement, radio-equipped state patrol cars, and a changing public conscience had driven perpetrators into something of a lynchers’ underground. Ceremonial mob violence was giving way to the speedy and effective work of small clandestine bands. Media-generating exceptions, such as the ceremonial-style lynching of Claude Neal – one of the most gruesome in history, contributed to the shift away from traditional forms of white terror.

Despite the reshaping of lynchings, Howard writes, they had not lost the force of the white community’s will. Perpetrator identifications came infrequently, indictments less often, and convictions never. Local police often colluded with lynchers. Town newspapers tended to hold the purported actions of victims responsible for the violence and, like state officials, worried more about community image than about civil injustices and the loss of life. Condemnation came primarily from outside the state. Although three whites died by the hands of Florida vigilantes in the 1930s, lynching was in the tradition of the South a segregated activity – only whites practiced and condoned it.

Understanding the compulsion behind this macabre pastime has long posed a challenge for scholars. Howard explains that motives were as varied as circumstances, and they spanned a range that included economic competition, alleged murder and attempted murder, purported sexual assault, and political radicalism. He concludes that “race was undoubtedly more important than class as the root cause of” most lynchings (148). In addition to punishing the individual, lynching served the purpose of social control and the maintenance of white supremacy. Each of the black lynchings, for instance, involved allegations of black-on-white crime.

While Howard’s findings confirm established scholarly claims, *Lynchings* lacks a fresh perspective of vigilante justice. Some readers will find that the book is longer on narrative than on analysis, and perhaps too short on both. It offers an incomplete understanding of lynching’s cultural underpinnings, which went deeper than race and class conflict. For instance, the chapter entitled “Protecting White Women” never fully develops the powerful myths behind race and sexuality. Throughout the book, one finds little treatment of the local black community’s reaction to lynchings and only a glossy picture of the larger social dynamics of the host communities.

These observations aside, Howard writes with a style and ease that is inviting. Students of extralegal violence and Florida history will find *Lynchings* an accessible read.

Jack E. Davis