



Anatomy of a Lynching: The Killing of Claude Neal

James R. McGovern

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"A sensitive and forthright analysis of one of the most gruesome episodes in Florida history... McGovern has produced a richly detailed case study that should enhance our general understanding of mob violence and vigilantism." -- Florida Historical Quarterly

"[McGovern] has succeeded in writing more than a narrative account of this bloodcurdling story; he has explored its causes and ramifications." -- American Historical Review

"A finely crafted historical case study of one lynching, its antecedents, and its aftermath." -- Contemporary Sociology

First published in 1982, James R. McGovern's *Anatomy of a Lynching* unflinchingly reconstructs the grim events surrounding the death of Claude Neal, one of the estimated three thousand blacks who died at the hands of southern lynch mobs in the six decades between the 1880s and the outbreak of World War II.

Neal was accused of the brutal rape and murder of Lola Cannidy, a young white woman he had known since childhood. On October 26, 1934, a well-organized mob took Neal from his jail cell. The following night, the mob tortured Neal and hanged him to the point of strangulation, repeating the process until the victim died. A large crowd of men, women, and children who gathered to witness, celebrate, and assist in the lynching further mutilated Neal's body. Finally, the battered corpse was put on display, suspended as a warning from a tree in front of the Jackson County, Florida, courthouse.

Based on extensive research as well as on interviews with both blacks and whites who remember Neal's death, *Anatomy of a Lynching* sketches the social background of Jackson County, Florida -- deeply religious, crushed by the Depression, accustomed to violence, and proud of its role in the Civil War -- and examines which elements in the county's makeup contributed to the mob violence. McGovern offers a powerful dissection of an extraordinarily violent incident.

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