



The End of American Lynching

Ashraf H. A. Rushdy

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The End of American Lynching questions how we think about the dynamics of lynching, what lynchings mean to the society in which they occur, how lynching is defined, and the circumstances that lead to lynching. Ashraf H. A. Rushdy looks at three lynchings over the course of the twentieth century—one in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, in 1911, one in Marion, Indiana, in 1930, and one in Jasper, Texas, in 1998—to see how Americans developed two distinct ways of thinking and talking about this act before and after the 1930s.

One way takes seriously the legal and moral concept of complicity as a way to understand the dynamics of a lynching; this way of thinking can give us new perceptions into the meaning of mobs and the lynching photographs in which we find them. Another way, which developed in the 1940s and continues to influence us today, uses a strategy of denial to claim that lynchings have ended. Rushdy examines how the denial of lynching emerged and developed, providing insight into how and why we talk about lynching the way we do at the dawn of the twenty-first century. In doing so, he forces us to confront our responsibilities as American citizens and as human beings.

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