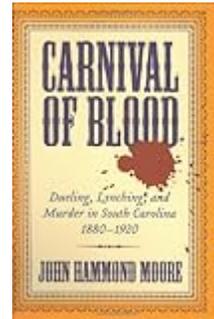




John Hammond Moore. *Carnival of Blood: Dueling, Lynching, and Murder in South Carolina, 1880-1920.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006. x + 304 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57003-620-0.



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Requiem for the Dead

The violence and disorders of the South in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era has long been a fascinating subject for historians of the region. Yet recent scholarship has sought to move past cataloging individual incidents of mayhem and explain in social terms the motivation for the heavy homicide rate below the Mason-Dixon Line. Especially when examining racially motivated killings, historians increasingly understand that the political culture of white supremacy fueled violence. South Carolina historians have also shown renewed interest in the social ethos that underpinned this racial ideology. However, while some important work has been done on the subject, much of this interest has been sporadic and significant gaps remain. Prior to *Carnival of Blood*, there has been no in-depth examination of violence in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Carolina. Moreover, this work achieves far more than simply filling a gap in the literature; it marks the first effort to describe a particularly dark time in our history. Hopefully other works will soon follow and the racial order that disfranchisement created will be more clearly understood, especially as it relates to violence.

Carnival of Blood unfolds as a discussion of the various motivations for and means by which Carolinians killed one another. Part of John Hammond Moore's story focuses on famous events: two chapters on the Cash-Shannon duel, one chapter on the Francis Dawson assassination, and another on the assassination of Narciso Gonzales. It is here that Moore's book really shines, as he describes events that attracted considerable attention within the state and places them within a historical context of violence. Moore is able to explain why and how these events spiraled out of control. While all of these events focus on conflict between whites, Moore also makes clear that, below the surface, the culture of honor and its discontents had a racial context. Moore's study of the aftermath of the Dawson and Gonzales murders provides striking evidence of how easily juries explained murder by honorable men as justified.

Yet Moore also discusses in extensive detail the experience of the less famous. He describes conflicts that involved gun play: shoot-outs with a dizzying array of individuals, cold-blooded murder, and shootings that occurred in the heat of the moment. The picture that

emerges from Moore's discussion is one of Carolinians prepared to kill one another for what often seems to be quite trivial reasons. While Moore dispenses with these individual cases fairly quickly, we see the same themes as were revealed by the more famous assassination cases discussed. White Carolinians lived with an acute sense that at any time they could expect to be challenged. They were often hyper-defensive of family and reputation, and they even sought out opportunities to prove themselves with the use of firearms. These attitudes also spilled over to juries, who often went out of their way to excuse violent acts of murder. The trials that ensued seem less like judicial proceedings and more like operatic dramas in which the actors already know the result.

Moore addresses lynching in several provocative chapters. South Carolina's stance on lynching represented something of a paradox. At least in comparison with other southern states, the number of lynchings was fairly modest. However, in South Carolina one could find the most aggressive defenders of lynching in the entire region. Ben Tillman and Cole Blease certainly never spared inflammatory rhetoric in their enthusiasm for the lynching of African Americans. The larger significance of lynching as a part of the political culture of the state is a subject that Moore sadly ignores.

Yet the real strength of Moore's examination of lynching is the extensive coverage that he gives to it. His approach, giving details regarding numerous acts of lynching and how lynching unfolded throughout the

state, is quite thought-provoking. Some of these cases will be well known to scholars of lynching. Yet others will come as a real surprise, suggesting lines of future inquiry. One of the real strengths of Moore's book is that he indeed suggests a wide range of subjects that deserve historical investigation.

Moore's research appears impeccable, with a hefty use of newspapers and manuscripts. The concluding chapters rely heavily on newspapers and are often more descriptive than analytical. The cases that he discusses in these chapters are many, but they are also covered very quickly, with extensive quotation from newspapers. This demonstrates strong research, but fails to reveal the events' meanings.

What is missing from this work is a marshaling of all of the evidence Moore has uncovered to present a larger perspective. While race, class, social conflict, and political culture are all subjects Moore touches on, he never truly explains why these events were significant. The historical context thus is often missing and these events become simply isolated incidents, separate from their social milieu. A more thorough discussion of the themes of the political culture of white supremacy would especially make the chapters on lynching stronger.

Regardless of the aforementioned criticism, Moore's discussion of death and lynching in the Gilded Age-Progressive Era South is an important one. Historians interested in the period will find his work to be a book they study closely.

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