

SINNERS IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY MOB:
VIOLENCE AGAINST RELIGIOUS OUTSIDERS IN THE U.S. SOUTH, 1865-1910

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by

Patrick Q. Mason, B.A., M.A., M.A.

R. Scott Appleby, Director

Graduate Program in History

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Studies of violence in the late nineteenth-century South focus almost exclusively on racial and political violence against African Americans. While this emphasis is both understandable and appropriate, what has been largely neglected is the violence committed against religious outsiders, and more generally their overall treatment in what was essentially a hegemonic culture of evangelical Protestantism. In addition to the many instances of violence against African American churches and ministers, the South also witnessed dozens of episodes of anti-Jewish violence and literally hundreds of cases of anti-Mormon violence from 1865 to 1910. Acknowledging and understanding this relatively hidden chapter in American history provides us with unique insights into postbellum southern culture and the sometimes violent side of the American experiment in religious pluralism.

This dissertation adds to the growing body of scholarship exploring the relationships between religion and violence in southern history and American history more broadly by making three primary contributions. First, it uncovers numerous untold narratives of violence against southern religious outsiders. Second, it examines the interrelationships between minority religious groups and the dominant evangelical Protestant culture in the South. Third, it explores the various ways in which religious identity and religious

motivations, whether explicit or implicit, informed the attitudes, actions, and reactions of the perpetrators as well as the victims of the violence. The four groups treated herein—black Christians, Mormons, Jews, and Catholics—were the groups that contemporaries most commonly perceived as providing substantial challenges to the cultural, racial, and religious orthodoxies of southern Anglo-Saxon Protestantism.

In short, this dissertation is a study of the multiple religious dimensions of violence in the postbellum South. Although some episodes treated herein qualify as overt religious violence, in most of the cases religion was one among a number of factors that shaped and triggered violence, and interacted with other variables including race, gender, family structure, politics, class, economics, and ethnicity. As a set of sacred doctrines and practices, a cultural category, or an analytical lens, religion played different roles in the ways that black Christians, Mormons, Jews, and Catholics precipitated, experienced, and responded to southern violence as religious outsiders.

To Melissa,
an incomparable companion

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Prologue

Robert and Mary Quinn were by all accounts fairly typical southerners. They came from good Confederate stock—Robert’s father William had been a company flag bearer at numerous battles including Shiloh and Vicksburg—and they, along with most of their extended family, were active members of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Ackerman, Mississippi. All that changed in 1895, however, when Mormon missionaries started preaching in the area. Persuaded by the missionaries’ message, Robert and his parents were baptized in a nearby creek before dawn one December morning; family legend has it that the ceremony was performed before sunrise “because they were afraid of mobs.” Mary was slower in making the decision, but she and several other members of the family were similarly baptized in the ensuing months. Shortly thereafter, the Mormon converts were excommunicated from Bethlehem Baptist, where many of their relatives still worshipped. Despite antagonism from their former church and threats of mobbing, the Quinns remained in Choctaw County long enough for Robert, who gained a reputation as a “brilliant speaker and a useful man,” to be ordained an elder and eventually president of the local branch of the church’s Mississippi Conference. In 1901 part of the family decided to emigrate to Idaho, piling themselves and all their worldly possessions in a boxcar and riding it to the West. They did so with an eye toward “gathering with the Saints,” as was common for many Mormon converts in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Leaving Mississippi was

difficult for the Quinns—the Baptist contingent of Mary’s family had disowned her when she became Mormon, and refused to even come out of the house when she came to say her goodbyes. Robert, who always retained his Mississippi accent and southern manner, was forever hurt to have left the South, considering himself a southern man to the day he died and regretting that his children grew up talking like Yankees.¹

Robert and Mary Quinn happen to be my great-grandparents, and it was through this family narrative that I became clued in to some of the general themes and questions that drive this study. To the best of my knowledge, none of the Quinns ever became victims of actual violence after they became Mormon; indeed, among the worst treatment they received was the cold shoulder that Mary’s family gave her. However, what intrigues me as a historian about this story is that they were so conscious of the possibility—or in their minds, the probability—of violence directed against them for apparently no other reason than their religious affiliation, or in this case, their change in religious affiliation. Indeed, the Quinns’ experience raises a number of questions, each laden with implications that go much further than my own family history or even the history of Latter-day Saints in the South: Could religious minorities in the postbellum South reasonably expect to be victimized by violence? What were the sources of those fears? Was the threat of violence (real or perceived) uniform for all minorities, or was it different among various outsider groups? What effect did violence and the potential for it have on minority religious communities and individuals? Were religious outsiders marginalized and persecuted because of their beliefs, their practices,

¹ This narrative is gleaned from multiple sources. It relies on my own remembrance of stories told by my grandmother, Lena Lillian Quinn Later, as well as two formal interviews with her: one conducted by myself on 5 June 2000, in Sandy, Utah; and another conducted by my brother Matthew Mason on 1 May 2004, also in Sandy. Other sources include a Quinn (Quin) family history (no author or date, photocopied typescript in my possession); H. P. Dotson, “Notes from Mississippi,” (*Salt Lake City, UT*) *Deseret News*, 8 Aug. 1896; Mississippi Conference Record, 6782, pp. 48, 188-189, in the Church History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; and Elizabeth Buckner Rester, “A History of Bethlehem Baptist Church” (July 1994), online at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~mschocta/BethlehemChurch.html>.

or something else? More broadly, what were the religious dimensions of violence in the late nineteenth-century South?

A survey of the historical literature on the Reconstruction and New South, or even on postbellum southern violence, reveals only a smattering of such conflict targeting religious outsiders.² Most studies of the postbellum South have focused exclusively on racial and political violence against African Americans, an emphasis that is both understandable and appropriate given the pervasiveness and historical significance of the phenomena of lynching and other forms of racial oppression. But what has been largely omitted from the narrative of the late nineteenth-century South is the violence committed against religious outsiders such as Latter-day Saints and Jews, and more generally their overall treatment in what was essentially a hegemonic culture of evangelical Protestantism. While racial and political violence was more prevalent, southern violence against religious outsiders was much more common than its absence from virtually all historical treatments suggests. Indeed, in addition to the many instances of violence against African American churches and ministers in the South, there were also dozens of episodes of anti-Jewish violence and literally hundreds of cases of anti-Mormon violence in the last quarter of the century. Acknowledging and understanding this relatively hidden chapter in the underside of the American experience provides us with unique insights into postbellum southern culture and the sometimes violent side of the American experiment in religious pluralism.

² For passing references to violence against LDS missionaries in the literature on southern violence, see Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 96-97; Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 255-256. One must look to the specialized subfield of Jewish history to find discussion of anti-Jewish violence in the South. See Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), esp. chap. 9; Howard N. Rabinowitz, "Nativism, Bigotry, and Anti-Semitism in the South," *American Jewish History* 77 (March 1988): 437-451; William F. Holmes, "Whitecapping: Anti-Semitism in the Populist Era," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 63 (March 1974): 244-261.

1.2 Religion and Violence in the Late Nineteenth-Century South

There are two basic truisms about the late nineteenth-century South: first, that it was religious; and second, that it was violent. In both cases, the statistics are telling. Between 1850 and 1890, the Southern Baptist Convention alone experienced a 374% increase in total membership, a five- or six-fold explosion in adherents, and a building boom of somewhere between two-and-a-half to four times as many churches.³ If the early nineteenth century represented “the beginnings of the Bible Belt,” then surely the last quarter of the century was when the belt was tightly fastened.⁴ Religion was pervasive, even inescapable, throughout the region, and “Even those filled with doubt or disdain could not escape the images, the assumptions, the power of faith.”⁵

At the same time that religion, and especially evangelical Protestantism, was solidifying its hold on the South, the whole region also seemed to be awash in violence. The colonial and antebellum South was renowned for its penchant for violence related to its culture of honor.⁶ In the decades following the Civil War the violence swelled, both in

³ William M. Newman and Peter L. Halvorson, *Atlas of American Religion: The Denominational Era, 1776-1990* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000), 73-75. For a stunning graphic representation of church growth in the South during this era, see Edwin Scott Gaustad and Philip L. Barlow, *New Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 81-82 (for Baptists), 225-227 (for Methodists). An excellent contemporary chronicling of church membership and organizational statistics based on the 1890 census is Henry K. Carroll, *The Religious Forces of the United States: Enumerated, Classified, and Described on the Basis of the Government Census of 1890* (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1893).

⁴ Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Knopf, 1997).

⁵ Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 160. Joseph Creech suggests that “The religious-cultural situation in the late-nineteenth-century South was something akin to seventeenth-century Puritan New England or Mormon Utah,” as everyone in the South, regardless of denominational or theological distinctions, shared “a common religious vision and language” that was symptomatic of evangelicalism’s “cultural predominance.” Joseph W. Creech, Jr., “Righteous Indignation: Religion and Populism in North Carolina, 1886-1906” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2000), 26.

⁶ See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1890s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Kenneth Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball,*

quantity and intensity. Violence was a strategic political tool frequently employed during the years of Reconstruction and Redemption. Although used by both races while posturing for power in the transitional postwar society, it was most effectively utilized by white Democrats to drive both Republicans and blacks out of power, to end any aspirations by poor white and black farmers of significant changes to the structures of society, and to reinforce white elites' power by creating the laws and structures that led to Jim Crow and the Solid South.⁷ C.

Vann Woodward suggested that violence was in fact more characteristic of the New South than the Old, and that the region was "one of the most violent communities of comparable size in all Christendom."⁸

By the last two decades of the nineteenth century, lynching became a kind of trademark for the region, being transformed from its origins as a means of frontier justice common in many parts of the country until by the 1890s "lynching had become primarily a

Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*, esp. chap. 1; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Bruce D. Dickson, *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); and Sheldon Hackney, "Southern Violence," *American Historical Review* 74 (Feb. 1969): 906-25.

⁷ On the use of violence as a political tool in the South during the late 1860s and 1870s, see Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), chap. 6; Jerry L. West, *The Reconstruction Ku Klux Klan in York County, South Carolina, 1865-1877* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2002); Michael W. Fitzgerald, "Extralegal Violence and the Planter Class: The Ku Klux Klan in the Alabama Black Belt During Reconstruction," in *Local Matters: Race, Crime, and Justice in the Nineteenth-Century South*, ed. Christopher Waldrep and Donald G. Nieman (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001); Gilles Vandal, *Rethinking Southern Violence: Homicides in Post-Civil War Louisiana, 1866-1884* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000); Christopher Waldrep, "The Politics of Language: The Ku Klux Klan in Reconstruction," in *Warm Ashes: Issues in Southern History at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Winfred B. Moore Jr., Kyle S. Sinisi, and David H. White Jr. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 138-154; Kenneth C. Barnes, *Who Killed John Clayton? Political Violence and the Emergence of the New South, 1861-1893* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); Laura F. Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction, 1863-1877: America's Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); George C. Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984); Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971/1995).

⁸ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951/1971), 158-59. In his neo-Woodwardian treatment, Edward Ayers concurs, saying that the New South was "a notoriously violent place," with homicide rates easily the highest in the country and among the highest in the world" (*Promise of the New South*, 155). Also see Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*.

southern and racial affair.”⁹ Although they can never capture the real toll in human terms, the numbers, even for their inadequacy as chronically low estimates, tell at least part of the story. Between the end of Reconstruction and the beginning of the Great Depression, one recent count is that there were at least 2462 African Americans lynched by southern mobs; another reliable estimate puts the figure at 3220.¹⁰ Those estimates do not count “legal lynchings” (state-sponsored executions after summary judgments by judges or juries) and Reconstruction-era violence, which together would exponentially increase the totals.¹¹ From 1889 to 1899, the decade in which the racial terror peaked, an average of at least 187.5 African Americans per year were lynched, more than one every other day.¹²

Despite their parallel rise, the relationship of religion and violence in the postbellum South has received surprisingly little scholarly attention. This oversight has begun to be addressed in recent years as scholars such as Donald Mathews and Orlando Patterson have

⁹ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 8. See also Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 351-52. For a comparative analysis of lynching across different regions of the country, see Michael J. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874-1947* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004). On the history of vigilante violence in America, the best work is still Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975). Other recent works on lynching include William D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Christopher Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch: Extralegal Violence and Punishment in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002); Brundage, ed., *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Tolnay and Beck, *A Festival of Violence*.

¹⁰ Tolnay and Beck, *A Festival of Violence*, 17; Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 8. The NAACP recorded 2522 blacks lynched in the United States from 1889 through 1918. See *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918* (New York: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1919), 7. Another source, the Tuskegee Institute records, documents 3417 lynchings of blacks and 1291 of whites from 1882-1944; see Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, viii.

¹¹ See George C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and “Legal Lynchings”* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1990), 3. Wright demonstrates the undercounting that typically attends lynching estimates: “Most sources have indicated that at least 205 people were lynched in Kentucky, placing it ninth among states with the largest number of mob murders. By contrast, my findings reveal that at least 353 people were lynched in the Bluegrass State” (5).

¹² See Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 351. For a detailed statistical analysis of lynching, see Tolnay and Beck, *A Festival of Violence*.

adopted theories and methodologies from other fields, focusing their analyses on the theological and anthropological implications of southern lynching.¹³ Historians Paul Harvey and Steven Hahn have each given a prominent place to the themes of both religion and violence in their excellent recent treatments of the postbellum period, but neither attempts an extended analysis of the linkages between the two.¹⁴

A need remains for a thoroughly historical treatment of the religious dimensions of southern violence that would cast the phenomena of Reconstruction-era political violence and lynching, among other violent acts, in a fresh light. In addressing this need, my dissertation makes three primary contributions. First, it uncovers numerous untold narratives of violence against southern religious outsiders. Second, the dissertation examines the interrelationships between minority religious groups and the dominant evangelical Protestant culture in the South that provided the context for such violence. Third, it

¹³ In his book *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries* (Washington, DC: Civitas/Counterpoint, 1998), Orlando Patterson indicts southern Protestantism for combining what he sees as the Pauline corruption of Christianity with a racist creed shaped by negrophobia and white supremacy, all of which resulted in a “cult of human sacrifice, focused on the literal and symbolic castration of Afro-American males” (xiii).

Scholar of southern religion Donald G. Mathews acknowledges the fact that the “overlay of religion and lynching in the New South” seems to be “a paradox if not a contradiction” that has received too little historical attention. Similar to Patterson he focuses on the element of human sacrifice and substitutionary atonement for communal sin common to both Christianity—at least the “orthodox (white)” interpretation of it—and lynching. Mathews does not come down so hard on southern Christians or Christianity as does Patterson, but he does argue that there was an unavoidable “connection between the South’s most dramatic act of brutality and the pervasive drama of salvation preached from pulpits throughout the region.” See Mathews, “The Southern Rite of Human Sacrifice,” *Journal of Southern Religion* (22 Aug. 2000), online at <http://jsr.as/wvu.edu/mathews.htm>. Also see Mathews, “Lynching Is Part of the Religion of Our People,” in *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*, ed. Beth Barton Schweiger and Mathews (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 153-194.

In her examination of lynching as communal ritual and visual display, Amy Wood is skeptical about the more Girardian aspects of Patterson’s and Mathews’ analyses, but agrees that communal lynching and southern Protestantism had significant cultural, rhetorical, and emotive overlap, as “defenders of lynching consistently configured mob violence as punitive justice, a revenge against the black man’s sin (certainly never their own) that was ordained and consecrated by God.” In Wood’s analysis, lynching was less about vicarious scapegoating and more about an evangelical crusade to rid their communities of sin and corruption, perfectly symbolized in the image of the black rapist. See Amy Louise Wood, “Spectacles of Suffering: Witnessing Lynching in the New South, 1880-1930” (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2002), 73, see all of chap. 2.

¹⁴ See Paul Harvey, *Freedom’s Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Hahn, *Nation under Our Feet*.

explores the various ways in which religious identity and religious motivations, whether explicit or implicit, informed the attitudes, actions, and reactions of the perpetrators as well as the victims of the violence. In short, I seek to better understand the religious dimensions of southern violence in all their variety.

1.3 Definition of Terms

“Religion” is defined here as “the human response to a reality perceived as sacred.” Although frequently thought of simply as an individualized spiritual expression or personal relationship with the divine, in its strictest sense religion (derived from the Latin *religare*, meaning “to bind together”) is originally communal. In this formulation religion, in all its globally diverse forms, is comprised of a creed (a foundational set of beliefs, values, myths, and doctrines), a cult (devotional and ritual behavior), a code of conduct (governing moral norms), and a community (the body of believers and devotees), all of which is focused on the transcendent, ultimate, or divine.¹⁵ Because religion at its heart deals with ultimate concerns, it is often used to sacralize other important categories and organizing principles of human society, including ethnicity, gender, hierarchy, economy, politics, nationalism, and so forth. Although we usually think in terms of the variety of world religious traditions—Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Taoism, to name a few—it is essential to recognize that each of these traditions is characterized by a high degree of internal pluralism, allowing for different constructions of each religious tradition by individuals and groups who claim to be its true heirs. In this study we will see pluralism as it is expressed both across religious traditions (Christianity and Judaism) and as multiple expressions of one tradition (evangelical Protestant, African American, Mormon, and

¹⁵ My discussion of “religion” here follows R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 8-9.

Catholic appropriations of Christianity).¹⁶ By exploring the multiple dimensions that religion assumed in shaping societal norms and reinforcing sanctions against their violation, we are better equipped to understand the complex nature of violence in the postbellum South.

It should be clear, then, that religion, whether operating as a spiritual feeling, a social force, or an analytical lens, is not a static concept that operates identically in all situations. Indeed, perpetrators and victims of violence often comprehended and used religion in very different terms, both in their self-understanding and in their construction of the world around them. Not only did these various groups typically have competing worldviews, but their relationship to the violence altered the way they used religion to understand and interpret their place in a particular historical situation. Religion, qua religion, helped establish and reinforce societal norms in many of the cases presented in these pages. But religious symbols, practices, beliefs, and worldviews also subtly informed and transformed politics, culture, and economy, in different ways for different groups. Rather than imposing a monolithic application of religion on all cases, then, this study will highlight some of the multitude of ways in which religion operated in a range of violent settings, thus opening up further possibilities for extending our understanding of the relationships between violence and culture.

In addition to defining religion, it is important to clarify what I mean by “religious outsiders,” “violence,” and “the South,” respectively. In terms of “religious outsiders,” this study focuses primarily on three major religious groups that fell outside the boundaries of

¹⁶ In the last two decades some scholars have argued that Mormonism comprises a new world religious tradition, emerging from Christianity as Christianity did from Judaism. In this study I am less concerned with establishing a precise taxonomy for world religions than I am with examining the historical interactions of Mormons with evangelical Protestants in the South, an approach that does not require a declaration one way or the other whether Mormonism does in fact constitute a new world religion. See Rodney Stark, “The Rise of a New World Faith,” *Review of Religious Research* 26 (1984): 18-27; Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

southern white mainline and evangelical Protestantism: black Christians, Mormons, and Jews. While these groups were not the only religious minorities or outsiders in the South (others include sectarian Christians and Indian and Chinese laborers), they were most commonly seen (and treated) by contemporaries as providing substantial challenges to the cultural, racial, and religious orthodoxies of southern Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. Catholics of course also fit this definition, but, for reasons I will explain in Chapter Six, with some qualifications they remained largely unscathed by the violence visited upon these other minority groups in the South. While recognizing that the concepts of “mainstream” and “outsiders” are constructed to a large degree, I maintain that they were historical realities that were reflected in the everyday lived experiences of the people involved, especially the marginalized.¹⁷ Although “minority” and “outsider” are not necessarily synonymous terms (i.e. throughout the nineteenth century Catholics were marginalized as cultural outsiders in the northeastern United States even in cities where they came to outnumber other religious groups), in the South all of the religious outsiders I discuss were in fact also minorities, so I will sometimes use the terms interchangeably.

For the most part, I will concentrate on instances of physical, or direct, violence. Direct violence in the late nineteenth-century South comprised a wide range of activities, including lynching, murder, attempted murder, rape, beating, tar-and-feathering, and whipping. In addition, it took the form of property destruction, such as when vigilantes burned or ransacked homes, businesses, and churches. In the course of my analysis, I will also consider the influence of the structural and cultural aspects of violence, particularly as

¹⁷ My conception of the nature and importance of “religious outsiders” parallels that of R. Laurence Moore in his formative work on American religious and cultural history, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). Mormons, Jews, black Christians, and Catholics comprise four of the five groups Moore focuses on (the other is Christian Science), and I agree that they constitute the most historically significant religious groups that stand outside the bounds of white Protestantism in America.

they shaped the ways in which direct violence was carried out. Structural violence is defined here as harm imposed indirectly on some people by a dominant group (or groups) who, through the social system, pursue their own preferences at others' expense. Examples of this would include economic exploitation, political repression, and social-cultural marginalization, as seen in Jim Crow or apartheid laws, colonialism, and certain features of global corporate capitalism, to name just a few. The notion of cultural violence is even broader, as it highlights the fact that culture can become a source of violence by allowing or encouraging the dehumanization of certain persons or groups, usually through the construction and marginalization of difference. Cultural violence is often, though not necessarily, used to legitimate direct and structural violence; common examples include misogyny (and machismo), racism, bigotry, religious hatred, caste-based ideologies, and so forth.¹⁸

The value of using structural and cultural violence as distinct categories is that by analyzing only direct violence one might miss a number of cases in which direct violence, as a form of social control, never actually occurred and was in fact unnecessary in a given community, because the structures and culture of violence in that locale were effective in keeping the target population "in their place." This approach draws on arguments common not only in the field of peace and conflict studies but also in African American history, where scholars have long asserted that the maintenance of white supremacy relied on a number of tactics ranging from lynching (direct violence) to segregation (structural violence)

¹⁸ See Johan Galtung, "Cultural Violence," in *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 196-210; Galtung, "Religions, Hard and Soft," *Cross Currents* 47 (Winter 1997/98): 437-450; and Marc Pilisuk and Jennifer Tennant, "The Hidden Structure of Violence," *ReVision* 20 (Fall 1997): 25-31.

to dehumanization (cultural violence).¹⁹ In short, paying attention to structural and cultural violence against religious outsiders can illuminate aspects of these conflictive social relationships that otherwise might be obscured if we looked exclusively at the more obvious instances of direct violence.

My study is not only located in the South, but also makes particular arguments about southern institutions, society, and culture. In doing so, I support claims that the South is a distinctive region, in part because of its culture of violence and its unique religious ethos. I employ a fairly standard set of geographical parameters for the South, including the states of the former Confederacy, and occasionally Kentucky and Maryland. Most of my cases, however, took place in the unquestionably southern states of North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Tennessee. The experiences of African Americans, Mormons, Jews, and Catholics were qualitatively different in the South than in other regions of the country, and even varied within the South from state to state and often between cities and the countryside. Although I often turn to the national scene for broad historical context, the story I tell is a uniquely southern one. Indeed, attitudes and practices that were widely shared by most Americans, including racism, anti-Mormonism, anti-Catholicism, antisemitism, defense of womanhood and family, and the use of extralegal violence for community preservation, all took on distinct forms as they interacted with one another in the specific historical situation of the South in the fifty years following the end of the Civil War.

In studying the period from 1865 to 1910, I depart somewhat from standard chronologies of postwar southern history that make a clear division between Reconstruction

¹⁹ Two general accounts that highlight the various of levels of violence used to oppress southern blacks are Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, chap. 6; and Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Knopf, 1998).

and the beginnings of the New South. In doing so, I make the point that the traditions and tactics of vigilante violence that were fine-tuned by the Ku Klux Klan and other paramilitary groups in the years immediately following emancipation were carried over into subsequent decades as southerners grappled with questions of how to deal with a range of outsiders, including religious and ethnic minorities. Although the Klan was officially disbanded by federal action in the early 1870s and not formally resurrected until circa 1915, about the time of the Leo Frank lynching, the tradition of southern vigilantism thrived during the Klan's hiatus and was applied to situations ranging far beyond race relations. In this sense I contend for a greater degree of continuity between Reconstruction-era violence and the violence of the lynching era than is typically portrayed in accounts of the period.²⁰

1.4 The Multiple Dimensions of Violence

What does it mean to claim that this dissertation is a study of *the multiple religious dimensions of violence* in the postbellum South? It means, first and foremost, that incidents of obvious "religious violence" do not begin to exhaust the range of cases in which religion, as defined above, was a central dimension of violence against minorities. By overt religious

²⁰ Most studies of racial violence make a clear distinction between Reconstruction violence (in the late 1860s and 1870s) and post-Reconstruction lynching (for which semi-reliable data begins to be available circa 1882). This division is not entirely arbitrary of course, as the South underwent significant social, cultural, and political transitions at the close of Reconstruction. However, either stopping or starting the clock at 1877 obscures many of the broader continuities in postbellum southern culture, including the similarities of Reconstruction-era violence to the less systematic but no less threatening vigilantism of the ensuing decades. Examples of this divided periodization are Rable, *But There Was No Peace* (1865-1877), and Brundage, *Lynching in the New South* (1880-1930). An example of including both Reconstruction- and lynching-era violence, such as I am doing, is Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky* (1865-1940).

At the same time, it makes sense for my narrative to end before the rise of the second Klan, which brought an unprecedented degree of organization and institutional strength to antisemitism and anti-Catholicism in the South, and for which there is already a fairly well-developed literature. The best work on the second Ku Klux Klan is Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). See also David A. Horowitz, ed., *Inside the Klavern: The Secret History of a Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999); Leonard Joseph Moore, *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921-1928* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987); David Mark Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York: F. Watts, 1981).

violence, I mean violence conducted by and/or against religious actors or institutions, in which the religious identity of the perpetrator or victim, as expressed in belief and practice, is the principal motivating or triggering factor. This type of explicitly religious violence is usually conducted by religious actors from a competing faction, denomination, or faith tradition, although secularists and the secular nation-state have also been involved on both ends of this kind of activity, particularly in the modern era.

In examining cases of religious violence, we must consider the role of doctrine, both in terms of unorthodox doctrines that potentially spur violent antagonism, and also certain theological orientations that allow for and even call for violence against individuals or groups who are seen as ungodly or otherwise dangerous. I contend that Americans have rarely mobilized violent resistance simply on the grounds of doctrinal heterodoxy, but it is clear that theological commitments and doctrinal interpretations have frequently led to, or at least justified, the use of violence against those whose religious practices positioned them out of the mainstream.²¹

Doctrines and theology often have discrete practical manifestations, and thus social and cultural practices that are inspired by religious commitments often become targeted for violence when they are perceived to transgress accepted community norms. In such cases the religious identity of the victims may not be directly assailed, but the perpetrators are insistent that certain practices be abandoned. The national campaign against Mormonism in the late nineteenth century was a vivid example of this, as most anti-Mormons were not really intent on extirpating the Latter-day Saint religion per se (although many would have

²¹ Here I am in agreement with William Hutchison, who argues that Americans have traditionally tolerated (if begrudgingly or bemusedly) radical beliefs but not radical behavior, that “manner” has meant more than “matter.” Speaking of the early republic but generally applicable otherwise, Hutchison asserts that “a dissenter could hold wildly heretical positions and yet be tolerated so long as he or she was ‘our sort of person.’” William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), quote from p. 32.

happy if Mormonism simply disappeared). Instead, they focused their efforts on eliminating the obnoxious practices—rooted in distinctive LDS theological claims—of theocracy and especially polygamy. The numerous episodes of anti-Mormon violence, detailed and interpreted in Chapters Three and Four, are the clearest examples in the dissertation of overt religious violence.

If our analysis is limited to religious violence in this classic sense, however, we miss many nuances of the other ways that religion also operates in violent settings. Beyond specific practices, religion also dictates or at least informs broad social, economic, political, and cultural orientations. It may not even be a specific religiously prescribed rite that draws opposition, but rather a worldview that is shaped by the religious vision of certain religious outsiders. One illustration of this was the explicit involvement of black preachers in politics following emancipation, which was inspired by the notion of an undifferentiated “sacred cosmos,” a cultural retention from West Africa in which there was no clear distinction between sacred and secular. In this case, as I argue in Chapter Two, religion undergirded and sacralized competing approaches to political culture. In other words, the pluralism within Christianity was the source of two diametrically opposed religio-political approaches. On the one hand was the “liberationist” Christianity of African American freedpeople, drawn largely from the Old Testament narrative of the exodus. This was pitted against the no less politically charged establishment Christianity of the white evangelical Protestants, who because of their dominance over a religion-suffused mainstream culture enjoyed the luxury of insisting on their own idiosyncratic version of a “church-state separation,” and reacting violently when African Americans transgressed the boundaries they had constructed. While it would obscure as much as it clarifies to categorize white terrorist attacks on black churches and preacher-politicians as religious violence per se, it is

nonetheless essential to seriously consider the religious dimensions of violent episodes such as these that are commonly typed solely as political or racial.

Whereas African Americans, who sought political and economic independence, and Mormons, who sought a peoplehood distinctive from Protestant America, consciously made religion a marker of their outsider status, Jews (Chapter Five) and Catholics (Chapter Six) chose an accommodationist route and privatized their religion as long as they remained a minority, which status constituted a perpetual condition for both groups in the South (with the exception of the Catholic areas of Louisiana). Violence against these religious outsiders in the South was triggered more by their economic and ethnic profiles than by competing religious doctrines, practices, or worldviews. Although antisemitism and anti-Catholicism operated as pervasive cultural forces throughout this period, and arguably strengthened with the rise of populist fears of foreign conspiracies in the late nineteenth century, they did not translate into widespread or systematic violence against Jews or Catholics in the South. These groups' conscious decisions to acculturate as much as possible to the southern mainstream made them non-threatening on a local level even while many southerners raged against the broader international perils of the "Jewish conspiracy" or the "papist threat."

Finally, it should be emphasized that precise taxonomies are difficult to achieve, as the lines between various types of violence are often blurry—for instance, scholars may quibble about whether a certain instance is an example of ethnic or religious violence. The process of categorizing violent episodes is further obscured because of lack of clarity about historical actors' true motivations, diverse opinions among the attackers or victims, and the difficulty of separating categories to begin with (i.e. are Jews a racial, ethnic, or religious group?). Furthermore, violent actors have frequently cloaked their true intentions in a guise of religion as a means of rallying the masses on their own side and giving a deeper and more

transcendent meaning to their actions.²² By focusing the inquiry on examining the religious dimensions of violence (which may simultaneously demonstrate economic, racial, ethnic, political, or other dimensions), we are better able to assess the richness and complexity of violent episodes rather than shoving them into categorical boxes that are not necessarily perfect fits. It would be inaccurate to describe southern violence against Jews, for instance, as being exclusively religious violence or even ethnic violence, as it usually had a distinct economic component to it as well. However, by considering the situation of Jews as religious outsiders in the South we are better able to contextualize and explain the violence against them, so long as we keep in mind that the violence also had ethnic, economic, and even racial dimensions. Their marginal status made Jews, African American Christians, and Mormons all more susceptible to stereotypes, discrimination, and violence. Religion played different roles—or had multiple dimensions—in the ways that these various groups precipitated, experienced, and responded to southern violence as religious outsiders. What connected all their experiences was that the victims had been accused of sinning against the social order in some way, and violence became the means of punishing the transgressors and impelling them to conform to southern cultural and religious orthodoxies.

²² Recent examples of this can be found in conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland, and India. See Michael A. Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Sudhir Kakar, *The Colors of Violence: Cultural Identities, Religion, and Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Stanley J. Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Appleby, *Ambivalence of the Sacred*; and Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 3rd ed., rev. and updated (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), esp. chap. 1.

CHAPTER TWO

“IF THIS BE THE SPIRIT OF JESUS”:

POSTBELLUM VIOLENCE AGAINST BLACK MINISTERS AND CHURCHES

The meanest negroes in the country are those who are members of the churches and, as a general thing, the more devout and officious they are, the more closely they need watching.

-- North Georgia Citizen, 1879¹

Within our own borders a Negro may be beaten with more brutality than one would dare treat a horse or even a dog. . . . He may be tortured and put to death with all the shocking horrors of savage ferocity. . . . If this be the Spirit of Jesus, then give us Mohammed or any other redeemer.

-- Reverdy C. Ransom²

Hell is an improvement upon the United States where the negro is concerned.

-- Henry McNeal Turner³

2.1 Overview

One night in June 1870 a band of masked horsemen attacked a small rural church near Tuskegee, Alabama. In the brief, one-sided skirmish that followed, two African Americans were killed and three wounded. The freedmen had gathered at the church that night to discuss candidates for upcoming elections, a topic that had been hotly debated

¹ Quoted in Nelson Lichtenstein, Susan Strasser, and Roy Rosenzweig, *Who Built America? Working People and the Nation's Economy, Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. 2, *Since 1877* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2000), 83.

² Reverdy C. Ransom, “The Race Problem in a Christian State, 1906,” reprinted in *Afro-American Religious History*, ed. Milton C. Sernett (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), 303-304.

³ *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 February 1906; quoted in Edwin S. Redkey, comp. and ed., *Respect Black: The Writings and Speeches of Henry McNeal Turner* (New York: Arno Press, 1971), 196-197.

recently in other sites throughout the county. In testimony provided over a year later before a congressional sub-committee, Robert H. Abercrombie, a prominent local white citizen, discussed the incident in the context of race relations in Macon County. When pressed for details, Abercrombie seemed confused about precisely what kind of assemblage it was that had sparked such bloodshed. When first asked about “the character of the meeting of the blacks that night at this colored church,” he answered that “its objects were political.” Two questions later, he hedged and stated that it was “a leaders’ meeting . . . a church meeting, I presume.”⁴

Abercrombie’s confusion over whether the nighttime gathering was “a League meeting” or “a meeting of the leaders of the church” is understandable, given the relationship of politics and religion among African Americans in the postbellum South. In the years following emancipation, African Americans’ political meetings were often led by ministers, opened and closed with prayer, and featured frequent references to God’s omniscient and omnipotent guidance of His suffering servants, the newly liberated freedpeople. It was also common for the freedpeople’s worship services to be liberally sprinkled if not saturated with talk of improving their lot in this life through both prayer and politics. Although this represented a pragmatic approach of progress by any means available, it also revealed a worldview in which the division between sacred and secular was neither clear nor entirely desirable. Just as God leading the ancient Israelites to the Promised

⁴ U.S. Congress, Joint Select Committee on the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, *Report of the Joint Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, So Far as Regards the Execution of Laws, and the Safety of the Lives and Property of the Citizens of the United States and Testimony Taken* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1872), IX, 1110; Abercrombie’s full testimony is on pp. 1103-1113. These extensive congressional hearings were (and are) better known as the Ku Klux Conspiracy hearings; as such, I will hereafter refer to them as *Ku Klux Conspiracy*, with accompanying volume and page numbers.

Land marked both their spiritual salvation and temporal deliverance, the freedpeople believed that the altar and the ballot box were both tools for their liberation from bondage.

This conflation of politics and the pulpit by African Americans represented a departure from common practice and cherished beliefs held by southern whites. In the antebellum era, southern evangelical Protestants had resisted any explicit fusion of religion and politics, particularly as they reacted against what they saw as the moral crusading of the emergent Republican Party.⁵ Even the providence-soaked language that sacralized the Confederate cause only went so far as to bless the state with divine favor, while preachers and politicians each retained their own separate spheres.⁶ Although individual southerners were hardly loath to inform their politics with their religion, they were suspicious of explicit ties between the two. During Reconstruction, northern evangelicals remained more overtly partisan, using federal and state governments to pass a wide range of societal reforms (many of which targeted the vanquished South). Southern evangelicals, on the other hand, were more adamant about the formal separation of church and state, even if such a separation did not prevent them consistently criticizing radical Republican rule. Southern Baptists in particular were champions of disestablishment, although their commitment to the principle was compromised somewhat as they supported Redeemer governments and increasingly

⁵ Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 321-322. Specifically in relation to the issue of slavery, antebellum southern evangelicals “increasingly articulated a doctrine [that] came to be known as the spirituality of the church which relegated to the state all power in the political sphere and to the church all authority in the moral sphere. As a corollary, the church could, in fact, meddle in politics, but only when a clear-cut moral issue was at stake.” Slavery was thus cast as a purely political, not moral, question, and abolitionists were condemned for their “sinful mingling of church/state issues.” Joseph W. Creech, Jr., “Righteous Indignation: Religion and Populism in North Carolina, 1886-1906” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2000), 196-197.

⁶ On how religion sacralized the cause of the Confederacy, see Kurt O. Berends, “Confederate Sacrifice and the ‘Redemption’ of the South,” in *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*, ed. Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald G. Mathews (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 90-124; Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980).

depended on the power of the state to legislate on “moral” issues that were mediated in the political sphere, such as marriage and divorce law, Sabbath observance, gambling, and especially temperance. There were internal debates about what did or did not entail political involvement, but a general consensus emerged that “Preachers should vote but not seek political office; they should refrain from partisan politics; and they should preach on political questions only as those questions concerned public or private morals.”⁷

Thus, when the leaders of the Macon County congregation held a Union League meeting in their church, they were seen as overstepping the bounds of the church’s acceptable function. Similarly, in Edgefield County, South Carolina, black prayer meetings were attacked by white vigilantes who thought the assemblies were prone “to terminate politically and not spiritually.”⁸ Across the South, politically active African American preachers were frequently threatened, intimidated, blackballed, beaten, whipped, or killed by whites who sought to subdue the former slaves; black churches with real or perceived political connections were attacked, demolished, or burned down. Few things were more

⁷ Rufus B. Spain, *At Ease in Zion: Social History of Southern Baptists, 1865-1900* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1961/1967), chap. 1, quote from p. 43; Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), chap. 9. Also see Gaines M. Foster, *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

Joseph Creech succinctly frames the tension among evangelicals on the church-state issues, and their inconsistency in supporting Redeemer governments: “Evangelicals’ thoughts on political action vacillated between two rather nebulous foci. On the one hand, evangelicals viewed the relationship between church and state from a conservative perspective summarized in their conceptions of ‘separation of church and state’ and their doctrine of the ‘spirituality of the church.’ Evangelicals drawn towards this view of church/state relations tended to frown at any attempts by Christians, churches, and especially ministers to ‘meddle’ in politics. On the other hand, ideals of patriotic millennialism and the close association made by evangelicals between religious and political freedom produced strong calls for Christians to be involved in the political sphere to reform civil corruption, legislate moral norms, or to ensure the continuance of civil and religious freedom. . . . In their support of redeemer governments, however, evangelicals were by no means consistent in their advocacy of separation of church and state. Even though many ministers condemned the close association of church and state in evangelical support for the Confederate cause, their actions often ended up intentionally or unintentionally supporting the Democratic ‘powers that be.’” Creech, “Righteous Indignation,” 196, 200.

⁸ Quoted in Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 54.

threatening to whites in the postbellum South than blacks exercising political power, and when religion was added to the mix, the combination became even more explosive. The black church and its more politicized clergy therefore became, along with the other pillars of black independence and progress during Reconstruction, the Freedmen's Bureau and the black school, special recipients of white violence.⁹

While scholars have been correct in noting that violence against black ministers and churches was generally political in nature, I argue that seeing the violence as purely political or even racial obscures some of the processes at work in the conflict. Viewing the violence through the religious—and not just racial or political—identities of both the perpetrators and the victims illuminates what was at least in part a clash of alternative worldviews informed significantly by the way the actors saw God ordering the world. Southern white evangelicals perceived a world of distinct hierarchies that ordered relationships among the various races, genders, and classes (placing elite Protestant white men on top), whereas black Christians since the days of slavery had developed a competing claim that God was in the business of liberation and sided primarily with the oppressed. The exodus of the freedpeople from white churches in the years following emancipation was the institutional culmination of this alternative religious vision, and was a move that made them not only racial but also religious outsiders in the postbellum South. Of course, freedom had its costs: just as emancipation freed the slaves from economic and political bondage, it opened them

⁹ As William Montgomery notes, the term “black church” is problematic. African Americans were never all members of a single homogenous or monolithic institution—not only were there numerous denominations and sects among African Americans, but they often were in fierce competition with one another. Recognizing this, however, scholars have generally agreed upon usage of “black church” as an umbrella term encompassing a wide variety of denominational and other religious expressions, focusing on the shared identity and interests of African Americans, especially in relation to white churches and the broader white culture. It is this in this respect that I will refer to “the black church” in this chapter. See William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South, 1865-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), xii.

up to terrorist violence aimed at suppressing that very economic and political liberty. So too the black exodus from the white churches brought black Christians out from under the suppression but also the protection of the white denominations. Using the freedom of their own churches to institutionalize a religious vision that included political rights as well as spiritual salvation was the freedpeople's prerogative, but it also put them at risk with those for whom the gospel of white supremacy held black subservience as a central dogma. Violence against black churches and ministers, while explicitly political in motivation, thus also attacked assumptions that lay at the core of the freedpeople's religious identity.

This chapter is concerned with how in the postbellum African American community political resistance and power were sacralized by subversive religion. This process in turn precipitated violence by whites against the clearest personal and institutional manifestations of this political religion (or religious politics), the black preacher-politician and the black church. As would also be the case in later movements such as Garveyism and the civil rights movement, blacks' political activism in the postbellum era was transformed and deepened by their religious convictions, as for them the religious element was never far from the political arena.¹⁰ Religion brought a power and dynamic to the political process that was empowering for blacks but frightening for their white opponents, and it galvanized people to take action on both sides. When black ministers began to retreat from the sphere of party politics after the Reconstruction political and social order collapsed, they correspondingly became more exempt from white violence. Although these more moderate black preachers became no less prominent within their own communities after their withdrawal from politics, their temporary capitulation to white demands for a depoliticized black church provided them

¹⁰ See Randall K. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1978); David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: Morrow, 1986).

with relative immunity from the worst horrors of the lynching era in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While religion was admittedly not a key variable in many cases of violence against freedpeople in the postbellum South, this chapter seeks to better understand those instances when religion was in fact a significant factor, considering the role of religion in shaping post-emancipation political culture and focusing in particular on episodes in which black preachers and churches were victimized by white violence.

2.2 The Development of a Distinctive African American Religious Vision

Colonial-era debates about whether or not slaves should be Christianized had eventually given way to a general antebellum consensus that religion, or at least the biblical teachings about otherworldly salvation and this-worldly submission, should be imparted to the slaves as part of the Christian duty of both individual slaveholders and the larger southern society.¹¹ While slaveholders always remained at least slightly nervous about the revolutionary possibilities inherent in slave worship—Martin Prosser and Nat Turner had taught them the explosive potential of black prophets—by the antebellum period the African American population in the South had for the most part become Christianized, either through the “invisible institution” of slave religion or through the visible but small independent churches that existed among the South’s free black community.¹² During

¹¹ The most thorough account of the evangelical Protestant mission to the slaves is Milton C. Sernett, *Black Religion and American Evangelicalism: White Protestants, Plantation Missions, and the Flowering of Negro Christianity, 1787-1865* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press and the American Theological Library Association, 1975). For scholarship dealing more broadly with the interaction of slaves with evangelical Protestantism in the Old South, see Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), chap. 5; Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1982); Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

¹² Numerous works deal with the importance of religion in the antebellum slave community. A concise summary of much recent scholarship is Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in*

slavery, southern blacks typically gathered in one of three different kinds of worship service: free black churches; biracial religious services alongside whites; or slave meetings, sometimes watched over by white ministers or overseers and sometimes free of supervision. Although the peculiar institution passed away, its basic religious counterparts did not, as former slaves retained multiple options about how and where they would go to church. One of the key questions that therefore gripped African Americans immediately upon emancipation was not whether but rather whither they would worship.

With freedom came blacks' entrance into not only the economic but also the spiritual marketplace, and the South was deluged with missionaries from northern denominations, both white and black, competing to bring adherents to their respective folds.¹³ White denominations in the South had conflicted feelings about whether or not they wanted freedpeople in their churches. Most whites supported separate black churches, not wanting to share the same space with freedpeople on Sundays any more than they did during the week. One white southerner expressed concern over integrated religious services, writing to his father in 1870 that such biracialism "would move toward amalgamation and the degradation, physically, mentally, & morally, of the whites, [more] than all that has yet been

the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 43-51. The standard works on religion among the slaves include Margaret Washington Creel, "*A Peculiar People*": *Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs* (New York: New York University Press, 1988); Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984); Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979); Raboteau, *Slave Religion*; John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, rev. and enl. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976 [1974]). A treatment of the free black church in the antebellum South is Ira Berlin, *Slaves without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: The New Press, 1974), chap. 9. A survey of African American history during the slavery years that places religion at the center of the narrative is Vincent Harding, *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1981).

¹³ Methodists were particularly active in proselytizing the former slaves; they were represented by both white (Methodist Episcopal) and black (African Methodist Episcopal [A.M.E.] and A.M.E. Zion) missionaries. See Reginald F. Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring: Methodist Preachers and the Crisis of Emancipation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

done.”¹⁴ At the same time, whites were wary of any form of black independence, and feared losing access to yet another institution of social control. This sentiment was reflected in statements that blacks were not capable of independently governing themselves, spiritually or in any other way. A writer for the Episcopalian publication *Spirit of Missions* argued, “The negro is not prepared for a separate organization. He is not yet mentally capable of the burdens of self-government. . . . He is not ready for separation, because of his lack at this time of proper administrative capacities.”¹⁵ In general, white southern churches went through a series of policy adjustments and readjustments as they considered their relationships with black Christians, but they eventually encouraged or at least allowed blacks to secede and form their own congregations. As in political and economic affairs, whites sought to retain significant influence over the religious life of the freedpeople, but most of the increasingly autonomous black congregations soon broke their dependence on white patronage and support.¹⁶

Regardless of what whites said or did, the freedpeople were determined to establish their own religious institutions, and it was through their own initiative, rather than via whites’ permission or patronage, that they did. Indeed, one of the most remarkable developments in the months and years immediately following emancipation was the

¹⁴ Letter from R. H. Wills to his father, 10 May 1870, in William H. Wills Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁵ “The Negro Problem,” *Spirit of Missions* 52 (Feb. 1887): 58.

¹⁶ Daniel Stowell argues that southern white evangelicals’ continually evolving policies toward blacks went through five stages: “Initially, leaders believed that the antebellum patterns of paternalistic biracial churches could continue. Next, they attempted the organization of the freedpeople into separate congregations with white ministers. Later, they accepted the idea that freedpeople might have black ministers under white supervision. Eventually they assisted in the organization of black associations, conferences, and presbyteries. Ultimately, they reluctantly admitted that the freedpeople would have an entirely separate and independent denominational structure.” Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 46-48, 85-89; quote from pp. 47-48. For a view of how one diocese dealt with ecclesiastical issues related to black membership and representation, see Lyon G. Tyler, “Drawing the Color Line in the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina, 1876 to 1890: The Role of Edward McCrady, Father and Son,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 91 (April 1990): 107-124.

