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Reading Response Paper

So far the reading that has interested me the most was “Lynch Law in America”, by Ida Wells-Barnett. It gave me a deeper perspective of the controversy that revolves around the brutality of lynching back in the 1800s and 1900s. And now, I will briefly summarize the reading, talk a bit about the author as well as my personal opinion about the main arguments within the reading.

Ida Wells-Barnett was an anti-lynching crusader and journalist, who was born to slave parents in Holly Springs, Mississippi and became a teacher in Memphis to support her siblings after the deaths of her parents during the yellow fever epidemic. She began her journalism career after she was fired from the public schools, she became editor and part owner of the *Memphis Free Speech* in 1892 the same year three of her male friends were lynched. Her editorial published on May 21, 1892, suggested that white women voluntarily engaged in interracial sexual unions with black men, which caused hostility and rage among the Southern white men. She founded the first black woman suffrage organization, the Alpha Suffrage Club, in Chicago in 1893.

“Lynch Law in America” is a very strong critique written in 1900 of the institutionalized racism and sexism that render African American men and women vulnerable to unspeakable acts of violence and racism. It starts off by saying that our country’s national crime is lynching, this

represents the calculating deliberation of intelligent people who declare that there is an “unwritten law” that justifies them in putting human beings to death without complaint under oath, without trial by jury, without opportunity to make defense, and without right of appeal. Thousands of African Americans, men, women, and children, were brutally punished by shooting, drowning, hanging, and burning them alive. It goes on to talk about the Ku-Klux Klan and their contribution to all the lynchings of African Americans. She describes specific situations where African Americans were punished for crimes they did not commit for example, if there was an altercation between a white man and colored man, the colored man had to die, either at the hands of the white man then and there or later at the hands of a mob that gathered quickly. If a man showed a spirit of courageous manhood he was hanged and the killing was justified by the declaration that he was a “saucy nigger”. Towards the end, there’s a section where she explicitly talks about how white people would advertise a lynching before it occur, very detailed descriptions of the way colored people were viciously tortured and then killed. Ultimately, it closes up by criticizing white people and the national anthem, also stating how the number of lynchings increased during that time, yet the government has done nothing to put a stop to it.

After reading, I believe one her arguments is that white people used lynching as a way to stop African Americans from possibly reaching equality and eventually dominated the United States. Right from the beginning Ida states “Hardly had the sentences dried upon the statute-books before one Southern State after another raised the cry against “negro domination” and proclaimed there was an “unwritten law” that justified any means to resist it.” White people feared African Americans would eventually be treated equally and their population would increase to the point where it would be the majority in the U.S.

Furthermore, I believed she argued about the brutality African Americans experienced due to the lynchings, tortured, imprisonment without trial, overall all the violence and discrimination against their ethnicity and culture. Also, she criticizes the white people who don't truly honor the meaning of their national anthem due to their participation in lynchings and other vicious attacks against African Americans. Finally, her other argument would be that she blames the government and the country for not putting an end to the violence and injustice that affects many African Americans.

Throughout the chapter she deliberately talks about lynching with so much detail since she was a journalist and really specialized in this controversial problem that affected many colored people included herself, when friends were lynched. She used some statistics from *The Chicago Tribune*, that showed the "reasons" why many African Americans were killed during this time. She gives detailed descriptions of the violent acts white people did to African Americans when they were lynched, which doesn't specify how she obtained that information, but I assume it was through the newspapers that were published by white people because according to Ida, they wanted to show everyone how African Americans were punished for their "crimes".

Overall, I don't think her arguments are out of line, she had the right to explicitly stand up for her people and report all the injustices against African Americans. During this time, the number of deaths caused by lynchings had increased dramatically which angered many African Americans. Having suffered from so many years before when African Americans were slaves, to becoming targets of white supremacists, was enough for many colored people. African Americans did not want to live for the rest of their lives as they saw and heard about the deaths

of **innocent** colored people, without denouncing the atrocities they had to go through simply because of the color of their skin. At this point, colored people wanted a change not only in some areas, but all along the U.S. Ida had the right to speak up for her people to help expose the true identities of the white americans, who in fact did not truly honor their countries morals.

Based on what I read, she definitely convinces me to understand her point of view that America's worst crime was lynching. There is section where she states "the nineteenth-century lynching mob cuts off ears, toes, and fingers, strips off flesh, and distributes portions of the body as souvenirs among the crowd." Reading this was just unbelievable, by including these types of descriptions it shows me that she really wants people to understand the severity of lynching and just how bad African Americans suffered during this time. This makes me think that maybe she's trying to say that America has done many injustices against colored people and is definitely not the "perfect" country many people think it is. Learning more about this country's history really makes me doubt the integrity and honesty of this country.

In my opinion, she focuses on the entire society that may not be aware of the tragic and unforgettable past of this country. She wrote this as a way of protesting or simply sharing her views on lynching. She wanted people to know and understand, then and now, that this problem existed and it affected so many African American families and that it will continue to be present in the memory of this country's history. She obviously wanted the lynchings to be over, however she knew that was never going to happen if everyone does not want to see that the country has many failures that need to be fixed. Self-government was her idea of beginning the change she wanted to see in the country.

The only risk she faced during this time was probably being lynched by white supremacists due to her strong statements against lynching. Being a well known publisher and journalist gave her enough power to freely express her opinion and denouncing this crimes. She had not political interest which meant she could not be affected in this aspect. She had the support from her suffrage organizations and family throughout this process. She mainly critiques society and the country for allowing lynchings against her people, she's more upset or angry that the country was not really getting involved in the situation to stop it from getting worse rather than the actual violence African Americans were suffering from.

In conclusion, this reading helped me understand that America has never been great which immediately contradicts the slogan of the current U.S president, "Make America Great Again". The U.S has done a decent job at hiding certain things about it's history, however they should know that sooner or later everyone will know all the horrible things this country has done to all the people living here, then and now. It's integrity will be seriously criticized by everyone. My only question would be: Was the government at that time, aware of the violent acts the KKK were doing against African Americans? Were the members eventually punished for what they did? Was there a connection between the government and the KKK?