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Book review of: Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890–1930. By Koritha Mitchell. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011. Gender and Lynching: The Politics of Memory. Edited by Evelyn M. Simien. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

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“official histories” (4), it can also offer a point of view that expands and even upends conventional understandings of historical events. Miranda’s memory of the 1969 Youth Liberation Conference as a moment of truncated possibility, rather than the beginning of a movement, is but one instance of this. Though her memory is no “truer” a representation of the past than others, it offers a perspective that shifts how we think about movement beginnings—and endings—and thereby opens up a previously unknown terrain wherein new, and perhaps more complex, archaeologies of memory and resistance can be excavated. ■

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Between 1890 and 1930, while most white Americans were invested in what they wanted lynching to clearly and singularly denote—what Robyn Wiegman so aptly describes as “the specular assurance that the racial threat . . . has been rendered incapable of return”—the black community was more interested in exploding such neat and often false conclusions in order to expose lynchings for the questions they both generated and left unanswered, for the various casualties and survivors they left behind in their wake, and for the families whose lives they would continue to haunt for generations.¹ As two recent books on the representational history of lynching violence in the United States suggest, the sufficiency of the word “lynching” to evoke the plenitude of black victimage, on the one hand, and white supremacy, on the other, should no longer be allowed to hold sway. To that end, Koritha Mitchell’s brilliant *Living with Lynching* takes especial care to remove her readers from the predictable outdoor venue for lynching—popularized by photographic “archives left by perpetrators” (6)—and ushers them, instead, into the quietude of the African American domestic space. The genre of her focus, lynching drama,

¹ See Robyn Wiegman, *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 81.

privileges the black home as a viable, probable, and alternative theatrical space in which to observe the repercussions of lynching violence. In bringing us to the indoor spaces where lynching drama brings her, Mitchell ultimately makes three important interventions in lynching scholarship.

First, she transforms our understanding of what constitutes black theatricality in the United States by introducing her readers to a repertoire of black physical and mental activities that are less often associated with black identity in the context of lynching: these include black people engaging in such ordinary activities as debate; mourning the loss of their loved ones; reading aloud to one another in amateur play adaptations; activating their critical thinking skills; asserting their rightful claims to citizenship, manhood, patriotic feeling, and humanity; and sustaining one another in a community. Mitchell calls these activities “embodied practices of black belonging” (14) as a way of distinguishing them from what mainstream 1920s (minstrel and lynching) theater had solidified in the popular imagination as embodied practices of black buffoonery, criminality, hypersexuality, merriment, misery, and death. Lynching as white theater—amusement and spectacle—perpetuates the white imposition of a circumscribed repertoire of movements made available to black bodies in the context of lynching.

Second, she convinces her readers that dominant discourses and public (outdoor) stages worked in tandem to distort African Americans’ self-conception. By bringing us into private spaces, behind closed doors, where blacks could congregate with sanctuary among their kith and kin, Mitchell grants us access to spaces that were clearly more conducive to thinking perceptively and judiciously—alternatives to mainstream spaces of lynching, which were almost invariably associated with public denigration, hype, and simultaneously hasty and fatal judgment calls against black people. To counteract the persuasive power of lynching’s relentlessness, African Americans regrouped inside their homes, removed from the distracting noise of mob-induced hysteria, myth, and clamorous demands for black death that threatened to disable their critical thinking skills.

Third, Mitchell suggests that there is an aspect of lynching violence that might be called its core, where the consequences of lynching hit the hardest, and that this vantage point is located in the African American hearth and home. Indeed, as lynching drama plays out inside the homes of black families, it necessarily delves deeper into interiors (structural ones, in the way of living rooms, and mental ones, in the way of psyches) in order to register the long-term effects of lynching violence rather than merely its immediate consequences. Not only did lynching have an immediate effect

on a particular lynching victim and (as was often the case) *his* family, its effects reverberated well into a household's future generations—sometimes foreclosing the possibility of the birth of that generation altogether.

As a purposeful effort to prevent the plays from being summarily subsumed under the category of protest literature, Mitchell refuses the term “antilynching” to describe them. She rightly insists, instead, that the plays are not reactive but that they serve as examples of the kinds of black “traditions” (4) and “community-centered success” (7) that actually provoked mob violence. Some African Americans justifiably viewed spectacle lynching as a form of vengeful theatrical one-upmanship that shattered the quiet domestic dramas of black excellence and success that had always already been taking place inside African American homes.

If ever a lynching book could be described as beautiful, it would undoubtedly be Mitchell's for the gracious way she takes care to read, generously and meticulously, all that she sees and hears (as well as what she does not see and hear) when she enters the homes that these characters have struggled to build for themselves. The beauty and persuasiveness of *Living with Lynching* lie also in its clarity and its sense of conviction, both of which are encapsulated by the persistent refrain of the book's thesis, which one will gratefully encounter throughout the book. Such insistence (as reinforcement) reminds us that the toll of living with lynching requires just as consistent and unremitting an antidote to combat the wearing impact of that form of violence. Mitchell's book successfully counters the provocative sensationalism of strangeness as a metaphor for lynch victims with a study that investigates what it means when living with lynching is not so much strange as it is a quotidian routine.

Evelyn M. Simien's edited collection *Gender and Lynching* constitutes an urgent call by artists, activists, and the five contributing women scholars who have written about them to expand our visual purview and hone our other senses, which may have atrophied because we have for so long been visually trained to associate lynching with black men, a training that has rendered us incapable of seeing (and, by extension, remembering) women in that historical narrative. By examining the various roles that women, mostly black but some white, played in the history of lynching, the collection does well to expose and emend the gender and racial bias of our visual cognition. *Gender and Lynching* opens with Simien's introduction to the volume, which compares the level of attention given to reporting the now well-known Jena Six case versus the little-known case of Megan Williams, “an African American woman who was kidnapped, raped, and tortured in West Virginia by six white assailants” (7). Simien concludes that this most

recent example of the impulse to raise awareness about black male victimhood to the neglect of African American women's experiences demonstrates how the "past influences the present" (8) and why this volume is therefore so important to making sure the past does not end up defining the future. In this volume, readers get a chance to hear black women testifying on behalf of themselves and other black women, singing in nightclubs, keeping family secrets in lynching plays, mourning in silence inside their homes, participating in silent protests against mob violence, and capturing the ineffable through sounds that cannot be described in words. Through this predominantly aural presentation of African American women's experiences with lynching, the contributors to *Gender and Lynching* ultimately exploit epistemological loopholes to show how the popular focus on the ocular politics of memory, and the consequent overlooking of women, needs to be expanded to take into consideration other modes of knowledge production and dissemination. ■

European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe. By Fatima El-Tayeb. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Reinventing the Republic: Gender, Migration, and Citizenship in France. By Catherine Raissiguier. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010.

Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France. By Miriam Ticktin. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

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The three books under review make an important contribution to the study of the struggle for rights by migrant movements in Europe. While grounding their analyses in empirical studies of these struggles, they offer a perspective drawn from the way wider movements have adopted the approaches of recent migrants' struggles—notably the struggle of the *sans-papiers* (undocumented workers in France) in the 1990s and countercultural projects in the Netherlands and Germany—as points of departure to talk about resistance in the face of the retreat of forms of governmentality such as the welfare state. They demonstrate how important it is to learn from successful migrant and ethnic minority mobilizations and innovations.

Fatima El-Tayeb argues at a broad, comparative European level, focusing on Dutch and German Black European identities. She identifies new

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