

Summary

From the end of the Civil War up to the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the American South and Texas underwent numerous changes that gave rise to a range of economic, social, and political anxieties. All these accumulated fears were both generated by the new conditions that the post Civil War situation created for former slaves, now free African Americans, and created by the concerns of the white former planters and slave owners about rapid and significant transformation of the South and Texas. Many of the fears found their scapegoat in African Americans. The pent-up negative emotions directed at them found a psychological relief in escalating aggression that took form of spectacular, massive, brutal, and ritualised lynchings. Aside from their purgative and liberating function, a kind of catharsis, these spectacular acts of vigilante justice consolidated the whites in their social resistance against the reforms imposed on them by the Yankees. The lynchings resembled well-directed cultural performances intended for a white audience and were supposed to be a demonstration of their unity and strength against imaginary evil coming from the former slaves. However, these acts of brutal performance also aimed at the Black audience with a terrorizing message especially directed at the new generation of African Americans, who after the Civil War and Reconstruction could potentially take the positions culturally and historically reserved for whites.

In this work, Chapter I characterises the American South and Texas in order to present the complex conditions of lynching. Chapter II introduces the topic of lynching and is devoted exclusively to Texas. It describes the post Civil War transformation of Texas, as well as the fears and moral panic that arise under their influence. The mechanisms of the formation and release of the fears are described in Chapter III. Chapter IV presents lynching as a ritualized, brutal spectacle organised to discharge accumulated fears through aggression. In addition, it will portray lynching as a space for commerce and entertainment.