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**African American Responses to the Lynching of non-black  
Ethnic Minorities in the United States, 1909-1939**

**by**

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**Thesis submitted**

**for the Degree of MA by Research**

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## **Abstract**

The study of lynching in the United States has often focused on the discrimination towards, and the lynching of, African Americans and their resistance and responses to it, whilst other ethnic minorities experiences of racially motivated violence has been discussed far less frequently. This thesis will build upon existing works by examining the African American response to the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities in the United States, through the examination of NAACP records, *The Crisis* and African American newspapers. The case of Leo Frank is also examined in depth, to show how African American responses towards an ethnic minority changed when one race was effectively ‘pitted’ against another.

# **Introduction**

The study of lynching in the United States has regularly focused on mob violence towards African Americans, which has led to public perception that lynching was experienced solely by African Americans. In actuality, all ethnicities were subjected to racial violence lynching at some point in American history. Whilst major works have been authored that detail mob violence towards African Americans and African American reactions to mob violence, there are few works that examine mob violence against non-black ethnic minorities or the reaction of African Americans to the lynching of other ethnicities. Consequently, this study focuses on the response of African Americans to the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities in the United States. Various sources have been analysed to determine the reaction of African Americans to mob violence against non-black ethnic minorities, including the files of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and African American newspapers and magazines. Over 1000 NAACP files have been investigated, with these files ranging from lynching statistics, personal correspondence between key NAACP officials, press releases, speeches from a number of officials, letters and lynching statistics for every state in the United States ranging from 1909-1939. This date range was chosen because the NAACP was founded in 1909 and the outbreak of the Second World War saw an increased focus on civil rights as a result of the fighting against inequality in Europe. In addition to the examination of NAACP files, the official newspaper of the NAACP, *The Crisis*, was also examined. Monthly issues from November 1910 through to December 1939 were analysed for any reference to the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities.<sup>1</sup> In addition to *The Crisis*, hundreds of issues of a number of African American newspapers were also located and analysed for any mention of such violence.<sup>2</sup> With hundreds of African American newspapers in circulation during this time period, only the most

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<sup>1</sup> Issues of *The Crisis* were accessed through the Modernist Journals Project database, which contains issues of *The Crisis* from November 1910 through to December 1922:

[http://www.modjourn.org/render.php?view=mjp\\_object&id=crisiscollection](http://www.modjourn.org/render.php?view=mjp_object&id=crisiscollection) For issues after this date which were used for this study, the collection at the British Library was used.

<sup>2</sup> Issues of the *Chicago Defender* from 1909-1939 were located through the following link:

<http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/chicagodefender/advancedsearch.html>, other African American newspapers were found through the British Library resources, at: <https://eresources.remote.bl.uk:2443/login>. On occasion, African American newspaper clippings were found within NAACP files.

prominent African American publications that commanded significant readerships that were able to be located without significant difficulty were used. These chosen newspapers include The Chicago Defender, The Baltimore Afro-American and the Cleveland Gazette. In addition to African American newspapers, several white newspapers were also studied in order to provide a direct comparison to the content in African American newspapers.<sup>3</sup>

A significant challenge in carrying out this research is the lack of scholarly consensus around the definition of a ‘lynching’. Historians and scholars have struggled to determine what constitutes a ‘lynching’ since the study of mob violence became more widespread. Although scholars have come to several interpretations, none of their conclusions are one and the same and there are conflicting ideas as to what constitutes a lynching. William Carrigan has defined lynching as ‘a summary execution committed by a self-appointed group without regard for established legal procedures’, yet he also states that the term ‘lynching’ did not have the same meaning for people in the nineteenth century, who he argues were more likely to understand lynching ‘as an extra-legal killing broadly supported by the community’.<sup>4</sup> Carrigan’s interpretation of a lynching as being endorsed by the community is supported by Gunnar Myrdal, who argued that lynching was seen as a community affair. Myrdal argues that whilst state authorities took active steps to prevent lynchings from happening, lynchings were rarely punished for their crimes and that even if a case went to court, those accused of being involved in a lynch mob would not be convicted, as often the judge, jury and witnesses either would hold sympathy with the lynchings or did not want to press the case further for fear of a possible reprisal, leading to the case being dismissed.<sup>5</sup> Roberta Senechal de la Roche expands upon Myrdal’s argument, presenting the idea that the act of lynching is a form of collective violence and can be distinguished into two major dimensions: the breadth of liability of the victim and the degree of organization. She argues that whilst lynchings may involve some planning and organization, they are

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<sup>3</sup> All of the ‘white’ newspapers used for this study were accessed through the Library of Congress website: <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>. Please note that the Library of Congress website only contains newspapers within its collection dating from 1836-1922, newspapers after this date which were used in this study were found in NAACP files

<sup>4</sup> W. D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture, Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916*, The University of Illinois: Chicago, 2006, p.10

<sup>5</sup> G. Myrdal, “An American Dilemma”, in *Lynching in America, A History in Documents*, C. Waldrep ed. New York University Press: New York, 2006, p.15

often merely spontaneous events and thus highly situational. La Roche also argues that due to a lack of organization, lynchings lack the capacity for sustained collective action seen in vigilantism and terrorism.<sup>6</sup> These differing opinions regarding the definition of lynching aided in the creation of a definition for the purpose of this study. With regards to this thesis, a lynching is defined as a form of collective mob action against an individual or group of individuals, upon whom the group exact perceived justice as a result of believing that the law will not take sufficient action. It is well documented that many communities supported this kind of mob action, as there are examples from newspapers that praise lynching as a superior form of justice to that which was administered in the courts.<sup>7</sup> Overall, this definition is intended to be broad enough to include a variety of violent incidents against ethnic minorities that were not necessarily included in contemporary lynching statistics.

Using this definition of a lynching, this thesis seeks to build upon already published works that detail mob violence in the United States, through the examination of an area within the field of lynching that has thus far had relatively little scholarly investigation. Although the examination of African American responses to mob violence against ethnic minorities has been sparsely covered, lynching in general and African American responses to mob violence have been well documented and researched by a variety of scholars. As a result, there are several works that hold great importance in relation to the general study of lynching in the United States. One of the most notable early works that documented lynching was Gunnar Myrdal's 'An American Dilemma', a book that served as an overview of American race relations. Myrdal discusses several issues related to lynching, including its history and the discrimination that African Americans faced. Myrdal also discussed the legal problems of indicting the members of a lynch mob: 'It is notorious that practically never have white lynching mobs been brought to justice in the South, even when the killers are known to all in the community and are mentioned by name in the local press'.<sup>8</sup> More recent discussions of lynching include Philip Dray's *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America*. In his

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<sup>6</sup> R. S. de la Roche, "The Sociogenesis of Lynching" in *Under Sentence of Death, Lynching in the South*, W. F. Brundage, ed. The University of North Carolina Press: London, 1997, p.51

<sup>7</sup> W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb, *Forgotten Dead: Mob Violence Against Mexicans in the United States, 1848-1928*. Oxford University Press: London (2013) p.24

<sup>8</sup> G. Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, Harper Brothers Publishers: London, 1944, p.552-553

work, Dray discusses the issues with locating information regarding the reasons why African Americans were lynched: ‘Lynching denies a suspect due process under law, and so the kind of information that due process generates-lawyers’ arguments, a judge’s rulings, testimony, evidence-is not available to assist the historian’.<sup>9</sup> Another notable book that has advanced the discussion of lynching is Christopher Waldrep’s *African Americans Confront Lynching: Strategies of Resistance from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Era*. In this work, Waldrep discusses the difficulty of determining just what constitutes a ‘lynching’: ‘The word lynching has never been satisfactorily defined. Although most Americans today envision a lynching as a large mob hanging its victim, in fact, lynchings have not always been fatal and some have occurred secretly with perhaps only one or two involved.’<sup>10</sup> Recent works that discuss the current state of lynching scholarship include Michael Pfeifer’s ‘At the Hands of Parties Unknown? The State of the Field of Lynching Scholarship’, which discusses the evolution of the study of lynching. Pfeifer provides an overview of the changing focus of lynching scholars, writing: ‘Scholars in recent years have demonstrated that the victims of racially motivated lynching were as diverse as the targets of American racial prejudice’.<sup>11</sup>

The response of African Americans to lynching, more specifically in anti-lynching campaigns, has also received attention from scholars, General African American responses to mob violence and lynching and racial violence have been explored in depth by Kidada Williams in *They Left Great Marks on me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I*. Her work provides a comprehensive documentation of African American experiences of racial violence, with Williams writing: ‘blacks wanted to strike back at their attackers; however, many of them understood the futility of such action given the monopoly of force employed by white people and the limit of their power as a racially subjugated people’.<sup>12</sup> In addition to African American responses, anti-lynching campaigns have also been the focus of several works. One of the earliest and

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<sup>9</sup> P. Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America*, Modern Library: New York, 2002, p.7

<sup>10</sup> C. Waldrep, *African Americans Confront Lynching: Strategies of Resistance from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Era* Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc: New York, 2009 p.2

<sup>11</sup> M. J. Pfeifer, ‘At the Hands of Parties Unknown? The State of the Field of Lynching Scholarship’ in *The Journal of American History*, Vol.101 (June 2014), p.837

<sup>12</sup> Kidada Williams, *They Left Great Marks on me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I*, New York University Press: London, 2012, p.2

arguably most important books concerning anti-lynching campaigns is Robert L. Zangrando's: *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950*. Providing a discussion of NAACP anti-lynching campaigns and strategies during the first half of the twentieth century, Zangrando argued that the NAACP's anti-lynching campaigns 'became the wedge by which the NAACP insinuated itself into the public conscience'.<sup>13</sup> In addition to the examination of the role the NAACP held in raising awareness of lynching, Ida B. Wells's campaigns have also been the focus of scholarly attention. The transatlantic anti-lynching campaigns of Ida B. Wells have most recently been discussed in depth by Sarah L. Silkey in *Black Woman Reformer*. In this work, Silkey discusses the importance of Wells's transatlantic activism, arguing that Wells 'called into question the basic assumptions about the role of mob violence in American society and permanently altered the way in which Britons and Americans understood lynching and American race relations'.<sup>14</sup> Overall, as the main focus of these academic works concerns African American responses to the lynching of African Americans, this thesis will take a different approach and will explore African American responses to the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities.

In order to understand African American responses to the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities, the files of the NAACP, the most important African American civil rights organization, are a significant source. NAACP documentation and anti-lynching investigative files were analysed, in addition to the NAACP's monthly journal, *The Crisis*.<sup>15</sup> Through analysis of these documents, an in-depth investigation into the NAACP's approach and response to violence towards non-black ethnic minorities was possible. The first major study to examine the NAACP's anti-lynching campaigns was Zangrando's *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950*. Zangrando's work provides an overview of NAACP anti-lynching campaigns from the formation of the group in 1909 to 1950, just after the Second World War. Zangrando writes that 'the Association (NAACP) used investigations and exposes to insist that society acknowledge and remedy the malicious cycle of racism that

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<sup>13</sup> R. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950*. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 1980, p.18

<sup>14</sup> Sarah L. Silkey, *Black Woman Reformer: Ida B. Wells, Lynching, & Transatlantic Activism*, The University of Georgia Press: London, 2015, p.5

<sup>15</sup> In a similar manner to the keyword search employed for the analysis of African American newspapers, keyword searches were used to help locate references to non-black ethnic minorities within NAACP files.

victimized the minority and left the majority callous and inert'.<sup>16</sup> Whilst Zangrando does not discuss the NAACP's response to non-black ethnic minorities, he does state that the NAACP 'developed contacts within government circles, established credibility among philanthropists, and opened lines of communication with other liberal reformist groups'.<sup>17</sup> This thesis will build upon these works, showing how the NAACP's anti-lynching campaign eventually led to cooperation with the Mexican Embassy to aid in the cessation of threats of violence against African Americans and Mexicans in Breckenridge, Texas, in 1922. An examination of donations to the NAACP will be made, to show that although several wealthy African American benefactors donated large sums to the NAACP anti-lynching campaign, perhaps they only intended to aid African Americans instead of other ethnicities. Another important book on the NAACP is *Lift Every Voice, the NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*, by Patricia Sullivan. Sullivan's research covers the formative years of the NAACP and their involvement with the formation of the Civil Rights Movement. Sullivan argues that during their early years, the NAACP 'placed an emphasis on legal strategy, which reflected their interest in nationalizing the race question as they sought to highlight the routine violation of constitutional rights in the south and looked to expose racial discrimination and inequality in the north'.<sup>18</sup> Sullivan also focuses on the role of W. E. B. Du Bois and *The Crisis* in profiling African American experiences, with Sullivan arguing that 'Du Bois played a crucial role in defining the challenges facing the association and framing its mission'.<sup>19</sup> Whilst Sullivan does discuss Du Bois' role as *The Crisis* editor and his role within the NAACP, she does not discuss the response of Du Bois, *The Crisis* or the NAACP to the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities. Finally, Gilbert Jonas's *'Freedom's Sword', The NAACP and the Struggle Against Racism in America*, builds upon the work of Zangrando and Sullivan by offering a comprehensive overview of NAACP activities and campaigns against discrimination from the perspective of a former member. Whilst these studies generally focus on the NAACP's role in the Civil Rights Movement, their anti-lynching advocacy and their role in fighting

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<sup>16</sup> R. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching*, p.210

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p.18

<sup>18</sup> P. Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*. The New Press: London, 1<sup>st</sup> ed (2009) p.19

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p.22

‘Jim Crow’ in the South, there has not been a study published as to how the NAACP investigated and responded to lynching and discrimination against non-black ethnic minorities in the United States. Consequently, this thesis will build upon the work of these scholars and discuss how the NAACP responded to the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities in Chapter One.<sup>20</sup> The events at Breckenridge will receive particular focus in this chapter, as it was a case in which the NAACP responded to discrimination against both African Americans and Mexicans. On November 16, 1922, a mob of armed men marched through Breckenridge and demanded that Mexicans and African Americans leave by nightfall. Manuel Tellez, a Mexican diplomat, responded to the event and asked the State Department to intervene. The NAACP also intervened in the event on behalf of Mexicans and African Americans. This is important, as it was the first time that the NAACP had openly cooperated with a Mexican body to fight against discrimination and the threat of mob violence. This thesis will discuss the events of Breckenridge and the response of African Americans, by examining African American newspaper coverage and NAACP responses of the incident to identify how African Americans reacted to mob violence when their race and another ethnicity were jointly suffering at the hands of racial discrimination.

The Crisis, like the NAACP, has also been examined in various scholars’ works. Sullivan has written of the importance of the journal, writing that The Crisis ‘sank its roots into black life in all parts of the nation, profiling black experiences and patterns of racial discrimination’.<sup>21</sup> Amy Kirschke agrees with this statement by referring to The Crisis as ‘the most influential journal that dealt with social and political thought in America’.<sup>22</sup> Russ Castronovo has also produced an article relating to the content published in The Crisis and how Du Bois used the journal to develop what Castronovo refers to as his ‘uncompromising aesthetic theory’.<sup>23</sup> The editor of The Crisis, W. E. B. Du Bois, has been

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<sup>20</sup> For works concerning the NAACP’s involvement in the Civil Rights Movement please see: A. Meier and J. H. Bracey Jr, ‘The NAACP as a Reform Movement: To Reach the Conscience of America’ in *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol.59, No. 1 (Feb., 1993) pp.3-30. There have also been several various articles published concerning the NAACP’s actions in different states. For an example, please see: M. L. Gillette, ‘The Rise of the NAACP in Texas’ in *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 81, No.4 (Apr., 1978) pp.393-416

<sup>21</sup> P. Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, p.23

<sup>22</sup> A. H. Kirschke, ‘*Du Bois and the Crisis Magazine*’ *Imaging Woman and Family*, Notes in the History of Art, Vol.24, No.4 (Summer 2005) pp.35-45

<sup>23</sup> R. Castronovo, *Beauty Along the Color Line: Lynching, Aesthetics, and the “Crisis”*, Modern Language Association, PMLA, Vol. 121, No.5, (Oct., 2006) p.1443

the focus of various academic studies, with a number of academics focusing on his involvement with The Crisis and the NAACP. A notable biography of W. E. B. Du Bois, authored by David Levering Lewis, has argued that due to Du Bois' monopoly over the opinions of his African American readership, he was to them, the voice of the NAACP.<sup>24</sup> Jonas furthers this argument, writing that throughout the early years of *The Crisis*'s publication, the journal was considered synonymous with the NAACP.<sup>25</sup> The controversial nature of Du Bois' tenure as editor of The Crisis has also been a topic debated amongst academics. John White has discussed Du Bois' role as The Crisis editor and has argued that as a result of Du Bois frequently going against the NAACP board due to Du Bois publishing material without their permission, there was a frequent state of conflict between Du Bois and the NAACP.<sup>26</sup> Other historians such as Raymond Wolters have further debated Du Bois' role as The Crisis editor, arguing that he 'dominated' the journal, with his articles proving to be a major source of controversy for the NAACP.<sup>27</sup> B. S. Stewart argues that Du Bois thrived on the controversy caused by his publications, noting that he was 'consumed with his own voice by promoting and receiving notoriety for his own works from the beginning'.<sup>28</sup> Whilst the controversy caused by Du Bois' editorship of The Crisis and his frequent disagreements with the NAACP board have already been discussed by scholars, an examination of whether this conflict resulted in the NAACP and The Crisis offering different responses to violence towards non-black ethnic minorities has not yet been explored. As a consequence, this thesis will explore the response of Du Bois and the NAACP to the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities, showing how the responses of Du Bois and the NAACP to violence against non-black ethnic minorities differ. Issues of The Crisis will be examined from the first issue in November 1910, through to the end of Du Bois' tenure as The Crisis editor in 1934, in order to assess his views towards mob violence against non-black ethnic minorities. Similarly,

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<sup>24</sup> D. L. Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois, Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* Henry Holt and Company: New York, 1<sup>st</sup> ed (1993) p.472

<sup>25</sup> G. Jonas, *Freedom's Sword, The NAACP and the Struggle Against Racism in America, 1909-1969*. Routledge: New York, (2007)

<sup>26</sup> J. White, *Black Leadership in America, From Booker T Washington to Jesse Jackson*. Longman: London, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (1990) p.58

<sup>27</sup> R. Wolters, *Du Bois and His Rivals*. University of Missouri: London, (2002), p.83. For an article focusing on Du Bois's tenure as The Crisis editor, please see: E. M. Rudwick, 'W. E. B. Du Bois in the role of the Crisis Editor', *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Jul., 1958)

<sup>28</sup> B. S. Stewart, 'Hypocrisy in the Life of W. E. B. Du Bois: Reconstructing Selective Memory', *Phylon*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Fall 2014), pp. 57-75

NAACP anti-lynching investigative files and correspondence will be assessed to ascertain their opinion, with this research showing that whilst the NAACP may have included Mexicans and other non-black ethnic minorities in their lynching statistics, they initially neglected to investigate lynchings of non-black ethnic minorities. However, after the NAACP and Mexican Embassy worked together following the events in Breckenridge in 1922, there was a noticeable change in their approach.

As well as analysis of NAACP files, African American newspapers were studied in order to provide a broader perspective than provided in the information obtained in the NAACP files. This was in order to highlight the differences between the opinions of an 'official organization' and wider African American centres of thought. Through the analysis of several African American newspapers such as *The Chicago Defender*, *The Baltimore Afro-American* and the *Cleveland Gazette*, it will be shown that African American newspapers neglected to report on incidents of mob violence against non-black ethnic minorities, unless their own race was involved in the event, or if the event could be related back to African American issues. Analysis of African American newspapers has been carried out by several scholars, with these works focusing on various different aspects of the African American press.<sup>29</sup> Writing about the *Chicago Defender*, Mary Stovall has argued that during the Progressive era, the *Chicago Defender* was only concerned with publishing material that furthered their goals of ending discrimination and elevating blacks up the social ladder.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Friksen has argued that the political and economic terrorism of lynching was central to the Indianapolis *Freeman's* visual lexicon.<sup>31</sup> This is a particularly important argument, as it emphasises the importance that African American newspapers placed on using lynching and violence more generally to create a discussion about race. O'Kelly furthers this argument, by writing that in order to guarantee their continuation, African American newspapers had to focus on the present situation of African

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<sup>29</sup> For examples of works focusing on African American newspapers, see: C. G. O'Kelly, 'Black Newspapers and the Black Protest Movement: Their Historical Relationship, 1827-1945', *Phylon* Vol. 43, No.1 (1<sup>st</sup> Qtr., 1982) pp.1-14, A. K. Friksen, "A Song Without Words": Anti Lynching Imagery in the African American Press, 1889-1898.' *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 97. No.3 (Summer 2012) pp.240-269, M. E. Stovall, 'The "Chicago Defender" in the Progressive Era'. *Illinois Historical Journal*. Vol. 83, No. 3 (Autumn, 1990) pp.159-172

<sup>30</sup> Stovall, *The Chicago Defender in the Progressive Era*, p.172

<sup>31</sup> Friksen, *A Song Without Words*, p.242

Americans, and advocate change when African Americans were oppressed.<sup>32</sup> In addition to the works of Frisken and O’Kelly, several other studies concerning different aspects of African American newspapers and individual newspapers demonstrate that African American newspapers sought to create a sense of community amongst their readers, and therefore reporting on mob violence against non-black ethnic minorities was not a priority. For example, Stovall refers to the Chicago Defender as ‘the country’s foremost shaper of black thought’, arguing that the function of the Chicago Defender was ‘less of reporting news...than of affirming black life by reporting significant activities, praising black successes, and defining worthwhile goals for the community’.<sup>33</sup> Although these studies have covered a number of different aspects of African American newspapers, they do not focus on the reaction of the African American press to the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities. Therefore, Chapter Two will discuss the lynching of Antonio Gómez, a fourteen-year-old Mexican boy, in order to show how the lynchings of non-black ethnic minorities were rarely reported in African American newspapers, as they were not of much interest to African Americans. The Gómez case received widespread attention and was reported in various newspapers around the United States with the trial of his murderers being referred to by the Byron Daily Eagle (Texas) as the biggest trial in the court annals of Milam County.<sup>34</sup> The lack of African American coverage of this case will highlight how events that did not involve African Americans were seldom reported in the black press.

Thorough research of both NAACP files and African American newspapers revealed far more mentions of violence towards Mexicans than towards any other non-black ethnic minority. This thesis therefore, will build upon previous studies of mob violence towards Mexicans. There have been relatively few works published thus far that detail violence against Mexicans in any significant detail, with all the major works that document violence against Mexicans all being published within the last fifteen years. Whilst there have been a few works published concerning racism towards Mexicans in the United States, there has only been one major work solely focusing on the lynching of Mexicans,

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<sup>32</sup> O’Kelly, *Black Newspapers and the Black Protest Movement*, p.1

<sup>33</sup> M. E. Stovall, ‘The Chicago Defender in the Progressive Era’, p.159-160

<sup>34</sup> See Bismark Daily Tribune (North Dakota), June 20, 1911, Omaha Daily Bee, June 21, 1911, Tonopah Daily Bonanza (Kansas), June 21, 1911, Daily Byron Eagle and Pilot (Texas), November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1911

and none detailing the response of African Americans to the lynching of Mexicans.<sup>35</sup> It should also be noted that the majority of the work undertaken to describe and explain violence against Mexicans has been conducted by Clive Webb and William Carrigan, prominent historians in the field of lynching whose works have been of vital importance to the completion of this study. Carrigan's examination of the history and creation of a lynching culture in Texas, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916*, is the first work that discusses the origins of mob violence against Mexicans in the United States. In addition to this, Carrigan also explores the legal status of Mexicans in the United States, arguing that although they were classed as 'white' by law, Mexicans still suffered formal as well as informal discrimination.<sup>36</sup> Carrigan's brief discussion of what made someone 'white' will be expanded upon at varying points in this thesis, arguing that the legal classification of Mexicans as white had an effect on how they were listed in NAACP statistics.<sup>37</sup> Webb and Carrigan have also co-authored several articles that consider various aspects of mob violence against Mexicans in the United States. 'The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States, 1848-1928', is the first study conducted by Carrigan and Webb that examines the lynching of Mexicans in the United States.<sup>38</sup> This article builds upon Carrigan's work in *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, by delving deeper into the origins of Mexican lynching. Carrigan and Webb compare the rate at which Mexicans were lynched to African Americans, showing that in some areas in the deep South, Mexicans faced a similar risk of lynching to African Americans.<sup>39</sup> Whilst this article does not explicitly discuss the response of African Americans to the lynching of Mexicans, it does discuss several issues surrounding mob violence. These themes, including Mexican

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<sup>35</sup> For a general overview of racism towards Mexicans and its origins, please see: G. M. Brack, *Mexican Opinion, American Racism, and the War of 1846*, *Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 1. No. 2 (April., 1970) pp.161-174

<sup>36</sup> W. D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, p.178

<sup>37</sup> Several works which discussed the idea of 'whiteness' and its implications were researched for the completion of this study. These works include: D. R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, Verso: New York, 2007, N. Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, Routledge: London, 1995 and D. Roediger, *Working Towards Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs*, Basic Books: New York, 2005.

<sup>38</sup> W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb, 'The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States, 1848-1928', *The Journal of Social History*, Vol.37, No. 2 (Winter, 2003) pp.411-438

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, please see p. 414-415 for figures showing a comparison between Mexican and African American lynching from 1880-1930 and a table showing a list of Mexican lynching victims by state. Please also see 419-420 for tables relating to the manner in which Mexicans were lynched and for a list of 'alleged crimes' that led to a Mexican being lynched.

resistance to mob violence and the reasons why Mexicans were lynched, will be discussed further in this thesis and linked to African American responses to mob violence. Building on this earlier work, the first major study documenting mob violence against Mexicans was Webb and Carrigan's *Forgotten Dead*.<sup>40</sup> This book documents the history of mob violence against Mexicans and people of Mexican origin in the United States, with Carrigan and Webb arguing that after the lynching of Rafael Benavides, the last recorded lynching of a Mexican in the United States, 'memories of the historical brutalities inflicted on Mexicans started to recede from collective consciousness'.<sup>41</sup> Whilst their work is ground-breaking for its inclusion of comprehensive numbers of Mexican victims of mob violence, the reaction of African Americans to the lynching of Mexicans isn't the main focal point of *Forgotten Dead*. Webb and Carrigan do discuss how the payment of compensation by the United States to Mexican victims of mob violence angered the African American press, who felt as if their government cared more for foreign nationals than their own citizens. *Forgotten Dead* also makes note of the NAACP's chronicling of Mexican victims of mob violence, yet due to the sparsity of NAACP records that contain references to Mexican lynching victims, Carrigan and Webb have stated that had they known how difficult it would be to find examples of Mexican lynching victims in NAACP records when they started, they would have deemed the project unfeasible.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, whilst their work is significant in the study of lynching in the United States, there is an opportunity to further complicate our understanding of mob violence by analysing African American responses to the lynching of Mexicans and other non-black ethnic minorities. As such, this thesis will build on Webb's article 'The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South, 1886-1910', which included a section detailing African American reactions to the lynching of Sicilian immigrants.<sup>43</sup> Webb explains that 'whilst the African American press condemned the lynchings, it nonetheless shared the conviction that the victims were murderous criminals who would otherwise have escaped their rightful punishment', a reaction that Webb asserts was an attempt to safeguard African American

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<sup>40</sup> W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, p.155.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p.165

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p.7

<sup>43</sup> C. Webb, 'The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South, 1886-1910', *American Nineteenth Century History*, 3 (1), p.61.

economic interests from Sicilians, who were now being preferred as cheap labour to African American workers.<sup>44</sup> As his work only focuses on the reaction to Sicilian nationals, this thesis will build upon his research by examining the wider African American reaction to mob violence against non-black ethnic minorities.

In addition to the examination of NAACP files and African American newspapers to determine their reaction to the lynching of ethnic minorities, the trial and subsequent lynching of Leo Frank has been included in this study as a means to evaluate African American responses to mob violence when a member of their own race was implicated in a crime alongside another ethnic minority. Leo Frank was a Jewish factory owner who was accused of murdering a young employee in his factory, Mary Phagan. Whilst Frank was charged with the murder, Frank's lawyers argued that an African American janitor working in the factory, Jim Conley, was responsible for the murder. Their accusations against Conley resulted in the African American community jumping to Conley's defence, with African American newspapers defending Conley and blaming Frank for Phagan's death. The pitting of Frank against Conley serves as an example of African Americans retaliating against another ethnic minority in order to defend a member of their own race, and as such forms the focal point of Chapter Three. Frank was eventually convicted of the murder and subsequently lynched, resulting in an outcry against lynching from African Americans. The case received a lot of press attention as Leo Frank was Jewish and Jim Conley was an African American. Likewise, Leo Frank's subsequent lynching was followed by the white press and African American press. The case has been described by Eugene Levy as the 'first well-focused incident of national interest in which the needs of blacks and Jews seemed to have been in direct conflict'.<sup>45</sup> The case was well documented by the African American press, with Nancy Maclean noting that Jews, Blacks and the White upper class reacted to different parts of the Leo Frank case.<sup>46</sup> The black press were particularly incensed with Leo Frank's appeal to white supremacy, with many black editors claiming that a white man was again

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p.62

<sup>45</sup> E. Levy, 'Is the Jew a White Man?': Press Reaction to the Leo Frank Case, 1913-1915', *Phylon*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1974), p.212

<sup>46</sup> N. Maclean, 'The Leo Frank Case Reconsidered: Gender and Sexual Politics in the Making of Reactionary Populism', *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (Dec., 1991), p.924

looking for an African American scapegoat.<sup>47</sup> The African American reaction to the Leo Frank case has been well documented by various historians. Nancy MacLean argues that several African Americans resented the outpouring of sympathy that Leo Frank received, as there was relatively little attention paid to the sufferings of African Americans.<sup>48</sup> Eugene Levy has also documented the African American press's reaction to the Leo Frank case, in particularly their reaction to the white press's frequent attacks on Jim Conley. Levy argues that from the outset of the case, African American publications like *The Crisis*, felt that an African American was the preferred victim instead of Frank.<sup>49</sup> The question of who committed the crime was a hotly debated topic at the time, with Jeffrey Melnick writing that most contemporary commentators of the Leo Frank case were asking whether a Jewish man or an African American committed the crime.<sup>50</sup> This thesis will expand upon knowledge of the Leo Frank case by re-examining African American newspapers to demonstrate that African American attitudes to the Leo Frank case were similar to their reactions to other ethnic minorities when the needs of African Americans were involved. The Leo Frank case essentially pitted Frank, a Jewish man, against Jim Conley, an African American, with both sides criticising the other throughout the trial. As such, the responses of African Americans to the trial and subsequent lynching effectively demonstrates how African Americans responded to violence towards other ethnic minorities when a member of their own race was placed under threat.

Overall, this thesis will present the argument that whilst African Americans were aware of mob violence against non-black ethnic minorities, reporting on such incidents of violence was not the main priority for either the NAACP or African American publications. Instead, African American publications would only feature reports of violence towards non-black ethnic minorities when an African American was involved, or when the event either included, or could be related to, African Americans in some way. The NAACP did not ignore violence against non-black ethnic minorities, as they were included in their lynching statistics, but violence against them was rarely investigated,

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<sup>47</sup> S. Hertzberg, *Strangers Within the City Gate: The Jews of Atlanta 1845-1945*, The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1<sup>st</sup> ed (1978) p.207

<sup>48</sup> N. Maclean, *The Leo Frank Case Reconsidered*, p.924

<sup>49</sup> E. Levy, *Is the Jew a White Man?*, p.216

<sup>50</sup> J. Melnick, 'The Night Witch Did It': Villainy and Narrative in the Leo Frank Case', *American Literary History*, Vol.12, No.1/2 (Spring-Summer 2000) pp.113-129

especially prior to the events of Breckenridge. Instead, African Americans at this time were focused on their own civil rights campaigns, and violence towards non-black ethnic minorities was not regarded as a priority.

# **The response of the NAACP to the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities in the United States**

The foundation of the NAACP in 1909 is significant, as it was the first major organisation committed to fighting lynching and oppression towards people of colour in the United States. The founding members of the NAACP consisted of both seasoned African American civil rights activists such as Ida B. Wells and W. E. B. Du Bois and a number of middle class white Americans from Northern and Midwestern social circles. All of the founding members of the NAACP were seasoned and vigorous reformers, with each of them holding a common revulsion to all forms of mob action.<sup>1</sup> By the time the NAACP was founded, white supremacy in the southern United States had effectively disenfranchised African Americans, stripped them of their rights, and made them second-class citizens.<sup>2</sup> The NAACP's aim during the early years of its existence was to secure the basic citizenship rights of African Americans guaranteed by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, which the NAACP aimed to accomplish by using a complex and strategic legal strategy that attempted to challenge racial discrimination and make lynching a federal crime.<sup>3</sup> The NAACP grew quickly, with over 1,000 branches having been set up across the United States and over 200,000 members by the end of the 1930s, making the NAACP not only the most powerful civil rights organization in American history, but also a stable, self-sustaining and enduring African American institution.<sup>4</sup> The NAACP used its prominence and status to launch an anti-lynching campaign that served to not only challenge the crime of lynching, but also aimed to draw attention to racial inequality. Thus, the

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<sup>1</sup> R. L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950*, Temple University Press: Philadelphia, p. 24

<sup>2</sup> P. Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, p.1 For a brief overview of the events that led to the foundation of the NAACP and the organisation's formative years, please see: 'The Rejection of Gradualism and the Founding of the NAACP', in J. M. McPherson, *The Abolitionist Legacy: From Reconstruction to the NAACP*. Princeton University Press: New Jersey, 1975 pp.368-394

<sup>3</sup> J. H. Bracey Jr and A. Meier, *The NAACP as a Reform Movement*, p.3 and P. Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, p.196

<sup>4</sup> G. Jonas, *Freedom's Sword*, p.22

NAACP's anti lynching campaign can be viewed as an attempt to fight racial inequality and violence from all fronts in addition to educating the wider American public to the need for broader reforms.<sup>5</sup>

Over the course of their anti-lynching campaign, the NAACP compiled lynching statistics that detailed the name of the victim, where the victim died, their 'crime' and the date of their death. The NAACP published their lynching statistics each year, with this including the number of lynchings that had occurred in a particular state.<sup>6</sup> Despite the fact by 1916 the NAACP had grown to include over 35,000 members and several branches stretching from coast to coast, their lynching statistics contained hardly any references to the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities, despite estimates suggesting that thousands of Mexicans and other non-black ethnic minorities died at the hands of the mob.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that despite the NAACP's wide reaching information network, by this point in their history, they had not developed effective methods for locating and communicating instances of mob violence. Details regarding discrimination and violence against non-black ethnic minorities are also lacking from NAACP correspondence, suggesting that the NAACP did not hold as much interest in investigating crimes against these minorities compared to African Americans. When the NAACP did refer to non-black ethnic minorities, it was usually because African Americans were involved in the case, suggesting that the NAACP held little interest unless African Americans were involved. Of the 1000 NAACP documents that were analysed, only a few mentions of non-black ethnic minorities were found.

The examination of these files only revealed a few mentions of non-black ethnic minorities, with Mexicans being the most prevalent of these groups. In most instances the mentions of non-black ethnic minorities were brief, often with little information present; apart from a few mentions concerning Mexicans, where there would sometimes be whole segments dedicated to them.

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<sup>5</sup> R. L. Zangrando, p.18 For information on the circulation of NAACP anti-lynching pamphlets as part of their anti-lynching campaign and of their reproduction of lynching photographs in *The Crisis*, please see: A. L. Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940*, The University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2009, p.184

<sup>6</sup> For examples of NAACP lynching statistics from 1889-1918 please see: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918*, Negroe Universities Press: New York, 1969

<sup>7</sup> W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, p.5 and P. Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, p.58

Consequently, this chapter will focus on the Mexican entries that were able to be located, as these entries contained the most information. It can be assumed that there were more entries for Mexicans in NAACP files due to the fact that more Mexicans were lynched than other ethnic minorities. Webb and Carrigan's research into the rate of mob violence against Mexicans reveal hundreds of specific names of victims, meaning that mob violence against Mexicans was not a rare occurrence.<sup>8</sup> The NAACP arguably reported on Mexican lynching more than other non-black ethnic minorities due to the fact that there were simply more victims and thus more reports in white newspapers of the deaths of Mexicans that the NAACP could include in their records. Although the NAACP didn't always include these victims in their statistics, the availability and increasing frequency of violence towards Mexicans in the early part of the twentieth century would have meant that reports were readily available, making them available for inclusion in lynching statistics. The events of Breckenridge (when both African Americans and Mexicans were targeted by a white mob) also resulted in NAACP-Mexican cooperation from 1922 onwards, meaning that Mexican lynching statistics were more likely to be included after this date than before.

The NAACP files that were surveyed contained a variety of documents, ranging from Anti-Lynching Investigative files, correspondence between key NAACP officials, lynching statistics and minutes from key NAACP meetings. There were also newspaper clippings found within these documents and correspondence, providing an insight into what kind of events the NAACP must have viewed as significant enough to warrant inclusion in their records. The information found in these files will be discussed in this chapter with the research showing that the NAACP only held an interest in racial discrimination and the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities when an African American was involved in the case. The documentation also shows that the NAACP cooperated with the Mexican embassy in Washington, if only because of the events of Breckenridge in 1922 where the needs of African Americans and Mexicans were the same. As several NAACP files listed Mexicans as white, a discussion of what made someone white and the legal status of Mexicans in relation to the racial hierarchy of the United States will also be discussed. Finally, the expulsion of African

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.6

Americans and Mexicans from the town of Breckenridge, Texas, in 1922 will be used as a case study to show that the NAACP's official response to the incident only included Mexicans because of the involvement of African Americans and the notoriety of the case, and that this reason prompted the NAACP to cooperate with the Mexican embassy.

An examination of the NAACP records that detail Mexican lynching victims highlights that these entries are not as detailed as those of African American victims. The NAACP lynching statistics for 1915-1916 have several references to Mexican victims of mob violence, with Mexicans either listed individually by date, name, their crime and the place where they were murdered. In cases where more than one Mexican was murdered the NAACP grouped Mexicans together and listed them as '3 Mexicans, 6 Mexicans' and so on.<sup>9</sup> This pattern of grouping Mexican lynching victims together without listing their names is a pattern which is not repeated throughout NAACP lynching statistics and reflects the lack of information which the NAACP had about the lynching of Mexicans and how inconsistent the NAACP was with regards to the investigation of Mexican lynching victims. The lynching statistics for Texas in 1915 contain no reference to Mexicans apart from a little note at the bottom of the document which reads: 'Includes 27 in Texas. 25 Unnamed Mexicans'. The lynching statistics from other states and years are more detailed, an example being the lynching statistics for Oklahoma in 1895 which list two Mexicans having been lynched for stealing cattle, however in this incident both the victims are named. Whilst the reasons for the differing amounts of information are not known, it can be theorized that this could be due to the information that was sent into the NAACP. Whilst they sought out records, the fact that the NAACP didn't have accurate lynching statistics for Mexicans lynched in places where lynchings of Mexicans were more prevalent, such as Texas, is altogether more surprising. The NAACP had a fairly large base of operations in Texas, with thirty-one NAACP chapters present. That these chapters were unable to find details of Mexican lynchings in the state where they were most prominent is puzzling.<sup>10</sup> Further, although the NAACP was still in its

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<sup>9</sup> Anti-Lynching Campaign correspondence and list of Lynchings, 1915-1916, Jan 01, 1915 – Dec 31, 1916 in Papers of the NAACP, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series A: Anti-Lynching Investigative Files, 1912-1953

<sup>10</sup> P. Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, p.248

formative years and establishing networks that could relay details about lynchings to them, the information and documentation regarding the lynching of Mexican nationals was available. It is also worth noting that all of the Mexican victims of mob violence included in NAACP statistics were listed as 'white.' The topic of Mexican 'whiteness' has a long and convoluted history and speaks volumes about how race was defined and designated in early twentieth century America. Whilst Mexicans were defined by US law as 'white' and were thus not referred to as 'Negro' or 'colored', they did not enjoy the same liberties as white Americans. Mexicans generally received lower wages, worked more difficult jobs and lived in less desirable neighbourhoods, were subject to racialized violence on a regular basis and were subject to segregation from the rest of the 'white' community.<sup>11</sup> Wealthy Mexicans, however, occasionally seemed to be exempt from this discrimination. W. D. Carrigan has argued that white travellers and settlers believed that ruling class Mexicans could trace a line of descent back to the Spanish colonists of the seventeenth century, which consequently elevated them to a position of social superiority over the majority of the Mexican population. In comparison, lower class Mexicans were classed as racially inferior and regarded as an almost separate race to their upper class counterparts and were thus more likely to be victims of mob violence.<sup>12</sup> Despite the hierarchical differences between Mexican social classes, the physical and psychological boundaries enforced by white Americans resulted in misunderstanding and a general dislike between Mexicans and Americans.<sup>13</sup> These factors show that although Mexicans were legally classed as white by Federal and Texan law, the racism they experienced and their forced segregation arguably placed them lower than white Americans in the racialized social hierarchy.<sup>14</sup> The ambiguity surrounding Mexican 'whiteness' is reflected in NAACP lynching statistics from the years 1898-1918. Although the

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<sup>11</sup> T. A. Guglielmo, 'Fighting for Caucasian Rights: Mexicans, Mexican Americans and the Transnational Struggle for Civil Rights in WW2 Texas', *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (Mar., 2006) p.1215  
For a general overview of the discrimination and segregation that Mexicans faced, please see: W. D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, p.177-179

<sup>12</sup> For a general overview of the classification of 'whiteness' in early twentieth century America, please see: D. R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*.

<sup>13</sup> W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb, *The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent*, p.9

<sup>14</sup> T. A. Guglielmo, *Fighting for Caucasian Rights*, p.1215

NAACP would designate them as white, their separation from other white victims reflects the ambiguity surrounding their status and classification as white citizens of the United States.<sup>15</sup>

Fig1. Table showing lynching victims from 1889-1918, with a note at bottom showing that Mexicans were listed as white, but were earmarked as being Mexican.

**APPENDIX I**  
**Analyses of Number of Persons Lynched**

TABLE NO. 1  
NUMBER OF WHITE AND COLORED PERSONS LYNCHED IN  
UNITED STATES, 1889-1918\*

Years	Total	White	Colored
1889.....	175	80	95
1890.....	91	3	88
1891.....	104	67	127
1892.....	226	71	155
1893.....	153	39	114
1894.....	182	54	128
1895.....	178	68	110
1896.....	125	46	79
1897.....	162	38	124
1898.....	127	24	103
1899.....	109	22	87
1900.....	101	12	89
1901.....	135	27	108
1902.....	94	10	84
1903.....	104	17	87
1904.....	86	7	79
1905.....	65	5	60
1906.....	68	4	64
1907.....	62	3	59
1908.....	100	5	92
1909.....	89	14	75
1910.....	90	<del>10</del>	80
1911.....	71	8	63
1912.....	64	3	61
1913.....	48	1	47
1914.....	54	5	49
1915.....	96	43 * †	53
1916.....	58	7	51
1917.....	50	2	48
1918.....	67	4	63
	3,224	702	2,522

\* Victims of the Atlanta, Ga. (1906), and East St. Louis, Ill. (1917), riots have been excluded from this and subsequent tables.

*L.M.V. - S.S. 1919*

*47 4 43*

*\* † Includes 27 in Texas (25 unnamed Mexicans)*

<sup>15</sup> Anti-Lynching Campaign correspondence, minutes of Anti-Lynching Committee meeting, and lynching statistics, Dec 01, 1918 - Dec 31, 1918 in Papers of the NAACP, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series A: Anti-Lynching Investigative Files, 1912-1953. Please see Figure.1 for an example of how Mexicans were specifically earmarked in NAACP lynching statistics

Whilst the fact that the information regarding Mexican lynching victims in NAACP lynching statistics was either incomplete or completely lacking, the complicated legal status of Mexican ‘whiteness’ raises an important point that explains the lack of investigation into instances of mob violence against Mexicans in the United States by the NAACP. On May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1918 Leonidas C. Dyer, the foremost congressional advocate of anti-lynching legislation, made a speech where he discussed his own investigations into lynching in the United States, finding that Mexicans were among the largest proportion of white men lynched:

I have recently made an investigation to get some idea of the number of people who have been lynched in the last three years, and I find a record in 1915 where there were 43 white and 49 colored lynched. Most of the white men lynched were Mexicans.<sup>16</sup>

Although it is unclear where Dyer collected his statistics, it is likely that he collected these statistics from organizations with lynching records, such as the NAACP and the Tuskegee institute. Overall, an examination of NAACP lynching statistics has shown that although Mexicans were included in their statistics, the fact that they were a non-black ethnic minority means that they were not a priority for the NAACP to study.

In addition to the listing of Mexicans as white in their lynching records and statistics, NAACP Records also provide details of the ‘San Antonio Anti Lynching Fund’ set up by the San Antonio Express newspaper in 1918, where a higher reward was offered for information leading to the arrest of those committing mob violence against an African American, whereas a lesser reward was offered for the same information that led to the arrest of those committing the same crime against a Mexican. Although this fund was unaffiliated with the NAACP’s own anti-lynching fund, it provides an interesting example of how investigating the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities was considered less important than investigating the lynching of African Americans:

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<sup>16</sup> W. B. Hixson, Jr, ‘Moorfield Storey and the Defense of the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill’, *The New England Quarterly*, Vol.42, No. 1 (Mar., 1969), p.66 and Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, Apr 01, 1918 - Sep 30, 1918 in *Papers of the NAACP, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series B: Anti-Lynching Legislative and Publicity Files, 1916-1955*

A reward of \$500 will be paid to each person who shall be directly responsible for the arrest, with subsequent conviction and punishment, of any person who were instrumental in arousing a mob to commit a lynching, or in putting through the lynching itself, when the individual lynched was not a Negroe. A reward of \$1,000 will be paid in such cases where the victim of the lynching was a Negroe.<sup>17</sup>

The San Antonio Express argued that the differentiation in reward was because African Americans featured as victims of lynching more regularly than other races and that ‘larger reward and the stringiest measures should be applied to the more prolific phase of this evil’.<sup>18</sup> Another possibility for the differentiation is that the benefactors of the anti-lynching fund would have preferred their money to prioritise African Americans victims over other races, as many of the benefactors of anti-lynching funds were wealthy African Americans. There is evidence that African Americans held resentment at the fact that the payment of indemnities by the US government to the families of those who were subject to other forms of violence did not include African Americans who were lynched. A newspaper article from the Colorado Statesman contained in the NAACP files from 1918, echoes this sentiment:

From 1831 to 1913, inclusive, indemnities amounted to \$792,499.39. This money was paid to France, Spain, China, Italy, British subjects and Mexico. This, of course, only went to aliens. It does not include the thousands of Americans who have been hanged by mobs or the property destroyed.<sup>19</sup>

Whilst the majority of the benefactors to the NAACP’s campaigns and anti-lynching funds were either not named or chose to be anonymous, a few documents detail several of the donors to the NAACP, one such donor being Madame C. J. Walker. One of the first self-made African American millionaires in the United States, Walker was also a political and social activist who was closely

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<sup>17</sup> Anti-Lynching Campaign correspondence and press releases, and newspaper articles on San Antonio Express donation to anti-lynching fund, Aug 01, 1918 - Sep 30, 1918 in Papers of the NAACP, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series A: Anti-Lynching Investigative Files, 1912-1953

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Newspaper clippings on lynching and anti-lynching legislation, Jun 01, 1918 - Jun 30, 1918 in Papers of the NAACP, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series A: Anti-Lynching Investigative Files, 1912-1953

affiliated with the NAACP upon joining the executive committee of their New York chapter in 1917. Already an important figure with the NAACP due to her involvement in their New York chapter, her wealth and donations to the NAACP's anti-lynching fund only amplified her importance to the organization.<sup>20</sup> NAACP correspondence shows that the NAACP's appeals were successful, with a letter sent to Walker in 1919 revealing that she had made a \$1000 donation to their anti-lynching fund. This letter describes Walker's gift as the largest donation the association had ever received, with the letter also detailing how Walker's donation had resulted in a flurry of other donations being received from other African American benefactors.<sup>21</sup> Aside from donations from wealthy African Americans such as Walker, the NAACP also received funds from organizations who held similar aims to them. In 1930, after a lengthy application process which saw the NAACP hold off competition from the International Labour Defence and the American Negro Labor Congress, the NAACP was awarded \$100,000 from the American Fund for Public Service, in order for them to be able to continue their widespread legal challenge to the racial caste system in the South. In their application for this fund, the NAACP declared that they would be continuing their efforts to secure basic citizenship rights for blacks, which they argued was essential to realizing black economic independence. The application also declared that the NAACP had the perfect 'machinery' with which to carry out their ambition, in the form of a national legal committee of leading lawyers, NAACP branches in forty-four states and contacts in places where the NAACP didn't have any branches.<sup>22</sup> The fact that this application made no mention of non-black ethnic minorities is telling, as it shows that they were not considered the main priority for the NAACP.

Although the priorities of the NAACP during the 1910s were not centred around reporting on incidents involving non-black ethnic minorities, the expulsion of African Americans and Mexicans from Breckenridge on November 16, 1922 placed the needs of African Americans and Mexicans together and forced the NAACP into acting on behalf of Mexicans as well as African Americans. The

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<sup>20</sup> R. L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching*, p.49

<sup>21</sup> NAACP anti-lynching fundraising campaign, Jan 01, 1919 - Dec 31, 1920 in *Papers of the NAACP, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series B: Anti-Lynching Legislative and Publicity Files, 1916-1955* For more information about the funding of NAACP anti-lynching campaigns including donations made by Philip G. Peabody in 1916, please see R. L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching*, p.28-30

<sup>22</sup> P. Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, p.142

events at Breckenridge were preceded by years of Mexican diplomatic protest against mob violence towards Mexican nationals in the United States. Although these protests had yielded positive results on occasion, such as the aftermath of the Antonio Rodriguez lynching of 1910, which resulted in the United States promising protection for Mexican nationals, Mexican diplomatic protests were resisted by state and local authorities, who were concerned that such protests would expose their complicity in promoting and protecting the actions of lynch mobs.<sup>23</sup> The events that took place in Breckenridge, Texas illustrate how local and state authorities resisted these protests and how through the ignoring of Mexican calls for justice, the federal government became involved in the case. On November 16, 1922 an armed mob of around three hundred men marched through Breckenridge and demanded that all Mexicans and African Americans living in the town leave by nightfall. Mexicans living in Breckenridge appealed to the mayor for protection, but he replied that he could not guarantee their safety.<sup>24</sup> Manuel Tellez, a Mexican diplomat to the United States and Charge d' Affaires of the Mexican embassy in Washington, responded quickly to the events in Breckenridge, requesting that the State Department intervene in the matter, arguing that the violence was symptomatic of the abuse suffered by Mexicans throughout Texas. Alongside Tellez's pleas, the federal officials also received pressure to act from the white press, who covered the incident in earnest. In addition to pressures from the press and Tellez, the United States also had diplomatic reasons to act.<sup>25</sup> The new Mexican government under the administration of Alvaro Obregon was the first stable government that Mexico had had in place since the outbreak of the revolution. Failure to investigate and respond effectively to the events in Breckenridge could risk a breakdown in relations similar to the events following the US Government's failure to respond to the lynching of Antonio Rodriguez in 1910.<sup>26</sup> The US Government responded by sending a detachment of Texas Rangers to Breckenridge in order to ascertain who was responsible for leading the mob that demanded that Mexicans and African

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<sup>23</sup> W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb, *Forgotten Dead*: p.148

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>25</sup> For examples of white newspapers that reported on the events in Breckenridge, please see: *Great Falls Tribune* (Montana), November 17, 1922 p.2, *Tonopah Daily Bonanza* (Nevada), 16 November 1922 p.1, *The New York Herald*, November 17 1922, p.21. For examples of African American newspapers that reported on the events in Breckenridge please see: *The Chicago Defender*, November 25, 1922

<sup>26</sup> W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, p.148-150, for more information about the lynching of Antonio Rodriguez and the effect it had on US-Mexican relations please see p.106

Americans leave. The Texas Rangers requested that an FBI agent be sent to assist in their investigation, with J. P. Huddleston being sent to assist. After a brief investigation, it was determined that an organization known as the White Owls, a white vigilante group set up to promote Anglo interests, was behind the attempted expulsion of Mexicans and African Americans from Breckenridge. Although the Rangers and FBI were unable to apprehend the leaders of the White Owls, the presence of federal officials in Breckenridge was able to stem acts of violence and discrimination and restore order.<sup>27</sup> In addition to the response of Manuel Tellez, the NAACP also intervened, on behalf of both Mexicans and African Americans. In a telegraph sent to President Warren Harding, the NAACP demanded that Mexicans and African Americans be protected, arguing that the events in Breckenridge highlighted the need for the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill to be passed. Although there is no record of a lynching taking place during the Breckenridge incident, the threat of mob violence and the unwillingness of the local authorities to act reinforced the need for the Dyer Bill, which aimed to not only make lynching a federal crime, but would also allow the prosecution of officials who failed to punish those responsible for threatening mob violence and racial discrimination.<sup>28</sup> In a press release by the NAACP detailing a telegram which the organization sent to President Harding, the NAACP mentioned Mexicans before African Americans, seemingly prioritizing them over African Americans at least in relation to the events in Breckenridge. The wording used within the telegram also appears carefully chosen and the use of the words ‘humiliating’ and ‘dangerous’ may have also been used as a means to remind the US government of how damaging incidents involving discrimination towards ethnic minorities could be, with previous incidents involving Mexicans resulting in the worsening of relations between the US and Mexico:

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People respectfully calls your attention to International situation created by lynching of Mexicans as well as negroes in Texas and again urges that Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill be endorsed by Administration and enacted by

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.151

<sup>28</sup> P. Sullivan, Lift Every Voice, p.105

senate in order that the Federal Government may properly deal with this humiliating and dangerous situation.<sup>29</sup>

Events similar to Breckenridge appear to have been fairly common during this period, as NAACP documentation and newspaper clippings reported on the events of Johnstown, an event which drew many similarities to Breckenridge. On August 30, 1923, the people of Johnstown attempted to expel African Americans and Mexicans from their town after a policeman, Joseph Grachen, was shot by Robert Young, an African American who was supposedly under the influence of drugs and alcohol. After shooting Grachen, Young proceeded to barricade himself in a nearby shed, where he became engaged in a shootout with local law enforcement. Young himself was killed in the shootout and several police officers were wounded in the incident.<sup>30</sup> After Young was killed, the mayor of Johnstown, Joseph Cauffiel, ordered all African Americans living in Johnstown who had lived there for less than seven years to leave the city. Cauffiel also banned the importation of African American and Mexican labourers and ordered that any African American visiting Johnstown in future needed to register with local police.<sup>31</sup> Whilst the NAACP files contained newspaper clippings of the event, detailing how ‘Negroes and Mexicans who had not been residents of Johnstown for at least seven years must get out of town immediately’, NAACP correspondence from Walter White makes no mention of Mexicans.<sup>32</sup> Walter White’s entry simply details how the mayor of Johnstown ordered African Americans in Johnstown to leave and ordered them to go ‘South of Mason’s Dixey line’.<sup>33</sup> Whilst the Johnstown incident created diplomatic tension between the US and Mexico and highlighted how white supremacist attitudes dominated the South, Johnstown also presented an opportunity for African American activists to ally themselves with Mexicans. With the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill

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<sup>29</sup> Anti-Lynching Campaign correspondence, press releases, and reports of Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, Jul 01, 1922 - Dec 31, 1922 in Papers of the NAACP, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series A: Anti-Lynching Investigative Files, 1912-1953

<sup>30</sup> R. B. Sherman, ‘Johnstown v. The Negro: Southern Migrants and the Exodus of 1923’, *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (October 1963) p.457

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p.459

<sup>32</sup> Monthly reports, including discrimination in education and the military, and lynching cases, Jan 02, 1923 - Dec 31, 1923 in Papers of the NAACP, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series A: Anti-Lynching Investigative Files, 1912-1953

<sup>33</sup> Monthly reports, including discrimination in education and the military, and lynching cases, Feb 12, 1924 – March 10 1924 in 1923 in Papers of the NAACP, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series A: Anti-Lynching Investigative Files, 1912-1953

about to reach the floor of the Senate in late 1922, the topic of lynching and racial inequality was prominent in American discourse. The events at Johnstown and the Breckenridge incident only served to highlight this, and with the State Department focusing on the small Texas town, African American activists argued that as both Mexicans and African Americans had been expelled from the town, action could not be taken to protect one and not the other. As a result, the Breckenridge and Johnstown incidents highlighted that if the United States government were to respond to the pleas of Mexicans, yet ignore African Americans, they risked suffering a severe backlash. African American anti-lynching campaigners realized this, and used these events to ally themselves with Mexican civil rights campaigners in order to demonstrate that the needs of both groups had to be met. Although the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill was defeated by Congress, Clive Webb and W.D. Carrigan note that the measures taken by both state and federal authorities to restore order in Breckenridge encouraged a closer alliance between NAACP activists and Mexican diplomats.<sup>34</sup> The closer cooperation between the NAACP and Mexican activists is evident from two letters that the NAACP sent to the Mexican embassy in Washington, one in January 1923 and the other in November 1926. Both of these letters were requests for the Mexican Embassy to provide details of the lynching of Mexican nationals, with the first letter reading:

‘In the New York Times of November 17, you were quoted as stating that there is on file at the Mexican Embassy at Washington information indicating that between fifty and sixty Mexican nationals had met violent deaths in the United States during the twelve months prior to that time. The dispatch also states that a list of twenty-two of these, eleven in Texas and eleven in other states, was made public by the embassy.

In order that our records may be correct we are requesting that you be good enough to furnish us, if possible, with a list of these murders, giving the names of the victims; the dates at which

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<sup>34</sup> W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, p.156-157 For more information about the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, please see G. Jonas, *Freedom's Sword*, p.115-116

they were killed; the alleged causes and such other information as you may possess regarding the circumstances. We deeply appreciate your prompt compliance to this request.’<sup>35</sup>

It is worth noting that the NAACP did not include details of any specific Mexican lynchings in their letter, instead asking for generic information regarding the murder of Mexican nationals in the past year. The Mexican Embassy did comply with the NAACP’s request, however, and provided the NAACP with a list detailing twenty-six Mexican nationals that had been lynched in the United States. The second letter is unlike the first letter, in that it doesn’t request a list, instead requesting details of a specific lynching. The fact that the NAACP requested details of a specific lynching shows that they must have been aware of Mexicans that were murdered and were actively searching for information relating to such events. The second letter reads:

‘The Columbia (S.C.) State of November 25 carried an item to the effect that the Mexican Vice Consul at San Antonio, Texas, had reported to the Mexican Embassy in Washington that two Mexican nationals has been murdered in Willacy, Texas, in the last three months; that at least one of them was painfully mistreated before his death; and that a grand jury investigation of the incident was not legally or properly carried out.

One phase of the work of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is keeping a record of all lynchings occurring in the United States. The mob murders mentioned above had not before come to our attention. Will you be kind enough to give us the details.’<sup>36</sup>

That the NAACP wrote these two letters to request details of Mexican lynching victims shows that the NAACP were not only aware of violence against Mexicans, but they were actively searching for information about lynchings. The fact that the NAACP requested information about a specific

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<sup>35</sup> Anti-Lynching Campaign correspondence and lynching statistics, Jan 01, 1923 - Feb 28, 1923 in Papers of the NAACP, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series A: Anti-Lynching Investigative Files, 1912-1953

<sup>36</sup> Anti-Lynching Campaign correspondence and ‘Is Lynching Ever Defensible’ article in The Forum, Dec 01, 1926 - Feb 28, 1927 in Papers of the NAACP, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series A: Anti-Lynching Investigative Files, 1912-1953

lynching in the second letter, rather than just a general update as in the first, highlights the fact that the NAACP were taking individual cases of anti-Mexican violence increasingly seriously.

NAACP correspondence between NAACP officials also contains references to Mexico, but these references are not regarding the lynching of Mexican nationals. A letter sent to Herbert J. Seligmann by Edward Alsworth Ross, Chairman for the Committee on Cultural Relations with Latin America, on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1931 invited Seligmann to a seminar taking place in Mexico in July. In this letter, Ross states that: ‘We are confident that, next to the work of Ambassador Morrow, the annual Seminar in Mexico has been the chief influence in developing an appreciative public opinion in the United States in regard to Mexico’.<sup>37</sup> Although Seligmann declined this invitation due to a busy work schedule, his invitation shows how important NAACP participation in the seminar was viewed. The seminars organized by the Committee on Cultural Relations with Latin America had been running every summer since 1928 and were instrumental in the effort to improving cultural understanding between Mexico and the United States. Whilst various issues were discussed at these seminars, the explicit aim of these meetings was to provide a means for bringing representative citizens of the United States into contact with Latin America.<sup>38</sup> The fact that the NAACP were invited to such a meeting only serves to highlight how the committee believed the NAACP could have an important role in the attempt to renew US-Mexican relations. Although the NAACP themselves did not place as much emphasis on the investigation of Mexican lynching, the fact that their presence was requested at this meeting shows how they were regarded by other organizations as an important factor in order to renew faith in Mexicans that the United States was taking violence against Mexicans seriously. The invitation to such events also shows how the NAACP was beginning to play a part in improving Mexican relations with the United States, representing a shift in their own approach towards mob violence against Mexicans. Throughout the 1910s the NAACP largely ignored mob violence against Mexicans, as there was no link to African American mob violence and the NAACP

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<sup>37</sup> Anti-Lynching Campaign correspondence and lynching statistics, Jan 01 1919 – Dec 31 1932 in NAACP, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series A: Anti-Lynching Investigative Files, 1912-1953

<sup>38</sup> H. Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations Between the United States*, The University of Alabama Press, 1992, p.73

would be unable to further their agenda and aims by responding to Mexican incidents. During the 1920s however, events such as Breckenridge where African Americans and Mexicans were being discriminated against together showed how cooperation between African Americans and Mexicans could be beneficial for both sides in their respective fight against discrimination. Consequently, it can be seen that the NAACP followed up their cooperation with Mexican officials at Breckenridge by collecting Mexican lynching statistics in order to maintain their relationship and to not be seen as only needing them when situations like the one at Breckenridge arose. It is possible that the events at Breckenridge made the NAACP realize how often discrimination against Mexicans was occurring. Whilst the NAACP would not have focused on the event had African Americans not been involved, their involvement forced the NAACP to respond to both, leading to a period when the NAACP became active in seeking Mexican lynching statistics, showing that they had shifted their approach as a result of Breckenridge.

Overall, the lack of response of the NAACP to the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities is of little surprise, as the organisation was geared to respond primarily to the lynching and discrimination of African Americans. Before the events of Breckenridge, Mexicans included in NAACP lynching statistics were always listed as white, while the records themselves were often incomplete and erroneous. After the events of Breckenridge, there appears to have been a shift in the NAACP's approach to recording incidents of mob violence against Mexicans. Arguably, this cooperation following Breckenridge only came to fruition as the needs of African Americans and Mexicans were the same, leaving the NAACP unable to respond to one group and not the other. In a sense, Breckenridge can be seen as a turning point in African American-Mexican relations, as Breckenridge showed that the two groups could cooperate when both were threatened by racial discrimination.

# **The reaction of the African American press to mob violence against non-black ethnic minorities in the United States**

The African American press in the United States had widespread circulation and influence amongst the African American population, with their papers penetrating even the most rural and isolated communities in the country.<sup>1</sup> Whilst it is known that the NAACP journal, *The Crisis*, had an estimated 30,000 subscribers by 1913, the circulation of other newspapers is an estimate at best.<sup>2</sup> The *Chicago Defender* has been estimated to have had around 600,000 readers by the end of the 1910s, with two thirds of those readers situated outside of Chicago.<sup>3</sup> Such a large readership base gave these newspapers an important role to play in African American daily life, as they not only represented African American interests, but the content contained in these papers offered opposition to white racism and thus helped create an African American identity.<sup>4</sup> The content in these papers, whilst intended to combat white racism, also helped create a sense of ‘community’ amongst African Americans, reinforcing the idea that they were fighting racism and discrimination together. Charlotte O’Kelly has discussed the importance of the content African American publications distributed, arguing that the championing of several issues including the right to vote, the end of segregation, equal school facilities and equal political participation placed African American newspapers at the forefront of the black protest movement.<sup>5</sup> By fighting on behalf of these issues, African American publications helped to create a sense of community identity amongst African Americans, by aiming towards the common goal of ending racial discrimination. This sense of creating an African American

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<sup>1</sup> C. G. O’Kelly, *Black Newspapers and the Black Protest Movement*, p.5

<sup>2</sup> E. M. Rudwick, W. E. B. Du Bois in the Role of *Crisis* Editor, p.214

<sup>3</sup> M. E. Stovall, *The Chicago Defender in the Progressive Era*, p.160, For information regarding the increase of African American literacy and the development of African American newspapers in the Western United States, see: G. K. Berardi and T. W. Segady, ‘The Development of African-American newspapers in the West: A Sociohistorical Perspective’, *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 75, No. 3/4 (Summer- Autumn, 1990) p.105

<sup>4</sup> R. Hardin and M. Hinton, ‘The Squelching of Free Speech in Memphis: The Life of a Black Post-Reconstruction Newspaper’, *Race, Gender and Class*, Vol. 8, No. 4, *Race, Gender & Class in Media* (2001) p.78

<sup>5</sup> C. G. O’Kelly, *Black Newspapers and the Black Protest Movement*, p.6

identity is best represented in the NAACP's journal, *The Crisis* which contained in every issue a segment entitled 'Along the Color Line', which contained updates and information detailing events in the African American community, as well as profiling African American achievements and episodes of victimization.<sup>6</sup> 'Along the Color Line' contained various sections detailing different aspects of African American life, whilst also containing a 'crime' section that detailed lynching and other episodes of racial discrimination that had taken place against African Americans in the past month. Whilst this section details the lynching of African Americans, the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities, especially Mexicans who experienced episodes of racism and discrimination more than any other immigrant group, were largely ignored, with only a few mentions of violence against non-black ethnic minorities from the first issue of *The Crisis* through to the December 1939 issue.<sup>7</sup> Other major African American publications follow the same pattern as *The Crisis*, in that they would dedicate articles which detailed instances of violence against African Americans whilst largely ignoring mob violence against non-black ethnic minorities. This sheer lack of articles relating to mob violence against non-black ethnic minorities is however, hardly surprising. As the main objectives of African American newspapers were to profile African American experiences and create a sense of African American community, the reporting of incidents of violence against non-black ethnic minorities would not have been part of their agenda. This means that whilst reports of the lynching of African Americans and race riots featured predominately in nearly every major African American publication, reports featuring non-black ethnic minorities are few and far between.<sup>8</sup> The reasons why prominent African American publications of the period such as the NAACP's *Journal*, *The Crisis*, the *Chicago Defender*, and the *Cleveland Gazette* neglected to report on incidences of violence against non-black ethnic minorities will be discussed in this chapter.

This chapter will discuss how African American publications neglected to report on instances of mob violence against non-black ethnic minorities and will also explore the idea that these publications would be more likely to report on such incidents were an African American involved in

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<sup>6</sup> R. Castronovo, *Beauty Along the Color Line*, p.1445

<sup>7</sup> W. Carrigan and C. Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, p.1

<sup>8</sup> *Daily Byran Eagle and Pilot (Texas)*, November 3, 1911

the case as well. The impact of the Mexican Revolution will also be assessed, as this war resulted in an influx of Mexican migrants into Texas and other southern states, leading to increasing levels of violence against persons of Mexican descent in these areas. Mexican bandits also operated during this time, raiding the Mexican border and generating anti-Mexican sentiment amongst the general population.<sup>9</sup> The African American reaction to these events will be assessed, arguing that the lack of an African American reaction to mob violence against Mexicans during this period was directly influenced by these events. In addition, African American coverage of Mexican-US relations will be assessed in order to show that African American publications would comment on political matters between these two countries and would use these events to highlight racism and discrimination against African Americans. African American newspaper responses to Japanese newspaper articles published in 1921 that condemned lynching in America, will be used to illustrate how anti-Japanese sentiment and a belief that only African Americans could comment on mob violence resulted in an angry reaction from the African American press.

The extent to which the African American press neglected to report on the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities is best represented in their lack of coverage of the lynching of a young Mexican boy named Antonio Gómez in 1911.<sup>10</sup> Antonio Gómez was lynched in Thorndale, Texas, on June 11<sup>th</sup>, 1911 after Gómez had an altercation with a local storeowner, Charley Zeischang, who had asked Gómez to stop whittling down a piece of railroad track.<sup>11</sup> After Gómez refused, Zeischang took the plank from Gómez and struck him with it. In retaliation, Gómez reportedly stabbed Zeischang and ran away, but was captured shortly afterwards and taken into custody.<sup>12</sup> Local newspapers do not explain what happened next, but due to the outcome of the incident, it is likely that a mob formed and pressured the authorities to hand Gómez over to them. After he was in their custody, Gómez was taken to a nearby telephone pole and hung until dead. Newspapers reporting on the event were initially confined to Texan newspapers, with the most extensive coverage of the case occurring in the

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<sup>9</sup> W. Carrigan and C. Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, p.23

<sup>10</sup> W. D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, p.175

<sup>11</sup> *Daily Byran Eagle and Pilot (Texas)*, June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1911

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

Byran Daily Eagle (Texas). Once it was revealed that that Antonio Gómez was only around 13 or 14 years old when he was lynched, the case quickly made headlines around America.<sup>13</sup> The lynching of Antonio Gómez outraged Mexicans living in Thorndale, with the case receiving attention from the Mexican consul, who investigated the lynching and telegraphed the authorities in Washington to ask for the protection of other Mexicans living in Thorndale.<sup>14</sup> The lynching of Gómez reinforced the need for Mexicans living in the United States to have urgent collective action against mob violence through the creation of civil rights organizations. Consequently, in June 1911 Mexican activists founded La Agrupación, an organization which aimed to provide legal protection for Mexicans who were facing aggression from Anglos.<sup>15</sup> Mexicans in Thorndale were also due to hold a mass meeting to discuss the Gómez case, however due to the efforts of Assistant Attorney General Lane in attempting to bring the perpetrators to justice, Miguel Diebold, the Mexican Consul persuaded them to cancel this meeting, to avoid tensions increasing any further.<sup>16</sup> The involvement of Miguel Diebold arguably forced the United States to respond to the lynching of Gómez in order to avoid straining relations with Mexico, with the authorities responding quickly to the murder by issuing arrest warrants on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June and working with Mexican officials in an attempt to bring the ringleaders to justice as quickly as possible.<sup>17</sup> White newspapers were quick to condemn the lynching, with articles reiterating that the authorities were doing all they could to apprehend those responsible.<sup>18</sup> The Byran Daily Eagle (Texas) published an article on June 26<sup>th</sup> discussing how there was no attempt made to prevent the Gómez lynching, although the tone of the article is sarcastic and appears to have been written by the paper to criticise the ‘best citizens’ of Thorndale, whom the writer notes claimed to condemn the lynching, but did nothing to prevent it:

We are assured that the “best citizens of Thorndale” condemn the lynching of that Mexican boy for defending himself when assaulted by a double fisted man. It seems that forty of these

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<sup>13</sup> Please see The Ocala Evening Star, (Florida), June 26, 1911

<sup>14</sup> El Paso Herald (Texas), June 23, 1911

<sup>15</sup> W. Carrigan and C. Webb, *The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States*, p.417

<sup>16</sup> Daily Byran Eagle and Pilot (Texas), June 27, 1911 and W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, p.144

<sup>17</sup> W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, p.144 and The Pensacola Journal (Florida), June 24, 1911

<sup>18</sup> Daily Byran Eagle and Pilot, June 30, 1911

“best citizens” stood by when the job was done and made no effort to prevent it. Were they afraid the four or five men who did it would lynch them if they interfered?<sup>19</sup>

As a result of the efforts of the authorities and the pressures of the Mexican consul, four men were arrested on 24<sup>th</sup> June and charged with the murder of Antonio Gómez. Their subsequent trial was covered in depth by the Byran Daily Eagle (Texas), who would later label the trial as one of the most famous in the history of Milam County.<sup>20</sup> Despite the notoriety of the case and the evidence against the accused, the four men were acquitted in less than twenty minutes due to the people on the jury being sympathetic to the lynchers.<sup>21</sup>

Whilst the Gómez case received coverage from the white press in Texas and a few mentions around the country, African American publications largely ignored the lynching, with the Kansas paper the Wichita Searchlight giving only giving a brief description of Gómez’s death and the altercation between Gómez and Zeischang.<sup>22</sup> The NAACP also mentioned Antonio Gómez in their lynching statistics for 1911, however, like the Wichita Searchlight (Kansas), the entry is short and doesn’t even mention Antonio Gómez by name, instead referring to him as ‘Mexican boy’; were it not for the date and the mention of Thorndale it would be impossible to ascertain that ‘Mexican Boy’ referred to Antonio Gómez.<sup>23</sup> The lack of Gómez’s name, in addition to the fact that the section which details why Gómez was lynched simply stated ‘murder?’, implies that the NAACP did not have enough research and information available, or did not place enough importance on the case to warrant an investigation. It is not known why the NAACP was unable to confirm even the basic details of Antonio Gómez’s lynching, but as noted in Chapter One, the investigation of Mexican lynchings was not a priority for the NAACP.

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<sup>19</sup> Daily Byran Eagle and Pilot (Texas), June 26, 1911

<sup>20</sup> Daily Byran Eagle and Pilot (Texas), November 3, 1911

<sup>21</sup> Daily Byran Eagle and Pilot (Texas), June 24, 1911, Byran Daily Eagle and Pilot (Texas) November 3, 1911 and Forgotten Dead, p.144

<sup>22</sup> Wichita Searchlight (Kansas), June 24, 1911

<sup>23</sup> List of lynchings in each state by year, Jan 01 1885- Dec 31 1917 in NAACP Papers: The NAACP's Major Campaigns--Scottsboro, Anti-Lynching, Criminal Justice, Peonage, Labor, and Segregation and Discrimination Complaints and Responses

Although the Gómez case is a good example of how African American publications took little interest in the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities, the lynching also illustrates how Mexicans, unlike African Americans, were able to call on their government to protect them against mob violence. Shortly after Antonio Gómez was lynched, the Mexican consul Diebold contacted officials in Washington to request the protection of other Mexicans living in Thorndale.<sup>24</sup> This request arguably placed pressure on US officials to act, and they responded by involving the Mexican Vice Consul Eduardo Valardo in the investigation.<sup>25</sup> The Byran Daily Eagle (Texas) reported on US officials' attempts to apprehend Gómez's lynchers, writing that the actions of the US to capture Gómez's murderers were well received by Mexicans living in Thorndale and that they were satisfied with the manner in which the Texas authorities were handling the Gómez case. The paper also reported that the Mexican Minister of Foreign Relations had been informed of their satisfaction with how the case had been brought to conclusion. The Byran Daily Eagle (Texas) concluded their report by stating that they hoped the report being sent to the Mexican Minister of Foreign Relations 'will help to remove the prejudice against Americans in that country'.<sup>26</sup>

The fact that US officials acted so quickly after pressure from the Mexican government to apprehend the murderers of Gómez not only underlines how keen the US government were to preserve relations between the two countries but also how effective Mexican calls for protection to their government were. Webb and Carrigan have argued that such diplomatic protests against mob violence from the Mexican Government proved decisive in ending mob violence against Mexicans.<sup>27</sup> Although the murderers of Gómez were never convicted, the awareness of the incident as well as the quickness of action of the US highlights how seriously they took requests from Mexico to protect Mexican nationals living in the United States. This ability to call upon their government for aid is one of the key differences between Mexicans and African Americans in this period and this was arguably

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<sup>24</sup> Bisbee Daily Review (Arizona), June 24, 1911

<sup>25</sup> The Pensacola Journal (Florida), June 24, 1911

<sup>26</sup> Daily Byran Eagle and Pilot (Texas) June 27, 1911, p.4

<sup>27</sup> W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb, *The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States*, p.427 For other examples of the Mexican Government putting pressure on the US Government to investigate the lynching of Mexican nationals, including the investigation of the lynching of a Mexican national in Colorado, please see: *Newspaper Clippings on Lynching, February 01, 1920 – March 31, 1920 in Papers of the NAACP, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series A: Anti-Lynching Investigative Files, 1912-1953*

a reason for resentment from African Americans towards Mexicans. Whilst Mexican pleas to their government for aid were listened to, African American cries for protection were frequently ignored by the US Government. On 31st May 1911, a delegation of NAACP members was received in the White House, where they pleaded with President Taft to make lynching a federal crime. Their plea was dismissed, with Taft arguing that the crime of lynching was under the jurisdiction of the state government and that he was powerless to help African Americans.<sup>28</sup> The refusal of the US government to make lynching a federal crime, coupled with the white press ignoring mob violence against African Americans, highlights how the United States placed more emphasis on maintaining relations with Mexico over the protection of African Americans. With African Americans unable to put diplomatic pressure on the US, there simply wasn't as much at risk to the US if they didn't respond. Also, previous instances of mob violence against Mexicans that the United States had ignored received an angry response from Mexico and Mexicans living in America. The lynching of Antonio Rodriguez the previous year nearly resulted in an armed conflict, with violent demonstrations erupting in Mexico City and American businesses and citizens being attacked. Antonio Rodriguez was lynched on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1910 after being accused of murdering a white woman. Clive Webb and William Carrigan have argued that that few other lynchings of Mexicans drew as large a crowd as the lynching of Rodriguez.<sup>29</sup> Following the lynching the Mexican Government also imposed an economic boycott of American products, highlighting that the lynching of Mexican nationals in the United States would not be tolerated.<sup>30</sup> The African American press responded to these events, with the Cleveland Gazette re-printing an article from a Mexican newspaper which condemned the lynching of Rodriguez and the United States. The Cleveland Gazette proceeded to attack the United States' indifference to lynching:

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<sup>28</sup> The Crisis, Vol.2, July, 1911, p.100 and C. G. O'Kelly, Black Newspapers and the Black Protest Movement, p.3

<sup>29</sup> W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb, Forgotten Dead, p.81-82

<sup>30</sup> W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb, The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States, p.428, it should be noted that by 1922, the American Government was again facing protests from the Mexican Government over the killing of Mexicans in the United States, after none of the perpetrators of these murders had been brought to justice. Please see: The Morning Tulsa daily world (Oklahoma), November 16, 1922, FINAL EDITION, Page 7,

‘What have those people in this country who wish to spread core plaster over the ugly sore (lynching) of our land say as to the facts in the Mexican charges, as to the logical deduction from these facts, as to the moral drawn from the callous indifference of the state governments and the United States government regarding the outrages perpetrated on its own citizens, white and black (mainly the latter), and on foreigners? ... Would it not be better to look things squarely in the face, acknowledge their wrong and abolish such a horrible state of affairs?’<sup>31</sup>

Like other African American publications, the Cleveland Gazette drew attention away from the lynching of Rodriguez in order to highlight the lynching problem in general, with the newspaper reiterating that those who lynched African Americans were rarely brought to justice. It should be noted that this was the only mention of Antonio Rodriguez that was able to be found in black newspapers during the research for this thesis, with the newspaper only reporting on his death a few weeks after it happened around the same time when the Mexican government began to apply pressure to the United States to investigate the lynching. The Cleveland Gazette neglected to report on the lynching of Rodriguez when it actually happened, suggesting that the paper only reported on the event as the Mexican Government’s criticisms of lynching in the US presented an opportunity to reiterate the plight of African Americans and of lynching in general. Whilst instances of mob violence against African Americans were still ignored, the Rodriguez lynching emphasised to the United States that mob violence against Mexicans couldn’t be ignored without serious consequence. As a result, the lynching of Antonio Gómez, only a year after that of Rodriguez, was unable to be ignored without there being serious repercussions.

Whereas the lynchings of African Americans could be ignored without any risk of protest, the backlash for ignoring a Mexican lynching had been shown to have too many repercussions for the United States government to dismiss. This fact is discussed in the December 1910 issue of *The Crisis*, where Du Bois argues that whilst 2500 black men had been lynched in the past twenty five years and

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<sup>31</sup> Cleveland Gazette, November 26, 1910

African Americans had been advised not to ‘make a scene’ about it, the lynching of a Mexican in Texas resulted in Mexico responding and threatening mob action unless there was something done about it.<sup>32</sup> Referring to this as ‘race prejudice’, the frustration that Du Bois felt over this incident is evident when he argued that ‘the land of Mexico was moved from centre to circumference; denunciation and even mob violence was threatened and all over one criminal’.<sup>33</sup> This extract clearly highlights the frustration that African Americans felt towards Mexicans as a result of their repeated calls for government intervention and the fact that whilst African American calls for racial justice were frequently ignored, Mexican calls were answered, despite there being a far larger number of African Americans falling victim to racial violence. This resentment is further echoed in a letter sent to W. E. B. Du Bois in 1921 by Fred DeArmond, who wrote that whilst African Americans faced white oppression in the South, the ‘dirtiest Mexican’ had complete freedom.<sup>34</sup> Although this is an individual letter and is not representative of the entire African American population, the letter in itself is surprising, for Mexican and African American experiences of mob violence in the South were incredibly similar, with both groups experiencing instances of racial violence and discrimination. However, although Mexicans were regarded as ‘racially inferior’ by whites in Texas, they were also treated somewhat better than African Americans.<sup>35</sup> The basis for DeArmond’s anger towards Mexicans likely stemmed from his belief that Mexicans had been given protection from lynching by the United States government as a result of the Mexican Government placing pressure upon the United States to protect Mexican nationals from mob violence in the United States. As African Americans had been fighting and campaigning for civil rights and had little success, DeArmond’s dislike of Mexicans was perhaps predictable. DeArmond is not alone in expressing his dislike for Mexicans, with various African American editorials unaware of the extent of anti-Mexican violence in the United States, expressing anger that their Government appeared to care more about the lynching of foreign nationals than it did their own people. Their argument centred on the basis that whereas

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<sup>32</sup> The Crisis, Vol.1, December 1910, p.21

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> DeArmond, Fred. Letter from Fred DeArmond to the editor of The Crisis, February 6, 1921. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries

<sup>35</sup> W. D. Carrigan, The Making of a Lynching Culture, p.178

African Americans had showed their continued loyalty to the United States by serving in the armed forces, Mexicans had conceivably not done as much for the development of the United States as their race had.<sup>36</sup>

The rate of mob violence against Mexicans only increased with the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, as rates of Mexican migration into the United States increased as more and more people attempted to escape the conflict, with around three thousand Mexicans moving into Texas and the southern part of the United States between 1910-1920 as a direct result of the Revolution.<sup>37</sup> This great migration of Mexican settlers resulted in great political and economic upheaval as more and more people migrated inwards, however this increase in migration led to an increase in instances of discrimination and mob violence against Mexicans.<sup>38</sup> This migration of Mexican migrants also coincided with anti-American protests in Mexico, with the poorer classes in Mexico frustrated that the benefits of industrialization were primarily benefitting the thousands of American businesses in Mexico, instead of Mexican-owned companies.<sup>39</sup> These protests, in conjunction with Mexican bandits raiding American property and killing American citizens along the Mexican border, inevitably led to widespread panic among the white population.<sup>40</sup> The white press frequently covered the actions of these bandits, with the *The Day Book* (Chicago) running a headline titled 'Mexican bandits spread terror as troops leave'. This article seemingly promoted American troop action in Mexico through detailing how the bandits had caused chaos and had attacked as news of American troop withdrawal had reached them.<sup>41</sup> In contrast to white publications, African American publications used the US's reactions to the bandit attacks as a way to criticise the US government's lack of action against lynch mobs in their own country. The *Chicago Defender* praised Mexico's attempts to apprehend the bandits, and declared that 'Mexico's approaches to mob violence and the United States lack of action

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<sup>36</sup> W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, p.155-156

<sup>37</sup> W. D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, p.174

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p.175 For figures showing the increase of lynchings of Mexican nationals in the United States before and after the great influx of migrants, please see: W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, p.30

<sup>39</sup> J. M. Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico Since the Civil War*, University of California Press (2002) p.272

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>41</sup> *The Day Book* (Illinois), May 22, 1916

is the difference between a civilised and an un-civilised country.<sup>42</sup> The Crisis also commented on these bandit attacks in a similar way to the Chicago Defender, by using the raids to attack the United States indifference to the lynching of African Americans:

‘While the angry tide was still swelling and threatening against the Mexicans, a crowd of American bandits murdered some other American citizens in our own country, right at their own homes. And the American public, gritting its valiant teeth at its helplessness to go down to Mexico and shoot that country clear off the earth, paid no attention to the lynching of five Negroes, or if it did it was either to ignore the murderous act or to applaud it.’<sup>43</sup>

African American newspapers also reported frequently on the events of the Mexican revolution itself, although their focus was centred on African American regiments that were stationed along the Mexican border.<sup>44</sup> The Crisis featured regular updates of the African American regiments sent to the Mexican border, with these articles showing a clear dislike for Mexicans in general through the use of offensive terminology and negative representations of Mexico. One such article published in The Crisis, not only refers to Mexicans in an offensive manner, but also comments on white soldiers’ suitability to fight in Mexico, arguing that African American soldiers were more suited to fighting in Mexico, as they were ‘physically constituted to “out Mex-the Mexicans”’. The sarcastic tone employed by Du Bois and his comments about how African Americans were ‘physically constituted’ to fight in Mexico highlights how he thought that African Americans were being sent to fight because white Americans didn’t want to.<sup>45</sup> The offensive language that Du Bois uses to describe Mexicans also shows the contempt that he had towards Mexicans and the situation as a whole. The article reads:

‘It will be pretty hard sledding for this breed of men (white men), wonderful as is its physical adaptability to the climes of all lands, chasing Mexicans hither and thither all day long and dodging their sniper bullets at night. But we have a breed within our borders, a breed physically constituted to out-Mex the Mexicans in the sort of fighting down there—that breed

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<sup>42</sup> The Chicago Defender, September 2, 1916

<sup>43</sup> The Crisis, Vol.11, March 1916, p.232

<sup>44</sup> The Crisis, Vol. 7, January 1914, p.125

<sup>45</sup> The Crisis, Vol.12, September 1916, p.238

being the Negro of the South. The real propriety of sending sure-enough Negroes to fight the half-caste, bastard breed of Mexico is clear enough.’<sup>46</sup>

The Chicago Defender also reported on events in Mexico and did so in a similar way to The Crisis, by publishing critical articles that presented Mexico in a negative manner. One such article, entitled ‘The Mexican Unpleasantness’, argued that ‘the officials who are running Mexico and those who are trying to run that portion of the globe, to say the least are not a bit nice in their treatment of Uncle Sam’ and how after refusing American aid ‘scowled and muttered something about letting every country fight their own battles’.<sup>47</sup> Not all articles concerning Mexico during the time of the Revolution, were critical, however. An article in The Chicago Defender on January 21 1911 reported that Mexico had given land to over 5,000 African Americans who didn’t want to return to the United States, with Mexico also planning to take in a further 500,000 African Americans from the South.<sup>48</sup> The stance of these articles towards Mexico highlights the complex relationship that African Americans must have had towards Mexicans. Whilst it is clear that they had a general dislike for Mexico and Mexicans due to the presence of African American regiments on the border, the articles which praised Mexico appear to have been published as a result of a country aiding African Americans in their fight against discrimination. As a few articles praised Mexican approaches to mob violence and criticised the United States’ relative indifference to lynching, the presence of articles praising Mexico for accepting African American migrants appears to have been done so as to shame the United States for not doing more to prevent mob violence from occurring in the first place.

The response of African American newspapers to the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities in the United States is rather complex. Whilst these newspapers neglected to report on the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities, they included stories about other ethnicities if an African American was either directly involved in the story, or if the events in the story could be directly related to African American experiences. Whilst this tendency to focus on African American affairs is unsurprising given that these publications were centred towards an African American readership, their ignoring of

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> The Chicago Defender, March 7, 1914

<sup>48</sup> The Chicago Defender, January 21, 1911

even the most infamous lynchings of non-black ethnic minorities indicates that even instances of mob violence towards these people was not of importance to African American newspapers. This, combined with the resentment that the wider African American community felt towards Mexicans as the result of the Mexican revolution and the US Government's continued attempts to prosecute those responsible for mob violence against Mexicans, meant that African American publications ignored instances of mob violence against Mexicans in the majority of cases in order to focus on events that they felt were more relevant to their readers, for example the promotion of anti-lynching legislation. The attitude taken by these publications seems to highlight that African Americans viewed lynching, and mob violence more generally, as a strictly African American affair. Aside from African American publications, there is evidence that white publications also discussed lynching, with the socialist newspaper *The New York Call* publishing an article on August 16, 1921 where they responded to an article from a Japanese newspaper that had discussed the lynching problem in America. The Japanese article wrote about the lynching in the same way in which African American publications had often done, describing it as a 'indelible stain on the name of America that in this enlightened age, [that] such crimes should take place publically and the offenders go unpunished'. However, the *New York Call* attacked the article, writing:

'We hardly need to say that we are in favour of exposing American hypocrisy. Nor is it out of place here to expose the utter hypocrisy of Japan which brutalises the Chinese, oppresses most shamefully the Koreans, crushes and abuses the Japanese working classes, and disenfranchises more Japanese – in Japan – than the United States disenfranchises negroes in the South.'<sup>49</sup>

The *New York Call's* response to this article suggests that white Americans would not tolerate other nations criticising the United States approach to lynching. In addition to the *New York Call's* attack on Japanese newspapers, the discussion of Japanese affairs also appears in African American newspapers. Examples of these discussions include *The Savannah Tribune* publishing an article

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<sup>49</sup> *New York Call*, August 16, 1921

detailing the Governor of California's wishes that anti-Japanese legislation should not be passed, and The Chicago Defender covering a range of topics from the hours and pay of the Japanese working class to an article which presented the idea of the Japanese being 'mixed race'.<sup>50</sup> The article in the Chicago Defender concerning Japanese ethnicity is particularly notable, as in this article The Chicago Defender not only discusses how the Japanese have many different 'strains of races' in their blood but also how 'there is no such thing as a perfectly pure unmixed race on the face of the Earth'.<sup>51</sup> As previously stated in this chapter, The Chicago Defender potentially used this article as a means to not only comment on the ethnicity of Japanese, but also to keep the article of relevance to their readers interests by highlighting that every single race cannot be 'pure' meaning that the discrimination African Americans faced in the United States had no foundation. If anything, the articles that African American newspapers published about the Japanese reinforces the fact that these publications only included stories if they could be directly related back to their readership and the belief of these publications that they alone could comment on lynching in the United States. These stories also highlight how African American newspapers used race as a means to create a discussion about issues that were of relevance to African Americans. The kidnapping and murder of Mariam Parker in 1927 also illustrates that violence was used by African American newspapers to generate a discussion about race. Mariam Parker, the daughter of a wealthy white banker in Los Angeles, was kidnapped on December 15, with a massive manhunt ensuing to find her captor and bring her back safely. However, these attempts were unsuccessful, as Mariam was murdered by her captor. The Chicago Defender published an article discussing the case, arguing that whilst the racial identity of the murderer appeared to be white, if the murderer were an African American the repercussions would have been far more severe:

'Had this 'fiend' been of dark skin, how different the whole affair would have been. The papers throughout the country would have used his color with glaring headlines: "A Negro Fiend", "A Black Brute!" All colored people would have been secretly or publically indicted,

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<sup>50</sup> Please see: Savannah Tribune (Georgia), January 30, 1909, Chicago Defender, October 28, 1911 and Chicago Defender, August 9, 1913

<sup>51</sup> Chicago Defender, August 9, 1913

according to location, but indicted, however, no matter wherever they lived. Maybe a race riot would have followed. But this cowardly brute, has no reason to fear drastic action. He will be tried according to the law. He will be given full rights as an American citizen.’<sup>52</sup>

By turning a story involving the kidnapping and murder of a young child into a commentary on the racial inequality facing African Americans, the article from *The Chicago Defender* highlights the African American press’s continual relation of stories involving non-black ethnic minorities back to affairs that concerned African Americans. In addition to this, various general interest stories concerning Mexicans were reported on by the African American press, with *The Chicago Defender* publishing a range of articles concerning Mexicans. Such articles included the story of a Mexican man being refused a marriage license to wed a black woman, an eighteen-year-old being held on a charge of murdering a Mexican, and an article detailing Mexican children who were ordered to leave their school and attend a school with African Americans instead.<sup>53</sup> It is worth noting that the majority of the stories involving Mexicans in *The Chicago Defender* all involved African Americans. The only exception to this was the article detailing the eighteen-year-old held on a murder charge. This brief article details how an 18-year-old killed a Mexican in self-defence:

‘Dallas, Tex., Oct. 25 – In an attempt to save his own life, Willie Moore, a 18 year old boy, shot an instantly killed Menzo Lopez, a Mexican. When officers searched the dead man they found a large knife and pistol. The boy was held on a charge of murder.’<sup>54</sup>

This article is notable not only for not making any reference to the color of Willie Moore, but for also declaring that he acted in self-defence. It is possible, however, that Willie Moore may have been an African American, which would explain its inclusion in *The Chicago Defender*. The description of the weapons held on Lopez’s person seems to suggest that the writer of this brief article believed that the boy was indeed in danger, even though Moore was now held on a murder charge. It should be noted that the language used in these articles was not derogatory towards Mexicans in any

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<sup>52</sup> *Chicago Defender*, December 31, 1927

<sup>53</sup> Please see *The Chicago Defender* (Big Weekend Edition) September 1, 1917, *The Chicago Defender* (National Edition) August 1, 1925 and *The Chicago Defender*, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1929.

<sup>54</sup> *Chicago Defender* (Big Weekend Edition) October 26<sup>th</sup>, 1918

way and that all of the articles were incredibly short. The article detailing a Mexican being refused a marriage license is the only article that makes any reference to race or colour, with the article detailing how the marriage license was denied due to a discussion as to whether a Mexican can be considered a white person. The article reads:

‘Frank Para, a Mexican, was denied the right to purchase a license to wed Jane Jones. When Para sought the certificate the question arose as to whether a Mexican is considered a white person. District Judge Webb answered affirmatively and the deputy refused to issue the permit to Para.’<sup>55</sup>

Overall, the short length of these reports highlights how any story that did not place African Americans at the centre was not perceived by the newspaper’s editors to have been of relevance or of interest to the *Chicago Defender’s* readership.<sup>56</sup> The lack of coverage of mob violence against non-black ethnic minorities, with these groups only being featured in African American publications when the story in question either involved African Americans, or could be related to African American experiences, is a continual occurrence during this period. Consequently, the next chapter will explore the trial and subsequent lynching of Leo Frank, a case covered in depth by the African American press due to the involvement of Jim Conley, an African American janitor. This chapter will highlight how African Americans responded to the events surrounding the case due to the involvement of Jim Conley and how they responded to other ethnic minorities when their own race was pitted against them.

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<sup>55</sup> Chicago Defender (Big Weekend Edition) September 1, 1917

<sup>56</sup> G. K. Berardi and T. W. Segady, *The Development of African American Newspapers in the American West*, p.96

## The Case of Leo Frank

The Leo Frank murder trial and his subsequent lynching in 1915 has been described by Jeffrey Melnick as ‘a perfect emblem for the erratic and dense history of Jews and African Americans’.<sup>1</sup> In 1913 Leo Frank, a Jewish factory manager, was accused of murdering Mary Phagan, a thirteen-year-old girl working in his factory. The only other suspect in the case was Jim Conley, an African American janitor with a criminal record who was working in the same factory as Frank. Conley accused Frank of the murder of Phagan, yet his alibi was suspect, as he had changed it a number of times throughout the trial. Frank’s defence team, led by Ruther Rosser, one of the most respected lawyers in the state, was unable to disprove Conley’s story, bolstering belief that Conley had told the truth.<sup>2</sup> The court chose to believe Conley’s alibi and Frank was sentenced to death by hanging. Frank made a series of appeals against his sentence for the next two years, eventually having his sentence commuted to life in prison on 21<sup>st</sup> June by the Governor of Georgia, John Slaton.<sup>3</sup> The commutation of Frank’s sentence resulted in mass outrage in Georgia, with an angry mob forming outside Slaton’s property threatening to lynch him if he showed himself. Slaton eventually declared martial law in the state of Georgia, becoming the first governor in American history to do so for his own protection.<sup>4</sup> Whilst Slaton himself was able to survive the backlash, Frank was unable to do so. On the night of 17<sup>th</sup> August, an angry mob stormed the jail where Frank was being held and lynched him.<sup>5</sup> Leo Frank’s trial and his subsequent lynching was followed in earnest by African American newspapers, their reaction to the case was ever evolving: originally they condemned Frank during his trial, but after his lynching they used his death as a means to denounce lynching in all its forms.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Melnick, “*The Night Witch Did It*”, p.113 For a general overview of the Leo Frank case see: C. Moseley, ‘The Case of Leo M. Frank, 1913-1915’, *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No.1 (March, 1967) pp.42-62. For an in depth analysis of the reaction of California progressives and California newspapers see: G. Henig, “He did not have a Fair Trial”: California Progressives React to the Leo Frank Case’, *California History*, Vol. 58, No.2 (Summer, 1979) pp.166-178

<sup>2</sup> P. Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, p.208

<sup>3</sup> *The Fairmount West Virginian*, June 21, 1915

<sup>4</sup> P. Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, p.213

<sup>5</sup> D. Brown and C. Webb, *Race in the American South, From Slavery to Civil Rights*, Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 1<sup>st</sup> ed (2007) p.203

<sup>6</sup> N. Maclean, ‘*The Leo Frank Case Reconsidered*’, p.924

The environment in which Leo Frank's trial took place was both intimidating and emotional.<sup>7</sup> The American public was gripped by the case and they eagerly awaited to find out whether Leo Frank or Jim Conley would be found guilty of the murder of Mary Phagan. Leo Frank's defence appealed directly to white supremacy by arguing that Jim Conley was not to be trusted as a result of his past demeanours and that he was, in the words of Frank's lawyer: 'a dirty, filthy, black, drunken lying nigger'<sup>8</sup>. Frank's defence was a safe move and one that arguably gave Frank the best chance of being acquitted. Not only was Conley a suspect character, but he had changed his alibi a number of times, implicating himself in Phagan's murder by announcing during his defence that he had helped Frank to dispose of Phagan's body.<sup>9</sup> In contrast to Conley's questionable character, Frank was a family man, a successful member of society with an unblemished criminal record who had always attested his innocence and had never once claimed to have been involved in Phagan's murder. On the other hand, Conley not only had a criminal record, but he also had a reputation for drunken behaviour. On the basis of the character of the two men at the centre of the trial, it appeared as though Frank would be declared innocent of all charges. Frank's defence, however, failed. The court chose to believe Conley's testimony and found Frank guilty of murder and sentenced him to death by hanging on 25<sup>th</sup> August 1913.<sup>10</sup> The outcome of the case is shocking in hindsight, as Conley had not only implicated himself in the case but had also changed his alibi a number of times. Arguably his alibi should have been dismissed immediately, however it was believed because it seemed too complicated a lie for a black person to make up.<sup>11</sup> The outcome of the case was extremely controversial and caused widespread shock throughout the United States. Of particular shock to white Americans was the fact that Frank had been convicted due to the testimony of an African American. The Chicago Day Book epitomized this shock, writing: 'Frank is probably the first white man in the history of the South who has been convicted largely on the testimony of a Negroe'.<sup>12</sup> Due to the shock surrounding the conviction of Frank, Steven Hertzberg has argued that Frank was convicted largely as a result of anti-

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<sup>7</sup> P. Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, p.208

<sup>8</sup> E. Levy, *Is The Jew a White Man?*, p.213

<sup>9</sup> J. Melnick, *The Night Witch Did it*, p.114

<sup>10</sup> *Daily Byran Eagle and Pilot (Texas)*, August 26, 1913

<sup>11</sup> P. Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, p.208

<sup>12</sup> *The Day Book (Illinois)*, Vol. 3, No 154, March 30, 1914

Semitic attitudes in Georgia. Hertzberg has argued that the willingness of the people of Georgia to take the word of Conley, an African American with a criminal record over that of a Jew with an unblemished criminal record, only served to indicate the depth of their prejudice against Frank.<sup>13</sup> It could also be argued that the prejudice of the court which convicted Frank was also responsible for not finding Conley guilty. Were Conley a white man, his alibi would have been viewed as inconsistent and would have in fact implicated him in the murder. Instead, due to white supremacist attitudes, Conley's repeated altering of his alibi was viewed as a sign of Frank's guilt, with the complexity of his defense being a sign of his innocence.

The controversy surrounding the Leo Frank case resulted in nationwide press coverage, with different aspects of the case appealed directly to Jews and African Americans.<sup>14</sup> With different features of the case appealing to different demographics, the Frank case was arguably the first well-focused incident of national interest in which the needs of blacks and Jews seemed to have been in direct conflict.<sup>15</sup> The African American press responded angrily to Frank's attempts to indict Conley for the murder of Phagan, with nearly every major African American newspaper following the case to some degree. The case was also followed by the NAACP and *The Crisis*, the monthly newspaper of the NAACP edited by W. E. B. Du Bois. From the first issue of *The Crisis* in November 1910, the aim of the newspaper was to serve as the official 'voice' of the NAACP, with the expressed aim of connecting the NAACP to the lives and experiences of African Americans in the United States.<sup>16</sup> The influence of Du Bois as *The Crisis* editor has been frequently debated amongst academics, with the idea that Du Bois published material which was in line with his own personal viewpoint, ignoring the views of the NAACP. As a consequence, this means that when researching African American reactions to the lynching of Leo Frank, the NAACP and *The Crisis* have to be treated as two different institutions, as their opinions regarding the case differ. Elliot M. Rudwick has argued that as editor of *The Crisis*, W. E. B. Du Bois, was 'determined that *The Crisis* would reflect his own ideology

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<sup>13</sup> S. Hertzberg, *Strangers Within the City Gate*, p.207

<sup>14</sup> N. Maclean, *The Leo Frank Case Reconsidered*, p.924

<sup>15</sup> E. Levy, *Is the Jew a White Man?* p.212

<sup>16</sup> P. Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, p.18

because he believed that the NAACP board, composed of varied personalities, was not truly able to express a set of well-defined opinions on specific issues'.<sup>17</sup> Du Bois believed that he alone best represented the interests of the African American readership and that outside interference from other NAACP board members would only be detrimental to his brand of 'militant journalism'<sup>18</sup>. Du Bois's belief that no one else in the NAACP was as capable of representing the interests of African Americans in *The Crisis* highlights the need to separate *The Crisis* and NAACP when researching the lynching of Leo Frank. By controlling the content of the journal and publishing material which he felt best suited his reader's interest, there is little doubt that the viewpoints of the NAACP were not conveyed in the journal. As a result of his overbearing control of *The Crisis*, the NAACP board was engaged in frequent disagreements with Du Bois over the relationship between the journal and the association.<sup>19</sup> Whilst *The Crisis* had become a journal of much esteem and prestige under the editorship of Du Bois, his writings were often controversial and resulted in conflict with various African American newspapers, bringing the NAACP into the disagreement as a result of their association with *The Crisis*.<sup>20</sup> One such example of controversy came in the March 1914 issue of *The Crisis*, where Du Bois launched an attack on African American newspapers, claiming that aside from the *Boston Guardian* and the *Cleveland Gazette*, no other publications had promoted 'staunch advocacy of the fundamental principles of freedom of justice'.<sup>21</sup> This claim caused an outcry from African American publications and journals, with the *Washington Bee* publishing an article claiming that Du Bois was not a civil rights activist, rather a man paid a 'thousand dollars a year for his ideals'.<sup>22</sup> The controversial articles which Du Bois published only served to damage the NAACP's image and credibility and strain relations between Du Bois and the NAACP board.<sup>23</sup> Certain sections

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<sup>17</sup> E. Rudwick, *W. E. B. Du Bois in the role of the Crisis Editor*, p.214

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> J. White, *Black Leadership in America*, p.57-58

<sup>20</sup> G. Jonas, p.24 and W. J. Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought*, Frederick Douglas, Alexander Crummell, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey. Cambridge University Press: New York, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (2004) p.219

<sup>21</sup> *The Crisis* Volume 7, March 1914, p.240

<sup>22</sup> *Washington Bee*, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1914. For examples of newspapers that agreed with Du Bois's criticisms please see *Savannah Tribune* (Georgia) 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1914 and *The Chicago Defender* (Big Weekend Edition) 7<sup>th</sup> March, 1914.

<sup>23</sup> G. Jonas, *Freedom's Sword*, p.24 and J. White, *Black Leadership in America*, p.58. It should be noted that the NAACP passed a resolution in 1914 praising the African American press to ease tension caused by Du Bois's provocative writings (also p.58)

of the NAACP board began to dislike Du Bois in the wake of his publications, with Oswald Garrison Villard taking particular offence to Du Bois' editorship of *The Crisis*. Eventually, as a result of the controversies that Du Bois had caused, Villard requested that his name be taken off the masthead as a contributing editor of *The Crisis* and in 1915 he threatened to turn his wealthy friends who had contributed to the NAACP away from the organization.<sup>24</sup> Despite the fact the NAACP and *The Crisis* were considered synonymous with each other; their frequent disagreements over content published in *The Crisis* render them as two different centres of African American thought. With regards to the trial and lynching of Leo Frank, their responses should not be considered one and the same as a direct result of the conflict between Du Bois and the NAACP. Du Bois' domineering role as *The Crisis* editor can be directly linked to the way other African American publications chose what content to publish in their papers. Du Bois, like African American newspapers, published material that he thought would best represent and would be of interest to African Americans, and African American publications only chose and published material that would be of interest to their readers. This practice of only publishing material that was within the interests of African Americans is similar to the NAACP's approach towards non-black ethnic minorities during the 1910s through to the events at Breckenridge. Early in their history, the NAACP frequently under reported on and neglected to investigate incidents involving non-black ethnic minorities, focusing instead on African Americans. It was only after Breckenridge, when it was within the interests of the NAACP to focus on discrimination against Mexicans, that this began to change.

The content published by Du Bois was remarkably similar to content published by other African American newspapers during this time period. African American newspapers published material designed to grab the attention of their readers, with strong, opinionated articles tailor-made for their target audience. Gunnar Myrdal commented on the similarities in the content which African American newspapers published, noting that it was similar all over the United States because of the demands of the reading public and the similar social environments the journalists found themselves

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<sup>24</sup> R. Wolters, *Du Bois and His Rivals*, p.83

in.<sup>25</sup> It was responding to these social environments that resulted in such provocative and opinionated articles from the African American press. African American newspapers were designed to provide the reader with information that concerned the African American community, countering the stereotypes perpetuated by the communities as a whole, which were often fostered by the white press.<sup>26</sup> This explains why the African American press focused on the role Jim Conley played in the Leo Frank case from the outset, as it appealed directly to African Americans interests more than Leo Frank did. African American newspapers were also dependent on subscribers to remain solvent, meaning that they had to focus on issues and stories that would be of interest to their readers. Consequently, had they not written about Jim Conley, there would arguably have been no interest from the African American public. There was a pressure on these newspapers to publish content which their target audience could engage with and would find interesting.<sup>27</sup> As a result of the social environment which African American editors found themselves in and the pressure to publish relevant material for their readers or risk going bankrupt, it is little wonder that Du Bois was in frequent conflict with the NAACP board, who didn't approve of the content he wrote.

The content African American newspapers published during the trial of Leo Frank in 1913 was similar all over the United States. Eugene Levy has argued that 'Black Americans, in reading the white press, quickly came to feel that the whites were again looking for a black scapegoat'.<sup>28</sup> This attitude is certainly represented in *The Crisis*, with Du Bois writing in the August 1913 issue: 'Atlanta tried to lynch a Negroe for the alleged murder of a young white girl, and police inquisition nearly killed the man. A white degenerate has now been indicted for the crime, which he committed under the most revolting circumstances'.<sup>29</sup> This defence of Conley arose from the familiarity of the Leo Frank case to African Americans. African Americans had long been convicted of crimes when there was no real evidence against them, simply because a white person claimed they were responsible. In the Frank case, however, there was evidence to convict Conley, it was simply overlooked by the

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<sup>25</sup> G. Mydral, *An American Dilemma*, p.910

<sup>26</sup> G. K. Berardi and T. W. Segady, *The Development of African American Newspapers in the American West*, p.96

<sup>27</sup> M. E. Stovall, *"The Chicago Defender" in the Progressive Era*, p.160

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p.215

<sup>29</sup> *The Crisis*, Volume 6, September 1913, p. 221

prosecution and the police. This makes one question whether the African American press were defending Conley because they believed he was innocent, or simply because they didn't wish to see another African American convicted and sent to death after he had been accused by a white man. From an article that Du Bois re-printed from the Columbia State, it can be argued that Du Bois supported the notion that as Frank had been sentenced to death, he should accept his punishment. This extract argued that Leo Frank, as a convicted murderer, was no less deserving of death than men who had lynched an African American in Georgia.<sup>30</sup> Du Bois regularly cited this newspaper in *The Crisis* and it is possible that he may have been a subscriber to the paper in order for him to have known of this article. The fact that it was printed in the 'Opinion' segment of *The Crisis*, a section which contained extracts of other African American newspapers and correspondence which represented the same viewpoint as *The Crisis*, reinforces the notion that Du Bois agreed with the extract for its warrant inclusion in his journal.<sup>31</sup> The series of appeals that Frank made against his sentence were also covered by Du Bois, with the August 1915 issue of *The Crisis* carrying an article that discussed the commutation of Frank's sentence to life imprisonment. In this article, Du Bois writes:

'The Frank case only offers illustration of the truth that in the South all things may be brought about by an appeal to prejudice. This case differs from similar cases principally in that the victim was a Jew instead of a Negro and that a governor had courage enough at the last to resist the popular clamour for his blood and base his decision on the evidence in the case. The case also illustrates strikingly the inadequacy of our legal machinery in solving questions of justice. Frank escaped a legal lynching by the narrowest possible margin. His sentence was commuted by Governor Slaton only a few hours before the time appointed for his death. His appeal had been carried to the Supreme Court of the United States. The majority of the body like that of the State Supreme Court based its adverse decision entirely on points of law.'<sup>32</sup>

Du Bois's response to the commutation of Frank's sentence was one of relief that Governor Slaton had the courage to commute Frank's sentence, whilst also discussing the inadequacies of the legal

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<sup>30</sup> *The Crisis*, Volume 10, June 1915, p.72

<sup>31</sup> D. L. Lewis, W. E. B. Du Bois, *Biography of a Race*, p.411

<sup>32</sup> *The Crisis*, Volume 10, August 1915 No 4, p.177

system in Georgia. Du Bois's commentary on the commutation of Frank's sentence was arguably restrained in comparison to the *Chicago Defender's* response, who wrote an article about the attempts on Slaton's life:

'They believe that the executive should not have interfered with the provisions of the court and believe it so strongly that they have made several attempts to lynch the governor. This lawless mob spirit isn't a new thing at all, it is only breaking out in a new place. A habit once formed is hard to break, it grows and fastens itself deep in till it becomes a very part and parcel of an individual.'<sup>33</sup>

Unlike Du Bois who had not commented on the actual attempts on Slaton's life, the *Chicago Defender* attacked the 'lynching culture' in Georgia, with their statement that the lawless mob spirit not being a 'new thing at all', referencing the number of African Americans that had fallen victim to lynch mobs. After the lynching of Leo Frank, Du Bois began to use Frank's lynching to commentate on the lynching and discrimination facing African Americans.<sup>34</sup> In the October issue of *The Crisis*, Du Bois published a letter from a white Jewish man, titled 'The Black Franks', where the author discussed his opinion of the Leo Frank case:

'I want to assure you and your readers that I am fully in accord with all those who now condemn the Georgia mob law. But as a white man of the Jewish race I am somewhat more consistent than the prominent people who now express their indignation so vehemently against the "lower element" of Georgia whose prejudices were inflamed by designing agitators. How about the inflamed passions in the thousands of cases where Negroes, men and women, were murdered by lynching mobs, generally even without the chance of a trial?'<sup>35</sup>

With the publication of this letter, Du Bois must have felt that the author's viewpoints were in accord with his own, as he didn't comment on the letter, or discuss it further in the issue. With the publication of this letter Du Bois was drifting attention away from the lynching of Leo Frank, instead

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<sup>33</sup> The *Chicago Defender*, Jul 10, 1915

<sup>34</sup> See: *The Day Book* (Illinois), Vol 4. No 273, August 17, 1915, *The West Virginian*, August 17, 1915

<sup>35</sup> *The Crisis* Volume 10, October 1915, p.291

focusing on the lynching of African Americans, who unlike Frank, were murdered without a trial. This content was also of direct interest to the readers of *The Crisis*, as Du Bois had turned the lynching of Frank into an event which they could directly relate to through their own experiences of racial prejudice. In this instance, Du Bois had kept to the original NAACP mantra by profiling African American experiences and their experiences of racial discrimination.<sup>36</sup>

There are a number of similarities between the writings of Du Bois in *The Crisis* and that of other African American newspapers towards the Leo Frank case. Whilst many African American newspapers were quick to condemn Frank when he attempted to indict Conley during his trial, their attitude quickly turned to remorse after he was lynched, expressing sympathy at his death yet shifting the attention away from the lynching of Frank and focused instead on the lynching of African Americans. The *Chicago Defender*, like *The Crisis*, keenly followed the Leo Frank case, first focusing on the role Jim Conley played in the case. The *Chicago Defender*, like other African American publications, felt that Conley was being made a scapegoat during the case.<sup>37</sup> This belief is highlighted in an article titled 'The Leo Frank Case Again' published on 28<sup>th</sup> November, 1914. This article discusses the appeals Frank had made against his sentence, with the article stating:

'The case of Leo M. Frank, under sentence of death in Atlanta, GA., for the murder of Mary Phagan, has been carried to the Supreme Court. Whether that body will sit in action upon it remains to be soon. Should Justice Lamar, who is assigned to the circuit in which Georgia is located, grant the writ to the case would go on the court's docket and would not be heard for about two years unless advanced. In the meantime, in all probability, they will skirmish around and try to find some Afro-American to fasten the blame on as they did before.'<sup>38</sup>

There is an underlying tone of resentment towards the attempted indictment of Conley in this passage, a feeling which was almost certainly a direct result of Frank's virulent racist offense against him during the trial.<sup>39</sup> The *Chicago Defender* also used the Leo Frank case as a means to highlight the

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<sup>36</sup> P. Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, p.23

<sup>37</sup> M. E. Stovall, *The Chicago Defender in the Progressive Era*, p.215

<sup>38</sup> *The Chicago Defender*, Nov 28, 1914

<sup>39</sup> N. Maclean, *The Leo Frank Case Reconsidered*, p.925

discrimination and racial violence that African Americans had to endure. An article from May 29 entitled: 'The Leo Frank Case Arouses the Entire World' features a passage which states: 'It is our hope, however, that the best conscience of the Americans will be aroused at this time to Southern injustice toward Afro-Americans in the same degree of intensity and interest that the proposed hanging of Frank has occasioned'.<sup>40</sup> In the same way as Du Bois had used the lynching of Leo Frank to shift attention to the lynching of African Americans who had been killed without the prospect of a trial, The Chicago Defender used the uproar around Frank's proposed hanging to express their hope that the public awareness of the Leo Frank case would soon shift its attention to the suffering of African Americans. This article also contains a passage which highlights how the opinions of The Chicago Defender and The Crisis differed. Whilst Du Bois had re-printed an article arguing that Leo Frank should be hanged as a convicted murderer, The Chicago Defender wrote that they agreed with the thousands of letters sent to Governor Slaton calling for Frank to be spared the death penalty, arguing instead that solitary confinement would be a fitting punishment.<sup>41</sup> After the lynching of Leo Frank, The Chicago Defender used Frank's murder as a means to highlight the plight of African Americans in a similar way to The Crisis. The Chicago Defender wrote on August 21<sup>st</sup> 1915:

'But perhaps after all, the death of Leo Frank may only be a sacrifice, an offering at the tribunal of justice which may turn the eyes of the nation upon the beastly practices the entire south inflicts upon the colored man.'<sup>42</sup>

Various other African American newspapers reacted to the lynching in the same way, with the Kansas newspaper the Topeka Plaindealer (Kansas) expressing regret for the lynching of Leo Frank, whilst simultaneously using his lynching and the press coverage of his death to highlight how African American victims of lynching received little press coverage or sympathy from the white press:

'Colored men and women have been lynched, burned and tortured in every conceivable manner in the Southland, yet we have out first time to hear or see an expression of

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<sup>40</sup> The Chicago Defender, May 28, 1915

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> The Chicago Defender, August 21, 1915

disapproval from the white pulpit, press or even the officers of the law. But when a popular white man is lynched, glaring headlines of condemnation of the uncivilized people of the South appear in all the papers and every pulpit is bitterly denouncing their action.’<sup>43</sup>

The Washington Bee’s reaction to the Leo Frank case differs from the reactions of The Chicago Defender and The Crisis in that it directly compares Leo Frank’s struggles to that of African Americans:

‘Whether Frank committed murder or didn’t commit murder, he did not have a fair and impartial trial because mob law reigned at the time of his trial. The presiding judge stated that he had doubts as to the guilt of Leo Frank and if that is a fact why hadn’t the Governor of Georgia a right to express his doubt as to his guilt or innocence. Frank was unfortunate by being a Jew. He had no more chance of acquittal than a Negroe whose innocence is often established before “Judge Lynch” renders a decision.’<sup>44</sup>

With their argument that Frank did not have a fair and impartial trial due to the mob action and pressures facing the court, the Washington Bee’s opinion was notably different to The Chicago Defender and Du Bois. Whilst Du Bois didn’t comment on the aspects of the trial, instead focusing on Jim Conley’s role in the case, The Chicago Defender argued that as Frank had been given a fair trial, he must hang for the murder of the Phagan girl.<sup>45</sup> The extract also has sympathetic undertones, suggesting that African Americans and Jewish people were on similar ground when it came down to discrimination. Jeffrey Melnick supports this idea by arguing that during the Frank case, African Americans and Jewish people could have been seen as intimately related, with the two groups being brought together by their respective representatives in Leo Frank and Jim Conley.<sup>46</sup> This extract displays the similarities between African Americans and Jewish people as well as the discrimination

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<sup>43</sup> Topeka Plaindealer (Kansas), August 20, 1915

<sup>44</sup> Washington Bee, June 26, 1915

<sup>45</sup> The Chicago Defender, May 1, 1915

<sup>46</sup> J. Melnick, The Night Witch Did it, p.115

that both groups faced by arguing that as a Jew, Leo Frank had no more chance of acquittal than an African American.

In addition to African American newspapers and issues of *The Crisis*, anti-lynching Investigative files of the NAACP were searched for references to the Leo Frank case. Upon examination of the NAACP's lynching record of 1915, a reference to the lynching of Leo Frank was found, although it is altogether brief: 'August 17, Leo M. Frank, alleged murder, Georgia.'<sup>47</sup> Noticeably, it is referenced that Frank was lynched for 'alleged murder'. This implies a sense of ambiguity surrounding the Frank case and not only highlights the difference in opinion between the official NAACP files and *The Crisis*, but also suggests that the NAACP had doubt over whether Frank had committed the crime. Unlike the rest of the lynching victims included in the 1915 record, Frank's 'alleged crime' received nationwide attention and the fact he was found guilty in a court of law should have left no doubt in the NAACP's mind that he was guilty. Furthermore, their labelling of his crime as 'alleged' contradicts Du Bois's earlier statement in *The Crisis* where he had all but confirmed his belief in Frank's guilt by labelling him a 'white degenerate' who had murdered Phagan in the most 'revolting circumstances', a statement which seemingly justifying his belief in Frank's guilt. The labelling of Frank's crime as 'alleged murder' also implies doubt as to whether Conley was innocent.<sup>48</sup> In hindsight, it appears as though Conley had committed the murder, as not only had the police and prosecution failed to examine his criminal past, but fingerprints were not taken from the crime scene before it was disturbed. There were also two 'murder notes' left at the crime scene, which incriminated Conley, but were instead used to convict Frank.<sup>49</sup> It is likely that most educated people at the time who didn't possess an anti-Semitic attitude would have had no doubt over Conley's guilt. This would explain why Du Bois expressed regret over the lynching of Frank in *The Crisis*, then shifted focus to the plight of African Americans so that he could draw attention away from the fact there were doubts surrounding Conley's testimony.

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<sup>47</sup> Anti-Lynching Campaign correspondence and list of lynchings, 1915-1916, Jan 01, 1915 - Dec 31, 1916 in Papers of the NAACP, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series A: Anti-Lynching Investigative Files, 1912-1953

<sup>48</sup> *The Crisis*, Volume 6, September 1913, p. 221

<sup>49</sup> P. Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, p.210

Examination of African American newspapers, *The Crisis* and NAACP files has revealed extensive African American coverage of the Leo Frank case. There was only interest in the case from African Americans, as the events of the trial and Frank's later lynching could be used to highlight discrimination and mob violence that African Americans faced. African American opinions towards the Leo Frank case is best exemplified in an article published in *The Chicago Defender* by Mrs K. J. Bills, where she states that she has only kept up with the case 'because her race was implicated'.<sup>50</sup> This implication of Jim Conley in the case was used by African American newspapers as a means to highlight how an African American was having the blame shifted onto him in order to save a white man's life. Efforts to prevent Conley from being indicted even included Mrs K. J. Bills requesting that her readers 'flood Georgia with letters in Conley's behalf, just as the white people have for Frank'.<sup>51</sup> Upon the lynching of Frank, the focus changed from the injustice that Conley had suffered to a discussion of mob violence against African Americans, with the hope that Frank's lynching would raise awareness of the discrimination they faced. Ultimately, the Leo Frank case serves as an example of how different aspects of a murder investigation appeal directly to different demographics. The reporting of Frank's lynching had to focus on the African American experience of mob violence, as African American newspapers and particularly *The Crisis*, were creating a sense of African American community through the publishing of stories that appealed to the African American public. These newspapers needed to publish content that would appeal to their readers and would reinforce the idea of a wider African American community, as the African American public would arguably not have been as interested in an event that was unable to be related to African American experiences.

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<sup>50</sup> *The Chicago Defender*, June 26, 1915

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

## Conclusion

The research conducted for this thesis has resulted in a number of possible reasons as to why African Americans neglected to report or respond to the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities. It should be noted, however, that nearly all of the references to non-black ethnic minorities in both African American publications and in the NAACP papers were of Mexicans, so whilst clear arguments and assumptions can be made regarding African American stances towards this ethnic group, their reactions to other ethnicities are harder to ascertain. However, it appears clear that African Americans were not interested in researching or reporting on events involving other ethnicities unless African Americans were involved in the incident. This is evident not only in major African American publications, such as *The Crisis* and other newspapers, but also in the NAACP's own anti-lynching investigative files. The vast under-reporting of these acts of violence was perhaps predictable, as African American publications would not have been willing to publish articles detailing these acts of violence if they believed their audience would not have had enough interest. Instead, the purpose and aim of African American newspapers was to report on events that were of relevance to the African American community and to praise African American achievements and define worthwhile goals for the community.<sup>1</sup> Evidently, reporting on instances of mob violence against non-black ethnic minorities would not have been relevant, or of interest to African American newspapers, as they needed to publish content that would appeal to their readers, namely content that included African Americans. This was apparent during the trial of Leo Frank, where a letter published in the *Chicago Defender*, detailed the response of Mrs K. J. Bills to the case, where she declared that she had only followed the case due to the involvement of Jim Conley, an African American.<sup>2</sup> This insistence on prioritizing African American interests above that of other ethnicities is merely in keeping with the agenda of African American publications, as the main purpose of these papers was to prioritize stories related to African Americans rather than non-black ethnic minorities.

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<sup>1</sup>G. K. Berardi and T. W. Segady, *The Development of African-American Newspapers in the American West*, p.102 and M. E. Stovall, *The "Chicago Defender" in the Progressive Era*, p.160

<sup>2</sup> *The Chicago Defender*, June 26, 1915

The lack of articles in African American newspapers that detail the lynching of Mexicans is more surprising, as African American newspapers certainly held an interest in Mexican affairs, through their following of the Mexican revolution and Mexican general interest stories. That they would report on anything but the lynching of Mexicans, considering what they did report on, is unexpected, especially when the number of Mexican lynching victims is considered. Webb and Carrigan have estimated that around 142 Mexicans were lynched in the United States between 1901-1939, with at least 124 of these Mexicans having been lynched as a direct result of the rise in anti-Mexican sentiment following raids by Mexican bandits and revolutionaries along the Texan border during the Mexican Revolution.<sup>3</sup> White newspapers frequently produced articles detailing mob violence against Mexicans, particularly after the diplomatic intervention by the Mexican government to secure indemnities for victims of mob violence. However, whilst African American publications did comment on instances of Mexican mob violence, these articles were short and were lacking detail. When these publications did report on Mexican affairs, in particular the raids of Mexican bandits, they were often used, as *The Crisis* wrote, to turn attention away from the ‘angry tide swelling and growing against the Mexicans’ and instead used to direct attention towards white ‘American bandits’ who lynched African Americans in the United States without incurring the same level of hatred and resentment that had been aimed at the Mexicans.<sup>4</sup> Whilst it is unknown whether African Americans disliked Mexicans, DeArmond’s letter to Du Bois, arguing that the ‘dirtiest Mexican’ had complete freedom in the South, whereas African Americans faced white oppression, certainly suggests that there was a level of resentment.<sup>5</sup> Whilst DeArmond’s letter is not necessarily representative of wider African American thought, the fact that his letter was written in 1921 provides an indication as to why he may have held such resentment towards Mexicans. During the 1920s the Mexican Government placed exceeding amounts of pressure on state and federal authorities in the United States to intervene in cases where Mexicans had been victims of racially motivated attacks. The early 1920s also saw the

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<sup>3</sup> W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb, *The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States*, p.423

<sup>4</sup> *The Crisis*, Volume 11, March 1915, p.232

<sup>5</sup> DeArmond, Fred. Letter from Fred DeArmond to the editor of *The Crisis*, February 6, 1921. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries

creation of La Comision Honorifica, an organization which served as an important communication link between consuls and Mexican citizens, facilitating action against racial discrimination.<sup>6</sup> The Mexican government's successful and publically visible attempts to fight racial discrimination and the steps they took to protect their citizens must have been noticed by African Americans. It can be speculated that African Americans were perhaps envious of the Mexican Government's success in fighting discrimination and securing indemnities for victims of mob violence as African Americans had struggled to prevent mob violence and discrimination, with the United States government frequently ignoring their cries for justice and the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill failing to pass.

African American publications that called attention to the fact that the United States government cared more for Mexicans than their own citizens who were frequently victimized only underlines the general feeling that African Americans were not cared for in their own country. Carrigan and Webb have argued, however, that African American journalists were unaware of the scale of anti-Mexican violence that was occurring throughout the United States. It could be theorised that had the full scale of atrocities been known, then a closer union of the two groups like the cooperation seen at Breckenridge may have been possible.<sup>7</sup> It can be speculated that the lack of mention of instances of Mexican lynching coincided with the decline in the lynching of Mexicans in the United States. The diplomatic protests of the Mexican government against the lynching of Mexican citizens in the United States, coupled with the widespread damnation from the white press towards such lynchings contributed to a decline in mob violence against Mexicans.<sup>8</sup> Although a recorded 124 Mexicans were lynched between 1911 and 1920, the figure began to drastically fall in the following decade, with only 10 lynchings of Mexicans having been recorded between 1921 and 1930.<sup>9</sup> The last known recorded lynching of a Mexican that took place in the United States was that of Rafael Benavides on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1928. Carrigan and Webb have argued that whilst this lynching was the last known community-sanctioned lynching of a Mexican, Mexicans still lived with the

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<sup>6</sup> W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, p.147-148

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p.155

<sup>8</sup> W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, p.141

<sup>9</sup> W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb, *The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States*, p.423

danger of lynching, as such attacks took place surreptitiously, instead of in public view. Evidence of these attacks however, was unable to be located during the research for this thesis.<sup>10</sup> Although lynchings continued to take place, the fact that they took place away from public view means that reporting on them would have been near on impossible for any publication, let alone African American newspapers who held little interest in lynching or discrimination towards Mexicans unless their own race was implicated in the event. As a consequence of their lack of interest and the fact there was likely some resentment towards Mexicans, the fact that African American publications rarely commented on instances of Mexican lynching is to be expected.

When considering the reasons for the lack of African American responses to mob violence against non-black ethnic minorities, it is worth noting that African Americans were also capable of discrimination and racially motivated attack against other ethnicities, often motivated to do so by the same reasons that led to African Americans themselves being victims of racial violence. In addition to his work researching mob violence against Mexicans in the United States, Webb has also investigated the discrimination Sicilian immigrants faced in the United States between 1886 and 1910, investigated the reasons why this group was the target for such discrimination, whilst also discussing the African American reaction to this discrimination. Webb's findings show a similar reaction of the African American press towards Sicilian lynchings to their reaction of other non-black ethnic minorities. Whilst African American newspapers condemned the lynching of Sicilians, African Americans were also concerned that they would lose their livelihoods if they were forced to compete with the cheap labour that the Sicilian immigrants could provide. As a consequence of this, African American leaders orchestrated a propaganda campaign against the Sicilians, depicting them as criminals with no respect for the law.<sup>11</sup> This approach is similar to the response of *The Crisis* and other African American publications to the lynching of other non-black ethnic minorities. Whilst these publications would actively denounce lynching and mob violence, they would also promote African American interests at the same time. The act of denouncing mob violence against Sicilians yet at the same time publicising

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.160

<sup>11</sup> C. Webb, *The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South*, p.61

them as criminals in order to protect African American economic interests reflects the wider reaction of African Americans to mob violence. Du Bois reflected this approach when he reported on the lynching of two Sicilians in Tampa, Florida in the November 1910 issue of *The Crisis*. He wrote:

‘Two Italians were lynched in Florida. The Italian Government protested, but it was found that they were naturalized Americans. The inalienable right of every free American citizen to be lynched without tiresome investigation and penalties is one which the families of the lately deceased doubtless deeply appreciate.’<sup>12</sup>

Webb has also uncovered evidence that African Americans were actively involved in the lynching of Sicilian immigrants, as several photographs taken clearly show African Americans involved in the mob. The Italian consul of New Orleans, Pasquale Corte, was also reportedly attacked by three African American men and had to draw a revolver in order to defend himself.<sup>13</sup> Webb’s research into African American discontent and violence towards Sicilian immigrants reveals similarities to another group whom African Americans held a level of resentment towards: Mexicans. Both Sicilian immigrants and Mexicans were taking jobs that had traditionally been held by African Americans; they were preferred as they were a cheaper option. That African Americans held resentment towards both of these groups after they had migrated into the United States and had taken up jobs traditionally held by African Americans shows that the origin and reasons for mob violence are similar wherever there is mass migration.<sup>14</sup> De la Roche has argued that migration was a key factor behind an increase in lynchings, writing that areas which experienced high levels of migration from African Americans also experienced increased rates of lynchings.<sup>15</sup> The reasons behind African American publications’ lack of reporting on incidents of violence towards ethnic minorities, is less clear however. Whereas white publications would report on incidents of violence against Mexicans and other minorities, there were a multitude of reasons as to why African American publications neglected to report on such

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<sup>12</sup> *The Crisis*, Volume 1, November 1910, p.10 and C. Webb, *The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South*, p.62

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p.63

<sup>14</sup> W. D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, p.174-175

<sup>15</sup> Roberta Senechal de la Roche, ‘The Sociogenesis of Lynching’, in *Under Sentence of Death, Lynching in the South*, W. Fitzhugh Brundage ed, The University of North Carolina Press: London, 1997 p.61

incidents. An insistence on reporting on African American issues to appeal to subscribers who would hold little interest in other ethnicities, as well as possible resentment towards Mexicans, led to a reluctance to publish stories unless African Americans were involved or would benefit in some way. The publication of such stories was not on the agenda of African American newspapers, as it would not have been of much interest to their readership, who arguably would be much more interested in stories about African American issues and accomplishments.

When considering the overall response of African Americans to the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities, one must consider the environment in which African Americans were in during the early part of the twentieth century and how this environment affected the aims and direction of the NAACP and various African American publications. Quite simply, African Americans were more focused on their own fight against lynching and discrimination and held little interest in the struggles of other ethnic groups unless it was relatable to their agenda. This explains why African American publications did not report on lynchings of non-black ethnic minorities, as there would not have been enough of an audience for it. The lack of articles or editorials about even the most notorious lynchings of non-black ethnic minorities reflects this. Even when such an event was reported, the article used the event to draw attention away from the incident itself and back to the injustices suffered by African Americans. In one sense, African American publications only felt the need to report on these lynchings when they were able to use such events to further their own cause. This approach of only responding to events that would publicise their campaigns or appeal to African Americans is again found in the NAACP's sporadic reporting of such instances of mob violence. Jonas has argued that the NAACP's agenda during the early years of the organization's existence was mainly to defend African Americans against the injustices of discrimination and to lobby the courts to make lynching a federal crime.<sup>16</sup> Although the NAACP were committed to making lynching a federal crime, their main focus was not to protect non-black ethnic minorities, but African Americans. Investigating the lynching or discrimination of other ethnic groups was never the main priority of the NAACP, unless their organizational goals were able to benefit from such an investigation. The Breckenridge case

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<sup>16</sup> G. Jonas, *Freedom's Sword*, p.2

highlights this, where the NAACP's cooperation with the Mexican embassy in Washington only arose as a result of African American and Mexican needs being the same. It can be reasonably assumed that had African Americans not been expelled from the town along with Mexicans, then the NAACP would have taken little to no interest in the event and would not have cooperated with the Mexican embassy. Although the NAACP and African American publications did not prioritize the reporting and investigation of the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities, however, they occasionally included brief reports of non-black ethnic minorities being lynched. Du Bois for example, occasionally included brief mentions of non-black ethnic minorities having been lynched or discriminated against in the *Crisis*, although the fact these mentions were brief and didn't contain much information reinforces the idea that they were not of significant importance to Du Bois.<sup>17</sup> What is clear, however, is that whilst the *Crisis* rarely reported on incidents involving non-black ethnic minorities, African American publications like the *Chicago Defender* would report on incidents involving Mexicans, suggesting that the *Chicago Defender* must at least have had some interest in Mexican affairs. It is also worth noting that the NAACP did seek out lynching records and statistics from not only the Mexican embassy, but also from another civil rights organization, the Tuskegee institute. These requests for more information indicate that through the constant seeking of lynching statistics, the NAACP must have held an interest in the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities, if only for the purpose of updating their records.<sup>18</sup> Whilst the NAACP's lack of information regarding Mexican lynching victims is to be expected given the direction and aims of the NAACP during the first decade of its formation, the fact that there was increased cooperation between the organisation and the Mexican embassy in Washington following the Breckenridge case highlights how African American organizations were willing to respond to cases of Mexican discrimination when African Americans

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<sup>17</sup> Please see Antonio Gómez section of this paper for examples of African American newspapers reporting the lynching of a Mexican p.21-22. For descriptions of lynching and violence against non-black ethnic minorities in *The Crisis*, please see: *The Crisis*, Volume 1, November 1910, p.10 for the lynching of two Sicilian's in Tampa, *The Crisis*, Volume 3, April 1912, p. 233 for a description of a trial involving Texans who were accused of murdering a Mexican and *The Crisis*, Volume 9, December 1914, p.64 for a description of an Italian murdered for asking for a cigarette.

<sup>18</sup> Anti-Lynching Campaign correspondence and press releases, Jan 01, 1924 - Jun 30, 1924 in Papers of the NAACP, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series A: Anti-Lynching Investigative Files, 1912-1953

were involved as well. Through the NAACP's enquiry of Mexican lynching victims and request for statistics detailing these murders, it shows that the NAACP was becoming more proactive in terms of actively seeking out and recording episodes of violence against Mexicans, although whether this increase in seeking out statistics was as a result of Mexican and African American cooperation following Breckenridge or as a result of the NAACP needing statistics to highlight the prominence of lynching in American society, is up for debate.

Overall, the response of African Americans towards the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities seems to have been fairly uniform among the NAACP, *The Crisis* and various African American newspapers. The focus and direction of these groups between 1909 and 1939 was all incredibly similar, with the NAACP focusing on anti-lynching campaigns and fighting the segregation of African Americans, whilst *The Crisis* and African American publications set out to profile African American experiences and create a sense of community amongst African Americans.<sup>19</sup> As a consequence, reporting on incidents of mob violence against other ethnicities was not of paramount importance to these groups. Whilst the NAACP did include ethnic minorities such as Mexicans in their lynching statistics, a comparison of NAACP lynching statistics to Webb and Carrigan's own research into the rates of Mexican lynching has shown that Mexicans were most certainly under-represented in NAACP lynching statistics. There is also no record of the NAACP investigating instances of mob violence against Mexicans until the Breckenridge incident in 1922, with the cooperation between these two groups only happening as a result of African American involvement in the case. Evidently, the NAACP only felt the need to research and investigate Mexican lynchings when it was in their interests. Similarly, African American newspapers neglected to report on the lynching of non-black ethnic minorities, with such incidents only reported on when it could be related to African American experiences, so that their audience could engage with it. The trial of Leo Frank also perfectly demonstrates African American attitudes towards non-black ethnic minorities during this period, with the African American press defending Jim Conley and attacking Leo Frank, until Frank's lynching, where they expressed regret at his death and used his lynching as a means to

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<sup>19</sup> P. Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, p.23

highlight the plight of African Americans. After all, African Americans were lynched at a much higher rate than any other ethnic group and were subject to more discrimination, so the focusing of these groups on African American issues was merely an attempt to bring to light the suffering of African Americans and attempt to end racial discrimination and lynching.

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