

REVIEW OF *THE LYNCHING*

An absolutely fascinating book revolving around an absolutely horrifying event.

In 1981, some KKK members wanted to kill a Black man to send a message, and they picked one completely at random: 19-year-old Michael Donald. This book covers the murder and the prosecution of the murderers, but its main focus is the civil suit litigated by the SPLC which succeeded in holding the United Klans of America responsible as a whole. There's also a lot of background about some interesting characters:

- Morris Dees, cofounder of the SPLC. After their office was vandalized in 1966 by (presumably) the KKK, Dees “was not about to leave it to the police, who might send over an officer who was a Klansman or at least a Klan sympathizer”. Instead, Dees pulled a shotgun on a Klansman, had him call Klan leader Bobby Shelton at gunpoint, and threatened Shelton over the phone: “Bobby, I’m going to blow this son-of-a-bitch’s head right off of his goddamned neck. You don’t fuck with me now.”
- George Wallace, Alabama governor who infamously proclaimed “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever”. I’d heard of that speech but didn’t know anything about Wallace—apparently he was a pretty influential figure, who tried to run for President multiple times. His personal life seems to have been as morally bankrupt as his political life: since Alabama did not allow governors to serve two consecutive terms, he got his wife Lurleen to run for the office in his place (with the understanding that she would be his puppet), in spite of the fact that she was battling cancer—of which she died only a year and a half after inauguration. (Also, Lurleen’s doctor initially shared the cancer diagnosis only with George, who kept it secret from her for four years. Ah, the sixties.)

One thing that caught my attention is how the racists in the story liked to blame opposition to themselves on “outside agitators”. This reluctance to believe that many people in your community could really disagree with you, and the insistence that opposition comes from evil Outsiders, remains common today. (And not *only* on the right; on my city’s left-leaning subreddit, for example, it’s common for people to allege that anyone criticizing progressive policies doesn’t even live here.)

I thought this was an eloquent comment on Wallace’s acceptance of conspiracy theories:

It didn’t matter that the story was not true, for it was true to his fears.

I have to mention how surreal it is to listen such a serious true story, with villains whose vicious, brutal acts inflict so much pointless suffering... when those villains go by ridiculous titles like Imperial Wizard and Exalted Cyclops.

Malcolm Hillgartner does a solid job narrating the audiobook.