

The Duluth Lynching

Editorial in the Chicago Tribune.

Duluth has now joined the American cities which have discovered how easily the safeguards of civilized justice can be leaped. Suddenness is a common factor of all such outbreaks and law finally reasserts itself, but after lives are sacrificed and the community's good name is besmirched.

In Omaha, it was said, delays and failure of justice in cases of offenses against women had inflamed public feeling. Pictures of the mob showed callousness and irresponsibility rather than uncontrollable passion. The delay of justice theory did not bear examination very well. In the Duluth lynching it seems to have less validity if it has any.

The problem is deeper. At its base, of course, is a very strong trait in American character which creates, in spite of inconsistencies and exceptions, a special attitude toward women. In the Duluth case the men charged with the offense were negroes, and undoubtedly this was an important factor in the psychology of the outbreak. But white men are sometimes lynched for this offense when circumstances are aggravated. In the Duluth lynching motives of sex protection and of race instinct were combined.

We can eradicate neither and we would eradicate neither. Both are useful, perhaps necessary if properly controlled and directed. But they were not controlled in Duluth, as they were not controlled in Chicago; in Omaha, in Springfield. The authorities of Duluth permitted the leaders of the mob to go about in automobiles gathering recruits for the lynching. This was a sign of inefficiency, of lax police discipline, if not of connivance, which challenges the self-respect of Duluth and warns the responsible elements of its population that the morale of its police protection is low. Prompt arrest of the mob leaders would have saved a blot on the city's scutcheon and perhaps the lives of innocent men.

That is for Duluth to think about; but all America has in this new lynching a cause for the gravest reflection. The Duluth mob heard appeals to let the law take its course. Its members did not heed these appeals because they themselves wanted to kill. We doubt if they were certain as to the guilt of the men who died asserting their innocence; but they wanted victims to assuage their lust for vengeance, and victims they would have, whether innocent or guilty. We doubt if the uncertainty and tardiness of legal processes of justice have much to do with lynch psychology; but we think it might be tempered by a keener sense of responsibility to the law. Mobs, and even mob leaders, are seldom punished. Until they are there is little to check the lynching evil.

We hope Duluth will do better than other cities in dealing with the men who have brought stain to her good name. Duluth is a very proud city and may set us all an example. We certainly need one. Mob violence is inexcusable in civilized communities. The American lynching is a disgrace to us the world over.

Blood Should Have Been Shed

Chicago Evening Post: The lynching at Duluth bears every mark of a disgraceful failure of constituted authority to do its duty.

The lynchers pursued the bold method of riding in automobiles through the streets of the city and appealing to passers-by to join them in their lawless enterprise. Apparently, the mob inciters were allowed to carry out their program of enlisting a hanging party without opposition.

When the mob reached the police station it was met with no better resistance than a fire hose. No shots were fired; no real effort was made to defend the unhappy wretches who were in the custody of the law. Several policemen are said to have been slightly injured in a brief skirmish which ended when the mob got possession of the fire hose. A moment later it had the men whom the authorities were charged with protecting until they could be given a fair trial. A mock trial was held in the station; three of six negroes were condemned to death, and sentence was executed on the city's streets over the protest of a Catholic priest, who alone seems to have had the courage to speak for law and order and human decency.

This is a crime of a Northern state, as black and ugly as any that has brought the South into disrepute. The Duluth authorities stand condemned in the eyes of the nation. They cannot escape condemnation by the plea that an attempt at effective resistance—an attempt involving the use of firearms—would have resulted in bloodshed. Blood should have been shed before the mob was permitted to trample law and justice under foot, before possibly innocent men were surrendered to a summary and undiscriminating vengeance. Duluth's shame lies in the fact that it can report no fatalities among either the assailants or the defenders of the law—only the death of men whose lives were in its keeping.