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Review of "Lynching to Belong: Claiming Whiteness through Racial Violence," By Cynthia Skove Nevels

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Lynching to Belong: Claiming Whiteness through Racial Violence. By Cynthia Skove Nevels. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007. xi + 189 pp. Photographs, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95.

From the Civil War to the early twentieth century the growing population of Brazos County, Texas included about equal numbers of white and black southerners. That division contributed to tense political campaigns between Democrats and Republicans as well as acts of political and racial violence. Among new settlers came Bohemian, Irish, and Italian immigrants. Anglos did not immediately accept them as white because of cultural differences. The immigrants sought white status in several ways, including racial violence.

In 1896 a mob seized three African Americans from jail and hanged them. Two had been accused of assaulting a white girl. The case remained clouded, however, by the differing reactions of her parents and by political conflicts between Populists in the mob and the Democratic sheriff. The third black man had been accused of rape by an Italian woman and convicted, but had won retrial on appeal. Questions about a possible personal relationship, her fainting to establish white womanhood, and alibi witnesses left the circumstances and the woman's status unclear. The mob killed the accused because he was in jail with the other black men.

Another rape claim in 1897 came from a young white woman of a tenant farming family, who gave an unsure identification of a black man. An Irish traveler placed the accused in the area, however, which led to a lynch mob. The witness probably contributed to Anglo acceptance of other Irish as white.

In 1900 the son of the only black county commissioner shot two Moravian Czechs, killing one. Arguments about politics and race seem the most likely causes, although a possibility of robbery existed. Trials convicted the black man of assault and murder, with the second jury, apparently under pressure, changing his sentence from life in prison to death. The case seemed to advance the white status of Bohemians.

Nevels has conducted thorough research in a wide range of sources to offer thoughtful accounts of ethnic group interactions in Brazos County. She has drawn upon recent studies of immigrants seeking whiteness, lynching motivations, and southern concepts about gender and race to develop a careful analysis of these violent events. This study is a valuable contribution to our understanding of how such ideas shaped Texas and the nation.

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