Request for the Monroe Work Today Dataset Compilation

Thank you for your interest in exploring the history of lynching in the United States. To produce this story in visual form, our studio spent more than 5 years compiling an inventory of those killed, from the information that could be found in public sources. auut studio requests that, before completing this Memorandum, you read through Parts I and II of the website https://plaintalkhistory.com/monroeandflorencework including the Bibliography page and its caveats, that you are familiar about the vastness and gravity of the historical violence that supported white supremacy for much of United States history.

Please know that, each month, auut studio receives numerous requests for the dataset we compiled to make the Monroe & Florence Work Today (MFWT) map, and that many of these come from researchers who are exploring very similar research questions, particularly through a quantitative method. Our studio benefitted from the many years grappling with data sources and historical details, and thus obtained what we believe is a fairly nuanced understanding of the limitations & pitfalls in the attempt to quantify racial violence. It is for this reason that we believe our studio’s responsible role is to engage first with inquirers about their research goal(s), so that we can advise on these features of the Monroe Work Today (MWT) Dataset Compilation, or perhaps other lynching inventories, that may or do not meet the researchers’ working assumptions. The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding is to begin that engagement, so that our sharing of data helps advance responsible new research in the humanities. Approximately three times per year, the studio reviews such requests and grants access to the dataset for the most informed research projects from those submitted. Priority is given to researchers who demonstrate familiarity with the MFWT website and specific prior scholarship on lynching data.

The MWT Dataset Compilation is a stitching together of lists of lynching deaths that can be found in many dozens of books, scholarly journals, and dissertations, careful to have avoided any duplications. The major contribution of our studio to the data was associating each victim to the historical county in which the data refers, using the schema of the GIS tables of the Atlas of Historical County Boundaries by The Newberry Library. In other words, if the scholarly source referred to Alachua County, FL in 1912, our dataset adds "fls_alachua", version 13, to that entry. From this key, it is then possible to associate events to a geographic entity according to whatever method a researcher prefers in a GIS. The MWT Dataset Compilation itself does not contain coordinates.

In creating the MFWT website, we held ourselves to a high standard of ethical conduct in recognizing the historical trauma it contains and the humanity of the people recorded. Regardless of their flaws, the men and women murdered were denied access to the law to contest their accusers; they died violent, painful, and brutal deaths, at times involving torture. Not only were they denied the full length of their lives and their dignity while they lived, but also their murderers would have wished to erase their names from historical memory. It is only for the efforts of activists such as Ida B. Wells and Monroe Work that their personhood is not forgotten to historians today. Thus when working with this (or any) compilation of data on lynching victims, we believe ethical practitioners must proceed cautiously not to re-enact casual actions of erasure. For example, some modern scholars have enjoyed professional advancement through studies to correlate lynching to other variables, having failed to include any discussion of the social enforcement of a white supremacist society, the logic of which still perpetuates ongoing trauma (and death) today. Nearly all researchers have utilized the records housed at Tuskegee
University (a HBCU, historically black college) without citation to Monroe Work or his successor Jessie P. Guzman, who served as the archivist and curator of the data. Even if done unconsciously, such actions continue to write history while perpetuating a dishonest record.

As statisticians we know that numerical analysis requires a framework of certain assumptions that must remain true. That framework will apply a blanket interpretation upon all records in the set, an act which will carry additional unnamed biases. Through the pitfalls of our five years of research, we learned that many mainstream assumptions about lynching are not supported by the extreme variability of narratives in the dataset. In fact, the MWT Dataset Compilation was assembled with the idea to retain some ambiguity, to which we leave to the researcher to apply their own criteria of which observations are ‘valid’ to their study.

Finally, as historians, we believe an understanding of lynching violence cannot be conveyed purely through data or numbers. Numerical summations erase the torture that was inflicted willfully by perpetrators and normalized to American society, erase the humiliating social control that followed in the wake of deaths, and erase the (physical) displacement of families and livelihoods which were shattered: each of these were equally real-world outputs of the tabulated numbers. So as historians, we also believe that any presentation of lynching data is only done ethically when it is given alongside some historical context, and that such history names the white supremacy where it was involved. Our studio was founded with the mission of advancing historical literacy and un-silencing the stories of people of color, so we require this standard of conduct with use of the compilation. It exceeds the level of responsibility traditionally expected from academia.

For the reason above, auut studio asks that researchers please complete and acknowledge the following in order to request access to the Monroe Work Today Dataset Compilation:

**Researcher context:**

Please describe your background research leading to this study and your current research question:

What working hypothesis(es) are you interested in?

Please list all other collaborators:

What is the time period(s) of interest to your study?

What is the geographic extent of interest to your study?
The following will help **auut studio** explain some of the narratives in the data and provide guidance on how best to filter the dataset for your purposes. As cases in point of the violence you are studying, would you want to include the following types of events?

- A spectacle lynching of a black man alleged to commit a heinous crime, attended by thousands
- A spectacle lynching of a black man found having a relationship with a white woman, attended by many dozens
- A public lynching of a white man alleged to commit a heinous crime, attended by hundreds
- The lynching of a black person, by a crowd composed of a both black and white perpetrators outraged over a heinous crime [id 5847]
- The lynching of a Mexican-Am. man for murdering his wife, by a crowd of Mexican-Americans [id 6067]
- With racist sentiments enfrenzied, a mob descended on Chinatown and sporadically murdered 15-17 men at night, their dead bodies hanged and sometimes stripped nude. [id 6101]
- A Mexican-Am. man promptly executed after being discovered with the stolen horses of slain men [id 6776]
- A 12-year old boy hanged by parties unknown for an unknown cause; the source author expresses uncertainty as to whether to classify the event as a lynching [id 7014]
- The seizure of a suspect in police custody by a group of 4 armed men, then shot and hanged [id 7016]
- An elderly black woman seized from her home and murdered, when word spread that, earlier that day, she had dared to rebuke the white children taunting her with rocks [id 8010]
- The assassination of a person alleged in a crime but not held in custody, by a vigilante posse related to the aggrieved party of the crime; the community neither participated in nor protested the lynching [id 2325]
- In a region that has had other lynchings, a black man found dead on the railroad tracks for an unknown cause; the source author cannot know the number of perpetrators [id 5676]
- In a fury of ‘moral outrage’ over a local murder, roaming mobs dragged dozens of (unrelated) black men off of streetscars; some die from the severe injuries of their beating. [id 7754]
- In a fury over an earlier exchange of fire with white police officers, mobs descended on the city’s black neighborhood and set it afire, shooting people dead one-by-one as they fled their homes, with other atrocities reported to have occurred against the dying and dead corpses. [id 7941]
- An eruption of rioting by white men saw black people shot dead indiscriminately, but some rioters went to a particular man’s home, for whom they held a grievance, and marched him into the street. Some sought to hang him, but others wanted to let him “try to run.” As he ran, at least forty men shot him dead. [id 7654]

Public opinion was turning against mob Lynchings by the late 1930s, putting pressure on towns to not appear on the Tuskegee Lynching Report. Nevertheless, events like the following occurred:

- A black man kidnapped overnight and shot dead by an unknown number of people, who dumped his dead body, with no significant police investigation. [id 8012 in 1941]
- A murder suspect was being transported in custody when, en route, the officers claimed he attacked both of them (even though he was in handcuffs) so they fired and killed him. [id 8053 in 1941]
- A respected black community leader was arrested for a recent unsolved murder, 4 days later dead in his cell with gunshot wounds and a crushed skull; the police chief claimed he killed him in self-defense. [id 8057 in 1947]
- A store owner & pillar of his community was the object of local resentment for being “too successful for a [black man].” Found riddled with bullets one day, with a single white suspect who claimed he overheard the man insulting his wife, released on bond. [id 8011 in 1947]
Please initial to indicate your agreement:

_____ I recognize the historical grounding of this data goes back as far as Ida Wells in 1892 and, later, the efforts of Monroe Work at Tuskegee Institute. Modern researchers have uncovered additional lynching victims that were unknown and, occasionally, identified errors in the original Tuskegee records. As a result of these corrections, the historic counts of Tuskegee Institute can no longer be used as an accurate source by itself.

_____ I understand there have been prior numerical analyses on the volume of lynching, and I recognize that my project should be familiar the conclusions of prior scholarship. A few studies to be aware of are “From Lynching to Gay Bashing: The Elusive Connection Between Economic Conditions and Hate Crime” (Green, Glaser & Rich 1998); A Festival of Violence (Tolnay & Beck 1995); “Lynchings and the economy” (Hepworth & West 1988); “Minor Studies of Aggression: VI. Correlation of Lynchings with Economic Indices” (Hovland & Sears 1940). Since then, other authors have produced similar studies, as well as critiques of their methods, by examining lynchings in other areas.

_____ I agree to include language in my published output that acknowledges the personhood of murdered human beings underlying or aggregated by numbers. This includes some language, however short, captioned on any chart or graph that is intended to be interpreted or shown in isolation, whether in print or in presentation slides.

_____ I understand the methodology in the patchwork construction of this compilation as described in the Bibliography: https://plaintalkhistory.com/monroeandflorencework/evaluate/bibliography.html, and I understand the limitations that arise from that methodology.

For further clarity, these limitations include:

_____ The compilation does not contain every lynching there ever was in the US. There will never be a perfect list of all people who met their death by lynching, because they were not always reported in a newspaper, or occurred in towns too small to have a newspaper. Some murders may have a faint record in historical sources, or none at all.

_____ This compilation includes some cases which were not a lynching, to help rectify prior errors in the historical record. (Such cases will be marked when a person actually survived, was killed legally under the law, committed suicide, etc.) I understand I must thus filter the dataset in order to utilize it.

_____ For some cases, the compilation indicates being “Uncertain” or “Unconfirmed” as to fitting the definition of a lynching. Unless otherwise indicated, this uncertainty is the reflection from the source author(s), not thetuut studio. I understand I must refer to the source publication for further details, and make my own decision whether these cases fit the assumptions in my project.

_____ This is a compilation only of the people who were successfully killed by the perpetrators. I understand that lynching deaths are not an accurate proxy for mob violence nor violent racism, and:
  • There are over 7,250 victims (or uncertain victims) of lynching in the data. But in thousands of other cases across the same time period, members of a town threatened to, even made attempts to lynch a person held in jail. The scale of this is significant: scholar Dr. E.M. Beck has counted 4,060 lynchings in the Southern states, with 3,500+ additional events (86% more) when a lynching was threatened: this includes over 1,950 cases (48% more) where the authorities successfully stopped an assembled mob, or the accused person was able to escape. I understand that this compilation is therefore a gross undercount of lynch mob intentions, and this is almost certain to be a non-random sample: in counties having leadership inclined toward the rule of law, or visible armed black resistance, fewer lynchings will be recorded, obscuring possibly many additional averted lynching attempts (which do not appear in the compilation).
I understand in the US there have been many other white supremacy riots where victims were hospitalized but not to the point of death, and coordinated supremacist attacks which burned down an entire neighborhood to cause its residents to flee, yet no one was killed. These events do not appear in the compilation.

- I understand there are other forms of racist violence, like public harassment and intimidation, physical brutality, seizing someone's property through pseudo-legal means, banishing people at gunpoint, or the credible threat of lynching posted as a warning sign throughout “Sundown Towns”. These incidents carried a similar declaration of murder with impunity, and are more numerous than lynchings. I understand these events do not appear in the compilation.

My research question does not involve the time period before 1882. I understand that for years prior to 1882, this compilation is known to be missing some, even ALL cases of lynching in some states. This compilation is not suitable for comparative analysis between regions for earlier years. The omission is especially true for these states, due to what sources were publicly available at the time: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia. For certain other states, adequate research into this time period has not even yet been attempted. For years even earlier (1830s-1860s), I understand that I must consider the compilation as little more than a cursory reflection of a history that is not fully known.

Having acknowledged above my commitments to its responsible and ethical use, I request access to the Monroe Work Today Dataset Compilation. I agree to cite as source material the Monroe Work Today Dataset Compilation using the details provided on the next page, including a citation to the underlying authors’ works.

Signature ___________________________ Print name ___________________________ Date ___________________________

Please email this signed form to: info [at] findauut.com

Priority is given to requests with a cover letter (attached or in body of the email) which demonstrates familiarity with specific examples of lynching data in prior scholarship and the history presented on Monroe & Florence Work Today.
How to cite the compilation:


And then also cite:

You must individually cite each of the corresponding authors’ works, which you are in fact utilizing by using this Dataset Compilation. Appropriate citation details are found in the bibliography at


If you use only a subset of the data, you may cite the applicable source authors of those records only.