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Local Sequential Patterns: The Structure of Lynching in the Deep South, 1882–1930

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Abstract

White-on-black violence was a fact of life in the Deep South during the decades straddling the turn of the century. Yet though the lynching of blacks

is historically significant, it was, statistically speaking, a relatively rare event. While each lynching is associated with a complex and often gruesome narrative, particularities often overwhelm efforts to reveal anything other than broad structural determinants or proximate causes. Efforts to apply narrative methods have been limited to the analysis of a single lynching incident, and yield more insight into patterns of interaction than into the phenomena of lynching as a whole. This article offers a new analytic description of the temporal structure of local lynching histories in the Deep South between 1882 and 1930. Sequential analysis reveals robust variation in the temporal pattern of local lynching; interpretation of the finite set of patterns of lynching histories focuses on the sequential consequences of various microlevel mechanisms, and demonstrates the advantages of moving beyond the analysis of discrete incidents.

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