



ABHM Book Club Discussion Guide

August 22nd, 2024 at 6 PM CT

***A Lynching in the Heartland* by James H. Madison (2001)**

How to Use this Guide:

[America's Black Holocaust Museum](#) staff created this guide to assist in reading and discussion of *A Lynching in the Heartland*. Please feel free to print a copy and keep it with your book as you lend to friends and others who are interested. Do not expect to get through all of the questions during the upcoming meeting nor in one sitting. Perhaps consider them as conversation starters or an invitation to reflect more deeply about this book.

Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. Did this book contribute to your understanding of race in the United States? How does it relate to [other books](#) we have read in this book club, particularly *A Time of Terror* and *Our Town*? See pages 1, 119, and 125.
2. Madison writes that this book is “about how stories get made, how people create different versions of the same event” (pg. 3). What were these different versions and what purposes did they serve? What is the point of Madison’s argument about Dr. Cameron’s retelling becoming the dominant narrative? See pages X, 3, 78, 79, 117, 126, 128, and 152.
3. Do we need to “stir up the past” in order to confront it? What role does historical truth-telling have in the effort to heal? How does this relate to Dr. Cameron’s core purpose with his writings and founding of ABHM? See pages 118, 122, 127, 137, 142, 143, 144, 146, 149, and 153.
4. How did Marion’s past shape the potential for and response to lynchings and racial violence? What color lines were drawn? What history was recognized at the courthouse through its architecture? Should the lynching be commemorated on this site today? If so, how? See pages 28, 29, 32, 47-49, 52, 56, 92, 123, and 150.

5. What does this book contribute to our understanding of spectacle lynchings? What does Madison share about the history of lynchings and the Ku Klux Klan in the North, in the Midwest, and in Marion, specifically? What is the role of gender in such instances of racial violence? See pages 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 24, 38, 40, 41, 68, 69, 74, and 86.
6. What is it about Lawrence Bietler's photograph that makes it iconic? How has it been used in newspapers and other media? When you look at the photograph, what do you see and feel? Why would someone want to purchase and send this or collect other memorabilia from the site of lynchings? See pages 10, 11, 16, 41, 64, 112, 113, and 115.
7. What impact did the legal system have after the lynching took place? How did Flossie Bailey, the NAACP, and the ILD try to seek justice in Marion and how did their approaches differ? Was justice served, ultimately? Why or why not? See pages 2, 7, 59, 61, 63, 66, 77, 81, 91, 92, 95, 99, 100, 105, and 142.
8. For those of you that have seen the *Unmasked* exhibit currently on view at ABHM until September 7th, how does this book contribute to your understanding of the themes discussed there? Specifically, how does Madison add to our understanding of the dueling anti-lynching art exhibitions of the Communist Party and the NAACP? See pages 101 and 103.
9. What happened in Marion in the aftermath of the lynching? Does the recent history shared by Madison connote progress? Why or why not? Are there other places in the country that have similar historical trajectories and/or racial reckonings? See pages 134, 135, 137, and 140.
10. Today, the Emmitt Till Antilynching Bill has been passed, ABHM has reopened, and the NMAACH and Legacy Museums exist, and there are people on the ground in Marion working towards commemorating the 1930 lynching. Just as the Civil Rights Movement "made people more willing to listen, made silences uncomfortable," do you think we are living in another one of those moments? How can museums and historic sites/markers contribute to racial reconciliation, or can they? See pages 96, 97, and 151.