



The Lyncher in Me: A Search for Redemption in the Face of History

Warren Read

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In June 1920, in Duluth, Minnesota, a mob of over 10,000 convened upon the police station, inflamed by the rumor that black circus workers had raped a white teenage girl—charges that would later be proven false. Three men were dragged from their cells and lynched in front of the cheering crowd.

More than eighty years later, Warren Read—a fourth-grade teacher, devoted partner, and father to three boys—plugged his mother's maiden name into a computer search engine, then clicked on a link to a newspaper article that would forever alter his understanding of himself. Louis Dondino, his beloved great-grandfather, had incited the deadly riot on that dark summer night decades before.

In his poignant memoir, Read explores the perspectives of both the victims and the perpetrators of this heinous crime. He investigates the impact—the denial, anger, and alcoholism—that the long-held secret of his ancestors had on his family, calling even himself to task. Through this examination of the generations affected by one horrific night, he discovers that to fully realize ourselves we must take responsibility for "our deep-seated fears that lead us to emotional, social, or physical violence."

Warren Read is a writer who teaches elementary school on Bainbridge Island, Washington. In 2003 Duluth unveiled what remains the most significant memorial to lynching victims in the United States. Read was the final speaker of the day. Serving as a representative of his family's violent legacy, he willingly shouldered responsibility for his ancestor's actions.

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