

In light of Jones's research, the "Aulk kirk" emerges as a more diverse, hardy, and vibrant institution, challenging traditional perceptions of the Disruption's impact and legacy.

Laura M. Mair  
University of Aberdeen  
doi:10.1017/S0009640723003001

***The End of Public Execution: Race, Religion, and Punishment in the American South.* By Michael Ayers Trotti. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022. 250 pp. \$32.95 paperback, \$99.00 hardcover, \$26.99 eBook.**

*The End of Public Execution* is an important book in more ways than one. Because the death penalty is still practiced in parts of the United States, much scholarship is focused on understanding the judicial and political processes that allow for a penalty that all our peer nations have abandoned. Relatively speaking, this means that we know more about what happens to capital punishment in the legislatures and the courts than we do about the practice of capital punishment—that is, the lawful killing of convicts sentenced to death. But as Trotti so persuasively shows in this book, it is precisely at the site of executions that the death penalty acquires the meanings that both challenge and sustain it.

In focusing on the transformation of legal executions in the American South, Trotti extends scholarship on capital punishment in several different ways, including a novel and nuanced analysis of the end of public executions, the varying relationship (or lack thereof) between the death penalty and death by mob violence (that is, lynchings) and, despite their shared history of "terrorizing and humiliating African Americans" (4), all sorts of capital punishment-related variations across the Southern states. Relying on a detailed analysis of more than 1,000 newspaper accounts of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century executions, Trotti invites his readers to let go of their preconceptions of the role of public executions in sustaining white supremacy and racial injustice in the South. There can be no doubt that such executions were designed by the white authorities to instill terror among black people. But that is not all they were. As Trotti notes, public executions that attracted thousands of spectators were not "easily controlled by the state" (9), thus opening up opportunities for transgressions.

The most significant contribution that Trotti brings to the field of capital punishment, however, is the centering of religious practices in the execution of black convicts. The history of capital punishment, in the United States as well as much of Western Europe, is of course deeply entangled in religion, with religious and secular authorities standing side-by-side on the gallows and delivering a unified condemnation of the man (and it was most often a man) about to die and a stern warning to would-be lawbreakers in the crowds gathered to watch him die. Even as executions became less steeped in religious pageantry in the nineteenth century, there is evidence to support a claim that the religious elements—sermons, prayers, and hymns—of executions served primarily to pacify convicts and subdue the crowds. But this is not the story that emerges from Trotti's analysis—on the contrary. It is a story where African American voices, at

least momentarily, drown out the harshness of oppression and turn the execution into a celebration of the coming meeting of the convict with his God. It is a story where the certainty of redemption, sometimes accompanied by a strong proclamation of innocence, serves as a rebuke against the (in)justice delivered by the white authorities. As one convict proclaimed, “They can kill my flesh, but not my soul” (7). While both claims of innocence and religious devotions were common among white convicts as well, they take on a different meaning when delivered by members of an oppressed group. “In a world of abundant suffering,” Trotti notes, “evangelical Christianity offered the hope of equity before God and the hope of transformation in the next life” (23). In fact, “the injustices facing African Americans could be seen as evidence of being chosen by God” (23).

Moreover, and possibly even more troubling to the white authorities, the executions of black convicts were often presided over by black ministers. This was an inevitable consequence of the near absolute segregation of religious life post-slavery and thus not in itself a challenge to white supremacy. But in giving the stage to black ministers, the white authorities also ceded part of their control over the proceedings. They watched on the sidelines as black ministers with the help of black spectators turned the public execution into an African American religious celebration where the fate of the convict not infrequently was likened to the fate of Jesus Christ himself. In this way, the fairly traditional *content* of the religious ceremonies presided over by black ministers, coupled with the African American “emotional style of worship” (22), turned into a challenge, if not a rebuke, of white supremacy. As Trotti concludes, “Clear and bold claims of equality in the eyes of God . . . made these moments on the scaffold particularly charged” (163).

With this book, Trotti has set the stage for a new kind of history (and history of the present) of the death penalty in the United States. The book is detailed in its depictions of executions and yet broad in its theoretical as well as historical implications. In centering religious practices at the execution of black convicts, Trotti complicates our understanding of the relationship between secular and religious authorities in the context of capital punishment and demonstrates how regular people—convicts and their friends—can, at least momentarily, appropriate even the most oppressive circumstances for their own purposes and, in so doing, shake the confidence of their oppressors. What frightens the white authorities here is not primarily overt resistance—guards and guns can protect against that—but instead the redemptive story that not simply restores the convict in the eyes of God but also challenges the righteousness of race-based oppression.

Annulla Linders

University of Cincinnati

doi:10.1017/S0009640723003475

***Muslim-Christian Relations in Damascus amid the 1860 Riot.* By Rana Abu-Mounes. Leiden: Brill, 2022. xii + 256 pp., incl. 5 color and black-and-white figures. \$125.00 hardcover.**

The Ottoman Empire was a multi-religious and multi-ethnic empire. Islam provided the glue that kept the empire together, while the *millet* system granted non-Muslims