



**LYNCHINGS APOLOGY FINE, BUT INADEQUATE; [FINAL Edition]
*Julianne Malveaux. USA TODAY. McLean, Va.: Jun 17, 2005. pg. A.13***

Kudos to Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., who was so moved by the photographs of lynching in the book *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, by Hilton Als, that she introduced a Senate apology to the victims of lynching and their descendants for the failure of that body to pass anti-lynching legislation.

Lynching was nothing less than domestic terrorism, a form of violence used to intimidate mostly African-Americans into subservience. Who knows how many yielded land to greedy neighbors or curtailed their educational and professional aspirations for fear that their uppity nature might earn them the noose? While many lynching cases were the result of accusations of eyeballing white women, some were because of economic envy.

As the book documents, too many whites found these lynchings occasions for celebrations. They brought their food and their children to the lynching fields and scrambled to get souvenirs of the occasion -- a tooth, a finger or another body part.

Though seven presidents petitioned Congress to end lynching, and the House of Representatives passed three anti-lynching measures, the Senate was silent. Indeed, the senator for whom the Russell Senate Office Building is named, Richard Russell, D-Ga., saw the measures as an affront to Southern dignity.

The apology, long overdue, was still profoundly flawed. Why, for example, didn't the entire Senate support Sens. George Allen, R- Va., and Landrieu's legislation? More lynchings took place in Mississippi than in any other state, yet the state's two senators, Trent Lott and Thad Cochran, were among the handful who had not signaled their support. And why a voice vote at night instead of a roll-call vote during the day? I believe some senators did not want to stand before cameras and weigh in on our nation's shameful history.

Does the apology mean anything? Not unless the Senate also does something more tangible. Every year in the House since 1989, Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., has proposed legislation to study reparations for African-Americans. It simply calls for a commission to consider the effect of slavery on blacks today, but it has little support. Perhaps a tangible outcome of the Senate apology should be a version of the Conyers legislation and a real analysis of what our past -- lynchings, slavery and all -- has meant to the way we live today.

To be sure, more pressing issues face our nation today -- war, poverty, health care and Social Security reform among them. But the apology is a meaningless gesture unless it motivates a tangible and corrective course of action for our nation.

Julianne Malveaux is co-editor of *The Paradox of Loyalty: An African American Response to the War on Terrorism*, which is now in paperback.