

Hopkins and Her Contemporaries:

Responses to Racial Violence, Appeals for Racial Justice

In early May of this year, Ida B. Wells (one of Pauline Hopkins' illustrious contemporaries) posthumously received the Pulitzer Prize in journalism for "her outstanding and courageous reporting on the horrific and vicious violence against African Americans during the era of lynching." Wells' award followed by some six weeks a historic vote in Congress to pass the first ever federal anti-lynching law (The Emmitt Till Anti-Lynching Act), even though over two hundred such bills had been proposed before the House or Senate since 1900—the year Hopkins would publish her first novel, *Contending Forces*, which itself advocated a concerted response to "mob violence" and "lynch law," terms introduced in the novel's Preface. Wells' recent recognition and the passage of the Emmitt Till Act—along with the Equal Justice Initiative's establishment in 2018 of a museum commemorating slavery and lynching in Montgomery, Alabama—seemed to suggest our nation's willingness today to confront its tragic history of racism and violence against African Americans. Yet by the end of May 2020, the police killing of George Floyd would galvanize the Black Lives Matter movement and spark protests for racial justice and police accountability across the country. Far from an isolated act, Floyd's murder has come to symbolize countless acts of police brutality and white violence against blacks that have occurred since the beating of Rodney King in 1991, an event that transpired a hundred years after lynchings reached their official peak in the United States in 1892.

Well over a century separates our historical moment from the "lynching era" of Wells, Hopkins, and their contemporaries. Our two worlds, however, share much in common and are historically linked—not unlike the Southern world of North Carolina in the 1790s and the contemporaneous Northern world of Boston in the 1890s that Hopkins interlinks and about which she powerfully writes in *Contending Forces*. As the American Literature Association reconvenes in the Boston of our own day, The Pauline E. Hopkins Society invites proposals that examine any aspect of racial violence in the work of Hopkins and her contemporaries—especially Ida Wells—for presentation at the 31st-annual convention in May 2021.

Please submit 300-word abstracts with the subject line "Hopkins and Her Contemporaries" to John Barton at bartonjc@umkc.edu by Jan 31, 2021.