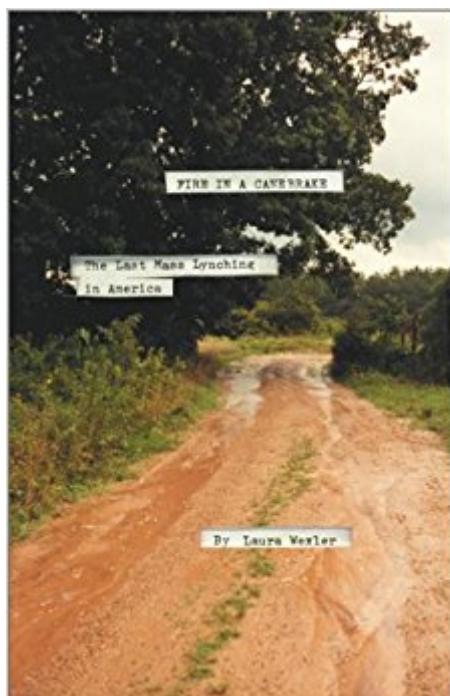


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# Fire In A Canebrake: The Last Mass Lynching In America



## Synopsis

On that July evening in 1946, the leader counted aloud and the mob of white men fired. Seconds later, the leader counted again, "One, two, three," and the mob fired once more. After the third and final volley of gunshots, the white men got into their cars and drove off, leaving the bullet-ridden bodies of two young black men and two young black women lying in the dirt near Moore's Ford Bridge in rural Walton County, Georgia. Since that summer evening, there have never been as many victims lynched in a single day in America. Now, more than a half century later, Laura Wexler offers the first full account of the Moore's Ford lynching, a murder so brutal it stunned the nation and motivated President Harry Truman to put civil rights at the forefront of his national agenda. With the style of a novelist, the authority of a historian, and the tenacity of a journalist, Wexler recounts the lynching and the resulting four-month FBI investigation. Drawing from interviews, archival sources, and an uncensored FBI report, she takes us deep into the landscape of 1946 Georgia, creating unforgettable portraits of sharecroppers, sheriffs, bootleggers, the victims, and the men who may have killed them. *Fire in a Canebrake* pursues the legacy of the Moore's Ford lynching into the present, exploring the conflicting memories of Walton County's black and white citizens and examining the testimony of a white man who claims he was a secret witness to the crime. In 2001, the governor of Georgia issued a new reward for information leading to the arrest of the lynchers. Several suspects named in the FBI's 1946 investigation are still alive, and there is no statute of limitations on the crime of murder. *Fire in a Canebrake* -- a phrase local people used to describe the sound of the fatal gunshots -- is a moving and often frightening tale of violence, sex, and lies. It is also a disturbing snapshot of a divided nation on the brink of the civil rights movement and a haunting meditation on race, history, and the struggle for truth.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Laura Wexler's "Fire in a Canebrake" is a highly important work. Carefully researched and masterfully written, it will undoubtedly remain the definitive work on the Moore's Ford lynching for years to come. Wexler's vivid account has all the elements of a great novel. But, alas, this is the true story of four African-American lynching victims, shot dead in the prime of life by a mob of mad men on the Walton County bank of the Apalachee River about nine miles from the town of Monroe, Georgia, during the afternoon of 25 July 1946. Wexler never allows her reader to forget them. After more than fifty years, a veil of lies yet covered the facts of the Moore's Ford lynching and it was yet stuck fast to the face of evil. Those who knew the truth about the lynching would never tell. Nevertheless, Wexler tenaciously picked away the rotting veil of lies. Beneath it, one can now see a mourning veil stained with tears. Wexler did not find a direct link between the Ku Klux Klan and the Moore's Ford lynching; however, FBI documents confirm that Loy Harrison and his lawyer, James Willie Arnold, were working together to impede the FBI's investigation of the Moore's Ford lynching. Both men, Loy Harrison and James Willie Arnold, were in fact active members of the Ku Klux Klan, Klavern No.5 of Athens and Bogart, Georgia, where James Willie Arnold held the high Klan office of Grand Titan. Arnold was a large land owner in Oconee County, as was Loy Harrison, and he lived quite near the Moore's Ford community. As to the important question of the Klan being active in Walton and Oconee counties at the time of the lynching, Stetson Kennedy, alas, not mentioned by Wexler, was present at a meeting of Klavern No.

The term, "Fire in a Canebrake", is a phrase that Walton County, Georgia residents used to describe the sounds of the fatal gunshots that commenced the last mass lynching in America; it is also the title of Laura Wexler's historical account of the Moore's Ford lynching where four blacks were murdered in late July 1946. The novel painstakingly details the "who, what, when, where and why" of the horrific crime and is supported by interviews, FBI reports, and other detailed documentation. Wexler takes us back to the beginning when a black man, Roger Malcolm, stabs a white man, Barnett Hester, for allegedly having an affair with his common law wife, Dorothy. As Barnett lingers near death, Roger sits in jail counting his days left on earth. Eleven days later when Barnett recovers, Roger is then set free when his bail is posted by Loy Harrison, a wealthy

landowner and landlord to George Dorsey (Dorothy's older brother) and his common law wife, Mae Murray. It is returning home from the jail that Roger, Dorothy, George, and Mae are dragged from Loy's car by an angry mob of white men and are murdered in cold blood. Loy claims he did not and could not recognize any of the attackers which was why his life was spared on that fateful day....and so the lying begins and never seems to end. For years, the NAACP, FBI, Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI), and local law enforcement conduct their investigations, interrogations, and examinations only to arrive at no convictions. It is only in 1991, when an "eyewitness" steps forward to tell his story that there appears to be a slither of hope for justice.

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