

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Poem Sundown

by Peter Neil Carroll



Sundown

Teaching adult teachers in the Mississippi Delta,
I ask Wilmer, the oldest black man in the room,
who was the oldest black man he ever knew
and what, if anything did that old man teach him?
Wilmer rubs his chin, speaks softly, without
hesitation, telling the story he'd heard---

*that night in September 1919 when a posse
shot into a meeting of sharecroppers
planning to start a fair-price store,
and the farmers, those not killed on the spot, fled
into the woods, and for a week the hounds hunted
them, treed the luckless survivors, whose bodies
were tossed by the dozens onto slow moving trains
trundling north and buried there by persons unknown
who also could never go home---*

When he stops, the teachers sit stock-still,
numbed by the horror, though not surprised
how word-of-mouth keeps their history alive.
Now with parched voices they tell their own
stories---shotguns stacked at the doors, fear
of sundown, fear of having business in town,
fear even of what could happen tonight.



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