

When William Faulkner was born on September 25, 1897, he entered the times of the high tide of racial extremism that marked the post-Reconstruction era and the beginning of the 20th century. The small domestic world of the Falkner family William lived in as a small boy also afforded him contact with racial differences, most memorably through the servant of the Falkner family - Caroline Barr. This was a harmonious contact. The Falkner boys called Caroline "Mammy" Callie; "she cooked, she cleaned, and she cared for them but most of all the boys liked her stories - of animals in the woods, ghosts, and the 'Old Days' of slavery. The boys loved her dearly" (Williamson, William Faulkner and Southern History 153).

However, William was soon confronted with the other side of the racially divided world. This must have happened most powerfully in the year 1908, when Oxford, Mississippi witnessed the lynching of Nelse Patton, "a black convict, but also [...] a 'trusty'" (Williamson, William Faulkner and Southern History 157) who was allowed to run errands all over the town. He killed Mattie McMillan, a white woman, to whom he delivered a message, but refused to leave her house. She attempted to draw a pistol, but he stopped her and "drew a razor blade across [her] throat [...], almost severing her head from her body" (Williamson, William Faulkner and Southern History 158). Her daughter ran up to help Mattie and Patton allegedly attempted to assault her as well. She escaped and alarmed the rest of the town. This started a frenzy in which about 2,000 people partook, arriving also from the surrounding countryside. Finally the crowd managed to drag Patton from the jail and "strung him up naked on a telephone pole, and riddled his body with bullets" (Williamson, William Faulkner and Southern History 159).