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TOPICS

TOPICS; CORRECTING THE PAST

Still on Georgia's Mind

A posthumous pardon for Leo Frank cannot erase the memory of an infamous lynching in 1915 that loosed a wave of anti-Semitic terror in Atlanta. But the state's Board of Pardons and Paroles can reduce the memory's bitterness by approving a petition to clear Mr. Frank's name.

He was accused of murdering 13-year-old Mary Phagan in the factory in which he worked as superintendent. He was a Jew from New York, and this counted against him more than any evidence at his trial. When his death sentence was commuted, a mob took his life, then turned its fury on the homes and shops of Georgia's 3,000 Jews, half of whom eventually moved elsewhere.

Not only Jews were affected. A revived Ku Klux Klan seized on the case to spread its gospel of hate through region and nation in a campaign shamefully abetted by Senator Tom Watson, a Georgia populist and bigot.

Decades passed, and the Frank case was forgotten. But not by a missing witness: Alonzo Mann, who had been an office boy in the same factory. He had seen the janitor carrying Mary Phagan's limp body, but kept a terrified silence when his life was threatened.

Mr. Mann's account was finally published a year ago by a Tennessee newspaper, which tested his veracity and found him truthful. "I pray to God that they will give Leo Frank a pardon," says Mr. Mann. "I feel it would be the Christian thing to do. He did not commit that crime."

The Board of Pardons can at last write a decent end to an appalling episode.

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