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Paper: **"Documentary Archive of the Horrific Torture and Lynching of Zachariah Walker, 1911-1912"**

**Submitted: 19 September 2026**
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Peer review:

Reviewer 1: Mondira Dutta
Jawaharlal Nehru University, India

Reviewer 2: Randle Sloan-Toraño
Historia Contemporánea, Universidad Jaume I, España

Reviewer 3: Ed Raphael B. Espinoza
Panpacific University, Philippines

Reviewer 4: Mwewa Mervyn Musonda
University of Lusaka, Zambia

# ESJ *Manuscript Evaluation Form 2026*

This form is designed to summarize the manuscript peer review that you have completed and to ensure that you have considered all appropriate criteria in your review. Your review should provide a clear statement to the authors and editors of the modifications necessary before the paper can be published, or the specific reasons for rejection.

Please respond within the appointed time so that we can give the authors timely responses and feedback.

NOTE: ESJ promotes a peer review procedure based on scientific validity and technical quality of the paper (not perceived impact). You are also not required to do proofreading of the paper. It could be recommended as part of the revision.
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***ESJ editorial office would like to express its special gratitude for your time and efforts. Our editorial team is a substantial reason that stands ESJ out from the crowd!***

| | |
|---|---|
| Reviewer Name: Mondira Dutta, Former Professor, School of International Studies | |
| University, Country: Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi 110067, INDIA | |
| Date Manuscript Received: 23 Sept 2026 | Date Review Report Submitted: 30 Sept 2026 |
| Manuscript Title: **Recording Violence, Evading Accountability: Documentary Knowledge after the Lynching of Zachariah Walker, 1911–1912** | |
| ESJ Manuscript Number: 1011/26 | |
| You agree that your name is revealed to the author of the paper: YES | |
| You approve, your name as a reviewer of this paper is available in the "review history" of the paper: YES<br>You approve, this review report is available in the "review history" of the paper: YES | |

## Evaluation Criteria:

**Please give each evaluation item a numeric rating on a 5-point scale, along with a thorough explanation for each point rating.**

| ***Questions*** | ***Rating Result*** |
|---|---|

| | [Poor] **1-5** [Excellent] |
|---|---|
| **1. The title is clear, and it is adequate for the content of the article.** | **2** |
| *The title is appropriate, but the main theme of the research hardly reflects the objectives.. Consider* ***"Documenting Lynching and Evasion of Accountability: Knowledge, Evidence, and the Zachariah Walker Case, 1911–1912"*** | |
| **2. The abstract presents objectives, methods, and results.** | **2** |
| *Abstract is well but could have been more explicitly stated with some background. It begins abruptly and ends suddenly. Some reference in context of lynching studies could have been visualized.* | |
| **3. There are a few grammatical errors and spelling mistakes in this article.** | **2** |
| *Overall, the manuscript is written in clear, formal academic English, with good command of historical and methodological terminology. However, several editorial issues require attention.*<br>*a) Inconsistent metadata/date information: The first page states "Approved: 21 September 2026" and "Posted: 23 September 2026," whereas the header on page 2 and subsequent pages states "September 2022." This is a significant inconsistency and should be corrected throughout the manuscript.*<br>*b) Repetition: Expressions such as "documentary knowledge", "legal accountability", "institutional sequence", "local social power", "individualized prosecution" occur very frequently. They are central concepts, but their repeated use sometimes makes the prose formulaic.*<br>*c) Sentence complexity occurs time and again* | |
| **4. The study methods are explained clearly.** | **3** |
| *The methodological section could be strengthened in several respects such as , selection criteria for newspapers and documentary sources are not sufficiently explained. The study does not indicate clearly how many newspaper reports/articles were examined in total. The process of comparing and coding the sources is described conceptually but not operationally. The author should explain more explicitly how contradictory newspaper accounts were evaluated. Since the article makes an argument about "documentary density," some indication of the extent and distribution of the documentary corpus would strengthen the claim. Further, the methodology would benefit from a clearer distinction between primary-source analysis and interpretations derived from secondary scholarship. Although the methodology is conceptually strong but needs to be made more transparent and reproducible.* | |
| **5. The results are clear and do not contain errors.** | **2** |
| *The results are coherent and broadly support the paper's central argument. The treatment of African American newspapers and The Crisis as a "counter-record" is a useful contribution because it expands the meaning of accountability beyond formal criminal conviction. However, there is some repetition between the Results and Discussion sections. Several arguments,* | |

| |
|---|
| *particularly the distinction between documentary knowledge and legal proof, the role of witnesses, and the limitations of individualized prosecution are repeated in slightly different formulations. The paper could therefore be shortened and made more forceful by consolidating recurring arguments. Some conclusions are interpretive rather than directly demonstrated by systematic evidence. For example, claims concerning "local social power," "social pressure," and "racial hierarchy" are plausible and supported by the historiography, but the manuscript should more consistently distinguish between what the primary documents directly establish and what the author infers from the combined historical record. The paper itself is aware of this issue and appropriately states that it does not establish that every official sought impunity.* |

| **6. The conclusions or summary are accurate and supported by the content.** | **2** |
|---|---|
| *The conclusion accurately synthesizes the paper's central proposition that Pennsylvania institutions generated extensive records, pursued investigations and prosecutions, but did not produce a criminal conviction. The statement that Black journalism preserved a wider scale of responsibility than criminal proceedings could accommodate is consistent with the analysis developed earlier.*<br>*Nevertheless, the conclusion could be more concise. It currently restates several arguments already made in the discussion. A stronger conclusion would identify, the principal empirical finding; the methodological/conceptual contribution; the significance for the historiography of lynching and state accountability; and the principal limitation. The conclusion should avoid introducing any new evidence or argument.* | |

| **7. The references are comprehensive and appropriate** | **2** |
|---|---|
| *The reference list is substantial and generally appropriate. It includes primary materials such as, the death certificates, newspapers, court records and contemporary political commentary nevertheless, Nevertheless, the paper itself acknowledges that the source base does not contain complete transcripts of all proceedings. References ought to have included More primary archival/legal records, particularly complete court records and trial proceedings. More intense literature survey ought to have been done. Verification of every important factual assertion drawn from the newspapers needs an appropriate citation. Bibliographic formatting should be checked carefully for consistency, particularly newspaper titles, dates, volume/issue information, URLs and DOIs. Several editorial issues also require attention.* | |

## **Overall Recommendation** (mark an X with your recommendation) :

| | |
|---|---|
| Accepted, no revision needed | |
| Accepted, minor revision needed | |
| Return for major revision and resubmission | |
| Reject | |

## **Comments and Suggestions to the Author(s):**

*Before publication, however, the manuscript requires substantial revision in the following areas:*

1. *sharpen and explicitly state the research objectives*
2. *improve methodological transparency, rationale and explain source selection and analysis*
3. *distinguish more clearly between primary evidence and historical interpretation*
4. *reduce repetition across Results, Discussion, and Conclusion*
5. *tighten the language and sentence structure*
6. *correct the significant 2022/2026 date inconsistency*
7. *strengthen documentation of legal proceedings where possible; and*
8. *undertake a thorough language, citation, and reference-style review*

*Overall, the manuscript is intellectually promising and potentially publishable, but it is not yet publication ready.*

**Comments and Suggestions to the Editors Only:** *No Comments*

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| | |
|---|---|
| Reviewer Name: Dr. Mwewa Mervyn Musonda | |
| University, Country: University of Lusaka, Zambia. | |
| Date Manuscript Received: 24th September, 2026 | Date Review Report Submitted: |
| Manuscript Title: **Recording Violence, Evading Accountability: Documentary Knowledge after the Lynching of Zachariah Walker, 1911–1912** | |
| ESJ Manuscript Number: 1011/26 | |
| You agree that your name is revealed to the author of the paper: yes | |
| You approve, your name as a reviewer of this paper is available in the "review history" of the paper:<br>You approve, this review report is available in the "review history" of the paper: | |

## Evaluation Criteria:

**Please give each evaluation item a numeric rating on a 5-point scale, along with a thorough explanation for each point rating.**

| *Questions* | ***Rating Result*** [Poor] **1-5** [Excellent] |
|---|---|
| **1. The title is clear, and it is adequate for the content of the article.** | **4** |
| *Very good title, clear and adequate in line with the article and speaking to its content.* | |
| **2. The abstract presents objectives, methods, and results.** | **4** |
| *The objective, methods and results are all properly tabulated except there should be a clear demarcation indicating the specific aspect which as it seems so difficult to tell in the manner that the author/s have paragraphed the abstract. Please have a look at that so that there can be that distinction.* | |
| **3. There are a few grammatical errors and spelling mistakes in this article.** | **4.5** |
| *Not seen any* | |
| **4. The study methods are explained clearly.** | **3** |
| *While I appreciate the philosophical approach embraced by the author/s, I equally think they could have done a little more to elaborate or indeed stated the kind of method, which academically is supposed to be the case. A reader should not look for or try very hard to see/understand the method used in an article. State it clearly and simply so that if the study could be replicated, it could produce similar results or simply for the reason of examining if the method used for your study is the most appropriate.* | |
| **5. The results are clear and do not contain errors.** | **4** |
| *In line with the objective set for the article, the results are clear.* | |
| **6. The conclusions or summary are accurate and supported by the content.** | **4** |
| *Accurate and supported by content.* | |
| **7. The references are comprehensive and appropriate.** | **4** |
| | |

**Overall Recommendation** (mark an X with your recommendation) :

| | |
|---|---|
| Accepted, no revision needed | |
| Accepted, minor revision needed | **X** |
| Return for major revision and resubmission | |
| Reject | |

**Comments and Suggestions to the Author(s): let the author take a second look at the abstract. It is the heart of an academic paper/review. It sets the tone of what the discussion is all about. It is divided into 3 or 4 parts that are distinct. It makes it easy for readers to follow the author's thoughts/thinking and what is been discussed, written about. All is good.**

**Comments and Suggestions to the Editors Only: Nil.**

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| | |
|---|---|
| Reviewer Name: Ed Raphael B. Espinoza | |
| University, Country: Panpacific University- Philippines | |
| Date Manuscript Received: 9/23/2026 | Date Review Report Submitted: |
| Manuscript Title: Recording Violence, Evading Accountability: Documentary Knowledge after the Lynching of Zachariah Walker, 1911–1912 | |
| ESJ Manuscript Number: ---38.---11.10.2026--- | |
| You agree that your name is revealed to the author of the paper: Yes | |
| You approve, your name as a reviewer of this paper is available in the "review history" of the paper: Yes<br>You approve, this review report is available in the "review history" of the paper: Yes | |

## Evaluation Criteria:

**Please give each evaluation item a numeric rating on a 5-point scale, along with a thorough explanation for each point rating.**

| ***Questions*** | ***Rating Result*** [Poor] **1-5** [Excellent] |
|---|---|
| **1. The title is clear, and it is adequate for the content of the article.** | **5** |
| *(Please insert your comments)*<br>**The title, "Recording Violence, Evading Accountability: Documentary Knowledge after the** | |

**Lynching of Zachariah Walker, 1911–1912," is clear, specific, and strongly aligned with the manuscript's central argument. It identifies both the substantive subject—violence surrounding the lynching of Zachariah Walker—and the article's analytical focus on documentation, accountability, and the period following the event.**

**The phrase "Documentary Knowledge" accurately reflects the manuscript's distinctive contribution. The article does not merely reconstruct the lynching; it examines how the death certificate, newspapers, police investigation, grand jury proceedings, criminal trials, Black press, and political commentary produced different forms of knowledge about the same event.**

**The inclusion of 1911–1912 is also appropriate because the analysis extends beyond the August 1911 lynching into the subsequent investigations, prosecutions, and political commentary. The title is therefore neither excessively broad nor misleading.**

| **2. The abstract presents objectives, methods, and results.** | **4** |
|---|---|

*(Please insert your comments)*

**The abstract effectively identifies the principal research problem: how a highly documented public killing could nevertheless end without a criminal conviction. It also clearly identifies the sources used, including the death certificate, newspapers, Black periodicals, grand jury report, criminal proceedings, and political commentary.**

**The abstract also communicates the principal analytical approach by explaining that the case is followed through "successive documentary settings." This gives readers a concise understanding of the manuscript's methodology and theoretical orientation.**

**The principal finding is also clearly stated: "documentary density and legal accountability developed unevenly." This is an effective summary of the article's contribution.**

**However, the abstract could be improved by making the methodological procedure more explicit. At present, it describes the source base and analytical movement but does not explicitly state that the study uses a comparative, sequential, archive-centered historical analysis. The manuscript later describes this methodology clearly, but the abstract should communicate it more directly.**

**The abstract could also state the major result in slightly more concrete terms—for example, that institutional records increasingly documented the event while criminal procedure progressively narrowed responsibility to individual defendants.**

| **3. There are a few grammatical errors and spelling mistakes in this article.** | **4** |
|---|---|

*(Please insert your comments)*

**The manuscript is generally well written, scholarly in tone, and grammatically strong. The prose is considerably more polished than many historical research manuscripts. Sentences are generally coherent, terminology is consistent, and the argument progresses logically.**

**There are, however, some areas requiring copyediting and stylistic refinement. Several sentences are long and contain multiple conceptual clauses. This occasionally makes the argument more difficult to follow, particularly in the Methods and Discussion sections.**

**There are also instances where wording could be tightened. For example, expressions such as:**

**"The record preserved several scales of explanation"**

**"Documentary knowledge was cumulative in volume and unstable in force"**

**"The archive remained open to political and historical argument"**

**are conceptually interesting, but some may benefit from more direct wording depending on the journal's preferred style.**

**The manuscript should also undergo a final check for APA/reference formatting, capitalization of newspaper titles, archival citation consistency, punctuation, dates, page numbers, and consistency in the presentation of primary sources.**

**Importantly, these are predominantly editorial rather than fundamental writing problems.**

| **4. The study methods are explained clearly.** | **4** |
|---|---|

*(Please insert your comments)*

**The Methods section is one of the stronger components of the manuscript. It provides a clear explanation of the historiographical foundation, source strategy, analytical concepts, documentary sequence, and limitations of the available evidence.**

**The manuscript appropriately explains that the sources are not treated as interchangeable factual accounts. Instead, they are examined according to institutional purpose, audience, authority, scale of responsibility, and evidentiary limitations. This is methodologically appropriate for an archive-centered historical study.**

**The distinction among "documentary knowledge," "documentary density," "public knowledge," and "legal proof" is particularly useful. These concepts provide an analytical framework for interpreting why a large volume of documentation did not necessarily result in criminal conviction.**

**The manuscript is also commendably transparent about limitations, particularly the statement that the corpus does not contain a complete transcript for every criminal proceeding. The distinction between newspaper accounts and courtroom testimony is methodologically responsible.**

**A minor concern is that the methodology could be made more reproducible. For example, the authors could specify more systematically:**

**how the sources were selected;**

**whether all available newspaper reports were examined or only selected reports;**

**how conflicting accounts were compared;**

**how the documentary categories were developed;**

**how the author determined which claims were sufficiently supported by independent sources.**

**The study does not require a quantitative methodology, but a clearer description of the source-selection and comparative-analysis procedure would strengthen methodological transparency.**

| **5. The results are clear and do not contain errors.** | **3** |
|---|---|

*(Please insert your comments)*

**The Results section is substantively rich and logically organized, and it effectively follows the manuscript's documentary sequence. The major sections—Northern Racial Violence, Body to Public Record, Public Knowledge to Criminal Evidence, Witnesses and Individualized Prosecution, and African American Counter-Records—are relevant to the central research question.**

**A major strength is the manuscript's ability to distinguish between what a source documented and what that documentation could legally establish. This is particularly clear in the discussion of death certificates, newspapers, grand jury proceedings, witnesses, indictments, and criminal trials.**

**However, this section receives 3/5 rather than 4/5 or 5/5 because several historical claims are presented with a level of confidence that would benefit from more explicit primary-source verification.**

**For example, statements concerning:**

**the precise conduct of members of the crowd;**

**witness pressure and community silence;**

**the number and sequence of indictments;**

**contradictory identifications;**

**the role of particular newspapers in shaping civic narratives;**

**the precise significance of the Charles Umsted proceeding;**

**the relationship between particular newspaper accounts and subsequent legal developments;**

**should be carefully checked against the original archival or newspaper sources.**

**The manuscript itself acknowledges this limitation, which is a strength. Nevertheless, some interpretive statements occasionally move from documented evidence to broader historical inference without always making the transition explicit.**

**For example, the statement that:**

**“Silence in this setting differed from ignorance.”**

**is analytically compelling, but it requires careful evidentiary support because silence, non-cooperation, fear, social pressure, and lack of knowledge are historically distinguishable conditions.**

**Similarly, the claim that:**

**“The documentary sequence reveals a consistent pattern.”**

**should be supported by clearly identifying which primary documents establish each stage of the sequence.**

**The Results section would also benefit from more direct integration of primary-source evidence, particularly short quotations or precise archival references where the argument depends heavily on a particular document.**

| **6. The conclusions or summary are accurate and supported by the content.** | **4** |
|---|---|

*(Please insert your comments)*

**The Conclusion accurately reflects the manuscript's central argument. It does not introduce a substantially different argument from the Results and Discussion sections. The central finding—that extensive documentation did not automatically produce criminal accountability—is consistently developed throughout the article.**

**The conclusion appropriately brings together the major documentary institutions:**

**vital registration;**

**newspapers;**

**state police;**

**grand jury;**

**criminal courts;**

**African American newspapers;**

**the NAACP;**

**political commentary.**

**It also appropriately distinguishes historical responsibility from criminal guilt, which is an important methodological strength.**

**The statement that:**

**“Documentary capacity and legal accountability developed unevenly”**

**provides a concise formulation of the article's contribution and is adequately supported by the preceding discussion.**

**The conclusion could nevertheless be slightly more concise. Several ideas have already been extensively developed in the Discussion section and are repeated in the Conclusion. A more compact conclusion would increase its impact.**

**The final paragraph could also more explicitly state the manuscript's original contribution to existing Coatesville and lynching historiography, rather than primarily restating the findings.**

| **7. The references are comprehensive and appropriate.** | **4** |
|---|---|

*(Please insert your comments)*

**The reference list is generally strong and appropriate for the subject. A particularly important strength is the combination of primary and secondary sources.**

**The primary-source collection includes:**

**death records;**
**local newspapers;**
**metropolitan newspapers;**
**African American newspapers;**
**The Crisis;**
**grand jury material;**
**court/archival material;**
**political commentary.**

**This is appropriate for an article whose principal argument concerns documentary production and institutional knowledge.**

**The secondary literature also demonstrates familiarity with the major historiographical areas relevant to the study, including:**

**lynching and racial violence;**
**northern lynching;**
**criminal justice;**
**African American resistance;**

**media representation;**

**archival theory;**

**racial-violence archives.**

**The inclusion of Ziglar, Hyser and Downey, Pfeifer, Wood, Waldrep, Williams, Sutherland, Muñoz Martinez, and Zangrando provides a solid historiographical foundation.**

**Nevertheless, the references should receive a final verification against the actual sources. In particular, the author should verify:**

**every newspaper title, date, and page/issue information;**

**archival collection and call-number information;**

**consistency between in-text citations and the reference list;**

**whether every major factual claim has an identifiable source;**

**DOI and bibliographic details;**

**whether primary sources available in archival databases should be cited with sufficient retrieval/collection information.**

**Because the article's contribution depends heavily on documentary evidence, source accuracy is especially important.**

## Overall Recommendation (mark an X with your recommendation) :

| | |
|---|---|
| Accepted, no revision needed | |
| Accepted, minor revision needed | **x** |
| Return for major revision and resubmission | |
| Reject | |

## Comments and Suggestions to the Author(s):

The manuscript presents a strong and potentially valuable contribution to the historiography of the 1911 lynching of Zachariah Walker by shifting attention from the event itself to the production, transformation, and institutional use of documentary knowledge. The distinction among documentary knowledge, public knowledge, documentary density, and legal proof is particularly useful. The extensive use of primary newspapers, archival records, legal proceedings, the Black press, and secondary historical scholarship provides a solid foundation for the study.

However, several revisions are recommended to further strengthen the manuscript:

1. **Clarify the methodological framework.**
   The manuscript describes the approach as comparative and sequential, but the methodology would be stronger if the author explicitly identified the study as a

historical/documentary analysis and explained the criteria used to select, organize, compare, and interpret the sources.

2. **Strengthen primary-source verification.**
   Because the article's main contribution depends on documentary evidence, important claims regarding witness testimony, community silence, indictments, acquittals, police conduct, and the Charles Umsted proceedings should be checked carefully against the original archival and legal records.
3. **Distinguish evidence from interpretation more consistently.**
   Some statements move from documented evidence to historical interpretation without clearly signaling the transition. The author should use phrases such as "the record indicates," "the newspaper reported," "Hyser and Downey argue," or "this suggests" where appropriate.
4. **Clarify the discussion of community silence and witness behavior.**
   The argument concerning social pressure, non-cooperation, intimidation, and changing testimony is important, but these claims should be supported by the strongest available primary evidence. The author should avoid implying that all members of the community participated in or supported a coordinated effort to prevent convictions unless the evidence establishes this.
5. **Provide more precise documentation of the criminal proceedings.**
   The manuscript discusses different numbers of indictments and defendants at different points. Although the author explains that these figures correspond to different procedural moments, a concise chronological table identifying the indictments, defendants, charges, proceedings, and outcomes would substantially improve clarity.
6. **Strengthen the treatment of the Charles Umsted case.**
   The Umsted proceeding is potentially important because it expands the discussion from individual mob participants to official responsibility. The author should provide additional details concerning the charge, procedural history, and disposition of the case, insofar as the surviving record permits.
7. **Reduce repetition in the Results and Discussion.**
   Several arguments—particularly the distinction between public knowledge and legal proof, the role of local witnesses, and the limitations of individualized prosecution—are repeated in multiple sections. Condensing these repetitions would make the manuscript more focused without weakening its argument.
8. **Make the original contribution more explicit.**
   The manuscript clearly builds upon Ziglar, Hyser and Downey, Pfeifer, Williams, Sutherland, and other scholars. The author should state more directly, preferably near the end of the Introduction, **what the present article demonstrates that previous Coatesville scholarship has not fully explained**.
9. **Refine the abstract.**
   The abstract is strong, but it would benefit from explicitly naming the research approach and stating the principal finding in a more direct form. This would

allow readers to understand immediately that the article examines the transformation of information across institutional settings.

10. **Review the terminology “evading accountability.”**
    The phrase is effective and consistent with the manuscript's argument, but it may imply intentional avoidance by identifiable actors. The author should clarify whether “evading accountability” refers to deliberate conduct, institutional outcomes, or the broader inability of the criminal justice process to secure individual convictions.
11. **Strengthen the limitations section.**
    The manuscript appropriately acknowledges incomplete criminal transcripts and uneven archival preservation. It would be useful to state more explicitly how these limitations affect the interpretation of witness behavior, community involvement, and individual responsibility.
12. **Conduct a final reference and archival citation check.**
    The reference list is extensive and generally appropriate, but all newspaper titles, publication dates, archival identifiers, legal citations, page numbers, DOI information, and in-text/reference-list correspondence should be verified before publication.

**Comments and Suggestions to the Editors Only:**