

Lynching in America High School Lesson Plan

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INTRODUCTION

TEACHING THE LEGACY OF LYNCHING IN THE UNITED STATES

The history of lynching in the United States remains with us all, even as it goes largely unspoken and unacknowledged.

The history of lynching in America is undeniably brutal and disturbing; yet avoiding this brutality disallows meaningful understanding of U.S. history. The ongoing challenge for teachers will be finding a balance between engaging and confronting the reality in its difficulty, while also supporting the emotional experience of students. Constructive approaches to this challenge will be largely dependent on the students and the context in which teachers are working. *Teaching the Taboo: Courage and Imagination in the Classroom* (2011), by Bill and Rick Ayers, takes up the concerns that many teachers might have about teaching difficult topics in the classroom.

TEACHING RACE AND RACISM

Teaching young people about race presents particular challenges for a lot of the same reasons that are explored in these curricular materials — we are not broadly educated on U.S. history on the experiences and/or perspectives of people of color. Color-blind ideology has discouraged honest discussion about race, and the discourse on diversity rarely addresses historical contexts for current-day racial dynamics. Further, many of us do not have a lot experience thinking very deeply about race, much less talking or teaching students about race and racism. At the same time, there are convenient narratives that are widely circulated and taken as reasonable explanations for past and present injustices, allowing many to avoid any critical engagement with race. These dominant narratives on race have explained away racial injustice using some of the same logic that is under examination in these curricular materials. These dominant narratives have minimized and justified historical practices and denied the legacy of those historical practices. While one does not need to be an expert in race theory to be able to teach students effectively, teachers will need to be sensitive to how dominant narratives rooted in white supremacy have influenced their own culture, knowledge, and understanding of the world, all of which impacts their teaching practice.

In “The White Man’s Guilt,” James Baldwin discusses the consequences of refusing to contend with history. Although written in 1965, the essay could be written today. *In Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), Toni Morrison writes about how the writers that make up the American literary tradition have collectively and consistently pretended black Americans did not exist, avoiding representation altogether or limiting representation to two-dimensional stereotypical characters. In media and popular culture, many have critiqued the lack of diversity in representation. If we are educated in U.S. schools, we have been educated in white supremacy. In order to be successful enough to become teachers, we have learned the dominant narratives that have systematically and consistently denied the voices, contributions, experiences, and knowledge of people of color, without realizing that that was what we were doing. This means that, with regard to race, we have been miseducated. Without troubling this miseducation within ourselves, we are likely

to reproduce dominant narratives in our own classrooms, even as we mean to do otherwise. But to do otherwise requires an ongoing unlearning. This unlearning necessarily reconfigures the classroom in terms of student-teacher dynamics, making the teacher less “the expert” and much more the facilitator and co-researcher, learning alongside students, rather than simply dictating to them how and what they should be learning. This kind of teaching is open to student experience, insight, and expertise.

In *Storytelling for Social Justice: Connecting Narrative and the Arts in Antiracist Teaching* (2013), Lee Anne Bell discusses the role of counterstories and resistant stories in undermining dominant narratives that have dehumanized and devalued populations of people. For many teachers, the challenge will be to think deeply about how their thinking and being in the world have been mediated by the logics of white supremacy.

DIFFICULT KNOWLEDGE

Deborah Britzman identifies difficult knowledge as “the representations of social traumas in curriculum and the individual’s encounters with them in pedagogy” (Pitt and Britzman, 2003, p. 755). Learning about lynching, slavery, and racial terror is difficult for students of all ages and should be approached with care and consideration. Learning about lynching will be difficult for many students, and they will experience this learning in a variety of ways. It will be up to the teacher, drawing on relationships with students, to determine how to support students in their learning. There is also the potential for students to become upset or emotional in ways that they may not be able to articulate. The lessons are written in acknowledgment of the emotional difficulty of both teaching and learning about lynching in the United States. Each lesson makes time for processing and guides students to think deeply about their learning, rather than memorize facts. There are also plenty of opportunities for thoughtful reflection and information processing in short, low-stakes writing assignments. These assignments, along with discussion, anonymous note cards, and group work, will assist teachers to monitor student learning in order to support their process. As students learn, they will be able to use their insight to write longer pieces, present their ideas with increased confidence, and collaborate in projects that can be shared in the broader school community.

Prior to teaching this material, teachers might have students prepare to approach this difficult topic by exploring what it means to learn about the pain and trauma of others. Students might learn how trauma can be felt by people who have not directly experienced the trauma. The teacher can address the complexity of difficult knowledge by reading an essay or short story that deals with this topic and facilitating a brief conversation about the piece with some time for writing and sharing. By doing this, the teacher gains insight about how students might approach the topics and also prepare them for the work. An essay or short story can be referred to over the course of the learning when students are challenged by their responses or the responses of their peers. Drawing students’ attention to the difficulty of engaging traumatic and tragic history at the beginning of the lesson will help prepare them for the experience and the serious work of learning. Additionally, the teacher can give students the opportunity to consider the role of empathy and other complicated emotions in learning about painful pasts.

It might also be important to decide upon community standards for language, behavior, and participation that are respectful in order to honor both the topic of study and all participants.

REFERENCES

Rick Ayres and William Ayers. *Teaching the Taboo: Courage and Imagination in the Classroom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2014).

James Baldwin, “The White Man’s Guilt,” in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998) p. 722.

Lee Anne Bell. *Storytelling for Social Justice: Connecting Narrative and the Arts in Antiracist Teaching* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

Toni Morrison. *Playing in the Dark : Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

Alice Pitt and Deborah Britzman. “Speculations on Qualities of Difficult Knowledge in Teaching and Learning: An experiment in Psychoanalytic Research,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* (vol.16 no.6, 2003), 755–776.

ABOUT THE LESSON PLANS

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

[Equal Justice Initiative](#) created the following curricular materials aligned with the Common Core State Standards. With the above challenges in mind, the lessons are intended to be adaptable to a variety of educational contexts. While there is a way to follow all of the lessons in sequence, teachers are encouraged to supplement and adapt the curricular materials at every stage of the learning in ways that make sense in their classrooms and learning spaces. These materials can be adapted to a variety of subject areas, by supplementing with literature for English and composition; music and art from the relevant time period can become central to study in subject areas in art, photography, and film, as well as history and social studies.

STRUCTURE OF THE LESSONS

The lessons are Common Core Standards aligned and organized around two units. The first unit closely follows the structure of the [EJI report *Lynching in America*](#) and is supplemented by the EJI report [Slavery in America](#) as well as their report [Lynching in America: Targeting Black Veterans](#). Students read, journal, discuss, and apply their learning in writing, projects, and presentations — both individually and in small groups.

MATERIALS

At the beginning of each lessons, the materials are listed. To streamline the materials, the teacher can create a reader that includes all reports and supplemental reading in one bound text. If the teacher opts to do this, each student will have access to all of the reading material used in the lessons and will be able to easily reread and reference the material.

ASKING THE SAME QUESTION REPEATEDLY

Over the course of these lessons, students are asked the same and/or similar questions repeatedly. This is not meant to bore them, but to support their emerging thinking by drawing their attention to the ways in which their thinking evolves in relation to new information and learning experiences. Students can compare their thinking with their colleagues', and the teacher can guide students to make critical and relevant connections toward developing insight and perspective.

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

Students are asked to reflect on their learning, both individually and in groups. These small writing assignments are low stakes but ask students to articulate their emerging thinking. This ongoing process allows students to work through the new information, but also tracks student learning for the teacher so that redirection or deeper explanations can occur before moving forward.

INFORMED CONSIDERATION

Students have a lot of opinions about the world. The purpose of these lessons is to challenge those opinions and poke at the source of those opinions through inquiry and reflection, in response to learning new information about history. These lessons hope that students will consider the world as it relates to new information and perspectives in order to become open to changing their viewpoint based on new information.

UNIT 1 : LYNCHING AND RACIAL TERROR

LESSON 1 : HISTORY AND ENGAGING THE PAST

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does knowing and thinking about the narratives of history we have available impact our ability to make sense of and act in the present?

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson is an opportunity for students to take stock of current iterations of white supremacy and be introduced to the historical origins of racial hierarchies and the Myth of Racial Difference, which continue to be evident today in the racial distribution of wealth, power, housing, education, and status. While students may have some knowledge of race, this lesson will challenge the dominant narrative of race in the United States. Students will be encouraged to make clear connections between the present and the topic of lynching. In this lesson, students will also identify their study groups and begin a journal, which they will keep over the course of their learning.

RATIONALE

This lesson asks students to begin to critically look at the world that they have known and understood in a particular way, and look anew. This fresh look should be in response to learning new information. This particular lesson is an opportunity for students to become prepared to grapple with difficult historical knowledge, as it relates to current-day questions and concerns about the present. This lesson emphasizes the relevance of history and the need to study history.

INTRODUCTION

Racial terror lynchings took place across a significant period of time in the United States (1877 – 1950) and impacted millions of black people in a variety of ways. An estimated 4,000 people were killed in racial terror lynchings, and even more families and neighbors were directly impacted by the campaign of racial terror in the South. Lynching and racial terror impacted generations of black people. These lynchings ended the lives of many black people and disrupted the lives of many others.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

TIME

1 – 2 class sessions

MATERIALS

Access to lynchinginamerica.eji.org
Journals

LESSON PLAN

BEGINNING

On the board, the teacher asks students to write in their journals in response to the following question:

Why might we study the history of lynching today?

After students have read this question, they might answer briefly. The teacher then has students watch the [Henry Smith profile](#).

Students should write in response to the same prompt for 5 to 10 minutes and then share their responses in a small group. Once they have had sufficient time to do this, the teacher (or a student) can facilitate a discussion of their responses. The teacher should keep track of student responses by writing student responses on the board or by having students write their own responses on the board. The teacher should take a photo of the board with their responses, which students can refer back to at various points in their learning. This will act as a class artifact that can represent their learning over time.

Note: If the teacher is using an online platform for the course, the teacher can post this photo on the course page and have students respond on the discussion board at various points in the lesson. Also, the teacher can ask students to take their journal entries and post responses to a discussion board on the course page.

The teacher should tell students that they will be able to thoroughly and competently answer the following questions by the end of their experience learning about lynching in the U.S. Students are not expected to be able to answer these questions at this time but should identify one that they would like to return to again and again, in both their study groups and individually.

1. What were the stated reasons that black people were lynched? How did those reasons obscure the actual purpose of lynching?
2. What does the history of lynching in America have to do with present-day America? How might you explain the relevance of that history to someone who is unaware?
3. How pervasive was lynching in the United States? Who were the victims of racial terror lynchings? Who were the perpetrators of racial terror lynchings? How did lynching impact the lives of black people?

4. What kind of society enabled lynching to occur for such a long period of time and to so many people? How did people who were not targeted by lynching respond to the violence that was regular and public?
5. What were some of the immediate consequences of racial terror lynchings? What have been some of the long-term effects of racial terror lynchings in the United States?
6. How can the history of lynching in America help us to understand and respond to the present-day issues of racial injustice? How does ignorance of the history make us susceptible to misunderstanding the present?
7. How is the overall health of a society undermined by obscuring historical realities that might not match a nation's stated ideals?

MIDDLE

Students read [“Introduction” of the *Lynching in America* digital report](#) (pp. 3-5 of PDF) and listen to the [Thomas Miles audio story](#).

Once students have heard the audio story, have students take a sheet of paper and fold it lengthwise, leaving additional space on the right side. On the left side, students write 3 to 5 questions that came to mind as they were listening. Students should have some time (10 to 15 minutes) to wander around the classroom and discuss their questions and write their responses on the right side of the paper.

END

Students have a discussion about how lynching continues to impact this particular family, then students have 15 to 20 minutes to respond to the following prompt in their journal:

We are living in a time that encourages us to imagine the present as ahistorical. Our official memory is short, and many of us are confused by current iterations of issues that are, in fact, quite old. This inability to meaningfully engage the past is not without costs, as the past impacts our lives whether we recognize it or not. What is something (personal or otherwise) that has happened in the past that continues to have impact into the present?

Note: Some high school students may be overwhelmed by this question. The journal writing should be low stakes and an opportunity for them to discover what they know.

Once students have written on this topic, they share a word, a phrase, or a line or two of their writing. Students should be encouraged to respond to their peers' writing, on comment cards or verbally.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Lynching is something that is referred to quite a bit in popular culture, often with no acknowledgment of the history attached to the references. Politicians refer to lynching casually to describe the experience of being criticised or challenged, and lynching imagery shows up in popular media. Students can collect some of these references and representations, to think about how current references to lynching further erase the actual history and its continued implications. Students can

critically compare representations of lynching to the history that they are learning. Students can create and monitor a class blog, and students can post photos of their artifacts on the blog and discuss them on the discussion board and in person.

Note: If students plan on doing this activity, this is a great opportunity to have a discussion on how violence against black people is documented and circulated in ways that are particular and racial. Use one of the following articles to facilitate a conversation about what it means to consume images of black suffering and death. Students might determine that they do not want to bring in images that represent violence against black people. See the following:

1. "I Will Not Share Videos of Police Officers Killing Black People," by Tiffany Onyejiaka, Huffington Post, September 23, 2016
2. "Why I Will Not Share the Video of Alton Sterling's Death," by April Reign, *Washington Post*, July 6, 2016

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Langston Hughes. "Let America Be America Again"

Anne Rice, ed., *Witnessing Lynching: American Writers Respond* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

UNIT 1 : LYNCHING AND RACIAL TERROR

LESSON 2: SLAVERY AND INVENTING THE MYTH OF RACIAL DIFFERENCE

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How do popular representations of slavery disrupt and/or reproduce incomplete or misguided understandings of slavery and U.S. history that propagate the Myth of Racial Difference?

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will recall some of their encounters with images and texts about slavery. Through critical analysis, they will begin to critique some of the ways that slavery is represented in relation to their new learning about slavery and Reconstruction. Then they will think about how the Myth of Racial Difference becomes the taken-for-granted logic of dominant culture, discourse, and society.

RATIONALE

Students in high school likely have learned something about U.S. slavery, but it is just as likely that their knowledge is incomplete and/or even inaccurate. The purpose of this lesson is to draw students' attention to those inaccuracies and assist them in reframing their historical knowledge about slavery in preparation for meaningfully learning about lynching. This lesson further assists students in engaging the Myth of Racial Difference as a way of thinking about how racial hierarchies are enforced and reproduced across eras, beginning with slavery and into the present.

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, there has been a resurgence of interest in representing U.S. slavery in popular culture. More recently, there have been a number of films and television shows that have made U.S. slavery central. These films and television shows represent aspects of slavery but rarely represent the time in its complexity or entirety. This is because the purpose is not to accurately represent historical truths, but instead to entertain and profit financially. This lesson will ask students to look critically at popular representations of slavery in relation to what they learn by reading excerpts from the EJI Slavery Report. (These readings will be included in the lesson plan.)

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3

Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

KEY TERMS

Narrative: Story, account

Mythology or myth: A popular belief or tradition, especially one embodying the ideals and institutions of a society or fragment of society

Institution: A significant practice, relationship, or organization in a society or culture

Genocide: The deliberate and systematic destruction of a racial, political, or cultural group

TIME

5 – 6 class sessions

MATERIALS

Popular media depictions of slavery: clips from films, art, literature, and television shows

Access to lynchinginamerica.eji.org

Journals

HANDOUTS

H1.2.1 Excerpt from *Slavery in America*: “Introduction”

H1.2.2 Exploring Narratives

H1.2.3 Excerpt from *Slavery in America*: “Inventing Racial Inferiority: How American Slavery Was Different”

LESSON PLAN

BEGINNING

As an introduction, students receive a note card and briefly and anonymously write in response to the following prompt:

How do you understand race? How do you understand racism?

Once students have written, the teacher can collect the cards and read some or all of them aloud. Students should be encouraged to ask questions or make comments in response. The teacher should keep track of some of these comments by writing them on the board.

Note: Students might say any manner of things, but this is a good chance to determine where students are in their thinking at the beginning of this lesson. This question can be referenced over the course of the learning. After the class has completed the note card activity, the teacher can ask students: *How does history help us understand racism in the present?*

Students can have small-group discussions and share the highlights of their discussion with the larger class.

The teacher might briefly discuss how the average person gets information about the world and how those sources are often insufficient. The teacher can tell students that they will be learning about the history of lynching in America and how that history relates to the present. Students will reflect on the ways they know about the world, and how their understanding of that world is based on both what they *know* and *do not know* about the world. The questions discussed at the beginning should be a way to monitor student learning over the course of the lessons.

Then students watch the video defining [racial terror lynchings](#) and read the “Introduction” of *Slavery*

in America (H1.2.1) independently, and highlight what resonates or stands out to them. Students might also write about what comes to mind as they are listening and reading.

Students will co-create a list of films, shows, classes, art, and books that they have encountered that discussed or represented U.S. slavery. They will spend some time thinking about what they have learned from these depictions of slavery and also what they have *not* learned. After students have made a list, they should write 2 or 3 paragraphs about what they think they have learned about slavery from these encounters with various texts, and how they understand slavery as connected to the present.

Note: When used, the term “text” refers to film, television, books, digital media, etc.

The teacher can facilitate a conversation about what students have learned about slavery as a result of these encounters. Depending on their answers, the teacher can discuss how these depictions can frame slavery in a variety of ways — some of which are more accurate than others. The teacher can choose 2 or 3 examples of popular texts (see suggestions below) and ask students to consider how slavery is framed across the different examples. Students may view/read/listen in class or be assigned the content to complete at home.

Ask students to form groups of 3 or 4 and discuss 2 or 3 of the questions listed below, in writing and/or discussion:

1. Who was involved in the creation of this piece? How might that impact how slavery is represented?
2. For each of the examples, what conclusions about slavery will likely be drawn by audiences about slavery as they encounter this text?
3. How do these examples represent slavery similarly? How do they represent slavery differently? Whose perspective is central in the text? Whose voice is not represented? How does this impact how the story is told and received by audiences?
4. Who do you imagine is the audience for this particular text? How does the intended audience impact how slavery is represented?
5. What is the purpose of these texts? (To entertain, to inform, to make a political statement, initiate a change in policy, social commentary, and/or some other combination?) How do you know that that is the purpose?
6. How does the purpose of the content impact what audiences can learn from encountering the text?
7. Reflect on your own learning about slavery: How thorough or complete do you think your understanding of slavery is? Explain with specific examples and details.

Once students have discussed their questions, they should create a brief multimedia presentation (5 to 6 minutes) summarizing their discussion and sharing their insights with their peers.

RELEVANT TEXTS

12 Years a Slave (2013)

Underground (TV series, 2016)

Gone with the Wind (film, 1939)

Glory (1989)

Manderlay (2005)
 Kara Walker's art
Beloved (film, 1998)
The Retrieval (2013)
Roots (TV series, 1977)
Uncle Tom's Cabin (film, 1927)
The Birth of a Nation (1915)

ADDITIONAL RELEVANT TEXTS

Zeba Bley, "Hollywood's Complex History of Portraying Slavery on Screen," *Huffington Post*, January 16, 2017.
 Noah Berlatsky, "12 Years a Slave: Yet Another Oscar-Nominated 'White Savior' Story," *The Atlantic*, January 17, 2014.
 Matthew Allen, "Films About Slavery Are Important, Even If You're Tired of Them," *Ebony*, June, 3, 2016.
 Tom Brook, "Slavery on Film: What Is Hollywood's Problem?" *BBC.com*, October 21, 2014.

MIDDLE

OPENING ACTIVITY

Ask students the following question:

What is a narrative? How are narratives created and why? How do narratives impact the way we see ourselves, our families, our communities, and our country? What is the Narrative of Racial Difference? Who created it and why?

The teacher might quickly review the previous lesson in terms of narratives. How have film, television, and popular media forwarded particular narratives about slavery? Colonization? American history?

Main ideas to reach in answering the question:

1. A narrative is a powerful tool for establishing, reinforcing, and spreading ideas, values, and institutions over time.
2. The Narrative of Racial Difference is an elaborate and enduring mythology about white supremacy and the inferiority of black people that was created to legitimate, perpetuate, and defend slavery.

NEXT: MOVE TO THE EXPLORING NARRATIVES HANDOUT (H1.2.2)

As a class, watch the Christopher Columbus animation [clip](#) and then ask one student to read aloud Side 1 of the Exploring Narratives handout. As a class, discuss the following questions:

1. Who do you think created this narrative and why?
2. What ideas, values, or institutions does it seek to establish or reinforce?
3. Does this narrative survive today? Does it still reinforce the ideas, values, or institutions you identified?

Ask a different student to read aloud Side 2 of the Exploring Narratives handout: Forced Removal of Native Americans. As a class, discuss the following questions:

1. What ideas, values, or institutions does this narrative seek to establish or reinforce?
2. How does this narrative interact with the Columbus narrative? Does it reduce or lessen its power?
3. Which of these narratives is more powerful and why?

SHARED READING: “INVENTING RACIAL INFERIORITY: HOW AMERICAN SLAVERY WAS DIFFERENT” (H1.2.3)

Before reading:

In a journal, students respond to the prompts “something I know,” “something I believe,” and “something I wonder” about each of the following terms:

- slavery
- white supremacy
- racial inferiority

Students share with a colleague and circle what they have in common. Students should ask, How do they know? What are their beliefs based on?

After reading:

Write the following on the board:

The Narrative of Racial Difference is an elaborate and enduring mythology about the inferiority of black people that was created to legitimate, perpetuate, and defend slavery.

CLOSING ACTIVITY

Direct students to read what they wrote in response to the before-reading prompt about “white supremacy.”

Students write in response to the following prompts:

1. How is “white supremacy” related to the Narrative of Racial Difference?
2. What does the genocide of Native Americans tell you about the early roots of the Narrative of Racial Difference?

Students return to their writing about narratives and myths and respond to one of the following prompts:

1. How do myths about race impact our society?
2. How are our current ideas about race and racism influenced by the same Myth of Racial Difference that was employed to justify slavery?
3. What are some similarities between past understandings of race and current ways of thinking about racial difference?

Key points:

1. American slavery was unique from other forms of slavery in that it relied upon a racial caste

system, or racial hierarchy, that tied slavery to race. To do this, a Myth of Racial Difference was created, circulated, and enforced, telling a narrative of black inferiority.

2. As slavery became an increasingly entrenched institution (see pp. 12 – 21 of EJI Slavery Report PDF), this myth justified its increasingly extreme violence and brutality. This myth was further strengthened by religious and scientific institutions (see “In Defense of Slavery” by Ta-Nehisi Coates and “What We Mean When We Say ‘Race Is a Social Construct’” by Ta-Nehisi Coates).
3. The institution of slavery relied on the Myth of Racial Difference and the myth of the benevolent slave owner to justify the dehumanizing and brutal treatment of black people.
4. Once slavery became illegal, these myths about race persisted in order to justify the continued subjugation of black people through violent intimidation, lynching, Jim Crow laws, Black Codes, voter suppression, and the expansion of the carceral state and increased use of capital punishment.
5. As the institution of slavery expanded, becoming more brutal and vicious, the myth helped to justify slavery as both benevolent and necessary, because under this logic, black people were inferior and in need of white guidance and management. White people were only providing a kindness to black people by enslaving them.
6. Although the Myth of Racial Difference was created to defend and justify the unique American institution of slavery, this myth persists into the present.
7. The Myth of Racial Difference both justifies and reproduces itself in a circular logic. Black people are different/inferior based on the myth, and the myth explains why black people are different/inferior. Despite now hundreds of years of evidence to the contrary, black inferiority is still the logic that organizes many U.S. institutions.

END

Students choose a text (any of the types of media discussed in these lesson plans) that has current representations of slavery, the Civil War, and/or Reconstruction. Students consider the way that history is framed in media representations toward a particular purpose. Students can do their own research to choose a text in a medium that they are interested in and can do this project individually or in pairs. The teacher can give students a list and/or students can propose a text to analyze based on their own interests in television, film, art, photography, and media. Students should write a 3- to 4-page paper about their analysis and create a brief presentation summarizing their media analysis.

Their analysis should specifically address the following:

1. How is slavery and/or Reconstruction represented?
2. Which characters (consider race, gender, social location, etc.) are developed? Which characters are undeveloped?
3. Whose perspective is central to the narrative? What effect does that have on the audience?
4. Is historical context provided? How?
5. What details and historical contexts are not represented or poorly represented? Explain.
6. What appears to be historically inaccurate?
7. What does this media representation of slavery do for audiences (inform, entertain, reproduce dominant narratives/misinform, etc.)? Students should be prepared to justify their responses with examples and explanations.

Students present their work to their colleagues, discuss their experience doing the analysis, and are encouraged to ask questions of their peers regarding their work.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

Ta-Nehisi Coates, "What We Mean When We Say 'Race Is a Social Construct,'" *The Atlantic*, May 15, 2013.

John Koblin, "How Much Do We Love TV? Let Us Count the Ways," *The New York Times*, June 30, 2016.

H1.2.1 EXCERPT FROM *SLAVERY IN AMERICA* – “INTRODUCTION”

Introduction

Beginning in the seventeenth century, millions of African people were kidnapped, enslaved, and shipped across the Atlantic to the Americas under horrific conditions that frequently resulted in starvation and death. Nearly two million people died at sea during the agonizing journey. For the next two centuries the enslavement of black people in the United States created wealth, opportunity, and prosperity for millions of Americans. As American slavery evolved, an elaborate and enduring mythology about the inferiority of black people was created to legitimate, perpetuate, and defend slavery. This mythology survived slavery’s formal abolition following the Civil War.

In the South, where the enslavement of black people was widely embraced, resistance to ending slavery persisted for another century following the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865. Today, 150 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, very little has been done to address the legacy of slavery and its meaning in contemporary life. In many communities like Montgomery, Alabama – which had a prominent role in the slave trade and was a primary site for human trafficking and facilitating slavery – there is little understanding of the slave trade, slavery, or the longstanding effort to sustain the racial hierarchy that slavery created. In fact, an alternative narrative has emerged in many Southern communities that celebrates the slavery era, honors slavery’s principal proponents and defenders, and refuses to acknowledge or address the problems created by the legacy of slavery. Great progress has been made in deconstructing some of the most explicit forms of racial injustice, but questions of racial inequality and discrimination continue to dominate social, cultural, and political life. Our history of racial injustice is not well understood and is often avoided, creating a racial divide which is evident today in hundreds of formal and informal ways.

In June 2013, at the request of Alabama officials, the United States Supreme Court struck down a key provision of the most significant remedial statute of the civil rights era, the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Alabama state and local elected officials have fought against the implementation of remedial statutes and decisions designed to protect voting, educational, and employment rights for African Americans since the end of slavery. The Court’s decision revives debate about the history and meaning of Southern resistance to remediation for African American victims of racial injustice. Slavery, decades of racial terror, legally sanctioned racial subordination, and segregation all have left an enduring legacy. How we discuss and confront this legacy will have profound implications for our future. From the administration of criminal justice to the myriad ways in which many people of color remain disadvantaged, race continues to matter.

The Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) believes that a more informed understanding of America’s racial history and the challenges it creates is vital to developing a healthier and more respectful local, state, and national identity. Reconciliation with a difficult past cannot be achieved without truthfully confronting history and finding a way forward that is thoughtful and responsible. We invite you to join us as we begin this effort by presenting this report on American slavery and the slave trade and how it relates to contemporary America. We hope that more information fosters greater knowledge and honest dialogue, and deepens our collective commitment to a just society. EJI believes that we have within us the capacity to transcend our history of racial injustice. But we shall overcome only if we engage in the important and difficult work toward reconciliation that lies ahead.

Bryan Stevenson, Director

H1.2.2 Exploring Narratives

Side 1: [Columbus Day Song](#)

Side 2: [Forced Removal of Native Americans](#)

SIDE 1

In fourteen hundred ninety-two
Columbus sailed the ocean blue.

He had three ships and left from Spain;
He sailed through sunshine, wind, and rain.

He sailed by night; he sailed by day;
He used the stars to find his way.

A compass also helped him know
How to find the way to go.

Ninety sailors were on board;
Some men worked while others snored.

Then the workers went to sleep;
And others watched the ocean deep.

Day after day they looked for land;
They dreamed of trees and rocks and sand.

October 12 their dream came true,
You never saw a happier crew!

“Indians! Indians!” Columbus cried;
His heart was filled with joyful pride.

But “India” the land was not;
It was the Bahamas, and it was hot.

The Arakawa natives were very nice;
They gave the sailors food and spice.

Columbus sailed on to find some gold
To bring back home, as he’d been told.

He made the trip again and again,
Trading gold to bring to Spain.

The first American? No, not quite.
But Columbus was brave, and he was bright.

Forced Removal of Native Americans

When Christopher Columbus reached the Americas in 1492, ten million indigenous people lived in what is now the United States. By 1900, there were less than 300,000.

In 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, which empowered the federal government to take Native-held land east of Mississippi and forcibly relocate Native people from their homes in Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, Florida, and Tennessee to “Indian territory” in what is now Oklahoma. In a mass atrocity remembered as the Trail of Tears, tens of thousands of Native Americans died or were killed after fleeing their homes in terror.

The Chiricahua Apache were exiled to Arizona, and in 1876, their settlement in Arizona was claimed by government officials, forcing Native people once again to relocate further west. Tribal leader Geronimo led many Chiricahua to Mexico and organized raids into Arizona against the white settlements occupying Chiricahua land. After years of conflict, the Chiricahua surrendered in 1885 and agreed to be detained by the United States Army for two years. Instead, many were incarcerated in prisons far from their families and homeland, held as prisoners of war without charges or trial for twenty-seven years.

Like the Chiricahua Apache, many Native tribes resisted terror campaigns waged by white settlers and the United States military to drive them from their land, and many thousands of indigenous people were killed or imprisoned. The displacement, violence, and deaths suffered by Native Americans are increasingly being recognized as genocide.

H1.2.3 EXCERPT FROM *SLAVERY IN AMERICA*: “INVENTING RACIAL INFERIORITY: HOW AMERICAN SLAVERY WAS DIFFERENT”

(pp. 6-8 of PDF)

Inventing Racial Inferiority: How American Slavery Was Different

The racialized caste system of American slavery that originated in the British colonies was unique in many respects from the forms of slavery that existed in other parts of the world.⁹ In the Spanish and Portuguese colonies, for example, slavery was a class category or form of indentured servitude – an “accident” of individual status that could befall anyone and could be overcome after a completed term of labor or assimilation into the dominant culture.¹⁰

American slavery began as such a system. When the first Africans were brought to the British colonies in 1619 on a ship that docked in Jamestown, Virginia, they held the legal status of “servant.”¹¹ But as the region’s economic system became increasingly dependent on forced labor, and as racial prejudice became more ingrained in the social culture, the institution of American slavery developed as a permanent, hereditary status centrally tied to race.¹²



Many enslaved and orphaned children were abandoned during the turmoil of the Civil War. (George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film.)

Over the next two centuries, the system of American slavery grew from and reinforced racial prejudice.¹³ Advocates of slavery argued that science and religion supported the fact of whites' racial superiority: white people were smart, hard-working, and more intellectually and morally evolved, while black people were dumb, lazy, child-like, and in need of guidance and supervision. In 1857, for example, Mississippi Governor William McWillie denounced anti-slavery critics and insisted:

The institution of American slavery developed as a permanent, hereditary status centrally tied to race.

"[T]he institution of slavery, per se, is as justifiable as the relation of husband and wife, parent and child, or any other civil institution of the State, and is most necessary to the well-being of the negro, being the only form of government or pupilage which can raise him from barbarism, or make him useful to himself or others; and I have no doubt but that the institution, thus far in our country, has resulted in the happiness and elevation of both races; that is, the negro and the white man. In no period of the world's history have three millions of the negro race been so elevated in the scale of being, or so much civilized or Christianized, as those in the United States, as slaves. They are better clothed, better fed, better housed, and more cared for in sickness and in health, than has ever fallen to the lot of any similar number of the negro race in any age or nation; and as a Christian people, I feel that it is the duty of the South to keep them in their present position, at any cost and at every peril, even independently of the questions of interest and security."¹⁴



"Contrabands" were enslaved people who escaped from plantations and sought protection from Union forces during the Civil War. These men escaped from plantations in South Carolina in 1862. (Collection of the New-York Historical Society, neg # 44751.)

Under this world view, black people's lifelong and nearly inescapable enslavement in the United States was defended not only as justified and necessary, but also as an act of kindness through which whites exposed their less-evolved human property to discipline, hard work, and morality. Though the reality of American slavery was often brutal, barbaric, and violent, the myth of black people's racial inferiority developed and persisted as a common justification for the system's continuation. This remained true throughout the Civil War, the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, and the 1865 adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment.

Though the reality of American slavery was often brutal, barbaric, and violent, the myth of black people's racial inferiority developed and persisted as a common justification for the system's continuation.

Indeed, ending slavery was not enough to overcome the harmful ideas created to defend it.¹⁵ "Freeing" the nation's masses of enslaved black people without undertaking the work to deconstruct the narrative of inferiority doomed those freedmen and -women and their descendants to a fate of subordinate, second-class citizenship. In the place of slavery, these beliefs in racial hierarchy took new expression in many forms, including lynching and other methods of racial terrorism; segregation and "Jim Crow"; and unprecedented rates of mass incarceration.

UNIT 1 : LYNCHING AND RACIAL TERROR

LESSON 3 : RECONSTRUCTION AND ENFORCING WHITE SUPREMACY

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How was lynching employed to violently enforce the myth of racial inferiority and maintain the racial hierarchy post-slavery?

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson allows students to explore how lynching was employed to keep black people subjugated post-slavery. Students should think about how slavery evolved, as lynching and racial terror increased in direct relation to the laws and policies that served to expand opportunities for black people.

RATIONALE

Many students have learned history as a series of events that move us toward continued progress. Students learn that slavery legally ended in 1863 but do not learn about how white supremacy remained “deeply rooted,” allowing slavery to evolve into institutions, policies, and customs that preserved the ideology of white supremacy.

INTRODUCTION

After slavery, there was a potential for radical change in terms of racial justice and reparation, but this did not happen. Contrary to the narrative that many students learn in the U.S., the end of slavery was not actually the end of the subjugation of black people, as is often understood. The institution of slavery and the brutal subjugation of black people evolved, as other practices and policies quickly replaced slavery.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2

Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.9

Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

KEY TERMS

Emancipation: The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 freed enslaved people in Southern states that had seceded from the Union. The Thirteenth Amendment, ratified in 1865, prohibited slavery throughout the United States “except as punishment for crime.”

Reconstruction: Process by which the federal government used federal troops and Congressional authority to enforce emancipation and protect formerly enslaved peoples’ new civil rights and American citizenship

Civil rights: The rights of personal liberty guaranteed to U.S. citizens by the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments and by acts of Congress, including the right to receive equal treatment and to be free from unfair discrimination in education, employment, housing, and other settings

Sharecropping: A system under which black laborers worked white-owned land in exchange for a share of the crop at harvest minus costs for food and lodging; sharecroppers frequently received no pay and had no recourse.

Convict leasing: The practice of selling the labor of state and local prisoners to private interests for state profit

Jim Crow: A term used to describe the subordination and separation of black people in the South, much of it codified and much of it still enforced by custom, habit, and violence.

TIME

1 – 2 class sessions

MATERIALS

Access to lynchinginamerica.eji.org

HANDOUTS

H1.3.1 Transcript of the Wes Johnson audio story

H1.3.2 Excerpt from *Slavery in America*: “The Lives and Fears of America’s Enslaved People”

H1.3.3 Excerpt from *Slavery in America*: “Montgomery Slave Trade”

H1.3.4 Excerpt from *Slavery in America*: “The Post-Slavery Experience”

LESSON PLAN

BEGINNING

Students listen to the [Wes Johnson audio story](#) (as well as receive a copy of the transcript, H1.3.1) and write down their responses.

Ask students to reflect on the myth of black inferiority and consider how slavery perpetuated that myth by violently controlling black autonomy in dehumanizing and barbarous ways – all of which were legal. The teacher might remind students of what life was like for black people who were enslaved by reading “The Lives and Fears of America’s Enslaved People” (H1.3.2) and “Montgomery Slave Trade” (H1.3.3) from the EJI Slavery Report.

Students should be encouraged to imagine how white people in the South had developed a deep investment in the myth of white supremacy, which justified their complicity in slavery while also allowing them to desire a democratic government where “all men are created equal.” Students might speculate how those white folks might have reacted after slavery became illegal following the Civil War, particularly when black inferiority was taken for granted as fact. Students might be reminded that white people overwhelmingly believed that black people were inferior morally, intellectually, and spiritually. Students should read “The Post-Slavery Experience” (H1.3.4) of the EJI Slavery Report. Broken into groups and drawing on textual evidence, students discuss **one** of the following questions:

1. How did the myth of black inferiority make slavery, not only possible, but widely supported, in a nation that was explicitly founded on “liberty and justice for all”?
2. What kind of groups formed during Reconstruction to maintain a racial hierarchy post-slavery? How were those groups enabled by the laws, policies, and customs in the South? What kind of climate did this create for black people?
3. How did white people view formerly enslaved black people? How did white people view all black people regardless of their status as formerly enslaved or not? What kind of climate did this create for formerly enslaved black people?

4. How did the federal government assist black people in the transition from enslavement to black autonomy? Were those efforts sufficient? Why or why not?
5. How did the white populous in the South respond to the end of slavery? How did the white populous in the North respond? How did both of these responses leave black people particularly vulnerable to violence and racial terror in the South?
6. What were some of the reasons that violence against black people increased post-Reconstruction?
7. Who perpetuated the violence against black people? What recourse did black people have in response to targeted racial violence?
8. How is violence against black people, both historically and currently, related to electoral politics? Distribution and control of resources? Labor exploitation?
9. When thinking about how black people were targeted for exclusion, economic exploitation, and racial terror post-Reconstruction, what connections can you make with the present time? Which groups are newly targeted? Which groups continue to be targeted? How does that impact their ability to live freely?

Give students time to report their thinking and to ask questions of each other. Guide students to support their answers with the text, particularly when there is confusion or uncertainty.

MIDDLE

Have students read [“Secession and Emancipation: 1861 – 1865”](#) (pp. 6–17 of Lynching Report PDF), and [“Back to Brutality: Restoring Racial Hierarchy Through Terror and Violence”](#) (pp. 18–26 of Lynching Report PDF).

Students should create a timeline, noting the important dates and events. All laws and policies referenced in their reading should be on their timeline with a brief explanation of their effects and consequences. Students will use this timeline to think about the relationship between lynching, black autonomy, and electoral politics.

Key points:

1. The enduring evil of American slavery was not forced labor; it was the Narrative of Racial Difference, which was created to justify the permanent enslavement of people based on their race. The Thirteenth Amendment ended forced labor, but it did not confront or change the Narrative of Racial Difference, which persists today. As a result, slavery didn’t end in 1865 – it evolved.
2. Racial progress is not continuous as time passes, rather it ebbs and flows, and must be maintained with great effort and vigilance. While slavery was made illegal, laws adapted to reposition black people at the economic and social bottom. In many cases, lynching picked up literally where the law left off.
3. White supremacy allowed people to imagine black people as inferior, criminal, and disposable. Jim Crow created the social and legal context to enforce white supremacy and also allowed black people to be targeted for violence and mistreatment.
4. Convict leasing and sharecropping allowed exploitation of black people and denied economic opportunity to black people, while also complying with the law.
5. Lynching, convict leasing, and legal and extralegal racial terror were ways to maintain the racial hierarchy even when slavery became illegal.

6. Lynching was an important part of maintaining racial hierarchy through racial terror, which caused black people to flee and required the black people who did not flee to comply with dehumanizing social norms and laws in the hope of remaining safe.

END

Students compare and contrast their timelines with the [Racial Terror Lynchings Map](#) to think about how historical events correlated with the frequency of lynching. Students can break into groups based on their interests in one of the following: economic implications, white supremacist vigilante groups, laws and policies, voting, and convict leasing/expanded incarceration system. Students can use the report and additional research to determine the relationship between these topics and lynching. Students can conduct the research as a small group but should individually write a 2- to 3-page essay about their topic's relationship to lynching.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ibram X. Kendi, "Racial Progress Is Real. But So Is Racist Progress," *The New York Times*, January 21, 2017.

H1.3.1 TRANSCRIPT OF WES JOHNSON AUDIO STORY

Episode 5 Transcript

James Johnson remembers his relative Wes Johnson, who was lynched in 1937 in Abbeville, AL.

James Johnson: I guess maybe I was an outspoken young boy — very curious, had a lot of questions. Why can't I drink at this water fountain? Why do I have to go through the back door of white people's homes? And we would pass right by nice white schools, but we were not allowed to go to those schools. I had a lot of whys, but no one would give me the answers. Most of the time they would tell me, "That's just the way it is," or, "That's the way it always has been."

But my mother told me about this young black guy, his name was Wes Johnson, and I was related to him. And so what had happened, this white guy thought there was a courtship going on between Wes Johnson and this white man's wife. So he was put in jail and a mob came. They took him and he was hanged and shot, I believe.

My mother's tone was very precautionary. It was very difficult, particularly for young black guys growing up here. And the least thing that you do, or it was perceived as being out of line, you could very well lose your life. My mother told me, "The most important thing here is keeping the family together. Don't worry about what they say or what they do, if you fight back, the family will be destroyed." And so we had to accept that, but, having to accept all this stuff, it caused me to be very bitter, because I didn't like the way things operated.

This is a time when the civil rights workers were being killed over in Mississippi and Alabama as well, prior to the march from Selma to Montgomery, so things were really just getting kicked off here. I was able to take part in the march where we integrated the Star Cafe. It being a small town like this, everybody knew everybody. They knew who I was, and they knew my grandmother, and she received a call once.

The words to her were, "Chastise that grandboy of yours, otherwise he gonna get in trouble." So my grandmother told me, she said, "Listen, you don't have to stay here, but I gotta live here." So rather than to risk her life, or my younger siblings, which were girls, I left.

'Course I wandered around for a while, and I still wasn't finding the answers I needed, so I knew that the best thing for me to do was to get in college—majored in education. By then I knew that eventually I was gonna return to the South, but I had to come back prepared. There was mob violence in New York and Chicago and throughout the North, but in the South it was so heinous because if you were a black male, you could very easily be lynched. Whether it was an electric chair or gas chamber, or whether it was with a rope or gun, it didn't matter.

And so I ended back here in Alabama, where I got my start, because there was a need to come back to help. It allowed me to be able to give the kids some of the answers that they were searching for that I couldn't get. So to come back here at home, to a place where you grew up, where you were

refused access to this high school, but now you're teaching in that high school. I felt like I had accomplished something.

And we are approximately twenty miles from where Wes Johnson was lynched. I don't know where it actually took place, but I often wonder if this is the area it happened. I wonder if this is the tree where it happened, you know? But the people that could've told me more about that are dead now.

The era of lynchings, it left a bitter taste in the mouths, or in the lives, of both black and whites throughout this country who did not particularly like what was going on, but many went along just to get along. So this is a very dark spot in American history that would never be erased, because the people who could've done something about it allowed it to happen.

H1.3.2 EXCERPT FROM *SLAVERY IN AMERICA*: “THE LIVES AND FEARS OF AMERICA’S ENSLAVED PEOPLE”

(PP. 8-11 OF PDF)

The Lives and Fears of America’s Enslaved People

In the decades leading up to the Civil War, confronted with abolitionists’ moral outrage and growing political pressure, Southern slaveowners defended slavery as a benevolent system that benefitted enslaved black people.¹⁶ Even today, some continue to echo those claims in attempts to justify more than two centuries of human bondage, forced labor, and abuse.¹⁷ Records from the era paint a much different picture, revealing American slavery as a system that was always dehumanizing and barbaric, and often bloody, brutal, and violent.



Enslaved people had to fear brutal abuse and mistreatment on many plantations in the South. (Donated by Corbis.)

As an institution, slavery deprived the slave of any legal rights or autonomy and granted the slaveowner complete power over the black men, women, and children legally recognized as his property. Structurally, this weakened enslaved people's claims to even the most basic social bond: the family. The enslaved could not legally marry, needed an owner's permission to enter into non-legal marriages, and could be forced to marry a partner chosen by the slaveowner. Once married, husbands and wives had no ability to protect themselves from being sold away from each other, and if "owned" by different masters, were often forced to reside on different plantations. Parents could do nothing when their young children were sold away,¹⁸ and enslaved families were regularly and easily separated at an owner's or auctioneer's whim, never to see each other again.¹⁹

Slavery deprived the slave of any legal rights or autonomy and granted the slaveowner complete power over the black men, women, and children legally recognized as his property.

In a first-hand account published by the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1839, a Kentucky woman told the story of two young black men, Ned and John, who had been severely whipped to death by their master as punishment for "staying a little over the time with their wives" living on different plantations nearby: "Mr. Long would tie them up by the wrist, so high that their toes would just touch the ground, and then with a cow-hide lay the lash upon the naked back, until he was exhausted, when he would sit down and rest. As soon as he had rested sufficiently, he would ply the cow-hide again, thus he would continue until the whole back of the poor victim was lacerated into one uniform coat of blood."²⁰

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In addition to the labor exploitation inherent to slavery, slaveowners had the power to sexually exploit their slaves, both male²¹ and female. Sexual abuse of enslaved black men included being forced to have sex with enslaved women against their will and in front of a white audience. In 1787, two white slaveowners in Maryland forced an enslaved black man, at gunpoint, to rape a free black woman; when the act was done, one of the white men likened the act to breeding horses.²²

In its most prevalent form – the rape of enslaved black women by white slaveowners – sexual abuse often resulted in the birth of biracial children who were also enslaved. As property, enslaved black women were not protected by the law and had no refuge from sexual violence.



An enslaved man, Private Gordon, was beaten so frequently that the multiple whippings left graphic scars depicted in this 1863 photograph. (Donated by Corbis.)

In 1855, an enslaved black woman named Celia stood trial for murder after killing Robert Newsom, the white slaveowner who had raped her regularly and repeatedly since purchasing her five years before, resulting in the birth of one child.²³ After repeated entreaties to the slaveowner's daughter led nowhere, Celia took action. According to Celia, when Newsom came to her cabin seeking sex on the night of June 23, 1855, she clubbed him over the head twice with a large stick, killing him.²⁴ The court concluded an enslaved black woman had no right to defend herself against sexual attack, and an all-male, all-white jury convicted Celia of murder.²⁵ Sentenced to death, she was hanged on December 21, 1855.²⁶

Finally, enslaved people frequently suffered extreme physical violence as punishment for or warning against transgressions like running away, failing to complete assigned tasks, visiting a spouse living on another plantation, learning to read, arguing with whites, working too slowly, possessing anti-slavery materials, or trying to prevent the sale of their relatives.²⁷

Enslaved people suffered extreme physical violence as punishment or warning for running away, failing to complete assigned tasks, visiting a spouse living on another plantation, learning to read, arguing with whites, working too slowly, possessing anti-slavery materials, or trying to prevent the sale of their relatives.

A slaveholder flogged an enslaved thirteen-year-old girl as punishment, then left her on a table in a locked room with her feet shackled together. When he returned, she had fallen from the table and died. The slaveholder faced no consequence, as under local law, "the slave was [his] property, and if he chose to suffer the loss, no one else had anything to do with it."

Because slaveowners faced no formal prohibition against maiming or killing their slaves, an enslaved person's life had no legal protection; for some slaveowners, this led to reckless disregard for life and horrific levels of cruelty. In Charleston, South Carolina, in 1828, a slaveholder flogged an enslaved thirteen-year-old girl as punishment, then left her on a table in a locked room with her feet shackled together. When he returned, she had fallen from the table and died. The slaveholder faced no consequence; under local law, "the slave was [his] property, and if he chose to suffer the loss, no one else had anything to do with it."²⁸ When an enslaved black man named Moses Roper ran away from bondage in North Carolina, his owner whipped him with 100-200 lashes; covered his head in tar and lit it afire; and when Moses escaped from leg irons, had the nails of his fingers and toes beaten off.²⁹

In May 1857, after a white family in Louisville, Kentucky, was murdered and their home destroyed by fire, four enslaved black men were accused of the crime and stood trial. After an all-white jury found the men innocent of the charges, an enraged mob of local white men armed with a cannon attacked the jail and overtook the building. Facing the threat of mob attack, one of the four enslaved men cut his own throat; the other three were beaten, stabbed, and hung.³⁰

Enslaved black people faced the constant threat of attack, abuse, and murder under the system of American slavery, which devalued their lives, ignored their human dignity, and offered no protection under the law.



(Randolph Linsly Simpson African-American Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.)

As illustrated by this and many similar accounts, enslaved black people faced the constant threat of attack, abuse, and murder under the system of American slavery, which devalued their lives, ignored their human dignity, and offered no protection under the law. Long after slavery ended, racialized attacks and extra-judicial lynchings like these continued, fueled by the same myth of racial inferiority previously used to justify enslavement.

H1.3.3 EXCERPT FROM *SLAVERY IN AMERICA*: “MONTGOMERY SLAVE TRADE” (PP. 17-21 OF PDF)

Montgomery Slave Trade

During the last twenty years of American slavery, no slave market was more central or conspicuous than the one in Montgomery, Alabama. Montgomery’s proximity to the fertile Black Belt region, where slaveowners amassed large slave populations to work the fertile, rich soil, elevated Montgomery’s prominence in the slave trade. By 1860, Montgomery was the capital of the domestic slave trade in Alabama, one of the two largest slave-owning states in America.⁶⁵ Just as New Orleans was the major slave trade center in Louisiana and Natchez was the foremost slave trading city in Mississippi, Montgomery became the most important slave trading space in Alabama. New Orleans and Natchez are commonly recognized as the largest slave trading markets in the importing regions of the South, but census data⁶⁶ suggests that Montgomery’s prominence among Southern slave markets increased dramatically after 1840.⁶⁷ The slave population in New Orleans *decreased* by 38 percent between 1840 and 1860, while the slave population in Montgomery County, Alabama, *increased* by approximately 80 percent.

Enslaved Black Population

| City or County, State | 1820 | 1830 | 1840 | 1850 | 1860 |
|------------------------|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Mobile, Alabama | 835 | 1106 | 6186 | 9356 | 11,376 |
| Montgomery, Alabama | 2655 | 6450 | 13,115 | 19,427 | 23,710 |
| Natchez, Mississippi | 7299 | 10,942 | 14,241 | 14,395 | 14,202 |
| New Orleans, Louisiana | 7591 | 9462 | 23,448 | 18,068 | 14,484 |

During the last twenty years of American slavery, no slave market was more central or conspicuous than the one in Montgomery, Alabama.



Court Square in downtown Montgomery, Alabama, looking down Commerce Street. (Ala. Dep't. Archives and History, Montgomery, Ala.)

At least 300,000 of the 435,080 slaves in Alabama in 1860 were in the state as a result of the domestic slave trade. Many of them were sold in Montgomery.

A century prior to Montgomery's emergence as a dominant player in the domestic slave trade, there were very few Africans living in the area now known as Alabama.⁶⁸ That changed in the nineteenth century when Alabama's fertile lands attracted early settlers from Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, who brought enslaved Africans with them. When the booming price of cotton led to an increased demand for labor, slave traders stepped in to provide Alabama farmers with a supply of enslaved workers.⁶⁹ In 1820, 41,879 slaves lived in Alabama; by 1860, this number had increased tenfold to 435,080.⁷⁰ Historians estimate that 70 percent of the new arrivals resulted from slave trading and 30 percent resulted from the relocation of white slaveholding families.⁷¹ In other words, at least 300,000 of the 435,080 slaves in Alabama in 1860 were in the state as a result of the domestic slave trade. Many of them were sold in Montgomery.

Slaves arriving by steamboat or rail were paraded down Commerce Street from the Alabama River or rail station to the slave auction site or slave depots.

The very Montgomery streets on which thousands of enslaved black people were sold in the mid-1800s are the same streets central to downtown Montgomery today. Slaves arriving by steamboat or rail were paraded down Commerce Street from the Alabama River or railway station to the slave auction site or local slave depots.⁷² Slave traders coming to Montgomery from the Upper South by foot marched enslaved people down the Old Federal Road,⁷³ which ran from Milledgeville and Macon, Georgia, across the Chattahoochee River near Phenix City, Alabama, then through Mount Meigs, Alabama, and into downtown Montgomery, where the Old Federal Road became what is now Adams Avenue. Montgomery's slave market was situated near the Artesian Basin in present-day Court Square.



Cotton Scene, Court Square, Montgomery, Ala.

"[Where] two principal streets met and formed an obtuse angle and another street crossed, there was sufficient space for a public market-place in the business center of the little city. From there a part of Market street (now Dexter avenue) ran up the capitol, on a commanding site about three-fourths of a mile to the east, and the other part (now Commerce street) ran down to the railroad and the Alabama River, about half as far to the northwest. The best hotel, the Exchange, faced this market-place, and most of the public buildings, banks and churches were near."⁷⁴

Cotton scene in Court Square, Montgomery, Alabama, 1870-1899. (Ala. Dep't. Archives and History, Montgomery, Ala.)

Montgomery attracted a growing number of major slave traders whose presence dominated the city's geography and economy. They were located primarily along Commerce Street and Market Street, which is now Dexter Avenue. The 1859-1860 Montgomery city directory listed four separate slave merchants and depots, the same as the number of banks and hotels.⁷⁵ Three of the city's four slave depots lined the local thoroughfare leading up to the state capitol on Market Street.⁷⁶

Montgomery attracted major slave traders whose presence dominated the city's geography and economy.

From 1848 to 1860, the probate office granted licenses to 164 slave traders in Montgomery. These traders arranged for the purchase of slaves from the Upper South and announced their subsequent sale in the Montgomery newspapers, advertising either for private sale at a depot or for public sale at auction.⁷⁷ These notices regularly appeared in local newspapers; in one, a prominent local slave broker advertised the sale of "about 140 Negroes . . . at public auction, for cash at the Artesian Basin [Court Square] on June 2, 1860." Another advertisement gave an observer "a sense of what the large traders meant by buying for the 'Southern market' [finding] in one column of a Montgomery newspaper three establishments respectively offering at private sale '150 likely Negroes, mostly from Virginia, and South Carolina' and '50 likely Negroes just arrived from the Carolinas.'"⁷⁸

From 1848 to 1860, the Montgomery probate office granted licenses to 164 slave traders, who purchased slaves from the Upper South and then advertised in Montgomery papers the private sale of slaves at a depot or public sale at auction.

E. BARNARD & CO., SLAVE DEPOT, MONTGOMERY, ALA.

A few doors above Montgomery Hall.



WILL KEEP CONSTANTLY ON HAND

MECHANICS, FIELD HANDS,

Cooks, Washers and Ironers,

AND GENERAL HOUSE SERVANTS,

Particular attention paid to Buying and selling Slaves on
Commission.

REFERENCES:

Lee & Norton, John H. Murphy, F. M. Gilmer, Jr., Montgomery, Ala.;
E. E. Brown, Macon, Ga.; J. S. Riggs, Charleston, S. C.; Harrison & Pitts,
Columbus, Ga.

W. H. WARE,

IMPORTER AND DEALER IN



Crockery, China,

AND

GLASS WARE,

Wood and Willow Ware, Plated Castors, Forks, &c.

FINE TABLE CUTLERY,

HOUSE FURNISHING GOODS,

41 MARKET STREET,

Mason Harwell, one of the most active slave dealers in the 1850s attracted a sizable crowd “about the Artesian Basin, January 2, 1850, to witness the public sale of 30 horses, which had belonged to a circus, and 165 slaves.”⁷⁹ In a single day, potential buyers could view as many as twenty different slave lots for sale in the heart of downtown Montgomery.⁸⁰ Sir Charles Lyell, an English citizen touring the South, came to Montgomery and recounted observing the sale of humans one day and the next day observing an “auctioneer . . . selling horses in the same place.”⁸¹ Another Englishman visiting Montgomery was struck, seemingly for the first time, at the inhumanity of humans being sold into slavery.⁸²

Even after Robert E. Lee surrendered the Montgomery Daily Advertiser ran “reward” advertisements posted by slave owners seeking return of their runaway “property.”

Slave trading in Montgomery thrived well into the mid-1860s, even as the Civil War raged. As late as 1864, T.L. Frazer & Co. opened a new “slave market” in Montgomery on the south block of Market Street (present-day Dexter Avenue) between Lawrence and McDonough streets. In April 1864, a new firm of slave dealers announced plans to establish an office in Montgomery and promised to “keep constantly on hand a large and well selected stock such as families, house servants, gentlemens’ body servants, seamstresses, boys and girls of all descriptions, blacksmiths, field hands.”⁸³ Tellingly, even after Robert E. Lee’s surrender, the *Montgomery Daily Advertiser* continued to run “reward” advertisements posted by slave owners seeking their runaway “property.” For example, on April 22, 1865, the *Advertiser* ran the following notice for N.G. Scott:

\$100 REWARD. My Negro Woman JANE left my house, on Tuesday, April 5. She is about 5 feet 4 inches high of dark copper color, quite fleshy, about 35 or 40 years old. I will pay the above reward if delivered to me or in jail where I can get her. She has a husband about 7 miles above Wetumpka belonging to Mr. Townsend.

Walking through downtown Montgomery today, one can still trace the steps that thousands of enslaved black people took in the nineteenth century as they stepped from boats and railcars to be sold in this capital city. The path from the railroad tracks and the river, up Commerce Street to Court Square, past Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, and on to where Dexter Avenue meets the Capitol, reveals a glimpse into that past and a chance to walk in those footsteps. Though the buildings that served as slave depots and offices for slave traders are no longer standing, the streets and plots of land where the domestic slave trade prospered remain.

Indeed, the plot where the offices of the Equal Justice Initiative now sit, at 122 Commerce Street, formerly housed a warehouse owned by John H. Murphy, commonly known as the founder of the Montgomery City Water Works and Sanitary Sewer Board and builder of the “Murphy House” at 22 Bibb Street. Murphy was a slaveowner involved in the slave trade in Montgomery who housed enslaved people at the warehouse where EJI currently resides.⁸⁴ And EJI is not alone. Every inch of Commerce Street, Court Square, and today’s Dexter Avenue witnessed the savagery and brutality of Montgomery’s notorious slave trade – and its role in American slavery – although very little has been done to acknowledge this history.

Opposite: Several slave depots could be found in downtown Montgomery advertising people for sale. (Ala. Dep’t. Archives and History, Montgomery, Ala.)

H1.3.4 EXCERPT FROM *SLAVERY IN AMERICA: "THE POST-SLAVERY EXPERIENCE"* (PP. 27-39 OF PDF)



Two women attend a convention for formerly enslaved people in Washington, D.C., in 1916. (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, [LC-USZ62-35640].)

At post-Civil War conventions for formerly enslaved people, formerly enslaved women reported that they had been sexually abused while they were enslaved.

The Post-Slavery Experience

Southern states seceded from the United States and formed the Confederacy in 1861 in an effort to preserve the institution of slavery, and sparked the American Civil War.¹⁰⁷ Following the Confederacy's surrender in 1865, the system of slavery that had become a foundation of the Southern economy and society was outlawed. The former slave states were immediately forced to recognize the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, which had freed enslaved people in rebelling territories. The Thirteenth Amendment, ratified in December 1865, soon went even further by prohibiting slavery throughout the United States "except as punishment for crime." Most whites in the South refused to accept the emancipated status of black people. Three states failed to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment until the twentieth century: Delaware in 1901, Kentucky in 1976, and Mississippi in 1995.¹⁰⁸

Following the Civil War, the federal government recognized it would be necessary to protect recently freed black people and their new citizenship rights. Because there was little expectation that Southerners would openly grant African Americans equal rights within their communities, federal enforcement was deemed crucial. This led to "Reconstruction," a process by which the Republican-controlled federal government used federal troops and congressional authority to enforce emancipation and protect formerly enslaved peoples' new civil rights and American citizenship. Congress also established the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands ("Freedmen's Bureau") to provide African Americans support in the areas of justice, labor, education, medical aid, and after 1867, political education.¹⁰⁹



Many African Americans fled plantations to fight with the Union Army. (Library of Congress.)

Racial violence targeting newly freed black people persisted during Reconstruction and ultimately outlasted the post-war federal intervention in the Southern states. Reconstruction ended less than fifteen years after the war's end, leaving the vast majority of the nation's black population still residing in the South, vulnerable to systems and institutions controlled by the very white people who had recently enslaved them and who largely still believed black people were inferior. A contemporary observer described the feelings of Southerners in the period immediately following the war:

[There existed] a desire to preserve slavery in its original form as much and as long as possible . . . the people . . . still indulged in a lingering hope slavery might yet be preserved — or to introduce into the new system that element of physical compulsion which would make the negro (sic) work . . . [T]he main agency employed for that purpose was force and intimidation. In many instances negroes (sic) who walked away from the plantations, or were found upon the roads, were shot or otherwise severely punished, which was calculated to produce the impression among those remaining with their masters that an attempt to escape from slavery would result in certain destruction. A large proportion of the many acts of violence committed is undoubtedly attributable to this motive.¹¹⁰



(Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Civil War Photographs, [LC-USZ62-67819].)

This struggle to enforce through violence and custom a racial caste system that could no longer be maintained by law would play out in Montgomery, the state of Alabama, and the South for generations, making slavery and its legacy a persisting part of our national identity.

Racial violence targeting newly freed black people persisted during and after Reconstruction.

After Slavery: Post-Emancipation in Alabama

In 1861, when Alabama seceded from the Union to join the Confederacy, more than 435,000 of its residents – 45 percent of the state’s total population – were enslaved black people.¹¹¹ The end of the Civil War carried with it the liberation of formerly enslaved people, but white Alabamians had little tolerance for the end of slavery. Observers of the time noted that this intolerance and anger was expressed both by former slave holders and by whites who had never owned slaves but who “even previous to the war, seemed to be more ardent in their pro-slavery feelings than the planters themselves.”¹¹² White citizens were “possessed by a singularly bitter and vindictive feeling against the colored race since the negro has ceased to be property.”¹¹³ This bitter and vindictive feeling, coupled with a desire to coerce freed black citizens into remaining enslaved, gave rise to a wave of extreme violence. To white citizens of Alabama, “the maiming and killing of colored men seem[ed] to be looked upon by many as one of those venial offences which must be forgiven to the outraged feelings of a wronged and robbed people.”¹¹⁴

When Alabama seceded from the Union in 1861, more than 435,000 of its residents – 45 percent of the state’s total population – were enslaved black people.

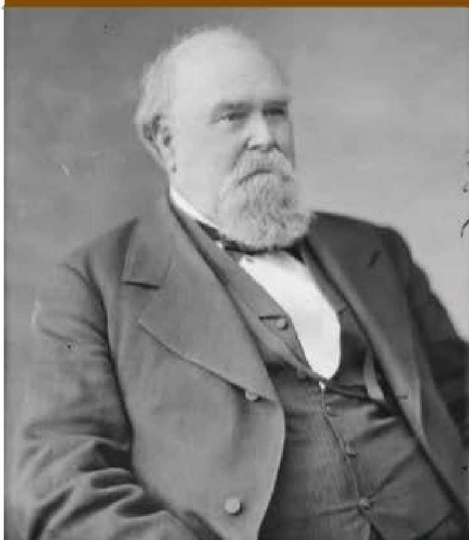
White citizens were “possessed by a singularly bitter and vindictive feeling against the colored race since the negro has ceased to be property.”



(Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, [LC-USZ62-110813].)

The end of slavery brought an immediate increase in violence against African Americans across the South that reached “epic proportions” in the summer of 1865.¹¹⁵ The racial violence achieved multiple objectives: coercing African Americans to labor without their consent; preventing African Americans from leaving the plantations; and deterring emigration out of the South. Whites “organized themselves into patrols, using dogs, to control the roads and pathways.”¹¹⁶ Contemporary observers described the violence in Alabama as “particularly atrocious.”¹¹⁷ An army observer overseeing Reconstruction in southern Alabama indicated that “blacks were still forced to stay and work on plantations without any pay. So many freedmen had been killed that the roads and rivers in south Alabama ‘stink with the dead bodies’ of those who tried to flee.”¹¹⁸ Violence was “the blunt instrument by which white society preserved its privileges — political, social, economic.”¹¹⁹

An army observer overseeing Reconstruction in southern Alabama indicated that “blacks were still forced to stay and work on plantations without any pay. So many freedmen had been killed that the roads and rivers in south Alabama ‘stink with the dead bodies’ of those who tried to flee.”



Alabama Governor George S. Houston restored white supremacy and enslavement-era practices after gaining office through racial violence and terror. Today, Alabama's fifth largest county is named in his honor. (Library of Congress.)

The election of 1874 returned the state of the control of former Confederate leaders and ended Reconstruction in Alabama

Yet social and political change marched on. Federally-enforced Reconstruction lasted from 1865 through 1874 in Alabama. During that period, black people voted and held public office in the state for the first time and had access to new economic and educational opportunities. In response, Alabama leaders resistant to social reform based on racial equality (including many Confederate veterans) formed a Democratic Party intent on “redeeming” the state and re-establishing white supremacy.

Democratic candidates were elected to office in large numbers in Alabama in 1874, largely due to the party's use of violence, threats, terror, and fraud to intimidate black voters and their white allies in counties throughout the state. In Eufaula, Alabama, high rates of black voting had led to Republican Party dominance throughout Barbour County since the start of Reconstruction. A branch of a Democratic paramilitary group known as the White League formed there and was active throughout the 1874 campaign season, working in Eufaula to disrupt Republican political meetings and suppress black voting. On election day, members of the White League raided Eufaula, attacked and killed several unarmed black Republican voters, and chased more than a thousand voters away from the polls. Soon after, in nearby Spring Hill, Alabama, the League burned the ballot box, killed the teenaged son of a white Republican judge, prevented the counting of any Republican votes, and declared victory for every Democratic candidate.¹²⁰ Similar violence was reported in Mobile. At the election's close, Alabama had a Democrat-controlled legislature and a Democratic governor, George S. Houston.

The election of 1874 returned the state to the control of former Confederate leaders and ended Reconstruction in Alabama. A Democrat and former congressman, Houston led a political effort to reverse the aims of Reconstruction in Alabama and restore the dominance of “the great governing race – the white people of the land.”¹²¹ The goal was to reclaim and resurrect the racial hierarchy that had been used to justify slavery and to establish a new system of racial dominance that could persist.



Convict leasing re-enslaved thousands of African Americans by using selectively enforced criminal codes to convict and then lease black people to businesses for dangerous slave labor.

(State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory.)

1901 Alabama Constitution

In 1901, a gathering of white, male delegates from throughout the state met in Montgomery, Alabama, to draft a new state constitution. Their goal was to deprive black people of their newly-won civil rights and to re-establish a legalized system of racial hierarchy. The resulting 1901 Constitution disenfranchised the vast majority of black men in the state, and all women; prohibited interracial marriage; mandated segregated public education; and created a legal system of second-class citizenship for black people that would last for generations.

Alabama's racially-motivated 1901 Constitution remains the state's governing document today. Repeatedly amended in the decades since its adoption and now the longest constitution in the world, it retains many discriminatory provisions along with the racist foundation on which it was written. Efforts to write a new state Constitution through legislative action or constitutional convention have repeatedly failed.

This was accomplished by passing laws that stripped black Alabamians of the civil rights they had briefly enjoyed during Reconstruction. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, local governments implemented laws and ordinances requiring racial segregation on public transportation. The state also outlawed interracial marriage and, despite the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of "equal protection of the laws," the Alabama Supreme Court in 1882 upheld the interracial marriage ban as constitutional.¹²² In 1883, the United States Supreme Court affirmed that ruling.¹²³ Economic exploitation and re-enslavement of black people re-emerged through the system of sharecropping, which kept black farmers impoverished and indebted to landowners from year to year, and convict leasing, which "leased" primarily black state prisoners to private companies to perform dangerous work in inhumane and often deadly conditions for state profit.

Violent intimidation of black voters continued in the decades following the 1874 election, but by the twentieth century Democratic political leaders felt confident enough to declare black disenfranchisement as a policy goal. In May 1901, 155 white male delegates gathered in Montgomery for a constitutional convention. Immediately after his election as president of the convention, attorney John B. Knox of Calhoun County delivered a speech summarizing the convention's goals:

"And what is it that we want to do? Why it is, within the limits imposed by the Federal Constitution, to establish white supremacy in this state. This is our problem, and we should be permitted to deal with it, unobstructed by outside influences, with a sense of our responsibilities as citizens and our duty to posterity . . . [I]f we should have white supremacy, we must establish it by law – not by force or fraud."¹²⁴

The resulting Alabama Constitution of 1901 mandated racial segregation in public schools, prohibited interracial marriage, and provided for the mass disenfranchisement of black people. Using the recently-passed disenfranchisement provisions of the Mississippi, South Carolina, and Louisiana constitutions as a guide, the convention adopted a poll tax, a grandfather clause, and felon disenfranchisement designed to intensify the effect of racialized law enforcement. Any loopholes were closed by the creation of arbitrary registration procedures that granted significant discretion to local white male registrars. Even when black people managed to qualify for voter registration under these discriminatory laws, registrars refused to register them and courts refused to act.

Jackson Giles, a black janitor living in Montgomery, had voted in Alabama from 1871 to 1901. Following implementation of the 1901 constitution, he was refused registration despite meeting all qualifications. He sued the state in federal court, asserting that the new provisions violated the Fifteenth Amendment's ban on racial barriers to voting. In 1903, the United States Supreme Court dismissed the case and authorized Mr. Giles's continued disenfranchisement.¹²⁵ Alabama's discriminatory voter registration system, combined with continued violent intimidation tactics, successfully suppressed black voting in the state for several more generations, with no significant federal interference until the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965.

Reconstruction and Beyond in Montgomery

As the state capital, Montgomery was a focal point for post-slavery developments in Alabama, both political and social. The city received significant federal attention during Reconstruction¹²⁶ because troops from the United States Army's Fifteenth Infantry Regiment were posted in Montgomery¹²⁷ and the Freedmen's Bureau had a station in the city.¹²⁸ The Freedmen's Bureau established schools and a hospital and provided the city's poor with nutritional assistance.¹²⁹ But like many cities across the South, Montgomery "refused to accept the spectre of equality" for the freedmen and -women in its midst.¹³⁰ The primary tool of resistance was violence.

Montgomery represented economic opportunity for recently emancipated African Americans and attracted migration. Though federal troops were stationed in the city, black Alabamians who traveled there still faced serious dangers. On August 21, 1865, doctors at two separate hospitals in Montgomery gave detailed accounts of treating almost twenty black residents of Montgomery who were victims of extreme violence.¹³¹ The doctors recounted seeing black men and women who had been shot in the hand, neck, or head; "scalped"; stabbed; beaten with clubs; had their throats cut; or had their ears, beards, or chins cut off.¹³² The doctors reported that the "provocation for most of the attacks was the attempt of newly freed blacks to come to town."¹³³

A black wagon driver was shot dead because he failed to "drive as far to the right as a white man thought he should."

The Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacist group started by Confederate veterans in Tennessee in 1866, resisted Reconstruction efforts by terrorizing free black people and their allies, including Republican legislators, federal agents, bureaucrats, teachers, and any other individuals who were sympathetic to the cause of black equality. The Klan was most active in northern Alabama, but offshoots of the group also operated in Montgomery. In one incident, after a white woman reported being insulted by a black man in downtown Montgomery, Klansmen donned white sheets and rode through north Montgomery's black community, terrorizing the residents with violence.¹³⁴

Although violence against free black citizens had been constant since emancipation, it surged in the late nineteenth century. Lynching accounted for nearly 2000 deaths nationwide between 1882 and 1901, and at least four black men – Isaac Cook, Oliver Jackson, William Westmoreland, and Henry Abrams – were lynched in Montgomery County in the 1890s, sending a tragic and terrifying message to the local black community.¹³⁵ African Americans in Montgomery were murdered for minor breaches of Alabama's apartheid norms. In one instance a black wagon driver was shot dead because he failed to "drive as far to the right as a white man thought he should."¹³⁶

(AP Photos/stf, 500603019)





Eighteen-year-old Jesse Washington was lynched by a large crowd in Waco, Texas, in 1916. (Donated by Corbis.)

The local courts provided no relief for black citizens terrorized by white violence, and the murder of black Montgerians occurred all too often. As the Black newspapers of the time pointed out, "White men who shoot and kill Negroes are not adjudged guilty of murder by the law. Even colored women fall before the pistol of the white murderer and no note is taken of it."¹³⁷

In the rare situation where the police and courts intervened on behalf of a black citizen, there was little chance that the white perpetrator of violence would be held accountable. In 1910, Mitchell Johnson, a black taxi driver, was hired to drive a white man home. When they reached the passenger's destination, the white man got out and refused to pay. Mr. Johnson, who was responsible to his employer for the money, had the man arrested. The white passenger made bond, sought out Mr. Johnson, and shot him dead. After he was arrested, the man claimed he killed Mr. Johnson in self-defense and was set free by Montgomery authorities.¹³⁸

Fear, intimidation, violence, and terrorism were not confined to private vigilante groups or racist judicial institutions. The Southern Democrats employed the same tactics to seize political control of Alabama and its capital from newly enfranchised black voters and their representatives, both black and white

Fear, intimidation, violence, and terrorism were not confined to private vigilante groups or racially biased judicial institutions. The Democratic Party employed the same tactics to seize political control of Alabama and its capital from newly enfranchised black voters and the representatives – black and white – that they supported. After Democrats were elected to the legislature and governor's mansion in 1874 through fraud and intimidation, Democrats in Montgomery set about eliminating the remaining black officials and black electorate.¹³⁹ In 1876, new city lines were drawn that excluded a number of black citizens, and by 1877 "most black voters and all black officeholders were eliminated from participating in [Montgomery] city government."¹⁴⁰

As early as 1914, Montgomery's city ordinances required black and white citizens to purchase theater and amusement park tickets in separate lines. That same year, the city required public transportation and cemeteries to be segregated and passed other "Jim Crow" ordinances.



This became a statewide reality in 1901 with the adoption of the new state constitution, which effectively ended African American suffrage. With the black community shut out of the political process, Montgomery officials enacted a series of laws designed to formalize the apartheid system. As early as 1914, Montgomery's city ordinances required black and white citizens to purchase theater and amusement park tickets in separate lines.¹⁴¹ That same year, the city required public transportation and cemeteries to be segregated¹⁴² and continued to pass "Jim Crow" ordinances that entrenched segregation and restricted the movement of African Americans within the city. This included segregated transportation, forbidding black and white citizens from playing dominoes or pool together, segregated theaters and places of amusement, segregated bathrooms, segregated restaurants, and segregated taxicabs.¹⁴³

Montgomery's criminal justice system was used as a tool of racial control and separation, and broad laws prohibiting "vagrancy" and "disorderly conduct" brought black residents into frequent contact with Montgomery law enforcement.

Montgomery's criminal justice system was used as a tool of racial control and separation, and broad laws prohibiting "vagrancy" and "disorderly conduct" brought black residents into frequent contact with Montgomery law enforcement. The city's vagrancy ordinance made it "unlawful for any person to loaf, loiter, or idle upon any street or public place of the City of Montgomery."¹⁴⁴ The punishment for vagrancy included a fine up to \$500 and hard labor for up to twelve months.¹⁴⁵ These laws were enforced almost exclusively against African Americans.

While African Americans ensnared in the criminal justice system initially provided forced inmate labor for the city, over time this system grew into the convict lease system. Under convict leasing, black citizens convicted in local courts were brought under the control of private employers.¹⁴⁶ The brutal convict leasing system continued to evolve over the years, ensnaring thousands of black Alabamians.¹⁴⁷

Post-War Throughout the South: Racism Through Politics and Violence

Efforts in Montgomery and across Alabama to re-establish white supremacy through violence and political suppression proliferated throughout the rest of the South following emancipation. Between 1864 and 1866, ten of the eleven Confederate states created governments that deprived black people of voting and other civil rights. Federal Reconstruction governments were set up in response, but resistance remained.

Racial violence surged in the South during this period. In addition to Ku Klux Klan terrorism, vicious mob lynchings became commonplace. Between 1882 and 1959, 4733 people were lynched in the United States; most lynchings occurred in the South and most victims were black men. An average of 150 people were lynched each year between 1882 and 1901; 231 lynchings were documented in 1892 alone.¹⁴⁸

An average of 150 people were lynched each year between 1882 and 1901; 231 lynchings were documented in 1892 alone.

In 1869, Klansmen in Georgia attacked and brutally whipped fifty-two-year-old Abram Colby, a former slave and sitting Republican congressman elected by enfranchised freedmen. Shortly before the attack, a group of Klansmen composed of town doctors and lawyers tried to bribe Colby to change parties or give up his office.¹⁴⁹ When he refused to do either, as Colby later described in testimony to a congressional committee, the men left and returned days later:

On October 29, 1869, [the Klansmen] broke my door open, took me out of bed, took me to the woods and whipped me three hours or more and left me for dead. They said to me, "Do you think you will ever vote another damned Radical ticket?" I said, "If there was an election tomorrow, I would vote the Radical ticket." They set in and whipped me a thousand licks more, with sticks and straps that had buckles on the ends of them.¹⁵⁰

In April 1868, white Democrats in Opelousas, Louisiana, frustrated with growing local black political power, attacked black voters and white Republicans and terrorized the area for days. The violence left six whites and at least a hundred black people dead. The parish became one of the first in Louisiana to return to Democratic control. Surviving local black voters had learned the consequences of opposing Democrats in politics, and in the November 1868 presidential election, Republican Ulysses S. Grant did not receive a single vote within the parish. By the time the 1876 gubernatorial elections put a Democrat into office and officially ended Reconstruction in Louisiana, Opelousas had birthed the state's first chapter of the White League.¹⁵¹

In most Southern states, like in Alabama, after a brief period of federally-led Reconstruction, local Democratic parties used violent attacks to suppress pro-civil rights votes by terrorizing black voters and their white allies. As a result, Southern state governments gradually returned to the control of Democratic "Redeemers" intent on restoring racial hierarchy. The last federal troops were withdrawn from the South in April 1877, and with them went the promise of the freedmen's new civil rights as Confederate veterans and their supporters returned to power in the South. As W.E.B. Du Bois would later write, the potential of emancipation had not been realized: "The slave went free, stood a brief moment in the sun, then moved back again toward slavery."¹⁵²

The potential of emancipation was not realized. As W.E.B. Du Bois later wrote, "The slave went free, stood a brief moment in the sun, then moved back again toward slavery."

This movement was hastened by local and state laws that combined to create a second-class citizenship for black people, mandating segregation in schools, trains, buses, motels, and restaurants; outlawing interracial marriage; authorizing economic exploitation through convict leasing and mandatory labor contracts; barring black people from holding public office, voting in elections, or serving on juries; and providing no protection from the violent terror of lynchings and Ku Klux Klan attacks. Ku Klux Klan violence was so intense in South Carolina after the Civil War that, in 1871, federal investigators found evidence of eleven murders and more than six hundred whippings and other assaults in one county alone.¹⁵³ When local grand juries failed to take action, federal authorities urged President Grant to intervene, describing the state as "under the domination of systematic and organized depravity," which created a "carnival of crime not paralleled in the history of any civilized community."¹⁵⁴

As the nineteenth century ended, many states moved toward creating laws and constitutions that would do legally what violent intimidation tactics had been doing for decades: disenfranchise black people. Opposing this course of action could prove dangerous, even for whites. During the summer of 1890, F.M.B. “Marsh” Cook, a white Republican and former candidate for Congress, campaigned for a seat at the upcoming Mississippi constitutional convention and vowed he would use the position to oppose all attempts to limit black voting rights.¹⁵⁵ Cook also encouraged the local black community to organize against the creation of discriminatory constitutional provisions. Cook’s political views earned him threats from local whites, and on the afternoon of July 25, 1890, one day after giving a speech regarding the upcoming convention, Cook was found shot dead near Mount Zion Baptist Church in Jasper County.¹⁵⁶

No one was arrested or tried for Cook’s murder and after his death, local Democrats alleged that he was a dangerous man who had been inciting local blacks against whites.¹⁵⁷ Meanwhile, the 1890 Mississippi constitutional convention moved forward and resulted in a state constitution that instituted literacy tests and poll taxes to effectively disenfranchise nearly all of the state’s black electorate. From 1890 to 1908, ten of the eleven Confederate states rewrote their constitutions to restrict voting rights through the use of poll taxes, grandfather clauses, and literacy tests administered by white registrars.¹⁵⁸

Ku Klux Klan violence was intense in South Carolina after the Civil War. In 1871, federal investigators found evidence of eleven murders and more than 600 whippings and assaults in one county alone. When local grand juries failed to take action, federal authorities urged President Ulysses S. Grant to intervene because the state was “under the domination of systematic and organized depravity” which created a “carnival of crime not paralleled in the history of any civilized community.”

From 1890 to 1908, ten of the eleven Confederate states rewrote their constitutions to restrict voting rights through poll taxes, grandfather clauses, and literacy tests administered by white registrars.

UNIT 1 : LYNCHING AND RACIAL TERROR

LESSON 4 : RACIAL TERRORISM AND THE IDEOLOGY OF WHITE SUPREMACY

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did racial terrorism enforce white supremacy?

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson guides students in examining how lynching was employed to enforce white supremacy. Students will learn how the continuance of white supremacy was possible post-slavery because of violent intimidation and racial terror. These were ways to maintain the racial hierarchy that had been established to justify slavery.

RATIONALE

Now that students have gained some historical knowledge about the facts of lynching, this lesson asks students to go much deeper into some of the details of lynching and how lynching became a normal part of everyday life in the South.

INTRODUCTION

Students will learn about racial terrorism and how racial terrorism enforced white supremacy in the era following slavery. Students will learn how black people were produced as criminal and morally deficient, in order to continue economic exploitation, restrict black autonomy, and maintain white supremacy through racial terrorism. Following slavery, black people gained a kind of freedom, but convict leasing, Jim Crow, and Black Codes greatly limited that freedom. Additionally, that freedom was always under threat because any black person could be lynched at any time. In the period following slavery, without equal protection under the law, black people were subjected to violent and brutal treatment. Students will learn how lynching played a vital role in maintaining white supremacy and how white people enthusiastically supported the lynching of their black neighbors. This lesson delves into the graphic nature of lynching; students should be prepared for this in ways appropriate to their particular context prior to beginning this lesson.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.3

Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.10

By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 11-CCR text complexity

band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

KEY TERMS

Terrorism: The systematic use of violence and threats to intimidate, coerce, and control

Impunity: Exemption or freedom from punishment, harm, or loss

Social transgression: Violation of social norms, which are informal understandings that govern the behavior of members of a society

Racial hierarchy: A system of stratification that focuses on the belief that some racial groups are superior or inferior to other racial groups. The groups perceived to be superior are at the top of the racial hierarchy, while the groups perceived to be inferior are at the bottom.

TIME

1 – 2 class sessions

MATERIALS

Access to lynchinginamerica.eji.org

Journals

HANDOUTS

H1.4.1 “Lynching in America: From ‘Popular Justice’ to Racial Terror” worksheet

H1.4.2 “Lynching in America: From ‘Popular Justice’ to Racial Terror” questions

LESSON PLAN

BEGINNING

Students listen to the [Fred Croft](#) and [Anthony Crawford](#) audio stories and write a brief response in their journals. Students should write about what resonates, what questions occur to them, or what the audio stories remind them of regarding their own knowledge and/or experience. After students have listened, the teacher can ask for their initial thoughts and also if there were any terms that were new to them; the teacher can help students understand the terms.

The teacher can introduce students to the term “racial terrorism” and also show the video defining [racial terrorism](#). Give students time to consider the implications of this definition in relation to how they have previously understood terrorism. Students might consider how the dominant narrative about terrorism (who is a terrorist and who can be victims of terrorism) is racialized. Students can further think about how in dominant discourse terrorism is often only recognized as such when the terrorism is perpetrated by particular groups and is defined differently when perpetrated by white people. (See Southern Poverty Law Center’s “President Trump: Don’t Ignore Terror from the Radical Right.”)

Students might consider the definition of terrorism and reconsider how the definition in dominant discourse is rooted in white supremacy — who can be terrorists? And who can be victims of terrorism?

Students might wonder why we do not think about lynching as terrorism, even though it clearly fits the definition of terrorism. Students might consider how white supremacy influences how groups of people are characterized, both historically and currently.

MIDDLE

Students read [“Lynching in America: From ‘Popular Justice’ to Racial Terror”](#) (pp. 27-47 of Lynching Report PDF). As students are reading, students can use the worksheet (H1.4.1) and questions (H1.4.2)

to track their learning. If students need more space to write, they can use Post-its or write on another sheet of paper.

After students have filled out their handout, they should meet in their groups to fill in what they have missed in their own work. Students should be encouraged to discuss their reading by answering one another's questions in their study group.

After students have had sufficient time to discuss their reading, they should go over their discussion as a whole class. The teacher can expand the conversation by reading and discussing one of the additional texts listed below (see Additional Resources).

Key points:

1. Lynching of African Americans was terrorism, a widely supported tool for enforcing the Narrative of Racial Difference after the Civil War. Lynchings were violent and public events designed to traumatize black people as a group and were carried out by white communities with impunity.
2. Black people accused of no crime were lynched for minor social transgressions ("speaking disrespectfully, refusing to step off the sidewalk, using profane language, using an improper title for a white person, arguing with a white man, bumping into a white woman, insulting a white woman, or other social grievances," anything that "offended" white people and challenged racial hierarchy (pp. 31–32 of [Lynching Report PDF](#)). Racial terror lynchings were the ultimate manifestation of the ideology of white supremacy and black inferiority, which was used to justify these acts of terrorism. Black people lived at a constant risk of arbitrary and deadly mob violence. Even the mere suspicion of a minor social transgression could result in a lynching of any black person. Any white person, even a child, could determine a black person was "guilty" of breaking a social norm, and thus all black people were always potential victims of lynching. These lynchings and the constant threat of deadly mob violence sought to terrorize the black community and created an environment of fear.
3. Black people who were brutally lynched based on allegations of crime were almost never legally convicted of any offense. Many lynching victims who were demonstrably innocent of the crimes alleged were lynched anyway. Race, not culpability, determined lynching victims' fate. This was a form of terrorism because it demonstrated that guilt or innocence was not the point of the lynchings.
4. Racial terror lynchings were lynchings that targeted black people in enforcement of the racial hierarchy. "During the lynching era, whites' hypervigilant enforcement of racial hierarchy and social separation, coupled with widespread stereotypes of black men as dangerous, violent, and uncontrollable sexual aggressors, fueled a pervasive fear of black men raping white women" (p. 29 of [Lynching Report PDF](#)).
5. Public spectacle lynchings were events that made lynching a festive, social event, which was attended by white people of all ages. These lynchings often included torture, dismemberment, mutilation, and burning. Postcards commemorating the events were sent, and in many cases, body parts were taken by participants as souvenirs. (Imagine how many of us post selfies at a concert.)
6. The public spectacle lynchings were widely tolerated because they matched the view that black people were inferior and control of them was essential to the broader safety of society. Brutal treatment was central to that control and management of this group of people.
7. Lynching was about racial control and maintenance of the Myth of Racial Difference and racial hierarchy.

END

Students relisten to the [Fred Croft](#) and [Anthony Crawford](#) audio stories to think about how they better understand the piece after they have read and learned about racial terrorism.

Students write in their journals in response to the following prompt:

How does learning about the racial terrorism of lynching allow you to think anew about terrorism?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Richard Cohen, “President Trump: Don’t Ignore Terror from the Radical Right,” The Southern Poverty Law Center, February 9, 2017.

Jordan Darville, “How White Supremacy Works,” Fader, December 5, 2016.

H1.4.1 "LYNCHING IN AMERICA: FROM 'POPULAR JUSTICE' TO RACIAL TERROR" WORKSHEET

| | Key Quotes | Questions, Comments, Connections |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------------------------------|
| "Lynching in America: From 'Popular Justice' to Racial Terror" | | |
| Characteristics of the Lynching Era | | |
| Lynching Based on Fear of Interracial Sex | | |
| Lynching Based on Minor Social Transgressions | | |

| | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|
| Lynching Based on Allegations of a Crime | | |
| Public Spectacle Lynchings | | |
| Lynchings Targeting the Entire African American Community | | |
| Lynchings of Black People Resisting Mistreatment (1915 – 1940) | | |

H1.4.2 “LYNCHING IN AMERICA: FROM ‘POPULAR JUSTICE’ TO RACIAL TERROR” QUESTIONS

READING QUESTIONS

In answering the following questions, cite evidence from the text, examples, and explanations to support your answer. Students should highlight their commentary in yellow and references to the text in blue.

1. What is racial terrorism? What are some examples of racial terrorism?
2. What were the purposes of different kinds of lynchings? How did the different kinds of lynchings terrorize black people?
3. What were the different reasons that black people were lynched? How did these lynchings enforce white supremacy?
4. What kind of climate was created by racial terrorism? How do you imagine the threat of lynching impacted the day-to-day lives of black residents? Why did “everyday” white people support lynching?
5. How did lynching and racial terrorism enforce the myth of black inferiority? How was this myth reproduced in addition to lynching?

UNIT 1 : LYNCHING AND RACIAL TERROR

LESSON 5 : DOCUMENTING RACIAL TERROR LYNCHINGS

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does EJI’s project documenting lynching provide an example of activism through research and knowledge?

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will learn about how EJI went about documenting racial terror lynchings. Students will be able to think about how problems of erasure can be addressed through action.

RATIONALE

This lesson allows students to learn about the methods involved in constructing a report on lynching. This lesson encourages students to think about history as a construction, rather than a document of “facts,” and how incomplete and inaccurate narratives can be forwarded and reproduced. Students can explore how expanding access to knowledge of history can have societal effects.

INTRODUCTION

EJI’s lynching research began with a review of established lynching lists created by Tuskegee University, the NAACP, the *Chicago Tribune*, Professors Stewart Tolnay and E.M. Beck, and other sources. EJI researchers then worked to create an accurate and verifiable list of lynchings by linking these secondary reports to independent supporting sources — typically contemporary news coverage. In that review of nineteenth- and twentieth-century news reports of racial violence, EJI researchers discovered a number of lynchings not previously included in existent comprehensive lists. The total 4,084 lynchings is greater than any other source has previously documented in these states during the given time period.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.1.A

Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences the claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

MAIN IDEAS

Racial terror lynching was much more prevalent than previously reported.

1. Some states and counties were particularly terrifying places for African Americans and had dramatically higher rates of lynching than other states and counties.
2. EJI staff spent thousands of hours researching and documenting more than 4,000 racial terror lynchings in the South.
3. Documenting the names and stories of African Americans who were lynched is critical to establishing the truth about racial terror lynching in America and understanding how the legacy of lynching impacts communities today.

TIME

1 – 2 class sessions

MATERIALS

Access to lynchinginamerica.eji.org
Journals

HANDOUTS

H1.5.1 Documenting Racial Terror Lynchings
H1.5.2 Interpreting Narratives

LESSON PLAN

BEGINNING

In a journal, students respond to the following prompts:

1. Describe a problem in your community or state that you feel passionate about and want to help solve.
2. What information do you need to describe the problem and begin to find a solution?
3. Does that information exist? If so, does it come from a reliable source? Is it up-to-date and complete?
4. How could you obtain the reliable, up-to-date, and complete information that you need?

MIDDLE

Before reading:

Students explore the [interactive maps](#) and the [charts and graphs](#) on the Lynching in America website (charts and graphs on pp. 40–45 of PDF). Students should write down five questions and five observations about the interactive map, to guide their thinking as they read.

Shared reading: Documenting Racial Terror Lynchings handout (H1.5.1)

After reading:

As a class, discuss the following questions:

1. Why did EJI researchers need a precise definition of lynching?
2. What definition of lynching did EJI researchers use? (Refer to handout.)
3. How does that definition correspond with the definition of “racial terror lynching” from the previous lesson? For reference: *Lynching of African Americans was terrorism, a widely supported tool for enforcing the Narrative of Racial Difference after the Civil War. Lynchings were violent and public events designed to traumatize black people as a group and were carried out by white communities with impunity.*

END

Interpreting Narratives activity:

Select a student to read aloud any narrative from the Interpreting Narratives handout (H1.5.2). As a class, evaluate whether or not that narrative fits the definition in the Documenting Racial Terror Lynchings handout and why.

KEY:

Narrative #1 – yes

Narrative #2 – no

Narrative #3 – yes

Narrative #4 – yes

Narrative #5 – no

Narrative #6 – yes

In a journal, students respond to the following prompts:

1. What surprised you about the data in the *Lynching in America* report and online experience?
2. What, if anything, did you learn about racial terror lynchings in your county or state?
3. Why document racial terror lynchings? How does reliable, up-to-date, and complete data help people understand racial terror lynchings in America?

Closing activity:

Ask students to volunteer to share their reflections and discuss these prompts as a class. Students should discuss how particular narratives about the past send messages that impact the present.

H1.5.1 DOCUMENTING RACIAL TERROR LYNCHINGS

Lynching in America documents 4,084 lynchings of black people in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia between 1877 and 1950, which EJI researchers have verified. (They also documented 341 lynchings in states outside the South, the majority of them in Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Maryland, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, and West Virginia.)

EJI's lynching research began with review of established lynching lists created by Tuskegee University, the NAACP, the *Chicago Tribune*, Professors Stewart Tolnay and E.M. Beck, and other sources. EJI researchers then worked to create an accurate and verifiable list of lynchings by linking these secondary reports to independent supporting sources — typically contemporary news coverage. In that review of nineteenth- and twentieth-century news reports of racial violence, EJI researchers discovered a number of lynchings not previously included in existent comprehensive lists. The total 4,084 lynchings is greater than any other source has previously documented in these states during the given time period.

The process of classification and categorization required adopting a definition of a “lynching.” The incidents listed in the appendix include those in which: (1) the lynching victims’ deaths were confirmed; (2) the lynching was a deliberate extrajudicial killing involving at least two perpetrators; (3) the lynching party claimed to be enforcing justice or protecting the social order; and (4) the lynching party acted with very little to no fear of any repercussions from official legal authorities.

By nature, the unprecedented number of lynchings documented in EJI’s report is still underinclusive. EJI cannot list the countless lynching victims who lost their lives in violent acts that went unreported — either because their deaths occurred in a town too small for national press to discover, because the mob worked in secret, or because the lynching terrorized the local community to an extent that organized protest and reporting of the event was not dared. Nor can EJI list who “disappeared” or was “assumed lynched” but not confirmed dead — though many of those individuals were likely lynched. And finally, EJI researchers have not tallied African Americans killed in violence that, while undoubtedly racially motivated, could not be definitively linked to mob action.

It is impossible to quantify all American lynchings of black people in this or any other time period, and futile to attempt to express the unfathomable terror, violence, and inhumanity of the lynching era through numbers and statistics. But the sheer number of victims, greater than ever previously presented elsewhere, is staggering. As a collection of the names and identifying details of 4,084 lynching victims, EJI’s listing (housed at EJI’s museum) stands as a testament to the individual lives lost, the unknown victims lost to history, and the cost of hatred and fear.

H.1.5.2 INTERPRETING NARRATIVES

Narrative #1

On August 14, 1904, a white woman in Thomaston, Alabama, claimed that a black man had entered her home and frightened her. A posse of white men soon formed and seized Rufus Lesseur, a black man, simply because someone claimed that a hat found near the house belonged to him. The white men locked a terrified Mr. Lesseur into a tiny calaboose, or makeshift jail, in the nearby woods and left him there for more than a day. Then at 3 a.m. on August 16, without an investigation, trial, or conviction, a mob of white men broke into the structure, dragged Mr. Lesseur outside, and shot him repeatedly. He was killed by a mob of unmasked white men in a town with only 300 residents, but the state claimed that no one could be identified, arrested, or prosecuted.

Narrative #2

On August 20, 1955, fourteen-year-old Emmett Till boarded a train in Chicago and headed for Money, Mississippi, to spend two weeks with his great-uncle and cousins. A few days into his visit, Mr. Till and a group of friends went into a nearby store to buy candy. While there, Mr. Till allegedly acted “familiar” when speaking to the white female storekeeper, Carolyn Bryant. This was a dangerous transgression in the racial caste system of the Mississippi Delta, a system of which Chicago-bred Emmett Till was largely unaware. Within a few days, word of the interaction reached Carolyn Bryant’s husband, Roy.

On August 28, 1955, Roy Bryant and his half-brother, J.W. Milam, abducted Emmett Till at gunpoint from his great-uncle’s home and drove him to a storage shed on Milam’s property in Drew, Mississippi. Each man took turns torturing and beating Mr. Till with a pistol, then took the battered boy to a nearby ginning company and forced him to load a 74-pound fan into the back of their pickup truck. The men then drove Mr. Till to the edge of the Tallahatchie River, ordered him to remove his clothes, and shot him in the head. Bryant and Milam then attached the heavy fan to the child’s neck and rolled his body into the river.

In September 1955, half-brothers Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam were indicted for murder. The trial took place over the course of three days. The state presented courageous testimony from Moses Wright, Emmett Till’s great-uncle who witnessed his abduction, and Willie Reed, an African American sharecropper who overheard Bryant and Milam torturing Mr. Till. The defense claimed that the mutilated body discovered in the Tallahatchie River was not that of Emmett Till. After deliberating for just over one hour, an all-white, all-male jury announced a not-guilty verdict on September 23, 1955.

Narrative #3

Elizabeth Lawrence, an older black woman, was killed by a white mob in Birmingham, Alabama, on July 5, 1933. Earlier that day, Ms. Lawrence was walking home when she was approached by a group of white children who threw rocks at her. In response, she verbally reprimanded the children. They reported her reprimand to their parents, who spread the word that a black woman had dared to rebuke white children. Later that night, an angry mob went to Ms. Lawrence’s home, seized her, and killed her. Her home was burned to the ground. When her son, Alexander, attempted to file a

complaint with the sheriff and sought the arrest of his mother's murderers, the mob reorganized and pursued him. He fled to Boston.

Narrative #4

In 1910, a black man named Bush Withers was killed in Sanford, Alabama. Mr. Withers was imprisoned at a convict leasing camp where horrific conditions and abuse were widespread. Despite the horrors of convict leasing, Mr. Withers was regarded as a faithful employee and "water boy" in the prison camp. One day he went to a nearby farm to get water as he regularly did and was later accused of criminally assaulting the farmer's daughter. Mr. Withers insisted he was innocent, but the mere allegation was enough. A mob formed and brought Mr. Withers to a prominent site in Sanford where, as he begged for his life and insisted he had done nothing wrong, Mr. Withers was tied to a stake, burned alive, and then shot to death in front of 400 spectators. Local newspapers praised the conduct of the mob as "orderly."

Narrative #5

On August 23, 1989, sixteen-year-old Yusef Hawkins and three friends went to the predominately white Bensonhurst section of Brooklyn, New York, to inquire about a used Pontiac for sale. On their way through the neighborhood, the three black boys encountered a group of thirty white youths gathered in the street. Armed with baseball bats and at least one handgun, the mob set upon the three boys. While his companions managed to escape the attack without serious injury, Mr. Hawkins was shot twice in the chest and later pronounced dead at nearby Maimonides Medical Center. Later investigation revealed that a neighborhood girl, Gina Feliciano, had recently spurned the advances of a young white man in the neighborhood and was rumored to be dating an African American. Angry, the rejected white boy gathered friends to lay in wait for the black boyfriend they believed would be visiting Feliciano. Yusef Hawkins walked into this scene of racial tension. A year after Mr. Hawkins's murder, eighteen-year-old Joseph Fama was convicted of second-degree murder and a string of lesser charges and sentenced to thirty-two years in prison. Five other participants were charged in connection with Mr. Hawkins's murder and received lesser sentences.

Narrative #6

In 1893, a white mob stormed the jail in Carrollton, Alabama, where Paul Hill, Paul Archer, Will Archer, Emma Fair, and Ed Guyton, four black men and a black women, were being held after they were accused of setting a fire that destroyed a mill and ginhouse. They did not resist when they were arrested, saying that they were innocent and would be cleared quickly. The mob entered the jail with no resistance from law enforcement and slaughtered all five victims in a hail of gunfire.

UNIT 1 : LYNCHING AND RACIAL TERROR

LESSON 6 : LYNCHING AND THE PRESUMPTION OF INNOCENCE

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How is the presumption of innocence unequally applied, both historically and currently?

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will critically consider how the presumption of innocence did not apply to African American people accused of crimes. This lesson asks students to think about lynching in terms of the presumption of guilt and dangerousness and how that presumption emerges from the elaborate mythology of white supremacy and black inferiority.

RATIONALE

Students have learned about lynching from a variety of perspectives and angles. This lesson emphasizes how lynching racialized criminality and reinforced the view that black people were inherently guilty and violent. This lesson allows students to deepen their understanding of racial terror lynching and its relationship to the Narrative of Racial Difference.

INTRODUCTION

In a context where black people are presumed guilty, black people must — in order to stay safe — behave in ways that avoid trouble, even as it greatly limits their personal freedom and autonomy. This was the case historically, and it continues today. Students should make connections between then and now in their discussion of the text and also when they write letters.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1.D

Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

TIME

1 – 2 class sessions

MATERIALS

Access to lynchinginamerica.eji.org

HANDOUTS

H1.6.1 Racializing Criminality (for reference, see p. 61 of Lynching report PDF)

LESSON PLAN

BEGINNING

Write on board: **PRESUMPTION OF INNOCENCE**

Have students read aloud the Racializing Criminality handout (H1.6.1)

As a class, discuss the following questions:

1. What is the presumption of innocence?
2. Did the presumption of innocence apply to African Americans accused of sexual assault or other crimes during this era? Explain.
3. How did lynchings based on allegations of crime and fear of interracial sex enforce the Narrative of Racial Difference?

On board, cross out **INNOCENCE** and write **GUILT**.

Brainstorm present-day examples of the presumption of guilt and dangerousness and write them on the board beneath the heading.

How does the presumption of guilt and dangerousness impact the lives of black and brown people today? How does it impact our broader society?

MIDDLE

Shared viewing: [Thomas Miles audio story](#) and [Elizabeth Lawrence profile](#)

After viewing:

Facilitate whole-class discussion with the following questions:

1. What is a “social transgression”?
2. What “social transgression” was the basis for the lynching of Thomas Miles? Does this fit any other category of lynching (namely, fear of interracial sex)?

3. What other “social transgressions” led to racial terror lynchings?
4. Give some examples of social transgressions today. Encourage students to draw from their own personal experiences.
5. Ask students to imagine they lived in a community or society where they could be killed for any of those social transgressions. What would it feel like? Would you ever feel safe? How would this change your behavior?

END

In a journal, students respond to the following prompt:

“In the lynching era, African Americans lived in constant terror that they or their loved ones could be brutally killed at any time, whether or not they’d done anything wrong, based simply on the word of a white person.”

Imagine you are the parent (or older sibling) of an African American child in the South during the racial terror era. What would you tell your child to keep them safe? Write a letter to your child that reflects the advice you would give.

Facilitate a whole-class discussion. Begin by asking several students to share their letters with the class. Then discuss the following questions:

1. In your role as a parent, what are the most important things you would want your child to know?
2. Are you confident that your child will be safe if they follow your advice? Why or why not?
3. Now imagine you are the parent (or older sibling) of an African American or Latino child in America today. What would you tell your child to keep them safe?
4. Is the advice you’d give today different from your letter? Why or why not?

What dangers do children of color face today, and how are they different from the lynching era? How are they different from the dangers faced by white children today?

H1.6.1 RACIALIZING CRIMINALITY

(REFERENCE P. 61 OF LYNCHING REPORT PDF)

Lynching directly fostered the racialization of criminality. White people defended vigilante violence aimed at black people as a necessary tactic of self-preservation to protect property, families, and the Southern way of life from dangerous black “criminals.” The link between lynching and the image of African Americans as “criminal” and “dangerous” was sometimes explicit, such as when lynchings occurred in response to allegations of criminal behavior. In other cases, white mobs justified lynching as a preemptive strike against the threat of black violent crime.

Decades of racial terror in the American South reflected and reinforced a view that African Americans, especially men, were dangerous criminals who posed a threat to innocent white citizens, especially white women. Although the Constitution’s presumption of innocence is a bedrock principle of American criminal justice, African Americans were assigned a presumption of guilt.

The presumption of guilt and dangerousness assigned to African Americans has made minority communities particularly vulnerable to the unfair administration of criminal justice today. Numerous studies have demonstrated that white subjects have strong unconscious associations between blackness and criminality. Implicit biases have been shown to affect policing — marking young men of color for disparately frequent stops, searches, and violence — and all aspects of the criminal justice system — leading to higher rates of childhood suspension, expulsion, and arrest at school; disproportionate contact with the juvenile justice system; harsher charging decisions and disadvantaged plea negotiations; a greater likelihood of being denied bail and diversion; an increased risk of wrongful convictions and unfair sentences; and higher rates of probation and parole revocation.

UNIT 1 : LYNCHING AND RACIAL TERROR

LESSON 7 : RACIAL TERROR INSTITUTIONALIZED

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Why does the prevailing narrative blame lynching on a minority of Southern white extremists, like the KKK? How does the prevailing narrative forward a misunderstanding of the historical time?

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will explore how the prevailing narrative of a few bad actors allows us to ignore how lynching was related to entrenched racial hierarchies and enforced white supremacy. This narrative also reproduces the narrative that because these events do not happen anymore, racial justice has been achieved.

RATIONALE

This lesson asks students to put their emerging knowledge and understanding about lynching in contrast with how the history of lynching is broadly understood.

INTRODUCTION

The prevailing narrative about lynching misses how widespread and normalized the lynching of black people was in the South. This prevailing narrative of white extremists as the ones responsible for the racial terror of lynching encourages a misunderstanding of history and erases how a society made up of everyday people supported and relished in the practice of lynching. It is important to recognize the complicity of white people who were not considered extremists.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2

Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g.,

visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

MAIN IDEAS

Narratives emerged after the lynching era that blamed lynchings on a minority of Southern white extremists, but reports of the day clearly demonstrate that participation in lynching was widespread among Southern whites.

1. Racial terror lynching was a valued, respected institution dedicated to maintaining the social and racial order from which all whites benefitted and which grew from and reinforced the Narrative of Racial Difference.
2. That racial terror lynching was not “popular justice” is evidenced by lynchings targeting the entire African American community, which were clearly designed to send a message of domination, to instill fear, and sometimes to drive African Americans from the community.

KEY TERMS

Institution: A significant practice, relationship, or organization in a society or culture

Confederate flag: The display of flags used by and associated with the Confederate States of America (1861 – 1865) has continued into the present day, with the “Southern cross” used in the battle flag of General Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia gaining the most popular recognition as a modern symbol of the Confederacy, and by extension, of the white component of the Southern United States in general. Such displays have been made for a variety of reasons, with Southern culture, states’ rights, and historical commemoration among the stated reasons for particular uses.

Impunity: Exemption or freedom from punishment, harm, or loss

TIME

2 – 3 class sessions

MATERIALS

Access to lynchinginamerica.eji.org

HANDOUTS

H1.4.1 “Lynching in America: From ‘Popular Justice’ to Racial Terror” worksheet

H1.7.1 Postcard

H1.7.2 Confederate flag photos article

LESSON PLAN

BEGINNING

Students get out their “Lynching in America: From ‘Popular Justice’ to Racial Terror” worksheet (H1.4.1).

Students silently read [“Characteristics of the Lynching Era”](#) (pp. 29–40 of Lynching Report PDF).

Students (working independently or with a neighbor) reread [“Public Spectacle Lynchings” to “Lynchings of Black People Resisting Mistreatment”](#) (pp. 33–40 of Lynching Report PDF). These pages include the stories of several lynchings. Students write the name of each lynching victim under the category of lynching to which they think the lynching best corresponds. Some may fit in more than one category.

Encourage students to make notes on the worksheet about characteristics of lynchings as they read.

MIDDLE

Before viewing:

In a journal, students respond to the prompts “something I know,” “something I believe,” and “something I wonder” about the term “lynch mob.” Write 2 or 3 responses for each prompt.

Shared listening: [John Hartfield audio story](#)

After listening:

On the board, write **PUBLIC SPECTACLE LYNCHING** and underneath:

| | WHAT/HOW | WHO | WHY |
|-------------------------|----------|-----|-----|
| PREVAILING NARRATIVE | <hr/> | | |

NOW KNOW

Ask students what the prevailing narrative tells us (or what students thought before this lesson) about lynching, and enter their responses above the line under the corresponding heading.

- Students might offer “hanging” for **WHAT/HOW**.
- Students can refer to what they wrote in response to the before-listening prompt in offering terms for **WHO**.
- Students might offer “popular justice” or “response to crime” for **WHY**.

Ask students what they now know about lynchings, and write their responses below the line under the corresponding heading.

- Encourage students to be sober and specific in offering terms for **WHAT/HOW**, which should include burning, shooting, and torture. Prompt students to think about the tasks individuals performed as part of a public spectacle lynching, such as building the scaffolding, starting the fire (often an “honor” awarded to children), buying or selling souvenirs and refreshments, writing and publishing ads, articles, and postcards, and witnessing as a member of the audience.
- Under **WHO**, encourage students to be specific, and prompt them to name what individuals/groups would perform the tasks above, such as police, politicians, carpenters, vendors, reporters, photographers, as well as doctors, lawyers, teachers, students, preachers, men, women, and children.
- For **WHY**, students should identify “enforcing the Narrative of Racial Difference” and maintaining the social order. Also encourage students to think about specific ways in which individuals/groups benefitted from lynching, such as earning money, gaining public approval or status, looking “macho” or tough, and enjoying entertainment with friends and neighbors.
- Ask students why some lynchings were designed to terrorize the entire African American community. Students may offer sending a message of domination, instilling fear, or driving African Americans from the community. Write these responses under **WHY**.

To add another layer to complicate their thinking, invite students to the board to draw lines connecting the three categories. For example, a line could be drawn from “publishing postcards” to “photographer/journalist” to “earning money/building reputation.”

Discuss the following questions:

1. Looking at the board, who does the prevailing narrative blame for lynchings? Under the prevailing narrative, who participated in lynchings and why?
2. Looking at the board, what do you now know about who participated in lynchings and why?
3. Why does the prevailing narrative blame lynchings on a minority of Southern white extremists, like the KKK?
4. How does it change your understanding of lynching to recognize that it was widely and enthusiastically embraced by Southern whites?

END

Distribute Postcard handout (H1.7.1) and ask a student to read aloud.

Direct students to write on the handout in response to the following prompts:

1. What reaction did the sender of this postcard expect? Did he expect to be congratulated or criticized, praised or punished? Did he think he could be arrested for participating in a murder?
2. Were his expectations reasonable? Why or why not?
3. How do expectations about reactions or consequences influence what you do? What changes when people think they will not get caught or be held accountable for violent acts?

Read aloud the Confederate flag photos article (H1.7.2). Discuss:

1. What reaction did these selfie-takers expect when they posted these photos online?
2. Were those expectations reasonable? Why or why not?
3. What reaction(s) did the selfies generate? What is your reaction?
4. Do these selfies align with or reinforce the Narrative of Racial Difference? Why or why not?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Some Were Neighbors: Collaboration & Complicity in the Holocaust, an online exhibition of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

H1.7.1 POSTCARD

This postcard features a photograph of the silhouetted corpse of African American Allen Brooks hanging from Elk's Arch, surrounded by spectators on March 3, 1910, in Dallas.

Printed inscription on border: "LYNCHING SCENE, DALLAS, MARCH 3, 1910"

Penciled inscription on border: *All OK and would like to get a post from you. Bill, this was some Raw Bunch.*

Addressed to Dr. J.W.F. Williams, LaFayette, Christian County, Kentucky:

Well, John – This is a token of a great day we had in Dallas, March 3, a negro was hung for an assault on a three-year-old-girl. I saw this on my noon hour. I was very much in the bunch. You can see the negro hanging on a telephone pole.



H1.7.2 CONFEDERATE FLAG PHOTOS ARTICLE

“Teens’ Prom Picture with Guns and a Confederate Flag Causes Controversy” ABC13, May 6, 2015

<http://abc13.com/society/teens-prom-picture-causes-controversy/700081/>

Wednesday, May 06, 2015

DENVER, CO (KTRK) — Eight high school students in Denver stirred up a controversy after posing for their prom photos with guns and the Confederate flag.

In the photo, three boys are seen holding a Confederate flag while five girls stand around them. Two of the girls are holding an assault weapon and a rifle with a tactical scope, while the other girls make gun gestures with their hands. The students, who all attend Chaparral High School, are dressed in floor-length gowns and tuxedos.

The controversial photo was posted on social media and has since gone viral. Some say they don’t see anything wrong with the photo, calling the Confederate flag a piece of history. Others have complained, saying the flag is associated with slavery.

“If you’re going to take a picture of a flag, you need to know what it stands for. You need to know that people are going to be offended by it,” Mairenn Digeorge, a student at University of Colorado-Boulder, told KDVR-TV after seeing the photo on her Facebook feed.

One of the girls in the photo, who has not been identified, has since apologized.

“I was very uncomfortable with this whole situation and didn’t know what to say or what to do,” the student told KDVR-TV. “I don’t condone any of the actions that were in the picture and I don’t condone anything that has to do with the flag.”

The mother of one of the boys in the photo told the television station she was shocked by the image. She says the picture wasn’t her son’s idea.

“When he got there he was surprised that guns were brought out and the Confederate flag was brought out,” the parent said. “There were other parents there fully supporting it and taking pictures.”

The flag was never the official flag of the Confederacy during the Civil War, although its design was incorporated into several of the flags that were used. It was used as a battle flag, and today it is part of the state flag of Mississippi. While supporters say the flag represents “southern pride,” others believe it is a symbol of racism, pointing to variations often used by white supremacy organizations.

It’s not clear if the students were disciplined for the photo. Chaparral High school has refused to comment.

UNIT 1 : LYNCHING AND RACIAL TERROR

LESSON 8 : RACIAL TERROR AND THE GREAT MIGRATION

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did racial terror prompt the forced mass migration of black people from the South into the North and West? How do those patterns of migration still linger into the present?

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will learn how the Great Migration was the forced movement of black people in response to lynching and racial terror by exploring the [Great Migration Map](#) and the [Racial Terror Lynchings Map](#) to see how their emerging knowledge of lynching in the United States is reflected on these digital maps.

RATIONALE

Students have learned about the social climate created by lynching and how black people's existence was under constant threat. This lesson guides students in thinking about the Great Migration and forced mass exodus of black people from the South into the North and Western parts of the United States. Students can consider how this mass movement of people impacted black people economically, culturally, and socially at the time and into the present.

INTRODUCTION

In the Great Migration, over six million black people fled the South. This mass movement of people had an enormous social and cultural impact that continues to linger into the present.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.C

Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3

Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

TIME

2 – 3 class sessions

MATERIALS

Access to lynchinginamerica.eji.org

Chart paper for students to write their paragraph

Post-its

Journals

LESSON PLAN

BEGINNING

As a class, students listen to the [John Hartfield audio story](#).

Once they have listened, break into small groups and spend some time exploring the [Racial Terror Lynchings Map](#) and the [Great Migration Map](#). Students should then read [“Lynching in the South, 1877 – 1950”](#) and [“Lynching Outside the South, 1877 – 1950”](#) (pp. 39–45 of Lynching Report PDF). Students should be encouraged to ask questions and make relevant observations regarding the way those three things are connected.

Students can work independently or in groups to explore these different texts and write down the things that they notice. In reviewing these documents and maps, students should draw on what they have already learned (collectively or individually) to answer the following prompt on their chart paper in 2 or 3 paragraphs:

Taken together, what story do these maps and charts tell about lynching?

Once students have written their responses, they should post their writing on the walls. Give students small Post-its to respond to the work of their peers as they do a “gallery walk.” Once students have done this, each group can share their writing and respond to 1 or 2 questions placed on their poster by their peers.

MIDDLE

Students listen to the [John Hartfield audio story](#) and write a brief response in their journals. Students should have time to ask questions and discuss the audio story after they have written in their journals.

Students read [“Enabling an Era of Lynching: Retreat, Resistance, and Refuge”](#) (pp. 48–58 of Lynching Report PDF).

After students read, discuss, using the following questions as a guide:

1. We often think of terrible violence in our history as being the result of a few “bad apples” or individual actors. How does the history of lynching counter that because it was institutional? What are some current examples of violent acts enabled by government policies or even inaction?
2. How did Northern states and the federal government enable lynching in the late 1800s?
3. How did the Supreme Court enable lynching in the 1876 *Cruikshank* decision?
4. How did government leaders explain their decision to not do anything to protect black people from lynching?
5. How did lynching impact electoral politics in the late 1800s?
6. What were some of the ways that black people responded to the environment animated by racial terror, voter suppression, violence, and lynching?
7. Over six million people fled the South in response to lynching and racial terror. What do you think that experience was like for people fleeing their homes, traumatized by a recent murder, or the threat of murder? How did fleeing, sometime without preparation, impact families?

END

Small groups can return to their initial writing (at the beginning of the lesson) and rewrite their stories to reflect their new knowledge.

Students should take their chart paper and write a 2- to 3-page essay about responding to the following prompt:

Why did over six million black people leave the South? How did this forced migration make black Americans into refugees?

Students should cite specific examples from their reading to support their claims.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

The Great Migration is the subject of rich African American art, literature, theater, and music. Students can choose an artist, writer, or musician (see Additional Resources, below, for some ideas) to research and study. Students might also include the work of current artists working in themes that are connected to the themes under study. Under the guidance and facilitation of the teacher, students can create an “installation” highlighting that person’s life and work for a “gallery walk” that is open to the school community. Students might also organize a teach-in where they share their knowledge of the history of lynching, highlighting some of the key figures, with the broader school community.

Note: The installation should be conceived by the students but supported by the instructor. Students can have time to brainstorm with peers before beginning their project. Each student can share their project idea to inspire their colleagues.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

Jacob Lawrence's art documenting the Great Migration: "Migration Series 1940 – 1941."

"A Thousand Midnights" (short film), directed by Carlos Javier Ortiz, 2015.

Jill Lepore, "The Uprooted: Chronicling the Great Migration," *The New Yorker*, September 6, 2010.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Isabel Wilkerson. *The Warmth of Other Suns : The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010).

UNIT 1 : LYNCHING AND RACIAL TERROR

LESSON 9 : BLACK VETERANS AND THE IDEOLOGY OF WHITE SUPREMACY

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How is the ideology of white supremacy undermined by the fact that enforcement requires hypervigilance and violence?

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will read from EJI's report [*Lynching in America: Targeting Black Veterans*](#) and will explore how white supremacy needed to be maintained by violence.

RATIONALE

Students have learned about the different kinds of lynching and how lynching created a climate of terror in order to enforce white supremacy in the absence of the institution of slavery. Students will read about the lynchings of black veterans, using EJI's report to deepen their knowledge of lynching in U.S. history.

INTRODUCTION

The ideology of white supremacy is persistent, even though it is logically flimsy, as it's unsupported by facts or evidence. When people do point to evidence, they are using white supremacy to justify white supremacy. In order for such a specious claim to continue to be believed and circulated, it must be constantly maintained and reproduced. Black veterans returning home from serving in the military were a particular threat because their existence undermined the ideology of white supremacy. Because black veterans threatened the ideology of white supremacy, black veterans were not celebrated when they returned home; instead, they were targeted for lynching.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2

Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well

as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.2.A

Introduce a topic and organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a unified whole; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

MAIN IDEA

Black veterans who had proved their valor and courage as soldiers during the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, World War I, and World War II were targeted for racial terror lynchings because their military service caused them to be seen as a particular threat to Jim Crow and the narrative of black inferiority.

TIME

1 – 2 class sessions

MATERIALS

Access to lynchinginamerica.eji.org

[*Lynching in America: Targeting Black Veterans*](#)

Journals

LESSON PLAN

BEGINNING

Students read [“The Tragic, Forgotten History of Black Military Veterans”](#) by Peter C. Baker, *The New Yorker*. After they have read, they should briefly write in their journals, listing one question that they have after reading the article.

Students read “The Myth of Racial Inferiority and the Black Veteran” and “Fighting for Freedom: The Civil War and the Aftermath” from [*Lynching in America: Targeting Black Veterans*](#).

MIDDLE

Independently, students read **one** of the following sections of the report, [*Lynching in America: Targeting Black Veterans*](#). Once they have read, they should meet with their colleagues who read the same section.

“Red Summer of 1919” (p. 22 of Veterans Report PDF)

“Moore’s Ford Bridge” (p. 27)

“Hosea Williams” (p. 32)

“Marching Toward a Movement: Black Service in World War II” (pp. 34-38)

Once students have read, they should write a brief summary of their section, then meet with their colleagues who have read other sections. Students should briefly summarize their section for their colleagues who have not read it. After students have shared their summary and answered any questions, students discuss the following questions:

1. Why were black veterans targeted when they returned home from serving?
2. How does the targeting of black veterans undermine the ideology of white supremacy?
3. How does the targeting of black veterans help us better understand the purpose of lynching?
4. How does the lynching of black veterans help us understand the legacy of lynching?

END

Students should write a 5-page essay responding to the following prompt:

Many of us learn that the U.S. became an independent country because people wanted democracy. How did the targeting of black veterans, as well as lynching in general, undermine the United States' claims of being a democratic society and upholding particular democratic ideals? How should this violent history be addressed in the present?

Students should draw on EJI's veterans report and find at least three additional sources to support the claims.

UNIT 2 : THE LEGACY OF LYNCHING

LESSON 1 : THE END OF LYNCHING AND THE BEGINNING OF MASS INCARCERATION AND CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did mass incarceration and capital punishment rely on the ideology of white supremacy?

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will learn about the end of lynching as an evolution, and about the beginning of mass incarceration and capital punishment as a continuation of the myth of black inferiority. In this lesson, students should learn how the ideology of white supremacy evolves, rather than ever being confronted and resolved.

RATIONALE

By this time, students have learned about lynching in the U.S. They have begun to understand how lynching was used to produce a particular kind of society, which conferred humanity only on those who were white. This was institutionalized, rather than an unfortunate detail of a time period. This lesson is about how lynching evolved to become mass incarceration and capital punishment.

INTRODUCTION

Lynching declined as capital punishment and mass incarceration expanded. Like at the end of slavery, the ideology of white supremacy continued to go unchallenged, adapting as lynching became less tolerated in the mainstream.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.9

Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research

TIME

1 – 2 class sessions

MATERIALS

Access to lynchinginamerica.eji.org

Markers

LESSON PLAN

BEGINNING

Listen to the [Anthony Ray Hinton audio story](#). Also watch the videos of EJI founder Bryan Stevenson talking about the [legacy of lynching](#) and the [death penalty](#).

The teacher should write the number of years that black people were enslaved in America, the number of years Reconstruction was attempted, the number of years that lynching was a constant threat to black life, and the number of people who fled the South. The teacher should ask students to write about these numbers in their journal by responding to the following prompt:

How has this history impacted the lives of black people today? How has this history impacted our society today?

Once students have written for 10 to 15 minutes, they should underline or highlight a section of their writing that they would like to share. Students should get pieces of paper and markers to write what they will share with the class. Students can post their papers on the wall and go around the room reading each other's writing.

MIDDLE

Students read [Confronting Lynching](#) (pp. 57–64 of Lynching Report PDF), [Racially Biased Criminal Justice and Mass Incarceration](#) (pp. 60–61), [“Lynching’s Legacy: Capital Punishment in America”](#) (pp. 62–64), and [“Trauma and the Legacy of Lynching”](#) (pp. 65).

After students have read, they can discuss and/or write in response to the following questions:

1. What happened when the number of lynchings began to decrease?
2. How did lynching create an association between criminality and blackness? How is this association a continuance of the ideology of white supremacy?
3. What is the legacy of lynching in terms of policies and practices of surveillance and policing?

4. Given what you now know about lynching in America, how do you understand the policing, surveillance, and incarceration of black people today?
5. What can be done to address the ideology of white supremacy today? How does understanding the past help us to address the present and future?

END

Give students time to find 4 or 5 recent newspaper articles/think pieces (written in the past six months) discussing a topic associated with lynching. Students should think about what they would like to know more about (see topics below) and create a visual, literary, or sonic representation of what they have learned, highlighting how this current issue is related to lynching. Students should write a brief explanation of their work, tying the present-day issue to the history of lynching.

Note: Many students understand issues of racial disparities in terms of individual effort and worth. This is an opportunity to challenge that thinking with a critical exploration of historical factors, which persist in our institutions today. Particularly, we as a society continue to deny history in order to forward a narrative of individual merit that is ahistorical.

Students present their work to the class and/or the school community.

Topics:

- Representation in film and television
- Geographic segregation
- Voting and voter suppression
- Disparities in educational access and attainment
- Policing, incarceration, and capital punishment
- Employment
- Wealth attainment
- Health disparities
- Housing and homeownership
- Environmental racism
- The absence of memorials

Optional: Each student can read 2 to 4 more articles about their topic of choice and plan a 5- to 6-minute presentation summarizing their research, but more importantly, connecting this current issue with the history of lynching in America.

EXTENSION: BOOK REPORT AND PRESENTATION

Much has been written how about crime continues to be racialized. The teacher can facilitate a conversation about current events that allows students to explore the legacy of lynching, particularly how blackness continues to be associated with criminality. Students can choose one of the books below (or another relevant one) and read their book with a small group of their peers. Student groups can prepare a presentation, art piece, and/or activity connecting their text with the history of lynching in the U.S.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

Time: The Kalief Browder Story (TV series), directed by Jenner Furst (United States: Viacom, 2017).

13th (film), directed by Ava DuVernay (United States: Kandoo Films, 2016).

Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration,” *The Atlantic*, October 2015.

Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Moynihan, Mass Incarceration, and Responsibility,” *The Atlantic*, September 24, 2015.

Michelle Alexander. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010).

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963).

“The Enduring Myth of Black Criminality” (short film), produced by *The Atlantic*, September 10, 2015.

Claudia Rankine. *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Simone Browne. *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

Kiese Laymon. *How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America* (Chicago: Bolden, 2013).

Note: The distinction between resources for teacher and student is subjective. Many of the texts listed as resources for teachers might be enjoyed by students and vice versa.

UNIT 2 : THE LEGACY OF LYNCHING

LESSON 2 : THE ENDURANCE OF WHITE SUPREMACY

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Why does white supremacy endure, even as our culture and society have changed in so many ways?

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will begin to think about the enduring legacy of slavery and lynching by processing what they have learned up until this point. This lesson is another opportunity to think about the weight of history.

RATIONALE

This lesson allows students to think and write more deeply about the endurance of white supremacy. Students will consider how institutions, customs, and practices protect white supremacy and the Myth of Racial Difference, even when the most obvious examples of inequality or injustice become illegal or socially unacceptable.

INTRODUCTION

Even as overt forms of racial discrimination have become illegal, racial injustice persists and white supremacy endures. Although custom and social norms have shifted in many ways, race still determines many things about a person's life chances. Here, we are concerned with how white supremacy endures, even into the present.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.9

Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

TIME

1 – 2 class sessions

MATERIALS

Access to lynchinginamerica.eji.org
Journals

HANDOUTS

H2.2.1 Key Quotes from “Trauma and the Legacy of Lynching”

LESSON PLAN

BEGINNING

Students consider how enacting and enforcing white supremacy impacted the everyday experience of black people. Students might think about what it meant to have no recourse in response to violence, theft, or vandalism. Black people were unprotected in terms of the law, which meant that even though there were laws, those laws never protected black people. Black people were also punished if they attempted to protect themselves.

Students watch the videos of [Rufus Lesseur](#), [Claude Neal](#), [Elizabeth Lawrence](#), and [Calvin McDowell](#), [William Stewart](#), and [Thomas Moss](#) to contemplate how black people were always vulnerable, because they were not only unprotected by the law, but the law was hostile to their existence.

After each video, students should write a word or a phrase on a note card. These can be anything that comes to mind after watching the videos. Once students have done this, they can pass their cards around until everyone has three cards. Students should read their cards and discuss, if they are compelled.

Then students write in response to the following prompt in their journals:

Since the United States enslaved African people and tied slavery to the color of one’s skin, racial injustice continues to challenge our culture and society. At this point, you might have some insight as to why that is the case. The legacy of lynching continues to impact our culture and society. We have discussed the direct impact of lynching on generations and generations of black people, but what are the costs on U.S. society?

Once students have written for 10 to 15 minutes, they should discuss their thinking in their small groups.

Option: Students get a large piece of chart paper to create a collective “mind map,” where students use graphic organizers/maps, drawings, quotes, photographs, key terms, and questions to think through their answer to the prompt and create a map of their thinking. Students can post their work on the wall.

MIDDLE

Students read Key Quotes from [“Trauma and the Legacy of Lynching”](#) handout (H2.2.1) (pp. 65–76 of Lynching Report PDF) before rereading the entire section and adding it to their mind maps.

Then students watch the [Thomas Miles film](#) to discuss the enduring legacy of lynching. Students should think about the direct legacy of lynching and the broader impact of lynching on our present society.

After students have watched the film, students get in their study groups and respond to one of the following prompts about the legacy of lynching:

- *How has white supremacy adapted since slavery? Consider the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, the Great Migration, the civil rights movement, and into today.*
- *What is the legacy of lynching? How does this history continue to impact our lives and society?*
- *Based on what you have learned about lynching, what is the legacy of lynching? How does that legacy impact the present?*

END

Students should discuss their writing in small groups and plan a photo essay that they conceive and create as a group. Students can use their writing to create a photo essay. Students can use a camera on a phone to take photos and/or a disposable or Polaroid camera, or do it on the computer using images to create a PowerPoint; students can make a playlist, read poetry, read sections from their own writing, or some artful combination of all of those things. Once students have created their photo essay, students can share their work in class, or students can post on the course web page.

Note: Some students may want to do this project alone. They can still participate in the discussion in order to get ideas for their own photo essay.

H2.2.1 KEY QUOTES FROM “TRAUMA AND THE LEGACY OF LYNCHING”

“Very few public commemorations of African Americans’ suffering during the post-slavery era exist today. Formal remembrances of national racial history tend to celebrate the civil rights movement’s victories, focusing on individual achievements and success stories rather than reflecting on deeply rooted, violent resistance that upheld the racial caste system for so long. Honoring civil rights activists and embracing their successes is appropriate and due, but when they are not accompanied by meaningful engagement with difficult history of systemic violence against black Americans for decades after slavery, such celebrations risk painting an incomplete and distorted picture.” (p. 66)

“The absence of a prominent public memorial acknowledging racial terrorism is a powerful statement about our failure to value the African Americans who were killed or gravely wounded in this brutal campaign of racial violence.” (p. 66)

“The Southern landscape is cluttered with plaques, statues, and monuments that record, celebrate, and lionize generations of American defenders of white supremacy, including public officials and private citizens.” (p. 66)

“Millions of black Americans left the South between 1910 and 1970 in response to the instability and threat of violence that racial terror created in the region. These largely involuntary relocations compounded the trauma suffered by terror survivors, even as leaving the South improved their physical reality.” (p. 69)

UNIT 2 : THE LEGACY OF LYNCHING

LESSON 3 : MEMORIALS AND MONUMENTS

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What do memorials and monuments do for a community where atrocities and loss have occurred?

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will reflect on memorials and monuments that they have encountered over their lives and consider their purpose. In regards to lynching, students will learn about how memorials and monuments have been used to create a narrative that obscures the truth of lynching and erases the generations of victims of lynching. This is done in favor of a narrative that reframes the Civil War and racial terrorism. Students will think about what memorials and monuments do generally, then they will focus in on what memorials and monuments have done for our understanding of the history of lynching, while also imagining what memorials and monuments have the potential to do, for both the present and future.

RATIONALE

Students have likely not thought very much about memorials or monuments unless they have personally lost someone. This lesson is meant to focus students' attention on something that might previously have been in the background, in order to think about the potential in memorials and monuments to uncover histories that have previously been hidden from view.

INTRODUCTION

There are many memorials and monuments to those who supported and facilitated the lynching and subjugation of black people, while there are very few commemorating and memorializing the victims of those events. This disparity impacts how we understand this history in the present and frames our thinking of current racial inequities. When we uncover the past through reminders like memorials and monuments, there is an opportunity to address the past while reconsidering the present and reimagining the future.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.2.B

Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

TIME

1 – 2 class sessions

MATERIALS

Access to lynchinginamerica.eji.org

LESSON PLAN

BEGINNING

Students watch Bryan Stevenson’s videos on [memorials](#) and [truth and reconciliation](#).

In small groups, students briefly describe a memorial or monument that they have seen over the course of their life. The teacher should remind students that memorials can be large and government-sanctioned or small and community-driven. For example, memorials created by family members or community members, “ghost bikes,” highway memorials, and even tattoos memorializing someone can count in this discussion.

In thinking about the memorial or monument that they visited or saw, students may consider the following:

1. Who or what was memorialized? Why?
2. Who constructed/created the memorial?
3. When looking at the memorial or monument, what did you feel?
4. How do you explain that feeling? What does that feeling suggest about monuments and memorials?

Write the following on the board or a piece of chart paper:

| | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Famous Person | Not Famous Person | Historical Event | Other |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|

After students have written about the memorial that comes to mind, they should tally in which group their memorial falls.

After students have tallied their memorials, as a class, they can analyze the kinds of memorials that they remember. Then students can get into small groups and respond to the following:

1. What is the purpose of memorials? What can memorials do for the people who visit them? How can memorials impact a community?
2. Who in the community decides who, or what, gets memorials and monuments? How are memorials reflective of particular understandings of history? Or, whose version of history do memorials often reflect?
3. How do memorials help us remember and understand history? From whose perspective?

MIDDLE

Students listen to the [Anthony Crawford audio story](#) and draw on the “[Trauma and the Legacy of Lynching](#)” section to support their responses. After listening and reading, they should return to the questions that they discussed earlier, to reconsider their initial answers and revise their earlier responses.

Key points:

1. While we have many monuments and memorials to remember lots of people, places, and events, there are none memorializing the victims of lynching.
2. Lynching is a historical human rights violation, but is not widely understood in those terms and has been largely ignored or minimized, despite overwhelming documentation of deep and continued harm.
3. The harms of the past can only be mitigated if we meaningfully and honestly address them. While this has never occurred, doing so now would have a meaningful impact.
4. Lynching has had lasting impacts on our society. The impacts of lynching are largely unknown because, as a society, we have never meaningfully addressed the past to connect it to the present.
5. We do not often have tolerance for difficult knowledge and painful histories because many of us do not have practice engaging difficult and painful topics that do not cast the U.S. as innocent. Memorials and monuments help us slow down and reflect on the past.

END

Students share the highlights of their conversation with the class. Once students have done this, they should write an ending journal response about the power of memorials and monuments. Students might write in response to the following prompt:

We learn history in a variety of ways: family stories, books, school, museums, films, and more. How do memorials and monuments have the potential to educate us about history?

Students should support their claims with references to their reading.

UNIT 2 : THE LEGACY OF LYNCHING

LESSON 4 : TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Why do we remember the past of racial terror and lynching? How do we remember?

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will learn about the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in South Africa, Canada, and Rwanda to imagine what such a process could look like to account for slavery and lynching in the United States. Students will read key documents from these historical contexts and draw connections to lynching in America, regarding the absence of any commissions addressing past racial terror and injustice.

RATIONALE

Students will have an opportunity to apply their knowledge of both the past and present to consider what kind of future can be possible, by meaningfully addressing and accounting for the past.

INTRODUCTION

Although “healing” is not a sufficient term to address historical atrocities committed against a people, the U.S. has never acknowledged the history of this country, choosing instead to obscure that history by forwarding false narratives. At the same time, racial injustice stubbornly persists to the consternation and confusion of many. This lesson is an opportunity for students to think deeply about what a truth and reparation process could look like in the U.S., given the history of sustained exploitation, trauma, and violence committed against black people over hundreds of years.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.C

Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

TIME

2 – 4 class sessions

MATERIALS

Access to lynchinginamerica.eji.org

Journal

LESSON PLAN

BEGINNING

Students write in their journal or speak to their neighbors in response to the following prompt:

What happens when we move on from problems without addressing them, or possibly pretending like they never happened?

MIDDLE

Students [watch](#) and [read](#) (p. 52 in Report PDF) the profiles of Ida B. Wells, discussing the role of exposing the truth of lynching and emphasizing the quote at the end of the profile in the digital report.

Note: Students might also read excerpts from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa report and/or watch videos of the testimony. Additionally, students can read “The Survivors Speak: A Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.” The more students know about what other nations have done, the easier it will be for them to imagine what could be done in the U.S.

Ida B. Wells exposed the truth of lynching, but she was also reframing lynching in opposition to the myths that were told about black people — some call this a counterstory. Even so, many people do not know of Ida B. Wells’s work.

1. What conclusions can we draw about who determines the version of truth that becomes “the truth”?
2. How do we move forward into the future when our knowledge of the past is based on versions of the truth that are inaccurate?
3. How do we resist versions of the truth that erase entire populations of people in favor of a version of the truth in which the U.S. is always imagined as benevolent and just?
4. Why is it important to account for the past, and the stories that we have learned about the past? What kind of accounting is required for meaningful change toward racial justice?
5. What kind of process should we have in order to address the past of lynching in the U.S.?

Students might then read some combination of the following:

[“Panel to Investigate Atrocities of the Apartheid Era”](#)
[“South Africa to Pay \\$3,900 to Each Family of Apartheid Victims”](#)
[“Portraits of Reconciliation”](#)

Students can discuss the articles in terms of their relevance to thinking about truth and reparation in the U.S.

Students then break into small research groups and choose 3 to 5 items from a list of articles, texts, and films to study as a group. The students decide how the work is distributed within their groups, but the work should be guided by the teacher. In their research groups, they will read several newspaper articles, watch television clips on YouTube, and/or watch a film or documentary about the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

After students have learned about the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (and potentially other examples of truth commissions), students can discuss how it relates to the history of lynching in the U.S.

1. What was the purpose of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission?
2. From what you understand about apartheid in South Africa, did the Truth and Reconciliation Commission accomplish its goal? Why or why not?
3. What impact does acknowledgment of state-sanctioned harm to a group of people have on a society suffering under the history of past atrocities? What does acknowledgment of wrongdoing do for individuals directly impacted? What does it do for people who stood by and allowed it to happen? Be specific here.
4. Even though nothing can fully account for past atrocities, what can governments and institutions do to begin to account for the past, even when that accounting will always be insufficient?

END

Students meet in small groups and discuss what kind of government response would begin to address the history of lynching and its legacy, considering the following:

1. What would a national response to the history of slavery and lynching (and subsequent racial injustice) look like in the U.S.? Consider institutions that are tasked with justice, but also educational institutions and community organizations.
2. What would be required in the U.S. for redress to become possible?
3. What are some of the challenges at this current time that make a serious national response to the legacy of slavery and lynching difficult? What can we do now, so that such a thing will be possible in the future?
4. What can you do *now*, in your peer groups and community, to influence the kind of change in perspective and priority that takes seriously the history of lynching and racial injustice?
5. While we heal from the past, we might consider how government policies dehumanize and target groups today by exploiting fear, ignorance, and hatred in ways that might be familiar to students after learning about lynching. How does healing from the past also mean critically engaging the present?

The teacher might remind students of how the history of lynching should not be equated with apartheid, even if there may be some similarities. Students should come with a guide or a plan to address the history of lynching in the U.S. Students might create a ten-point plan of their own (using the Black Panther Party's Ten-Point Program) as a guide. This plan should address the history of lynching and also the legacy of lynching. Students imagine how their ten-point plan might begin a process of healing from the past, but also a practical and actionable plan for a more just future. Students should be prepared to present their plan. Encourage students to explain how such procedures and policies might address past racial injustice and racial terror.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Suzanne Daley, "Panel to Investigate Atrocities of the Apartheid Era," *The New York Times*, August 27, 1995.

Ginger Thompson, "South Africa to Pay \$3,900 to Each Family of Apartheid Victims," *The New York Times*, April 16, 2003.

Long Night's Journey into Day (film), directed by Deborah Hoffmann and Frances Reid (United States: Reid-Hoffmann Productions, 2000).

Facing the Truth with Bill Moyers (TV movie), directed by Gail Pellett (United States: Public Affairs Television, 2005).

Pieter Hugo and Susan Dominus, "Portraits of Reconciliation," *The New York Times*, April 4, 2014.
The Black Panther Party's Ten-Point Program

CONCLUDING ACTIVITY IDEAS

1. Students can design and create a memorial and an explanation of the memorial for the victims of lynching in their school and/or community. Encourage students to invite the school community to visit the memorials. Students might also create a “digital memorial” to remember an event, victim, or geographic location that was resonant with them.
2. The class might create a “Lynching in the U.S.” informative installation for their school community. Students might draw on museums that provide learning experiences for visitors using film, audio, images, and interactive digital media. Students can plan and create a sort of “museum” for lynching in the U.S. Students might refer to their conversation about representing violence against black people (Lesson 1.1) and ask that students be sensitive to how their exhibit deals with representing history and trauma. Students might also create a digital museum that is available to all students in their community.
3. The class can sponsor a school essay contest, where students in the school community write an essay about one of the topics related to lynching in the U.S. Students can invite writers and teach them about lynching before they write their essay. Students can organize an event where the top essayists read their essays.
4. Students can host a film series where they screen films that they have watched and want to share with the broader school community. Students can organize a panel, where they discuss the film in terms of its accuracy and fidelity to historical facts.
5. Students can organize an event or a series of events related to the history of lynching in the U.S. by doing teach-ins, but also producing plays written during that time and/or having a reading of the poetry and literature written during that time.