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The Negro Holocaust: Lynching and Race Riots in the United States, 1880-1950

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The United States has a brutal history of domestic violence. It is an ugly episode in our national history that has long been neglected. Of the several varieties of American violence, one type stands out as one of the most inhuman chapters in the history of the world—the violence committed against Negro citizens in America by white people. This unit of post Reconstruction Afro-American history will examine anti-Black violence from the 1880s to the 1950s. The phenomenon of lynching and the major race riots of this period, called the American Dark Ages by historian Rayford W. Logan, will be covered.

Immediately following the end of Reconstruction, the Federal Government of the United States restored white supremacist control to the South and adopted a “laissez-faire” policy in regard to the Negro. The Negro was betrayed by his country. This policy resulted in Negro disfranchisement, social, educational and employment discrimination, and peonage. Deprived of their civil and human rights, Blacks were reduced to a status of quasilavery or “second-class” citizenship. A tense atmosphere of racial hatred, ignorance and fear bred lawless mass violence, murder and lynching.

This unit is divided into three sections: 1) lynchings, 2) the most significant race riots between 1898 and 1943 and 3) the Black response to these acts of violence.

LYNCHING

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the lynching of Black people in the Southern and border states became an institutionalized method used by whites to terrorize Blacks and maintain white supremacy. In the South, during the period 1880 to 1940, there was deep-seated and all-pervading hatred and fear of the Negro which led white mobs to turn to “lynch law” as a means of social control. Lynchings—open public murders of individuals suspected of crime conceived and carried out more or less spontaneously by a mob—seem to have been an American invention. In *Lynch-Law*, the first scholarly investigation of lynching, written in 1905, author James E. Cutler stated that “lynching is a criminal practice which is peculiar to the United States.”¹

Most of the lynchings were by hanging or shooting, or both. However, many were of a more hideous nature—burning at the stake, maiming, dismemberment, castration, and other brutal methods of physical

torture. Lynching therefore was a cruel combination of racism and sadism, which was utilized primarily to sustain the caste system in the South. Many white people believed that Negroes could only be controlled by fear. To them, lynching was seen as the most effective means of control.

There are three major sources of lynching statistics. None cover the complete history of lynching in America. Prior to 1882, no reliable statistics of lynchings were recorded. In that year, the *Chicago Tribune* first began to take systematic account of lynchings. Shortly thereafter, in 1892, Tuskegee Institute began to make a systematic collection and tabulation of lynching statistics. Beginning in 1912, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People kept an independent record of lynchings.

These statistics were based primarily on newspaper reports. Because the South is so large and the rural districts had not always been in close contact with the city newspapers, it is certain that many lynchings escaped publicity in the press. Undoubtedly, therefore, there are errors and inaccuracies in the available lynching statistics.

The numbers of lynchings listed in each source varies slightly. The NAACP lynching statistics tend to be slightly higher than the Tuskegee Institute figures, which some historians consider "conservative." For example, in 1914, Tuskegee Institute reported fifty-two lynchings for the year, the "Chicago Tribune" reported fifty-four, and *The Crisis*, the official organ of the NAACP, gave the number as seventy-four.² The reason for the discrepancies in these figures is due in part to different conceptions of what actually constituted a lynching, and errors in the figures. According to the Tuskegee Institute figures, between the years 1882 and 1951, 4,730 people were lynched in the United States: 3,437 Negro and 1,293 white.³ The largest number of lynchings occurred in 1892. Of the 230 persons lynched that year, 161 were Negroes and sixty-nine whites.

Contrary to present-day popular conception, lynching was not a crime committed exclusively against Black people. During the nineteenth century a significant minority of the lynching victims were white. Between the 1830s and the 1850s the majority of those lynched in the United States were whites. Although a substantial number of white people were victims of this crime, the vast majority of those lynched, by the 1890s and after the turn of the century, were Black people. Actually, the pattern of almost exclusive lynching of Negroes was set during the Reconstruction period. According to the Tuskegee Institute statistics for the period covered in this study, the total number of Black lynching victims was more than two and one-half times as many as the number of whites put to death by lynching.

Lynchings occurred throughout the United States; it was not a sectional crime. However, the great majority of lynchings in the United States took place in the Southern and border states. According to social economist Gunnar Myrdal: "The Southern states account for nine-tenths of the lynchings. More than two-thirds of the remaining one-tenth occurred in the six states which immediately border the South: Maryland, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Kansas."⁴ Mississippi, Georgia, Texas, Louisiana, and Alabama were the leading lynching states. These five states furnished nearly half the total victims. Mississippi had the highest incidence of lynchings in the South as well as the highest for the nation, with Georgia and Texas taking second and third places, respectively. However, there were lynchings in the North and West. In fact, every state in the continental United States with the exception of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Vermont has had lynching casualties.

The causes assigned by whites in justification or explanation of lynching Black people include everything from major crimes to minor offenses. In many cases, Blacks were lynched for no reason at all other than race prejudice. Southern folk tradition has held that Negroes were lynched only for the crimes of raping white

women—"the nameless crime"—and murder. However, the statistics do not sustain this impression.

The accusations against persons lynched, according to the Tuskegee Institute records for the years 1882 to 1951, were: in 41 per cent for felonious assault, 19.2 per cent for rape, 6.1 per cent for attempted rape, 4.9 per cent for robbery and theft, 1.8 per cent for insult to white persons, and 22.7 per cent for miscellaneous offenses or no offense at a 11.5 In the last category are all sorts of trivial "offenses" such as "disputing with a white man," attempting to register to vote, "unpopularity", self-defense, testifying against a white man, "asking a white woman in marriage", and "peeping in a window."

Being charged with a crime did not necessarily mean that the person charged was guilty of the crime. Mob victims were often known to have been innocent of misdeeds. A special study by Arthur Raper of nearly one hundred lynchings convinced him that approximately one-third of the victims were falsely accused.⁶ Occasionally mobs were mistaken in the identity of their victims.

The racist myth of Negroes' uncontrollable desire to rape white women acquired a strategic position in the defense of the lynching practice. However, homicides and felonious assault, not rape, were most frequently cited in explanation of mob action. Next in importance, from the viewpoint of number of cases, is rape and attempted rape—25.3 per cent of the victims. Concerning this figure, Myrdal states: "There is much reason to believe that this figure has been inflated by the fact that a mob which makes the accusation of rape is secure from any further investigation; by the broad Southern definition of rape to include all sexual relations between Negro men and white women; and by the psychopathic fears of white women in their contacts with Negro men."⁷ Another fact which refutes the fallacy of rape as being the primary cause of Negro lynchings is that between 1882 and 1927, 92 women were victims of lynch mobs: 76 Negro and 16 white.⁸ Certainly they could not have been rapists.

The lynching of Negroes, Cutler states, "can only be justified on no other ground than that the law as formulated and administered has proved inadequate to deal with the situation—that there has been governmental inefficiency..."⁹

Lynchings occurred most commonly in the smaller towns and isolated rural communities of the South where people were poor, mostly illiterate, and where there was a noticeable lack of wholesome community recreation. The people who composed mobs in such neighborhoods were usually small land holders, tenant farmers and common laborers, whose economic status was very similar to that of the Negro. They frequently found Black men economic competitors and bitterly resented any Negro progress. Their starved emotions made the raising of a mob a quick and simple process, and racial antagonism made the killing of Negroes a type of local amusement which broke the monotony of rural life. Although most participants in the lynching mobs were from the lower strata of Southern white society, occasionally middle and upper class whites took part, and generally condoned the illegal activity. Many Southern politicians and officials supported "lynch-law", and came to power on a platform of race prejudice.

Lynching was a local community affair. When the sentiment of a community favored lynching the laws were difficult or impossible to enforce. State authorities often attempted to prevent lynchings, but seldom punished the mob participants. Because of the tight hold on the courts by local public opinion, lynchings were rarely ever indicted by a grand jury or sentenced. The judge, prosecutor, jurors and witnesses—all white—were usually in sympathy with the lynchings. If sentenced, the participants in the lynch mobs were usually pardoned. Local police and sheriffs rarely did anything to defend Negro citizens and often supported lynchings. Arthur Raper estimated, from his study of one hundred lynchings, that "at least one-half of the lynchings are carried out

with police officers participating, and that in nine-tenths of the others the officers either condone or wink at the mob action.”¹⁰

Myrdal suggests several background factors and underlying causes for the prevalence of lynching in rural areas by lower class whites: poverty, economic and social fear of the Negro, low level of education, and the “isolation, the dullness of every day life and the general boredom of rural and small town life.”¹¹ However, the fundamental cause of lynching was fear of the Negro—the basis of racism and discrimination. Many whites, after Reconstruction and during the first four decades of the twentieth century, feared that the Negro was “getting out of his place” and that the white man’s social status was threatened and was in need of protection. Lynching was seen as the method to defend white domination and keep the Negroes from becoming “uppity”. Therefore, lynching was more the expression of white American fear of Black social and economic advancement than of Negro crime. W. E. B. DuBois was correct when he stated: “...the white South feared more than Negro dishonesty, ignorance and incompetency, Negro honesty, knowledge, and efficiency.”

¹²

After 1892, lynchings declined quite steadily until about 1905, when there were sixty-two. No material change occurred for nearly twenty years. There was an annual average of sixty-two lynchings for the years 1910 to 1919. However, beginning in 1923 lynchings began to grow markedly fewer, and in the late 1930s and 1940s trailed off and became rarer. During these two decades, the annual rate of lynchings dropped to about ten and three respectively. Although the actual number of lynchings declined after 1892, the percentage of Black victims increased.

This decline has never been fully explained. There has been much speculation about this matter, but several logical reasons have been considered responsible for this steady decline in lynchings. Some have suggested the growing distaste of Southern elites for anti-Negro violence, particularly Southern women and businessmen. Others mention the increasing urbanization of the South during the 1930s and 1940s. Moreover, statewide police systems were developed which were willing to oppose local mobs, and the National Guard was increasingly called to stop lynchings. Also, Southern newspapers began frequently to denounce lynchings.

The work of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was tremendously effective in awakening the nation to the urgency of stopping lynching. The NAACP, an interracial civil rights protest organization founded in 1909, made thorough investigations of lynchings and other crimes committed against Negroes, and informed the public concerning them. In 1919 the NAACP published *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918*, which was a revelation of the causes of lynching and the circumstances under which the crimes occurred. Beginning in 1921, the NAACP sponsored antilynching legislation such as the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill and numerous other proposals to make lynching a federal crime.

The sharp decline in lynchings since 1922 undoubtedly had something to do with the fact that early in that year the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill was passed in the House of Representatives. The Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill provided fines and imprisonment for persons convicted of lynching in federal courts, and fines and penalties against states, counties, and towns which failed to use reasonable efforts to protect citizens from mob violence. It was killed in the Senate by the filibuster of the Southern senators who claimed that anti-lynching legislation would be unconstitutional and an infringement upon states’ rights. However, the long discussion of the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill was of great importance to the decline.

Southern white organizations also began to condemn lynchings during the two decades before World War II. Among them were the Commission for Interracial Cooperation, which did research and issued publications

which provided additional facts on lynchings, and the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, which was founded in Atlanta in 1930. Various other women's organizations in the South were also active in the struggle against lynching.

RACE RIOTS

In the decade immediately preceding World War I, a pattern of racial violence began to emerge in which white mob assaults were directed against entire Black communities. These race riots were the product of white society's desire to maintain its superiority over Blacks, vent its frustrations in times of distress, and attack those least able to defend themselves. In these race riots, white mobs invaded Black neighborhoods, beat and killed large numbers of Blacks and destroyed Black property. In most instances, Blacks fought back and there were many casualties on both sides, though most of the dead were Black.

Gunnar Myrdal opposed the use of the term "riots" to describe these interracial conflicts. He preferred to call this phenomena "a terrorization or massacre, and (considered) it a magnified, or mass, lynching."¹³ Race riots occurred in both the North and South, but were more characteristic of the North. They were primarily urban phenomena, while lynching was primarily a rural phenomenon.

Although lynchings were decreasing slightly by the turn of the century, race riots were perceptibly on the increase. Large-scale interracial violence became almost epidemic, as increasing numbers of Blacks migrated to Northern cities. The greatest number of race riots occurred during and just after World War I. During this period the North was concerned with the tremendous migration of Blacks from the South, and the displacement of some whites by Blacks in jobs and residences, which escalated social tensions between the races. The South was concerned about the possible demands of returning Negro soldiers, who were unwilling to slip quietly back into second class citizenship.

The summer of 1919, called "The Red Summer" by James Weldon Johnson, ushered in the greatest period of interracial violence the nation had ever witnessed. During that summer there were twenty-six race riots in such cities as Chicago, Illinois; Washington, D.C.; Elaine, Arkansas; Charleston, South Carolina; Knoxville and Nashville, Tennessee; Longview, Texas; and Omaha, Nebraska. More than one hundred Blacks were killed in these riots, and thousands were wounded and left homeless.

The seven most serious race riots were those which occurred in Wilmington, N. C. (1898), Atlanta, Ga. (1906), Springfield, Ill. (1908), East St. Louis Ill. (1917), Chicago, Ill. (1919), Tulsa, Okla. (1921) and Detroit, Mich. (1943). What follows is a brief summary of the facts concerning each riot.

Just before the turn of the century, in November 1898, Wilmington, North Carolina exploded in the first major race riot since Reconstruction. The Wilmington riot followed an impassioned election campaign in which intimidation and fraud brought in a white supremacist government. Plans were drawn up before the election to coerce the Black voters and workers, and to expel the editor of the Black newspaper. Two days after the election, as whites began to execute their plan, the riot flamed. About thirty Blacks were killed in the massacre and many left the city. The white mob suffered no casualties.

One of the South's most sensational riots occurred in Atlanta, Georgia in September 1906. For months the city had been lashed into a fury of race hatred by a movement to disfranchise Blacks. The Atlanta press had begun

to treat Black crime, especially assault and rape, in an inflammatory fashion. Twelve rapes of white women were reported in one week, giving the impression that there was an epidemic of Black rape. This touched off a riot. White mobs, meeting ineffective resistance by city police, murdered Blacks, destroyed and looted their homes and businesses. Blacks attempted to resist, but were outnumbered. Some Blacks were arrested for arming themselves in self-defense. When the four days of rioting ended, ten Blacks and two whites were dead, hundreds were injured, and over a thousand fled the city.

In Springfield, Illinois, during August 1908, a three-day riot took place, initiated by a white woman's claim of violation by a Negro. Inflamed by newspapers' sensationalism, crowds of whites gathered around the jail demanding that the Negro, who had been arrested and imprisoned, be lynched. When the sheriff transferred the accused and another Negro to a jail in a nearby town, white mobs headed for the Negro section and attacked homes and businesses. Two Blacks were lynched, others were dragged from their houses and streetcars and beaten. By the time the National Guardsmen reached the scene, six persons were dead—four whites and two Negroes. This riot, in the home town of Abraham Lincoln, shocked white liberals, who met the following year in New York City, with several prominent Blacks, to form the NAACP "to promote equality of rights and eradicate caste or race prejudice..."

The East St. Louis, Illinois riot in 1917 was touched off by the fear of white working men that Negro advances in economic, political and social status were threatening their own status. When the labor force of an aluminum plant went on strike in April, the company hired Negro workers. Although the strike was crushed by a combination of militia, injunctions, and both Black and white strike breakers, the union blamed its defeat on the Blacks. A union meeting in May demanded that "East St. Louis must remain a white man's town." A riot followed, sparked by a white man, during which mobs demolished buildings and Blacks were attacked and beaten. Policemen did little more than take the injured to hospitals and disarm Negroes. Harassments and beatings continued through June.

On July 1, some whites in a Ford drove through the main Negro district, shooting into homes. Blacks armed themselves. When a police car, also a Ford, drove down the street to investigate, the Blacks fired on it, killing two policemen. The next day, as reports of the shooting spread, a new riot began. Streetcars were stopped, Blacks were pulled off, stoned, clubbed, kicked and shot. Other rioters set fire to Black homes. By midnight the Black section was in flames and Blacks were fleeing the city. The official casualty figures were nine whites and thirty-nine Blacks, hundreds wounded, but the NAACP investigators estimated that between one hundred to two hundred Blacks were killed. ¹⁴ Over three hundred buildings were destroyed.

The worst of the post-War race riots took place in Chicago, Illinois. It began late in July 1919 when a young Black "encroached" upon a swimming area that the whites had marked off for themselves, and was stoned until he drowned. By the time the riot ended, thirteen days later, thousands of both races had been involved in a series of frays, fifteen whites and twenty-three Negroes were killed, and 178 whites and 342 Blacks were injured. More than one thousand families, mostly Blacks, were left homeless due to the burnings and general destruction of property.

The Tulsa, Oklahoma riot took place from May 31 to June 1, 1921. A white girl charged a Black youth with attempted rape in an elevator in a public building. The youth was arrested and imprisoned. Armed Blacks came to the jail to protect the accused youth, who, it was rumored, would be lynched. Altercations between whites and Blacks at the jail led to a "race war". A mob, numbering more than ten thousand attacked the Black district. "Machine-guns were brought into use; eight aeroplanes were employed to spy on the movements of the Negroes and according to some were used in bombing the colored section." ¹⁵ Four

companies of the National Guard were called out, but by the time order was restored, fifty whites and between 150 and 200 Blacks were killed. Many homes were looted and \$1,500,000 worth of property was destroyed by fire.

The riot in Detroit, Michigan in 1943 flared from the increased racial friction over the sharp rise in the Negro population, which led to competition with whites on the job and housing markets. On June 20, rioting broke out on Belle Isle, a recreational area used by both races but predominately by Negroes. Fist fights escalated into a major conflict. The first wave of looting and bloodshed began in the Black ghetto "Paradise Valley" and later spread to other sections of the city. White mobs attacked Blacks in the downtown area, and traveled into Black neighborhoods by car, where they were met by sniping. By the time federal troops arrived to halt the riot, 25 Blacks and nine whites were killed and property damaged exceeded \$2 million. ¹⁶

Race riots were caused by a great number of social, political and economic factors. Joseph Boskin, author of *Urban Racial Violence* observed that there were certain general patterns in the major twentieth century race riots: ¹⁷

1. In each of the race riots, with few exceptions, it was white people that sparked the incident by attacking Black people.
2. In the majority of the riots, some extraordinary social condition prevailed at the time of the riot: prewar social changes, wartime mobility, post-war adjustment, or economic depression.
3. The majority of the riots occurred during the hot summer months.
4. Rumor played an extremely important role in causing many riots. Rumors of some criminal activity by Blacks against whites perpetuated the actions of white mobs.
5. The police force, more than any other institution, was invariably involved as a precipitating cause or perpetuating factor in the riots. In almost every one of the riots, the police sided with the attackers, either by actually participating in, or by failing to quell the attack.
6. In almost every instance, the fighting occurred within the Black community.

BLACK RESPONSE

The Black American community responded to white mob violence in several ways. Black people resisted this oppression. This resistance was expressed in three ways: retaliatory violence, Northward migration, and organized non-violent protest.

There are records of numerous instances of individual and collective acts of Black retaliatory violence. Although retaliatory violence seemed unreasonable, and often led to more lynching and violence, Blacks

frequently armed themselves and fought back in self-defense.

Several Black leaders advocated self-defense against mob attack. Through the pages of *The Crisis*, W. E. B. DuBois occasionally encouraged Blacks to fight back. "If we are to die," he angrily wrote after a Pennsylvania mob lynched a Negro in 1911 "in God's name let us not perish like bales of hay." Lynching, said DuBois, would stop in the South "when the cowardly mob is faced with effective guns in the hands of the people determined to sell their souls dearly," (Oct. 1916). A. Phillip Randolph, editor of the militant Socialist monthly, *The Messenger*, also advocated physical resistance to white mobs: "The black man has no rights which will be respected unless the black man enforces that respect...We are consequently urging Negroes and other oppressed groups concerned with lynching and mob violence to act upon the recognized and accepted law of self-defense." ¹⁸ The NAACP, considered moderate by Randolph, also defended the legality of Black retaliatory self-defense from mob attack.

Poet Claude McKay, in 1921, captured the sentiment of many militant Negroes in his poem, "If We Must Die": "If we must die/let it not be like hogs: hunted and penned in an accursed spot!...If we must die; oh let us nobly die/ dying but fighting back." ¹⁹

By the First World War, Blacks were increasingly armed and prepared to defend themselves from mob violence in many parts of the country, even in the deep South. In one case, the mayor of Memphis, Tennessee was advised, "The Negroes would not make trouble unless they were attacked, but in that event they were prepared to defend themselves." Most of the race riots were the result of Negro retaliation to white acts of persecution and violence. However, in most cases, because of the overwhelming white numerical superiority, Negro armed resistance was futile.

Another response of disillusioned Black people to the southern reign of terror was the "Great Migration" which began shortly before World War I. In the decade between 1910 and 1920, more than five hundred thousand Blacks fled from the social and political oppression of the South to the overcrowded industrial centers of the North. The number of Blacks in Northern cities increased substantially. Despite southern efforts to halt the Black exodus, the annual rate of Black northward migration reached seventy-five thousand by the 1920s.

Organized non-violent protest, educating public opinion about the barbarity of lynching, and the passage of federal anti-lynching legislation were seen by many Black leaders to be the most effective weapons against anti-Black mob violence. The pioneer organizer of the crusade against lynching was a Black woman named Ida B. Wells-Barnett. Mrs. Barnett, editor of the Memphis *Free Speech*, had more to do with originating and carrying forward the anti-lynching crusade than any other person. Almost single-handedly, she rallied anti-lynching sentiment in the United States and England. She served as chairman of the Anti-Lynching Bureau of the Afro-American Council. Mrs. Wells published several pamphlets exposing the barbarity of lynching, including *A Red Record* written in 1894.

The struggle of Black leaders and organizations to make lynchings a federal crime was long and futile. At the beginning of the twentieth century, such organizations as the Afro-American Council and the Niagara Movement, precursors of the NAACP, demanded investigation of lynchings and legislation to enforce the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. In 1900, Negro Congressman George White introduced America's first anti-lynching bill, only to see it die in the House Judiciary Committee.

In the first year of its existence, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People launched a vigorous campaign against lynching and all forms of racism and discrimination. By 1918, *The Crisis*, the NAACP organ, was alerting one hundred thousand people each month to the horrors of mob violence and the

demands of Black America. The NAACP's Legal Redress Committee attacked segregation and discrimination in the courts. The NAACP's attempts to secure federal anti-lynching legislation, such as the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, were unsuccessful. However, the Association's nationwide and interracial fight against lynching eventually helped reduce the annual number of lynchings in the United States.

Notes

1. James E. Cutler, *Lynch Law* (New York, 1905), p. 1.
2. Edward B. Revter, *The American Race Problem* (New York, 1927), p. 367.
3. Guzman, Jessie P., ed., *1952 Negro Yearbook* (New York, 1952), pp. 275-279.
4. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York, 1944), pp. 560-561.
5. Guzman, *op. cit.*, p. 275-279.
6. Myrdal, *op. cit.*, p. 561.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 561-562.
8. Walter White, *Rope and Faggot* (New York, 1929), p. 227.
9. Cutler, *op. cit.*, p. 224.
10. A. Arthur Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill, 1933), pp. 13-14.
11. Myrdal, *op. cit.*, pp. 563-564.
12. White, *op. cit.*, p. 97.
13. Myrdal, *op. cit.*, p. 566.
14. Elliot M. Rudwick, *Race Riot in East St. Louis* (New York, 1964), p. 50.
15. Joseph Boskin, *Urban Racial Violence* (Beverly Hills, 1976), p. 37.
16. *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York, 1968), p. 244.
17. Boskin, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.
18. Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Gurr, *Violence in America* (New York, 1969), p. 402.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 402.

Utilization of the Unit

This unit is designed as part of an elective course in Afro-American History for high school students, grades ten through twelve. It will take approximately three weeks to cover this unit completely.

The following questions are to be considered by the teacher and students:

1. What were the social, political and economic factors behind anti-Black violence?
2. What were the justifications given by white people in defense of anti-Black violence?

3. What role did newspapers play causing anti-Black violence?
4. Why did lynchings begin to decline and race riots increase during the early part of the twentieth century?
5. What was the Black response—individual and collective—to anti-Black violence?
6. What were the general characteristics of the major race riots?
7. How did the government—local, state and federal—respond to lynch-law?
8. How did the early twentieth century race riots differ from those in the 1960s?

Sequence of Lessons

First Week

The first week of lessons will cover the topic of lynching as a form of anti-Black violence. The points to be covered are:

1. The background of the post-Reconstruction period and the Negro.
2. The definition of lynching; methods used.
3. Lynching statistics and their sources.
4. Where lynchings were committed: a national, not a sectional, crime.
5. Justifications given by whites for lynching Blacks.
6. The economic-social background of the lynch mob participants.
7. Reasons for the difficulty in prosecuting lynch mob participants.
8. Reasons for the decline in lynching.

Second Week

The second week of lessons will examine the phenomena of race riots from the turn of the century to 1943. The points to be covered are.

1. What constituted a race riot.
2. The social-political factors that caused the increase in race riots.
3. Discuss the three major pre-World War I riots: Wilmington, Atlanta, and Springfield.
4. Discuss the East St. Louis, Chicago, Tulsa and Detroit riots.
5. The general characteristics of the twentieth century race riots.
6. The local, state and federal investigations of the major riots.

Sample Lessons

Lesson 4. Lynching was not a sectional crime.

In this lesson students will learn that lynchings were not restricted to the rural South, but took place throughout the United States. Mimeographed copies of the Tuskegee Institute lynching statistics for the period 1882-1951 will be utilized by teacher and students in this lesson.

Objectives

1. Students will be required to read and interpret statistical data.
2. Students will learn that the majority of lynchings occurred in the South.
3. Students will list reasons why the majority of lynchings occurred in the South, i.e. why it was a rural phenomenon.
4. On maps of the United States students will write in the number of lynchings that took place in each state.

Lesson 5. Justifications given by whites for lynching Blacks.

In this lesson students will learn the five general accusations for which Black people were lynched. The Tuskegee Institute statistics will be used with this lesson.

Objectives

1. Students will suggest reasons for lynching Blacks.
Students will learn that the charges made against Black lynching victims fell under five
2. categories: homicide, felonious assault, rape, insulting a white person and miscellaneous offenses.
3. Students should see that homicide and felonious assault, not rape, were most frequently cited as reasons for mob action.
4. Students will consider other reasons white people would use to justify lynching.

Lesson 6. Who participated in lynching mobs.

In this lesson, students will learn that most mob participants were from the lower strata of Southern white society.

Objectives

1. Students should see that the average mob participant was poor, illiterate or poorly educated, and was either a small land-owner, tenant farmer, or common laborer.

- Students should understand that this group of people frequently competed with Blacks for
2. jobs, and, therefore, saw Blacks as a social and economic threat—a major cause of race hatred.
 3. Students should consider how monotonous rural life affected the lynching of Blacks.
 4. Students should consider why middle and upper class whites occasionally participated in lynchings.

Classroom Activities - Projects

1. Arrange a classroom debate on one of the following suggested resolutions:

a.

Resolved, Lynching was an effective means of controlling Black crime.

b.

Resolved, the proposed Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill violated states' rights.

2. Arrange a mock Southern court trial of a Black youth who is accused of raping a white woman in the 1920s. Students will play the various parts; judge, jury, victim, the accused, etc. This activity will help students visualize the tension and racial hostility that could lead to mob violence.

3. Write a letter to a Congressman in which you strongly state your views in support of the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill and advise him to support it.

4. Write a detailed description of a lynching or race riot for a Black publication of the 1920s, or 1930s.

5. Hold a "Meet-the-Press" interview on the subject of racial violence with members of the class playing the roles of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, W. E. B. DuBois, NAACP investigator Walter White, or a Southern Congressman.

6. Interview Black senior citizens who have experienced or witnessed some form of anti-Black mob violence, or who have had relatives or friends who were the victims of mob violence.

7. Research paper 5 to 7 pages on any topic dealing with lynching and race riots.

Selected Bibliography

Books Recommended for Teachers

Aptheker, Herbert. *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States* (New York, 1951). Chapter 7, section 14 contains lynching documents.

Baker, Ray Stannard. *Following the Color Line* (New York, 1908). Chapter 1 contains a contemporary account of the Atlanta Riot, chapter 9 is a contemporary account of the lynchings.

Boskin, Joseph. *Urban Racial Violence* (Beverly Hills, 1976) Part 1 covers the major race riots.

Brown, Earl and George R. Leighton. *Why Race Riots? Lessons from Detroit* (New York, 1944). A Study of the 1943 Detroit Riot.

Brown, Richard M. *American Violence* (Englewood Cliffs, 1980). Chapters 24 and 29 contain information about lynching and the Chicago Riot.

Chicago Commission on Race Relations. *The Negro in Chicago* (Chicago, 1922), contains a full account of the Chicago riot.

Cutler, James E. *Lynch Law* (New York, 1905). A historical study of lynchings in the U.S.

Duster, Alfreda M., ed. *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago, 1970). Mrs. Wells' autobiography recounts her anti-lynching activities.

Edmonds, Helen G. *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina 1894-1901* (Chapel Hill, 1951). Chapter 11 describes the 1898 Wilmington riot.

Graham, Hugh Davis and Ted Robert Gurr. *Violence in America* (Washington, 1969). Chapters 9-11 concern racial violence.

Grishaw, Allen D. *Racial Violence in the United States* (Chicago, 1969). A general history of racial violence; chapters 4-5, and 7 are very useful.

Guzman, Jessie Parkhurst. *1952 Negro Yearbook* (New York, 1952), contains the Tuskegee lynching data and statistics.

Jackson, Kenneth T. *The Ku Klux Klan in the City 1915-1930* (New York, 1973), contains several sections on anti-Black violence by the KKK.

Kellogg, Charles Flint. *NAACP: A History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* (Baltimore, 1967). Chapter 10 covers the NAACP fight against lynching.

Myrdal, Gunnar. *An American Dilemma* (New York, 1944). Chapter 27 is an excellent brief summary of lynching and race riots.

NAACP. *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918* (New York, 1919). A historical survey of lynching.

Platt, Anthony, ed. *The Politics of Riot Commissions 1917-1970* (New York, 1971). A helpful study of the riot commissions.

Raper, Arthur. *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill, 1933), concentrates primarily on lynchings during the 1920s and 1930s.

Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (New York, 1968). Chapter 5 is a historical sketch of American race riots.

Reuter, Edward Byron. *The American Race Problem* (New York, 1927). See Chapter 15 "Crimes Against the Negro."

Rudwick, Elliot M. *Race Riot in East St. Louis* (New York, 1964). The major history study of the 1917 E. St. Louis riot.

Shay, Frank. *Judge Lynch, His First Hundred Years* (New York, 1938). A historical survey of lynching.

Tuttle, William M. *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York, 1970). A historical study of the Chicago riot.

Van Deusen, John G. *The Black Man in White America* (Washington, 1944). Chapter 11 is a helpful study of lynchings and race riots.

Wells-Barnett, Ida B. *On Lynching* (New York, 1969). Reprint of three pamphlets on this anti-lynching crusader, including "A Red Record."

White, Walter. *Rope and Faggot* (New York, 1929). A detailed study of lynching by an NAACP investigator.

Books Recommended for Students

Archer, Jules, *Riot: A History of Mob Action in the United States* (New York, 1974). Chapters 10 and 12 cover race riots.

Bontemp, Arna and Jack Conroy. *Any Place But Here* (New York, 1966). Chapters 11 and 12 discuss Negro migration to Chicago and the 1919 Chicago race riot.

Demaris, Ovid. *America the Violent* (New York, 1970). Chapters 4, 5, and 9 cover anti-Black

violence.

Drisko, Carol F. and Edgar A. Toppin. *The Unfinished March* (New York, 1967). Chapters 5-10 cover Negro activities during the era of lynch-law, reform and northward migration.

Hofstadter, Richard and Michael Wallace, eds. *American Violence: A Documentary History* (New York, 1970). See Part III "Racial Violence."

Hughes, Langston. *Fight for Freedom: The Story of the NAACP* (New York, 1962). A history of the NAACP.

Lowenberg, Bert James and Ruth Bogin. *Black Women in the 19th Century American Life* (University Park, 1976). Chapter 3 includes a biography of anti-lynching crusader Ida B. Wells-Barnett.

Meltzer, Milton, ed. *In Their Own Words: A History of the American Negro, 1865-1916* (New York, 1964), includes anti-lynching documents by Frederick Douglass and Mrs. Barnett.

Meltzer, Milton, ed. *In Their Own Words: A History of the American Negro, 1916-1966* (New York, 1967), includes documents on post World War I riots.

Mitchell, J. Paul. *Race Riots in Black and White* (Englewood Cliffs, 1970). Chapters 3, 5, 6, 7 contain information about lynching and race riots.

Shogan, Robert and Tom Craig. *The Detroit Race Riot: A Study in Violence* (Philadelphia, 1964). A study of the 1943 Detroit race riot.

Sloan, Irvin J. *Our Violent Past* (New York, 1970). Chapter 2 covers race violence in the U.S.

Spear, Allan H. *Black Chicago* (Chicago, 1967). Chapter 11 is a discussion of the 1919 Chicago race riot.

Waskow, Arthur I. *From Race Riot to Sit In* (Garden City, 1966). For a comprehensive account of the 1919 riots see chapters 2-10.

White, Walter. *A Man Called White* (New York, 1948). This autobiography of Walter White includes his personal account of the 1906 Atlanta riot, his lynching investigations for the NAACP, and the NAACP anti-lynching struggle.

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