



## **“Lynch Law”—An American Community Enigma**

Curriculum Unit 89.01.09  
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This unit was written with two distinct purposes in mind. One, to supplement or to be incorporated into an American history unit. The other being, to expose students to one of the most hideous enigmas ever to plague American communities.

In order to give students a complete picture of the lynching phenomenon in the United States there are four areas related to this topic I wish to explore in this unit. First of all, I would like to present the history and evolution of the term lynch law. Next, I intend to concentrate on mob mentality and the role played by the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). After which, a presentation and discussion of several lynchings will occur. Finally, I will conclude with an in-depth examination of the effects lynching has had on the United States.

The term lynch law has a very interesting etymology. In my research I encountered several historians who offered varying explanations for the origin of this term. There were common areas of agreement, however the discrepancies make it quite evident a universally accepted etymology for lynch law does not exist.

Even though this may be the case, in my opinion James Elbert Cutler in his work , *Lynch Law* , offers the most accurate account of how the term lynch law evolved. In fact, all the authors I read on the subject cite Cutler’s book as a resource. Cutler begins his discussion on the etymology of lynch law by presenting and discussing several accounts of the evolution of this word.

One account attributes the origin of this term to James Fitzstephen Lynch, mayor and warden of Galway, Ireland in 1493. Supposedly, Mayor Lynch hung his own son, against the wishes of the Galway townspeople, for killing the nephew of a Spanish friend of the Mayor. Professor Cutler quickly dismisses this theory. As will be discussed later, lynch law procedure is a type of summary justice which occurs outside the legally recognized justice system. Cutler notes that in this incident there was a trial and that Lynch was acting in his capacity as an authorized public official. Also, there is no evidence which substantiates the assumption that after this hanging the term lynch law was used to describe summary justice.

Another account of the origin of lynch law involves an Englishman named Lynch who was sent to the colonies in 1687 to suppress piracy. As the story goes, Lynch apparently hung every pirate he apprehended without a trial. Once again Cutler asserts that there is no evidence which suggests that the methods used by Lynch were ever referred to as Lynch’s law.

There is another account which attributes the origin of lynch law to an incident which happened near Lynch

Creek in Franklin County, North Carolina about 1778. In this incident Major Beard, a Tory, was hung by a group of patriots led by Major John H. Drake of South Carolina. Major Drake fearing that a group of Tories would rescue Beard before he took him to the headquarters of Colonel Seawell, hung him near Lynch Creek. A saying developed in Franklin County as result of Beard's death for people who committed serious offenses, it was 'he ought to be taken to Lynch Creek.' (Cutler, p.18)

Reference is made to this saying in John H. Wheeler's "*History of North Carolina* " when Wheeler gives an account of the Beard hanging. Wheeler, however says nothing about there being a connection between what happened near Lynch Creek and the origin of the term lynch law. Cutler states that there is no supporting evidence besides the mentioning of this saying in Wheeler's book to suggest that lynch law owes its origins to the occurrence near Lynch Creek. It should also be noted that Beard was hung in accordance with the rules of war.

There are two versions concerning the origin of lynch law. I wish to refer to prior to discussing the story which Cutler attributes the origin of lynch law. The first version believes the phrase lynch law originated at Lynch Creek in South Carolina. In South Carolina around 1768 there existed a group known as 'Regulators'. The Regulators prime function was to maintain law and order. Lynch Creek was a common meeting place for this group from which they dispensed their summary justice. There was a need for such a group in rural communities where our court system had not established itself in our rapidly expanding young nation. The assertion is made that lynch law evolved from the meetings of these Regulators at Lynch Creek.

Cutler does not accept this version because he states that the Regulators have their origin in North Carolina in as early as 1766. At this time they were referred to as the 'Mob'. It was not until a meeting on April 4, 1768 that this group decided to change its name from 'Mob' to Regulators. Cutler goes on to state that the practice of regulating was started by Thomas Woodward, Joseph Kirkland, and Barnby Pope. Cutler emphasizes that the name given to the practices of this group was regulation and not lynch law. Even though this may be the case, in my opinion there is a strong tie between the practices of regulation and lynch law.

As the saying goes 'absolute power corrupts' and the Regulators were not an exception to this classic idiom. As a result, a group referred to as 'Moderators' was used to control the Regulators. There is movie that will be available on video cassette by the time this unit is published that I strongly recommend be shown as part of this unit. The movie, *Young Guns* , shows how a group of Regulators abused their power and subsequently become the hunted instead of the hunters. I think students will be amazed to learn that one of the Regulators in this movie was no other than the infamous 'Billy the Kid'.

The other version was published in the *Niles Register* for August 8, 1835. It contends that lynch law originated in Washington County, Pennsylvania. There was a poacher in the county who was given an ultimatum, leave the county within twenty-four hours or suffer the consequences. To say the least, the poacher refused to leave. Several neighbors got together and went to the poacher's home. One neighbor, named Lynch, was appointed judge. The poacher was tried and convicted. Lynch ordered that he receive three hundred lashes. If he still refused to leave, he would receive another three hundred lashes. The second set of lashes was not necessary, for the poacher left the county. Cutler states that nothing further is known of this farmer named Lynch and that this case was an isolated incident of summary justice.

Professor Cutler asserts that the practice of lynch law originated in Virginia during the latter part of the Revolutionary War. It referred to the type of justice that was dispensed by Charles Lynch of Virginia. Cutler states that people sometimes confuse Charles Lynch with his brother , John Lynch, who was responsible for founding Lynchburg, Virginia.

Charles Lynch was born in 1736 at Chesnut Hill, his father's estate. Charles's mother, Sarah Lynch, was a Quaker. As a result, he became affiliated with the Society of Friends. Quakers, because of their religious beliefs shun holding public offices because they think it is wrong to make a solemn oath to anything or anyone other than God. When Charles Lynch was elected to the Virginia House of Burgess in 1767 he was disowned by his fellow Quakers. However, the Quaker teachings would still continue to influence and play a vital role in his life.

It was his Quaker's convictions and the fact he was needed on his farm that kept him out of active service during the early part of the War of Independence. Charles's loyalty was never questioned because he played a crucial role in recruiting and equipping troops from Virginia. As the war waged on Charles would find himself playing a more active role. In fact, on March 5, 1781 (Colonel) Lynch led a battalion of rifleman at the Battle of Guilford Court House.

During the war in Virginia it was a very difficult process taking criminals to the proper courts. At this time the county courts functioned as examining courts in criminal cases. Once the case was examined, it was bound over to the one single court for the final trial in Williamsburg, which was over two hundred miles from Lynchburg.

This process had two major drawbacks. One, it was near impossible to take both prisoner and witnesses necessary for conviction that great distance. Many witnesses could not afford to leave their farms, businesses, or homes to make a journey of this magnitude. Secondly, officers escorting their prisoners were subjected to attacks from outlaws in which they were forced to release their prisoners. Or they themselves were captured by the British and in turn became prisoners.

It was due to these conditions that Lynch and some of his neighbors came together to formulate more expedient ways of dealing with the criminal element. It was determined that it was in the best interest of the community that they should take matters into their own hands. Charles Lynch was chosen to be the presiding justice while his neighbors, William Preston, Robert Adams, Jr., and James Calloway, served as associate justices.

The accused person was brought before the tribunal to face his accusers. The prisoners were allowed to bring witnesses in their defense. They were also afforded an opportunity to present any mitigating or extenuating circumstances if they existed. If the person was acquitted, he was freed with the apologies of the court. In some cases the vindicated person received reparations. If a guilty verdict was reached, the convicted person would receive thirty-nine lashes on his bare back, and if he then refused to shout 'Liberty Forever', he would be hung by his thumbs until he did.

Before concluding my discussion on the various accounts for the origin of lynch law, mention must be made concerning the Vehemic courts, Lydford law, and Halifax law. Lydford and Halifax laws were known as Cowper Justice and Jeddart or Jedburg justice in Scotland. Some historians have attributed the origin of lynch law to these European practices. Cutler makes a clear distinction between these practices and lynch law.

The Vehemic courts were established in Germany during the feudal period to curb the lawlessness and disregard of authority which existed in this country. Cutler states that lynch law in the United States has never been administered by an organization so perfect and extensive as that of Vehemic courts.(Cutler, p.5) Also, the Vehemic courts give no explanation for the institution of lynch law in America.

Edward Phillips in his 1678 fourth edition of 'The New World of Words or a General English Dictionary' defines

Lydford law as the practice of first hanging a man, then trying him. Some people contend that Lydford law became a proverbial expression of summary justice. Cutler disagrees with this assumption. Professor Cutler holds to the point that Lydford law was confined to one section of England and never came into general use.

In another part of England was another type of summary justice known as Halifax law. With this type of justice there was a trial prior to the punishment. People, however were not given a proper chance to defend themselves and the punishment was irrevocable. Once again, this procedure was confined to one locality and did not come into general use.

It is my belief that one of the strongest challenges to Cutler's theory that lynch law originated in Virginia is when you examine the etymology of the word lynch. The word lynch has been traced to the Anglo-Saxon verb *linch* which means to beat severely with a pliable instrument or to chastise or to maltreat. Cutler questions the very existence of the verb *linch*. Cutler states that no such verb as *linch* or *linge* is found in Bosworth's Dictionary of the Anglo-Saxon Language or in Stratmann's Middle-English Dictionary. Murray's Oxford Dictionary (1903) gives the verb *linch* as a variant of *linge*, a word of obscure origin. Murray's Oxford Dictionary goes on to state that *lynch* was originally used in the United States. Thus, Cutler concludes that the origin of lynch law is not to be found in England but in America.

As an introductory activity for this section of the unit I plan on assigning a short research assignment in which students will be responsible for finding an account of how lynch law originated. After which, a discussion on the various explanations found will occur. Hopefully, the etymology presented earlier will be helpful in this discussion.

Students should be made to realize that lynch law was practiced in many areas of the United States during its early history. This practice was not referred to as lynch law until the mid-eighteenth century as a result of the actions of Charles Lynch of Virginia.

A final question should be posed to students before concluding this discussion in order to establish a link between the past and the present concerning this subject. Students should be asked if they have heard of any incidents of summary justice occurring nowadays. (This would make another excellent research project.)

The earliest reference to lynch law that is known at the present time is the one found in William Wirt's book, *Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry*, published in 1818. In his work, Wirt recants a statement made by Judge Roane in 1792. Judge Roane wrote that there were many suits in the year 1792 for inflicting lynch law. It should be noted that there were other terms used for summary or illegal punishment during the period 1780-1830. These included club law, mob law, and summary justice. The term used depended on one's locality.

Students can obtain a general idea of the history of lynch law by noting the definitions of the term that have appeared over the years. Here are a few entries.

1. Brande's Dictionary of Science, Literature, and Art (1842)—"Lynch law" the irregular and revengeful species of justice administered by the populace in some parts of the United States is said to have been so called from a Virginian farmer of the name of Lynch, who took the law into his hands on some occasion, by chasing a thief, tying him to a tree, and flogging him with his own hands.
2. Webster's Dictionary "University Edition" (1845)—"Lynch law"—the practice of punishing men

for crimes by private unauthorized persons, without a legal trial. The verb lynch is defined as meaning to inflict punishment without forms of law, as by a mob.

3. Worcester's Dictionary (1846)—"Lynch law"—an irregular and revengeful species of justice, administered by the populace or a mob, without any legal authority or trial. For the verb lynch the following meaning is given, "to condemn and execute in obedience to the decree of a multitude or mob, without a legal trial, sometimes practiced in the new settlements in the southwest part of the United States.

4. Webster's Dictionary (1848)—"Lynch law"—the practice of punishing men for crimes or offenses by private, unauthorized persons without a legal trial. The term is said to be derived from a Virginia farmer, named Lynch, who thus took the law into his own hands.

5. The Progressive Dictionary of the English Language (edited by Samuel Fallows and published at Chicago in 1885)—"Lynch"—to punish without the forms of law; specifically to hang by mob law.

6. Webster's Dictionary (1893 edition)—"Lynch law"—the act or practice by private persons of inflicting punishment for crimes or offenses without due process of law. The verb lynch is defined as meaning to inflict punishment upon, especially death, with forms of law, as when a mob captures and hangs a suspected person.

7. Webster's New World Dictionary (Third College Edition, 1988)—"Lynch law"—the lawless practice of killing by lynching. The verb lynch is defined as meaning to murder (an accused person) by mob action and without lawful trial, as by hanging.

Two major differences exist between the definitions offered for lynch law in the 1840's, 1880's, and in recent years according to Cutler. One, in the more recent definitions the operation of lynch law is described as being much more harsh and severe. Also, doubt is expressed concerning the etymology of the term. Whereas, in the earlier definitions death is not mentioned as the usual punishment resulting from lynch law procedure. In addition, the American origin of the term is accepted without question in the earlier entries.

Cutler attributes the doubt expressed concerning the origin of lynch law in later definitions to the appearance of many stories claiming to account for the origin of the term. Also contributing to this doubt according to Cutler is the lack of careful investigation to determine the etymology of lynch law from historical resources.

The harshness and severity expressed in recent definitions can be traced to the fact that the punishment inflicted under the name of lynch law has become more severe over the years. This accounts for the reason why in recent times that the term lynching has become synonymous with the word hanging.

However, in earlier times the three common punishments associated with lynch law consisted of the following. They were: 1. being run out of town 2. being run out of town on a rail after being tarred and feathered 3. receiving lashes on one's bare back, the number being dependent upon the infraction.

In my opinion it is a modern-day misconception to associate lynching to just hanging. There are countless

incidents where people were burned at the stakes, drawn and quartered, or simply shot at the hands of an angry mob. These are all forms of lynching of which students need to be made aware. A primary example of this would be the deaths of three civil rights workers who were shot and killed and then buried in their car in Philadelphia, Mississippi in 1964.

Based on the lynching statistics available, it is quite evident that a majority of the lynching which occurred in the United States took place in the southern and western states. The statistics used in this unit were derived from a National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) publication, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918*. The NAACP compiled their statistics from two other sources in addition to its own recordings of lynchings in the United States. The other sources were the Chicago Tribune and the Tuskegee Institute. Bear in mind while reviewing this information that the totals are much higher. The reason for this being that many lynchings were not publicized and thus were not recorded. Also, the Chicago Tribune, the first to collect such data, did not begin to do so until 1885. The information is as follows.

#### *PEOPLE LYNCHED, 1889-1918*

*WHITES* —702

Men—691

Women—11

*BLACKS* —2,522

Men—2,472

Women—50

*TOTAL* —\*3,224

\*The total could go as high as 3,405 but 181 victims (43 Whites, 138 Blacks) were not included because of imperfections in available data. (NAACP, p.7)

#### *DISTRIBUTION 1889-1918*

North—219

South—2,834

West—156

#### *LYNCHINGS-SOUTHERN STATE DISTRIBUTION, 1889-1918*

1. Georgia—386

2. Mississippi—373

3. Texas—335

4. Louisiana—313

5. Alabama—276
6. Arkansas—214
7. Tennessee—178
8. Florida—178
9. Kentucky—169 (NAACP, p.7)

*NUMBER OF PERSON LYNCHED IN 5 YEAR PERIODS, 1889-1918*

	1889-93	1894-98	1899-03	1904-08	1909-13	1914-18
NORTH	66	73	44	9	15	12
SOUTH	690	661	474	362	343	304
WEST	76	34	24	9	4	9

These charts graphically illustrate and substantiates the premise that a majority of the lynchings that occurred in the United States took place in the southern and western states. Thus, in order to study the mob mentality associated with the execution of lynch law I have chosen to concentrate on the southern states of our country.

By no means am I trying to imply or insinuate that lynch law did not stretch its hideous neck above the Mason-Dixon line, for it did. But due to the great number of incidents of summary justice in southern communities and the wealth of material written about this enigma, the South is a logical place to study mob mentality. I strongly believe the studying of mob mentality in the South will provide the key to understanding why lynch law occurred elsewhere in our country.

Walter White in his book, *Rope and Faggot* , provides valuable insights into understanding southern mob mentality. White attributes the deep-seeded hatred of southern whites towards Afro-Americans to three misconceptions that were drilled into southern minds through the pulpits, press, home, schools, and on the streets. The misconceptions were: 1. Negroes are given to sex crimes 2. that only lynching can protect white women 3. that unmentionably horrible deeds can be prevented through the use of extreme brutality. Even though slave uprisings were few and far between, the savagery of the revolts like the one led by Nat Turner just served to heighten southern fears of the Negro and intensify their beliefs in the misconceptions previously mentioned.

Added to this is the belief that any white man, no matter how inept, criminal, or depraved, is infinitely superior to “the best Negro who ever lived”.(White, p. 8) This conviction is illustrated in many movies depicting southern lifestyle. For example, in the Oscar winning film, “To Kill a Mockingbird”, this sentiment is echoed throughout the film. Especially in the courtroom scene when the father of the alleged raped girl states, “Are you going to take the word of a Nigger over a white man?” It was evident that the black man, Tom, was innocent by a preponderance of the evidence presented, but he was still convicted. This has been known to happen in real life situations.(i.e. the Scottsboro Case) It might be helpful to show “To Kill a Mockingbird” to illustrate two points to students. One, to show the racist attitude held by some southern whites. Two, to illustrate that all southern whites did not harbor these racial prejudices.



This attitude was also communicated to me via my parents, who were Afro-Americans, born and raised in the South. They told me that no matter how much education I acquired that there will always be some whites that will always consider me a Nigger. This goes to illustrate the point that the racist message of inferiority was not only perceived by the American Negro, but it was also passed on to their children. I did not really believe what my parents had told me until I was called a Nigger a few years after I had graduated from college.

*(table available in printed form)*

Walter White contends that the unwillingness of some southerners to form new ideas concerning race relations in spite of how much sound evidence is offered to counter their racist beliefs helps to perpetuate racial tension. "The average southern boasts that no one knows the Negro as he does".(White, p.10) These southerners according to White classify Afro-Americans into three groups. They are: 1. happy-go lucky, improvident, shiftless 2. a habitual criminal of unrestrained appetites kept within bounds only by extreme brutality 3. the third type is humble, the 'befo de woh' type—the Negro who knew how to stay in his place. The question should be posed to these southerners, "If you know how to handle the American Negro so well, why was it necessary to lynch so many Negroes year after year?" Evidently, the methods used did little to deter the so-called wayward Negro.

White believes that there are two other factors which have created and perpetuated the psychology of the lyncher. First, lynchers are given the feeling that they will not be punished. This feeling was communicated by public officials in the court and law enforcement systems. For instance, while covering a trial in Alabama of several people accused of lynching two Negroes, several court officials freely admitted to White the guilt of the defendants, but accurately predicted early acquittals. One of the officials stated, "Nobody around here is ever going to vote for convicting a white man for killing a Nigger".(White, p.9)

Another contributing factor to the lynching psychology according to White is the human love of excitement. Seeing as most southerners lived such a drab life, lynching was seen as a form of entertainment. White quotes H. L. Mencken as saying lynching often takes the place of the merry-go-round, the theater, the symphony orchestra, and other diversions common to large communities.(White, p.9)

I tend to partially agree with the part of Mencken's statement that states that lynching was a form of entertainment for some southerners. However, his statement falls short in explaining why lynchings occurred in large southern metropolises with all the social and cultural amenities that were found in large Northern communities. I believe the answer lies in the fact that some southerners were simply sadistic as a result of them being raised in a society which held little regard for the Negro life. Thus, they truly enjoyed the barbaric acts done to the American Negro.

It did not help matters when some southerners started to observe the economic progress of the former slaves after the Civil War. White makes the assertion that it is little realized that lynching is much more an expression of southern fear of Negro economic progress than of Negro crime. Mencken supports this point of view in his statement "Ku Kluxry is the southern poor whites answer to the progress of the emerging Negro, once his equal and now threatening to become his superior." (White, p.11) This attitude gave more impetus to the notion that "Niggers" needed to be put in their place. If you examine ethnic group relations in the United States you will notice that where ethnic tensions have been exhibited, economic rivalry is found to be the basis for such dissension.

In *Rope and Faggot* White explores another crucial motive used by southern mobs as a justification for the use of lynch law procedure. That being, to avenge sex crimes against white women committed by the American Negro. As already stated, many southerners felt the former slaves had a propensity to commit sex crimes.



White contends that southern whites were victims of their own conjuring. According to White, even though only a few Negroes, in relation to the total lynched, were accused of rape, a vast majority of whites in states where lynching were most frequently staged believed most mob murders were the result of sex crimes.

Walter White asserts that another cause of this sex obsession in the South was the southern women's prones to hysteria where Negroes were concerned. It is obvious these women bought into the notion that black men have an insatiable sexual craving for white women. This possibly led to innocent gestures being misinterpreted and blown out of proportion.

Another aspect of southern lifestyle needs to be discussed concerning this preoccupation with this sex issue. Which is the southern white man's sexual attitude toward black women. It was an acceptable practice by white southern men to degrade, use, and rape Negro women to satisfy their sexual needs. At the same time they felt it was their moral obligation to respect and uphold the virtue and honor of white women at all times. White believes that this dual standard leads to moral deterioration.

Dr. A. A. Brill, a distinguished psychiatrist, links the propensity of mob violence to abnormal sex instincts. Even though the number of lynching have decreased over the years, the brutality and the unbelievable torture of its victims has not lessen in its severity. Dr. A. A. Brill states, "The torture of modern lynching", he declares, "shows that it is an act of perversion only found in those suffering from extreme forms of sexual perversion." (White, p. 61)

It was the southern whites' economic and sexual fears of the Negro that the Ku Klux Klan(KKK) used to instigate acts of mob violence. The KKK also played on the fears of southerners concerning their perception of the violent nature of the American Negro. The KKK tried to portray itself as the instrument by which the South could protect itself from the savageness and ruthlessness of the former slave.

This sentiment is depicted in the 1915 film, "Birth of a Nation". If possible, I would recommend you showing this film to your class. I think your class will be surprised to know that there were no blacks acting in this movie. This film also attempts to show how the idea for the KKK originated.

Charles C. Alexander in his book , *The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest*, states that historically there were three different Klan eras. The first Klan appeared during the Reconstruction Period. It was secretive, political, and violent in nature. It was preoccupied with nullifying the effects of the Radical Republican state and local governments in the South.

The second Klan, known as the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, operated between the years 1915-1944. This Klan was also secretive and prone to violence. But unlike the Reconstruction Klan, this Klan was ultrapatriotic and nativistic according to Alexander.

Alexander asserts that the third Klan, in reality is composed of a multitude of anti-Negro societies. Because of their racist stance, they all seem to be referred to as the Klan by outside observers. Alexander does not state this, but it is not uncommon for each of these societies to have their own local name. In the movie, "Betrayal," the local racist group was known by the acronym ZOG.("Betrayal" is another good movie to view with your class.)

In an interview on the CNN program, Crossfire, the Grand Wizard of the KKK from Shelton, Connecticut confirmed this assertion by stating that there were over sixty different Klans across the United States. During the interview it became quite clear that some philosophical differences between these racist organizations

existed. This Klan does not have as violent a track record as its predecessors. This is due to the fact that today's society will no longer tolerate the barbaric acts of lynch law.

Of all three Klan eras, the Klan was at its height during the years 1915-1944. On December 4, 1915 the state of Georgia granted a charter for a new fraternal order, The Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Inc. It should be noted that Georgia led all southern states in lynchings from 1889-1918 with 386 lynchings. Although there were twelve men who signed the charter, William Joseph Simmons was the instigator of this organization.

W. J. Simmons was the son of a country physician. At eighteen he joined the army and fought in the Spanish-American War. Simmons was a minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church until he left in frustration because he failed to receive a large ministry. After which, he became a fraternal organizer.

Simmons's new organization, the KKK, suffered a major setback at the hands of his most trusted subordinates, Jonathan Frost, when he absconded with several thousand dollars of the KKK's funds. The Klan was able to rebound from this disaster with the help of Mrs. Elizabeth Taylor and Edward Young Clark of the Southern Publicity Association.

Taylor and Clark used 1100 solicitors called Kleagles to recruit new members for the Klan. By October, 1921 the Klan had collected 1.5 million dollars from the sale of robes, ritual equipment and Klan paraphernalia. The Kleagles were not inspired by their love of the Klan but the percentage they received from all the money they collected.

Alexander suggests that there were three events which aided in getting the Klan before the people. They were: 1. The burning of gins and cotton bales somehow was attributed to the Klan in the fall of 1920 by the press. The ironic thing about this is that some property-minded Klansmen worked as guards to prevent such occurrences. 2. The New York World in an attempt to expose the evils of the Klan and its backwardness became an unwitting promoter of the Klan by introducing it to receptive Americans who had never heard of the Klan. 3. During the 1920's the Rules Committee began a series of hearings on the Klan which resulted in more publicity and members for the Klan.

As the press inadvertently helped increase the Klan membership between 1915-1944, it would ultimately be responsible for its demise. The press coverage of Klan atrocities was to serve as the coup de grace for the Invisible Empire. There are two lynchings that I wish to discuss at this present time. It may be true that there was never any hard evidence to connect the Klan with these lynchings, but you can rest assured that the burning cross fans were not absent from these grotesque proceedings.

The first lynching I wish to discuss is that of Claude Neal in Marianna, Florida in 1934. This lynching had a traumatic effect on the nation's attitude toward lynching. Claude Neal, a young black man, was lynched after confessing to the murder of Lola Cannidy. The methods used to extract the confession cast doubt on its validity. Ms. Cannidy, a young white neighbor, was supposedly having an affair with Neal. To ensure Claude's safety he was kept in an Alabama jail. The lynch mob took him from the authorities and subjected him to ten hours of excruciating torture involving castration and self-cannibalism before he was put to death.

As Neal's castrated body hung from the tree a photograph was taken from which a post card was made. Neal's fingers were sold as souvenirs to the bloodthirsty crowd who arrived too late to witness the gory festivities.

What made this situation even more deplorable is the fact that the Florida press had advance notice of the

lynching and they reported in their newspapers. Not one official, local, state, or federal, lifted one finger to prevent this lynching. Neal's lynching was followed by a race riot in the town of Marianna in which white rioters attempted to drive all blacks out of the city.

This horrible affair outraged a previously indifferent white America and produced a shift in governmental policy toward the prosecution of members of lynch mobs. This lynching also led to the second and final major attempt to pass a federal ant-lynching law.(Smead, p. x) Although lynching persisted, they declined in number and the mobs were much more surreptitious with their lynching activities.

The lynching of Mack Charles Parker in Poplarville, Mississippi in 1959 carried many of the notorious elements associated with southern lynchings according to Howard Smead in his work, *The Lynching of Mack Charles Parker* . There were charges of rape followed by the incarceration of Parker. Afterwhich, a mob stormed the jail and took him prisoner. Just as in the Neal lynching there was widespread and detailed knowledge of the lynching conspiracy before and after its occurrence. And as usual, no member of the mob was prosecuted. It should be noted that several local law enforcement officers cooperated with the mob in this hanging. This lynching was a planned and premeditated act of vigilante-style justice.

There are countless other acts of lynch law that could have been presented but these two seemed to stand out above the rest. The one exception might be the lynching of a black pregnant women, afterwhich the unborn fetus was cut out from the uterus and the infant's head was crushed under the heel of a mob member.

For further lynching accounts I would refer you to the pamphlet put out by the NAACP in April, 1919 called *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918* . There is a chapter in this publication entitled "The Story of One Hundred Lynchings" which consists of one hundred brief synopses of lynchings across the United States.

If you have Afro-American students in your class you should expect a great deal of anger after they have read these accounts. This anger needs to be channeled so as not to allow these young impressionable minds to use these accounts as a reason to hate all white Americans. They need to understand that some southern whites considered these acts of violence perpetrated against the American Negro as grotesque and intolerable. It was these southerners who played an active role in such organizations as the NAACP, the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, and the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching.

One of the effects of lynching is the deep-seeded hatred and fear that has been passed on from generation to generation of Afro-Americans. Even though lynchings are almost non-existent nowadays in comparison to the past, racial prejudice and tension still persists. To this very day I am still afraid to travel into the deep South due to the lynchings of the past.

Dr. A. A. Brill states that, "Anyone taking part in or witnessing a lynching cannot remain a civilized person". (Shay, p. 6) I agree with Dr. Brill on this point. Young white southern children who were taken by their parents to these lynching were taught that the degradation of the American Negro was normal and an acceptable practice. Even when lynching became an unacceptable practice in American society, the hatred and bigotry that were motivating factors for lynchings became so ingrained in our society that it still exists. This is evident by a comment made by a white suburban eighth grader in the New Haven Register exposé, 'A City Divided'. The student from this school commented that black students from urban areas think that we are snobs, at which time a fellow classmate chimed in "And we think they are dirtbags", with several other students nodding in agreement."

Lynchings in the United States has tainted our image as a nation which upholds the high ideals of democracy. In two world wars the United States claimed that it was fighting against social and moral injustices while at the same time it was allowing American citizens to be lynched. There was no way we could justify this American community enigma to our allies, let alone our adversaries. As a nation we were able to drastically reduce lynchings by showing our abhorrence to this hideous practice, we need now to address the hatred, prejudice, and fear which resulted from lynch law. Hopefully, this unit will help students understand and eventually alleviate the racial tension which exists in the United States.

## **STUDENT-TEACHER BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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Alexander, Charles C. *The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest* . United States: University of Kentucky Press, 1965.

Excellent source on the history of the Klan. This text also provides an in-depth study of the Klan attitude.

Caughey, John W. *Their Majesties the Mob*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1960.

An excellent account of the evolution of lynch law in the United States.

Cutler, James Elbert, Ph.D. *Lynch-Law* . New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969.

Excellent source on lynch law. Cited by many historians researching this topic. I strongly recommend reading this book prior to using this unit.

Frost, Stanley. *The Challenge of the Klan* . Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1924.

Excellent presentation of the history of the KKK.

McGovern, James R. *Anatomy of a Lynching; The Killing of Claude Neal* . Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982.

This work gives a vivid account of one of the most grotesque lynchings in the U.S. This lynching is credited with instigating a change in governmental policy toward lynching.

Minor, Robert. *Lynching and Frame-up in Tennessee*. New York: New Century Publishers, 1946.

This text deals with lynchings that happened in Tennessee, especially the case in which the perpetrators of an act of mob violence were vindicated.

NAACP. *Thirty Years of Lynchings in the United States, 1889-1918* . New York: NAACP, 1919.

This booklet provides lynching statistics from 1889-1918. It also gives 100 brief synopses of lynchings.

Raper, Arthur F., Ph.D. *The Tragedy of Lynching* . Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1933.

This provides an in-depth study of lynching in the U.S. This is an excellent resource on the subject.

Shay, Frank. *Judge Lynch; His First Hundred Years*. New York: Biblo and Tannen Publishing Co., 1969.

This book does an excellent job discussing 'Judge Lynch' and the mentality of the people practiced this type of summary justice.

Smead, Howard. *Blood Justice; The Lynching of Mack Charles Parker*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

This work gives an account of the lynching of Charles Parker. It also gives some valuable insights into lynch law. This book also contains an extensive bibliography which I found useful.

White, Alma A.M. *Klansmen: Guardians of Liberty* . New Jersey: The Good Citizen, 1926.

This book was written by female Klan member. It gives you an insight into how deranged the thinking is of the Klan.

White, Walter. *Rope & Faggot* . New York & London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929.

Excellent source on the mind of the lyncher and the effects of lynching on the U.S.

## **MOVIES/VIDEO CASSETTES**

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BIRTH OF A NATION

YOUNG GUNS

BETRAYAL

MISSISSIPPI BURNING\*

\*Mississippi Burning is an excellent movie concerning lynching. This controversial film has sparked much heated debate from blacks and the people of the town in which the story took place.

## **RESOURCES**

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NEWSPAPERS\*

ALABAMA JOURNAL

ATLANTA JOURNAL

NEW YORK HERALD-TRIBUNE

ATLANTA WORLD

BALTIMORE AFRO-AMERICAN

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

PITTSBURGH COURIER

CHICAGO CRUSADER

\*These newspapers should be used to examine the press coverage of the Parker lynching, they could also be used to review press coverage of other lynchings.

### **LESSON PLAN 1**

***Objective Students will research the etymology of lynch law.***

#### ***Content Outline***

\*Lynch Law by James Elbert Cutler

\*Judge Lynch; His First Hundred Years by Frank Shay

#### ***Procedure***

1. Break students into groups of threes and take them to the library.
  - a. One student will serve as the recorder, one student will serve as the researcher, and one student will serve as the reporter.
2. Each group will be responsible for finding two stories on how lynch law evolved.
3. The reporter, on returning to class, will present the group's findings.
4. Review the different accounts, then present the etymology most commonly accepted.

### **LESSON PLAN 2**

***Objective Students will write their reactions to five lynchings.***

***Content Outline Have copies of 'The Story of One Hundred Lynchings'.***

#### ***Procedure***

1. Distribute copies of 'The Story of One Hundred Lynchings'.
2. Students are to choose at least five stories and write a brief synopsis of each incident.
3. After, students should write their reactions to the lynchings.
4. Then students can share the stories they chose and discuss the cases.

## LESSON PLAN 3

**Objective** Students will write a 1-2 page paper describing the racist group depicted in the film *Betrayal*.

**Content Outline** “BETRAYAL” video

### **Procedure**

1. Prior to viewing film, discuss the three different Klan eras described by Charles C. Anderson in his text.
2. Explain to students that while they are watching “Betrayal”, they should focus on the white racist group.
3. Explain to students written assignment.
  - a. 1-2 page written assignment describing “ZOG”.
  - b. Students should include which Klan era is depicted.
4. View “Betrayal” (this could take 2-3 class periods)
5. After viewing film, have students begin assignment.

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