Citation:

Tuttle, Kate. "Jim Crow." *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience, Second Edition*, edited by Kwame AnthonyAppiah. , edited by Henry LouisGates Jr.. *Oxford African American Studies Center*, http://www.oxfordaasc.com.gate.lib.buffalo.edu/article/opr/t0002/e2085 (accessed Thu May 21 01:30:48 EDT 2009).

Jim Crow

By: Tuttle, Kate

System of laws and customs that enforced racial segregation and discrimination throughout the United States, especially the South, from the late 1800s to the 1960s.

African Americans living in the South during the first half of the twentieth century saw graphic reminders of their second-class citizenship everywhere. Signs reading “Whites Only” or “Colored” hung over drinking fountains and the doors to restrooms, restaurants, movie theaters, and other public places. Along with Segregation, blacks, particularly in the South, faced discrimination in jobs and housing and were often denied their constitutional right to vote. Whether by law or by custom, all these obstacles to equal status went by the name Jim Crow.

Jim Crow was the name of a character in Minstrelsy (in which white performers in blackface used African American stereotypes in their songs and dances); it is not clear how the term came to describe American segregation and discrimination. Jim Crow has its origins in a variety of sources, including the Black Codes imposed upon African Americans immediately after the Civil War (1861–1865), and prewar racial segregation of railroad cars in the North. But it was not until after Radical Reconstruction ended in 1877 that Jim Crow was born.

Jim Crow grew slowly. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, many African Americans still enjoyed the rights granted in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments, along with the Civil Rights Act of 1875. But, according to historian C. Vann Woodward, by the late 1890s various factors had combined to create an environment in which white supremacy prevailed. These included the reconciliation of warring political factions in the South, the acquiescence of Northern white liberals, and the United States' military conquest of nonwhite peoples in the Philippines, Hawaii, and Cuba.

Some of the earliest Jim Crow legislation came from the transportation industry. New Orleans's 1890 law requiring separate railroad cars for black and white passengers was soon followed by regulations in other cities and states. Such laws, ostensibly written to “protect” both races, were given federal support when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) that “separate but equal” accommodations on Louisiana's railroads were constitutional. The ruling led to legalized segregation in education, public parks, and libraries.

Other Jim Crow laws did not specifically mention race but were written and applied in ways that discriminated against African Americans. Literacy tests and poll taxes, administered with informal loopholes and trick questions, barred nearly all African Americans from voting. For example, though more than 130,000 blacks were registered to vote in Louisiana in 1896, only 1,342 were on the rolls in 1904.

Disfranchisement was often defended by invoking the mythology of Reconstruction, in which Southern whites claimed that unsophisticated black voters had been manipulated by Northern Carpetbaggers who had moved south after the war. Jim Crow proponents also found ammunition in the incendiary propaganda of the Southern white press, which published sensational and exaggerated accounts of crimes committed by African Americans. As Woodward and other historians have pointed out, an atmosphere emerged of racist hysteria, which further fueled Lynching, antiblack rioting, and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. In addition, early-twentieth-century trends in scholarship, including the pseudoscience of Eugenics, lent respectability to the view that blacks were inherently inferior to whites.

Jim Crow extended to deny private as well as public, or civil, rights to African Americans. Businesses routinely refused to serve blacks, and many white homeowners would not rent or sell property to African Americans. A strict, unwritten, code of behavior governed interracial interaction. Under Jim Crow etiquette, African Americans were denied all social forms of respect. Whites addressed even adult black men as “boy,” and all blacks were expected to show deference to all whites. The combination of constant personal humiliation, dismal economic opportunities (sharecropping consigned most rural Southern blacks to perpetual poverty), and inferior segregated education for their children prompted thousands of African

Americans to leave the South in the Jim Crow era. Waves of exodus culminated in the Great Migration north in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, but many African Americans found conditions in the North little better.

A combination of factors led to the dismantling of Jim Crow starting in the late 1940s. Attention attracted by Gunnar Myrdal's 1944 book An American Dilemma made Jim Crow a national embarrassment. After more than a decade of litigation, the legal work of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NACCP) began to bear fruit. Supreme Court decisions in *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950) and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma* (1950) started to break down the “separate but equal” standard set by *Plessy* and finally outlawed state-sponsored segregation in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Violent resistance by some white Southerners was met by a growing Civil Rights Movement that used boycotts, Sit-Ins, marches, and other forms of nonviolent protest to achieve goals such as passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. But despite victories against segregation and discrimination, African Americans continued to face unequal opportunities, and new approaches, such as the Black Power Movement, sought to repair the lasting damage of Jim Crow.

See also Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment; Fourteenth Amendment; Fifteenth Amendment.

Citation:

Tuttle, Kate. "Lynching." *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience, Second Edition*, edited by Kwame AnthonyAppiah. , edited by Henry LouisGates Jr.. *Oxford African American Studies Center*, http://www.oxfordaasc.com.gate.lib.buffalo.edu/article/opr/t0002/e2445 (accessed Thu May 21 01:08:15 EDT 2009).

Lynching

By: Tuttle, Kate

Mob execution, usually by hanging and often accompanied by torture, of alleged criminals, particularly African Americans.

Apart from slavery, lynching is perhaps the most horrific chapter in the history of African Americans. Although lynching, defined as execution without the due process of law, has been used against members of many ethnicities, the vast majority of victims have been African American men, mostly in the Southern states, during a fifty-year period following Reconstruction. Despite its stated justification—that lynching is merely a response to crime—in most cases victims had not been convicted of, or even charged with, a specific crime. As historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage has noted, lynching was not only “a tragic symbol of race relations in the American South” but also “a powerful tool of intimidation.” A constant and unpredictable threat, lynching was used to maintain the status quo of white superiority long after any legal distinction between the races remained.

Because of its unpredictability and extra-legal nature—black men knew that they could become victims at any time, for any reason—lynching cast a shadow greater than its 3,386 known black (mostly male) victims between 1882 and 1930. It is almost certain that these numbers are understated. Despite groundbreaking research into lynching by historians and sociologists, many cases were never recorded. Even those that were well documented rarely reveal the names of the perpetrators; as scholar Robert Zangrando points out, coroner's reports typically attributed the murder to “parties unknown,” even though “lynchers' identities were seldom a secret.”

This flag flew from the NAACP headquarters on Fifth Avenue in New York City whenever a lynching occurred.

Library of Congress

More than an epidemic of racially targeted violence, however, lynching has become a symbol of the most disheartening

aspects of American race relations. For many African Americans, there is no more potent reminder of their history of slavery, subjugation, and pain at the hands of white society. In music—most notably Jazz singer Billie Holiday's “Strange Fruit” —literature, and painting, black artists have explored this brutal and complex crime. As many scholars have pointed out, lynching was directed not only at a particular victim, but at all black people.

History of Lynching

Lynching has its roots in the lawless early days of pre-Revolutionary America. Lacking an established system of courts, jails, and legal rights, mobs often attempted to maintain social order by executing alleged criminals. From its beginning, though, lynching was also a means of controlling people deemed marginal by society's mainstream. Although slaves were often beaten, whipped, and sometimes killed by white slaveholders, systematic violence against African Americans in the form of lynching was not prevalent before the Civil War (1861–1865) and Emancipation.

In the five years that followed the Civil War, a series of constitutional amendments conferred several rights upon African Americans: freedom from slavery, legal recognition as U.S. citizens, and, for men, the right to vote. At this time Reconstruction—primarily an effort to reunite the country—began, and the federal government, dominated by Northern Republicans, maintained a presence in the South and established agencies to oversee the transition from slavery to freedom. But after their emancipation, blacks faced a threat of social violence. With white supremacy challenged throughout the South, many whites sought to protect their former status by threatening African Americans who exercised their new rights. Southern blacks, particularly political and religious leaders, became the targets of white violence. But as Republican resolve weakened, Reconstruction waned, and white Southern Democrats were able to engineer limits on state and federal rights for African Americans.

Incidents of lynching increased as Reconstruction faltered. Although good statistics on lynching were not kept before 1882, historians believe that the numbers grew throughout the 1870s and 1880s, peaking around 1892, which saw 230 victims, 161 of them African American. From that year on, white victims of mob execution sharply and steadily decreased, while blacks in the South continued to be lynched in large numbers (for instance, in 1900, 106 African Americans were lynched, compared to nine whites). From its frontier roots, when it took the place of legal law enforcement, lynching became almost entirely a Southern, racial phenomenon—in which, as historians have pointed out, mob execution was really about social control, not crime control.

With the rise in racially motivated mob execution, an Antilynching Movement was born. Its foremost voice was Ida B. Wells-Barnett, an African American who in the early 1890s published several influential pamphlets detailing the horrors of lynching. Her statement that many of the alleged rapes that led to lynchings were actually consensual interracial encounters caused Wells-Barnett to be vilified by Southern whites, and she was forced to flee her home city of Memphis under threat of lynching. In addition, many of her potential supporters, middle-class black clubwomen, saw Wells-Barnett's bold and passionate rhetoric as unfeminine and supported her cautiously.

In 1909, when the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded, an end to lynching was named as one of the organization's top priorities from the start. In 1917 the NAACP staged the Negro Silent Protest Parade in New York City to criticize the federal government's lack of commitment to ending lynching. The Dyer Bill, which would have made participating in a lynch mob a federal crime, was first introduced in 1918 by Leonidas Dyer, a white Republican congressman from Missouri. Over the next ten years, the NAACP, led by James Weldon Johnson and Walter White, lobbied heavily for its passage, which was repeatedly blocked by Southern Democrats in the Senate. Despite its legislative failure, the Dyer Bill debate allowed the NAACP to educate the white American public about the amount and severity of racial violence that was going unpunished.

The number of lynchings began to decrease in the twentieth century, especially during the 1920s; by the late 1930s, the annual victim count was in the single digits. Although some African Americans were still lynched in the following decades, lynching was more or less ended by 1965. Historians have different explanations for the decline in lynching, among them increased public awareness, national pressure on the South, and the growing exodus of African Americans from the region in the Great Migration of the 1930s and 1940s.

Significance of Lynching

Starting in 1882, scholars at the Tuskegee Institute began collecting data on lynching, including documenting every known case of mob execution. Because of the availability of this detailed information, sociologists and historians have been able to

study the phenomenon of lynching, and to try to understand this most extreme form of racial violence.

Early theories about lynching emphasized the economic and political threats that African Americans posed to the superior status of poor whites in the period following the Civil War. Historians such as Arthur Raper suggested that lynch mobs were made up of marginalized white men who murdered black men out of fear and frustration. Most historians today recognize that lynchers were, in fact, as W. Fitzhugh Brundage says, not “isolated deviants” but instead “representative … members of society.” In the collected testimony of some Southern sheriffs, jailers, and lawyers—typically the people most likely to be in a position to prevent lynching—several mention that they would release the prisoner to the mob after noticing several of the town's leading citizens among it.

Some historians have proposed a new interpretation of lynching, seeing it as a political and economic tool. Marxist historians have suggested, for instance, that rich white businessmen supported lynching, as it helped cement the racial hatred that could work to their advantage. Such scholars reasoned that without racism to divide poor blacks and whites from each other, workers on both sides of the color line could unite against their capitalist oppressors.

Although some scholarship, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, focused exclusively on lynching as an economic and political event, many historians now also consider social and psychological factors in mob executions. Historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, who has written about the antilynching movement, argues that lynching was intimately linked to white men's fears about black men's sexuality. While interracial sex was a staple of the prewar South (slaveholders regularly raped their female slaves), it was part of the white South's code of honor that white women must be protected from the supposed threat of black men. So, while less than 30 percent of the black lynching victims had even been accused of sexually assaulting white women, defenders of lynching continued to claim that the practice was necessary to prevent rape.

LYNCHING VICTIMS 1868–1935

Year	Blacks	Year	Blacks
1868	291	1907	58
1869	31	1908	89
1870	34	1909	69
1871	53	1910	67
1882	49	1911	60
1883	53	1912	61
1884	51	1913	51
1885	74	1914	51
1886	74	1915	56
1887	70	1916	50
1888	69	1917	36
1889	94	1918	60
1890	85	1919	76
1891	113	1920	53
1892	161	1921	59
1893	118	1922	51
1894	134	1923	29
1895	113	1924	16
1896	78	1925	17
1897	123	1926	23
1898	101	1927	16
1899	85	1928	10
1900	106	1929	7
1901	105	1930	20
1902	85	1931	12
1903	84	1932	6
1904	76	1933	24
1905	57	1934	15
1906	62	1935	18

Lynching's basis in the sexual fears of white society would account, more than cotton prices or other economic reasons, for the extreme brutality with which many lynchings were carried out. It was not uncommon for lynching victims to be castrated. Many were burned alive. Other common tortures were to have their eyes gouged out, their fingers severed, or their teeth

pulled out—with the white lynch mob taking home various body parts as souvenirs.

As antilynching activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett pointed out, the emphasis on rape as a justification for lynching only served to reinforce racist stereotypes of black men as sexual predators and to put them “beyond the pale of human sympathy.” The sexual excuse for lynching helped perpetuate both the racial and gender inequalities in American society. Lynching reflected a value system that put white men at the top of a hierarchy, above both the white women lynching was said to protect and the black men it was meant to intimidate. In this system, black women's humanity was ignored—although their vulnerability to sexual assault by white men continued to remind black men that they could not protect their wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters. Historian Patricia Schechter says of Wells-Barnett's work that it proves that lynching was “both about sex and not about sex.” That is, most lynchings were not directly the result of rape accusations, but all of them served to remind both whites and blacks, men and women, where they stood in Southern society.

Legacy of Lynching

Despite the end of lynching, African Americans continued to suffer from inferior legal status. Subject to discriminatory segregation under the South's Jim Crow laws, blacks were unable to choose freely where to work, live, eat, or go to school. Until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, most Southern African Americans could not exercise their constitutional right to vote. If they no longer faced the threat of death at a hangman's noose, they were still vulnerable to being beaten, fired from their jobs, or arrested for whatever infractions a white person accused them of.

Increasingly, the criminal justice system—which had been, in lynching days, an accused man's one hope for safety—began to seem another arena of unfairness. Still treated as second-class citizens, black men were often tried, convicted, and executed on shaky charges. Only a strong defense and nationwide publicity saved the defendants in the Scottsboro Case—young black men who had been accused of having sex with white women—from such a lynching-like fate. Many scholars have called this sort of unequal application of the death penalty “legal lynching.”

See also Black Women's Club Movement; Fifteenth Amendment; Miscegenation; Racial Stereotypes.

Citation:

"Ku Klux Klan." *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience, Second Edition*, edited by Kwame AnthonyAppiah. , edited by Henry LouisGates Jr.. *Oxford African American Studies Center*, http://www.oxfordaasc.com.gate.lib.buffalo.edu/article/opr/t0002/e2256 (accessed Thu May 21 01:03:54 EDT 2009).

Ku Klux Klan

Secret terrorist organization that began in the Southern states during Reconstruction and that was reactivated on a wider geographic scale during the twentieth century.

The original Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was organized in Pulaski, Tennessee, during the winter of 1865–1866, by six former Confederate Army officers. The group's founders gave the group a name adapted from the Greek word *kuklos*, meaning “circle.” Although the Ku Klux Klan began as a fraternal organization, its activities soon were directed against the Republican Reconstruction governments and their leaders, both black and white, who came to power in the Southern states after the Civil War.

Original Targets and Tactics

The Klansmen regarded the Reconstruction governments as hostile and oppressive, and they resented the rise of former slaves to a status of civil equality and often to positions of political power. Waging a battle against Reconstruction governments, the KKK quickly spread throughout the former states of the Confederacy. Dressed in white robes and wearing masks topped with pointed hoods, the Klansmen terrorized public officials in order to drive them from office. They also intimidated African Americans to prevent them from voting, holding office, and otherwise exercising their newly acquired political rights. When such tactics failed to produce the desired effect, Klan victims might be flogged, mutilated, or murdered.

A secret convention of Klansmen held in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1867, adopted a declaration of principles expressing loyalty to the United States government and its Constitution and declaring the determination of the Klan to “protect the weak, the innocent and the defenseless …; to relieve the injured and oppressed; [and] to succor the suffering. …” The convention designated the Klan as an “Invisible Empire” and provided for a supreme official, called Grand Wizard of the empire, who wielded autocratic power and who was assisted by ten Genii. Other principal officials of the KKK were the Grand Dragon of the Realm, who was assisted by eight Hydras; the Grand Titan of the Dominion, assisted by six Furies; and the Grand Cyclops of the Den, assisted by two Nighthawks.

From 1868 to 1870, as federal occupation troops withdrew from the Southern states and Democrats began to regain control of state governments from Republicans, the Klan was increasingly dominated by rougher elements in the population. The local organizations, called klaverns (a blend of *klan* and *caverns*), became so uncontrollable and violent that the Grand Wizard, former Confederate general Nathan B. Forrest, officially disbanded the organization in 1869. Klaverns, however, continued to operate on their own. In 1871 Congress passed the Force Bill to implement the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guaranteeing the rights of all citizens. In the same year, President Ulysses S. Grant issued a proclamation calling on members of illegal organizations to disarm and disband; thereafter hundreds of Klansmen were arrested. The remaining klaverns gradually faded as the political and social subordination of blacks was reestablished.

Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan

The name, rituals, and some of the attitudes of the original Klan were adopted by a new fraternal organization incorporated in Georgia in 1915. The official name of the new society, which was organized by a former preacher, Colonel William Simmons, was Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Membership was open to native-born, white, Protestant males, sixteen years or older. Blacks, Roman Catholics, and Jews were excluded and increasingly became targets of defamation and persecution by the Klan.

Until 1920 the society exercised little influence. Then, in the period of economic dislocation and political and social unrest that followed World War I, the Klan grew rapidly in urban areas and expanded beyond the South. The Klan of the 1920s was active in many states, notably Colorado, Oregon, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio,

Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. Although the defense of white supremacy remained a core issue for the Klan, it focused its attack on what it considered to be alien outsiders, particularly the Roman Catholic Church, which it believed was threatening traditional American ways and values. All non-Protestants, aliens, liberals, trade unionists, and striking workers were denounced as subversives.

Like its prototype, the Klan burned crosses to intimidate its victims. Masked Klansmen marched through the streets of many communities, carrying placards threatening various people with punishment and warning others to leave town. Many people were kidnapped, flogged, and mutilated by Klan members; a number were lynched or murdered. Few prosecutions of Klansmen resulted, and in some communities local officials abetted the Klan.

Journalistic disclosures of crimes committed by the KKK and of corruption and immorality in its leadership led to a congressional investigation in 1921, and for a time the Klan changed its tactics. After 1921 the organization experienced a rapid growth in membership and became politically influential throughout the nation. One estimate of its membership, made in 1924, when the Klan was at the peak of its strength, was as high as three million. That year a resolution denouncing the Klan was introduced at the national convention of the Democratic Party. The resolution precipitated a bitter controversy and was ultimately defeated.

In the mid-1920s, inept and exploitive leadership, internal conflict, and alleged Klan immorality and violence greatly damaged the Klan's reputation. Political opposition to the organization increased. By 1929 the Klan's membership had dropped to several thousand members. During the economic depression of the 1930s, the Klan remained active on a small scale, particularly against trade union organizers in the South. It also threatened blacks with punishment if they tried to exercise their right to vote. In 1940 the Klan joined with the German-American Bund, an organization financed in part by the government of Nazi Germany, in holding a large rally at Camp Nordland in New Jersey.

After the entry of the United States into World War II, the Klan curtailed its activities. In 1944 it disbanded formally when it was unable to pay back taxes owed to the federal government. Revival of Klan activities after the war led to widespread public sentiment for the suppression of the organization. The organization suffered a setback in its national stronghold, Georgia, when that state revoked the Klan charter in 1947. With the death of its strongest postwar leader, the obstetrician Samuel Green of Atlanta, Klan unity broke down into numerous, independent, competing units.

Recent Activity

The 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, stirred the Klan into new attempts at recruitment and violence. It did not, however, bring the group internal unity, increased membership, power, or respectability in the South. The newly formed White Citizens Council (WCC), whose membership was largely middle class and included civic and business leaders, led the resistance to desegregation. WCC members wielded the tools of economic intimidation and public harassment to silence civil rights proponents while also contributing to an atmosphere that tolerated and even encouraged anti-black violence. The Klan attracted marginal groups and was often at the center of violent assaults on civil rights workers, from beatings and murder to bombings. One particularly egregious crime attributed to the Klan occurred during the Freedom Summer voter registration campaign of 1964. Two white activists (Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner) and one African American (James Chaney) were murdered while investigating a church bombing in Mississippi, allegedly perpetrated by the Klan. The crime received significant media attention and increased national awareness of the Klan's covert, yet powerful, presence in the South.

After passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Klan experienced a startling increase in membership, reaching an estimated 40,000 in 1965. By the mid-1970s, the Klan's influence in politics had transitioned from covert to mainstream, as acknowledged Klan leaders ran for public office in the South, wining sizable numbers of votes. Approximately fifteen separate organizations existed, including the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, the United Klans of America, and the National Klan. A resurgence of Klan violence occurred in the late 1970s, and in 1980 a Klan office was opened in Toronto, Canada. In 1989 David Duke, a former Grand Wizard of a Klan splinter group, was elected to the Louisiana House of Representatives. Duke ran unsuccessfully in the state's gubernatorial election in 1991, but he did win the support of most white voters in that election.

Klan groups have been in decline since the 1980s. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and other groups have won civil suits on behalf of victims of the Klan, winning damages that have drained the movement of funds. Federal prosecutors have brought Klansmen to trial for violent acts and sedition, and have reopened several civil rights cases from the 1960s, winning convictions of Klansmen charged with the murder of civil

rights leaders in Mississippi more than three decades ago.

See also Great Depression; Lynching.