



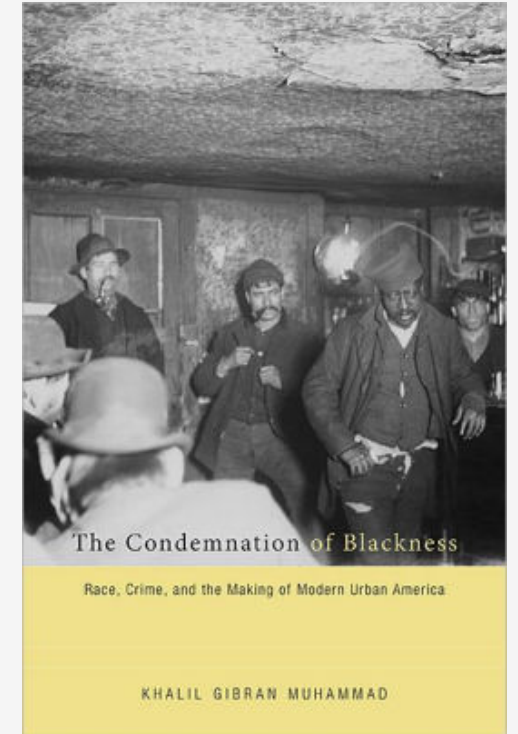
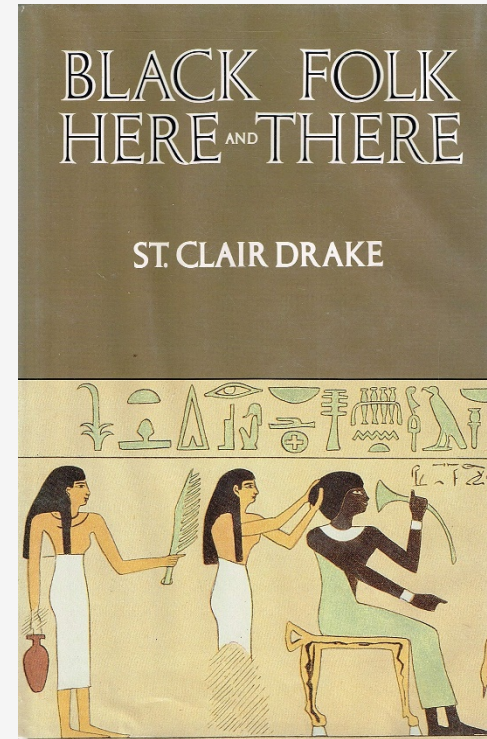
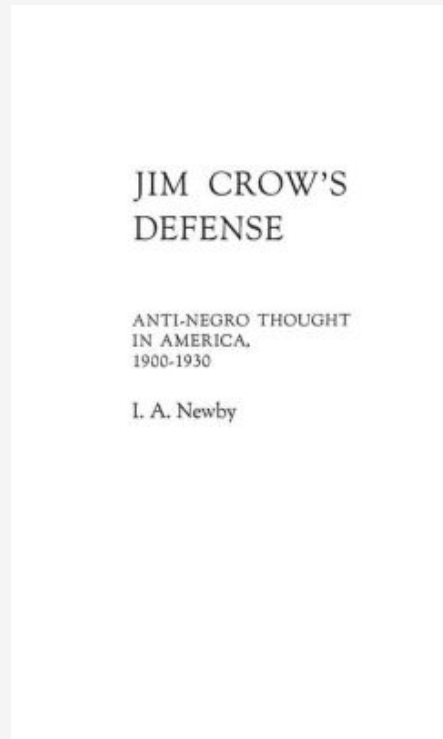
# *Shattered Humanity: The Brutality of Lynch Mob Formation*

*Krystin Robertson  
Professor Gritter  
HIST – J 495  
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**Title Slide** – Good evening, thank you all for coming. Today, I will be giving a presentation on the subject of lynching in the South between the post-emancipation period (or, after 1865) to the 1930s, or, the Great Depression era in United States history. For this presentation, I will begin by discussing my historiography and methodology, then I will introduce my thesis statement, provide evidence for each of my main points, conclude with a turning point to this era, and then I will note why this subject is important.

# Historiography

- *Jim Crow's Defense: Anti-Negro Thought in America, 1900-1930* (1965) by I. A. Newby
- *Black Folk Here and There: An Essay in History and Anthropology* (1987) by St. Clair Drake
- *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (2010) by Khalil Gibran Muhammad



**Historiography Slide** – For my historiography, I have included three books that share common themes of anti-Negro thought, the pejorative connotations of being black, or black criminality. It is crucial to understand these themes to make sense of the context of the lynching era and the backdrop of lynching justifications. White perceptions were designed on each of these premises because they all led to the belief that African Americans were inferior.

As for issues with this historiography, lynching is not a big subject that is featured often throughout these books. I. A. Newby has a section dedicated to lynching in his index, but Drake and Muhammad do not, although their books mention this subject throughout. Lynching should be discussed more in these texts, but the overall purpose seems to be about addressing race, blackness in America, and prejudice and discrimination. Violence against African Americans, especially the grotesque act of lynching, seems to be a minor detail in the grand scheme of things. This makes sense because of their overall argument, but it leaves more to be desired when the periods they cover fall on the timeline of the lynching era. Regardless, my research has made an attempt to add to the existing historiography with the examination of lynching in more detail. I have made an effort to understand how violence like this could possibly happen, what motivations were behind it, and how this practice succeeded with minimal prevention efforts in place.

# *Methodology*

- Books
- Primary Sources
- Secondary Sources
- Web Sources
- The Legacy Museum
- The National Memorial for Peace and Justice



The Legacy Museum and The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Montgomery, Alabama, March 25, 2019

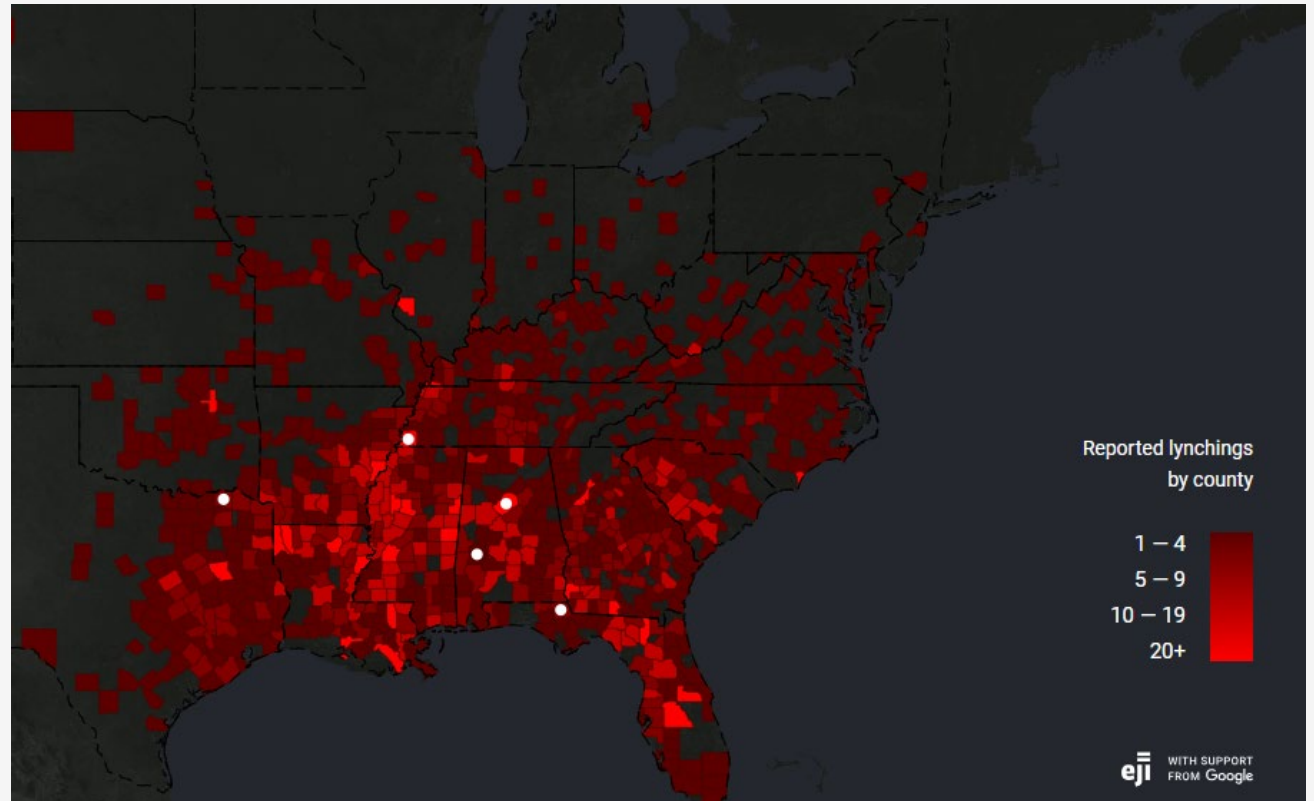
**Methodology Slide** – For my research methodology, I have gathered source material through books, primary, secondary, and web sources, and through the Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama. I checked out several books on the subject of lynching through the IU Southeast Library. Primary sources that I have found include *On Lynchings*, a work from Ida B. Wells in 1892, writings from Frederick Douglass called *Southern Barbarism* and *Why is the Negro Lynched*, and newspaper sources. Secondary sources, aside from the various books that I have collected, include pieces from academic journals through JSTOR. I have also found some sources through the Equal Justice Initiative (a private, nonprofit organization that was founded in 1989 by Bryan Stevenson, a widely acclaimed public interest lawyer and the bestselling author of *Just Mercy*), including an interactive map of the United States on racial terror lynchings that documents over 4,000 reported cases, and a book from 2017 called *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror*. Over spring break, I got to visit the museum and the memorial. Opened in April 2018, the museum holds information from enslavement to mass incarceration, and the memorial is dedicated to lynching victims. I was able to gather material from both of these establishments while I was there, including detailed accounts of lynchings, names, dates, and locations of lynching victims, and various justifications as to why African Americans were lynched.



# Thesis

Southern lynch mobs justified their extralegal practices based on four specific motives:

- They were exposed to a history entrenched in racist ideologies
- They received public support from their communities
- They were immune to prosecution from law enforcement officials
- They viewed themselves as citizens who were protecting society from criminality



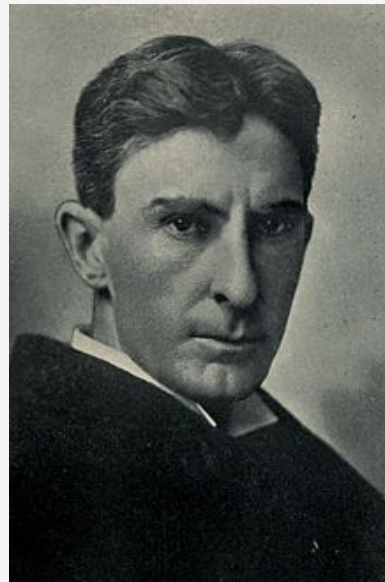
Equal Justice Initiative, Racial Terror Lynchings, 1877-1950

**Thesis Slide** – For my thesis, I have claimed that Southern lynch mobs justified their extralegal practices, that is, lynching, based on four specific motives: they were exposed to a history entrenched in racist ideologies. They received public support from their communities. They were immune to prosecution from law enforcement officials. And they viewed themselves as citizens who were protecting society from criminality.



*Mobs were exposed to a history entrenched in racist ideologies*

- History of Southern Violence
- Historical Racism
- African American Inferiority
- Slavery
- Romanticizing the Ku Klux Klan
- White Domination of the South



Thomas Dixon, author of *The Clansman* (1905)



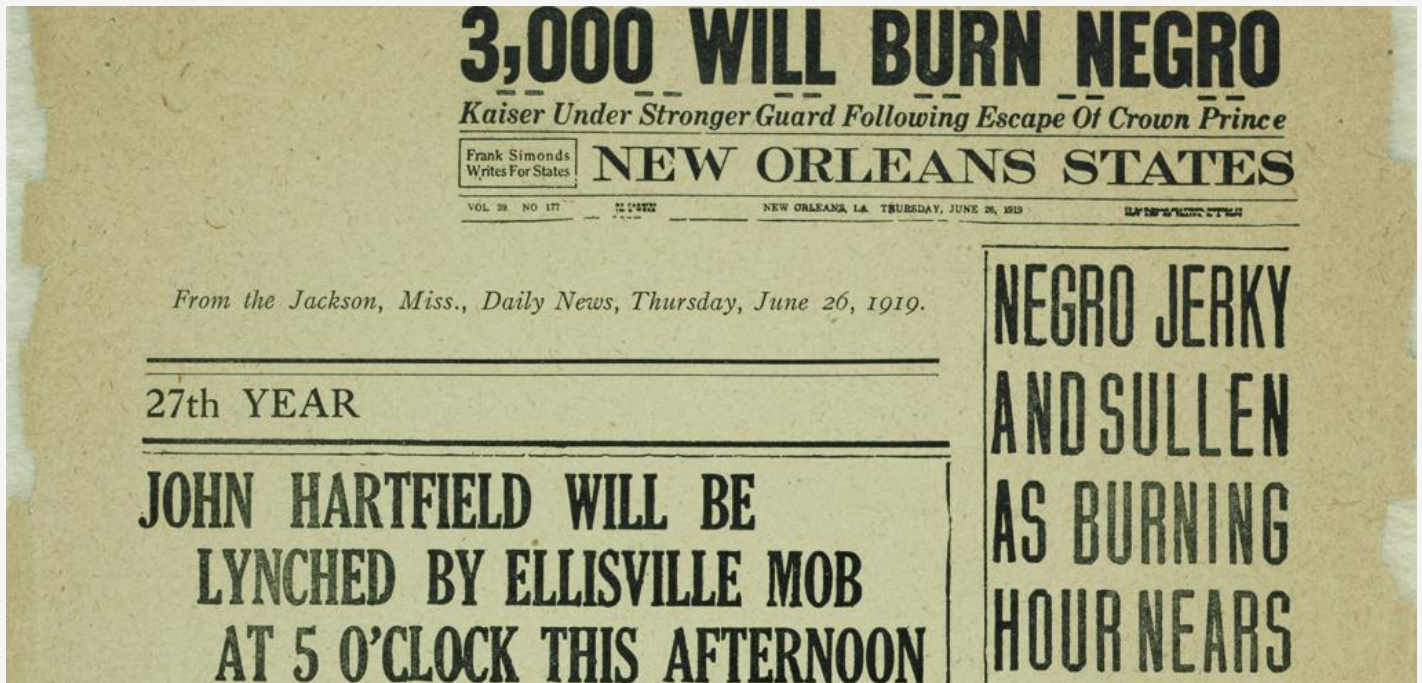
D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)

**Mobs were exposed to a history entrenched in racist ideologies slide** – James W. Clarke, author of “Without Fear or Shame: Lynching, Capital Punishment and the Subculture of Violence in the American South,” said, “A history of previous violence remains the single best known predictor of future violence, whether in individuals, families or societies.” He claims that the South has “always been one of the most violent regions of the United States, and remains so. Brawls, duels, assassinations and murder are familiar events in its history. Preceding it all was slavery.” Historical racism perpetuated this violence further because African Americans were thought of as inferior. In regards to slavery, Alfred P. Schultz, author of *Race or Mongrel* said, “As a slave the Negro had been ‘at least a good working-tool’ but as a free man he was arrogant, indolent, and unreliable.” The Ku Klux Klan was romanticized, especially through *The Clansman, An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905) that was written by Thomas Dixon. It became the basis for D. W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation*, which portrayed African American men as “vicious and depraved animals” who were threatening to white womanhood.

Each of these components constituted a logical reasoning behind African American inferiority. In the context of the lynching era, this evidence could be trusted as indisputable proof. If one person believed any of this information from reputable scholars and authors, then surely the rest would follow to maintain social order through white domination of the South.

*Mobs received public support from their communities*

- Press Coverage
- Lynching as a Public Spectacle
- Community Involvement



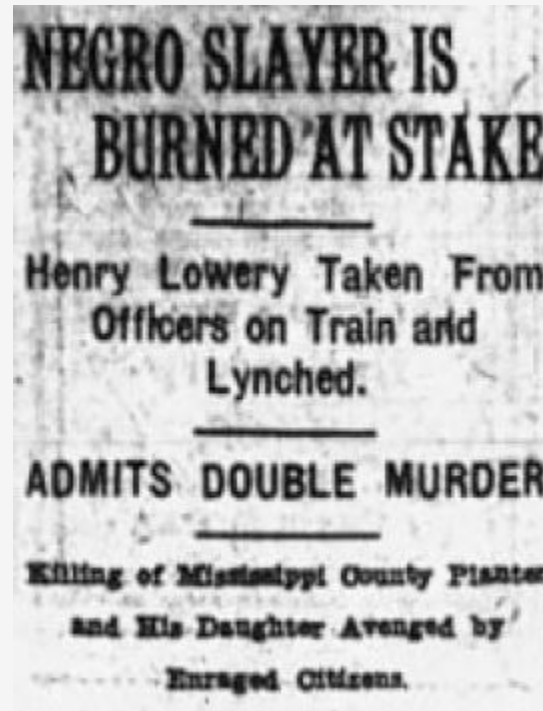
Jackson, Mississippi *Daily News* announces the lynching of John Hartfield, June 26, 1919

**Mobs received public support from their communities slide** – Press coverage was utilized to either document cases of lynching or support the practice. The press was also more influential then because there were fewer media outlets to gather information from. Richard M. Perloff of Cleveland State University highlighted this coverage in “The Press and Lynchings of African Americans.” He said, “Newspaper stories identified the race of the accused; assumed without question that the accused person was guilty; used a number of dehumanizing terms to label the Black victim—for example, *wretch*, *fiend*, and *desperado*; assumed the Black person’s race predisposed him to commit violent crimes, particularly rape; and sometimes self-righteously defended lynching of Black individuals.” George C. Wright, author of *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and “Legal Lynchings,”* claimed that newspaper editors “stated that lynchings were necessary to punish murderers and rapists who might otherwise go unpunished and to show others what awaited them for engaging in outrageous criminal activities.”

As for lynching as a public spectacle, Clarke’s “Without Fear or Shame” begins with the lynching of Sam Hose, an African American man who was killed in April 1899 in Palmetto, Georgia. Once Hose was captured, Clarke said, “Bulletins were subsequently tacked up everywhere people gathered, announcing the place and date of the scheduled burning... Ladies clothed in their Sunday finery watched from carriages, gazing excitedly over the heads of men carrying small children on their shoulders as the ritual began.” Hose was tortured and burned alive, and then parts of his corpse were sold and distributed as souvenirs to the event. John Hartfield was lynched in Ellisville, Mississippi on June 26, 1919. The act was advertised in the newspaper beforehand, and there were food vendors, speeches by politicians, and postcards that were sold for 20 cents to commemorate the day.

*Mobs were immune to prosecution from law enforcement officials*

- Law Enforcement Officials Released African American Prisoners to White Mobs
- “Slow” Legal Process
- Overwhelming Pressure with Public Sentiment
- Lack of Prosecution



Henry Lowery was seized from a train in Sardis, Mississippi. He defended himself against his employer. He was lynched on Christmas Day 1920 in Nodena, Arkansas.

**Mobs were immune to prosecution from law enforcement officials slide** – Kidada E. Williams, author of *They Left Great Marks on Me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I* has several examples in this book of law enforcement officials who released black prisoners to white mobs. She also claims that whites believed the legal process was too slow, and their extralegal means could be brought about swiftly to eliminate any criminal who threatened their society. Clarke discusses Henry Lowry who was burned alive on Christmas Day in 1920 in Nodena, Arkansas. He had an argument with his employer for wages that were owed to him, but they fought and the employer's son shot and wounded him. Lowry was armed and he fired back, and he killed his employer and one of his daughters. He fled to Texas, but he was later seized in Sardis, Mississippi, from a train that was bringing him back. Two policemen were escorting him, and they did nothing about it. Additionally, the Arkansas sheriff was asked why nothing had been done since the lynching occurred in his jurisdiction. He replied, "Nearly every man, woman and child in our county wanted the Negro lynched... When public sentiment is that way, there isn't much chance left for officers to do anything about it." The white lynch mob and the law enforcement officials were never prosecuted, nor were they even arrested for this murder.

*Mobs viewed themselves as citizens who were protecting society from criminality*

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- Lynched for No Offense
- Lynched for Trivial Offenses
- Offenses to White Society
- Threat to White Womanhood



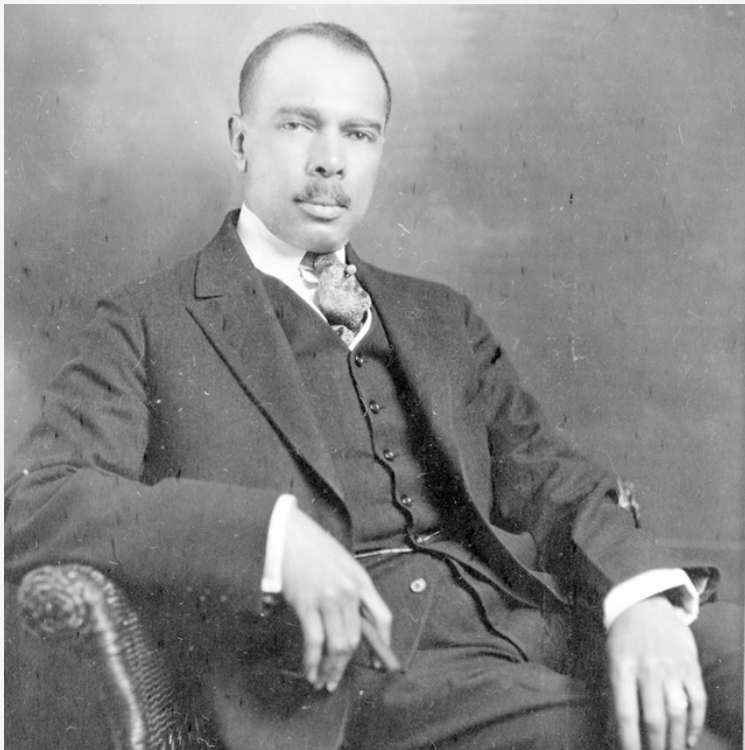
Ida B. Wells, author of *On Lynchings* (1892)



**Mobs viewed themselves as citizens who were protecting society from criminality** – Ida B. Wells notes in her “Lynched for No Offense” chapter in *On Lynchings* that five people were lynched, and she concludes that these individuals were “simply lynched by parties of men who had it in their power to kill them, and who chose to avenge some fancied wrong by murder, rather than submit their grievances to court.” Oliver C. Cox, author of “Lynching and the Status Quo” notes other offenses to white society, such as using offensive language, bringing suit against white men, trying to act like white men, frightening women and children, being a witness, gambling, making boastful remarks, and attempting to vote. Perhaps one of the greatest threats to white society was the danger to white womanhood. Perloff quotes E. L. Ayers: “Although most lynchings were inflicted in response to alleged murder, most of the rhetoric and justification focused intently on the so-called ‘one crime,’ or the ‘usual crime’: the sexual assault of White women by Blacks.”

# *The Turning Point*

- Anti-Lynching Legislation, 1918
- Great Migration, prior to and after the 1920s
- Harlem Renaissance, 1920s
- New Negro Movement, 1920s



James Weldon Johnson, NAACP Executive Secretary



Leonidas C. Dyer, Republican  
Representative of Missouri



Claude McKay, Harlem Renaissance poet

**The Turning Point Slide** – I would like to add that there seems to be a turning point near the end of the lynching era. First, the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill was introduced in 1918 by Leonidas C. Dyer, which would have punished the crime of lynching. The NAACP, specifically Executive Secretary James Weldon Johnson, lobbied for its passage. It passed through the House of Representatives in 1921, but it never passed through the Senate. Although it failed, efforts to introduce anti-lynching legislation undoubtedly meant that public opinion of the practice was shifting. The Great Migration meant that a substantial amount of African Americans were moving (and oftentimes fleeing) from the South to Northern, urban industrial centers for better opportunities. As for the New Negro Movement, a spirit swept through all who were involved to fight for their rights. Harlem Renaissance poet Claude McKay and his famous poem, “If We Must Die,” captures that sentiment: “Like men we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack / Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!” The Harlem Renaissance itself cultivated black thought, art, and culture.

# *Why is this subject important?*

- Topic of Discussion
- Victim Blaming?
- Contemporary Relevance
- African American Perseverance and Strength

The Legacy Museum, Montgomery, Alabama  
The banner displayed was placed outside of NAACP headquarters when a report of a lynching was received. It symbolized the growing resistance to racial terror in America. It says, "A man was lynched yesterday."



**Why is this subject important slide** – As for my final comments, I want to turn this question to you for your own reflection. Consider the following points when I ask why the subject of lynching is important: As a topic of discussion, I feel like lynching is not widely mentioned. Every American history course that I have taken typically looks to World War II and the atrocities of Nazi Germany, for instance, but we rarely take a deeper look into our own dark past of lynching. Lynching is something that should be learned about more. As for some of my source material, I have found that some authors discuss black population growth or black prominence to be a cause for lynching, meaning that because the black population expanded, or because black individuals found success, they were lynched. While this might be a motive, I find that the justifications are deeper than that, and it seems that these reasons just blame African Americans for essentially climbing the social ladder. As for contemporary relevance, the Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice just opened to the public last year, but they are the only structures that stand as a true testament to this subject, and people want to learn about it. Finally, I have noted some of the achievements of African Americans in the turning point because it is important to recognize historical agency. Showing perseverance and strength through surviving is significant to this narrative. It shows that the spirit of African Americans cannot be broken, even if there has been a history of violence that has tried to do so.

Thank you.

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