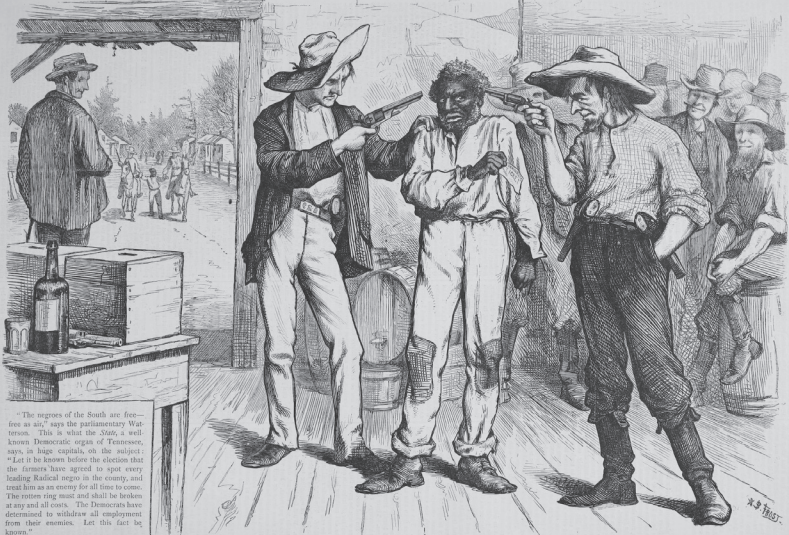


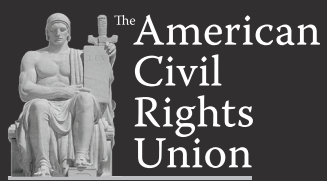
The Truth About Jim Crow



"The negroes of the South are free—free as air," says the parliamentary Waterson. "This is what the *State*, a well-known Democratic organ of Tennessee, says, in huge capitals, on the subject: "Let it be known before the election that the former have agreed to spot every leading Radical negro in the county, and treat him as an enemy for all time to come. The voters ring must and shall be broken at any and all costs. The Democrats have determined to withdraw all employment from their enemies. Let this fact be known."

"OF COURSE HE WANTS TO VOTE THE DEMOCRATIC TICKET"
Democratic "Revolution." "You're as free as air, ain't you? Buy you are, or I'll blow yer black head off!"

HARPER'S WEEKLY
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Introduction

The Jim Crow era ended nearly 50 years ago with the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which restored African-Americans to full citizenship in the United States after a century of legalized oppression. As the era fades deeper and deeper into the past, Americans are rapidly forgetting the historical realities of Jim Crow. Most of us weren't even born when Jim Crow mercifully came to an end. Therefore, most of us never personally experienced one of the ugliest and most shameful chapters in American history.

Jim Crow was an era in which whites, mostly but not always in the South, used methods sometimes legal, sometimes illegal, often deadly, but always immoral, to maintain political and cultural domination over blacks. Blacks were reduced to second-class citizenship. They were denied the right to vote, kept separate from whites in most phases of life, and in general, treated as if they were subhuman, in an effort to justify white supremacy and keep the black population under tight control.

This brief paper is not intended to be an exhaustive academic treatise about the Jim Crow era. Instead, its purpose is to reacquaint readers with the most important aspects of Jim Crow, by addressing the Jim Crow era's white supremacist culture, how white supremacy was enforced, and the politics of the era. The public should come away understanding the three most important facts about Jim Crow: Jim Crow was Dehumanizing; Jim Crow was Deadly; and Jim Crow was Democratic.

I. Jim Crow was Dehumanizing: The Culture of Jim Crow

Jim Crow was an entire way of life dedicated to asserting and maintaining the superiority of whites over blacks. The Jim Crow system dominated the southern and border states, though Jim Crow laws and attitudes could be found in the Northeast, the Midwest and the West as well. In the South, blacks were systematically oppressed and deprived of their constitutional rights, and strict segregation of the races was aggressively enforced. Social institutions were structured to reinforce the organizing principle of the culture: that blacks were inherently inferior to whites, in effect subhuman. In consequence, blacks and whites were never supposed to relate to one another as equals. The principle of black inferiority pervaded every aspect of life, from status before the law to the voting franchise, from education to access to public accommodations to entertainment and even to social etiquette.

Jim Crow's Historical Setting

For all practical purposes, the Civil War ended with Confederate commander Robert E. Lee's surrender on April 9, 1865. Slavery ended in practice on June 19, 1865, when the Union Army reached Galveston and ordered the freeing of the 200,000 slaves in Texas. As the postwar Reconstruction period (1865–1877) began, Federal forces occupied the South. Blacks began to organize politically and campaign for equal legal and political status as early as 1865, forming equal rights movements throughout the South. The 13th Amendment to the Constitution ratified on December 18, 1865, banished slavery in the United States.

Following Republican Abraham Lincoln’s assassination, however, his successor, Democratic President Andrew Johnson, allowed Southern states to implement “black codes,” which restricted and controlled the newly freed slaves. The political tide turned with Republican victory in the 1866 Congressional elections. The Republicans fought to elevate the newly emancipated black slaves to full citizenship, successfully engineering two more constitutional amendments. The 14th Amendment, ratified on July 28, 1868, extended equal protection of the laws to former slaves, and the 15th Amendment, ratified on March 30, 1870, guaranteed that all blacks, including former slaves, had the right to vote.

The cumulative effect of these constitutional amendments was to make former slaves fully equal American citizens in the eyes of the law. Because most Southern states had substantial black populations, black candidates began to win state and local elections. The first black man to be seated in the House of Representatives, Joseph Rainey of South Carolina, was elected in 1870. In the same year, Hiram Rhodes Revel of Mississippi became the first black U. S. Senator. “In all, 16 African Americans served in the U.S. Congress during Reconstruction; more than 600 more were elected to the state legislatures, and hundreds more held local offices across the South.”¹ Everyone was a Republican.



Blacks elected to the U.S. Congress in 1870 and 1872. Hiram Rhodes Revel is on the far left, and Joseph Rainey is second from the right.

Backlash: the Beginning of Jim Crow

Growing black political power was viewed with hostility by whites, who had ruled the roost until 1865. But even more threatening was the growth of black social status. As blacks began to interact more frequently and more equally with whites, many whites feared that interracial marriages could become commonplace, and “would produce a mongrel race which would destroy America.”² The stereotype that black males were sexually uncontrollable and predatory was ubiquitous, such that many white women feared being raped. To avoid these perceived dangers, many whites felt social contacts between the races had to be kept to an absolute minimum, and white political dominance had to be reestablished.

The Reconstruction era ended with the Compromise of 1877, which resolved the disputed 1876 presidential election. Democrats controlled the House of Representatives, which gave them the power to prevent the inauguration of the new president. The Democrats agreed to allow Republican Rutherford B. Hayes to enter the White House in return for the withdrawal of the Federal troops still occupying the South. The troops were the principal guardians of the safety of the Republican governments in Southern states, and when they departed, many white Republicans left the South as well.

The South was left in the hands of the Democratic Party, which considered itself the “party of the white man.”³ Democrats established so-called “redeemer governments” throughout the region, and began to reassert white supremacy by passing laws that infringed upon the rights of blacks and enforced strict segregation.

Black legal and political rights quickly deteriorated. “[A]fter 1877, most lost the right to vote or to hold government positions.”⁴ The 1875 Civil Rights Act, which banned discrimination based on race, was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1883.

In 1890, the Louisiana General Assembly passed a law requiring segregated railroad cars. In 1896, this legalized segregation was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. In its infamous *Plessy* decision, the Court established the principle that public accommodations could be “separate but equal.” In 1898, the Supreme Court went further in its *Williams v. Mississippi* decision, upholding a Mississippi law intended to prevent blacks from voting.

Once discriminatory laws were approved in principle by the Supreme Court, such laws spread quickly throughout the South. According to the Civil Rights Foundation, “Given the green light, Southern states began to limit the voting right to those who owned property or could read well,

to those whose grandfathers had been able to vote, to those with ‘good characters,’ to those who paid poll taxes. In 1896, Louisiana had 130,334 registered black voters. Eight years later, only 1,342, one percent, could pass the state’s new rules.⁵

Segregation

Racial segregation was the very heart of Jim Crow, and the Jim Crow era was marked by the adoption of explicitly racist laws intended to keep blacks and whites away from each other everywhere from ballparks to graveyards. Black access to public accommodations like restaurants, buses and trains was restricted, and blacks were forced into separate (and inferior) schools. Laws decreed segregation in areas ranging from the profound to the petty, as the following list illustrates⁶:

Amateur Baseball: “It shall be unlawful for any amateur white baseball team to play baseball on any vacant lot or baseball diamond within two blocks of a playground devoted to the Negro race, and it shall be unlawful for any amateur colored baseball team to play baseball in any vacant lot or baseball diamond within two blocks of any playground devoted to the white race.” (Georgia law)

Barbering: “No colored person shall serve as a barber [to] white women or girls.” (Georgia law)

Beer and Wine Sales: “All persons licensed to conduct the business of selling beer or wine...shall serve either white people exclusively or colored people exclusively and shall not sell to two races within the same room at any time.” (Georgia law)

Burial: “The officer in charge shall not bury, or allow to be buried, any colored persons upon ground set apart or used for the burial of white persons.” (Georgia law)

Buses: “All passenger stations in this state operated by any motor transportation company shall have separate waiting rooms or space and separate ticket windows for the white and colored races.” (Alabama law)

Hospitalization: “The Board of Control shall see that proper and distinct apartments are arranged for said patients [in a mental hospital], so that in no cases shall Negroes and white persons be together.” (Georgia law)

Libraries: “The state librarian is directed to fit up and maintain a separate place for the use of the colored people who may come to

the library for the purpose of reading books or periodicals.” (North Carolina law)

Marriage: “All marriages between a white person and a negro, or between a white person and a person of negro descent to the fourth generation inclusive, are hereby forever prohibited.” (Florida law)

Marriage: “All marriages of white persons with Negroes, Mulattos, Mongolians, or Malaya hereafter contracted in the State of Wyoming are and shall be illegal and void.” (Wyoming law)

Nursing: “No person or corporation shall require any White female nurse to nurse in wards or rooms in hospitals, either public or private, in which negro men are placed.” (Alabama law)

Prison: “The warden shall see that the white convicts shall have separate apartments for both eating and sleeping from the negro convicts.” (Mississippi law)

Restaurants: “It shall be unlawful to conduct a restaurant or other place for the serving of food in the city, at which white and colored people are served in the same room, unless such white and colored persons are effectually separated by a solid partition extending from the floor upward to a distance of seven feet or higher, and unless a separate entrance from the street is provided for each compartment.” (Alabama law)

Schools: “Separate rooms [shall] be provided for the teaching of pupils of African descent, and [when] said rooms are provided, such pupils may not be admitted to the school rooms occupied and used by pupils of Caucasian or other descent.” (New Mexico law)

Schools: “[The County Board of Education] shall provide schools of two kinds; those for white children and those for colored children.” (Texas law)

Teaching: “Any instructor who shall teach in any school, college or institution where members of the white and colored races are received and enrolled as pupils for instruction shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction thereof, shall be fined...” (Oklahoma law)

Toilets: “Every employer of white or negro males shall provide for such white or negro males reasonably accessible and separate toilet facilities.” (Alabama law)

Voter Denial

Keeping blacks out of the polling booth was essential for maintaining white political dominance. Blacks were denied the franchise in many ways. Dr. Russell Booker of America's Black Holocaust Museum has identified eight methods used to deny blacks the right to vote⁷:

All-white primary elections: In the United States, there are usually two rounds of elections: first the primary, then the general. In the primary, Republicans run against Republicans and Democrats run against Democrats. In the general election, the winner of the Republican primary runs against the winner of the Democratic primary. The Republican or Democrat who gets the most votes is elected.

In the South from about 1900 to about 1960, the Democratic candidates usually won. (See the exhibit Political Parties in Black and White to learn the reason for this.) Republicans were almost never elected, especially in the Deep South. *This means that the Democratic primary election was usually the only election that mattered.*

African Americans were not allowed to vote in the Democratic primary elections. White Democrats said the Democratic Party was a "club" and did not allow black members. So blacks could not vote in the only elections that mattered.

Former prisoners: People who had gone to prison were often not allowed to vote. Blacks were very often arrested on trumped-up charges or for minor offenses. Sometimes, white owners of mines, farms, and factories simply needed cheap labor, and prisons provided it. This law kept many more blacks from voting than whites.

Grandfather clause: People who could not read and owned no property were allowed to vote if their fathers or grandfathers had voted before 1867. Of course, practically no blacks could vote before 1867, so the grandfather clause worked only for whites.

Literacy tests: Today almost all adults can read. One hundred years ago, however, many people – black and white – were illiterate. Most illiterate people were not allowed to vote. A few were allowed if they could understand what was read to them. White officials usually claimed that whites could understand what was read. They said blacks could not understand it, even if they could.

Poll taxes: In Southern states, people had to pay a tax to vote. The taxes were about \$25 to \$50 dollars in today's money. Many people had extremely low incomes and could not afford this tax. This poll tax applied to all people who wanted to vote – black and white. There were ways for whites to get around other laws, but not around the poll tax. Many poor whites could not vote because of the poll tax. (Others contend that grandfather clauses did, in some states, enable whites whose fathers or grandfathers had voted before 1865 to be excused from paying the poll tax.⁸)

Property tests: In the South one hundred years ago, many states allowed only property owners to vote. Many blacks and whites had no property and could not vote.

Purges: From time to time, white officials purged the voting rolls. That means they took people's names off the official lists of voters. Some voters would arrive at the polls and find that they were not registered to vote. Often they could not register to vote again until after the election. Purges more often affected blacks than whites.

Violence: Blacks who tried to vote were threatened, beaten, and killed. Their families were also harmed. Sometimes their homes were burned down. Often, they lost their jobs or were thrown off their farms. Whites used violence to intimidate blacks and prevent them from even thinking about voting. Still, some blacks passed the requirements to vote and took the risk. Some whites used violence to punish those “uppity” people and show other blacks what would happen to them if they voted.

According to the Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement, literacy tests often went far beyond simple tests of literacy⁹:

Prior to passage of the federal Voting Rights Act in 1965, Southern (and some Western) states maintained elaborate voter registration procedures whose primary purpose was to deny the vote to nonwhites. This process was often referred to as a “literacy test.” [Editor's note: in fact, many states, even states in the Northeast, had literacy tests.¹⁰] But in fact, it was much more than just a reading test, it was an entire complex system devoted to denying African-Americans (and in some regions, Latinos and Native Americans) the right to vote.

Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement went on to describe voter registration in Alabama¹¹:

In Alabama, a typical registration process for an African-American citizen went something like this:

In the rural counties where most folks lived, you had to go down to the courthouse to register. The Registrar's Office was only open every other Monday for a couple of hours, usually in the morning or afternoon. You had to take off work — with or without your employer's permission — to register. And if a white employer gave such permission, or failed to fire a Black who tried to vote, he could be driven out of business by economic retaliation from the Citizens Council.

On the occasional registration day, the county Sheriff and his deputies made it their business to hang around the courthouse to discourage “undesirables” from trying to register. This meant that Black women and men had to run a gauntlet of intimidation, insults, threats, and sometimes arrest on phony charges, just to get to the Registration Office. Once in the Registrar's Office they faced hatred, harassment, and humiliation from clerks and officials.

The Alabama Application Form and oaths you had to take were **four pages long**. It was designed to intimidate and threaten. You had to swear that your answers to every single question were true under penalty of perjury. And you knew that the information you entered on the form would be passed on to the Citizens Council and KKK.

Jim Crow's Social Etiquette

Discrimination under Jim Crow extended beyond legal status to social interactions. A complex set of rules governed the ways that blacks and whites spoke to each other, touched each other, ate with each other, even drove on the same roads. The rules were designed to reinforce the notion of black inferiority.

Sociology professor Dr. David Pilgrim, of the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia at Ferris State University, compiled the following list of “etiquette norms”¹²:

- a. A black male could not offer his hand (to shake hands) with a white male because it implied being socially equal. Obviously, a black male could not offer his hand or any other part of his body to a white woman, because he risked being accused of rape.
- b. Blacks and whites were not supposed to eat together. If they did eat together, whites were to be served first, and some sort of partition was to be placed between them.
- c. Under no circumstance was a black male to offer to light the cigarette of a white female — that gesture implied intimacy.



Segregated restaurant with separate entrances for whites and colored.

- d. Blacks were not allowed to show public affection toward one another in public, especially kissing, because it offended whites.
- e. Jim Crow etiquette prescribed that blacks were introduced to whites, never whites to blacks. For example: “Mr. Peters (the white person), this is Charlie (the black person), that I spoke to you about.”
- f. Whites did not use courtesy titles of respect when referring to blacks, for example, Mr., Mrs., Miss., Sir, or Ma’am. Instead, blacks were called by their first names. Blacks had to use courtesy titles when referring to whites, and were not allowed to call them by their first names.
- g. If a black person rode in a car driven by a white person, the black person sat in the back seat, or the back of a truck.
- h. White motorists had the right-of-way at all intersections.

Dr. Pilgrim goes on to cite Stetson Kennedy, author of the 1990 book *Jim Crow Guide*, who compiled a list of Jim Crow rules for blacks conversing with whites¹³:

1. Never assert or even intimate that a white person is lying.
2. Never impute dishonorable intentions to a white person.
3. Never suggest that a white person is from an inferior class.

4. Never lay claim to, or overly demonstrate, superior knowledge or intelligence.
5. Never curse a white person.
6. Never laugh derisively at a white person.
7. Never comment upon the appearance of a white female.

Jim Crow's Climate of Racial Hostility

White notions of racial superiority, reinforced by Jim Crow's formal laws and informal code of conduct, percolated throughout American society to create an everyday climate of overt hostility toward blacks. This climate can be illustrated by studying the derision and abuse of blacks that were common themes in the entertainment of the era.

According to Dr. Denis Mercier, until World War II, carnivals and fairs commonly featured a game called, among other things, "African Dip." The "dunking booth" is still familiar today: a person sits on a seat perched above a tank of water, and players throw balls at a target. A solid hit on the target drops the person into the water. A 1928 catalog ad for African Dip claimed that at three balls for a dime, African Dip could bring in forty or fifty dollars an hour, while thrilling the crowd.¹⁴

Another carnival game, "African Dodger," was far more vicious. A black man would stick his head through a hole in a canvas painted with a plantation scene, and players would throw balls at his head. "Some operators provided human targets with protective wooden helmets covered with curly hair."¹⁵

Abusive depictions of blacks extended to children's games, and Mercier provides several examples. The 1914 "Little Darcy Shooting Gallery" came with a gun, rubber-tipped arrows, and three targets, one featuring an obese black woman. Bowling games used stereotypical black figures as pins. An 1874 jigsaw puzzle was called "Chopped Up Niggers." As late as 1940, a Michigan company marketed a toy pistol game with a "Sambo" target.¹⁶

Mercier observes about such games, "The unspoken message was that Blacks, unlike other people, felt no pain, so players could indulge in and enjoy aggressive assaults because no real pain was inflicted."¹⁷

The minstrel show, which featured white or black performers in blackface depicting stereotypical blacks, was a very popular form of entertainment



throughout the United States in the mid-1800s. The name of the main character in the original 1828 minstrel show, Jim Crow, became a common derogatory term for blacks. The popularity of minstrel shows had fallen sharply by the time the Jim Crow era began in the 1870s, but the name “Jim Crow” was eventually appropriated to identify the era. Minstrel shows, which reinforced the notion that blacks are lazy and foolish, remained fairly common throughout the United States and England into the 1950s.

Jim Crow laws and behavior codes constituted a deliberate program to dehumanize blacks. Casting blacks as subhuman was necessary in order to justify white supremacy. Through segregation, deprivation of legal rights, and belittling social customs, the lesson was driven home to blacks and whites alike: blacks were inherently inferior to whites.

II. Jim Crow was Deadly: The Enforcement of Jim Crow

Jim Crow laws were enforced by the police, of course, but Jim Crow social standards and voter suppression were typically enforced through extrajudicial terrorism. Blacks were commonly intimidated, assaulted, flogged, and murdered throughout the Jim Crow era. The violent enforcement of Jim Crow culture reflected the dehumanization of blacks central to the Jim Crow mindset.

Lynching

Reaction to the growing participation of blacks in society during Reconstruction was swift and savage.

Most Americans are aware of the violent acts of the 1960s Civil Rights era, like the Birmingham church bombing and the murder of Emmett Till. Many, however, do not realize these were merely a continuation of a long history of such violence, far, far worse in earlier years, that made any challenge to the political establishment extremely and personally dangerous.

According to PBS.org's Tsahai Tafari, 535 blacks were lynched in 1867 alone.¹⁸ White Republicans were also targeted for intimidation, assault and murder.

According to Robert A. Gibson, "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.”¹⁹

Many people also imagine that lynchings were carried out by hooded men in the middle of the night, deep in the woods, and far out of sight of law enforcement. They couldn't be more mistaken. Many lynchings took place in broad daylight, right in the middle of major American cities. Lynchings were performed in public places in order to intimidate blacks, and whites working on behalf of blacks, and also to make examples of people accused of various crimes. The lynchers typically made no effort to hide their identities; they were proud of their work. Lynchings often drew large crowds, and took place in a carnival-like atmosphere. And they were not limited to states in the South. One well-known photograph records a lynching during a race riot in Duluth, Minnesota, in June 1920, of two black men accused of rape.

The Tuskegee Institute has compiled a list of lynchings by state and race from 1882 through 1968. According to Tuskegee, a total of 3,445 blacks and 1,297 whites were lynched during that portion of the Jim Crow era.²⁰ Tuskegee's numbers are considered understated.

Some of these murders had nothing to do with Jim Crow. More whites were lynched than blacks between 1882 and 1885, reflecting that lynching often represented rough-and-ready justice for horse thieves, cattle rustlers, and especially heinous murders and rapes, regardless of the race of the perpetrator. According to Tuskegee, between 1882 and 1968, blacks were lynched in 37 American states, and whites were lynched in 43 states. While many of these whites were criminals, others were lynched because they were Republicans challenging the Southern Democratic political establishment.²¹

Intimidation was a central purpose of lynching. In an 1899 pamphlet, Ida B. Wells-Barnett exposed the motives of the lynchers:

“During six weeks of the months of March and April just past, twelve colored men were lynched in Georgia, the reign of outlawry culminating in the torture and hanging of the colored preacher, Elijah Strickland, and the burning alive of Samuel Wilkes, alias Hose, Sunday, April 23, 1899. ... The real purpose of these savage demonstrations is to teach the Negro that in the South he has no rights that the law will enforce. Samuel Hose was burned to teach the Negroes that no matter what a white man

does to them, they must not resist. Hose, a servant, had killed Cranford, his employer [in self-defense]. An example must be made. Ordinary punishment was deemed inadequate. This Negro must be burned alive.”²²

British pastor Peter Thomas Stanford traveled to America in the 1890s to report on the state of American blacks, and asserted that the abuse of blacks under Jim Crow was among the most horrific human rights violations going on in the entire world. According to Stanford, some blacks were lynched for not knowing their place: “In the month of August, 1888, at New Iberia, Louisiana, ten Negroes were done to death for ‘being too prosperous, and not behaving correctly toward white people.’ Antonio Smith, Ramson Livingstone, Peter Simon, John Simon, Thomas Simon and Sam Kokee, all of them most respectable men and property owners, and four others whose names are not given, were butchered by a mob for no crime whatever.”²³

The widespread acceptance of lynching reflected the twisted moral values prevalent during the Jim Crow era. Lynchers boasted about their actions. Photographs of the horrifying spectacles were actually turned into postcards, which were sometimes delivered through the mails.

Most lynching victims were killed by hanging or bullets, but more barbarous methods were also used. Lynching victims were sometimes tortured before being killed. One famous photo depicts a thick black plume of smoke rising as John Lee was burned to death before a sizable crowd in the middle of the day, in Durant, Oklahoma, August 1911.

A black man accused of assaulting a three-year-old white girl was lynched in broad daylight in downtown Dallas in 1910. A mob of 200 or more stormed into the man’s trial, seized him, and strung him up from Elks Arch, a Dallas landmark.

Lynchings were frequently festive occasions. Another well-known lynching picture shows a crowd, including several women and girls, looking on, and even smiling, during a 1935 lynching in Ft. Lauderdale. “James Weldon Johnson captured the disconcerting tone of this photo when he described the epidemic of whites lynching blacks as a ‘problem of saving black America’s body and white America’s soul.’”²⁴

An “iconic” photo depicts the 1930 lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith in Marion, Indiana. The men had been accused falsely of raping a white woman, and a mob of 10,000 people broke down the jailhouse doors to get at the victims. The photo also records members of the crowd clearly enjoying themselves.

Lynching was the very antithesis of formal justice. A man, possibly a prison trustee, was lynched in 1960 in McDuffie County, Georgia. The ten-second “investigation” of this lynching by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation concluded he died by suicide.

The Ku Klux Klan

Jim Crow culture was enforced in part by local police, but the worst violence was perpetrated by unorganized mobs, often in white-instigated race riots, and by organized terror groups. The Ku Klux Klan was the largest and best known white supremacist organization operating during the Jim Crow era. While the Klan began as social club aping college fraternities, it quickly transformed into a full-fledged terror network. The Klan was primarily a collection of local groups. The first person recognized as the overall leader of the Klan, Confederate Lieutenant General Nathan Bedford Forrest, was named Grand Wizard of the Klan at an 1867 convention.²⁵ Forrest was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1868. In 1869, Forrest disbanded the central organization of the Klan, but the local branches continued to operate independently.

According to History.com, “Founded in 1866, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) extended into almost every southern state by 1870 and became a vehicle for white southern resistance to the Republican Party’s Reconstruction-era policies aimed at establishing political and economic equality for blacks. Its members waged an underground campaign of intimidation and violence directed at white and black Republican leaders. Though Congress passed legislation designed to curb Klan terrorism, the organization saw its primary goal—the reestablishment of white supremacy—fulfilled through Democratic victories in state legislatures across the South in the 1870s.”²⁶

The 1870s crackdown on the Klan effectively put an end to the Ku Klux Klan during the Reconstruction period, but the organization saw a nationwide resurgence in 1915, spurred in part by the release of the D.W. Griffith movie, *Birth of a Nation*.

According to History.com, “This second generation of the Klan was not only anti-black but also took a stand against Roman Catholics, Jews, foreigners and organized labor. It was fueled by growing hostility to the surge in immigration that America experienced in the early 20th century along with fears of communist revolution akin to the Bolshevik triumph in Russia in 1917. The organization took as its symbol a burning cross and held rallies, parades and marches around the country. At its peak in the 1920s, Klan membership exceeded four million people nationwide.”²⁷ The organization attained significant political influence in a handful of

states, but lost membership during the Great Depression in the 1930s. The second iteration of the Klan disbanded in 1944.

After the modern civil rights movement began in the mid-1950s, the Klan saw its third resurgence. Klansmen murdered several civil rights workers between 1955 and 1965, and infamously bombed the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963, killing four black girls. Rather than intimidate civil rights activists, the murders of the civil rights workers and innocent girls served only to turn public opinion against the Jim Crow system. The Klan never regained the influence it had in the 1920s. It continues to exist, but with only a few thousand members scattered around the country.