

Lynching is a form of mob violence that involves the ritualized torture and killing of a victim. The term has its roots in Revolutionary America with Colonel Charles Lynch of Virginia. Lynch had become upset with the lack of law and order in the western part of his state. Since the nearest trial court was over 200 miles away, Lynch and his associates formed an extra-legal court, with Lynch serving as the chief judge. Punishment usually entailed a whipping at the foot of a tree in the Colonel's yard.

Systematic use of lynching against African Americans did not become prevalent until after Reconstruction when Federal Government withdrawal enabled White Supremacists to regain control of the South. Southerners, who according to WEB Du Bois had originally looked to the criminal justice system as "a means of re-enslaving the blacks", became impatient with the legal process. In order to expedite "justice", lynch mobs stormed local jailhouses and seized their victims. Such victims were usually men who were waiting trial for murder, rape, or assault. Once they were in control of their victim, the mobs hung their prey and subjected him to a variety of additional punishments that might have included beating, whipping, dismembering, shooting, and burning. These events were usually public spectacles where observers wrangled over the body parts of the victim and photographs were taken to keep as souvenirs. Between 1880 and 1930 more than 3,200 African Americans were lynched in the South. At the height of the lynching crisis, 1892, 230 African Americans were lynched in a single year.

Historians who are interested in gaining more insight into the topic of lynching utilize numerous primary sources. It is the job of the historian to analyze multiple sources in an attempt to determine the truth about the past. You are assigned the task of investigating how individuals tried to change the accepted use of lynching as a method of intimidating African Americans.