

THE CROSS AND THE
LYNCHING TREE
BY
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1938-2018

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THE NATIONAL
MEMORIAL FOR
PEACE AND
JUSTICE IN
MONTGOMERY,
ALA.

SPRINGFIELD AND LA APRIL 1906

A crowd estimated at 6,000 (?) watched a lynch mob hang and burn three innocent young black men at the center of the Square in Springfield, Missouri, on Saturday night and early Easter Sunday morning, 1906.

The victims were Fred Coker, Horace B. Duncan, and William (Bill) Allen.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN# in Spfd: “Not only did the percentage drop, from 10% of the population to under 2% in the 1980s; There were fewer blacks in Springfield in the early 1980s than there were in 1905.”
(Joplin News – 2005).



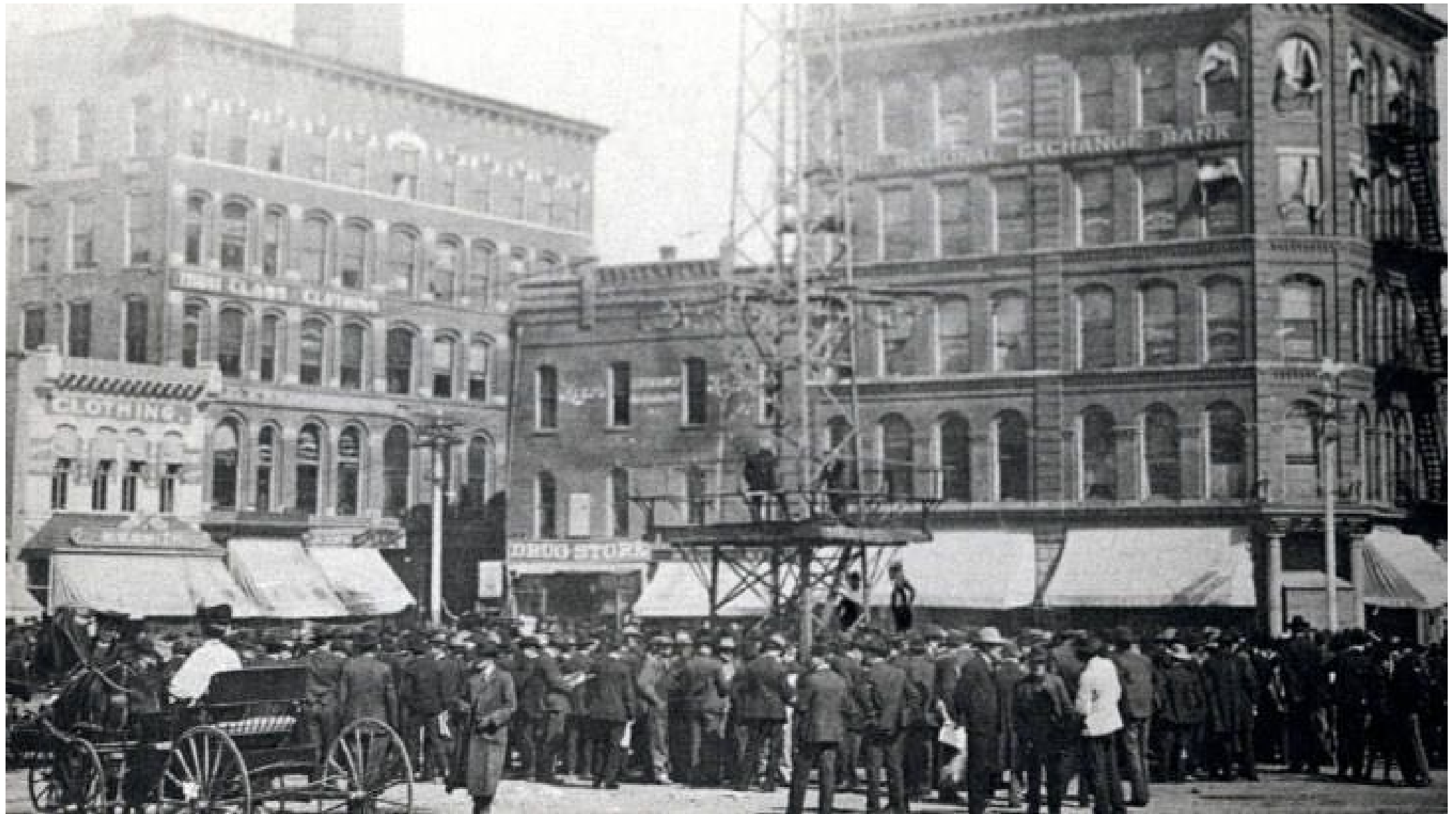
THE LYNCHINGS OF HORACE B. DUNCAN, FRED COKER, AND WILLIAM ALLEN

On Good Friday, April 13, 1906, Springfield and Greene County had a thriving population of African American professionals, business owners, and community leaders. By the early hours of Easter Sunday, the city had been overwhelmed by hate and violence because of a false allegation that two black men, Horace B. Duncan and Fred Coker, had assaulted a white woman. A lynch mob was formed, and the two men were taken to the city jail for their protection. A third young black man, William Allen, was already in the jail. The mob broke into the jail and took Mr. Duncan and Mr. Coker to the city square, where they were hanged from the Gottfried Tower - an iron structure topped with a replica of the Statue of Liberty. Not satisfied with lynching the two men, the mob returned to the jail and brought Mr. Allen to be lynched. By Easter Sunday morning, all that remained was a pile of ashes and the men's burned bodies. A crowd of thousands watched both public spectacle lynchings. Fearing further violence, many African Americans left the city, some never to return. After the lynching, a grand jury met and indicted eighteen men who were involved in the incident. One man was brought to trial, but no one was ever convicted of these murders.

EQUAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE
AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE TRAIL

2019

DOWNTOWN



In the "lynching era," between 1880 to 1940, white Christians lynched nearly five thousand black men and women in a manner with obvious echoes of the Roman crucifixion of Jesus. Yet these "Christians" did not see the irony or contradiction in their actions.

-James H. Cone

*The Cross and the Lynching Tree
in the Black Experience*

They put him to death by hanging him on a tree.

—Acts 10:39

Hundreds of kodaks clicked all morning at the scene of the lynching. People in automobiles and carriages came from miles around to view the corpse dangling from the end of a rope. . . . Picture card photographers installed a portable printing plant at the bridge and reaped a harvest in selling the postcard showing a photograph of the lynched Negro. Women and children were there by the score. At a number of country schools the day's routine was delayed until boy and girl pupils could get back from viewing the lynched man.

—*The Crisis* 10, no. 2, June 1915,
on the lynching of Thomas Brooks
in Fayette County, Tennessee

JAMES CONE

Opening Headline, pg. 1.

BLOOD AT THE ROOT

BY

RICHARD
LACAYO

TIME
JOURNALIST

There were two kinds of lynchings. At the "orderly" ones, local bankers and lawyers attended to keep the bloodlust in check. What that meant is merely that the victim was hanged without torture. At the wilder scenes, the crowd egged itself on into a frenzy beyond imagining. Before Sam Hose was doused with oil and set afire, he had his ears and fingers cut off and the skin stripped from his face. Jesse Washington, a retarded farm worker convicted of killing a white woman, was hung by a chain over a bonfire and repeatedly dipped into the flames.

At their worst, lynchings were episodes of sunlit municipal sadism. Newspapers announced the time and place in advance. Excursion trains were organized to move crowds to the scene. It was the Vicksburg Evening News that reported how Luther Holbert and his wife were burned to death by a crowd in Doddsville, Miss., in 1904. The couple were tortured with corkscrews that pulled out hunks of flesh. Their fingers were cut off, one by one, and distributed among the crowd as souvenirs. Mutilated flesh was racism's ultimate trophy.

Strange Fruit

As performed by Billie Holiday

*Southern trees bear strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees*

*Pastoral scene of the gallant south
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh*

*Here is fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop*

WHY WOULD THEY BELIEVE?

It has been a terrible mystery, to know why the good Lord should so long afflict my people, and keep them in bondage—to be abused, and trampled down, without any rights of their own—with no ray of light in the future. Some of my folks said there wasn't any God, for if there was, he wouldn't let white folks do as they do for so many years. I

Albert J. Raboteau in CLT 123

**WHY WOULD
THEY BELIEVE?**

Suffering naturally gives rise to doubt. How can one believe in God in the face of such horrendous suffering as slavery, segregation, and the lynching tree? Under these circumstances, doubt is not a denial but an integral part of faith. It keeps faith from being sure of itself. But doubt does not have the final word. The final word is faith giving rise to hope.

-James H. Cone

LANGSTON
HUGHES

*CHRIST IN
ALABAMA*

Christ is a Nigger,
Beaten and black--
O, bare your back.

Mary is His Mother
Mammy of the South,
Silence your Mouth.

God's His Father--
White Master above
Grant us your love.

Most holy bastard
Of the bleeding
mouth:

Nigger Christ
On the cross of the
South.

Cone presents the reason for African-American hope in the midst of hellacious suffering of the lynching tree era, by clinging to the cross of Christ. Both the lynching tree and the cross became symbols that evoked deep emotional responses as a result of such terrible suffering at the hands of white supremacists.

Music became an outlet and avenue for blacks to affirm their humanity during great pain.

The church provided a way for hope to be found, as the cross is the ultimate symbol of God defeating the power of sin and death.

Because Jesus suffered on the cross, blacks who suffered knew that God was not distant from the hanging bodies on the trees, for Christ himself hung on a tree.

The pursuit of justice, for the change of social structures that fostered the notion of white supremacy and oppressed blacks, was fueled with the fire that came of knowing that Christ was crucified.





**The blood of the martyrs is
the seed of the church.**

Tertullian

WHAT DO
THESE WORDS
MEAN?

LISTEN AGAIN.

- “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” (Mt 26:39)
-
- “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?
My God, I cry out by day, but you do not
answer, by night, but I find no rest.” (Ps. 22:1-2)
 - “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.” Ps. 23:4)

HEBREWS

- 6:6 They crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.
- 13:1-3 Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.

I PETER 2

- ¹⁸ Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹ For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.
- ²² “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”
- ²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” ²⁵ For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

MORE...

**“This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:
“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb
before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.
In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can
speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the
earth.” (Acts 8:32-33)**

RESPONSES TO CONE

- THE RECASTING OF THE LYNCHING TREE
 - VIOLENCE, POLICING, INCARCERATION, DEATH PENALTY
- SCRIPTURE... (Horizons).
- GRIEF
- ANGER
- REPENTANCE
- INSPIRATION
 - Listen. Read. View. African American literature, art, music, testimonies.