

Voices on Being Black in America in the 1920s and 1930s

Name: _____ Date: _____ Hour: _____

Lynching in America, ca. 1926

FOR THE GOOD OF AMERICA

Do you know that the United States is
the Only Land on Earth where human
beings are BURNED AT THE STAKE?

In Four Years, 1918-1921, Twenty-Eight People were publicly
BURNED BY AMERICAN MOBS

3436 People Lynched, 1889 to 1922

For What Crimes Have Mobs Nullified Government and Inflicted the Death Penalty?

The Alleged Crime	The Victim	Why Some Mob Victims Died
Murder	1208	Not having out of coat for white boy to enter
Rape	571	Being a relative of a person who was lynched
Crimes against the Person	615	Jumping a labor contract
Crimes against Property	323	Being a member of the New-Partisan League
Miscellaneous Crimes	493	"Talking back" to a white man
Absence of Crime	178	"Insulting" white men
	3436	

Is Rape the "Cause" of Lynching? . . .

Of 3436 people murdered by mobs in our country, only 571, or less than 17 per cent., were even accused of the crime of rape.

83 WOMEN HAVE BEEN LYNCHED IN THE UNITED STATES

Two lynchings estimate that they were lynched for "the usual crime!"

AND THE LYNCHERS GO UNPUNISHED

There were four lynchings in eight days after the failure to pass the Dyer Anti-Lynching bill. One of the victims being publicly burned at the stake.

TO MAINTAIN CIVILIZATION IN AMERICA
AND FOR THE GOOD NAME OF THE NATION
BEFORE THE WORLD

YOU

CANNOT ESCAPE YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

Will You Not at Least Aid the Organization Which Has
Been Fighting for Ten Years to Wipe Out Our Shame?

The Gilder Lehrman Collection

Send your checks to J. E. SPINGLARD, Treasurer of the
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE
79 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY

NAACP, "For the Good of America" broadside, ca. 1926. (Gilder Lehrman Collection)

The number of violent acts against African Americans accelerated during the first quarter of the twentieth century. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began

compiling lynching statistics in 1912, thirty years after the *Chicago Tribune* and twenty years after the Tuskegee Institute started tracking such crimes. In November 1922, the NAACP ran full page ads in newspapers pressing for the passage of the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill. Entitled "The Shame of America," the ad laid out the shocking statistics of lynching from 1899 through 1922. The bill was passed by a two-to-one majority in the House of Representatives but was defeated in the Senate. A few years later, the NAACP issued the statistics as a broadside. Entitled "For the Good of America," it encouraged citizens to "aid the organization which has been fighting for ten years to wipe out our shame." Despite the NAACP's vigorous efforts through the 1930s and the introduction of several subsequent bills, the US Congress did not outlaw lynching until 2023.

1. Why was it impossible to pass a law in Congress to outlaw lynching in the 1920s? Choose the answer supported by the document.
 - a. Because the KKK was actively protesting the U.S. government.
 - b. Because even if it passed in the U.S. House of Representatives, it was blocked in the U.S. Senate until 2023.
 - c. Because even if it passed the U.S. Senate, it was blocked in the U.S. House of Representatives until 2023.
 - d. Because, according to the document, lynching was "Good for America."
2. TRUE or FALSE: According to the document, women were not the victims of lynching.
 - a. True
 - b. False
3. According to the document, WHO cannot escape the responsibility to do something about lynchings in America? Use the document to answer this question.
 - a. The NAACP
 - b. Congress
 - c. The KKK
 - d. You

Strange Fruit

In 1937 [Abe Meeropol](#), a Jewish schoolteacher from [New York](#), saw a photograph of the [lynching](#) of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith. Meeropol later recalled how the photograph "haunted me for days" and inspired the writing of the poem, *Strange Fruit*. Meeropol, a member of the [American Communist Party](#), using the pseudonym, Lewis Allan, published the poem in the *New York Teacher* and later, the Marxist journal, [New Masses](#).



After seeing [Billie Holiday](#) perform at the club, [Café Society](#), in [New York City](#), Meeropol showed her the poem. Holiday liked it and after working on it with [Sonny White](#) turned the poem into the song, Strange Fruit. The record made it to No. 16 on the charts in July 1939. However, the song was denounced by [Time Magazine](#) as "a prime piece of musical propaganda" for the [National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People](#) (NAACP).

Meeropol remained active in the [American Communist Party](#) and after the execution of [Ethel Rosenberg](#) and [Julius Rosenberg](#) he adopted their two sons, [Michael Meeropol](#) and [Robert Meeropol](#). He taught at the De Witt Clinton High School in the Bronx for 27 years, but continued to write songs, including the Frank Sinatra hit, The House I Live In.

Billie Holiday usually ended her set with the song as it was an emotional experience for her every time. Her father, she felt, had been lynched. He was denied treatment at a hospital because he was black and later died because of it. She never forgot.



Rubin Stacy, lynched in Fort Lauderdale on 19th July, 1935

Strange Fruit: Written by Abel Meerpool and performed by Billie Holiday

*Southern trees bear strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black body 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 magnolia 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.*

[Click Here to watch Billie Holiday perform Strange Fruit in 1959.](#)

4. Which of the following quotes does NOT include information about the setting/location?
 - a. Pastoral scene of the gallant South
 - b. Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh
 - c. Southern trees bear strange fruit
 - d. Here is a strange and bitter crop

5. From the text, which quote identifies the “strange fruit?”
 - a. Black body swinging in the Southern breeze
 - b. Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
 - c. Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh
 - d. Here is the fruit for the crows to pluck

6. Which quote from the text does not connect to actual fruit? This is a question about metaphors.
 - a. The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
 - b. Here is the fruit for the crows to pluck
 - c. Then the smell of burning flesh
 - d. Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees

7. Connect the documents provided here to events today. Do lynchings still occur in America? Explain your answer including evidence from the documents.

The Harlem Renaissance

The “Harlem Renaissance” of the 1920s and 1930s produced an extraordinary group of black writers and artists. There were the novelists Zora Neale Hurston and Nella Larsen, the painters Jacob Lawrence and Aaron Douglas, the poets Gwendolyn Bennett, Claude McKay, and Countee Cullen, and many others. One of the most challenging of these voices was that of poet Langston Hughes, who speaks in these two poems of the social conditions of African Americans, the poor, the working

people. Hughes captures the feeling of being “damn tired” of waiting for rescue from the political leadership of the country.

Langston Hughes was the primary voice of the Harlem Renaissance, a rebirth of African American culture that took place in Harlem, a borough of New York City, in the 1920s. Hughes was known as “The Poet Laureate of Harlem.” Hughes and others used social, political and religious aspects of African American experiences as outlets for their poetic expression. The jazz and blues clubs of Harlem provided the backdrop for African American writers and entertainers who attempted to instill cultural pride and raise the social conscience of African Americans.

“Ballad of the Landlord” (1940)* ” ~ **Langston Hughes**

Landlord, landlord

My roof has sprung a leak

Don't you 'member I told you about it

Way last week?

Landlord, landlord,

These steps is broken down.

When you come up yourself
It's a wonder you don't fall down.

Ten Bucks you say I owe you?

Ten Bucks you say is due?

Well, that's Ten Bucks more'n I'll pay you
Till you fix this house up new.

What? You gonna get eviction orders?

You gonna cut off my heat?

You gonna take my furniture and
Throw it in the street?

Um-huh! You talking high and mighty.
Talk on — till you get through.

You ain't gonna be able to say a word

If I land my fist on you.

Police! Police!

Come and get this man !

He's trying to ruin the government
And overturn the land!

Coppers whistle!

Patrol bell!

Arrest.

Precinct Station
Iron cell.

Headlines in press:

MAN THREATENS LANDLORD

--

TENANT HELD NO BAIL

--

JUDGE GIVES NEGRO 90 DAYS IN COUNTY JAIL.

8. Which of the following best describes the tone of the speaker towards their landlord?
- A) Gratefulness
 - B) Anger
 - C) Empathy
 - D) Appreciation
9. What does the speaker's request for the police and their reference to headlines imply about their situation?
- A) The speaker believes the landlord is a threat to society.
 - B) The speaker wants to avoid any trouble with the landlord.
 - C) The speaker wants to report their landlord for mistreatment.
 - D) The speaker feels unsafe and seeks protection.
10. What can be inferred about the speaker's socio-economic background from the passage?
- A) They come from a wealthy family.
 - B) They have a history of criminal behavior.
 - C) They are facing financial difficulties.
 - D) They are recognized as a community leader.