

Lesson Four

Objectives:

- Students will use resources at Mark Twain's Mississippi web site, as well as other web sites.
- Students will focus on understanding an historical interpretation and use additional sources to contextualize and evaluate it.
- Students will appreciate the social, economic, and political context of lynching in American history and its continuing relevance in contemporary discussions of race.
- Students will write a newspaper editorial either supporting or opposing the Costigan-Wagner anti-lynching bill of 1935.

Notes on the Lesson:

This lesson is intended for history classes that have access to computers during class time so students can read the sources and view the video clips.

Materials Needed:

<http://englishclassnet.files.wordpress.com/2008/01/lynching.jpg>

* picture of a lynching

<http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/file.php?file=ibwred.html>

A Red Record. Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States, 1892-1893-1894. Respectfully Submitted to the Nineteenth Century Civilization in 'the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave.' Chicago: Donohue and Henneberry, 1895.

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USALynching.htm>

* historical background article on lynching and brief sources on lynching

<http://dig.lib.niu.edu/gildedage/video.html>

* video clips of Prof. Patricia Schechter discussing work of Ida B. Wells

* *Ida B. Wells: Triple Murder*

* *Ida B. Wells: Response to Lynching*

Time Required:

Two 50-minute class periods will be needed and perhaps some time as homework writing the newspaper editorial.

Introduction:

During the Reconstruction period and after, whites used mob violence to deprive African-Americans of their civil rights. Such violence focused on lynching, an extra-legal form of torture and execution designed to intimidate black communities and punish perceived

violations of racial boundaries. Ida B. Wells, a black reformer living in the 1890s in Memphis, spoke out and wrote against lynching. Nonetheless, the practice continued well into the twentieth century and came to symbolize continuing racial inequality. In this lesson, students will examine Wells's analysis of lynching, evaluate it next to other sources, and articulate the importance of lynching in framing racial attitudes.

Assignment:

1. Project the image of lynching for students and ask them to write down 3-4 things they see. Focus student attention on the following: A) mob action, B) celebratory and ritualized nature, C) involvement of the whole community, D) openness and even pride in the act, E) racial attitudes suggested.

2. Based on the schoolnet site, provide brief background on the importance of lynching in the post-Civil War period as it relates to race, civil rights, and politics. Teachers may also wish to use statistics from the Wells article to demonstrate the prevalence of lynching.

3. Teachers will divide students into groups of 3-4 and have them read through as much of the Wells account (see web site above) as they can in the remainder of the class period, focusing on Chapters IV-VI. As students read, they should attempt to answer the questions from the attached worksheets as a group.

4. For homework, teachers should have students access the schoolnet site, read through the sources, and answer the questions on the worksheet.

5. To begin class, teachers may wish to show the two video clips of Patricia Schechter from the Mark Twain Mississippi site and then lead a discussion on the following questions:

- How does Schechter portray Memphis after the Civil War?
- What economic and social conditions did blacks face at the turn of the century?
- Why did Wells see lynching as a significant issue for African-Americans?
- What impact did Wells's efforts against lynching have on her life?
- To what extent and in what ways do the schoolnet sources support both Wells's account and Schechter's interpretation?

6. To conclude the lesson, teachers might explain that several anti-lynching laws were (see schoolnet site) proposed during the Great Depression in the United States, such as the Costigan-Wagner Bill. Have students write a brief newspaper editorial explaining why such a federal law is or is not necessary to combat lynching and/or racial inequality. Depending on the level of class, instructors might wish to use the attached template to guide students.

Lesson Four: Ida B. Wells and Lynching
Worksheet

1. Identify 3-4 elements that seem to be part of the ritualized violence of lynchings that Wells describes.

2. What rationalizations or reasons does Wells survey that are used to justify lynchings?

3. How does Wells explain the prevalence of lynchings in the South during this period (1890s)?

4. When reading through the schoolnet site, list the arguments that seem to support and those that seem to oppose Wells's explanations for lynchings.

<u>Support</u>	<u>Oppose</u>

Lesson Four: Ida B. Wells and Lynching
Editorial Template

1. **Select a "hook" for your piece (a quote, story, anecdote, statistic, or interesting fact).**
2. **Identify 3-4 reasons in support of your position. These should be logical, clear, and consistent.**
3. **Devise 1-2 rhetorical points or themes. These should be words, ideas, or symbols that motivate readers emotionally (such as "liberty," "American Dream," "equal rights," etc.).**
4. **Now write a one-paragraph editorial either supporting or opposing national anti-lynching laws.**