



What has the film accomplished?

- Starting with a Smithsonian premiere in March 2017, through **73 screenings in 25 states—reaching more than 4,600 people**, with more screenings planned for this year and next—*An Outrage* has spurred conversation coast-to-coast about America’s history of racial violence.
- The Southern Poverty Law Center’s Teaching Tolerance project has deployed the film and a companion curriculum to **500,000 teachers** at no cost.
- **College professors and students**, and patrons of the **nation’s 200 largest public library systems**, have free access to the film through the streaming platform Kanopy.
- With support from **Virginia Humanities**, we’re collaborating with Prince William County Library to adapt the Teaching Tolerance curriculum for use as a **community discussion guide**.

What have we seen?

Our audiences tend to be integrated, but their experiences frequently are not. We’ve discovered a wide gap in understandings about American history often defined by race.

Many African American audience members have told us that they learned the history of lynching when they were children, listening to parents and elders talk to each other—or speaking to their kids, in warning tones—about the dangers of being black in America. Many of these same viewers have applauded the film’s unflinching exposure of truths far outside of mainstream narratives of American history. Indeed, a great many of our white audience members have expressed shock at the scale and disgusting diversity of lynching. Nearly all white audience members who have spoken up noted being generally aware of lynching, but most told us that they didn’t know it was nearly so widespread and consequential.

This non-mutual understanding of the past is toxic to collaboratively building a future defined by unity. Yet in airing such different perspectives in a shared space, audience members have started a process of dialogue around truth that could lead to cooperation.

What can be done? What’s already being done?

Two arenas present **opportunities to productively confront** this ugly past:

- The **public memorial landscape is largely bereft of markers and monuments acknowledging lynchings**. In a nation with 1,740 Lost Cause-era Confederate monuments—not including the 113 removed since the 2015 massacre of nine African American worshippers at Charleston’s Mother

Emanuel Church—even mere markers at lynching sites are exceedingly rare. **Yet in places where community members have drawn together to confront and mark this past, things are changing.** Much, much more needs to change, even in the most reflective of communities where lynchings took place. But conversation, education, and activism have different tones in places like Charlottesville and Memphis, where two of the most robust initiatives to reveal the history of racial violence have taken root. Now, as staffers of the Historical Highway Marker program prepare an effort to mark sites in the Commonwealth associated with lynchings, **we should look to leaders in these communities for guidance** on how individual cities, towns, and counties can confront the past without fearing the loss of their future.

- **History and social studies standards nationwide omit racial violence as a key theme of the American past.** Yet racial violence is an American tradition. Starting with the enslavement of people taken from West Africa and brought to Virginia's Point Comfort in 1619, continuing through 256 years of slavery, the terrorism of lynching, the innumerable indignities and oppressions of Jim Crow, and still today in the form of unchecked violence against African American people, the safety of black bodies in the United States has always been at risk. In the years after the Civil War, when constitutional amendments promised equal protection of the law for all citizens, more than 4,000 African Americans were murdered and their deaths never prosecuted. **In 2022, as mandated by the General Assembly, Virginia Standards of Learning will be reviewed—and the history and social studies standards ought to reflect these realities.** Initiatives such as the Southern Poverty Law Center's recently released curriculum framework, "Teaching Hard History: American Slavery," demonstrate how an accurate, expansive narrative of US history designed for students can complement state standards and help to develop informed citizens who fight racism and embrace inclusion.

The MLK Commission—charged with developing programming to further the philosophy of Dr. King, monitoring education around the histories of people of color, and facilitating analysis of policy embracing King's principles—could and should **encourage the organizing of public events around effective and accurate public memorialization** and the **establishment of teaching standards** that reflect a history integral to the American past and deeply embedded in its present.

When Dr. King stood before the Lincoln Memorial in 1963, he invoked the language of debt and obligation. King argued that when the Founders "wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir." He continued: "It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned." His audience knew that King's "dream" was long deferred, and lynching a significant part of the debt. That debt has roots across the country, especially in the South and certainly in Virginia.

Our Commonwealth is at once typical and exceptional: it's a state with demographics and political persuasions symmetrical with the nation as a whole, yet with thought leaders, public historians, and reformers who are true path-breakers. In confronting the hardest parts of our history, Virginia could continue to surprise and lead the country, demonstrating a thoughtful, inclusive approach to facing the fullness of our past — showing the way to speak truths long hushed.