

Racial Terror: Lynching in Virginia, 1877-1927

Racial Terror: Lynching in Virginia, 1877-1927 is an ongoing research project examining one of the darkest, yet almost forgotten, pages of American history: the lynching of thousands of people between the end of Reconstruction and the 1930s in the US South. In particular, this website focuses on telling the stories of all the 104 known lynching victims who were killed in Virginia between 1877 and 1927, most of them African American men. Even though a small number of the victims of mob violence were white, lynching was essentially a form of state-sanctioned terrorism against African Americans – almost none of the lynchers ever faced trial, and even fewer were indicted for their crimes. Lynching was indeed a key institution in the preservation of white supremacy in the Jim Crow South.

In addition to telling the stories of lynching that so often have been erased from local histories and collective memories, this website also stores more than 500 historical newspaper articles describing those barbaric acts of ‘popular justice’. These articles are available for anyone to read and use for their own research. A map of Virginia is also provided to display where each lynching occurred.

As this project is a work in progress, the website will be periodically updated with more information, sources, tools to explore the database, as well as in-depth investigations of single lynchings and analysis of geographical, temporal and sociological patterns of racial violence in Virginia.

About the Project

This project is the result of a collective research effort led by Gianluca De Fazio, assistant professor in the Department of Justice Studies at James Madison University. Gianluca initially devised the Lynching in Virginia project as a data collection effort, as well as a pedagogical tool for his Justice Studies students. In particular, he intended to build a website where all lynching stories could be told and disseminated to students, researchers and the general public. Gianluca thus designed and taught an Advanced Research course (JUST402) in the Spring of 2017. Under his supervision, senior students actively participated in the process of collecting and organizing hundreds of articles from historical Virginia newspapers, detailing all the known lynchings that occurred in the

Commonwealth between 1877 and 1927. In addition to updating the current available information on lynchings in Virginia, Gianluca also revised and finalized the posts narrating each lynching.

Kevin Hegg, Director of Digital Projects (within Libraries & Educational Technologies) at JMU, made it possible to transform this research project into a digital project. Since the very beginning of the project in the Spring of 2016, Kevin planned most of the website functions, designed the relational features of the database and its implementation throughout the website. With the help of LET Graduate Assistant Caroline Hamby, Kevin managed the upload of hundreds of newspaper articles and created the lynching map.

In the Fall of 2016, Zeyu Ju helped set up the relational database portion of this website. During the Spring semester of 2017, senior students in the JUST402 Advanced Research course – Olivia Azrak, Azuree Bowman, James Cihak, Samantha Dyer, Catherine Hill and Paul Skudlarek – searched, collected and helped to organize hundreds of historical newspaper articles on lynching by using the Chronicling America website and other archival resources. They also wrote the first draft of the narratives for each lynching victim and helped to locate where those lynchings took place. Social sciences librarian Howard Carrier assisted students to identify suitable newspaper sources for this project and trained them to conduct online archival research. As a teaching and research assistant in the Spring and Summer of 2017, Daroon Jalil coordinated the JUST402 students' research assignments, helped with data cleaning and with finding the geolocation of each lynching event.

This project was in part funded by a Faculty Diversity Curriculum Development Grant awarded by JMU's Office of the Provost and by a Faculty Summer Research Grant awarded by JMU's College of Liberal Arts.

For any inquiries about the project, please contact Gianluca De Fazio (defazigx@jmu.edu).