

Ever since the 13th amendment freed over four million enslaved Black people in the United States, white people have found ways to relentlessly terrify, harass, and torture Black people. Post-slavery, Black people have suffered because of inadequate financial restorations, problematic voting laws and tests, and inexcusably poor access to good education, good health benefits, and good jobs. But none of these injustices compare to the brutal, hideous acts of lynching. The NAACP's definition for lynching is "the violent public acts that white people used to terrorize and control Black people in the 19th and 20th centuries, particularly in the South." Lynchings could vary in terms of violence, like hanging, burning alive, torture, mutilation, decapitation, and desecration. Despite the moral knowledge that lynching itself was atrocious, white people presented the murders as an appropriate response to crimes allegedly committed by the person to be lynched; and the allegations of said crimes were almost always reported by white people themselves.

Perhaps the most famous charge was fourteen-year-old Emmett Till mutilated and killed for *allegedly whistling at a white woman*. White women and girls regularly accused Black men and boys of rape, making Black males seem like 'overpowering sexual predators.' The charges that Black people faced could be anything between murder, arson, robbery, and vagrancy to miniscule irritants like violating contracts, unpopularity, and even "shooting at rabbits." Essentially, a white person could cause a Black person to be lynched for any reason as long as the allegations provoked enough outrage in the white community to act justified in the lynching. It made white people feel comfortable with the idea that Black people somehow *deserved to be lynched*.

To be clear: *No, they don't.*

Sometimes it's easier - not that any of this is easy - to learn about difficult events when we take a first-person experience. Take for instance, Joseph McCoy. In 1897, Joseph was a nineteen-year-old Black teenager in Alexandria, Virginia. He had four siblings, Harriet, Charles, Rachel, and Samuel Jr, himself being the youngest, and his parents were Samuel Chase and Ann McCoy. But Ann soon died, so Joseph and his siblings spent the majority of their childhoods with their grandmother Cecelia McCoy who lived down the street from their father. From a young age, Joseph learned to be a resourceful and hardworking person by working as a domestic servant for the Lacy family, until Richard Lacy accused him of assaulting his daughters. Joseph McCoy was arrested despite *sixteen years of faithful service*, and not even the next day was dragged from his cell by a white mob and lynched.

Being accused of a crime one did not commit, and killed extralegally in Alexandria, Virginia wasn't as rare as it seems. Only two years after McCoy's lynching, sixteen-year-old Benjamin Thomas died at the hands of a white mob, accused of sexually assaulting an eight-year-old Lilly Clark. This time, fellow Black citizens tried to protect him. On the night of his allegations, some Black Alexandrians went to the authorities and warned the police that a lynching might occur. They were ignored, so they took it upon themselves to stand guard where Benjamin was being held. The police arrested them and the defenders were "tried, fined, and sent to the chain gang" as reported by Alexandria's own memorial site for the two boys. Though the

Black community was brave, they could not avoid the incredibly unjust result of systemic Black racism.

Lynching spread heinous lies, perpetuating the belief that Black men were rapists or murderers. If a Black man was arrested and lynched for raping a white woman, very soon there would be a rumor that *all* Black men were rapists. Those ideologies, would fuel the next accusation of a white woman to a Black man - a never ending cycle of deadly stereotypes and stigmas.

That cycle continues today, where police brutality has replaced lynching as another way to undermine the success of Black people and retain supremacy. Mapping Police Violence, a research organization dedicated to providing a comprehensive number of police-related deaths in the United States, reported that at least 274 Black people died in 2022 at the hands of the police. Of these, three cases prosecuting the police officers were won. So if a Black person was fatally shot by a police officer in the United States, there would be *a hundredth of a percent* chance that that person would be avenged. One percent of one percent.

Pause. Let's stop talking about statistics for a second.

I've tried to separate my opinions from this topic - it's not my white, privileged voice that needs to be heard crying for justice for the Black community. But I would like to say this: I don't think police brutality is going away anytime soon. There are always going to be people who feel justified in the suffering of others for personal gain, and too many of those people are in positions of power now. Yes, now we honor the memories of the victims of lynching. Yes, now we protest for the lives taken by the police, even though we are scared. But if we have any hopes of protecting Black people from police brutality, today's lynchings, then it starts with confronting those biases. We need classes for police officers to differentiate real from perceived threats, more conversations about lynching especially in white households, and most of all, a world where there is no more death for the sake of unadulterated hate.

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