

Good

(2)

David Garland's article, "Penal Excess and Surplus Meaning Public Torture Lynchings in 20<sup>th</sup> Century America" exemplified blatant racism and lawlessness which has taken place in our country. Garland's article which discussed lynchings, showed how bigotry tightly coincided with lawlessness in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. White racists were able to take justice into their own hands and apply illicit punishments to blacks who had violated the law. These illicit punishments were often done in the form of lynchings. The lynchings were generally either ignored or approved by public officials. Although lynchings were essentially eliminated in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the issue of public officials facilitating racist crimes is far from over. There have been many contemporary incidents where racism and law have been closely connected. These incidents are ubiquitous throughout our society and are impeding our nation's long journey to achieve full equality.

David Garland made note of the fact that people who participated in lynching during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century America were essentially immune from punishment. He stated, "...lynchers' conduct was usually regarded with broad approval by large sections of the Communities in which the lynchings occurred, and it was tolerated (and often applauded) by local politicians and law officers<sup>1</sup>". Eventually legal efforts were made to constrain these lynchings, and they basically stopped after WWII. Nevertheless, political racism did not stop. A prime example of racism amongst public officials was the 1979 Greensboro Massacre. This massacre which was conducted by the KKK targeted blacks

---

<sup>1</sup> Garland, David, "Penal Excess and Surplus Meaning Public Torture Lynchings in 20<sup>th</sup> Century America", Law and Society Review, Vol. 39 Dec. 2005

and members of the Communists Workers Party. It is evident that local officials were well aware that the massacre was going to take place and purposefully were absent from the scene so that the massacre could be done successfully<sup>2</sup>. In spite of the fact that lynchings were eliminated from our society, it seems that bigotry among law officials is clearly still present.

David Garland's article showed that lynchings were often conducted to hinder African Americans efforts to move forward. Racists used lynching as a way to overcome progressions that were being implemented to further racial equality. By gruesomely lynching African Americans, they were sending a message to all blacks that the white race was still superior. I believe that this idea of burdening African American's progress by initiating racist activities is still very prevalent today. Recently there have been multiple efforts by the government to progress racial equality including affirmative action and the assimilation of blacks and whites in public schools. Even so, there have also been many incidents of strong racism within our country. This racism seems significantly evident in America's judicial system. One source stated that in the age group of twenty to thirty four, 12 percent of African Americans in America are currently incarcerated versus 1.6 percent of white men<sup>3</sup>. These figures suggest that African Americans are still being treated partially by the law. I contend that the motive of modern racism is similar to the motives behind the lynchings. Racism towards blacks hurts their efforts to move forward, and in turn pleases those who have a bias against them.

---

<sup>2</sup> Unknown Author, *Through Survivors Eyes* (Amherst, Ma.: Collective Copies, Edited by Thomas Hilbink Spring 2005)

<sup>3</sup> Bruner, Jerome, *Do Not Pass Go* (Amherst, Ma.: Collective Copies, Edited by Thomas Hilbink Spring 2005)



The lynchings which were done in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were gruesome and unequivocally racist. Unfortunately, racism still today haunts our nation. The U.S government has initiated movements which are attempting to perpetuate equality in America, yet (comparable to the time of the lynchings) these efforts are impeded by racism. It is clear that in order for the U.S to successfully move forward on the issue of racial equality we need to move past the days of the lynchings, and eliminate racism from society.