

reckoning with the truth

Racial Terror in Orange County

An Information List for Further Learning

Compiled by Orange County Public Library

Understanding history requires ongoing action on the part of individuals and communities. It requires a willingness to learn about events and examine them without omission or the lenses of romanticism and toxic nostalgia. It requires consideration of how an event has affected people, systems, and ideas about how or world does and should work and what we can learn from those things. It requires that we revisit histories as we grow, change, and create new generations because our understandings will also grow and change. What follows is a list of resources containing information that can help along the path to achieve those goals with regard to Reckoning with the Truth of Racial Terror in Orange County, North Carolina.



What is lynching?

- A reference entry on [the word “lynching” from Encyclopedia Britannica](#)
- [Lynching and the Excuse for It](#), a 1901 article by Ida B. Wells-Barnett, reproduced and hosted online by Encyclopedia Britannica
- The last recording lynching in the United States was in 1981, however lynchings have never truly stopped in the US according to a 2021 report by the Washington Post. The Posts’ article is not free to view, but it is summarized and discussed:
 - in a paywall-free [summary of that article via theGrio and Yahoo! News](#); and
 - in a fewer than 8 minutes [video by theGriot Politics](#)
- Lynching also [takes place in the present utilizing means that don’t require a rope](#) as explained in a 2020 CNN article, *America’s legacy of lynching isn’t all history. Many say it’s still happening today*

The History of Lynching in the United States, in North Carolina, and in Orange County

- [A short history of lynching in the US](#) by the NAACP
- [Lynching in the US discussed as part of a larger discussion on the Murder of Emmett Till](#) by American Experience on PBS
- [Lynching in North Carolina: A History, 1865-1941](#) by Vann R. Newkirk | [Copies have been purchased for Orange County Public Library](#)
 - Synopsis | From the end of the Civil War through 1941, there were 168 North Carolinians who lost their lives to lynching. This form of mob violence was often justified as a means of controlling the Black population...After 1922, however, in a phenomenon unique to North Carolina, incidents of lynching inexplicably and rapidly declined, prompting the state to head a national movement to end it. Appendices provide an account of all 168 known lynching occurrences.
- [Troubled Ground: A Tale of Murder, Lynching, and Reckoning in the New South](#) by Claude A. Clegg | [This book and eBook available at Orange County Public Library](#)
 - Synopsis | Three Black men were killed in Salisbury, NC, in 1906 following the ax murder of the white family for whom the men worked. One of the lynchers was later prosecuted for his role in the execution, the first conviction of its kind in NC and one of the earliest in the country. In this book, Clegg mines records to reveal a complex history of lynching in the area and the determination of the city to rid its history of a shameful and shocking chapter. The result is a multi-layered, deeply personal exploration of lynching and lynching prosecutions in the US.

Lynching as Spectacle

Lynching was frequently used as a form of entertainment, with families gathering with children to witness murder and photographs being taken which were monetized and sold as mementos or postcards to be sent in the mail.

- **A short description** of this practice by Equal Justice Initiative
- ***Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*** is a museum exhibit hosted at [withoutsanctuary\(dot\)org](http://withoutsanctuary.org). **Content Warning:** Bearing witness to history, even in its gruesomeness, is crucial to understanding it. However, imagery can be haunting and evocative. The images make up the *Without Sanctuary* exhibit are incredibly graphic and disturbing. The web address to this photo collection has been purposely left unlinked (using “dot” in parentheses to prevent the link from becoming live) so that viewers of this document won’t be taken to the site by accident.
- ***Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940*** by **Amy Louise Wood** | [This book available at Orange County Public Library via Interlibrary Loan from UNC’s Davis Library](#)
 - Synopsis | Lynch mobs in late 19th and early 20th century US exacted horrifying public torture and mutilation on their victims. In *Lynching and Spectacle*, Amy Wood explains what it meant for white Americans to perform and witness these sadistic spectacles and how lynching played a role in establishing and affirming white supremacy.

Finding Victims of Lynching

There are several inventories of US lynching victims. Below are some commonly used sources.

- ***Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930*** by **Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck** | This inventory is considered the most comprehensive of lynchings in the US South, created using local and national newspapers accounts. [This inventory is available on the Center for Studies in Demography and Ecology, University of Washington, Lynching Database website.](#)
- ***National Crimes: A New National Data Set of Lynchings in the United States, 1883 to 1941*** by **Charles Seguin and David Rigby** | This dataset extends beyond the states covered by the Tolnay-Beck inventory and includes the 48 contiguous states up to 1941. [A map including information from this inventory is available at charlieseguine.com](#)
- ***Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror***, Third Ed. by **Equal Justice Initiative** | This includes an inventory of 3,959 victims of racial terror lynchings in 12 Southern states from 1877 to 1950. [The full report is available at eji.org](#)
- ***A Red Record: Revealing Lynching Sites in North Carolina*** is a UNC undertaking to document lynchings in the American South, starting with North Carolina. [Information about this project can be found on the Red Record website hosted by UNC.](#)

Honoring Lynching Victims and Telling Their Stories

Equal Justice Initiative is a nonprofit organization committed to ending mass incarceration and excessive punishment in the US through a number of legal, research, memorial, and education programs. Among its many works, EJI supports and engages in the creation of new spaces, markers, and memorials that address the legacies of slavery, lynching, and racial segregation, which shapes many issues today. The listing below details some efforts that EJI has put toward honoring victims of lynching and telling their stories.

- **The National Memorial for Peace and Justice** is a memorial commemorating lynching victims in the US in downtown Montgomery, Alabama founded by Equal Justice Initiative. The National Memorial is a sacred space for truth telling and reflection about racial terrorism and its legacy. More than 4,400 Black people killed in racial terror lynchings between 1877 and 1950 are remembered here. Their names are engraved on more than 800 corten steel monuments—one for each county where a racial terror lynching took place—that form the main structure of the memorial at the heart of this six-acre site.
- **Equal Justice Initiative's Community Remembrance Project** supports local memorialization of documented victims of racial violence and to educate communities about the history of racial injustice.

Understanding Trauma Associated with Racial Terror

Racial terror can create more than one type of trauma in individuals exposed to it and can negatively affect a person biologically, socially, mentally, and emotionally. Trauma can also be passed down through generations.

- **The differences between collective, historical, and generational traumas** (also known as intergenerational trauma or transgenerational trauma) briefly explained by Care Counseling
- **The effects of transgenerational trauma on families by BetterUp**
- ***The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* by Bessel van der Kolk** | [This book and eBook available at Orange County Public Library](#)
 - Synopsis | In *The Body Keeps the Score*, recent scientific advances to show how trauma literally reshapes both body and brain and exposes the tremendous power of our relationships both to hurt and to heal.
- ***Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* by Joy DeGruy** | Copies have been ordered for Orange County Public Library.
 - Synopsis | What do repeated traumas endured generationally by a people produce and what's the impact on African Americans today? Dr. Joy DeGruy answers these questions and more.

- ***It Didn't Start with You: How Inherited Family Trauma Shapes Who We Are and How to End the Cycle* by Mark Wolynn** | [This eAudiobook is available at Orange County Public Library](#)
 - Synopsis | A groundbreaking approach to transforming traumatic legacies passed down in families over generations by an acclaimed expert in the field. Depression. Anxiety. Chronic Pain. Phobias. Obsessive thoughts. The evidence is compelling: the roots of these difficulties may not reside in our immediate life experience or in chemical imbalances in our brains—but in the lives of our parents, grandparents, and even great-grandparents.
- ***Go Back and Get It: A Memoir of Race, Inheritance, and Intergenerational Healing* by Dionne Ford** | [This book is available at Orange County Public Library.](#)
 - Synopsis | What shapes does intergenerational trauma related to slavery take? For Dionne Ford it manifested as alcoholism, post-traumatic stress, and impacted her relationships with her family members. To heal, Ford tries a wide range of therapies, lifestyle changes, and recovery meetings. On her journey, she discovers that what she needs to feel whole is to connect with her female ancestors and unearth what she can about them.

Connecting Our Histories with Our Futures

How we engage future generations in the examination of our histories and allow our understandings of histories to change based upon future examinations is dependent upon how we tell our histories: where, when, by whom, and in what context. Resources that discuss various aspects of how we recount and preserve our histories follow below.

- ***How the Word Is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America* by Clint Smith** | [This book and eBook are available at Orange County Public Library.](#)
 - Synopsis | Clint Smith leads the reader on a tour of monuments and landmarks that offer an intergenerational story of how slavery has been central in shaping our nation's collective history, and ourselves.
 - Author Discussion Video | [Clint Smith's discussion of *How the Word Is Passed* with Miwa Messer at Barnes & Noble - Union Square on January 23, 2023 is available on Youtube.com](#)
- ***They Came for the Schools: One Town's Fight Over Race and Identity, and the New War for America's Classrooms* Book by Mike Hixenbaugh** | Copies have been ordered for Orange County Public Library.
 - Synopsis | Award-winning journalist, Mike Hixenbaugh, investigates struggles between factions of a small Texas community concerning with banning books and rewriting histories and curricula at its public schools
 - Author Discussion Video | [Mike Hixenbaugh's discussion of *They Came for the Schools* with Yamiche Alcindor at Politics and Prose bookstore in Washington, DC on May 17, 2024 is available on Youtube.com](#)

- ***Reframing Rhetorical History: Cases, Theories, and Methodologies*, edited by Kathleen J. Turner and Jason Edward Black** | [The full text of this book is available at Acadamia.edu for free with a free account.](#)
 - Synopsis | This scholarly work focuses on those who write the histories that we, schoolbooks, articles, etc. use as reference materials. It contains sixteen articles that discuss framing history with a consideration for and understanding of hot-button issues in rhetorical scholarship such as: digital rhetoric; public memory; race and ethnicity; gender dynamics and sexualities; health and well-being; transnationalism and globalization; social justice; archival methods and politics; and colonialism and decoloniality.

- **The Reframing History Project Toolkit, Podcast, and More by American Association for State and Local History** | Reframing History is the result of a two-year research effort to understand how Americans think about history and how to effectively explain history's value. The recommendations from this project are designed to help historians, educators, museum professionals, and history advocates better communicate about history to build a wider understanding of what inclusive history looks like and why it is important for all of us.