

Why were racial terror and lynchings allowed to happen?



A Newspaper clipping from the Evening Star, 09/13/1932, that details Thompson's lynching as a suicide.

Supporting Questions

1. How did the act and threat of lynching become a technique of enforcing racial domination and beliefs about racial inferiority?
2. How did authority play a role in lynching and racial terror?
3. How does the authority of the media influence the way racial terror is perceived?

Why did police allow racial terror, specifically lynchings, to happen?

Standards and Content	<p>VUS. 8 The student will apply social science skills to understand how the nation grew and changed from the end of Reconstruction through the early twentieth century by</p> <p>d) analyzing the impact of prejudice and discrimination, including “Jim Crow” laws, the responses of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, and the practice of eugenics in Virginia</p> <p>VUS.1 The student will demonstrate skills for historical thinking, geographical analysis, economic decision making, and responsible citizenship by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) synthesizing evidence from artifacts and primary and secondary sources to obtain information about events in Virginia and United States history; c) interpreting charts, graphs, and pictures to determine characteristics of people, places, or events in Virginia and United States history; d) constructing arguments, using evidence from multiple sources; j) investigating and researching to develop products orally and in writing.
Staging the Compelling Question	<p>Allow students five minutes to watch the following video (scenes may contain language or lynching graphics that that may be disturbing to some students) to construct their own version of what lynching was and consider how victims and their families must have felt.</p> <p>After watching the video, ask students to analyze the video and express, through their own words, some of the ways in which African Americans have had to navigate the world to prevent themselves from being victims of structural violence.</p>

Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3
<p>How did the act and threat of lynching become a technique of enforcing racial domination and beliefs about racial inferiority?</p>	<p>How do authority figures play a role in lynching and racial terror?</p>	<p>How does the authority of the media influence the way racial terror is perceived?</p>
Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task
<p>Graphic Organizer and Jigsaw</p>	<p>Venn Diagram (Shedrick Thompson vs. George Floyd)</p>	<p>Graphic organizer displaying various perspectives and a written paragraph</p>
Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources
<p>Source A: Terror Lynching in America Video</p>	<p>Source A: The Lynching of Shedrick Thompson</p>	<p>Source A: Shedrick Thompson in Fauquier</p>
<p>Source B: LYNCHING IN AMERICA Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror</p>	<p>Source B: George Floyd Source C: George Floyd's Autopsy and the Structural Gaslighting of America</p>	<p>Source B: The Other Side of Eden</p>

Summative Performance Task	<p>ARGUMENT: Why were racial terror and lynchings allowed to happen? Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that evaluates the need to study, remember, and/or celebrate this expedition using specific claims and relevant evidence from sources while acknowledging competing views.</p>
	<p>EXTENSION. Students will create a visual representation that tells Shedrick Thompson's story (Profiler Tasks/TriMind) to be displayed in the school as part of Black History Month.</p>
Taking Informed Action	<p>UNDERSTAND Racial terror was allowed to happen because of the complacency of society and the cooperation of law enforcement.</p> <p>ASSESS Students will assess how discussing past wrongs changes the present and informs the future, and how they can be part of the fight for justice by shedding light on the horrors of lynching.</p>

ACT This project will have students contributing to the *Racial Terror* project via recorded interviews of people who experienced racial violence in some capacity (e.g., witnessed violence, family experiences, etc.). Students can interview a family member or someone from a list of cooperating participants provided by the teacher. In pairs, students will come up with a list of interview questions, with at least one centered on the role of authority - the teacher will review and assist in this activity.

**Featured sources are suggested and links are provided. It may be that these links are broken and we apologize in advance for the inconvenience.*

Overview

Inquiry Description

This inquiry leads students through an investigation of the lynching of Shedrick Thompson and how police allowed this lynching to be viewed as suicide and how perpetrators were not brought to justice. Students will also look at how current African Americans, such as George Floyd, have, and are, facing racial terror.

This inquiry highlights the following additional standards:

- STANDARD VAUS.8d
 - The student will apply social science skills to understand how the nation grew and changed from the end of Reconstruction through the early twentieth century by
 - d) analyzing the impact of prejudice and discrimination, including “Jim Crow” laws, the responses of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, and the practice of eugenics in Virginia;

It is important to note that this inquiry requires prerequisite knowledge of ...

- The Civil War
- 13th and 14th amendment
- The Jim Crow Era/Jim Crow laws
- Race relations in Virginia along with the Southern United States
- Freedom of the Press within the United States
- History of slavery within the United States

Note: This inquiry is expected to take three or four 50-minute class periods. The inquiry time frame could expand if teachers think their students need additional instructional experiences (e.g., supporting questions, formative performance tasks, featured sources, writing). Teachers are encouraged to adapt the inquiry to meet the needs and interests of their students. This inquiry lends itself to differentiation and modeling of historical thinking skills while assisting students in reading a variety of source material.

Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question, the students must first build their understanding of the unit through answering the supporting questions. The supporting questions create a framework necessary to better understand why racial terror and lynchings were allowed to happen? Students will use the lynching story of Shedrick Thompson and the death of George Floyd as evidence for answering the supporting questions and construct an argument for the compelling question.

Staging the Compelling Question

Staging the compelling question:

- In groups of two-four students per group, allow students five minutes to watch the following [video](#) (scenes may contain language or lynching graphics that may be disturbing to some students) to construct their own version of what lynching was and consider how victims and their families must have felt.
- Each group is then tasked to write their answers down and keep their thoughts throughout the unit.
- After watching the video, ask each group to analyze the video and express, through their own words, some of the ways in which African Americans have had to navigate the world to prevent themselves from being victims of structural violence. Ask students to consider some of the stereotypes that people, focusing on the police, hold about African Americans and how these stereotypes are a leading cause of racial discrimination in the U.S.
- Conclude with a class discussion about police brutality and racial discrimination.

Supporting Question 1

The first supporting question - How did the act and threat of lynching become a technique of enforcing racial domination and beliefs about racial inferiority?

The formative task for this supporting question will have the students creating a graphic organizer and a jigsaw. The students will be divided into 5 groups where students will get to examine different articles about lynching and racial terror.

Teachers may implement this task with the following procedures:

- The entire class will watch a short video about [terror lynching](#). The students will take notes on how lynching created fear in the hearts of African Americans and created beliefs about racial inferiority.
- The students will then get into five groups with at least 5 students in each group (teachers may adjust as they see fit for their class size). Each group will be assigned one or two sections to read from the following [website](#).
 - Group one will read pages 27 - 30, "Lynching in America: From "Popular Justice" to Racial Terror" & "Characteristics of the Lynching Era"
 - Group two will read pages 30 - 32, "Lynchings Based on Fear of Interracial Sex" & "Lynchings Based on Minor Social Transgressions"
 - Group three will read pages 32 - 35, "Lynchings Based on Allegations of Crime" & "Public Spectacle Lynchings"
 - Group four will read pages 38 - 39, "Lynchings Targeting the Entire African American Community" & "Lynchings of Black People Resisting Mistreatment (1915-1940)"
 - Group five will read pages 48 - 50, "Turning a Blind Eye to Lynching: Northern and Federal Complicity"
 - During these groups, students are given 20 minutes where they will fill in the column that corresponds to their reading section. The teacher may add specific questions as they see fit, or simply give the students the supporting question as their guide for what answers they are looking for.
 - After 20 minutes, 5 new groups are to be formed with one student from each previous group represented in one of the new groups.
 - Students will then take 10 minutes to share what their group learned from their assigned readings and how they answered the given questions in their section.
 - Finally, the teacher will have a class discussion where the focus is to answer the supporting question as a class, and how the video and the divided readings have helped the students answer the question.

Scaffolds and other materials may be used to support students as they work with sources. Scaffolding is present in this formative task throughout the different readings and videos that the students will watch. As the students create the new groups to complete the jigsaw chart, they will gain further information from each other.

The following sources were selected to help guide students in finding their own explanations as to how they act and the threat of lynching become a technique of enforcing racial exploitation and beliefs about racial inferiority.

- **Source A:** [Terror Lynching in America](#)
- **Source B:** [LYNCHING IN AMERICA Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror](#)

Supporting Question 2

The second supporting question— How do authority figures play a role in lynching and racial terror?

The formative task is a Venn diagram (Shedrick Thompson vs George Floyd) where students will compare the Thompson and Floyd cases and how authority figures played a role in lynching and racial terror in both cases. Students will be able to analyze how authorities have responded to the death of both men, and in what way they were directly involved in their death.

Teachers may implement this task with the following procedures:

- The teacher will start by providing the students with the links below.
 - The students will read through the links and analyze them in order to complete the Venn diagram.
- The students are given 20 minutes to complete the Venn diagram.
- The class will then discuss along with the teacher the results and how authorities today play a role in racial terror.

The scaffolds and other materials may be used to support students as they work with sources. Scaffolding is present in this formative task throughout the different readings.

The following sources were selected to help guide students in finding their own explanations of how authority figures play a role in lynching and racial terror:

- **Source A:** [The Lynching of Shedrick Thompson](#)
- **Source B:** [George Floyd](#)
- **Source C:** [George Floyd's Autopsy and the Structural Gaslighting of America](#)

Supporting Question 3

The third supporting question - How does the authority of the media influence the way racial terror is perceived?

The formative task is a graphic organizer about each side's story with a written paragraph. The students will watch a video titled, *The Other Side of Eden*, about Shadrick Thompson where it details through the eyes of relatives of those who played a role in Thompson's story. The students will also analyze newspaper sections that ruled Thompson's lynching as a suicide. The graphic organizer will allow the students to understand how different sides, mainly the media, have portrayed Thompson's lynching as suicide and how his death occurred.

Teachers may implement this task with the following procedures:

- The video is long and will require the entire class time, however, the teacher can assign the remaining portion of the video to be watched at home.
- Students will start by reading through the newspaper sections that detail the death of Thompson and reasons for the order of his death.
- Students will then, knowing the true story of Thompson through their readings from the first lesson, will compare how the media has portrayed his death versus what actually took place. In a different column, the students will provide their reasoning as to why the media has portrayed his death in such a matter.
- The students will then begin watching the provided documentary. (Again, students may finish the film outside of the classroom.)
- Students will continue to fill in the graphic organizer. At the end of the lesson, students are to write a paragraph in response to today's supporting question and use evidence from their graphic organizer to support their points.

The scaffolds and other materials may be used to support students as they work with sources. Scaffolding is present in this formative task throughout the different readings and the documentary that the students will watch.

The following sources were selected to help guide students in finding their own explanations as to how does the authority of the media influence the way racial terror is perceived:

- **Source A:** [Shadrick Thompson in Fauquier](#)
- **Source B:** [The Other Side of Eden](#)

Summative Performance Task

At this point in the inquiry, students have examined how police brutality contributed to racial terror and lynching in the United States towards African Americans, and the ways in which such terror has enforced racial exploitation and beliefs about racial inferiority. Furthermore, students were able to examine how authority figures and the media played a role in racial terror through the examination of the life of Shedrick Thompson and George Floyd.

Students should be expected to demonstrate the breadth of their understanding, and their abilities to use evidence from multiple sources to support their claims. Students are to use varying sources for this unit to form an argument on why racial terror and lynchings were allowed to happen? Students have the option of creating a detailed outline, poster, or written essay to answer the compelling question. Students must include two primary and two secondary sources.

Students' arguments will likely vary, but could include any of the following:

- At least four sources (at least two primary and two secondary)
- A discussion of racial oppression in the United States
- Background information on the historical context of lynching and the Jim Crow Era
- In-depth primary source analysis
- An understanding and analysis of media bias
- A discussion of African American agency both in the Jim Crow era and the present day
- A discussion of Shedrick Thompson and George Floyd's story.

To support students in their writing, the teacher should provide students with a rubric based on their chosen assessment. The selected sources should be on grade level. For EL students, the teacher should select sources that provide visual aid for further understanding. The students should be given extra time in the classroom to work on this assignment to get feedback, if needed.

To extend their arguments, the students will create a visual representation that tells Shedrick Thompson's story (Profiler Tasks/TriMind) to be displayed in the school as part of Black History Month.

Students have the opportunity to Take Informed Action by contributing to the *Racial Terror* project via recorded interviews of people who experienced racial violence in some capacity (e.g., witnessed violence). Students can interview a family member or someone from a list of cooperating participants provided by the teacher. In pairs, students will come up with a list of interview questions, with at least one centered on the role of authority - the teacher will review and assist.