

The Long History of Lynch-mobs  
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History shows that our ancestors began to thrive when they learned to work together, to cooperate. Cooperation was the dominant behavior of human beings, but the lesser aspect of our behavior was domination by force. Modern historians have assessed that we have lived far more years of our lives in in peace, war being the lesser condition. But we tend to focus more on our warfare periods because they are less usual and more horrible.

Despite the predominance of peaceful cooperative behavior of most human beings, the dark underbelly of violence emerges from time to time, and its horrors mark its survivors. We remember them.

Today?s column is about infrequent but horrific human actions that have punctuated human history: not organized warfare, which usually has some rules, but the process of turning otherwise ordinary people into mobs that kill people living among them. The word "lynch" is different from lawful execution. It is the opposite of order, but is often the tool of otherwise lawful leaders who can incite violence that distracts or promotes their power.

When we use the term lynch-mob, the most systematic use of this mob manipulation was directed at former Black slaves, who were intimidated and terrorized deliberately by former slave owners after the Civil War. Reconstruction was aborted by the losers of the war, Southern leadership, who turned their loss into a win, a return of White authority. American Black populations lived with this threat and horror for a century after they had legally won emancipation. The horrors propelled them to leave the South in thousands, and voter intimidation of the rest kept Blacks Americans from participation in elections. White power prevailed.

Chinese and Native Americans. Lesser known lynch mob activities were the hunting down of Chinese former railroad workers, to intimidate them to leave the US. Lynch mobs also periodically attacked Native Americans, in addition to official persecution by the government itself.

Jews. Historians can point to other events, evil leaders inciting otherwise ordinary people to join together in murderous mobs. Jews living in Europe experienced lynch mobs over a 1,000-year period (not counting the organized murders of Hitler?s regime).

The first was the pogrom (lynch mob action) in 1099, incited by a Catholic monk travelling the Rhine River valley calling for extermination of Jews, accused of causing the Bubonic Plague.

Pogroms were periodic horrors for Jews living in England, France, Spain, Germany, and almost annually in the dying Russian Empire in the 19th century. In Europe, the illogical accusation of "Christ Killers" was enough of a trigger to spur drunken mobs to extract "vengeance."

The Ukraine tallied the most murders in lynching Jews before Hitler?s organized holocaust. Mass pogroms were incited by the Russian government from 1881 to 1884, and 1903-1906, and when added to the death squads of Ukrainian Nazis during World War II, estimates are up to 1.6 million.

Huguenots. Another group, 16th century French Protestants, were set upon by lynch mobs, incited by the Catholic French monarchy and Catholic clergy. The St. Valentine?s Day wedding celebration of a Protestant French prince lured Protestants to the French Court, where they were exterminated by lynch mobs, and then throughout France, in a day of horror.

Armenians. This Christian population living in Ottoman Turkey were so integrated in Istanbul that they were unprepared for an organized pogrom carried out by their neighbors. The rest of that holocaust was organized and nation-wide, settling old scores.

Rwandan Civil War. The dominant Hutu tribe organized a 100-day pogrom in which Hutus killed neighbors, husbands killed Tutsi wives, and women were carried off as sex slaves. This was not technically done by lynch mobs, but by militia forcing citizens to murder with specially-ordered machetes delivered by China.

Trump?s Mob. Many of the Capitol attackers announced intent to lynch Trump?s legal

successors: his Vice President and House Speaker Pelosi. They were summoned and incited by President Trump, who repeated lies that he was cheated out of his election win. The January 6 murderous rampage illustrated lynch mob behavior and its danger to our democracy.

Their March 4 fantasy of "inaugurating" Donald Trump failed. Stupidity is incurable.

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