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# THE WACO HORROR

*Designed by Aleksandr Wray*

The lynching of Jesse Washington, a 17 year old African American young man from Waco, Texas, was one of the most heinous acts of government sanctioned mob “justice” in American society. The barbarity of the act, the festive/jovial/family-centered nature of the event, the sheer volume of participants, and the local government inaction around the incident shocked many people in the nation and spurred the NAACP to take immediate action around Anti-Lynching Legislation. Jesse Washington was just one of thousands of stories but we will focus on primarily on his today and the context surrounding lynchings in the early 20th century.

# PART I: NEWS ARTICLES

In the widgets below, you will find two separate news reports on the lynching of Jesse Washington, one written in the Bryan Daily Eagle (a newspaper located approximately 70 miles from Waco, Texas) and a piece written by the NAACP's "The Crisis". Read each document and discuss the following prompts with your group. Be sure to designate a scribe to take notes on your conversation, which will be collected.

(Supplement to the CRISIS, July, 1916)

## The Waco Horror

*An account of the recent burning of a human being at Waco, Tex., as reported by a special agent of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 70 Fifth Avenue, New York City.*

**1. The City.**  
THE city of Waco, Tex., is the county seat of McLennan county. It is situated on the Brazos river, about half way between Dallas and Austin. It is the junction point of seven railways. The city is in a fertile agricultural region with grain and cotton as the chief products, and with nearly two hundred manufacturing establishments, representing some seventy different industries.

It had a population of 14,445 in 1890 which increased to 20,686 in 1900, and to 26,425 in 1910. The white population in these twenty years has almost exactly doubled. The colored population has increased from 4,069 to 6,967, forming thus 23% of the population. The bulk of the population is native white of native parentage, there being only about 1,000 foreigners in the city.

The whole of McLennan county contained in 1910 a population of 73,250 of whom 17,234 were Negroes. This total population has nearly doubled in the last twenty years. Waco is well laid out. The streets are broad, over sixty miles of them being paved.

The sewer system of one hundred miles is excellent. There is a fine city-owned water system, and parks on the surrounding prairies.

There are thirty-nine white and twenty-four colored churches in Waco. By denominations the white churches are: Baptist, 14; Methodist, 9; Christian, 4; Presbyterian, 3; Jewish, 2; Episcopal, 2; Evangelistic, 1; Lutheran, 1; Catholic, 1; Christian Science, 1; Salvation Army, 1.

The colleges are: Baylor University, Baylor Academy, the Catholic College, the Independent Biblical and Industrial School, all white; and the Central Texas College and Paul Quinn, colored colleges. There are also the A. & M. College, the Gurley School, the Waco Business College, Toby's Practical Business College, the Provident Sanitarium, and the Training School.

Baylor University was founded in 1854 and has between 1,200 and 1,300 students. It is co-educational. The president is running for the United States Senate.

Two high schools serve white and colored population, and there are seven banks, including four national banks.

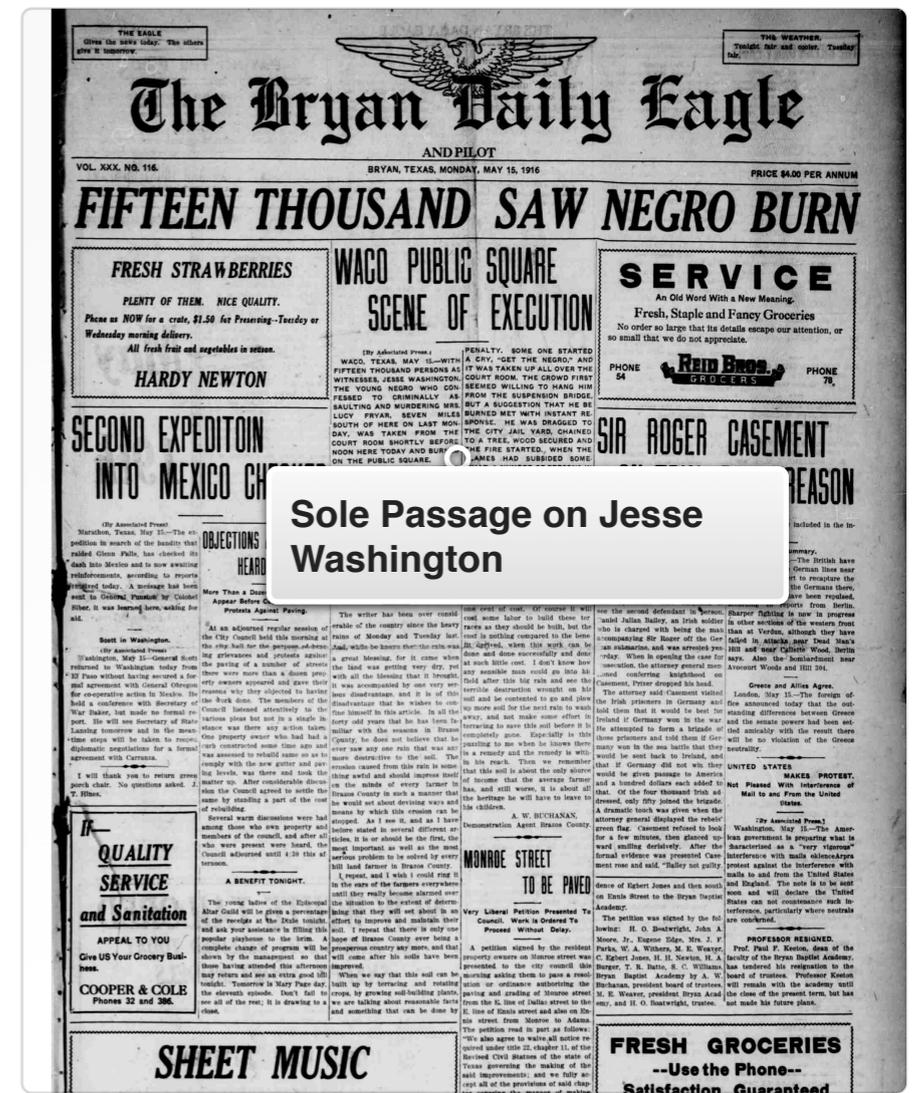


1. What are some important pieces of information that should be observed about each document?

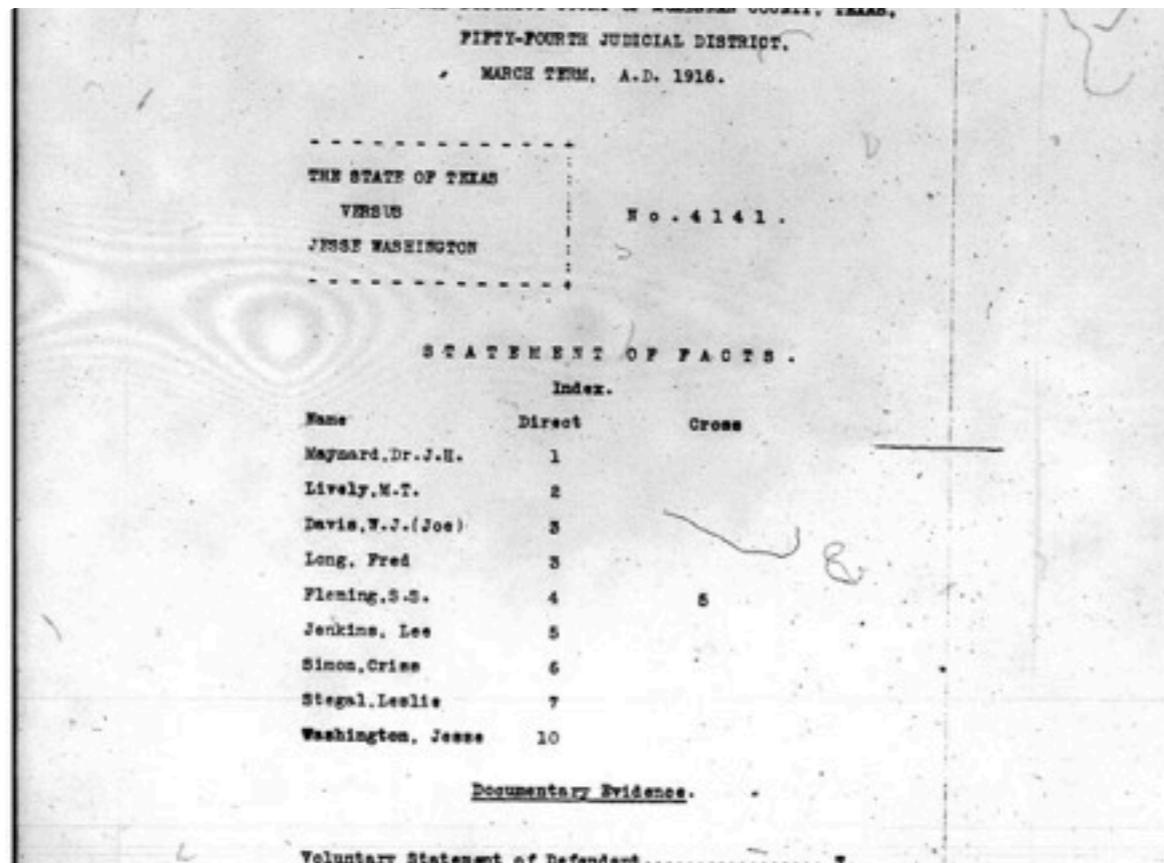
2. What do you think accounts for some of their differences in reporting?

3. Which article helps you understand what happened better? Why?

4. Highlight as many similarities/differences between the two articles as you can.



# Part II: Jesse Washington's Trial



Court Transcripts From the Trial of Jesse Washington



The trial of Jesse Washington was extremely brief and the jury took little to no time to reach a verdict of guilty before a mob stormed the court room and took him (with no opposition from the sheriff who was up for re-election). The photo gallery on the left shows the actual court transcripts from the trial. With a group, read the documents and respond to prompts below:

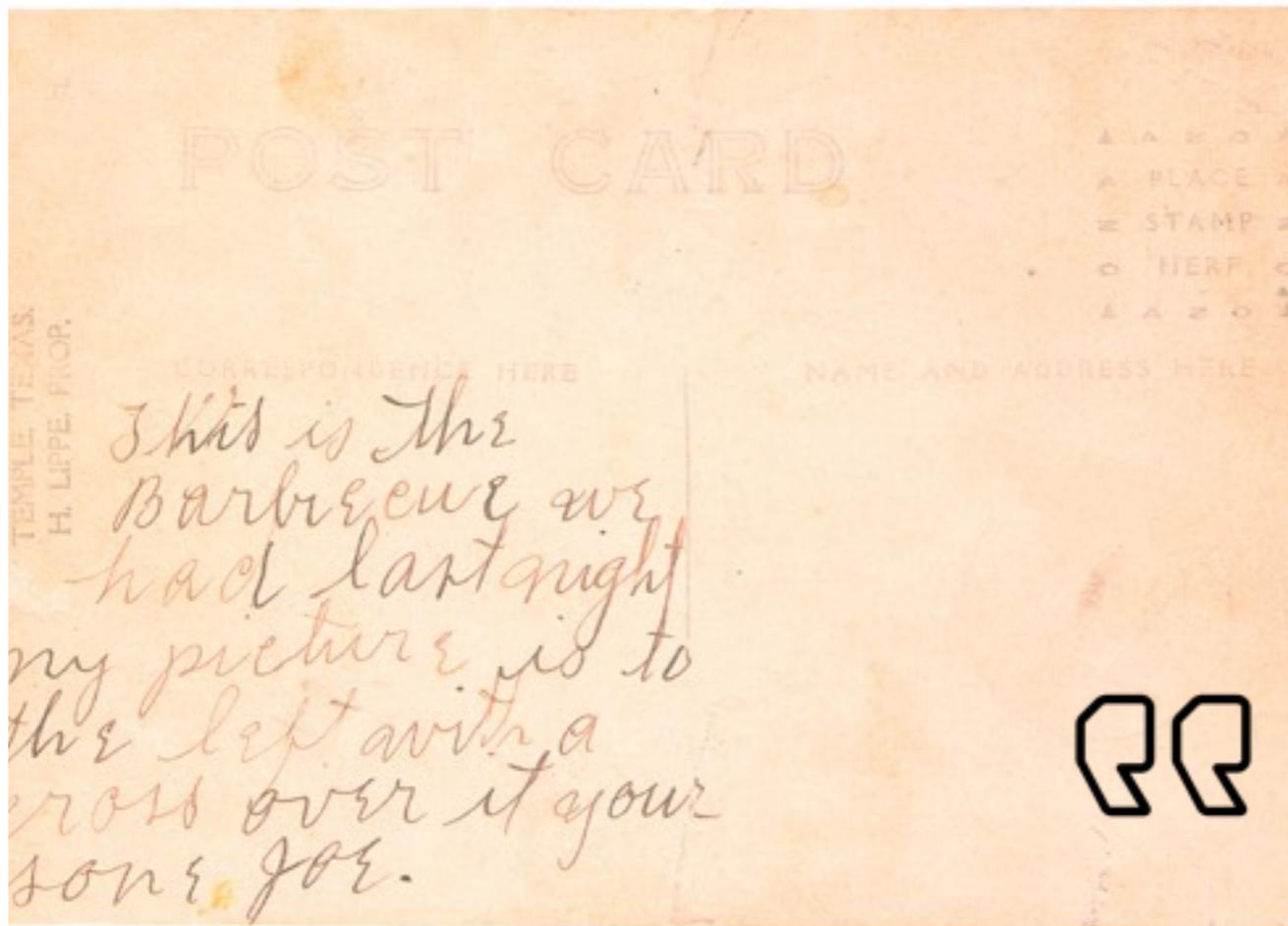
1. What did the state use to prove that Jesse Washington was guilty?
2. What sort of defense was made for Jesse Washington?
3. Why is it significant that Jesse Washington's statement was called a "voluntary statement" and not a confession?
4. Did you notice any differences in how Jesse Washington's "voluntary statement" sounded as compared to his in-court testimony? What could be the reason for the differences?
5. What else stands out to you about this document?

# PART III: POSTCARDS



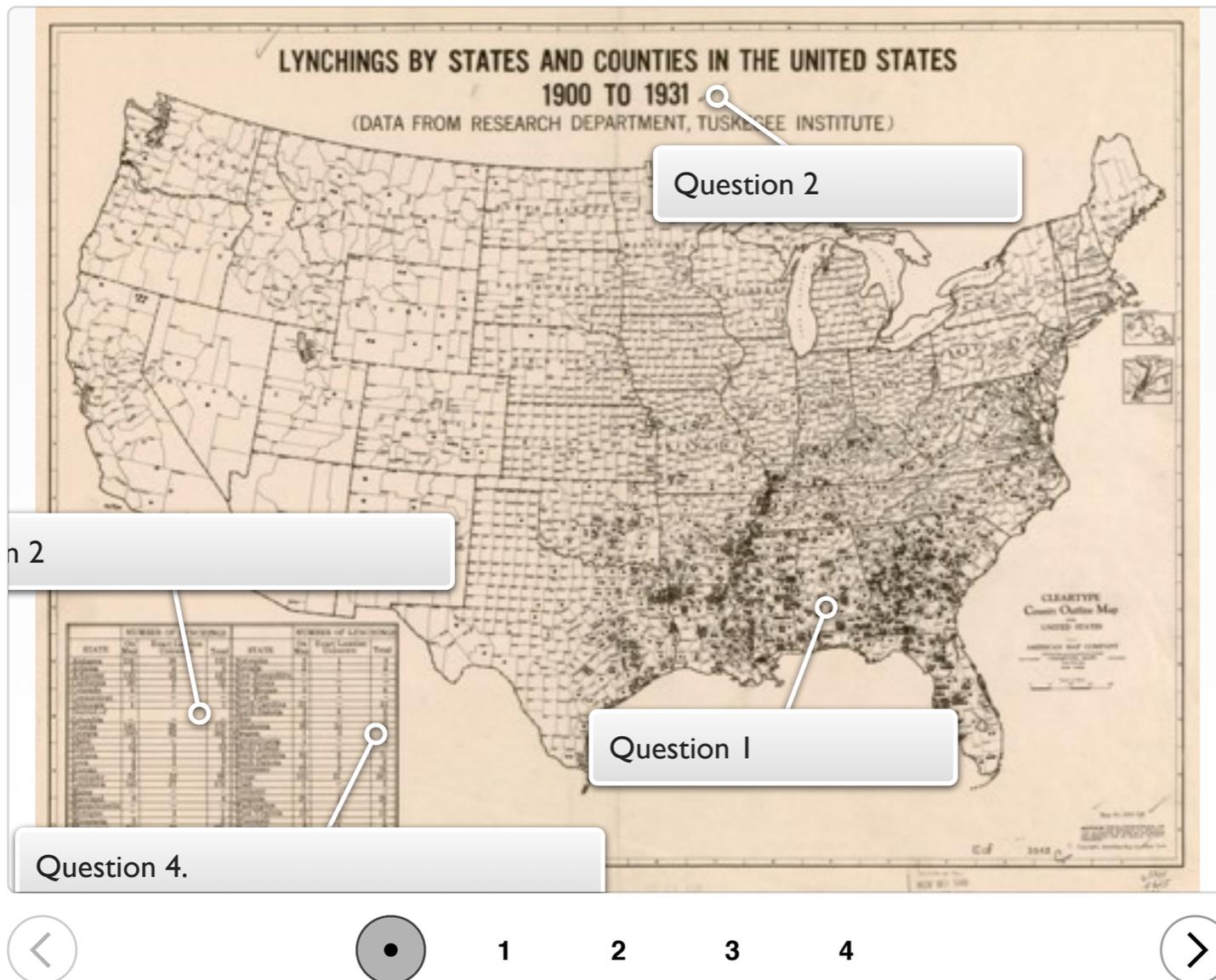
Postcards like the one seen here were common and even popular among locals after Jesse Washington's lynching: Many like it were sent to friends and family all over the country. In addition to postcards, bones, teeth, and other body parts were sold to local participants. In a small group, again, designate a scribe to take notes and respond to the questions below:

1. What sort of message do you think postcards like this sent about African Americans when they were sent all around the country?
2. How does the profitability of human remains and "merchandise" like this land for you? What do you think this means about African American bodies?
3. Based on the author of the note's tone and the fact that postcards like this were bought/sold/sent across the country, do you think violence to this extent was an uncommon occurrence? Why or why not?
4. This incident took place in a college town, a town with big business aspirations and with enough churches for every corner - on top of that, the actual lynching occurred at the tree Wacoans called, "The Tree of Knowledge". What ingredients were necessary for such extremes acts of barbarism to take place in Waco?



*Click on the quotes below to read the handwritten note more clearly.*

# PART IV: THE SCOPE OF LYNCHINGS



You now see a map of lynching that occurred throughout the entire country, by county, from 1900-1931. In your group, examine this map and answer the following questions.

1. Why do you think the Tuskegee Institute chose to only measure data from 1900-1931? What other years would you have liked to see them get data for and why?
2. What three states had the most lynchings occur during this 30 year time period? What type of reputation do you think those states earned in the African American community?
3. In what part of the country did the majority of lynchings take place? Why?
4. Why do you think states like Oregon had so "few" lynchings as compared to states in the South?

# PART V: ANTI-LYNCHING BILL

As a result of so many African Americans losing their lives to mob violence, organizations like the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) spearheaded a campaign to enact federal legislation to snuff out lynchings. In the early 1920s, the Anti-Lynching Bill, often referred to as the Dyer Bill after the man who was responsible for putting it together, went before congress. It passed the House of Representatives but was then filibustered (aka blocked) in the Senate and was never enacted. Read the text of the proposed bill below.

1. Is there any part(s) of the bill that seem like it's asking a lot of local governments? Is there any part that seems unfair?

2. Why do you think this bill was not approved and put to practice?

3. Why do you think the Senate filibustered the bill?

Note: Even though Congress failed to pass the bill, organizations like the NAACP turned most of their attention to anti-lynching laws on a state and local level.

## ANTI-LYNCHING BILL.

APRIL 20 (calendar day, JULY 28), 1922.

AN ACT To assure to persons within the jurisdiction of every State the equal protection of the laws, and to punish the crime of lynching.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the phrase "mob or riotous assemblage," when used in this act, shall mean an assemblage composed of three or more persons acting in concert for the purpose of depriving any person of his life without authority of law as a punishment for or to prevent the commission of some actual or supposed public offense.

SEC. 2. That if any State or governmental subdivision thereof fails, neglects, or refuses to provide and maintain protection to the life of any person within its jurisdiction against a mob or riotous assemblage, such State shall by reason of such failure, neglect, or re-

Text from the 1922 Anti-Lynching Bill

# PART VI: CONTINUED



There were many people in the country who were upset at Congress' unwillingness to curb lynching through federal legislation. See the political cartoon on the left and respond to the questions that follow:

1. What is happening in the cartoon?
2. How does the caption of the photo connect to the failure to pass the Anti-lynching Bill?
3. What do you think is the artist's point of view/perspective?
4. How does this image reflect what was happening on the ground during the time period?

# PART VII: STRANGE FRUIT

1. Billie Holiday's song "Strange Fruit" was released in 1939, and was sparked by the overwhelming number of African American lynchings at the beginning of the 20th century and has been lauded as one of the most influential songs of the century. Before you watch the video, read the lyrics out loud and collect your groups' initial thoughts (what words stick out to you, which specific imagery makes you stop to think, how does it leaving you feeling, how do you think this poem/song left those who heard it feeling?)

2. After your groups' initial thoughts have been written down, listen to "Strange Fruit" by Billie Holiday. Since the song was an artist's medium to protest the legacy of black lynchings, on your own, use a blank piece of card stock to create your own poem inspired by "Strange Fruit". The poem should :

- b. Be written from the perspective of an individual who took a stand against lynchings in the early 1900s.
- c. Be decorated creatively to make it aesthetically appealing
- d. Be reviewed and given suggestions for improvement by a peer before you start work on your card stock.

3. I don't expect anyone to finish this project in class but I do expect the final piece to be completed and turned in no more than 5 days.



[Click Here for Lyrics](#)



# Works Cited

1. Spectators Watch Jesse Washington Burn:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lynching\\_of\\_Jesse\\_Washington](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lynching_of_Jesse_Washington)

2. Bryan Daily Eagle:

<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86088651/1916-05-15/ed-1/seq-1/#date1=1836&index=7&rows=20&words=JESSE+WASHINGTON&searchType=basic&sequence=0&state=&date2=1922&proxtext=jesse+washington&y=0&x=0&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1>

3. NAACP's "The Crisis" Article:

[https://books.google.com/books?id=KloEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA110-IA2&lpg=PA110-IA2&dq=the+crisis+jesse+washington&source=bl&ots=6oomYG-iLQ&sig=I2y1OvW6JCPNJFicVzDloj-nq3U&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CCMQ6AEwAWoVChMI1di674\\_zyAIV0pmlCh0bBg3z#v=onepage&q=jesse%20washington&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=KloEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA110-IA2&lpg=PA110-IA2&dq=the+crisis+jesse+washington&source=bl&ots=6oomYG-iLQ&sig=I2y1OvW6JCPNJFicVzDloj-nq3U&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CCMQ6AEwAWoVChMI1di674_zyAIV0pmlCh0bBg3z#v=onepage&q=jesse%20washington&f=false)

4. Court Transcripts for Trial of Jesse Washington

Document provided by A.J. Muhammad, Librarian for the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, via email correspondence.

5. Jesse Washington Postcard:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Postcard\\_of\\_the\\_lynched\\_Jesse\\_Washington,\\_front\\_and\\_back.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Postcard_of_the_lynched_Jesse_Washington,_front_and_back.jpg)

6. Tuskegee Institute's Lynchings Map

<http://www.loc.gov/item/2006636636/>

7. Anti-Lynching Bill:

<http://www.naacp.org/pages/naacp-history-anti-lynching-bill>

8. Political Cartoon

<http://www.lva.virginia.gov/exhibits/mitchell/lynch1.htm>

9. Billie Holliday's "Strange Fruit"

[https://archive.org/details/BillieHoliday-StrangeFruit\\_965](https://archive.org/details/BillieHoliday-StrangeFruit_965)

## **Reflection:**

Throughout the entire process of creating my document based lesson I was incredibly engaged. The idea of setting up students to serve as historical detectives was fascinating and doing the research to “uncover” primary sources/information proved incredibly fruitful and fulfilling. I even felt like a historical detective at certain points, especially when the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture emailed me the court transcripts from Jesse Washington’s “trial” in Waco, Texas!

Focusing on the lynching of Jesse Washington was certainly an emotionally/spiritually challenging task for me, however, and I initially struggled with the idea of what I wanted students to actually do with this information and what my intention for the lesson was. “Do I want students to get angry over Jesse Washington’s lynching and just sit in that anger? Do I want students to see how groups like the NAACP rose to prominence because of the work they did to quell lynchings? What am I trying to get at?” Ultimately, I ended up deciding that my intention was multifaceted... I am totally fine with students getting upset over historic injustices (after all, who learns about events like the Holocaust or Jim Crow and DOESN’T get upset?) because I believe that will ignite an inner fire/passion to fight against present day injustices and, of course, I want students to feel empowered in their ability to contribute to society for the better so I felt the need to highlight the NAACP’s article in “The Crisis” and Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” as examples of resistance.

I truly appreciated this process and wish I had more opportunities to engage in document based learning during my secondary education career. I fully intend on utilizing this type of lesson in my future classroom in sha Allah.

If anybody who reads my chapter on Jesse Washington and the dark legacy of American lynchings has any feedback or recommendations, I would love to hear from you. Please feel free to contact me on [LinkedIn](#). Much obliged.



FROM EXPLORING  
HISTORY: VOL III

Available free at [iTunes](#)

This eBook is a collaborative project of Peter Pappas and his Fall 2015 Social Studies Methods Class [School of Education](#) ~ University of Portland, Portland Ore.

Graduate and undergraduate level pre-service teachers were assigned the task of developing an engaging research question, researching supportive documents and curating them into a DBQ suitable for middle or high school students.

For more on this class, visit the course blog [EdMethods](#)  
For more on this book project and work flow tap [here](#).

## Chapters in chronological order

1. *Finding Egyptian Needles in Western Haystacks*  
by Heidi Kershner
2. *Pompeii* by Caleb Wilson
3. *Samurai: Sources of Warrior Identity in Medieval Japan*  
by Ben Heebner
4. *The Declaration of Independence* by David Deis
5. *Reconstruction in Political Cartoons*  
by EmmaLee Kuhlmann
6. *Regulation Through the Years*  
by Chenoa Musillo Olson / Sarah Wieking
7. *Battle of the Somme* by John Hunt

8. *The Lynching of Leo Frank* by Jeff Smith
9. *The Waco Horror* by Alekz Wray
10. *The Harlem Renaissance* by Monica Portugal
11. *A Date of Infamy* by Mollie Carter
12. *Anti-Vietnam War Imagery* by Felicia Teba
13. *Examining the Ongoing Evolution of American Government* by Eric Cole

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Cover image: Door knocker

Amsterdam NL Photograph by Peter Pappas