



History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people.

-Martin Luther King Jr.

Between 1877 and 1950 more than 4000 African Americans were lynched across 20 states. Including Minnesota.

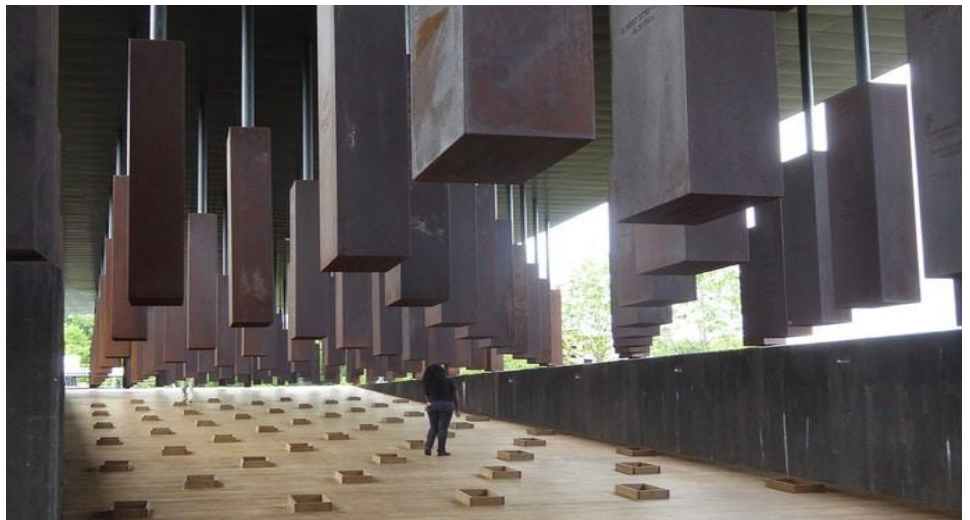
On June 15, 1920, in Duluth, Minnesota, a mob of 5000 people lynched three black men named Isaac McGhee, Elmer Jackson, and Nathan Green. After seizing the men from jail, where they were being held on charges of assault, the mob ignored the pleas of a local white clergyman to spare the young men and hanged them from a light pole.

Seder Supplement: Breaking the Silence

In March, a group of 30 from Beth El travelled to the south to learn about the civil rights era. It was a deeply powerful trip. Now as we prepare for Pesach, our travel group would like to offer a discussion topic that could be used for seder. This topic is disturbing and graphic and so is appropriate for adult sedarim.

One of the most moving and difficult things we saw on our trip was The National Memorial for Peace and Justice known as the “Lynching Memorial” in Montgomery, Alabama.

Walking around, feeling the weight of the “bodies” hanging above us, we were brought to silence, to tears.



800 steel monuments- one for each US county where lynchings occurred

TABLE 1

African American Lynching Victims by State, 1877-1950



In the accompanying museum, we learned that slavery didn't really end after the civil war. It morphed into Jim Crow laws and racial terror against black people including lynching.

Crowds of hundreds and even thousands of white people attended lynchings as participants or spectators including elected officials and prominent citizens. Spectacle lynchings were preserved in photographs that were made into postcards and distributed unashamedly through the mail.

Look at the picture:

What does it say about these acts of racial terror and about the onlookers that lynchings were turned into post cards?

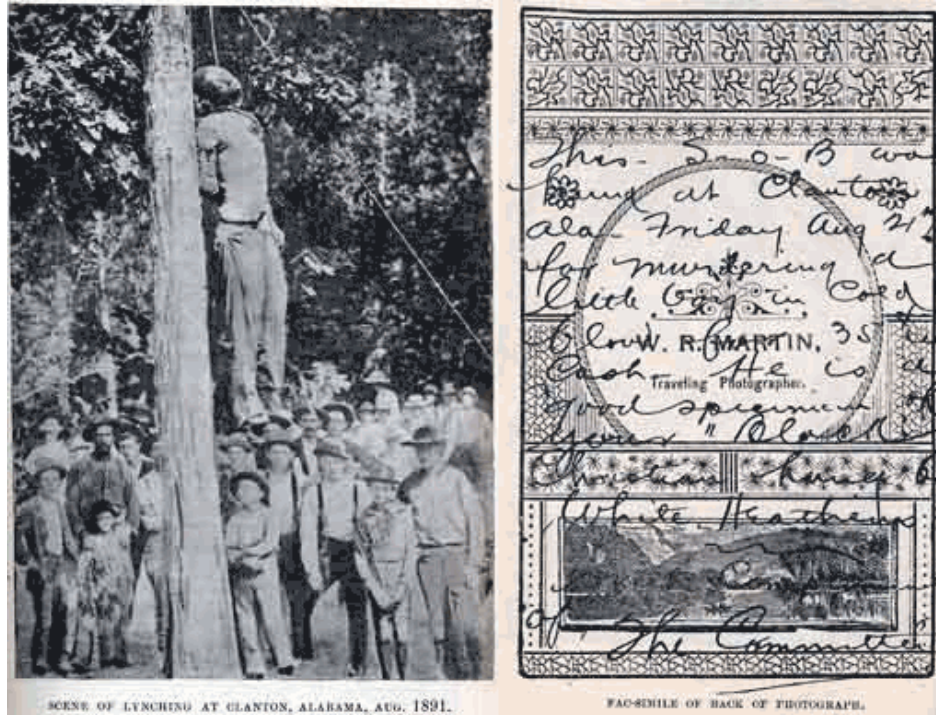
For Discussion:

1. What does Martin Luther King Jr. mean by the “appalling silence of good people?” Do you agree? Who was silent and when?

2. The “Lynching Memorial” is said to end the silence on our nation’s history of racial terrorism. Why is it necessary to end the silence? Why do you think it was named “The National Memorial for Peace and Justice?”

3. When it comes to racial justice in this country, when you “look this way and that way,” what do you see?

4. What role do you have to lift your voice in the pursuit of justice?



Lynching of Allen Brooks Post Card | Dallas, TX – March 3, 1910

Exodus 2:12

We read in the Book of Exodus a story about Moses. Moses had grown up with privilege in Pharaoh’s home. One day, he went out of the palace and saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave. The Torah says, “Moses turned this way and that way, and seeing no one about, struck the Egyptian” to save the Hebrew slave (2:12).

- How did Moses’ childhood privilege affect and impact his role as liberator?
- Why did Moses “turn this way and that way?”
- Why does the Torah tell us that Moses saw no one around?

Etz Chayim Chumash Commentary

It is not uncommon for a leader of an oppressed people to come from privileged background. One thinks of Herzl, Gandhi, King. Such a person may be psychologically freer to act and will be taken more seriously both by his followers and by his opponents.

Seeing no one about - not because Moses wanted to act furtively but to indicate that because there was no one to administer justice, he had to take the law into his own hands.

To get involved in Beth El’s Social Justice Committee, contact Rabbi Alexander Davis

Find more information at the Equal Justice Initiative website:

www.EJI.org