

Retracing American Past

What are Lynchings?

An act of terror meant to spread fear among blacks and served the broad social purpose of maintaining white supremacy in the economic, social and political spheres.

How often did it happen?

Very often

Why did it occur?

1- *Rise in Black Prominence*

Although the practice of lynching had existed before slavery, it gained momentum during Reconstruction, **when viable black towns sprang up across the South and African Americans began to make political and economic inroads by registering to vote,**

establishing businesses and running for public office. Many whites -- landowners and poor whites -- felt threatened by this rise in black prominence.

2- *Fear of Black male sexuality*

Foremost on their minds was a fear of sex between the races. Some whites espoused the idea that black men were sexual predators and wanted integration in order to be with white women. They were a kind of *vigilantism* where Southern white men saw themselves as protectors of their way of life and their white women.

Where did they take place?

Lynchings were frequently committed with the most flagrant **public** display. Lynchings were often advertised in newspapers and drew large crowds of

white families. Often times the entire community and neighboring towns would attend, sometimes cancelling school and closing work.