The Dark Side Of American Racial Discrimination

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Cases of lynching and racial segregation have received mixed reactions from different parties that have led to the formation of movements and laws to protect human rights. However, some individuals have criticized these movements as a counter-response. Despite these counter-movements, it is evident that lynching and racial discrimination are a threat to humanity due to the effects they bear. Therefore, there needs to be a precise depiction of the effects of lynching and discrimination on the community. The song “Strange Fruit,” penned down by Abel Meeropol, brings the apprehension of racism and brutality to real life on the practice of lynching, debunks racial segregation of Black Americans, and takes a harrowing look at 1900s America’s South.

Symbolism and Social Critique in Strange Fruit

Meeropol’s song Strange Fruit deals with the social issue of lynching and racial segregation and how this affects society. For instance, the lyrics “black bodies swinging in the southern breeze” show the lynching of black people, which was irrational and inhuman. Moreover, the author presents the idea of a tree that bears strange fruit that is covered with blood on its leaves and on the roots (Embrick 60). This symbolism represents the black people and the atrocities committed against them and how this affects the black community. Throughout the song, the author creates a vivid image with a provoking touch on the lynching of black people. Consequently, an audience picks on the author’s bitterness due to this topic’s sensitivity and heart-wrenching sense. The author is keen on bringing out these effects, which would have had a positive impact if human rights were preserved and the black community protected from harm.

History and Scale of Lynching

The act of lynching was a form of extrajudicial killing in America, where black people were tortured and murdered by black mobs. The lynching happened in South America throughout the 19th century, and victims hung on tree branches. The song presents the hanging bodies as strange fruit, as trees are supposed to grow edible fruits (Alexandre 16). Reports indicate that over 4000 black people were lynched between 1882 and 1968. Mississippi has the highest record of lynching between 1882 and 1968, recording 581 lynches. Georgia and Texas follow with 531 and 493 lynches consecutively. Despite the black population being the highest percentage of these lynches, white people and

Mexican, Australian, and Chinese immigrants were also victims. However, the white people were lynched for trying to help the black people and championing anti-lynching.

Fabricated Charges the Great Migration and NAACP Activism

The charges that provoked lynching were often fabricated to justify these grotesque actions. In many cases, black men were accused of rape which made people agitated, thus causing racial segregation with the men being portrayed as hypersexual aggressors. Moreover, black people were lynched on account of robbery, murder, and arson. Besides, black people were killed on baseless issues like violation of racial expectations and social customs, including speaking while showing a lesser sense of respect as required by the white people. Consequently, black people started to flee South America to protect themselves from these atrocities, resulting in the Great Migration (Gregory 223). The Great Migration is a known historical event that was a counter-response to the racial lynches through boycotting white businesses. The NAACP is among the organizations formed as an anti-lynch movement during the Great Migration. The NAACP helped mobilize support from newspapers and the public to change their opinion on the lynches. Moreover, the NAACP championed legislators' introduction of the anti-lynching bill, which first succeeded in Missouri in 1918 through Leonidas Dyer, a congressman. However, the Senate defeated the bill, which slowed down the results of this activism. The NAACP continued to push this bill to halt lynching at a federal level, and by 1930, the lynching had declined significantly. As the lynches declined, there was no report of lynching in 1952.

From Emmett Till to Modern Racial Violence

However, the decline in lynching did not guarantee its end. In 1955, Emmett Till, a 14-year-old, was murdered on allegations of flirting with a white woman (House 92). Despite this not being a novel case of lynching, it depicted white supremacy that dictated over the black people. Due to a lack of basis for the allegations Emmett faced, the NAACP declared this an act of lynching. Despite testimonies presented by witnesses on this murder, an all-white jury acquitted the accused of these charges. Later, the accused men bragged about their actions in a magazine article that elicited different reactions. Till's mother was agitated with her son's death and later expressed her frustrations by displaying the brutalized body in an open casket during the funeral. There have been cases of lynching in the modern years, with George Floyd's death causing a huge ripple effect. Despite the method of lynching having changed, the emotional damage and the societal gap it creates are similar to that shown in Abel Meeropol's song Strange Fruit.

Motive of lynching

After getting a perspective on how lynches were conducted and the course of these lynches, it is crucial to understand the intent behind these hideous undertakings. First, lynches were executed to suppress black prominence. The rise of black towns and businesses was a threat to white supremacy. Moreover, the black population started to gain political leverage that allowed them to vote and run for public office. Therefore, the white people felt threatened, with some openly criticizing the possibility of interracial mixing. As a result, the white people depicted the black Americans as sexual predators to prevent interracial encounters. The penalty for these encounters was lynching, which was a significant threat to black lives. Besides, the lynches were conducted as a pervasive threat to black people. The entitlement that resulted from white supremacy was a significant contributor to these pervasive lynches.

Furthermore, lynches were conducted to be used as souvenirs and newspaper headlines to stamp the aspect of white supremacy. The headlines often highlighted these acts in a demeaning manner with pictures of happy crowds and brutally murdered people. The headlines often created fear amongst black people with a clear understanding of the consequences they could face on crossing paths with white people. In addition, most of the lynching victims were labour organizers and political activists who went against the white people's expectations. Despite the men being the primary victims, women were not exempted from befalling this fate. This was done to ensure that the white people retained dominance over the black people. Moreover, lynching was done to prevent black people from accessing economic sustenance tools. The unfair treatment of blacks was evident as the white people were not punished for any wrong deeds committed against black people (Lee 145). This ensured that black people remained impoverished without access to human rights, which diminished any hope. Therefore, the white people had an economic advantage over the black people.

Relevance of Strange Fruit in addressing brutality and racial discrimination

The song Strange Fruit makes an emotion-triggering attempt to address the horrors of racial abuse. The song explicitly highlights the lynching in South America on black people. The song addresses the scene of lynched black bodies hanging from trees with bulging eyes and twisted mouths to show the damage and the terrible encounters of these victims before their deaths. Unlike other songs that often try to be audience sensitive when addressing this issue, Abel Meeropol's expressions are bare to show the distaste and pain that originates from these lynches. Each line in this song is carefully constructed to reveal its intent without hiding any details of these horrific scenes. For instance, the line "here is a fruit for the crows to pluck shows how black lives were wasted to become a meal for the crows. Despite referring to the bodies as a fruit, the line adds that the fruit is meant for crows. However, crows do not feed on fruits but on flesh and are known to be scavengers. Hence, this shows the extremes of these horrific acts fueled by racial differences. The song can effectively call out the

white people for these actions, thus preventing any future cases of lynching.

In conclusion, the lynching committed on black people is distasteful in the eyes of humanity and civilization. Despite these acts having occurred in a century filled with violence, their impact is evident even in recent years. Besides, cases of lynching have been reported in recent years, which puts into question human progress in stopping these acts (Davenport 446). Therefore, there is a need to establish an effective task force and laws to avoid any developments in cases of lynching. Moreover, the relevant organizations tasked with protecting human rights need to be effective and free from compromise in handling this delicate issue. The human population needs to be aware of their actions and their effects on human civilization. Awareness will help in appropriate decision-making and develop the need to protect each individual, regardless of race or cultural beliefs. It is a human responsibility to facilitate coexistence and sharing of resources due to the developed ethics system. The song Strange Fruit is a message to remind the white people of their distasteful actions on a racial basis.

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