

THE LYNCHING OF REUBEN SIMS (1448 characters)

On April 19, 1904, Reuben Sims, a Black man, was lynched by a white mob in Little River, Alabama. Beginning on April 18, the mob terrorized local Black residents in a manhunt for Black men after a white man was found dead. Mr. Sims was seized and whipped three times to torture him into saying he was involved. Then, the mob hanged him and riddled his body with bullets. The Sheriff of Baldwin County reported that he knew the identity of some of the lynchers but that no one in the local white community would cooperate with an investigation. He made no arrests. The local circuit judge had the power to hold a special session to investigate the lynching, and people from outside the community called for a court hearing at the Baldwin County court here in Bay Minette. However, the judge announced that in his opinion no special session was necessary. During this era, lynch mobs regularly used torture to elicit false confessions from their victims. These alleged confessions were indications of fear, not complicity, and victims of racial terror lynching were denied their constitutional rights to due process. Local officials empowered to hold lynch mobs accountable instead granted them impunity, sending a message that Black people had no protection against racial terror violence. Reuben Sims was one of at least eight Black people lynched in Alabama between April 6 and September 7, 1904. No one was ever held accountable for his lynching.

LYNCHING IN AMERICA (1436 characters)

Between 1865 and 1950, at least 6,500 African Americans were victims of lynch mob violence in the United States. After the Civil War, an ongoing commitment to white supremacy led to organized resistance to Black equality. Lethal violence against Black people was used to maintain white economic, political, and social control. From 1865 to 1876, mass lynchings of Black people were common. The total number of deaths is unknown. After 1877, lynching emerged as the most public and notorious form of racial terrorism. Mobs of white people participated in public spectacle lynchings in which Black people were mutilated, hanged, shot to death, and burned alive. African Americans were targeted for participating in politics, working towards economic independence, violating arbitrary social customs, engaging in interracial relationships, and being accused of crimes. Black people faced a presumption of guilt at even the suggestion of attempted violence against a white person. This presumption was used to justify lawless mob murder of Black people, who were deprived of their constitutional rights. Public officials and law enforcement often declined to protect Black people and then granted impunity to the white people who lynched them, sending the message that Black people had no protection from lethal racial violence. Between 1877 and 1950, Reuben Sims was one of at least 360 victims of racial terror lynching killed in Alabama.