

## Activity Sheet – The South After Reconstruction

### Introduction:

Conditions were very difficult for African Americans in the America South after the end of Reconstruction. The four documents that follow describe one of the most unjust periods in United States history.

Examine each document carefully and answer the questions at the end of the document.

### Document A. Mrs. Ida Wells-Barnett Writes a Letter to President McKinley, 1898

Mr. President, the colored citizens of this country. . . desire to respectfully urge that some action be taken by you as chief magistrate of this great nation . . . for the apprehension and punishment of the lynchers of Postmaster Baker, of Lake City, S.C. . . (W)e most earnestly desire that national legislation be enacted for the suppression of the national crime of lynching.

For nearly twenty years lynching crimes . . . have been committed and permitted by this . . . nation. Nowhere in the civilized world save the United States of America do men, possessing all civil and political power, go out in bands of 50 and 5,000 to hunt down, shoot, hang or burn to death a single individual, unarmed and absolutely powerless. Statistics show that nearly 10,000 American citizens have been lynched in the past 20 years.

1. What year is this letter from?
2. Ida Wells-Barnett writes President Wilson about the “colored citizens of this country.” What term would we use to describe this group of people today?
3. What problem does Ida Wells-Barnett describe?
4. How many times has this happened in the last twenty years?
5. What does Ida Wells-Barnett demand of President McKinley?

### Document B. Picture

1. Describe what you see in this picture.
2. Why is this picture so frightening?



### Document C. How many people were lynched in the South

Year	Total Victims	Whites	Blacks	% Black
1882	113	64	49	43%
1885	184	110	74	40%
1890	96	11	85	88%
1895	179	66	113	63%
1900	115	9	106	92%

1. How many years are shown on this chart?
2. How many people were lynched in the South in 1882?
3. How many of these people were White? How many were Black?
4. How many people were lynched in the South in 1900?
5. How many of these people were White? How many were Black?
6. What has changed from 1882 to 1900?

### D) Strange Fruit, a song sung by Billy Holiday in the 1930s

Southern trees bear a strange fruit,  
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,  
Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,  
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.  
Pastoral scene of the gallant South,  
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,  
Scent of magnolias sweet and fresh,

And the sudden smell of burning flesh!  
Here is the fruit for the crows to pluck,  
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,  
For the sun to rot, for a tree to drop,  
Here is a strange and bitter crop.

1. The lyrics to this song say that there is “Blood on the leaves and blood at the root” of the trees in the South. What is the “strange fruit” described in this song?
2. What images does the song use to create a picture in your mind?
3. Draw a picture or write your own poem, song or rap about lynching in the South.