

# The history of the noose and its significance to african

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The origins of the noose, also known as the hangman's knot, has been associated with the capital punishment more pronounced during the Elizabethan times. The noose has strikingly evoked a kind of historical perspective quite commonly associated with death as a punishment for crimes committed. In Britain, the noose was often looped into one end where a man's neck could easily fit and allowed to hang and apparently die of strangulation from the tightening loop or by a breakage of the hanged man's vertebra. Its positioning is seen to coincide with the angle of the jaw in order to make sure that the head is thrown backwards by the rope so that the force is transmitted into the neck vertebrae rather than being thrown forward and the force taken on the throat which tends to cause strangulation.

In our modern era however, the noose signifies for many a corrosive ingredient to an otherwise risky social practice of racism. In the first part of the 20th century, the practice of lynching was ascribed to stifle mob violence due in part to an ineffective law enforcement agency (Apel, 2004: 49). From the torturous slave trade era, the nooses of the Ku Klux Klan evoked a sign for the Black society to remain passive and stand defenseless in the face of any racist assault (Bobo et. al, 2004: 140). In the historical opposition to black voting rights, representation and summary punishments, the lyncher's noose represented white supremacy (Grant, 2001: 101).

## **Purpose of the Study and Statement of the Problem**

It is therefore to the best interest of everyone to be able to identify the origins of the hangman's knot or the noose in the current period. Such knowledge leads to the understanding of how the hangman's noose is

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currently associated to an issue of importance to the Black American society in the US. In the history of hate crimes and lynching against the Black Americans and other marginalized sectors, the rope has often symbolized hatred.

In the face of modernity and globalization, and equal rights for every American, the interpretation of the hangman's noose as an action is still often seen as an over reaction in a climate full of questions relative to racism and supremacy. The meaning behind the noose and its presence has been seen by the Black community as denoting racial hatred and white power.

However, amidst a modern and diverse society that has publicized political correctness; every American is faced with the question on its proper interpretation and to discuss the rightful censorship of the act. Will there be a chance when people will stop reacting to the noose and somehow understand that this is just an overblown racial rhetoric or will the culture and climate of racism fit for censorship or punishment?

## **Review of Literature**

When a white police officer placed a hangman's noose on the motorcycle of a black policeman in Boston, the black policeman complained that he was being victimized by the white officer. Although investigative reports did reveal that no racial motives were behind the act, the black officer claimed that, " no one can just hang a noose near any black man who knew his history and say that it does not have a tremendous significance" (Blum, 2002: 2).

The consequences for such an action in some states like Miami has allowed black employees who were subjected to an intimidating presence of a hangman's noose in the office of AdelpiaCommunication's manager to collect a \$1 million settlement (Apel, 2004: 17). Suddenly a spate of similar incidents are happening across the country where a noose was left for a black workman at a construction site in South Elgin while a woman in Queens, New York brandishes a noose to threaten her black neighbors. Pitts also reported for the Chicago Tribune how a noose was left on the door of a black professor at Columbia University that stands to investigate the recent spate actions (Pitts, Oct. 2007).

History had associated the noose as a tool for capital punishment against criminals during the Elizabethan times. The United States whose justice system was patterned after England's has adapted death by hanging to convicted and ruthless crime offenders. The fall of slave trade after the Civil War marked a quest for civil rights that soon catered to the emergence of groups opposed to Black freedom and rights. The Ku Klux Klan became an effective and organized movement against Black rights who once exercised a reign of terror using the symbolic gesture of the noose to evoke fear among the blacks and other minorities (Grant, 2001: 100).

The memory of lynching still runs fresh on the hearts and minds of the targeted Black population along with other minorities (Reid-Pharr, 1999: 126). In the last few years of the 20th century, even after the successful allowance of equal rights for every American citizen, random incidents of

lynching with the symbolic use of the hangman's noose despite progress and modernization (Diuguid, 2007: 149).

## **Findings and Analysis**

Despite progress and modernity, it is observed that the memory of lynching particularly with the symbolic use of the noose is seen as a persistent wound to the Black American society. Authors Bobo, et, al (2004) Apel (2004) Blum (2002) have a similar idea that the noose is seen as a predicament for the Blacks and other minorities in the societies whether they were intended as a joke or otherwise. The noose has seen an association and a symbol of white supremacy and hatred against the African Americans in the United States.

In light of the spate and re-emergence of noose lynching around the country, many Black populations could not bring themselves to understand despite comprehensive investigation that it was a prank (Pitts, 2007). Many look back to the atrocities committed against the blacks and other minorities and regard the handful of happenings as an apparent move to stifle violence perpetrated by the marginalized communities (Wallace, 1999: 32).

Random incidents which have happened in relations to actions commonly associated with the hangman's noose dismissed such incidents although an astonishing response that condemned such atrocity could be heard by both white and black communities who were both offended (Diuguid, 2007: 19). Although nothing was done, many African-Americans were hurt about the incident (Diuguid, 2007: 21).

In the exercise of political ideals in the face of diversity, such racial slurs and symbolic forms of hatred has no room in the American egalitarian society as the black population struggle to pursue a more decent and humane existence for their families (Wallace, 1999: 32). Such things that should be forgotten cannot simply be delegated immediately to the memory banks because many still experience feelings of hurt and marginalization after hearing of community members being subjected to such treatment. Although the youths have experienced minor blows to resulting from racism in comparison to their forefathers, Black culture still appreciates the deep roots of their black culture and will continue to feel hurt and rejection as a response to random and symbolic act of the hangman's noose.

## **Conclusion**

The notoriety of the noose however, lies not only in its use as a method of capital punishment. It has also been associated as a racial hate symbol, so far being used in the United States against African-Americans. This is in reference to the various forms of extermination performed against African-Americans in the rural South in the past. To address such, the use of nooses for the intention of perpetrating a hate crime, or using nooses as a racial hate symbol, was actually made illegal under U. S. law. Recently, there have been cases where the hanging of nooses was done at American universities in what many see may be a resurgence of the symbol.

In totality, nooses however can be said to be very significant to African-Americans, as it tries to represent a direct attack on their African American race. The move to make it illegal was definitely a step in the right direction.

Just as the noose gained its reputation with being a form of capital punishment, it too has become a racially charged symbol that continues to affect African-Americans today.

It will therefore be a difficult option to encourage Black Americans to forget about the noose and its symbolism. Their deeply embedded culture is taught to every Black child in order for him to appreciate his importance in the struggle for equality.

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