

RACIAL VIOLENCE

Lynching In St. Petersburg

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- :26 From reconstruction until the civil rights movement, white people carried out lynchings as a way to terrorize, punish, and control black people.
- :36 Between 1900 and 1930, Florida had the highest ratio of lynchings to minority populations of any state in the country and Tampa had the most lynchings of any Florida city or county during the same period. In 1905, John Thomas was lynched on Christmas Day. Thomas killed the St. Petersburg police chief while being arrested on a disorderly conduct charge. A mob of white men stormed the jail, overpowered police officers, and shot and killed Thomas. No one was arrested or charged with his murder.
- 1:22 John Evans and Ebenezer Tobin, both African-Americans, were suspected of murdering white photographer, Ed Sherman, and attacking his wife, Mary Sherman. John Evans was lynched at Ninth Street, now Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Street and Second Avenue South on Tuesday, November 12, 1914 by a mob of 1500 white men, women, and children. A year later, Ebenezer Tobin was put on trial for murdering Ed Sherman and attacking his wife. He was found guilty on September 17, 1915 and sentenced to be hanged. It took the jury 15 minutes to determine his guilt. He was hanged at 11:06 AM on October 22. His execution was Pinellas County's first legal hanging. He was buried in a pauper's grave.
- Parker Watson was lynched on May 9, 1926 at the hands of a group of masked, armed men as three police officers were taking him to the county jail. His body was found along an isolated road the next morning. He had been shot five times and had acid or other chemicals poured on his face. Unlike the lynching of John Evans in 1914, when public officials and upstanding citizens were members of the lynch mob and were said to have planned it the night before, the Watson lynching brought outcries from a number of people, including St. Petersburg ministers. During a special session, the county commission condemned the lynching in a resolution and offered a reward of \$1000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the guilty parties. The perpetrators were never identified or prosecuted.
- 3:41 At the time of the lynchings, St. Petersburg was promoting itself as a progressive city, open to all who wanted to rest and relax in warm tropical breezes. The mob that lynched John Evans walked west on Central Avenue past these buildings. These documented lynchings are likely not the only ones that occurred. The death of so many black people today at the hands of law enforcement and self-styled vigilantes reminds us that the fight for equal rights and the equal value of black lives is far from won.

