

# Florida Lynched More Black People Per Capita Than Any Other State, According to Report

[Ray Downs](#) | February 11, 2015 | 7:00am

Reuben Stacy, a 37-year-old black man, hangs from a tree on Old Davie Road in Fort Lauderdale, blood trickling down his body and dripping off his toes. Behind him, a white girl, about 7 years old, looks on, a strange smile on her face as she takes in the sight of the "[strange fruit](#)" her elders had just created that hot day in July 1935.

Stacy was accused of attempting to assault a white woman in her home after first asking for a glass of water. According to a [1993 telling of the story](#), he was arrested three days later 25 miles from the scene. But no trial was ever conducted, and mere hours after his arrest, Stacy was hanged and shot.

The infamous photograph of Stacy's death might be one of the few visual accounts of a lynching in Florida, but a new report from the Equal Justice Initiative about lynching across the American South reminds us that the Sunshine State was among the most brutal in the country when it come to race-fueled executions of black people. Per capita, Floridians lynched at a higher rate than any other state.

Between 1877 and 1950, the report, *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror*, counts 3,959 examples of "racial terror lynchings," which EJI describes as violent, public acts of torture that were tolerated by public officials and designed to intimidate black victims.

The staggering tally is 700 more than previously reported and is based on research of court records, newspaper accounts, local historians, and family descendants.

EJI's report explains that these terror lynchings were widespread and began to decrease only once court-sanctioned capital punishment increased. In addition, the report found that many lynching victims were not accused of crimes but killed for minor social transgressions or for demanding basic rights and fair treatment.

Of the 12 states analyzed, Florida ranked fifth, with 331 terror lynchings within its borders.

Per capita, however, Florida ranks first, with 0.594 lynchings for every 100,000 residents.

Of the 25 counties across the South with the most lynchings, Florida has six: Orange (34), Marion (30), Alachua (19), Polk (19), Columbia (17), and Taylor (17).

"Many people are under the wrong impression that the majority of lynchings were black males assaulting white females, but most were because black men and women were accused of

stealing," University of Florida professor Jack Davis, who [has written about](#) Florida lynchings, tells *New Times*.

Davis adds that other historical accounts back up Florida's reputation as a lynching capital.

"Black men were more at risk of being lynched in Florida than any other state," he says.

The reasons for this vary but include heightened efforts by some white people to stop blacks from voting and, of course, sheer racism. But efforts against organized labor were also a factor, and during the early 20th Century, when Tampa's cigar industry was booming thanks to the labor or minorities and immigrants, lynchings were common.

"In the early days of organized labor, there was lots of physical violence and people killed by police or hired security forces -- and these lynchings went 'unsolved,'" Davis says. "Law enforcement didn't put value on the laws of nonwhites and immigrants."

Black Cubans, non-black Cubans, and immigrants from Spain and Italy were victims of urban vigilantism during this time.

"The failings of this era very much reflect what young people are now saying about police shootings," EJI director Bryan Stevenson told the [Guardian](#). "It is about embracing this idea that 'black lives matter,'" he added. "I also think that the lynching era created a narrative of racial difference, a presumption of guilt, a presumption of dangerousness that got assigned to African-Americans in particular -- and that's the same presumption of guilt that burdens young kids living in urban areas who are sometimes menaced, threatened, or shot and killed by law enforcement officers."

EJI's report on lynchings is the first comprehensive look in several years at the number of such killings. The last study of similar size was published in 1993, when University of Georgia researchers spent five years calculating the number of lynchings across the South. That study, titled *A Festival of Violence* and conducted by E.M. Beck and Stewart Tolnay, found [2,314 lynchings](#) in ten states between 1882 and 1930. Florida accounted for 212 lynchings -- again enough for fifth in the nation and most in the country per capita.

The difference in numbers could be attributed to the broader time range of the EJI study, compiling lynchings in 12 states opposed to ten, and simply finding records of new lynchings not previously reported in lynching studies.