

## VI. STRANGE FRUIT



For many African Americans growing up in the South in the 19th and 20th centuries, the threat of lynching was commonplace. The popular image of an angry white mob stringing a black man up to a tree is only half the story. Lynching, an act of terror meant to spread fear among blacks, served the broad social purpose of maintaining white supremacy in the economic, social and political spheres.

Jazz singer Billy Holiday made a song about the horrors of lynching famous. When Holiday decided to sing "Strange Fruit," the song reached millions of people. While the lyrics never mention lynching, the metaphor is painfully clear:

*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 magnolia sweet and fresh,  
And the sudden smell of burning flesh!  
Here is a 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.*

**Q1. What connections can you make between the photograph of the tree and the lyrics of "Strange Fruit"?**

**Q2. How does the lyric make use of figurative language? Cite any examples of figurative language you can identify in the lyrics and explain how it is being used.**