Jefferson County’s 30 Residents
Jefferson County's 30 Residents

A Report By Jefferson County Memorial Project Fellows
CONTENTS

Introduction.............................................................................................................3

Why We Made This Report ..................................................................................4

Who Made This Report .......................................................................................6

EJI’s Lynching in America Research .....................................................................8

How to Approach This Report .............................................................................10

30 Victims .............................................................................................................12

Commonly Asked Questions ...............................................................................44

Conclusion and Acknowledgements .................................................................46

Racial Violence in the U.S. ..................................................................................48

jeffersoncountymemorial.com  @jeffcomemorial  /JCMP:jeffersoncountymemorialproject
THIS REPORT WILL BE HARD TO READ.

It tells the individual stories of lives ended unjustly, violently, and in an act of utter dehumanization. The combined stories outline acts of racial terrorism that lasted for nearly half a century in Jefferson County. This was a national system of terror and oppression that local governments, the press, religious institutions, and businesses were complicit in upholding. These residents were sons and daughters, siblings, and fathers and mothers. They lived through slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the rise of Jim Crow. But, their stories have mostly been lost. JCPM fellows have taken an important step in researching these histories.

But, if we feel prepared, we'll read it.

We will read these histories to remind ourselves of what we shouldn't forget. We'll learn how white mobs used lynching to enforce racial hierarchy and segregation. We'll learn a different history of Linn and Stockham Park, of the Birmingham Mineral Railroad, Pratt Mines, and our main streets. This history informs our understanding of racial injustice and our current system of mass incarceration.

Then, we'll tell others.

We can tell others that this report isn't easy to read. But, we'll tell our friends and families what compelled us to read this history. We know our past informs our present; that, only together, can we bring truth to our country's history and advocate for change today.

Thank you for reading,

Abigail Schneider
Jefferson County Memorial Project
WHY WE MADE THIS REPORT

In 2018, The Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) opened a groundbreaking memorial dedicated to African American victims of racial terror lynchings called The National Memorial for Peace and Justice. The memorial contains monuments corresponding to over 800 counties where EJI documented racial terror lynchings. Each county has a duplicate monument. EJI has invited residents of these counties to retrieve their monument and lead in facilitating a local reckoning. To learn more about this initiative, please visit EJI’s website https://museumandmemorial.eji.org.

Community leaders of Jefferson County have created a grassroots community coalition, the Jefferson County Memorial Project, to orchestrate the retrieval of our monument. This is an intergenerational, interfaith, and interracial coalition with over 35 community partners. It is our hope that the opportunity to retrieve our monument will bear witness to our history of racial terror and make a statement that Alabamians are leading the charge in confronting our past and changing our future.

THE JEFFERSON COUNTY MEMORIAL PROJECT WILL:

1. **Research** and reach out to descendants of the victims of the 30 Jefferson County lynchings

2. **Educate** the county on the history and purpose of the monument through museum exhibits, K-12 student engagement, a city-wide book discussion, and other programming

3. **Place** the monument and establish historical markers throughout the county

4. **Advocate** for criminal justice reform for the city and county

For more information, go to our website www.jeffersoncountymemorial.com
WHO MADE THIS REPORT

To begin the retrieval process, JCMP knew we first needed to understand who these victims were. Previous to this report, no comprehensive research had ever been completed on these individuals. JCMP created the Jefferson County Memorial Project Fellowship, a group of students from our county's colleges who would be trained on how to conduct this research. These students study at Birmingham Southern College, Jefferson State Community College, Lawson State Community College, Miles College, Samford University, and University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Together, these fellows have worked with university mentors and the Birmingham Public Library to learn the skills needed to conduct original primary source research. They've also learned how to process this painful history and be trauma informed discussion leaders.
JCPM Fellows

Tammy Blue, MA in History
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Jamilria Bryant
Lawson State Community College

Madelyn Lisette Cantu
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Katie Fagan, MA in Anthropology
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Becca Glass
Jefferson State Community College

Samantha Gonzalez, PhD, Medical/Clinical Psychology
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Lily Haskins
Samford University

April Johnson
Lawson State Community College

Caroline Larry
Samford University

Nisha Maxwell
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Alexis Nail
Birmingham-Southern College

Jimena Ortiz-Perez
Lawson State Community College

Ashley Pates
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Undré Phillips, MPA
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Jenesia Porter
Samford University

Hana Presley
Jefferson State Community College

Amber Somma
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Isaac Sours
Samford University

Adamantia Dia Stathakes
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Devyn Troy
Miles College

Margaret Weinberg
Birmingham-Southern College

Advisors

Tony Bingham
Miles College

Chris Metress
Samford University

Pam King
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Andrew Nelson
The Altamont School

Andrew Baer
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Harriet E. Amos Doss
University of Alabama at Birmingham

William P. Hustwit
Birmingham-Southern College

Gregory Wilson
Lawson State Community College
EJI'S LYNCHING IN AMERICA RESEARCH
“During the period between the Civil War and World War II, thousands of African Americans were lynched in the United States. Lynchings were violent and public acts of torture that traumatized black people throughout the country and were largely tolerated by state and federal officials. These lynchings were terrorism. “Terror lynchings” peaked between 1880 and 1940 and claimed the lives of African American men, women, and children who were forced to endure the fear, humiliation, and barbarity of this widespread phenomenon unaided.

Lynching profoundly impacted race relations in this country and shaped the geographic, political, social, and economic conditions of African Americans in ways that are still evident today. Terror lynchings fueled the mass migration of millions of black people from the South into urban ghettos in the North and West throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Lynching created a fearful environment where racial subordination and segregation was maintained with limited resistance for decades. Most critically, lynching reinforced a legacy of racial inequality that has never been adequately addressed in America. The administration of criminal justice in particular is tangled with the history of lynching in profound and important ways that continue to contaminate the integrity and fairness of the justice system.

The history of terror lynching complicates contemporary issues of race, punishment, crime, and justice. Mass incarceration, excessive penal punishment, disproportionate sentencing of racial minorities, and police abuse of people of color reveal problems in American society that were framed in the terror era. The narrative of racial difference that lynching dramatized continues to haunt us. Avoiding honest conversation about this history has undermined our ability to build a nation where racial justice can be achieved.” — Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror

The terror lynchings in this report follow EJI’s research of focusing on the years between 1877 and 1950. The time-frame helped focus their definition of a racial terror lynching, which was an extrajudicial act of racial terrorism, motivated by the narrative of racial difference. The act involved killing African Americans by hanging, burning, mutilation, or other brutal assault at the hands of white mobs of at least three or more people. The mob’s purpose was not only to terrorize the victim, but the entire African American community, with near complete impunity and no fear of legal recourse. EJI has documented 362 lynchings in Alabama.

HOW TO APPROACH THIS REPORT

Our ask of the Jefferson County community is to join the Jefferson County Memorial Project as we bear witness to this painful history. We understand that addressing racial terror is difficult in nature. We only ask that you participate in this conversation if you are comfortable. We recognize this report will surface different types of pain. The pain of highlighting the act of the lynching; the pain of the victims and their families; and the pain of blame of living ancestors of those that participated in these horrific acts.

Our individual feelings and experiences in relation to the Jefferson County Memorial Project and the important history of lynching are valid. Below are resources to address trauma and people who are willing to listen:

TELEPHONE RESOURCES

If you, or someone you know is in a crisis, please refer to these hotlines in the local Birmingham area. As always, in an emergency, please dial 9-1-1.

Local Crisis Line: (205) 323-7273

Birmingham Crisis Line: (205)-323-7777

*For Suicide Prevention Support*: 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) or go to suicidepreventionlifeline.org (to chat with a counselor online)

ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING RESOURCES FOR MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

NO MORE MARTYRS:
National Website: www.nomoremartyrs.org
Local Birmingham Chapter Telephone: (205) 440-2837

Magic City Acceptance Center:
Website: www.magiccityacceptancecenter.org
Telephone: (205)-407-5799

Birmingham Counseling and Wellness:
Website: www.birminghamcounselingwellness.com
Telephone: (205)-224-9181

Impact Family Counseling
Website: www.impactal.org
Telephone: (205) 916-0123
THIS IS ALSO A REPORT OF ACTIVISM

This report is not a story of victimhood. There was an immense amount of activism, bravery, and heroism within the black population to curb this system of racial terror violence. The black Lawyer James A. Scott tried to have a public protest after Lewis Houston's lynching. Yet, the Birmingham mayor used the militia to break up the protest. When Tom Collins was released on bail, a group of black individuals saved his life by organizing to escort him from the courthouse. Black individuals raised money to properly try to prosecute James Thomas’ murders. These were dangerous forms of protest. As you’ll read, mobs lynched men who tried to protest these acts of utter injustice. They lynched Tom Redmond as he tried to stand up to police brutality. They lynched an unknown man who protested Henry Smith’s lynching. As more research is done on these victims, we hope to paint a more comprehensive picture of such acts of bravery.
30 VICTIMS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lewis Houston</td>
<td>11/24/1883</td>
<td>Linn Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>4/22/1886</td>
<td>Pratt Mines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monroe Johnson</td>
<td>9/28/1887</td>
<td>Leeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff Curry</td>
<td>3/18/1888</td>
<td>Adger, Blue Creek Mines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardy Posey</td>
<td>4/23/1888</td>
<td>Bessemer, Southern Railway Depot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Meadows</td>
<td>1/15/1889</td>
<td>Birmingham, Near Pratt Mines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Steele</td>
<td>9/27/1889</td>
<td>Pratt Mines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom Redmond</td>
<td>6/17/1890</td>
<td>Brookside Mines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Smith</td>
<td>11/16/1890</td>
<td>Hillman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>11/17/1890</td>
<td>Birmingham Mineral Railroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Mosley</td>
<td>11/14/1894</td>
<td>Dolomite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Anderson</td>
<td>10/09/1896</td>
<td>Toadvine, near Rocky Creek Bridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Cyat</td>
<td>10/10/1896</td>
<td>Toadvine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Wardley</td>
<td>12/07/1896</td>
<td>Irondale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake McKenzie</td>
<td>3/22/1897</td>
<td>Brookside Mines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Thomas</td>
<td>7/03/1897</td>
<td>Blossburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>5/11/1901</td>
<td>Leeds, Southern Railway Train Route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Bentley</td>
<td>8/02/1901</td>
<td>Leeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry Johnson</td>
<td>9/03/1907</td>
<td>Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elijah Nelms</td>
<td>7/29/1908</td>
<td>Pratt City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Miller</td>
<td>8/04/1908</td>
<td>Brighton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Davis</td>
<td>8/21/1908</td>
<td>Pratt City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Thomas</td>
<td>4/25/1909</td>
<td>Bessemer, outskirts of the town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Chandler</td>
<td>1/28/1912</td>
<td>Bessemer, 3rd Ave and 19th Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Smith</td>
<td>11/01/1912</td>
<td>Bessemer, 1623 Second Avenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson Gardner</td>
<td>8/23/1913</td>
<td>Kilgore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will McBride</td>
<td>7/12/1923</td>
<td>Adamsville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Lawrence</td>
<td>7/05/1933</td>
<td>Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Taylor</td>
<td>8/23/1934</td>
<td>Stockham Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O.D. Henderson</td>
<td>9/05/1940</td>
<td>Fairfield</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lewis Houston was born in Chilton County in 1863. He was the son of Ned and Lucy Houston and had three siblings, Anthony, Millie, and Maggie. In early 1883, when he was 20 years old, Mr. Houston moved to Birmingham to find work, and was under the employment of foreman C.F. Giles at the Louisville and Nashville roundhouse as general help. He had previously worked as a car coupler and a porter.

On Friday, November 23, 1883, Mr. Houston was accused of assaulting a white woman. Police officers arrested him from his place of work and brought him to the jail on Fourth Avenue North. Rumors swirled about plans to lynch him. A mob of white men began to gather outside the jail. On Saturday evening, November 24, 1883, a mob of 150 men approached the jail to apprehend Lewis. The mob broke into the jail with pistols and took Mr. Houston from his cell. The mob dragged Mr. Houston from Fourth Avenue North to Capitol Park, now known as Linn Park.

The mob took Mr. Houston to a pine tree in the park, and told him to confess to raping the woman. Lewis responded, “Gentleman, before God, I didn’t do it.” Following this, the mob adjusted the rope around his neck. His last words were “Jesus, take me home.”

The mob disbanded. They did not use firearms or other displays on Lewis’s body. The event was so widely known a reporter from The Birmingham Iron Age was on site. Yet, the Mayor did not call the militia until after the lynching occurred.

Mr. Houston was buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Birmingham in the pauper’s field.

Following the lynching, a black lawyer, James A. Scott, tried to gather the black community to protest Mr. Houston’s lynching. Mayor Lane requested the help of Captain S.S Thompson and R.J. Love of the Birmingham Rifles and the Birmingham Artillery. The companies stayed in Birmingham all of Sunday night, patrolling on horse and on foot. A newspaper article notes that “not a dozen” black people were seen on the street after 10 p.m., and nor were they congregating where they typically did on Sundays.

This choice by Birmingham to engage the militia mirrors why the mob chose to drag Lewis Houston through the streets to the park. Both by mob force and militia, the goal was to systematically repress the black community socially, politically, and economically. These events were not only an attack on Lewis Houston, but efforts to maintain white supremacy in Birmingham. The government’s complicity is obvious in the way the militia quickly gathered in the case of controlling black Birmingham residents, but was too late to protect them the night before.

Madelyn Lisette Cantu
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Selected Sources
1870 United States Federal Census, Autauga County, Alabama, Beat 7, Ned Houston and family, digital image, retrieved from Ancestry.com
On April 21, 1886, a tragic and familiar demonstration of the prevalence of race-based lynching in Jefferson County unfolded near Pratt Mines outside of Birmingham. An African-American man named Tom Collins was accused of assaulting the wife of William Gould, a farmer living in the area. Though Mr. Collins's alleged attack on Mrs. Gould was not confirmed, a mob of 1,500 local whites quickly assembled as Mr. Collins fled into the woods. The mob was led into the forest by E.O. Crauswell of the Pratt Coal and Iron Company and the trained bloodhounds he used to track down and recapture escaped convict laborers who regularly fled the suffering and toil of the mining camp.

The mob searched for Mr. Collins into the night and the next morning but eventually returned without their targeted victim, refusing to offer details to interested onlookers. Many took the mob's silence on the outcome as "conclusive evidence that [Collins] has been lynched."

When the National Memorial for Peace and Justice opened in the spring of 2018, Mr. Collins's name remained unrecovered. A review of April 1886 editions of the Birmingham Iron Age led to the discovery of Mr. Collins's identity and further information about what appears to be the mob's unsuccessful lynching of Mr. Collins. According to the Birmingham Iron Age, Mr. Collins "came near being mobbed at Pratt Mines," but, "however, his neck was saved."

Mr. Collins was found in the woods, denied attacking Mrs. Gould, and was taken before a judge and released on bond. He was then "quickly brought to the city by armed negroes," a reminder of the consistent African-American resistance to terror lynching that existed in Jefferson County. Subsequent issues of the Birmingham Iron Age make no mention of Mr. Collins's case, pointing to the likelihood that Mr. Collins escaped this attempted lynching.

Though this review of a contemporary newspaper does not verify Mr. Collins's lynching, it nonetheless further validates the horrific consistency of lynching in late-nineteenth century Jefferson County, for these same April 1886 editions of the Birmingham Iron Age include an account of the lynching of a man named Otis Pettus near Five Mile Creek in northern Jefferson County.

Andrew Nelson
JCMP Advisor and teacher at the Altamont School

Selected Sources
"Tracked Down by Bloodhounds," The Richmond Item, April 22, 1886, page 2.
Monroe Johnson was an African American man who worked on the construction of the Columbus & Western Railway. He lived in Jefferson County at Dunnavant’s Camp, a worker’s camp near Leeds. State records show that he had previously served six months in a mining camp as a convict laborer under the Jim Crow convict lease system.

There is not much information to offer in terms of his background. Details such as his age and family have been lost through the years due to the manner in which records and documents were kept.

In the summer of 1887, according to the Birmingham Age-Herald, the atmosphere in Dunnavant’s Camp became especially violent when a white man, Boyd Fleming, shot a black man. Fleming, another worker on the Columbus and Western Railroad, went into the camp with a loaded gun and threatened to shoot more black men. Many African Americans in the camp were enraged by Fleming’s act. Mr. Johnson supposedly made threats to kill Flemming.

On August 31, 1887, it was reported that Mrs. Jack Foster, Flemming’s sister, was shot and killed at her home. There were no witnesses to the events of that night, but authorities hunted for Mr. Monroe. Weeks later, he was found and arrested in Atlanta and sent by train back to Birmingham.

At 4 a.m. on September 19, 1887, a mob of over 70 white men stopped the train carrying Monroe Johnson. The men boarded the train. Mr. Monroe was chained to a seat. “The mob did not wait to unchain him, but tore up the car seat to which he was fastened,” The Cullman Tribune reported. They carried him, still chained to his chair, to a nearby tree and hung him from it. They then returned to the train and shot at him through the windows, as if he were target practice.

The men were not charged for Mr. Monroe’s murder. There was scant evidence of any reprimand, or disapproval. Only The Eufaula Daily Times on September 20, 1887, in reporting on Monroe’s arrest and lynching, mentions that “The Birmingham Herald has a timely editorial condemning the work of the mob.” Records from the week The Birmingham Age-Herald would have published the article condemning the lynching have been lost or damaged, so there is no sure way to know.

I wish that I had more to tell you about his family and the type of character he had. However, with what little is left of his memory I can’t help but feel more like I’m pleading his case to you. Lynching took away the right to trial and that is why it is so important to remember this part of history. By remembering it we can keep from repeating it and offer some sort of justice for men and women like Mr. Monroe.

Amber Somma
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Selected Sources
“Hung By a Mob,” The Montgomery Advertiser, September 20, 1887, page 1.
“In the Dark,” Birmingham Age-Herald, September 2, 1887.
Jeff Curry, an African-American cobbler was lynched by a mob on March 18, 1888 at the Blue Creek Mines just outside of Birmingham. It was a Sunday evening when Curry met with a Mr. Powell and his son, apparently discussing a job he had done for them. It was reported that a dispute broke out and pistols were drawn by both sides, but no bullets were fired.

Not surprisingly, Curry was the only one arrested on the charge of carrying a concealed weapon and was taken before a Magistrate. There it was ordered that Curry be brought to Birmingham City Jail. Curry was taken into the custody of two white officers, Dave Rainey and Sam Reddon who started to carry out the court order and transport Curry to Birmingham. It is unknown exactly how Curry was abducted from two armed guards, but their story was that a disguised mob overpowered them and murdered him. Interestingly, one of the guards was seen speaking to one of the Powells right before they left with the prisoner, which would suggest that the guards knew about the mob and their plans to murder Curry. It was not uncommon for mobs to demand African-Americans “by force” while they were in police custody, and even more common that law officials would look the other way, assist with murders, and refuse to identify mob members after these incidents. Considering how quickly the mob caught up with the guards, it is likely that the murder of Curry was planned.

Selected Sources
“Murdered by Unknown Parties,” The Troy Messenger, March 18, 1888.
Hardy Posey was the son of Irvine and Rose Posey. He had five siblings. The family lived in Jonesboro in Jefferson County. Mr. Posey grew up with childhood trauma from racial terror violence. According to a newspaper clipping from the Montgomery Advertiser, Wesley Posey’s father was killed by the Ku Klux Klan in 1871.

At age 21, Mr. Posey worked on construction for Captain Cahill in Bessemer. On April 23, 1888, the police arrested him for the alleged assault of a white girl. He was taken to the town prison after being confronted by the police and the girl. Though he was initially detained at the local jail, he was moved to the marshal’s home for his safety. However, a mob took Mr. Posey from the marshal’s home. The mob shouted “Lynch him” and “String him up.”

The mob lynched Mr. Posey on a large oak tree near the Southern Railway Depot, near the center of Bessemer. The mob, the marshal, and two policemen were part of the crowd. The mob placed a placard on his hanging body. It read, “our wives and daughters must and shall be protected”, signed by “Bessemer’s Best.”

The black community protested Mr. Posey’s murder. Some buildings allegedly caught fire. The sheriff called in help of a hundred armed men to quell the protest. Trains ran throughout the night for extra support. The county was quick to act to stop the black protestors. Yet, they did not offer any help to save Mr. Posey’s life.

No other records could be found about Hardy Posey or the remaining loved ones they left behind in their untimely deaths. Mr. Posey’s case is not unlike many others during this time period, as many African Americans were not granted the right to due process and a fair trial. Often times, all that was needed was an accusation and a person to blame. Cross-racial misidentifications, forced confessions, and blatant racism propagated the racial terror that African Americans endured, the continuation of white supremacy, and led to the murders of countless black men, women, and children.

Alexis Nail
Birmingham Southern
Madelyn Cantu
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Selected Sources
“Excitement at Bessemer Alabama” The Baltimore Sun, April 25, 1883, page 1.
“Posey’s Father Killed by the Ku Klux,” The Montgomery Advertiser, December 12, 1883, page 1.
On the morning of January 15, 1889, George Meadows, a young African American man, would find himself in the crosshairs of a violent moment that he would be unable to avoid. Little is known about his life. Did he have friends? A wife? People that would miss him if he vanished from the face of the earth? We can only make assumptions.

We don’t know much about the life of George Meadows, but what we do know about is his death. On January 15, 1889, a mob of white men lynched George Meadows at Pratt mines and then riddled his body with bullets. Mr. Meadows was accused of assaulting a white woman, Mrs. Kellman.

Photos were taken of his hanging body and distributed. Later, his body was brought to an undertaker and left out in the public for crowds to view.

Mrs. Kellam had begged the mob not to lynch Mr. Meadows because she was unsure if he was the right man. The following day, the sheriff decided Mr. Meadows was not in fact the perpetrator of the crime and arrested another black man, Lewis Jackson.

George Meadows was buried in a paupers grave in the old Red Mountain Cemetery. Today that land base has been transformed for the most part into Lane Park, home to the Birmingham Zoo and the Birmingham Botanical Gardens. My hope is to locate the grave site of George Meadows if it still exists, or to ask the directors of one of those organizations to allow the creation of a site of remembrance at their facilities.

Tony Bingham
J CMP Advisor and Professor at Miles College

Selected Sources
John Steele was an African American married man with four children who worked in Ensley City. No other records could be found on his life or family.

On the morning of September 27, 1889, Deputy Sheriff E. King Vann took the Ensley City train to Walker Station to execute a warrant for John Steele, placed on a complaint made the day before by Mr. Steele’s brother-in-law. While on the train he asked people who knew Mr. Steele to tell him who Mr. Steele was. As he was riding, the Engineer Rigsby saw Mr. Steele and pointed him out. Deputy Vann exited the train and began chasing and shooting at Mr. Steele. According to a newspaper account, Mr. Steele fired back and killed the Deputy.

Upon hearing of the shooting, several people returned to the area to look for Mr. Steele. The men used bloodhounds from Pratt Mines to help find him. They caught Mr. Steele four miles south of Ensley in the woods and a chase ensued. They shot and killed Mr. Steele. The men then riddled his dead body with bullets.

The court brought a case against Mr. Steele’s murder. On October 1, 1889, The Montgomery Advertiser reported that the jury returned a verdict that “the deceased came to his death from the effects of bullets fired by unknown parties.”

Jamilria Bryant
Lawson State Community College

Selected Sources
“Steel Shot Dead”, The Montgomery Advertiser, September 28, 1889, page 1.
Tom Redmond was murdered in June 1890 in the aftermath of an altercation between a group of white men and a group of black men that left five others wounded, according to newspaper accounts. For Mr. Redmond’s age, his family, his occupation or his life until this point, no records have been found.

Only one side of the story of Mr. Redmond’s death has been deemed ‘official’. It is from the perspective of the white men involved in the incident through the white run Montgomery and Birmingham newspapers.

At Brookside mines, a mine 12 miles north of Birmingham and owned by the Sloss-Sheffield Steel and Iron Company, a group of white men were said to be drinking from a keg of beer, which they then rolled down a hill. The men then proceeded to throw rocks at the keg and the black men at the bottom of the hill. Tensions heightened and both parties armed themselves. The next day, a white man, Tom Acres, attempted to arrest one the black leaders, Jim McDowell. Mr. Redmond heroically stepped in to stop Acres from firing on McDowell, but the encounter sparked a shoot-out in front of the Sloss & Company’s store. Mr. Redmond was killed, and at least five other men were wounded. The black party eventually fled. Two of the men were caught by the white party, who pursued them with bloodhounds. Although law enforcement prevented another lynching of these two men, no one was held accountable for Mr. Redmond’s death.

Newspaper accounts say nothing about what happened to the body of Mr. Redmond or about whether anyone was ever held responsible for the deaths. One newspaper clearly takes the side of the white men involved, the other makes the whole ordeal seem like it was blown out of proportion. The articles cater to the views of the local white communities. No official account of events from the perspective of the black men involved or possible black witnesses seems to exist. It is as if no one thought it important enough to get a different perspective on the events that took place on June 17, 1890.

Nisha Maxwell
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Selected Sources
“Bullets and Blood at Brookside,” The Montgomery Advertiser, June 17, 1890, page 1.
“Negroes Threatening to Kill the White and Burn the Town,” The Montgomery Advertiser, June 17, 1890, page 1.
“Untitled,” Birmingham Chronicle, June 1890.
Henry Smith was lynched on Sunday, November 16, 1890, near Hillman, a community about eight miles outside of Birmingham. He had been arrested on an assault charge of a white woman, but insisted he was innocent. Nothing is reported about Mr. Smith’s age, family, or occupation.

Marshal Anderson of Blocton arrested Mr. Smith around 6 p.m. on Saturday, November 15, 1890, saying he matched the description of a man wanted for an alleged assault of a 60-year-old white woman Mary (or Nancy) Calhoun at Woods Crossing. He was held in custody at Blocton. In order to prove his innocence, Mr. Smith asked to be taken to a house about a half mile away, located on the line between Birmingham, Bessemer, and Blocton road. He would prove his alibi. According to reports, officers handcuffed him and agreed to take him there around 10 p.m. On the way, the reports said, Mr. Smith tried to escape. Officers shot at him 10 or 12 times, with the last shot striking his right hip, causing him to fall. When he continued to try to wade into Blue Creek, he was pursued and recaptured.

Throughout the rest of the night, the mob carried the wounded Mr. Smith from place to place, making a show of obtaining alleged identifications. Once he was declared the perpetrator, a mob of over 200 white men prepared to lynch Mr. Smith.

Before he was hung, Mr. Smith confessed and begged for mercy. The lynchers, however, were unmoved, and the group of miners and Mrs. Calhoun’s neighbors dragged Mr. Smith to a nearby branch line of the Birmingham Mineral Railroad. Once there, the mob gave Mr. Smith time to pray, and then they hanged him from a tree.

His hanging body was discovered by a conductor on the Birmingham Mineral Railroad about a mile from Chinn’s trestle. He was buried on Tuesday, November 18, by the people of Adgers in a shallow grave below the tree on which he was lynched.

Lily Haskins
Samford University

Selected Sources
“A Dead Negro,” Birmingham Age-Herald, November 17, 1890, page 1.
“A Negro Hung,” The Weekly Advertiser (Montgomery, AL), November 20, 1890.
“And He Was Buried” Birmingham Age-Herald, November 18, 1890.
On November 16, 1890, a mob of white men lynched Henry Smith. The following day, an unknown black man created a protest against this act of racial terror. That night, on November 17, 1890, a group of men lynched this unknown man. No more is known about his age, family, or occupation or about where the incident occurred. Only one article, in Tennessee’s *Camden Chronicle*, published several days after the lynching, could be found for this report.

The murder of this man illustrates ways in which the white community ensured that any justice sought for these victims of racial terror would be met with equal violence.

Lily Haskins
Samford University

Selected Sources

As JCMP fellows researched victims, it was important to write against the white press’s “rough justice” narratives. The press usually assumed the individual had committed the allledged crime. They legitimized these acts of racial terror as seeing them as a kind of justice. Yet, without a fair investigation or trial, victims of racial terror carried the presumption of innocence to their deaths. Additionally, unlike the newspaper articles, fellows also wanted to draw attention to how the individuals that killed these men almost never faced prosecution. Though it was usually widely known who was part of these mobs, coronor’s reports and juries notoriously reported that this killings were “at the hands of person’s unknown.”
Unfortunately, the Alabama census of 1890 no longer exists, so I cannot tell you when Robert Mosley was born or how old he was when he was wanted by a lynch mob. I can tell you that there is no record of him on the 1900 census, which leads me to believe that the mob in 1894 eventually caught up to him and ended his life in a brutal fashion. Dolomite was an unincorporated area in Jefferson county, so I cannot be sure, but the 1900 census lists two families with the surname Mosley, so it is possible that Robert had two brothers who lived there and who continued their work after his death. If that is the case then he is survived in death by James and Peter Mosely, their wives, Mary and Jane, and a niece and nephew, Jane L. and Henry. James was a coal miner and Peter was a day laborer, James could read and write but Peter could not, neither of their wives could read or write.

The newspaper article detailing the “excitement over the crime” says that Mr. Mosley’s offense was criminally assaulting Mrs. Thomas Sayre, the young wife of a prominent farmer in Dolomite. The Sayre family is well known in Montgomery, Anthony Dickinson Sayre was a justice of the Supreme Court of Alabama and the father of Zelda Sayre, the future Mrs. F. Scott Fitzgerald. The connection between the Sayre’s of Montgomery and the Sayre’s of Dolomite is fuzzy, and there is no record of Thomas Sayre on the 1900 Alabama census for Jefferson County, so their fate remains unknown. One thing we can easily distinguish from this newspaper article is the intense hatred of African Americans in this time and in this small town. Whether Robert Mosley committed the crime is not the question, but why was the immediate response to this crime to form a lynch mob. Robert Mosley was not given a fair trial and his story was lost in time.

Adamantia Dia Stathakes
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Selected Sources
“Scouring the Swamps for an Unknown Negro,” The Montgomery Advertiser, November 15, 1894, page 1.
On October 9, 1896, James Anderson was lynched by a mob following his arrest by police as a suspect in the death of Randolph Falls, a white farmer from the small town of Toadvine, Alabama. Mr. Anderson and another black man, Henry Cyat, were accused of attacking and robbing Falls. Mr. Anderson did not live to return to Toadvine for questioning and trial, but was lynched after he pleaded for his life.

Falls had given a ride to two black men as he returned from selling cotton in Birmingham. They were still about 10 miles from Toadvine when it started getting dark, so they stopped near Taylor’s Ferry to sleep for the night. The following morning Falls was found fatally wounded and unconscious. He died shortly after.

Quickly following Falls’ death, a few black men were accused of being connected to the murder, but they were found innocent and let go. On Friday, the police settled on James Anderson, arresting him as one of the two possible suspects. The officers who found Mr. Anderson were attempting to bring him back to Toadvine when a mob met them near Rocky Creek Bridge late Friday evening. Mr. Anderson offered to confess to the crime if the mob would take him to jail. He pleaded again with the mob to show mercy. However, no mercy was shown. The mob gave him a moment to pray; then a man came forward and shot Mr. Anderson in the head with a pistol. After the initial shot, approximately 20 more men took aim to Mr.

Anderson, continuing to shoot him until his body was “riddled with holes.”

Before he was lynched, Mr. Anderson named Henry Cyat as his partner in this crime, and soon thereafter Mr. Cyat was captured and lynched. Mr. Anderson and Mr. Cyat were believed to have been lynched by different mobs. Their bodies were found about a mile apart.

Caroline Larry
Samford University

Selected Sources
“'The Lynching Bee,' The Montgomery Advertiser, October 13, 1896, page 3.
On October 10, 1896, Henry Cyat was lynched by a mob after being seized following a confession coerced from another man, James Anderson, prior to Mr. Anderson being lynched. Mr. Cyat’s and Mr. Anderson’s lynchings followed the death of Randolph Falls, a white farmer from the small town of Toadvine, Alabama. Mr. Anderson and Mr. Cyat were lynched by what were believed to be two different mobs after they were accused of attacking and robbing Mr. Falls, who ultimately succumbed to his wounds. The mob that seized Mr. Cyat said they would take him back to Toadvine; however, they did not make it that far. Instead, they lynched Mr. Cyat. The bodies of Anderson and Cyat were found about a mile apart from each other.

Mr. Falls had given a ride to two black men as he returned from selling cotton in Birmingham on a Wednesday. They were still about 10 miles from Toadvine when it started getting dark, so they stopped near Taylor’s Ferry to sleep for the night. A man passing by saw two men on Mr. Falls’ wagon with him and later, on his way back, the same man saw them asleep next to Mr. Falls. The following morning Mr. Falls was found unconscious, almost dead, his body suffering several axe wounds. Mr. Falls soon succumbed to his wounds.

Quickly following Mr. Falls’ death, a few black men were accused of being connected to the murder, but they were found innocent and let go. On Friday, the police settled on James Anderson, arresting him as one of two possible suspects. Before Mr. Anderson could be brought to jail, a mob lynched him. In a forced confession as he pleaded for his life, Mr. Anderson named Henry Cyat as his partner in this crime, and soon thereafter Mr. Cyat too was captured and lynched.

Caroline Larry
Samford University

Selected Sources
An article in *The Atlanta Constitution*, published on December 8, 1896, bears the headline “Posse Kills Strange Negro: Flimflam Workers Try To Do Irondale Merchants.” A second, sub-headline elaborates, “New One and Two Dollar Bills Taken For Counterfeit and Refused. An Inquest.” From minimal reporting on the day after his killing to his inclusion in the Equal Justice Initiative’s National Memorial For Peace and Justice, so began William Wardley’s journey of erasure and re-emergence — a traveler who would never reach his destination, and who would be largely forgotten in history, the details of his life and identity undocumented.

The article continues, elaborating on events that lead to Mr. Wardley’s death, describing how “Wardley, colored” was pursued by a group of locals after he “entered the town and displayed a number of new crisp one and two-dollar bills, which were thought to be counterfeit.”

Mr. Wardley was traveling with one white and one black companion. Both of his partners escaped, but Mr. Wardley was shot down by the mob. “Flimflam,” as it is used in the title of this article, characterizes these men as perceived criminals and con-men.

When Mr. Wardley presented these crisp new bills, it was in an attempt to purchase a nickel’s worth of apples from a man named Edmund N. Guardian. After the merchant refused to accept Mr. Wardley’s payment, a mob formed and Wardley and his partners were chased through town. According to a report by the Equal Justice Initiative, released for Wardley’s inclusion in the organization’s Community Remembrance Project, Mr. Wardley was fatally wounded a mile and a half out of Irondale by a spot at the railroad tracks.

After his death, an investigation by the the Secret Service Agents Forsyth and Barret ensued and declared that the money was not counterfeit. Even when agents declared the currency legitimate, locals first maintained that it was counterfeit. They then changed their story to claim that Wardley had either killed himself or that he had fallen on and discharged his own gun. Nobody in this accounting was ever prosecuted, including a local area minister who had participated in the mob.

As stated in a report by the Equal Justice Initiative, “Black people carried a heavy presumption of guilt during this era, and many hundreds of African Americans across the South were lynched based on false allegations, accusations of non-serious crimes or even for non-criminal violations of social customs and racial expectations.” Of 554 lynchings documented by the NAACP between 1889 and 1919, 89 were for “Crimes Against Property,” 39 cataloged under “Absence of Crime.”

*Margaret Wineburg*
Representative for Birmingham-Southern College

Selected Sources
To learn more about the presumption of guilt as a legacy of the era of racial terrorism, please visit https://eji.org/racial-justice/presumption-guilt
Jake McKenzie was born in the early 1860s in Macon County, Alabama. He had two older siblings, Lewis and Nelly McKenzie. The 1866 Macon County census report does not list any parents for these children. At some point, Mr. McKenzie moved to Jefferson County, Alabama, and worked at Brookside Mines, a mine owned by Sloss-Sheffield Steel and Iron Company ten miles north of Birmingham.

On March 22, 1897, a Saturday night, a group of black men gathered at Burgins, a bar in Brookside. City Marshal Glen Tetherow entered the establishment with a warrant for the arrest of Henry Johnson, a black man, for a charge of abusive language. A group of black men, including Mr. McKenzie, tried to stop the arrest. Tetherow and other officers began shooting at the men, killing Mr. McKenzie. An officer was also killed and several black men wounded. Mr. McKenzie was in his late twenties or early thirties. No records show that the men were ever prosecuted for his murder.

Abigail Schneider
Jefferson County Memorial Project

Selected Sources:
“Blood was shed at Brookside Saturday Night,” The Birmingham News, March 23, 1897, page 3.
The lynching of James Thomas occurred on July 3, 1897, in Blossburg, Alabama. The Birmingham News reported that his body was found “in Pickney branch, a mile or two above Blossburg, riddled with bullets and very much dead.” Blossburg was primarily a mining town, so a fair assumption is that unskilled physical labor was a likely line of work for a black man less than two generations removed from slavery. A group of white men lynched Mr. Thomas because he said he had information about a white woman who was assaulted in Blossburg.

Unlike most cases of racial violence, a trial ensued against these men. The black population of Blossburg raised a fund to prosecute four men: Sam Jones, Charles Clark, Joe Williams and Jack Hollins. The Birmingham News wrote, “The negroes held that the summary death of Thomas was an outrage ... there was no extraneous evidence to tend to show that he was connected with it. They argued that if he was suspected, there ought to have been some examination into the facts.” They were granted this examination, albeit posthumously, and the hearing was covered in full detail in the papers. There was great local interest in the case, with 20 black folks and 40 white folks attending the public hearing, and 50 witnesses slated to be heard. The hearing took place over three days.

According to press reports of witness statements, a crowd of armed white men, including the defendants, marched Mr. Thomas around the town. Shortly after, witnesses heard shots near Pickney Branch. Later, the body was reported to have six gunshot wounds. Reporting praised the testimony of one black man for its clarity and intelligence and his persistence in the face of questioning by the defense. Defense witnesses tried to introduce the theory that Mr. Thomas was killed by other black folks who were upset that he was helping the whites. All defendants claimed they were at home at the time of the murder.

The hearing ended with the judge discharging Sam Jones, who could not be connected to the other three men near the time of the murder. The prosecution did not protest this decision. The other three men made bonds of $1,000 each. No further coverage of the trial appears in white Alabama papers in 1897 or 1898, and there is not much available to search in black-owned press records. It is likely these men never faced true justice for their crime.

Isaac Sours
Samford University

Selected Sources
“A Preliminary Trial,” The Montgomery Advertiser, July 9, 1897, page 1.
An unknown African-American man was 25 years old when a group of white men shot him as an act of racial terror violence. The man was one of several victims of a manhunt for a fugitive by the name of Jim Brown. The lawlessness and violence demonstrated in the manhunt illustrates how little worth white men and city and state governments gave to black lives.

On May 7, 1901, Dell Garrett, a white female student at Spring Lake College, reported that Brown, a local African-American farmhand, had raped her. Her father immediately notified his neighbors and the sheriff. Authorities sent telegrams to surrounding towns and dispatched several groups of men to find Brown.

Between May 7 and May 9, there was a massive manhunt to apprehend Brown. White men attacked, arrested, or murdered several black men across the state, under the premise that they thought the man was Brown. An unnamed black man of St. Clair County, Alabama, was accused of killing Garrett, but successfully convinced the mob he was not Brown. Whites still beat him and threw him into the Cahaba River. A mob mistook another man for Brown and chased him. A railway employee opened fire on a man he believed to be Brown in Irondale. Irondale officers also suspected a man by the name of Jim Roberts of being Brown. Officer Marshal Hambright arrested Roberts and took him to Jefferson County jail. The St. Clair County Sheriff, James L. North, along with three residents of Springville, went to the jail and confirmed he was not Brown. Yet, he was held in jail on charges of vagrancy.

Even with these murders and beatings, state and local governments condoned these acts by increasing the reward for capture of Jim Brown. On May 10, 1901, Alabama Governor William J. Samford announced a $200 reward for the capture of Jim Brown, with the city of Springville offering an additional $200. The day after the awards were set, two white men shot and killed this unknown man. His body was found on the Southern Railway train route on May 11, 1901, in Leeds.

Two white men spotted this man catching a ride on a Southern Railway freight. The men yelled, “Yes, you—we have you,” and shot the man eight times. They appear to have intentionally laid him on the tracks to be run over by the next oncoming train. After both the coroner and the residents of Springville examined the body to find it was not Brown, he was buried on May 14 at an indigent graveyard in Birmingham. No legal action was taken against the men that killed this man.

After his death, authorities found a letter in the victim’s pocket signed Charlie Winston. It is possible this is the name of this victim. Yet, further research needs to be done to be sure.

Undré Phillips
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Selected Sources
Red Mountain Cemetery Record of Interments, May 14, 1901, Birmingham Public Library Archives, Birmingham, Alabama.
“Rewards For Fugitives,” Montgomery Advertiser, May 11, 1901, page 1.
On August 2, 1901, Charles Bentley was lynched in Leeds, Alabama. The account in The New York Times on August 3, 1901, gives no more information about Bentley, his age, family, or occupation. This silence of facts is one of the many ways the press also dehumanized these black men and women.

A jury found Mr. Bentley guilty of killing a white man by the name of Jim Vann in Leeds, Alabama. Though Mr. Bentley did face a judge, it is unlikely this was anything resembling a fair trial. Mr. Bentley faced an all white jury that probably needed very little to no evidence to convict a black man. A short time after the coroner completed the investigation, a white mob gathered around the jail, took Mr. Bentley to the county border between St. Clair and Jefferson counties, hanged him, and shot him multiple times. His body was left to hang for townspeople to see.

The choice to take him to the border illustrates ways in which mobs tried to avoid the justice system. They would hope that neither county would take ownership of the murder and so not press charges. In this case, Sheriff North did help press charges.

On November 30, 1901, Jas B. King, a sawmill owner, was arrested for the murder of Charles Bentley. King said he was at the scene shortly after Mr. Bentley was dead and not there for the actual lynching. No records could be found on what happened to King.

Mr. Bentley was lynched only two months after provisions had been made to the Alabama Constitution that addressed lynching. The provisions placed more responsibility on law enforcement to protect people in custody. Unfortunately, he was one of many men who were murdered as a result of a lapse in protection.

Undré Phillips
University of Alabama at Birmingham

ALABAMA’S LYNCHING AMENDMENTS

While the manhunt ensued, in Montgomery, on May 21, 1901 legislators added an amendment to the state’s Constitution. Article V, Section 138 states, “...whenever any prisoner is taken from jail, or from the custody of any sheriff or his deputy, and put to death, or suffers grievous bodily harm, owing to the neglect, connivance, cowardice, or other grave fault of the sheriff, such sheriff may be impeached ...” The amendment could be seen as an attempt to limit the number of lynchings in the state. After the immoral slew of killings that occurred during the supposed search for Mr. Brown, the new legislation placed more responsibility on sheriffs to protect victims. Even with this amendment, many lynchings occurred in the next half century in Jefferson County.

Selected Sources

“Mob Hangs Alabama Negro,” newspaper unclear, Tuskegee Archives.
On September 3, 1907, Jerry Johnson’s body was found in an alley in Lewisburg, now part of the Fairmont area. He had been shot multiple times. The press reported that Mr. Johnson was believed to be the man that a white mob had chased the day before. The mob had formed after a white woman said a black man had assaulted her. The jury decided the death was “by unknown parties.” The government did not take any further judicial action.

I could not find any reports on this act of racial terror from any newspapers within Alabama. However, the piece was widely reported throughout many states, and even in Canada.

Abigail Schneider
Jefferson County Memorial Project

We wish we had more documents, like this marriage certificate, to better tell the stories of these residents. However, the continued lack of documentation of these lives and the difficulty fellows faced in tracing these stories and their descendants is another example of the oppression that black lives faced. Their history was not archived and recorded to the same degree and with the same respect as white history.

Selected Sources
Elijah Nelms, known also as Lige Nelms, was born in 1881. At age 22, he married Nettie Tolbert, an African-American woman. They had a son Jaussie Smith. Mr. Nelms labored as a pumper, someone who pumps up mining products through wells, in the Banner Mines owned by the Pratt Consolidated Coal Company, in Pratt City.

In 1908, many Southern mines were facing strikes as the desire for greater profits created a need for cheap labor rather than unionized workers. Major mines, particularly those owned by the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company, refused to renew their contracts with the United Mine Workers union (UMW), sparking the union members to go on strike. Mr. Nelms was not a member of UMW and was one of the non-unionized workers who filled jobs at the Banner Mines during the strike.

On July 29, 1908, a group of white union laborers killed Mr. Nelms in an act of racial terror violence. The men shot Mr. Nelms and another African-American worker, Ed Miller. Mr. Nelms died from his bullet wounds, while Mr. Miller survived. When the militia arrived to restore order, they took Mr. Miller to jail. We have no records of what happened to him.

By August 21, 1908, twenty-two men had been arrested for Mr. Nelms's murder. Yet, they all posted bail and so were released from jail prior to sentencing. There is no record of whether or not they faced penalties, but it was not uncommon for such hate crimes to receive light or no punishment. Ultimately, Mr. Nelms' death had no real impact on the strike itself, which ended shortly thereafter due to the militia's intervention.

While Elijah Nelms was lynched, other African Americans suffered and lost their lives due to discrimination and wanton disregard for their humanity. The desperation of freed African Americans forced many of them to accept jobs that paid significantly less than their labor was worth and work in unsafe conditions that often put their lives at risk. Whether they were given dangerous jobs or murdered publicly without justifiable cause, African Americans suffered prejudice and inhumane conditions in the post-Civil War era.

Becca Glass
Jefferson State Community College

Selected Sources
“Certificate of Marriage, Jesausie Nelms to Katherine Smith,” February 14, 1942, Norfolk, Virginia.
“Food for Strikebreakers,” The Montgomery Advertiser, August 1, 1908, page 1.
“Several Incidents In the Strike in Mining District,” The Birmingham News, July 1908.
On August 4, 1908, William Miller of Brighton, Alabama, was hanged outside the Brighton jail. Records show that Mr. Miller was a coal miner and a member of the union, but reveal nothing else about his age or family.

In August 1908, unionized workers had gone on strike at mines near Brighton. On August 4, the house of strikebreaker Finley Fuller was dynamited. Whites framed Mr. Miller by falsely accusing him of bombing the house. After hearing the false accusation, authorities searched for Mr. Miller, using bloodhounds to catch him, and threw him into the Brighton jail. That same night, a mob from Brighton went to the jail, took Mr. Miller out of his cell, and murdered him by hanging him from a tree right next to the jail. The jailer denied any knowledge of the events. The next morning when authorities went to check on Mr. Miller, they found his body still hanging. The police did nothing to bring the mob to justice for this crime. As time went on in this community, bombings happened almost regularly.

Some newspapers used the lynching to endorse segregation. The Gadsden Daily Times wrote, “the danger of mixing white and negro labor, in more or out of them, is aptly demonstrated by the lynching of the negro miner at Brighton last night. It is not certain at all that the victim was guilty of the crime charged, but he was lynched as a kind of vigorous protest against the negroes taking any part in the strike troubles.”

Whites were opposed to and sickened by the thought of blacks getting equal or better pay and some would do anything to stop the unionizing and equal rights of African Americans. These acts of terror often went unreported.

Hana Presley
Jefferson State Community College

Selected Sources
On July 9, 1907, Anthony Davis, age 25, married Lucy Mitchell. A year later, on August 21, 1908, a white mob killed Mr. Davis on his way home from work.

No record is available on the rest of his family, but a newspaper account writes he was diligent in reporting to the sheriff that he had seen three men running from a violent incident in which a mob had blown up Mr. Davis' home and that of a white, union coworker, Thomas Duggan. Although a strike was going on where Mr. Davis and Duggan worked, both men were strikebreakers and continued to show up for their jobs.

The same day that Mr. Davis made the report, a mob of white men ambushed and killed him on his way home after dark. Three men were arrested following the bombing and Davis' death—two black men and one white man. The names listed in the newspaper account were Alf Jones, Walter Findley, and Peter Wallace.

April Johnson
Lawson State Community College

Selected Sources
“Young Women Hurt,” The Montgomery Advertiser, August 20, 1908, page 1.
In the 1900s, brutal killings of African Americans were nothing less than normal. In fact, the murders were very much expected in places like Alabama. Most murders of black people during the 1900s were so normal that they were left unsolved.

On April 25, 1909, John Thomas was 25 years old and lived in Jefferson County. Andy Roy arrested him for the alleged attack of a white woman, Mrs. Patterson. At night, Roy was supposed to walk Mr. Thomas from the jail in Birmingham to the one in Bessemer. The city would have known such transportation of a black man could be open to the threat of a lynching. Even so, they only had Roy accompany him.

During the transport, a group of white men easily took Mr. Thomas from Roy’s custody. His bullet-ridden body was found the next day in the woods. A white cloth mask was found near his body as well.

Mr. Thomas was buried in Cedar Hill Cemetery. No other information about his life could be found.

Ashley Pates
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Selected Sources
“The Happenings of the Week,” Goodwater Enterprise, April 30, 1909, page 1
On Sunday, January 28, 1912, at about 3 p.m., a white mob lynched John Chandler in Bessemer, Alabama. Reports from the time say Mr. Chandler was also known as John Prentiss, but no other information is known about his age, family, or occupation.

Mr. Chandler, along with Forney Smith and Charles Paige, had been arrested for the murder of prominent Italian business owner, Joseph Gagliano. According to reports, a black man walked into Gagliano's store on Friday night, ordered a dime's worth of fruit, and began to leave without paying. When Gagliano asked him for the money, the man turned and shot Gagliano, killing the 34-year-old store owner almost instantly.

The Sunday after the murder, Mr. Chandler, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Paige were to be transferred to the county jail in Birmingham. The men were handcuffed and placed in the responsibility of Deputy Herron and Deputy Parker. The group was waiting at the prominent corner of 3rd Avenue and 19th Street, where the Bright Star restaurant now sits, for the arrival of the car that would take them to Birmingham, when the funeral procession for Joseph Gagliano passed by.

As they walked to the car, Louis Gagliano, the brother of the deceased, broke from the funeral procession and shot Mr. Chandler four times in the back, killing him instantly. Deputy Parker quickly grabbed Louis Gagliano, but six other men attempted to free him from police custody. Other officers were quick to help Deputy Parker. Gagliano was arrested and charged with murder. Other Italian men saw Mr. Chandler's prostrate body in the street and fired as many as twenty more shots into his body before continuing on with the funeral. Mr. Chandler's body was removed from the street.

It is unclear whether Louis Gagliano was convicted or served any time. Two weeks after the lynching, Coroner Brasher declined to allow the people of Bessemer to know what was discovered at Mr. Chandler's inquest. Gagliano's attorney was allowed to be present, but no reporters were in attendance despite requests by Solicitor Ben Berry, Assistant Solicitor George Bumgardner, and Chief Deputy Sheriff Lacey Edmundson. It was not in doubt that Gagliano killed Mr. Chandler, yet the coroner's jury failed to assign blame for the killing.

The absence of information on John Chandler as an individual and that Gagliano was not held responsible for Mr. Chandler's murder illustrates the lack of value placed on African-American life during this time. Much of his story remains unknown, like many other lynching victims. Mr. Chandler was presumed guilty, despite the absence of a fair trial, which served to justify the actions of Gagliano and the other members of the funeral procession turned mob. Even the papers appeared more concerned with sensationalizing the story and justifying Gagliano's actions than with being objective or informative.

Katie Fagan
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Selected Sources
We know that William Smith was married, but little else about his life except that his death was a result of a violent altercation with an officer of the law. News of this altercation, reported in The Citizen-Examiner in November 1912, described Mr. Smith as a “desperado,” criminal, and the like.

On November 1, 1912, Mr. Smith went to a Bessemer pawn shop to pawn a watch with a general’s name engraved on it. The shop owner assumed the expensive watch was stolen and alerted the police. City Detectives Childress and Ceph Ross entered the store and began intimidating Mr. Smith, searching his pockets for a gun. Allegedly, a shoot-out and chase occurred between Mr. Smith and Ross. The chase went out into the street, where a mob began to form. Shots were fired, allegedly from Mr. Smith. Childress was fatally wounded. As the chase continued, Mr. Smith hid in the bathroom of J. G. Bruce on 1623 Second Avenue in Bessemer. The mob entered the house and fatally shot Mr. Smith. He was subsequently taken to Kennedy Undertaking, still owned by Mamie, Connell, and W.T. Kennedy.

The coroner’s report stated, “The Will Smith, alias James Roberts, colored came to his death at Bessemer Friday afternoon, Nov. 1, by being shot, at the hands of C. Ross, Dock Parsons (policemen) and others, and that the same was justifiable homicide.”

Although both Mr. Smith’s and Childers’ deaths resulted from this altercation, far more is known about both the life and death of City Detective Childers. While little is known about the life and death of many racial lynching victims, the facts about lynchings involving law enforcement officers have been especially subverted. The power structures between African Americans and law enforcement have a long history of oppression. Bessemer, Alabama, in particular, has a long history of corruption within local government and law officials. Residents of Bessemer described the town as home to an inordinate number of African-American citizens due to “white flight” of Caucasian residents as Civil Rights era integration began. Even as civil rights were obtained nationwide, Bessemer law enforcement made the south no safer for African-American residents who routinely were harassed by white police officers. Even today, remnants of the racial tension between Bessemer law enforcement and African-American residents remain.

Samantha Gonzalez
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Selected Sources
“Former Tuscaloosian is Murderously Attacked While Performing his Duty,” November 2, 1912, page 1.
“Shooting Negro was Justified,” The Tuscaloosa News, November 3, 1912, page 1.
Wilson Gardner was born in 1861 and married to Hattie Gardner in 1898.

On August 23, 1913, Wilson Gardner was hung by a belt under a trestle in Kilgore, Alabama. The authorities stated that there “were no clues to the Jefferson County lynching.” It is believed that Mr. Gardner was beaten to death before he was hanged. He would have been 52 at the time of his death.

Hana Presley
Jefferson State Community College

Selected Sources

FEDERAL ANTI-LYNCHING LAWS

The Anti Lynch Laws that were first mentioned in 1918 by Leonidas Dyer to make lynching a federal crime was finally passed in 1922 by the U.S. House of Representatives but was then halted by a Southern Democratic filibuster in the Senate. From 1890 to 1952, seven presidents asked congress to pass a federal law making lynching a crime. Almost half of the South did not want lynching to become a federal crime, leaving the injustice of the criminals and allowing a voice of any victim to go unheard. It was not until 2018 that the Senate unanimously passed anti-lynching legislation, the Justice for Victims of Lynching Act. As of February 2019, it has not been passed by the House of Representatives or signed by the President.
Will McBride, 60 years old, from Adamsville, Alabama, was murdered on the night of Thursday, July 12, 1923. No more personal information is available about him, except that he was described as an “old man” by a crowd of school children.

Mr. McBride first came before the court on a charge of assault after children reported they were frightened when meeting him on a country road, even though he had done nothing to them. Mr. McBride was discharged. That night, a group of members of a masked organization took Mr. McBride from his home and fatally lynched him. His body was found later.

The first known report of Mr. McBride’s death was published Thursday, August 23, 1923, in a Charlotte, North Carolina newspaper. However, his death almost went unnoticed until the NAACP released a complete report on his lynching. They wrote, “colored people who witnessed the affair have been told to leave town and terrorized into silence.” The NAACP forwarded the report to the Alabama governor with a request for investigation and punishment. It is unclear if any proper investigation ever occured.

Jimena Ortiz-Perez
Lawson State Community College

Selected Sources
During the last week of June 1933, Elizabeth Lawrence, an African-American mother and school teacher, was killed by a mob in her own home near Birmingham. Ms. Lawrence was walking along a country road about five miles from her home when a group of young white children began taunting and throwing rocks and dirt at her. Being a school teacher and mother herself, she reacted as many might. Ms. Lawrence verbally reprimanded the children without ever touching them. However, in the years post-slavery, all that was needed to justify violence against a black person was the word of a white person, even a child. Like so many other African Americans who were lynched based on these social norms, Ms. Lawrence was now at risk for violent retaliation because she committed a “social transgression.”

On July 5, Ms. Lawrence was alone in her home when the children’s parents surrounded her house. It is unknown if she exited the house in protest or if the mob stormed inside during the attack, but Ms. Lawrence was shot and her house burned to the ground, likely with her still inside.

Her son Alexander [last name and age unknown] was away when the mob murdered his mother. He returned and attempted to file a report with county law enforcement. A mob quickly re-gathered and threatened Alexander with the same fate. Like many other African Americans who left the South for threat of their lives, he fled to Boston, and reported his mother’s lynching. In July 1933, the International Labor Defense (ILD) opened an investigation, and three newspapers reported the incident, but no charges were ever brought against any members of the mob.

It is important to note that while white periodicals would occasionally report on lynchings, it was mainly black newspapers such as The Chicago Defender, or in this case, the Baltimore Afro-American Newspaper, that would report the witness accounts of these violent incidents. The research on Elizabeth Lawrence’s death is still ongoing, with the expectation that the ILD’s investigation report contains additional information.

Tammy Blue
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Selected Sources
“Negro Woman Lynched in B’ham: Son Narrowly Escapes Same Fate,” Daily (name unreadable on the film), July 5, 1933, via Tuskegee Reel #228.
George Taylor was born in 1905 in Washington County, a rural county in southwest Alabama that was home to many plantations. He was one of seven children of Ike and Allien Taylor. There is no record of Mr. Taylor’s occupation or why he was in Birmingham, but the industrial city provided jobs for many from the rural South over the years. When he was 29 years old, on the night of August 23, 1934, George Taylor was shot to death following an incident in Birmingham’s Stockham Park.

The events told were statements made on behalf of the three women involved in the incident. Mr. Taylor never had a chance to tell his side of the story. Grace Tabor, 23, Lorena Tidwell, 19, and Edith Tidwell, 24, said they were threatened in Stockham Park. The women attracted the attention of a group of white men and led them to Mr. Taylor. Several men, armed with revolvers, chased Mr. Taylor into an alley and fired a volley of 15 or 20 shots, striking him in the head. According to the account, he ran several more feet and fell. While suffering his gunshot wounds, the three women crowded around Mr. Taylor and identified the victim as the man who approached them. Mr. Taylor was taken to Hillman Hospital, now part of UAB Hospital, and died shortly after being admitted.

Whatever the truth of the incident, this was a time period when African-American males could be lynched and murdered in very heartless ways just for looking at white women. According to the police report, Mr. Taylor fired shots at the posse of white men, but it was not reported that a revolver belonging to the victim was ever recovered.

The injustice of Mr. Taylor’s murder shows how there was no regard for an African American’s death, especially if a white man murdered him. The deep racial hostility that permeated Southern society during this time period often served to focus suspicion and blame on African-American communities for crimes, whether or not evidence supported that suspicion. Almost all white murderers of African Americans killed in hate crimes were never legally convicted of any offense. In this society, white lives held heightened value, while the lives of black people held little or none.

Ashley Pates
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Selected Sources

“Negro Is Killed after Attempt to Abduct Girls,” Tuskegee Archives, August 23, 1934.
O.D. Henderson, a 25-year-old African-American man from Fairfield, worked at the Tennessee Coal and Railroad Iron Company. Mr. Henderson was not married and had no children, but had two parents, Ben and Lillie Henderson.

On May 9, 1940, Mr. Henderson was walking to work when a coworker, M.M. Hagood accused Mr. Henderson of allegedly bumping into him and knocking him down. Hagood called a nearby officer, named Glenn, over. Officer Glenn allowed Hagood to beat Mr. Henderson on the street. Officer Glenn then dragged Mr. Henderson to the local Fairfield police station where he, Hagood, and another police officer, Thomas Nelson, continued to beat him. Mr. Henderson's face became swollen, bruised, and unrecognizable. Other officers watched and did nothing to stop the beating. A police officer who was a witness reported hearing Mr. Henderson say, “let me explain,” and “have mercy on me.”

Nelson shot Mr. Henderson three times in the chest, killing him. The town coroner labeled the death an “unjustifiable homicide.”

In the aftermath of the shooting, a local Methodist minister, Ted Hightower, urged the city council to hold a special meeting to discuss the shooting. Mayor Claude N. Gilley called for the officers to be dismissed from the force. Nelson was suspended for 30 days pending an investigation. The Fairfield City Council held a meeting to discuss whether three officers who were involved should be dismissed from the police force. During the deliberations, Sergeant W.G. Cook testified that 20 or 30 beatings had taken place at the Fairfield police station in the three years he had been on the force. Despite the history of systemic violence that was exposed, the resolution to dismiss the officers lost by one vote.

Ultimately Nelson was charged with first-degree manslaughter. The local NAACP unit and other officials rallied together to press for a conviction. However, Nelson was adamant that he acted in self-defense. As in other cases where a white murderer was judged by a jury of his peers, it didn't take long for the jury to render a verdict of not guilty.

Devyn Troy
Miles College

Selected Sources


On February 10, 1946, less than two months after his honorable discharge from the U.S. Marine Corps, 24-year-old Timothy Hood was wrongfully killed. A street car conductor, W.R. Weeks, shot Mr. Hood, who had moved a Jim Crow segregation sign, dividing seats for whites and blacks. Chief Fant of Brighton found Mr. Hood, placed him in his car, and shot him. TJ McCollum, the local coroner, declared Mr. Hood’s killing a “justifiable homicide.”

Mr. Hood’s racial terror murder is not included on the Jefferson County Memorial because only two individuals were involved in his death. But, his story and many others’ in Alabama remind us of the ways in which police brutality continues to be a form of racial terror throughout the United States.
COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS
How many acts of racial terror violence occurred in the United States and Alabama?

EJI has documented 362 lynchings in Alabama and 4,085 in Southern States. However, racial terror violence was a national issue, not just a southern issue. Documented racial terror lynchings occurred in all but four states.

How are you choosing to discuss such a painful history?

We recognize that this history will surface different types of pain. The pain of highlighting the act of the lynching; the pain of the victims and their families; and the pain of blame of living descendants of those that participated in these horrific acts. We are being intentional about providing resources to address trauma and creating calm spaces at events.

How does this history affect us today?

Lynching shaped the geographic, political, social, and economic conditions of African Americans in ways that are still evident today. For instance, it was a driver for the millions of black families and individuals from the South who moved into urban ghettos in the North and West during the first half of the 20th century. Lynching also reinforced a legacy of racial inequality that has never been adequately addressed in America. The administration of criminal justice, police brutality, and our system of mass incarceration are linked to this history. We can only change our present, if we understand what created it.

Where will the Jefferson County Monument go?

JCMP believes we should erect the memorial in Linn Park because it was where a white mob lynched Lewis Houston, the first victim of racial terror violence in Jefferson County. Additionally, it was the route taken by those fighting against the poll tax. Voting rights was one of the core triggers that justified the lynching of those who dared defend their rights. Lastly, Linn Park is the public space that connects the seat of City Government, City Hall, with County Government, the Jefferson County Courthouse. By placing the monument in Linn Park, we will remind our local government to never let such atrocities happen again. Yet, we hope for this to be a community decision. Via its website, JCMP is soliciting community-wide feedback on this suggested placement site.

How do I get involved in JCMP?

JCMP is a grassroots, citizen-led, initiative. We would be thrilled for you to join. Please visit our website: www.jeffersoncountymemorial.com/join-us
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As a grassroots coalition, this report was put together by JCMP volunteers. It wouldn’t have been possible without them. Thank you to:

THE CORE COALITION
Graham Boettcher, Director of the Birmingham Museum of Art
Joi Brown, Marketing Manager at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute
Carol Clarke, Project Director and Community Development Specialist at Corporate Realty
Myeisha Hutchinson, Jefferson County Outreach Manager for Congresswoman Terri Sewell
Scott Douglas, Executive Director of Greater Birmingham Ministries and a member of the EJI board
T. Marie King, Community Activist of Peace and Healing
Meg Nelson, Development Specialist at Create Birmingham (Fiscal Sponsor)
Abigail Schneider, Project Director for the Jefferson County Memorial Project
Jim Sokol, Community Activist

JCMP COMMUNITY PARTNERS:
A.R.C Outreach Center, Bessemer
Abroms-Engel Institute for Visual Arts
Alabama Faith in Action
Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation
Birmingham AIDS Outreach
Birmingham City Schools
Birmingham Civil Rights Institute
Birmingham Holocaust Education Center
Birmingham Islamic Community
Birmingham Jewish Federation
Birmingham Museum of Art
Birmingham-Southern College
City of Bessemer (Mayor’s Office)
City of Birmingham (Mayor’s Office)
Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham
Create Birmingham
Greater Birmingham Ministries
Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama
Jefferson County Commission
Jefferson State Community College
Kids in Birmingham 1963
Lawson State Community College
Magic City Acceptance Center
Miles College
No More Martyrs
Samford University
The Altamont School
University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB)
Urban Impact
White Birminghamians for Black Lives
YWCA Central Alabama

THE PHOTOGRAPHERS
Tony Bingham
Kenzie Greer

THE EDITORS
Emily Rushing
Brad Kachelhofer
Jeff Hirschy
Carla Jean Whitley

THE DESIGNERS
Kashara Johnson
Brad Kachelhofer
We are a grassroots, citizen-led initiative. If you would like to be a community partner or get involved, please reach out to info@jeffersoncountymemorial.com
RACIAL VIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

We must remember that lynchings are only one instance in a longer history of ways in which the United States has oppressed African Americans. After the Civil War, the end of slavery, and Reconstruction, the South entered the era of Jim Crow segregation and its accompanying racial terror. Jim Crow codified a system of racial apartheid that affected almost every aspect of daily life for African Americans, greatly or even completely restricting their access to economic and civil rights.

Even after Brown vs. Board of Education and the Civil Rights Movement, local and federal governmental policies still marginalized people of color. Laws that accompanied New Deal relief and the GI Bill disproportionately gave whites a lift into the middle class while redlining, discriminatory lending policies, and local control of federal funding kept access away from non-whites.

Racial inequality and violence have manifested themselves in new forms in the 21st century. African Americans are disproportionately victims of police brutality and mass incarceration. In its report to the UN Human Rights Commission, The Sentencing Project noted that for black males born in 2001, the probability of going to jail is about one in three. Once incarcerated, Alabama prisoners are subject to deplorable overcrowded conditions, including a mental health care system a federal judge has ruled to be “horrendously inadequate.”

From the abolition of slavery to the eradication of Jim Crow laws, this country has taken many steps to improve the lives of people of color. Many people have been able to create a life their ancestors could only dream of. But despite all of the improvements that have been made in our country, the United States still has a long way to go before we reach true equality.
The Jefferson County Memorial Project is a citizen-led coalition. Will you join us?

www.jeffersoncountymemorial.com