

LYNCHING IN THE BORDER STATES: PRESS COVERAGE CHANGE
OVER TIME 1901-1942

By Ann M. Sheppard, Bachelor of Arts

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
Master of Arts
In Historical Studies

Advisory Committee:

Jason Stacy, Ph.D., Chair

Bryan Jack, Ph.D.

Michelle Kuhl, Ph.D.

Jessica Harris, Ph.D.

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
May, 2016

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LYNCHING IN THE BORDER STATES: PRESS COVERAGE CHANGE OVER TIME 1901-1942

“What is the cost of knowing our past, and what is the cost of not?”
--Wright Thompson¹

The people must know before they can act, and there is no educator to compare with the
press.
-- Ida B. Wells

The word lynching has been in use for several hundred years and the exact beginning of its usage is uncertain. Originally, in the late eighteenth century lynching referred to extra-legal punishment of offenders by a mob of citizens that entailed tarring-and-feathering, riding-the-rail and floggings.² It wasn't until the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the Reconstruction era of Jim Crow that lynching took on a more deadly and frightening meaning: death at the hands of a mob outside of any legal parameters.³ An exact definition might be had by using the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) version in its efforts to pinpoint and document lynching in the United States, "...a lynching is regarded as an activity in which persons in defiance of the law administer punishment for an alleged offense to an individual with whom some offense has been associated."⁴ Most recently Federal law defines lynching as,

¹ Thompson, Wright. "OTL: Ghosts of Mississippi." <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/eticket/story?page=mississippi62>>. (Accessed November 9, 2015).

² Philip Dray, *At The Hands of Persons Unknown* (New York: Random House, 2002), viii. See Also Amy Wood in *Lynching and Spectacle* (introduction) for additional analysis of the rise of lynching in American lexicon.

³ Dray, viii.

⁴ Christopher Waldrep, <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/eticket/story?page=mississippi62>> See also Waldrep in "The Controversy over the Definition of Lynching, 1899-1940" which will be used to discuss more fully the fight to define lynching by the NAACP, the Tuskegee Institute and the AWSPL.

...the civil rights conspiracy statute, which makes it unlawful for two or more persons to conspire to injure, oppress, threaten, or intimidate any person of any state, territory, or district in the free exercise or enjoyment of any right or privilege secured to him/her by the Constitution or the laws of the United States (or because of his/her having exercised the same) and further makes it unlawful for two or more persons to go in disguise on the highway or premises of another person with intent to prevent or hinder his or her free exercise or enjoyment of such rights. Depending upon the circumstances of the crime, and any resulting injury, the offense is punishable by a range of fines and/or imprisonment for any term of years up to life, or the death penalty.⁵

I will be using the Federal definition to provide a continuity and clarification of those lynching incidents that I will be exploring as case studies. It is important to have a consistent definition in place, although there was no consensus of the definition at the time the lynchings occurred, so that examples used for the case studies all have the same characteristics with which to define the events in question.

When studying the phenomenon of lynching that occurred in the United States above the commonly accepted southern lynch-belt several questions immediately come to bear on the subject. How was lynching reported in regional newspapers at the time of the incident? Were there appreciable differences in types of coverage or different points of view between these regional papers? What dynamics defined any difference in coverage that might have occurred and what role did the press play in the American civil rights discourse? Were there any appreciable differences that were at the root cause of lynchings between southern states and the border states of Illinois and Missouri?

Based on research into the regional newspapers that reported on lynchings in Southern Illinois and Southern Missouri between 1901 and 1942 a more thorough understanding of the unique set of circumstances that surrounded each lynching can be

⁵ Title 18, U.S.C., Section 241 - Conspiracy Against Rights

obtained and provide a broader understanding of lynching in the border states than the prevailing current literature and research that exists of our knowledge of lynching in the United States South.

This paper will argue that unlike the South that rarely used lynching to run African-Americans out of their towns, Southern Illinois and Southern Missouri used lynchings as a way to racially cleanse their respective cities. The South needed the Black labor pool to continue working its primarily agricultural production. McGovern argues that "most [southern] blacks responded fearfully [to the lynching] by staying within prescribed social boundaries." In essence, before mobilization was possible prior to the Great Migration, the Southern Black population stayed in the South, while being subjected to or witnessing terror inducing tactics such as lynchings or whippings or cross burnings. By contrast Illinois and Missouri saw the Black labor pool as competition for more industrialized jobs that minority citizens could potentially take away from them by working for much lower wages.

In addition to racial cleansing, vigilantism in individual lynching cases in the South reinforced *de jure* laws that were already in place: a system of justice that almost guaranteed no Black person would receive equal justice under prevailing laws. In Illinois and Missouri, however, a well-defined judicial system (especially in Illinois) was in place that theoretically afforded persons of color due process in criminal proceedings. Lynchings occurred above the lynch-belt in these individual cases as the White population refused to acknowledge the law in cases where a crime was perceived as so heinous that immediate justice in the form of lynching occurred. The *de jure* rights of the Black citizen were then denied because the written laws of equality of the Black victim was overridden by the people with their hands on

the rope and thus they took their perceived right to mete out justice as they deemed necessary and expedient.

From the late-19th to the early 20th century, a period of significant shifts in American civil rights discourse began and the newspaper was the major disseminator of all news, including that of racial tensions both regionally and across the United States. As Startt writes, "...since the 1870's the effects of the media on nationalism and on American political culture in particular has been conspicuous, and their ability to penetrate and spread national culture farther and deeper was equally conspicuous as the new century opened."⁶ As Perloff argues "the press both upheld social order as well as molded public opinion on the issue of lynching."⁷ Thus, the discourse American's were having between each other regarding race relations and the issue of lynching was reflected back to the press and then reinforced to the public by subsequent press coverage of each event. Press owners controlled the content of its papers based on political leanings, the desire to make money by selling both the newspapers and the advertising space in the papers and finally to inform the public of local or regional happenings.⁸

Utilizing newspaper accounts of lynchings is one of the few ways historians can better understand what Americans were feeling, hearing and saying about the lynchings that occurred within their towns. Lynchings that occurred within a small geographic area above the accepted lynch-belt is an under researched area and as such this research, using newspapers as a primary focus adds to the body of historical knowledge.

⁶ James D. Startt and William David Sloan, *The Significance of Media in American History*, (Vision Press: Northport, Alabama, 1994), 184.

^{7 7} Richard M. Perloff "The Press and Lynchings of African Americans," *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Jan., 2000), pp. 315-330

⁸ Mitchell, Stephens, "History of Newspapers The Press and Lynchings of African Americans," Accessed 02/10/2016.

Through the observation of lynchings in a chronological fashion and in depth can more closely answer the question of causality of the event (according to the regional papers surrounding it) and its repercussions on those who performed the act, witnessed or encouraged the act and those who reported on the act. This chronology can be described as a form of micro-history as defined by Bednarski when he wrote that a microhistory is “those same events that occurred within a short time period” and further concluded that these micro-histories “are a legitimate and important area of research.”⁹ Their legitimacy lies in the realization that some historical events did not give agency to the people located at the center of those events—in this case individual lynchings—while examining a phenomena such as lynching as a whole. Thus, the experiences of everyone involved in each singular event were not represented by the historians studying lynching. Because of this, my paper will attempt to view these lynchings not as a singular phenomenon with singular commonalities, but rather see each case examined from varying viewpoints so that “individuals who must not be lost either within the historical processes or in anonymous crowds.”¹⁰

This paper will use both secondary and primary sources to demonstrate the various views held by specific newspapers within the geographical regions of each lynching examined and across the time frame specified. Evaluation of the headlines in addition to analysis of the textual body of these newspaper articles will be made to determine editorial intent, if possible as well as the use of secondary sources to provide contextual historical analysis of the time frame to these individual lynching events. In addition, I will attempt to examine several factors that are unique to each newspaper and their owners or editors to

⁹ Steven Bednarski, *The Press and Lynchings of African Americans*, (University of Toronto Press: Ontario, 2014) 13-14.

¹⁰ George Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*, (Wesleyan University Press, Feb 28, 2005), p. 103.

determine if these factors includes the newspaper owners and/or editors racial and political views and the reason for the type of reporting completed. I will not be using any existing Black owned newspapers because their reporting of the lynching(s) in the regions that the lynchings occurred did not contribute to the racial cleansing or judicial control that occurred. By the time these papers were printed and disseminated the Black population targeted had largely already left town. As the research will argue, when the lynchings happened and rioting or mobs grew to large size and began to threaten other African-Americans, the cleansing was already underway as many of the Black population fled the city in question. They did not need nor did they wait for a newspaper to inform them of the lynching and the inherent threat implied behind each act.

I will use nine lynching cases that occurred in Southern Missouri and Southern Illinois as examples for the time period 1901 to 1942. These dates cover the significant events that occurred in the united States with regards to civil rights: the Jim Crow era following the failed Reconstruction era, the first and second great migration of African-American from the South to the North, especially in combination with the first and second World Wars as well as the interwar years that covers the Great Depression.¹¹ These events ultimately led to the beginning of the modern Civil Rights movement when returning African-American servicemen arrived home after World War II with a newfound sense of the hypocrisy of the United States fighting for freedoms abroad that they did not have at home.

Lynching in one form or another has been used in the United States since colonial times. Its exact meaning has changed over time, but the very act of lynching was utilized to

¹¹ See historiography section specifically Pfeifer's *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society 1874-1947*, (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 2006) for a more thorough discussion of the period chosen.

intimidate the spectator, especially the minority spectator, and during Reconstruction used to show and maintain White supremacy in the Deep South as well as, to a lesser degree, the Border-States.¹²

Lynching in the Border-States, above the usually defined “lynch-belt” is an under-researched area. It is my intention to explore lynching in the Border-States viewed through the press’s lens to add to the body of lynching research and to further examine the reporting of lynching in the border states of Missouri and Illinois to support my argument that causation of lynchings were appreciably different in the geographical areas of the South versus the Border-States over time and place.

Historiography

This paper utilizes several types of sources necessary to explore the subject of lynching as a whole and in particular, lynching in the Border States. The general lack of scholarly sources pertaining to Border-State lynchings becomes apparent when researching the subject. This paper will fill those gaps as outlined below and demonstrate the differences that exist between the southern and Border-State lynchings. This is an important historical area that requires further exploration and this paper provides that exploration through the use of the following sources.

Journal articles will be used to define and explain lynching in relation overall and to provide context for definitions, and for evaluation of the press and media attention to which

¹² Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940*, (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2009), 23.

American citizens were exposed. Monographs such as Fitzhugh, Brundage and Woods examine lynching overall and provide theories of lynchings that are primarily focused in the South. Using these theories as a backdrop for differentiation of southern and border lynchings is essential to juxtapose against my argument that there are appreciable differences in the reasons for lynchings between these regions. In addition to theorists, I use monographs on individual lynching cases to more fully understand the circumstances that preceded each event and its aftermath. The primary sources I use are regional newspapers that existed either in the city of the lynching itself, or within the county in the cases where the city did not have a newspaper or those papers were never archived. The use of newspapers are significant and essential to understand the incidents of lynching and to ascertain just what the citizens of the cities at the center of the lynching were being told and to a degree, what the citizens themselves thought about the act in the form of editorials or reported statements made to the newspaper reporters when interviewed. Through the use of varied sources, a more nuanced attempt to discover and underscore my arguments of racial cleansing and occasional vigilante justice as different reasons in the border-states for lynching cases as opposed to the reasons theorized by the prevailing historians on the subject. As such, a breakdown of these sources on a closer level will provide the reader with a clearer understanding of the reasons the sources were utilized.

Important to any analysis of lynching is how the definition of lynching was derived. Waldrep in his article “The Controversy over the Definition of Lynching, 1899-1940” (*The Journal of Southern History*, 66, no. 1 (February, 2000)), provides a comprehensive survey of the origin of the Federal definition I am using in this thesis. Waldrep’s article provides a more comprehensive examination of the fight to frame an acceptable definition between

several competing factions. Although to look to past events such as lynching and define these mob actions with a more recent definition would seem anachronistically ill-advised, it is important to have a definition that is in place, that can be utilized with a specific set of parameters to define the event so that we can discuss each lynching with a base knowledge of (even if only minimally) that is consistent across the time frames included in this paper.

W. Fitzhugh Brundage in *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (1993) argues that socioeconomic factors played largely in the lynchings that occurred in Georgia (the state with the second largest number of lynchings in the post Reconstruction era) as compared with the relatively smaller number that happened in Virginia, two bordering states with differing social and economic conditions that either fostered or hindered the prevalence of lynching in those states. He asserts that the differing lynching experiences of Georgia and Virginia were primarily the result of two ongoing economic needs: the financial needs of both White landowners and Black tenant farmers and sharecroppers. In the agricultural centers of Georgia, lynching used as a warning to their Black workers by White landowners created a steady roster of Black workers that were sorely underpaid but acquiescent to the landowners work demands. Lynching "flourished within the boundaries of the plantation South, [Georgia] where sharecropping, monoculture agriculture, and a stark line separating white owners and black tenants existed" and that "deeply rooted traditions of violent labor control, unhindered by any meaningful resistance from either institutions or individuals opposed unconditionally to racial violence, sustained a tradition of mob violence that persisted for decades."¹³ Brundage's arguments are compelling and well defined. However, his work focuses on the South and neglects to recognize that lynchings above the

¹³ W. Fitzhugh Brundage *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930*, (University of Illinois Press: 1993) 159.

deep South had different dynamics, such as my argument that many lynchings in the border states were designed to do just the opposite of his argument: to intentionally racially cleanse the city by utilizing fear and lynching. The South wanted to keep their Black labor pool. The Border-States sought to make their cities White only and preserve any labor pool for White citizens.

Amy Woods in her book *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (2009), argues that lynchings that happened in the South were not only about imparting a warning to the Black citizens. She writes that lynchings were performed by White people for White people as “...spectacles for other whites. The rituals, the tortures, and their subsequent representations imparted powerful messages to whites about their own supposed racial dominance and superiority...Lynching thus succeeded...not only because African Americans were its targets but also because white southerners were its spectators.”¹⁴

The powerful message sent to Black citizens in the South that Woods argues can be seen in the border-states as well when examining the intentional racial cleansing lynchings that are examined in this paper. However, in those cases such as the Wyatt lynching where relatively few of Belleville’s citizens attended or witnessed the act does not fully support her argument that lynchings were only spectacles for White’s. A degree of spectacle was involved in every border-state lynching, either by those actually performing the act or by those who chose to stay and witness it. Woods’ theory does not fully address the causation of the lynchings in states that had established judicial systems for both White and Black citizens and would seemingly negate the necessity of lynching to achieve the same end that the justice system would provide.

¹⁴ Amy Woods, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2009), 2.

The causation of lynchings in states that had *de jure* laws of judicial equality can be found in Michael J. Pfeifer's work *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874-1947* (2006), where he examines various regions across the United States and defines lynching as "rough justice" as it compared and clashed with the existing State laws and their ability to meet the demands of local citizens in response to perceived or actual threats to their communities by the alleged perpetrator of any number of broken laws. He argues that "to rough justice advocates, real justice was lodged in the community. It was administered face-to-face with a measure of retribution that matched the offense, and it sought to "preserve order," that is, to uphold the hierarchal prerogatives of the dominant residents of the locality."¹⁵

All of these approaches add light to the continuing historical understanding of lynching as a phenomena in the Southern United States. Brundage does little to shed light regarding lynchings outside of the South. Woods' view that spectacle was a predominant factor in lynching was also played out in the South. Certainly her views complement Brundage in that she examines areas where lynching was prevalent and adds a new dimension to Brundage that when combined make for a convincing argument as to the South's lynching behavior and causes for it. However, each individual act of lynching within and outside the traditional lynch belt had at its core a unique set of circumstances that distinguished one from another. Through examining lynchings above the lynch belt and on an individual case by case basis over a set period of time it can be argued that the reasons cited by Brundage, Woods and Pfeifer for lynchings were present at some level although there were additional reasons that existed for non-Southern lynchings. Pfeifer does examine

¹⁵ Michael J. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874-1947* (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 2006), 3.

cross regional lynchings but he does so in the context of an over-arching narrative of criminality that prohibits a closer look into why lynchings occurred above the established lynch belt on an individual basis.

The examination of the two border States of Illinois and Missouri—one formerly free and one formerly a slave State—will add a broader understanding for the reasons lynchings were happening above the lynch belt. The South, largely agricultural and dependent upon its Black population for manual labor used lynching, in all of its spectacle to maintain the status quo: the White race as economically and numerically superior to their Black neighbors and workers. Above the lynch belt in increasingly more industrialized areas that bordered Southern states a collision began when White workers faced an influx of Black laborers that would compete with them in the labor market. Instead of attempting to maintain the Status Quo as Brundage asserts Southern Landowners were doing, these Border-State White citizens felt that lynchings could serve to racially cleanse a town of competing Black laborers perceived to be taking White jobs.

Most lynchings occurred during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and a study of the change in reporting over this time period is necessary to fully understand how the press contributed to the discourse Americans were having about lynching and its aftermath to both the community and to the individual. The Jim Crow era prior to the mass migrations of Black citizens from the South cannot be adequately explained by Brundage's argument that Southern White men felt that they needed to maintain dominance and stability over a pool of workers to whom they felt superior. Roberta Senechal de la Roche in her work *In Lincoln's Shadow: The 1908 Race Riot in Springfield, Illinois* (1990) supports my argument that White citizens above the lynch belt during the Jim Crow era used lynching for

a different manner than did their Southern counterparts. Her work, in conjunction with Kimberly Harper's *White Man's Heaven: The Lynching and Expulsion of Blacks in the Southern Ozarks, 1894-1909* (2010) argues that vigilantism as a way of life in the Jim Crow North of Southern Illinois and Southern Missouri can thus could be seen closer to Pfeifer's argument that the White citizenry of these areas had a long standing distrust of the legal system and felt it their right and duty to administer justice in their counties as they saw fit.

The subject of lynching has also been covered by historians with monographs covering a single instance of lynching and seeking to examine the causes of these acts of violence. However, this literature does little to show a pattern over time and the changing dynamics that occurred in lynching incidents as the twentieth century moved toward World War II. These monographs do add context for a particular incident and thus will be included in this paper as additional support for the argument that at their core certain factors that were not present in the existing narratives that Brundage, Wood and Pfeifer offer. Included in this literature is Dominic Capeci's *The Lynching of Cleo Wright* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998) and Cynthia Carr's *Our Town: A Heartland Lynching, a Haunted Town, and the Hidden History of White America* (Three Rivers Press: New York, 2006).

The ultimate cause of the decline of lynching is not a major component of this paper but it is important to include this discussion as the last lynching in Missouri is covered as one of the incidents discussed within the scope of this thesis. The reasons for the decline of lynching have been argued by Brundage, Woods and Pfeifer but Philip Dray's *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (Modern Library: New York, 2002) studies lynching as a whole across the United States. His focus falls on the anti-lynching movement and how noted persons such as Ida B. Wells, W.E.B. Dubois and James Weldon

Johnson crusaded on behalf of their attempts at a Federal anti-lynching bill.¹⁶ By examining lynching in its entire timeframe a more complete understanding can be made of the processes anti-lynch programs went through including the use of photographs, pamphlets and use of the Black owned press to force all American's to see lynching at its truest and ugliest form and thus pave the way for the ultimate decline of lynching in the United States.

In addition to monographs on lynching, several key articles will be used to support my study of the different editorial styles and tones that regional papers imparted to their readers and how these differences impacted the lynchings included in this paper. Included will be "The Press and Lynchings of African Americans" a survey of the press coverage of lynching and its influence on American perception by Richard M. Perloff (*Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Jan., 2000), pp. 315-330. Perloff recognizes the lack of a body of work that deals with regional coverage by the press of lynching. Through examples from newspapers across the North and South he provides a clearer picture of how lynching was reported and how cross sections of Americans were exposed to it. "Media Rhetoric and Images of Lynching in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" by Ira Wasserman (*Michigan Sociological Review*, Vol. 12, (Fall 1998), pp. 68-94, examines the changing rhetoric and images employed by the printed mass media in the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by focusing on the role of the mass media in creating and maintaining "social reality". Wasserman argues that the media can help to reinforce changing social views of this reality. He considers the changing views over time of the press on lynching between 1882 and 1930. This article specifically speaks to some of the questions raised within this paper as well as to the specific time line of that which I chose to isolate as

¹⁶ Dray, See pages 53-108 for another view of Ida B. Wells and W.E.B.Dubois and their relation to black owned presses and the NAACP rise.

well. Although Wasserman does not deal specifically with Missouri and Illinois as comparable regions of the country as I propose to do, he still provides an excellent overview of the changing overall picture of the press during these times. The use of primary documents is essential in framing this paper. Newspaper accounts themselves are of primary importance when examining the trend of media reporting during the featured time period of lynching being analyzed. Specifically the border regional papers.

The statistics of lynching belie the horrific nature of each of these acts of mob violence against another person. And yet, the statistics that have been compiled by the Tuskegee Institute since 1882 of the lynchings happening across the United States do stand alone in painting the stark reality that at least 4200 times in a period of only eighty years American citizens turned on their own and committed barbaric atrocities against another citizen. Tallying these numbers and using them to underscore the continuing egregious practice of lynching is necessary to continually bear in mind that although the overall numbers might be considered minor in an overall context of murder in general, these acts were particularly barbaric in that the majority of lynchings were committed against people of color. The Tuskegee Institute, founded in 1881 began keeping record of the lynchings occurring throughout the United States. Their archival record stands as the definitive number amassed, but is certainly not complete as some lynchings, particularly in the Deep South went unreported.¹⁷ Lynchings between 1882 and 1968 numbered 4,743 of which 1,297 were White and 3,446 were Black. Missouri, a slave state prior to the Civil War accounted for one hundred and twenty two lynchings of which fifty-three were White and sixty nine Black.

¹⁷ Wood, 3. See also a recently completed study by The Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror*, (Montgomery: Private Press, 2015) that has recently uncovered significantly more lynchings that went uncounted by the Tuskegee institute.

Illinois, a free state from slavery had thirty four lynchings of which fifteen were White and nineteen Black.¹⁸ The discrepancy between White and Black are not as marked as the Deep South states of Georgia with five hundred and thirty one lynchings of which only thirty nine were White and four hundred ninety two were Black and Mississippi with five hundred eighty one lynchings of forty two White and five hundred thirty nine Black men and women.¹⁹

At the heart of every lynching in the South was an excuse by the person holding the rope and his or her accomplices, usually in the form of some perceived criminal act or social mores incident committed by the victim. It is the intention of this paper to explore those excuses in the Border States and differentiate the underlying goals of the perpetrators of the examined lynchings in these states from the typical lynchings of the South. To better understand causation of lynchings in the Border-States it is important to understand how African-Americans established themselves or were established by others in these states and how they were viewed by White residents in these same areas.

A Brief History of Missouri and Illinois As Slave and Free States

Illinois and Missouri, although ostensibly Free states following the Civil War have had a long tradition of slavery. After the failed reconstruction period, Missouri (formerly a slave state) had Jim Crow laws written into their State by-laws, including miscegenation,

¹⁸ Tuskegee Institute Archives “Lynching Whites and Negroes 1882-1962”

¹⁹ Ibid. Although Waldrep makes a compelling argument that no actual count of lynchings can be accurately be determined and the recent study by the Equal Justice Committee bears out this fact, it is widely recognized that the Tuskegee count is a fair representation of many of the lynchings that occurred.

segregation of all public places and a system to thwart African-Americans attempts to vote. Illinois maintained *de jure* school segregation and *de facto* public area segregation along racial lines. The inherent racism brought with it the hypocrisy of Illinois, claiming to be a free state with a well-defined justice system in place lynching its citizens with impunity of that same law. Here I will examine the history of Slavery in both states as well as outlining the justice system dealing with capital crimes in place during the time frame of the lynchings discussed in this paper.

African slaves were brought to Illinois (then territory) via Haiti in 1720 through early French settlers. The first documented slavery in Illinois was in 1721, when Philip Renault, a failed mining operator, brought five hundred African slaves to the region. Renault founded St. Philippe in 1723 and used those first slaves to farm his lands. Slavery continued in Illinois following the American Revolutionary War when the burgeoning United States claimed Illinois as its own territory. By 1818 seventy one percent of Illinois settlers were from slave states.²⁰

The Northwest Territory was established as the “Land Ordinance of 1784” which was eventually replaced in 1787 by the “Northwest Ordinance” in which Thomas Jefferson had proposed dividing the territory into “gridded townships”, so that when the areas were surveyed, they could eventually be sold to individual, investors and speculative land companies.²¹ (See Figure 1). Article six of the ordinance spoke directly to the issue of slavery in these regions and states that:

There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory, otherwise than in the punishment of crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted:

²⁰ Solon J. Buck, *Illinois in 1818*, (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 2967), 99.

²¹ Jerel A. Rosati, James M. Scott, *The Politics of United States Foreign Policy*, (Wadsworth, Cengage Learning: Boston, 2010), p. 20

Provided, always, That any person escaping into the same, from whom labor or service is lawfully claimed in any one of the original States, such fugitive may be lawfully reclaimed and conveyed to the person claiming his or her labor or service as aforesaid.²²

Illinois was one of the states created from this ordinance and as such was set from that time forward as a “free” state, although there remained a fugitive slave law also allowed under this ordinance.²³



Figure 1²⁴ Map of Northwest Territory (1787)

Missouri had its own complicated history with regards to slavery. The Missouri Compromise of 1820 enacted by Congress prohibited slavery in northern portions of the Louisiana Territory but permitted it in its southern territories. Thomas Jefferson in a letter to US Congressman John Holmes “immediately identified a danger in establishing in law a geographical line that would divide the nation over a moral and political principle.”

²² Our Documents, “The Press and Lynchings of African Americans” Retrieved April 11, 2016. <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=8&page=transcript>

²³ Paul Finkelman, “Slavery and the Northwest Ordinance: A Study in Ambiguity”, *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Winter 1986), p. 345.

²⁴ <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/> title=“Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0

Jefferson admits that he views slavery as inherently unjust but is unable to see any practical solution to the problem.

The notion of public execution and its impact on Southern Illinois and Southern Missouri is important to understand as it bears close historical context to extra-legal lynchings. In the decade prior to the lynchings discussed later in this paper during the Jim Crow era, 36 legal executions were conducted in Illinois and 63 in Missouri of both Black and White criminals.²⁵ A system was in place to legally execute a criminal and was used with relative frequency. These executions were all public. Amy Woods makes the connection between lynching and public execution when she writes that “the demand for a public execution was not as astonishing as it might appear.” She explains that as states began to make executions less available for public viewing, the greater need it created, especially in Southern areas as these regions tended to lag socially behind their Northern counterparts to “see the thing done.”²⁶ In other words, when executions became private affairs, the South did not see this in a favorable light. They wanted to see justice done and see it with their own eyes. As state sanctioned executions became more sanitized, it created a greater need for immediate justice—lynchings. This causal factor of public executions and lynchings bears little relationship to Border-State lynchings as executions in both Illinois and Missouri were public and used for both Black and White criminals. What can be seen happening in the Border-States are open legal executions alongside open extra-legal lynchings. As I will document in this paper, at least two of the case studies openly defied those resisting the

²⁵ Matt Cherry. *Death Penalty Focus*. n.d., <http://deathpenaltyusa.org/usa1/state/missouri.htm>, <http://deathpenaltyusa.org/usa1/state/illinois1.htm> (Accessed April 10, 2016).

²⁶ Woods, 23.

lynching and demonstrated a complete disregard for the justice system in place at the time to deal with the “criminals” and their alleged crimes.

CHAPTER ONE: LYNCHING IN THE JIM CROW ERA

"It is the central paradox of our history that a nation based on the respect for law and order should so often resort to violence to maintain the inequities of race and class."—Carole Merritt

In this chapter I will discuss four lynching incidents that occurred between 1903 and 1909. Three of these lynchings can be explained by the population of the city in question using lynching as a precursor to racially cleanse the town of its Black population. The fourth lynching bolsters my argument that disregard for existing laws were blatantly ignored when a perception of a social more was breached by an African-American or that they were afraid that the outcome of any such trial might result in acquittal of a person of color. This timeline occurs during the Jim Crow era in the United States that began after the failed reconstruction period in 1877 following the Civil War.

Jim Crow law excluded Blacks from public transport and facilities, juries, jobs, and neighborhoods. With the passage of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth Constitutional Amendments African-Americans had been granted the same legal protections as their White counterparts. However, after 1877 with the election of President Rutherford B. Hayes, southern and Border States began restricting the civil rights of African-Americans and were buttressed by the 1896 Supreme Court case “Plessy v. Ferguson”, which legitimized Jim Crow laws.²⁷

Equally important was the Jim Crow “etiquette” that went hand in hand with the laws. As Kennedy Stetson explained “Southerners, whites and Negroes alike, having been steeped

²⁷ For a more thorough and complex treatment of the Jim Crow era see Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, pgs. 40-45, Loewen, *Sundown Towns*, pgs. 33-34

for generations in the atmosphere engendered by interracial etiquette, usually know precisely—almost instinctively—just what is expected of them in all situations.”²⁸ He is referring to the unwritten rules such as never accuse a White person of lying and never make dishonorable intentions to a White person or suggest that they are socially inferior. Never show superior knowledge or intelligence. Never raise your voice to a White person and never comment upon the appearance of a White female. But in the Border-States these racial etiquette rules were not quite as clear cut, and as Kennedy argues, “...in the border areas...no one can know for certain what to expect, and this uncertainty gives rise to a certain added tension in interracial encounters.”²⁹

This tension is one of the underpinnings of the case studies presented in this chapter. In the South lynching was conducted with virtual impunity, but in Missouri and especially Illinois with a legal system set up to deal with actual crimes, lynchings seemed to have as part of the reason for the act a breach of the social mores, or etiquette in some manner. Coupled with immigration into these states from within and outside of the United States into a competitive job market, the Jim Crow era was a distinctive period for lynchings in the Border-States.

Racial cleansing was at the core of most of these cases. The question of whether the effect of a town being “cleansed” was accidental, intentional or incidental to the lynching is an important consideration, but will not be analyzed in this paper. The intent of racial cleansing requires an in-depth analysis that goes far beyond the scope of this paper, but should be addressed at some point

²⁸ Stetson Kennedy, *Jim Crow Guide to the U.S.A.: The Laws, Customs and Etiquette Governing the Conduct of Nonwhites and Other Minorities as Second-Class Citizens*, (University Alabama Press, 2011), 203.

²⁹ Kennedy, 204.

On July 9, 1868 the fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified after the Civil War, extending the Fifth Amendment's protections to the states. The Fourteenth Amendment states: Its broad goal was to ensure that the Civil Rights Act passed in 1866 would remain valid ensuring that "all persons born in the United States...excluding Indians not taxed...." were citizens and were to be given "full and equal benefit of all laws....nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." Between the years of 1900-1935, 157 of the 360 total Illinois legal executions occurred, certainly centering on the fact that Illinois was not squeamish in applying the death penalty to those persons that were convicted of murder, treason, aggravated kidnapping or rape.³⁰

By 1890 Missouri had instituted by statute anti-miscegenation and segregated school laws that were widely supported during the Jim Crow years following the failed Reconstruction period of the Civil War.³¹ Southern Missouri had become the sanctuary of some freed slaves, with immigration into the area by not only freed people but Union veterans from Indiana, Illinois and Ohio, and former Confederates from Virginia, Arkansas and Kentucky.³² This is the location that the first of the lynchings occurred that will be covered in this paper.

³⁰ ProCon, <http://deathpenalty.procon.org/view.resource.php?resourceID=004087#IX>, (Accessed February 12, 2016).

³¹ Missouri Constitution as well as legislative rulings upheld these laws and *Plessy v Ferguson* upheld them in the Supreme Court ruling in 1896.

³² *History of Newton, Lawrence, Barry and McDonald Counties, Missouri: From the Earliest Time to the Present*, (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1888) 909-910.

The Lynching of Will Godley, 1901

The first example in this paper's chronology is the 1901 lynching of Will Godley in Pierce City, Missouri. Godley was African-American and his death was a part of a regime to drive Black persons from the Southern Ozark region of Missouri.³³

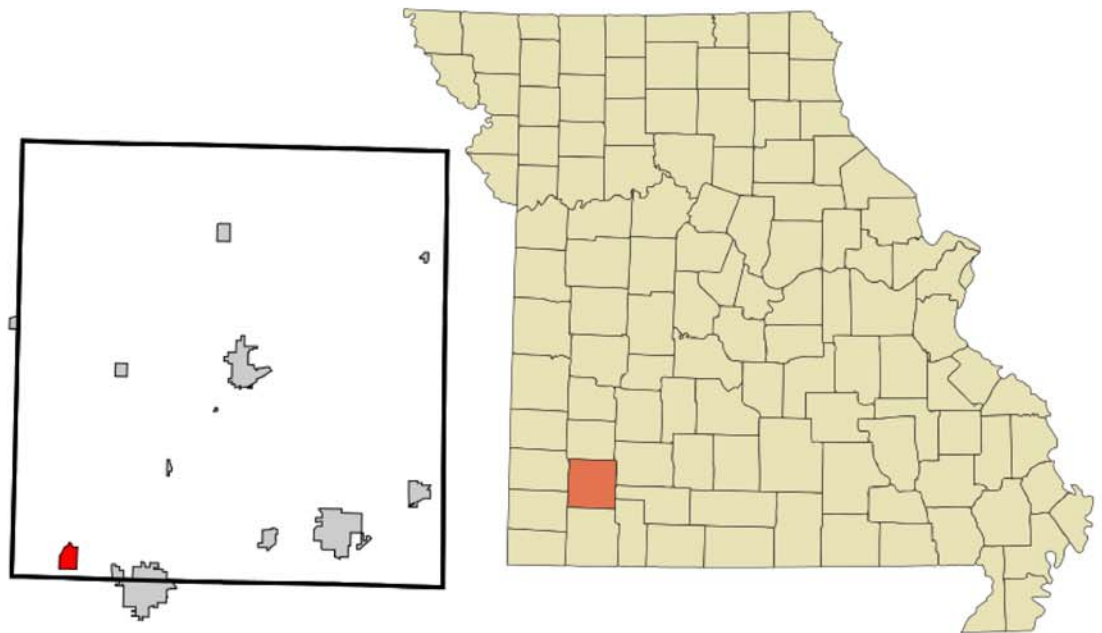


Figure 2³⁴ Map of the location of Pierce City, Missouri

Pierce City lies in the Southwest corner of Missouri, bordered by Kansas, Oklahoma and Arkansas. (See Figure 2). It is located in Lawrence County and by 1894 280 Black residents of the County lived in Pierce City.³⁵ The Black population lived in an area across the tracks from the main area of town. It was a small area that was plagued with occasional

³³ Harper, 41.

³⁴ Arkyan, Based on similar map concepts by Ixnayonthetimmay, CC BY-SA 3.0, common usage, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2967433>

³⁵ Elliot Jaspín, *Buried in the Bitter Waters: The Hidden History of Racial Cleansing in America*, (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 70.

floods and that had trains coming through at all hours of the day and night.³⁶ They had little choice in living in Pierce City as they had been run out of another city, Monett, Missouri after a lynching that had occurred there in 1894.³⁷ The Black citizens lived in Pierce City without any true disruption of their lives until the influx of so many varied people into this area as well as the addition of a railway and the growing black suffrage movement caused friction that as Harper says was “only a matter of time before the simmering caldron boiled over.”³⁸

This lynching underscores one of the primary differences between southern state and border state lynchings. African-Americans in the South were needed to maintain the largely agricultural economy that prevailed there. In southern Missouri, Black citizens were being routinely run from one town to the next in an effort to maintain the White majority and thus hold their employment opportunities for themselves. The roughly 300 African-Americans living in Pierce City had come from Monett, Missouri in the previous decade after a lynching had occurred there. In addition, Harper writes that the growing Black suffrage movement added to the tensions in the area. This speaks directly to the argument that social mores in the Border-States were not well defined. Black suffrage movements occurred quite infrequently in the South until the modern Civil Rights movement began after World War II. Yet here, in a Border-State Black suffrage would be seen as the Black population not keeping “in their place.” This added element piled onto an existing White versus Black employment seeking created the tension that ultimately led to the lynching of Will Godley.

³⁶ Jaspin, 69-70.

³⁷ Jaspin, 70.

³⁸ Harper, xvii. For a more complete description and portrayal of Black suffrage activism in Lawrence County see Harper pgs. 1-15.

That boiling point between the races that Harper had previously spoken of occurred on August 18, 1901 when 24 year old Giselda Wild, a White woman was raped and murdered on her way home from church. Her body was thrown into a culvert off of the railroad tracks that led to her parents' house. Her brother Carl was the first to find her body and upon questioning nearby witnesses they all pointed to one or more "negroes" that had been seen sitting on the bridge at the approximate time of her death.³⁹ Blame was quickly placed on two Black men, Will Godley and Eugene Barrett. The Sheriff of the town visited their homes, but after interrogating the two he believed they had no part in the crime. Talk of lynching Black people had already begun and then Sheriff Manlove "inexplicably left town."⁴⁰

After Manlove left Pierce City, a posse arrested Godley and Barrett and placed them in the city's jail amidst hundreds of people forming a mob around the city square. Just mere hours before Godley was lynched, three train cars full of men from Monett, Missouri arrived in Pierce City and greatly added to the agitation of the crowd that was forming and calling for the lynching of Godley. Monett citizens, which had already expelled all of its Black population since 1894 were determined that Pierce City could achieve that same goal.⁴¹ It was this force seemingly from not one but two towns of people involved in Godley's lynching that Black citizens were once again been moved along and that racial cleansing in Pierce City was going to be achieved.

Eventually Godley was hung in front of the Hotel Lawrence and after his death his body was riddled with bullets. The lynching of Godley was only a precursor to the expulsion

³⁹ Jaspin, 69.

⁴⁰ Jaspin, 71.

⁴¹ Jaspin, p. 72-73.

of the Black population. Within weeks the entire population of Black Pierce City residents were gone, having fled eastward to cities that accommodated their arrival.⁴²

This lynching was a deliberate act to terrorize the Black population of Pierce City and force them to flee the town. The lynching was all that was required for those African-Americans, many having lived through the Monett lynching and those horrific memories, to send them fleeing to other parts of the state. After the lynching a large crowd of white men, having raided the town's armory advanced on the "colored" area of Pierce City and began shooting randomly and wildly into the Black population's homes and then began to burn their homes systematically until every person of color had fled into the surrounding woods and river bank. Some left on foot and some by rail car although, "In one last indignity, blacks were not allowed to board at the depot, forced instead to wait in the dust by the tracks."⁴³ These were frightened people traumatized by the visage of a bullet ridden Black corpse, burning homes and facing a mob of gun wielding men. The message to the African-American residents was clear—Pierce City does not want or need the Black population; go somewhere else. They heeded that message and moved on, as far as their feet, money or ability could take them.

There was only one local newspaper in Pierce City, the *Weekly Empire*, edited by Alex T. Boothe that sought to minimize the destruction of the Black dwellings that occurred in the aftermath of the action as well as the lynching itself by stating:

That there are two sides to every story every reasonable grants. The country at large already has one side of the story of the terrible events that began with the murder of Miss Gazella WILD by a negro at high noon, Sunday, August 18, 1901, and ending with the hanging of Will GODLEY, and the shooting of Pete HAMPTON and French GODLEY and the burning of five negro dwellings and the *expulsion of*

⁴² Jaspin, 70-80.

⁴³ Jaspin, 77.

the colored population of Peirce City [emphasis added] from the town. No one denies these facts. But owing to the fact that the outside world has bitterly criticized and anathemized [sic] the citizens of Peirce City and surrounding community, holding them responsible for the treatment to the negroes and severely and unjustly blaming them, they, the citizens of Peirce City send out this statement which may be depended upon as containing the exact truth in the matter and withholding nothing. All that is asked of the world is that judgment be suspended until all the facts are known.⁴⁴

Even earlier Boothe had underscored the justification of the lynching of Godley as:

Mob law is to be deplored, but under some circumstances it may be justifiable. The murder of Miss WILD was an awful thing and would naturally cause a strong feeling of resentment against anyone who may have had any hand in the affair, or even knew the parties who did. The negro, GODLEY, who was hanged last night had been sent to the penitentiary from this county at one time for committing rape, and his record was against him. The hanging may have been justifiable.⁴⁵

This editorial imploring the understanding of outsiders follows directly on the heels of the outcry of several other regional papers condemning the lynching as a deplorable act by the citizens of Pierce City. In particular the *Springfield Republican*, owned and edited by H.R. Snyder (himself a liberal), wrote in his paper (Springfield is closely due North of Pierce City), following the lynching and expulsions that "It is wrong, anyhow, to lynch men accused without giving them a trial to determine the question of their guilt. The present manifestation in this part of Missouri is unfortunate and will work injury in many ways. It lessens the popular regard for laws, undermines the foundations of social order and does great harm."⁴⁶ To which Boothe replied in The *Peirce City Times* "The Springfield Republican is wild in its statements in regard to the damage done last night, and should correct its statements for the good of the town."⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Alex T. Boothe, "PEIRCE CITY'S SIDE OF THE STORY" *Pierce City Time*, September 5, 1901; Page 3

⁴⁵ Alex T. Boothe, *Peirce City Times*, August 2, 1901, p. 2

⁴⁶ H.R. Snyder, "Lawlessness Dangerous", *Springfield Republican*, August 21, 1901, p. 4.

⁴⁷ Alex T. Booth, *Peirce City Times*, August 24, 1901, p. 2.

Harper notes that “Boothe’s attitudes may have reflected the wave of lily-white Republicanism that began to sweep across the South.” to which he most certainly would have been opposed.⁴⁸ Certainly as he continued to implore his readers to arm themselves and get the perpetrators of the murder of Wild as well as his continued justification of the lynching and expulsions of Blacks suggest his alliance did not lie with the Black population. Will Godley’s lynching was a direct act to purge Pierce City of its Black residents. The overall perception of the White population that Black suffrage (an unwritten social etiquette *faux pas*) was being discussed alongside the decreasing demands for unskilled labor that Black citizens were filling for lower wages at the expense of White men and then coupled with a heinous crime by an alleged Black man with a criminal record was all that was needed to ignite this maelstrom of lynching, burning of houses and the running off of an entire Black population from a small southern Missouri town.

The Lynching of Thomas Gilyard, 1903

Joplin, Missouri is the site of the second marker incident of lynching and lies approximately 248 miles Southwest of St. Louis (see Figure 3). It was to Joplin that many of the Black citizens that were run from Pierce City in 1901 had fled after Godley’s lynching there. After only two years, however, some of these former Pierce City Black residents once again faced expulsion from a Southern Missouri City in an effort by Joplin to racially cleanse their town. This was an intentional effort by the White population to racially cleanse its

⁴⁸ Harper, p. 14.

town. Gilyard had been in the town for only one day when the crime had occurred and no apparent broken social etiquette rules were implied to have been broken.

On April 16, 1903 a mob of nearly 2000 people lynched Thomas Gilyard, a Black man who had arrived from Mississippi just the day before, for the alleged crime of having killed a Joplin police officer the preceding day.

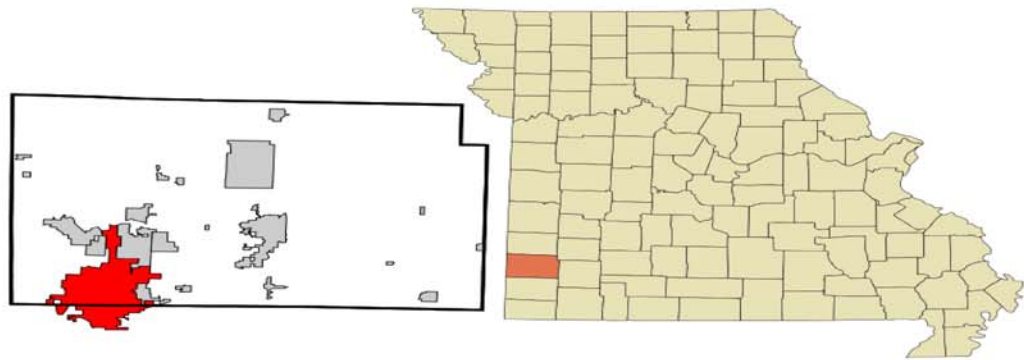


Figure 3⁴⁹ Map of the Location of Joplin, Missouri

Within an hour of his arrest, and despite several efforts from cooler heads to calm the crowd, they burst their way into the jail, dragged him several blocks away and then hung him from a telephone pole. His body was cut down after half an hour and taken to a temporary morgue to prevent further mutilation of his body. His last words were proclamations of his innocence and the one White eyewitness to the officer's murder who attempted to plead with the mob that Gilyard was not the murderer went unheard.⁵⁰

Two regional newspapers covered the lynching, *The Joplin Globe*, owned by Gilbert Barbee who was a staunch supporter and actor for the conservative Democratic Party and the *Carthage Evening Press*, eventually owned by liberal E.L. Dale who took frequent pot shots

⁴⁹ By Arkyan -based on public domain information. Based on similar map concepts by Ixnayonthetimmay, , <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2967314>

⁵⁰ Harper, pgs. 75-79

at Joplin for being a lawless town. The *Globe* offered \$1,650 for the capture of Officer Leslie's murderer.⁵¹ After the lynching had occurred reporters from both papers rushed to interview law enforcement officers, the mayor and other townspeople who witnessed the lynching.

The *Joplin Globe* reported that the mob was stirred up quickly upon the news that the (alleged) murderer had been caught. Yells of "hang the nigger," "Get a rope," and "Hang the murderer" were heard by people within the jail where Gilyard was being questioned by the police.⁵² Jasper County Sheriff James T. Owens, an elected official whom the town Republicans saw as a weak man (and then were proved correct when he failed to stop the lynching) was conducting the interrogation but was being drowned out by the swelling numbers of people outside the jail.⁵³ Instead of attempting to remove Gilyard surreptitiously from the jail for his safety as they had done for two other suspects arrested (for different crimes), at the same time as Gilyard, the officers instead made sure that Gilyard was placed in a cell well away from the other prisoners so that they would not be caught up in any violence that might take place against Gilyard or as the *Globe* put it, "the wrong prisoner taken."⁵⁴ Sheriff Owens made sure to contact the Carthage Police where the other two prisoners had eventually been taken to determine if any mob activity was beginning there. Every time the potential whereabouts of the prisoners may have been detected they were moved to a new location.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Joplin Daily Globe*, April 15, 1903, p.1

⁵² *Joplin Daily Globe*, April 16, 1903, p.1

⁵³ Harris, p. 271.

⁵⁴ *Joplin Daily Globe*, April 16, 1903, p.1

⁵⁵ *Carthage Evening Press*, April 16, 1903. p. 6.

In this case several factors involving the aftermath of the lynching stand out as different from the previous that has been discussed. First, City Attorney C.H. Decker twice attempted to calm the crowd—the first attempt met with success while the second went unheeded, even after having the initial eye witness of Gilyard tell the mob that Gilyard was not the person originally identified as the killer.⁵⁶ The fact that Decker did try to repeatedly stop the lynching in the face of hundreds of fellow citizens all intent on hanging Gilyard stands in stark contrast to the other lynchings where officials either walked away or stood by passively. Second, although this incident is seen in light of the Southern Missouri region to cleanse White towns of their Black citizens, in this case the attempt to rid Joplin of its African-American citizens failed. Initially several hundred members of the Black population fled Joplin, but by 1910 “801 African Americans lived in Joplin, up from 773 in 1900.”⁵⁷

Racial cleansing played a large role in the lynching death of Thomas Gilyard. Joplin was one of several towns to which both Black citizens of Monett and Pierce City had fled following lynchings and house burnings in their respective previous homes. Although the attempt in Joplin was ultimately unsuccessful, the attempt was being played out in successive cities across the southern half of Missouri. This lynching underscores the argument that racial cleansing in Southern Missouri was one of several factors that didn’t exist in lynchings that occurred within the lynch-belt of the South.

⁵⁶ *Joplin Daily Globe*, April 16, 1903, p. 1

⁵⁷ Harper, p. 84.

The Lynching of David Wyatt, 1903

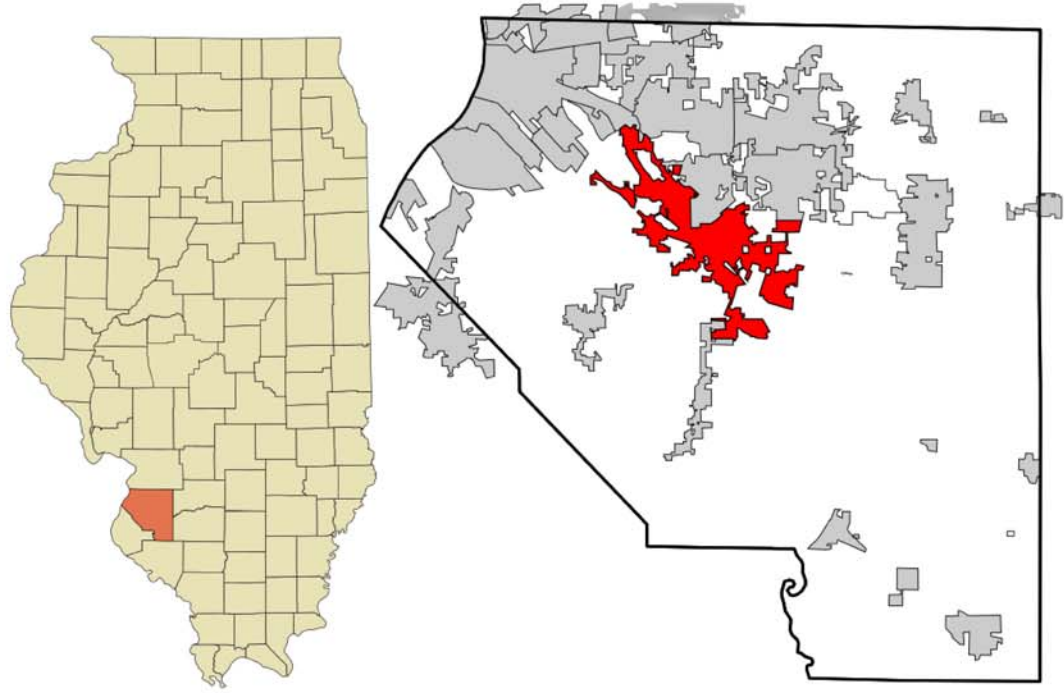


Figure 4⁵⁸ Map of the Location of Belleville, Illinois

This third example used in this paper of lynching underscores the second part of my argument that some cases of lynchings that happened in Southern Illinois and Missouri were due in large part because citizens of a particular town chose not to trust the legal system in place and instead sought immediate and permanent “justice” through extra-legal means. In addition, a breach of Black social etiquette is alleged in the form of a Black man dealing with Northern “agitators” seeking increased rights for the African-American citizens of Belleville.

This was the case in the lynching of David Wyatt, an educated Black man, who lived and worked as a teacher in St. Clair County, a region that sits directly across the Mississippi

⁵⁸ RCSprinter123, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belleville,_Illinois#/media/, Accessed 03/28/2016.

River from St. Louis. On Saturday, June 7, 1903 Wyatt applied for a renewal of his teaching certificate at the Belleville, Illinois (see Figure 4) office of School Superintendent Charles Hertel, a White man. Hertel advised Wyatt that his credentials would not be renewed. Angry words were exchanged and Wyatt left the office only to return later that evening with a gun. He shot Hertel, wounding but not killing him. The locally owned *Daily Advocate* newspaper later reported on the incident by claiming that Wyatt struggled with an assistant in the office and then Hertel in a continuation of the fight which led outside onto the public square. A crowd then gathered and police took Wyatt into custody, locking him in the “murderer’s cell” while the growing crowd began calls to “Lynch him,” and “Kill the Black Brute.” Eventually the police called on the fire department to try and break up the crowd to no avail. Wyatt was lynched in the courthouse square.⁵⁹

The *Daily Advocate* was a Belleville newspaper that had a large subscription base beyond the small city borders of Belleville, Illinois. It was originally established in 1840 and by the 27th of November, 1862, a Mr. Kimball purchased the paper, maintaining his sole proprietorship until January 1st, 1867 when F.M. Taylor bought into the paper. Eventually a

⁵⁹ *The Daily Advocate*, June 7, 1903, 1. The paper goes on to deliver the more graphic nature of the lynching, “The mob used sledge hammers to break into the locked cell and dragged Wyatt outside onto the public square with a noose around his throat. He was then hanged from a light fixture. His body was doused with kerosene and set alight. Once the flames had consumed most of his body the remaining pieces were beaten into an unrecognizably human form.” Reporter JJ McAuliffe of the *St The Louis Post Dispatch* added additional details, When this man recited the details of the lynching—how Wyatt was struck on the head with a sledge hammer as he crouched in his cell pleading for mercy; how his body was dragged by means of a rope tied around his neck through the principle streets; how he was then hanged from a telegraph pole, his body mutilated and parts of the flesh distributed to the fiendish mob as mementos of its unbridled passion, and how the bleeding and torn body was burned—I felt that no man with a spark of humanity in his heart could have urged or abetted such monstrous savagery , and that home-loving Belleville would not permit such brutality to go unpunished.

disagreement between the partners as to what the political position the paper should take arose and Kimball retired, selling the entire franchise to Taylor. Taylor was a member of the Radical Republican Party. It was then sold to J. Thomas in 1880 who contracted Kimball out of retirement and into the position of editor. It was for years considered the leading Democratic paper in Southern Illinois; and later one of the foremost organs of the conservative Republican Party in its congressional district.⁶⁰

The *Daily Advocate* reported extensively on the killing. The party affiliation of the paper is clearly evident when reporters echoed public sentiment by quickly blaming the victim, David Wyatt and not the pack of citizen's that had done the lynching.⁶¹ Belleville Mayor Kern excused the mob and offered up his opinion on why the lynching had occurred. Kern cited Northern agitators, thus echoing the Jim Crow excuses why "negroes" who "didn't assimilate" were fundamentally at fault for their own deaths by their fellow citizens.⁶² This is the unwritten social etiquette rules that Stetson had outlined. Wyatt was an educated Black man who was seen as someone not following the social dictates of a majority White community.

By contrast, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* was owned at the time by Joseph Pulitzer who had merged it with the bankrupt *St. Louis Evening Post* in 1878 to create its current incarnation.⁶³ Pulitzer appointed as his first Editor-In-Chief John A. Cockerill. From the

⁶⁰ *Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois, Part 2*. Ed. By Newton Bateman, Paul Selby, Alexander McLean, Alonzo St. Clair Wilderman, Augusta A. Wilderman, (Munsell Publishing Company, 1907), p. 851.

⁶¹ "EXCUSES LYNCHING, Rev. Bartlett of Chicago delivers sermon in defense of mobs, says the violators and not the mobs are the criminals", *The Daily Advocate*, June 29, 1903, 1

⁶² "Negroes Blamed for Lynching; Mayor Kern of Belleville, Ill, Says They Provoked Race Hatred in Belleville" *Moberly Evening Democrat*, June 10, 1903, 1.

⁶³ Jolley, Laura R. "Joseph Pulitzer". Missouri Biographies for Students.

<http://shs.umsystem.edu/historicmissourians/name/p/pulitzer/>, Retrieved October 31, 2015

beginning Pulitzer desired a progressive paper and wrote the papers platform upon his retirement in 1907:

I know that my retirement will make no difference in its cardinal principles, that it will always fight for progress and reform, never tolerate injustice or corruption, always fight demagogues of all parties, never belong to any party, always oppose privileged classes and public plunderers, never lack sympathy with the poor, always remain devoted to the public welfare, never be satisfied with merely printing news, always be drastically independent, never be afraid to attack wrong, whether by predatory plutocracy or predatory poverty.⁶⁴

In one of the first of their articles published about the lynching the Dispatch's headline read, "BELLEYJLLE (sic) MOB HANGS, THEN BURNS, NEGRO TEACHER: Body of Man Who Shot County Superintendent of Schools (sic) Burned on Public(sic) Square. CRIME CAUSED BY REFUSAL OF POSITION Instructor Failed to Pass Examination to Entitle Him to Reappointment in Brooklyn Schools. COUNTY JAIL STORMED BY CROWD FOR HOURS."⁶⁵

Although the headline blared about mobs and the storming of the jail, in the text of the same article the reporter states that, "the remarkable feature of this lynching was the utter lack of enthusiasm that prevailed amongst the lynchers. They went about it in a cool and indifferent manner... They simply appeared to regard it as a matter of course that Wyatt should be hanged, and they hanged him."⁶⁶

Unlike other lynchings that were occurring across this same region, there was no initial massive mob (estimates of about 300 spectators eventually witnessed the killing, but relatively few people actually had banded together calling for his death) thereby producing no real spectacle simply to see justice done to whatever convenient Black person might be in

⁶⁴ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* Platform from the newspaper's website.

⁶⁵ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. June 7, 1903. pA1

⁶⁶ Ibid.

the area. Moreover, this lynching occurred near the courthouse, where the actual crime had taken place. It would appear that there was no equivocation as to Wyatt's guilt: he shot, though not mortally, a White person in front of witnesses and he made no real attempt to escape his ultimate fate. It is impossible to know what Wyatt was thinking at the time of his crime as the lynching took place before he could make any statement. It appears to be a lynching that occurred because the Belleville citizenry involved witnessed a crime and decided to act as jury, judge and executioner in an expedient way. The fact that attempted murder was not subject to the death penalty speaks directly to the argument that these same citizens did not respect the laws in place to protect due process afforded equally to persons of color. Indeed, when the same reporter of the *Post-Dispatch* spoke to citizens witnessing or participating in the lynchings they simply replied, "It's just a way we have here in Belleville."⁶⁷

The reporter takes no notice of nor does he speculate on the sanguine message this statement represents. However, the *Post-Dispatch* itself does take exception with this benign message and goes on to quote Belleville Mayor Kern as stating that the lynching was a "somewhat irregular execution" and that "he can readily see how it was fed on the flames of prejudice through a negro agitator who has been busy in Belleville under the equal rights act."⁶⁸ This message is from the Mayor of a State that has abolished segregation and miscegenation laws by statute but feels comfortable justifying (in print) that his own citizen's may have taken the law into their own hands to prevent another citizen from exercising those rights. There has never been any evidence produced that Wyatt was in any way a participant in attempting to secure his or anyone else's right to vote, hold office or intermarry with

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 23, 1903, p. 14

White women. However, the private life of Wyatt has never been made available through diaries or other extant material.

What is interesting to note in this case is that two regional newspapers, less than fifteen miles from each other differ so vastly in their reporting of this event, especially in light of the fact that the *Dispatch* is in Missouri (the former slave State) and the *Advocate* is in Illinois (the former free State with anti-segregation laws already in place at the time). The elements of politics is clearly seen through the owners of the dueling papers particular political leanings and their reporting reflects that bias. The newspapers were not just reporting an event that happened. Reporters spoke to both the actors and witnesses of Wyatt's lynching, as well as city officials and then reflected that information back to those same people as well as to those who were not aware that it had happened (the *Post-Dispatch* had a large circulation outside of just the St. Louis metropolitan area). This was the discourse that Americans were exposed to via the media in 1903. The fact that a mayor of a city that just had a lynching (outside of the South in a state that did attempt to practice due process) was saying that it was okay to practice vigilantism in direct violation of existing law reinforces that feeling in others that hold the same belief and potentially gives rise to the fueling of other instances of violence.

The Lynchings of Scott Burton and William Donnegan, 1908

Five years later and in Springfield, Illinois another racial cleansing in the form of a race riot was being set into motion. In terms of racially motivated riots in Northern cities,

Springfield's of 1908 was not the first.⁶⁹ Springfield (See Figure 5) is approximately ninety miles due East of St. Louis. By 1908 anti-segregation laws in Illinois had been passed. Ostensibly Illinois citizens, both Black and White were on an equal level. However, the same economic and employment opportunity struggles, as well as the growing Black suffrage movement made the Black citizens of Illinois become to be seen as "out of their place" and thus stirred up any outlying or underlying bigotry that White citizens of Springfield had been holding.⁷⁰ Once again the dual existence of economic strain between the races coupled with the perception of the breaching of social etiquette rules by the Black male population attempting to use their right to vote fueled these lynchings in the form of a race riot.

Beginning in the late 1890's and early 1900's Springfield's industrial center was growing rapidly. European immigrants were relocating to Springfield for those jobs and found themselves in competition with Black citizens that numbered roughly 2300 or 6.5 percent of the town's population.⁷¹ However, as Senechal de la Roche notes, there was "...no sudden or massive influx of blacks into Springfield...patterns of black housing, politics and employment remained much the same over that period...and any black threats to whites

⁶⁹ Roberta Senechal de la Roche, *In Lincoln's Shadow: 1908 Race Riot in Springfield, Illinois*, (Carbondale: The Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), 1. For further information on these riots see also Phillip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America*, (New York: Random House, 2002), Sherrilyn A. Ifill, *On the Courthouse Lawn: Confronting the Legacy of Lynching in the Twenty-first Century* (Beacon Press, 2007), Thomas Sowell, *Ethnic America: A History*. (Basic Books 1981) and Howard Zinn, *Voices of a People's History of the United States*. (Seven Stories Press: New York, 2004).

⁷⁰ de la Rocha, 2.

⁷¹ Carole Merritt, *Something So Horrible: The Springfield Race Riot of 1908*, (Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation, 2008), p, 13-17.

dominance in Springfield must have been present before the riot.”⁷² This threat to the dominance of the White population was in full force at the time of the riot.

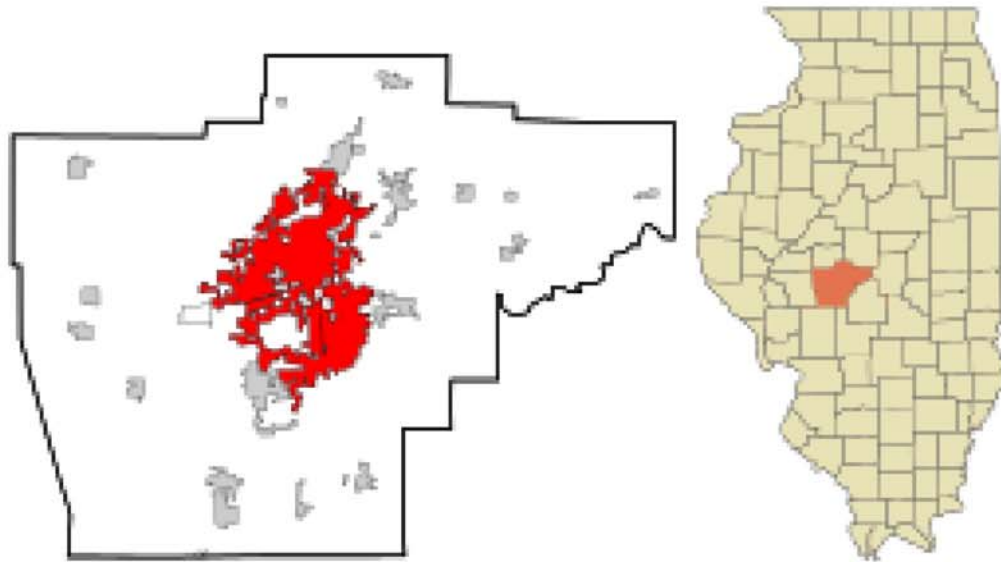


Figure 5⁷³ Map of the Location of Springfield, Illinois

Black people held lower-class and unskilled jobs and social tensions escalated from the severe job competition with the recent European immigrants for the lower grade jobs. In addition, some industries used Black workers as strikebreakers during labor strikes.⁷⁴

Although Blacks and Whites lived in segregated areas, town residents worried about growing political power among the Black citizens.⁷⁵ However, the Springfield race riot as reported by the regional papers and their editorials showed that the Black population was either leaving the city or being driven from the city. Once again, these lynchings can be seen in light of Southern Illinois’ attempt to racially cleanse their town.

⁷² Senechal de la Roche, 7.

⁷³ RCsprinter123, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Springfield,_Illinois, accessed 03/26/2016.

⁷⁴ Merritt, 13-17.

⁷⁵ Merritt, 13-17.

On the night of Saturday, July 4, 1908, a man broke into the home of Clergy Ballard, a white mining engineer. Ballard awoke and found a Black man standing near his daughter's bed. When the intruder fled, Ballard chased after him. When Ballard caught up with the man, the intruder attacked Ballard by slashing his throat with a straight razor. Before he died early Sunday morning, Ballard was able to identify his attacker as Joe James, a young Black man that had only just recently arrived in Springfield. James was eventually found sleeping off a drunk night in the white working-class neighborhood of North End, where he was beaten by White residents before the police finally took him away, arrested him and locked him in the city jail. The press then suggested that Ballard had saved his daughter from a sexual attack, and that fanned the flame of existing volatile racial tensions which inflamed residents more.⁷⁶

Thirty eight days later on August 14, the local *Illinois State Journal* newspaper reported that Mabel Hallam, a White woman and the wife of a well-known streetcar conductor had allegedly been raped by a Black caretaker, George Richardson. Richardson was arrested and he, too was paced in the city jail.⁷⁷

On that same day 2008 the White citizens of Springfield, Illinois began amassing at the jail and were demanding access to the prisoners being held inside, but were being denied. The prisoners had been quietly smuggled out by the police for their safety but when the ever-increasing mob heard this it just enraged them even more. They were there seeking their own brand of justice for the rape of a white woman by one of the prisoners and the alleged murder of a white male by the other. In the wake of their inability to get to the two Black prisoners the mob began to turn “its fury on Springfield’s black community. What had begun as a lynching quickly metamorphosed into a full-fledged race war.” White citizens broke into the

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ *Illinois State Journal*, August 14, 1908, p.1.

armory and armed themselves with shotguns and pistols and headed directly to the Black section of Springfield.⁷⁸ Two lynchings occurred during this riot, though not the two prisoners who had been taken out of harm's way. The two Black men were Scott Burton and William Donnegan.

Burton was a 58 year old barber who had earlier sent his family out of the city for their safety when the riot broke out but stayed behind, armed with a shotgun to protect himself and stayed inside his house. As the mob approached, Burton shot several rounds from inside his house but was quickly subdued, dragged outside and then hung from a dead tree in front of a saloon.⁷⁹

Donnegan was an 80 year old Black man married to a White woman. They and their family lived in one of only a few houses owned by a Black man in an otherwise all-White neighborhood close to the Capitol Building. He was severely disabled with arthritis and did not leave town when the rioting began because he believed his proximity to the Capitol as well as living in a neighborhood that had not been previously targeted by the rampaging mobs would render him some security.⁸⁰

On Saturday evening, August 15 the mob headed straight for the Donnegan home. He was knocked down, his throat was slit with a razor and then he was partially hung from a tree in his front yard. Local police were able to cut him down and attempted to render aid but he died the next morning.⁸¹

⁷⁸ de la Roche, 1.

⁷⁹ de la Roche, p. 38.

⁸⁰ de la Roche, p. 44-45.

⁸¹ Ibid., 45.

The riot was quelled with the help of the State militia but not after many of the Black population had fled the city.⁸² In the following papers cited, it can be seen that the White owned newspapers discourse with the public was that the riot was necessary to rid Springfield of its Black citizens. Five local papers existed at the time; White owned *The Illinois State Register*, a Democratic party supporting paper who had pushed hard against the election of Abraham Lincoln for President, the *Illinois State Journal*, a Republican paper that fully supported Lincoln and his bid to outlaw slavery, *The Springfield News* and the *Springfield Record*, and a single Black owned paper, *The Forum*. In the midst of the riot all four White newspapers appeared to be in full support of the White rioters.

The *Springfield Sunday Journal* (the Sunday edition of the Republican driven *Illinois State Journal*) devoted its entire front page to the riot, quoting partially from a speech President Lincoln had given in 1837 before the Young Men's Lyceum which stated in part, "Accounts of outrages committed by the mobs form the everyday news of the time...neither are they confined to the slave-holding or non-slave holding states...Whatever, then their cause may be, it is common to the whole country."⁸³ This message presented in bold type across the entire front of the newspapers front page before it even begins a discussion of the rioting taking place is to diffuse the criticism that can be seen coming from both Southern and Northern papers alike. This edition also erroneously reported that William Donnegan was alive after having been rescued by the militia. Donnegan, in fact had died on the fifteenth. Their headline read "Crowd attempts to lynch William Donnegan at Spring and Edwards Street but is prevented by the arrival of the Militiamen."⁸⁴ There are several

⁸² Ibid., 1.

⁸³ *Springfield Sunday Journal*, August 16, 1908, p.1.

⁸⁴ *Springfield Sunday Journal*, August 16, 1908, p.1.

pictures of the burnt out buildings and general destruction that had occurred on the previous two days and nights but the only picture shown of one of the deceased is of a White man, Louis Johnson who died in the rioting at a local restaurant. The *Journal* makes note of the fact that many of the towns “negroes Leave City.”⁸⁵

The *Illinois State Register* (a Democratic paper) makes the comparison of three riots that occurred in cities named Springfield: Springfield, Ohio in 1905, Springfield, Missouri in 1906 and Springfield, Illinois in 1908. The paper states that “now comes (Springfield, Illinois) with her race riot caused like all the others, at a white woman being assaulted by a negro.”⁸⁶ The *Register* did not use the words “alleged assault” but did, however call Donnegan’s death a “lynching” and correctly declared that he had died at the mob’s hands.⁸⁷ The paper blaming the riot on an assault of a White woman by a Black man is a common theme throughout the South and in many northern lynchings as well. Unfortunately, although the *Illinois State Register* uses that excuse it goes on later to determine that the upside was that Black citizens were leaving Springfield. Reporters from other cities arrived during and after the riot. William English Walling, a writer for the magazine, The *Independent*, arrived on August 9 to interview witnesses to the riot and the subsequent lynchings. He titled his piece “The Race War in the North” and reported uncovering a large number of Springfield’s White citizen’s that fully supported the riot. In his article he wrote that Springfield, “stood for the action of the mob. She hoped the rest of the negroes might flee.”⁸⁸

⁸⁵ *Journal*, p. 1

⁸⁶ *Illinois State Register*, August 16, 1908, p.8

⁸⁷ *Register*, p. 8

⁸⁸ William English Walling, “The Race War in the North” The *Independent* 65 (September 3, 1908), p, 529.

There are certainly mixed messages being sent from the *Register* (Democratic paper). On one hand they decry the mob violence, but then on the same page place the blame on attacks by Black men against White women. Both papers appear to be treading a fine line between reporting basic facts but not to the extent that it might anger its largely White readership. The inflammatory nature of the *Register's* reporting of the original crime that started the riot of the molestation of Mrs. Mabel Hallam when they reported on August 14, 1908 in a searing headline “Dragged from Her Bed and Outraged by a Negro.”⁸⁹ Of course, this ties in with their notice later that of their three reported race riots in cities named Springfield, the Negro, not the “alleged negro” was to blame.

The editor of the *Illinois State Journal* (a Republican newspaper) ran an editorial blaming the Black population for the riot when he wrote: “For months, yes, years past it has been predicted that such an outburst of popular fury would sometime come to Springfield... The implication is clear that conditions, not the populace, were to blame and that many good citizens could find no other remedy than that applied by the mob. It was not the fact of the white’s hatred toward the Negroes, but of the Negroes’ own misconduct, general inferiority or unfitness for free institutions that were at fault.”⁹⁰

The *Forum*, the city’s only Black owned newspaper’s editor E.L. Rogers wrote his own editorial several weeks following the riot when he condemned the White owned newspapers of actually spurring on the riots by writing such inflammatory comments in their papers. On September 12 he wrote that “not one newspaper offered condolence nor cheer

⁸⁹ *Register*, August 14, 1908, p. 1

⁹⁰ *Illinois State Journal*, August 15, 1908.

nor solace and comfort for the perturbed minds (of Black residents)...there are sins of omission as colossal as those of commission. 'As a man thinketh in his heart so is he'.”⁹¹

That the motivation of racially cleansing Springfield by lynching two Black men is not in doubt. After the riot was over, threats to White businessmen and store owners who allowed the Black population to shop at their locations were threatened by other White people to immediately stop selling anything to Black people. Farmers who had Black farmhands and households that employed Black domestic workers were also threatened. If the lynchings weren't going to be enough to drive the African-Americans from Springfield, then the White underclass would attempt to “literally starve them out of the city.”⁹² Once the militia who had been called in to attempt to help stop the Springfield rioting, White citizens were reported to have said, “...we will have to get rid of these black's. Springfield must be a white town.”⁹³

After this riot there were two consequences of it that had not occurred in the previous race riots across the country. First, it was the first race riot up to this point in which more White people (five) than Black people (two) were killed.⁹⁴ Second, and more importantly, this riot led to the creation of the NAACP. “The NAACP was formed partly in response to the continuing horrific practice of lynching and the 1908 race riot in Springfield, the capital of Illinois and resting place of President Abraham Lincoln. Appalled at the violence that was committed against blacks, a group of white liberals that included Mary White Ovington and Oswald Garrison Villard, both the descendants of abolitionists, William English Walling and Dr. Henry Moscovitz issued a call for a meeting to discuss racial justice. Some 60 people,

⁹¹ *Forum*, September 12, 1908.

⁹² Senechal De La Roche, p. 126

⁹³ *Chicago Tribune*, August 25, 1908, p.

⁹⁴ Merritt, p. 19-22.

seven of whom were African American (including W. E. B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Mary Church Terrell), signed the call, which was released on the centennial of Lincoln's birth."⁹⁵

Attempted racial cleansing of Springfield and Joplin, Missouri and Springfield, Illinois highlights the difference between lynch-belt Southern states that sought to intimidate their African-American population, but without full scale rioting to run these citizens from their towns where their labor was needed to handle the heavy physical demands of a largely agricultural society. In the border states of Missouri and Illinois, the tensions created by the integration of many different nationalities, the existence of the African-American either newly arrived or having been an established citizen coupled with White dominance mentality, facilitated the violence that occurred in the cities within the scope of this paper.

When social mores were breached by an African-American not obeying the Jim Crow etiquette rules the tension rose still higher. The tensions thus created between these two causes ultimately led to large crowds gathering not to just lynch an alleged Black criminal, but rather to use that same crowd to riot in the Black sections of those towns in attempts to drive the African-American completely out of and away from those cities studied in this paper. As the newspaper either gloated over the victory of the town's ability to drive out its Black citizens or boosted their own civic pride by decrying another city's actions their reports served to open and continue the discourse Americans were having about lynching, race relations and city sovereignty to run their legal system either within the scope of the law or in extra-legal actions.

⁹⁵ "NAACP: 100 YEARS OF HISTORY." NAACP.. <http://www.naACP.org/pages/naACP-history?>, Accessed October 10, 2015

CHAPTER TWO: LYNCHING DURING THE GREAT MIGRATION

“It occurred to me that no matter where I lived,
geography could not save me.”

— Jacqueline Joan Johnson, as quoted by
Isabel Wilkerson in *The Warmth of Other Suns: The
Epic Story of America's Great Migration*

In this chapter, an outline of the Great Migration will be examined, specifically as it applies to Missouri and Illinois. Additionally, the changing role of African-Americans in the Border-States will be studied as well as the resulting backlash against them by the White population who saw their increasing upward mobility as infringing upon those social norms or etiquette that had formerly kept the Black population in their place. Finally, an analysis of a lynching that occurred because of the desire to racially cleanse the town of Cairo, Illinois and one that occurred primarily because of this resentment of broken societal norms in Columbia, Missouri will be examined within this changing social climate.

In the border states of Missouri and Illinois, industrialization was slowly replacing agriculture. Black labor jobs in an increasingly industrialized city was seen as usurping the White person's potential for that same job. Like the South where Black labor was needed in a largely agricultural economy, growing industrialization in the North demanded an increasingly larger worker population for more menial factory, dock and other types of employment not requiring specialized skills.⁹⁶ Unlike the South, however, the jobs available gave rise to a competition between White unskilled laborers and their Black, newly arrived counterparts who were willing to work for less money. As Crew explains, “Many

⁹⁶ Spencer Crew, “The Great Migration of Afro-Americans, 1915-40”, *Monthly Labor Review*, March, 1987, 35-36

migrants...did not have enough money with them to tide them over for long periods of time once they reached the North. Consequently, finding a job became a high priority.”⁹⁷

But the northern cities did not provide the land of opportunity and freedom that migrating African-Americans were seeking. “...migrants were not always welcomed by residents of the northern cities. Both black and white urban residents worried about the impact of so many new people and, on occasion, they sought to discourage migrants from coming. Although not as virulent as it was in the South, racial discrimination also existed in northern cities. And while work was available, it usually was at the bottom of the pay scale and the occupational pecking order.”⁹⁸

By the beginning of the twentieth century the First Great Migration from the South to industrialized Northern cities including New York, St. Louis and Chicago had begun. From 1900 to 1930 According to Nicholas Lemann, the Great Migration was,

...one of the largest and most rapid mass internal movements in history -- perhaps the greatest not caused by the immediate threat of execution or starvation. In sheer numbers it outranks the migration of any other ethnic group -- Italians or Irish or Jews or Poles -- to [the U.S.]. For blacks, the migration meant leaving what had always been their economic and social base in America, and finding a new one.⁹⁹

The Great Migration introduced large numbers of southern African-Americans into what were primarily northern White populated states. The tension this created led to race riots throughout the North. It is within this climate of change, of the collision of differing social strata and the tensions that developed over job opportunities and lingering racism that

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991). p. 6.

the next incidents of lynching will be examined. Racial cleansing is still a strong motivation for the city of Cairo, Illinois. However, in Columbia, Missouri the argument that the town's people took the law into their own hands because they did not respect or accept the legal system in place becomes a major factor in the lynching that occurred there. Both cities simmered, much as Pierce City and Joplin had with undercurrents barely contained within the surface of the collective White population, and they solved their perceived problem of the "negro" in their midst through the same technique—drive them out by an overwhelming show of force.

The Lynching of William James and Henry Salzner, 1909

Cairo is the furthest-most southern city in the state of Illinois (see Figure 6). Lying at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, Cairo in the early twentieth century was a thriving community of about 13,000 people, of whom about 5,000 were African –American. In 1900 (the last official United States census prior to the lynchings) this number of Black citizens was high for a city of Cairo's size, considering that fully five percent of all Illinois African-American residents lived there at that time.. “As a result of the large black population in a town with a traditionally southern white heritage, race relations were already strained by 1900.”¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Kathy Weiser-Alexander, Cairo, Illinois - Death by Racism & Legends of America, ILLINOIS LEGENDS, <http://www.legendsofamerica.com/il-cairo.html>, (Retrieved March 3, 2016), p. 3.



Figure 6¹⁰¹ Map of the Location of Cairo, Illinois

Cairo's manufacturing economy just prior to the turn of the century continued to increase, aided by the city's convenient geographic location, rich natural resources such as lumber and minerals and an ample labor pool (Both Black and White men and women). Already established small-scale industries continued to maintain a presence such as barrel factories, breweries, grain and lumber mills, a cottonseed-oil manufacturer, brick and tool yards, and a Sewing Machine plant.¹⁰²

Cairo was also the place that marked the entry from Kentucky, a Jim Crow state to Illinois, a non-segregated state. An example of this very physical reminder to those Black

¹⁰¹ Cairoig, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cairo,_Illinois, accessed 3/26/2016.

¹⁰² Alexander, p3.

southerners migrating north was the uncoupling of the segregated railway cars that were required by law in Kentucky to the recoupling of integrated cars as required in Illinois.¹⁰³

Although racial tension did exist prior to and leading up to the 1909 lynchings, African-Americans continued to work as mostly unskilled laborers and according to Weiser-Alexander were not afraid to speak out. She writes that:

They were known to have participated more effectively in union organizations, strikes, and demonstrations than did the white workers. Black women, who were overwhelmingly employed in household service, also struggled for workplace justice by contesting their white employer's exploitative demands. Initially, the black population supported the Republican Party until they perceived that white Republicans resisted black demands for equal education, government jobs, and more black legislators. The white citizens retaliated by using the law, customs, and sometimes, violence, to reassert their white supremacy.¹⁰⁴

The majority of this changed in November 9, 1909 with the murder of Anna Pelly, a 22 year old "orphan" that had been strangled and mutilated on November 9, 2009. William James, a Black man nicknamed "Froggie" was immediately arrested for her murder and initially placed in the city jail. Increasingly larger numbers of people amassed outside of the jailhouse demanding the release of James so that they could mete out their own form of punishment. The Sheriff and a deputy of Cairo decided to sneak James out of town and had hidden with him in a swamp approximately nineteen miles from Cairo. When the crowd realized that James had been spirited away, approximately 500 people were able to essentially hijack a train heading in that general direction and the three men were soon discovered by the crowd hunting them right before nightfall.

After debating amongst themselves as to whether to hang James immediately or to take him back to Cairo for a more public viewing, it was ultimately decided to take him to

¹⁰³ Wilkerson, p. 200.

¹⁰⁴ Weiser-Alexander, p.3.

Cairo where anyone interested could view the proceedings. Those interested numbered more than 10,000 people who had gathered to witness the final spectacle of his lynching.¹⁰⁵

Newspapers were quite graphic when describing the lynching of James who was accused of killing Anna Pelly.

After James was lynched, a portion of the crowd were not satisfied with just killing James. They went back to the same jail and broke through steel bars to get to William Salzner, a White man who had been accused of killing his wife several months earlier and was awaiting his trial. The still frenzied crowd then took Salzner and hung him from a telephone pole. After his death, they cut his body down and left it lying, unmutilated, in the street.¹⁰⁶

The same horrific details of the lynching was relayed by this newspaper but there is no sense that James or Salzner were murdered. Rather, James was being held responsible (and they believed rightly so) by a group of citizens that wanted a Black man punished. In this account the *Post-Dispatch* reporter states that James admitted his guilt.¹⁰⁷ In this manner it again exemplifies that there could be almost no other reaction by the Cairo citizenry but to punish James and thus the crowd acted as Judge, jury and executioner; condemning James to his lynching. As in the lynching of David Wyatt in Belleville six years earlier, the Mayor of Cairo wrote in a letter to the editor of the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* that the citizens of Cairo

¹⁰⁵ See *St Louis Post Dispatch*, November 12, 1909, p 1: A rope was thrown across the steel trestle of "Hustler's Arch" that had been built the year before and he was hoisted into the air. The rope was not strong enough to hold James and broke. After his body fell to the street over five bullets were fired into James' corpse. His heart was then cut out, cut up and passed around as souvenirs before they lit his body on fire. Once reduced to only a skull and some charred bones they placed his head on a spike and left it in the alley where Anna Pelly had been killed.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

were merely righting a long standing injustice of Black criminals committing crimes, including murder, then escaping to neighboring states never to be held accountable for their criminal activity. In his letter to the editor, Cairo Mayor George Parsons wrote, in part, that:

I do not believe that any blame attaches to any one official. The entire community was worked up to such a pitch that no other termination was possible. I believe that the majority of citizens are pleased at the turn of affairs. And while they deplore the disgrace to the city and State, they believe that the result will be salutary. There has not been an official execution in Cairo for 10-15 years, and yet the city has had its share of murders. Juries have failed to convict in homicide cases or have convicted for only minor degrees, and it has been possible for murderers to escape. In fact murder in Cairo, I regret to say, has been tolerably safe. The feeling against crime that has so long been repressed has found vent, and so I believe that Cairo will be peaceful and law-abiding hereafter.¹⁰⁸

Although both a Black man and a White man were lynched on the same night that there still remains an element of racial cleansing in the act. As the following letter to the editor reveals, a former editor of the *Cairo Daily* paper reveals, not only did the Cairo citizens have no faith in the existing system of justice, they firmly put the blame on the Black population of the city. As in Wyatt's death in Belleville six years earlier, they felt that the court system would take too long and would not resolve the issue of the African-American "problem" that the citizens felt were to blame for the ongoing criminal activity of the city. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, a former editor of the Cairo Daily newspaper (edition and title undetermined) did blame the Black population for the lynchings that occurred there. He wrote that,

"Former Resident Says They Are Spoiled by Coddling and Are a Menace."

As a former resident of Cairo, Ill., where I was the editor of a daily newspaper for three years, I crave a word, not in defense of the double lynching which occurred there a few days ago, but in explanation of it...It is probably the only town in the North which has a true race problem to deal with. ...

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p.2

The white people of Cairo have always dealt indulgently with the negro. For years it has been the policy to keep two negroes on the small police force, and there have been negro Justices of the Peace. A negro physician once came near being elected a member of the Board of Education. While they pay but little taxes, the negroes are provided with three public schools... Yet this negro population, coddled as it is, is a constant menace to the town. No white woman dare venture outside of the house at night alone for fear of assault. Many outrages of which the world has never heard have been attempted. This is why, as Mayor Parsons says, the effect of the recent lynching will be "salutary." Altogether it is not surprising that a lynching took place in Cairo. The only wonder is that one did not take place long ago.

W.L. CLANAHAN

New York, Nov. 14, 1909¹⁰⁹

In his editorial he blames the concentration of Black people living in Cairo by quoting a census of 13,000 in 1900 of which 5,000 were "negroes." He believed that five per cent of all of the Illinois Black population, massed in such a small town was the cause of the murders by Blacks of both White or Black men that were "alarmingly frequent" and there could be no justice obtained for murder victims because "the murderer usually escapes either to Kentucky or Missouri, and is never heard of again."¹¹⁰

Cairo's Black population began decreasing dramatically in the decade following these lynchings and the riot and the satisfaction felt by the White citizens could be plainly seen by an article in the *Cairo Bulletin* newspaper after the 1920 census (approximately 10 years after the James and Salzner lynchings). "Cairo's population on January 1, 1920 was 15, 203, a gain of 655, or 4.5%...Disappointment was expressed by some that the figure was not larger...but were gratified...that more than 2,000 Negroes have left Cairo...making the increase in the white population nearly 2700 people."¹¹¹

However, even with this loss of African-Americans, both immediately after and during the decade after the lynchings, James W. Loewen argues that racial cleansing was

¹⁰⁹ W.L. Clanahan, "CAIRO'S NEGROES." *The New York Times*, November 14, 1909.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ "Cairo Disappointed", *Cairo Bulletin*, August 20, 1920.

never Cairo's intention. Instead he states that unlike other southern Illinois cities with significant Black populations Cairo simply had too many Black people to expel and instead the White citizens used the Black population in traditionally southern ways: "as cotton pickers, maids, janitors, railroad workers" and thus they would have opposed any such expulsions.¹¹²

However, the loss of nearly half of the Black population in ten years speaks to the fact that whether or not it was an overt intention on the part of White Cairo residents to run its Black citizens from the town or not, the effect was that African-American's left Cairo during a time of economic growth and opportunity. This would make no sense unless the Black population feared the vast majority of the White population who, just before the 1910 census was taken, witnessed a brutal act of lynching, sending a clear signal their lives could also be in jeopardy. Even the fact that Salzner (the White lynching victim) was left un mutilated after his death when James' body was hacked to pieces and then burned would have been seen as another sign that even after an extra-legal death, Black citizens would face a horrific aftermath that their White counterparts would not.

The Lynching of James T. Scott, 1923

The 1923 lynching of James T. Scott, a Black man from Columbia, Missouri (see figure 7) is the eighth example covered in this paper. Following the First World War, the stream of African-American migration from the South continued as part of the Great

¹¹² Loewen, p. 463.

Migration. Columbia is positioned in the middle of the state in an area historically known as

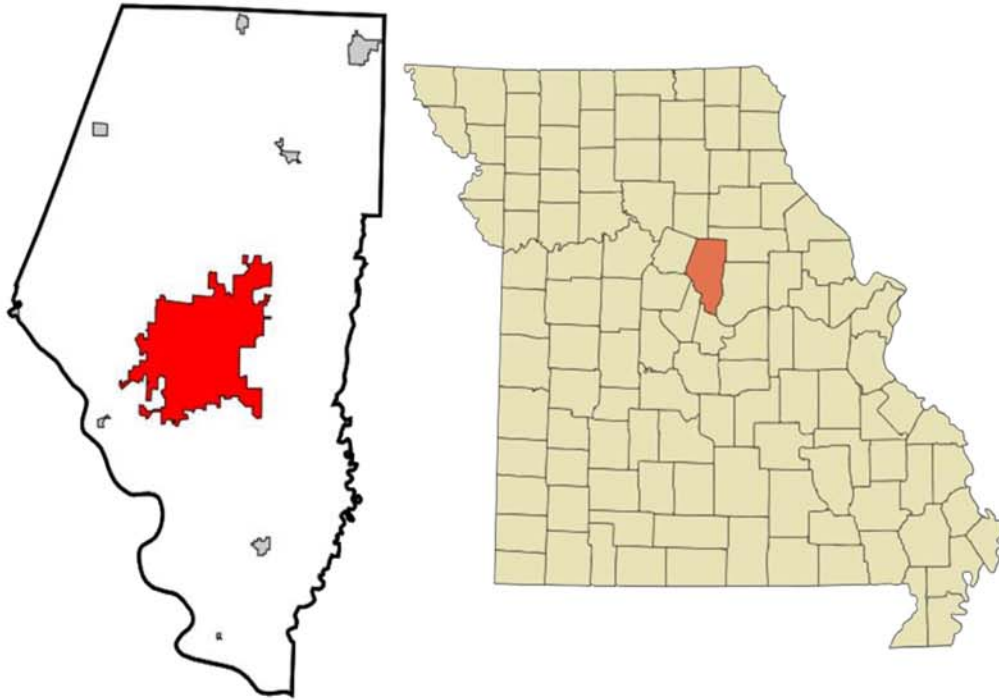


Figure 7¹¹³ Map of the Location of Columbia, Missouri

"Little Dixie," and had had one of Missouri's largest slave populations.¹¹⁴ Columbia, like most southern Missouri towns, was segregated and African-American citizens resided in a primarily overcrowded and derelict section of the city. Many Black women were employed as servants, housekeepers, cooks or laundry workers but most Black men were unable to find jobs and had to travel to other cities to find gainful employment that could support a family.¹¹⁵ However, by 1923 the African-American population in Columbia had begun to make progress towards a better economic situation for themselves and in Columbia, right in

¹¹³ Arkyan - based on public domain information, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbia,_Missouri, accessed March 28, 2016.

¹¹⁴ Patrick J. Huber, "The Lynching of James T. Scott: The Underside of a College Town", *Gateway Heritage*, vol. 12, no. 1, summer, 1991, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ William Wilson Elwang, *The Negroe. Columbia, Missouri: A Concrete Study of the Race Problem* (Columbia: University of Missouri Sociology Department, 1904)

the heart of “Little Dixie,” this was not well received by its White citizens and was to be a catalyst for the lynching of James T. Scott. “Scott was brutally killed because he symbolized black economic aspirations to a community that felt threatened by black mobility.”¹¹⁶

In fact, “If you were black you stepped off the sidewalk when white’s approached, and if you were male you removed your hat... In theory blacks and women could hold public office, but in practice they didn’t. Neither did they serve on juries. A small set of prosperous white men dominated public life, and most others bore this dominance meekly.”¹¹⁷ This acceptance by a majority of Columbia’s citizens that the rights under the law for minority citizens were not going to be protected even though they had *de Jure* rights by this time both instigated and escalated the events that led to Scott’s lynching. Just as David Wyatt was lynched in 1903, so were the set of circumstances similar with Scott.

James Scott was one of the few African-American men that held a full-time job in Columbia. He worked at the University Medical Center as a janitor making \$65 a month. He was married to a public school teacher and had two children. By all accounts the family lived an economically stable lifestyle, owned a car and lived in one of the better areas of the Black communities among families where one or more of the parents worked as a teacher. He had served in World War One and had been a decorated soldier. He had never been in trouble with the law prior to the attack against a White fourteen year old daughter of a professor at the University of Missouri in April, 1923.¹¹⁸

Regina Almstedt, “the daughter of University of Missouri German professor Hermann B. Almstedt, [stated that] an unfamiliar black man lured her down to the M. K. T.

¹¹⁶ Huber, p.14

¹¹⁷ Doug Hunt, *Summary Justice: The Lynching of James Scott and the Trial of George Barkwell in Columbia, Missouri, 1923*, (Amazon Digital Services LLC, 2010), p. 9

¹¹⁸ Huber, p. 1.

railroad tracks below Stewart Bridge and assaulted her in the nearby woods around 3:30 p.m. The stranger reportedly struck her several times in the face, choked her with his belt, gagged her, and threatened to kill her. However, he was scared off by a passing railroad crew before a sexual assault could be committed.”¹¹⁹

There were two newspapers in Columbia at the time of the assault and subsequent lynching. The first was the *Columbia Evening Missourian*. This paper originally began publication as the *University Missourian* in 1908 when the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri was established. From 1920 to 1923, the paper was named the *Columbia Evening Missourian*, before finally becoming the *Columbia Missourian*, the title it holds today. “From its inception, the *Missourian* sought to cover a variety of local, state, and national news,” an editorial published on September 15, 1908, and stated, “it will be necessary for the *University Missourian* to cover the entire news field, not limiting itself to University news in order that the training the students receive will be sufficiently broad to be valuable.”¹²⁰ The paper contained a great deal of information about University of Missouri events, editorials, sports, and news; and major national political news. There was never a concrete political viewpoint as student editors rotated in and out of the position, bringing with them their own particular political leanings.¹²¹ Essentially this was a student newspaper with circulation made available to the general public. The second local paper in circulation at the time was the *Columbia Daily Tribune*., a decidedly conservative paper. Ed Watson was the editor of the *Tribune* and had previously written anti-bigotry articles such as one run the month previously to Almstedt’s attack that ridiculed the Ku Klux Klan. He felt that he

¹¹⁹ *Columbia Evening Missourian*, April 21, 1923; *Columbia Daily Tribune*, April 21, 1923

¹²⁰ “About The *Evening Missourian*”. Library of Congress, (Accessed March 2, 2016), <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn89066315/>

¹²¹ Ibid.

was not prejudiced against African-Americans--however his opinion would not be borne out as he began reporting on the attack of Regina.¹²²

Regina Almstedt could only identify her attacker as a Black man with a Charlie Chaplin mustache wearing a brown coat and smelling of some sort of chemical. In the wake of Regina's attack, an all-out manhunt was conducted by the police and after one week an anonymous witness came forward who claimed that he had seen Scott walking near the University campus around 4:15 p.m. on the afternoon of the attack. This contradicted Scott's claims that the entire afternoon of the assault he had been on the University campus at the Medical Building, where he was employed as a janitor. Confronted with the witness's allegations, Scott "denied ever having left the campus and maintained that he had worked at the Medical Building all afternoon, cleaning and polishing the floor, stairs, and woodwork until he locked up at 5:00 p.m. Two white witnesses saw Scott at the building about 3:00 p.m. and again at 5:00 p.m., but no one had seen him for the intervening two hours."¹²³ On Saturday, April 28, one week after his arrest in the suspicion of his involvement in the assault Scott was officially charged with criminally assaulting Almstedt.¹²⁴ The following Monday on April 30, he entered his plea of "not guilty" at the Boone County Circuit Court represented by his White attorney, Emmett Anderson. Scott's trial date was set for May 21, 1923 and he was ordered held without bail.¹²⁵

Both of Columbia's papers followed the ongoing manhunt, arrest and court appearance of Scott closely. However, it was the conservative newspaper, the *Columbian*

¹²² Hunt, p.14

¹²³ *Columbia Daily Tribune*, April 27, 1923.

¹²⁴ *Columbia Evening Missourian*, April 28, 1923

¹²⁵ *Columbia Evening Missourian*, April 30, 1923.

Daily Tribune that “provided the spark that ignited the town's smoldering outrage.”¹²⁶ The *Tribune* reported that Regina had “positively identified” James T. Scott as her attacker. The *Tribune's* editor, Edward Watson wrote that “It is generally believed that Scott is guilty of the crime and Miss Almstedt's identification makes certain now that he is the man that attacked her.”¹²⁷ In this same editorial Watson challenged all White men to “assume their roles as champions of womanhood and mete out swift justice” to Scott. He wrote that “Columbia has the distinction of having in jail three rapists...These brutes and super-criminals should be dealt swift justice by the courts, of course...Murder and homicide can be committed under stress of anger or insult, but the rapist is guilty of premeditation, malice—in fact every degrading and criminal act. A man killer is a mild-mannered and desirable citizen compared with a despoiler and ravisher of innocent girlhood...This trio should feel the “halter draw” in vindication of the law.”¹²⁸

Due process for Scott up to this point had been afforded to him, but within eight hours of Watson’s editorial being printed, a lynch mob had begun to form. While the sheriff stood by, a group of about 100 men used hammers and crow bars to break into the jail and pull Scott from his cell. While they were extracting him, a large crowd had begun to form including a large number of Whites, (several hundred of which were students from the University) as well as about fifty Black citizens who stood at the periphery of the crowd.¹²⁹ As he was pulled out of the courthouse by a rope that had been placed about his neck he said to the reporter for the student-operated *Columbia Evening Missourian*. “I am not guilty, I

¹²⁶ Huber, p. 11.

¹²⁷ Edward Watson, “Columbia's Proud Pre-Eminence,” *Columbia Daily Tribune*, Saturday, April 27, 1923.

¹²⁸ Ibid. p.1.

¹²⁹ Huber, p. 4.

swear it," he said, "but I have no chance."¹³⁰ As with Gilyard's lynching in Joplin, officers of the court tried to dissuade the crowd from the intended vigilantism. Judge Collier exhorted the mob, "Men, do not kill him now, I will promise you a fair trial and swift justice if he is convicted." The crowd ignored the officials' pleas and shouted them down with their own solution, "Take him to Stewart Bridge. Hang him."¹³¹ The crowd, now numbering at about two thousand made their way to the Stewart Bridge, the site of Almstedt's assault. As the leaders of the mob were searching for a suitable rope with which to hang Scott, Professor Almstedt, Regina's father, spoke to the agitated crowd in an attempt to stop the lynching. "I am the father of the girl. As an American citizen I plead with you to let the law take its course with this man. I ask it of you in the name of law and order and the American flag." His pleas were met with threats by some of the crowd who told him to "Shut up or we'll lynch you too." Almstedt left the scene immediately thereafter.¹³²

Scott continued to plead for his life to the increasingly frenzied mob, "I am an innocent man. I have a fifteen year old daughter and it would be impossible for me to commit this crime. I have never touched a white woman my life." Scott then implored a journalism student nearby, stating, "I know I haven't a chance. They won't listen to me. Won't you say something?"¹³³ There was nothing this young student could do in the face of two thousand people bent on vigilante justice. Scott was thrown from the bridge and left to hang there.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ *Columbia Evening Missourian*, April 30, 1923.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Columbia Evening Missourian*, April 30, 1923

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Huber, p.6. She provides a more detailed description as follows-- A noose was tied to the bridge railing and the other end around Scott's neck. A large man "pitched him headlong off the bridge. Scott's body plunged down, crashing through the limbs of a small tree. The

Scott's lynching was not a simple case of mob violence in the face of a Black man assaulting a White girl. It must be remembered that there were two other accused rapists in jail at the time and they had been in custody for several months. The White citizens of Columbia did not go after the other two men. Scott was different in that he was seen as a relatively prosperous Black man who was well respected in the African-American community at a time when this represented a threat to the White dominated city. Like Wyatt's lynching, this was not an attempt to racially cleanse the town, but rather a disregard or distrust of the law and the possibly adverse (in the White man's opinion) verdict if Scott had been acquitted under his right to a fair trial.

The *Columbia Missourian* (the student run paper) echoed northern newspapers that had blasted Columbia for the vigilantism.¹³⁵ In an editorial run in its April 30 edition, the editor condemned the lynching and demanded that the vigilantes be prosecuted because "mob law" should never be tolerated. He argued that the guilty parties should be punished so that Columbia could clear its name"¹³⁶ It is unclear if the editor was angry that the students had been implicated in some way with the lynching and wanted to make sure readers understood that he felt they were not complicit in the mob action. By the tone of his editorial and considering that the University by its nature was a liberal school, coupled with the fact that Professor Almstedt, the father of the victim denied that Scott was the perpetrator of his

ecstatic crowd shrieked with approval. As the rope jerked taut, Scott's neck snapped audibly in a sickening crack. A convulsive twitch or two and his lifeless body, naked to the waist and dangling twenty feet from the ground, twisted and swayed in the early Sunday morning breeze."

¹³⁵ New York Times, April 30, 1923; Chicago Daily Tribune, April 30, 1923; Chicago Defender, May 5, 1923; Du Bois, "University Course in Lynching," p. 55, St. Louis Globe Democrat, April 30, 1923; New York Times, May 3, 1923. All of these newspapers ran articles condemning the lynchings, especially in light of the fact that the death of Scott occurred in a College town.

¹³⁶ "Punish the Guilty", *Columbia Evening Missourian* April 30, 1923

daughters assault suggests that the editor was sincere in his belief that the lynching was wrong and that justice was needed for Scott.

This was a student newspaper and was read by the University community but was also disseminated to the city of Columbia as well and provided a direct counterpoint to the Tribune's thinly veiled agitation to not only goad Columbian citizens to lynch Scott but then be unapologetic after the fact.

The *Columbia Tribune* took a different stance regarding the lynching. In several editorials, the editor Ed Watson took issue with the general condemnation from other newspapers. He took personal issue with Dr. Charles Ellwood, a sociology professor at the university who had been quoted in the *St. Louis Star* by one of his students who also happened to be a reporter for the *Star*. Ellwood lectured his class after the lynching by stating "This horrible incident wasn't the result of two bad men deciding to commit a crime. It was a collective act that couldn't happen unless many members of the community willed it to happen." The student reporter for the *Star* asked "do you mean to say that a community that has a lynching has lower moral ideals than the rest of the country?" Ellwood's short answer was "Yes." The *Star* used Ellwood's message of his general condemnation and used it to support its own disgust at the situation.¹³⁷

Watson, of the *Tribune* fired back with a personal attack against Ellwood. In an editorial he wrote that Ellwood "was by no means a Sir Galahad... [he was] a stock gambler...[who had] dropped several thousand trying to guess the heads or tails of the market...He might lay the Pharisaical unction to his soul that he is not like other

¹³⁷ Hunt, p. 39-40.

Columbian's but he should remove the beam from his own eye before scratching at the mote in his neighbor's." ¹³⁸

James Scott's lynching was certainly racially motivated. Scott was killed because unlike in the South where White dominance was both *de Jure* and *de Facto* through codified laws and lynchings that took place as reminders that the African-American was still a slave in all but name in the agricultural South economy. In Columbia Scott embodied the Black communities desire to become economically upwardly mobile: that was something that would not be tolerated. Scott's standing in the Black community coupled with his interaction with a White institution like the University Medical Center made him both a target and a symbol by Columbia's White population to the rest of the Black citizens that aspirations for equality was not going to happen in Columbia. Like the Wyatt lynching, Scott's death was not intended to racially cleanse a town, it was meant as a sign of continued dominance of White citizens over their Black neighbors.

The conditions African-Americans confronted in southern Missouri and southern Illinois were an improvement over their lives in the South but still filled with struggle and oppression. Racism was a continuing issue and government policy kept Black citizens confined to only certain neighborhoods through redlining; restrictive covenants and the inability of these racial groups to get approved for a mortgage. Migration of African-Americans from the South to the North solved some of their problems but once again the collision of two cultures created tensions that resulted in an outpouring of violence against a single person as a representative for that simmering anger of a White community wary of and unhappy with the change that was happening around them.

¹³⁸ Ed Watson, *Columbia Daily Tribune*, May 1-2 1923. See also Hunt pgs. 37-39 for additional background on Dr. Ellwood.

CHAPTER THREE: LYNCHING DURING WORLD WAR II

Culture is about humanizing people.
You look at the African-American Civil rights movement—
the culture changed before the politics did.
--Jose Antonio Vargas

World War II is the background for the ninth example and was also the last lynching that occurred in Missouri. The Lynching of Cleo Wright, a Black man in Sikeston, Missouri allegedly stabbed a woman whose husband was away in the armed services on the night of January 20, 1942.¹³⁹ This lynching will be analyzed within the historical context that Sikeston, Missouri (see figure 8) residents faced within the continuation of the Great Migration, and the fear that was occurring upon the United States entry into World War II.

Sikeston, Missouri is located in Scott County Missouri approximately 165 miles due South of Missouri, directly bordering Southern Illinois.



Figure 8¹⁴⁰ Map of the Location of Sikeston, Missouri

¹³⁹ Dominic L. Capeci, Jr. *The Lynching of Cleo Wright*, (The University Press of Kentucky: Lexington, 1998).

¹⁴⁰ Arkyan, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikeston,_Missouri, Accessed March 26, 2016.

Sikeston was served by two local newspapers, the *Sikeston Standard* and the *Sikeston Herald*. The Standard was a twice weekly newspaper that began publishing in 1911.

The *Daily Standard* editor at the time was Charles "Pole Cat" Blanton who purchased the paper in 1913. At the time of the lynching, the paper was a conservative one and Blanton's son, David Blanton, was the County Prosecutor.¹⁴¹ The *Herald's* publisher was Clint H. Denman and the paper was considered to be liberal leaning.

In 1940, Sikeston's population was 7,944 of which 1,003 were African American.¹⁴² Race relations at this time were similar to the South. White men and women dominated the work in factories and mills in the area as well as owning most of the shops and restaurants where both Black and White customers would shop. The Black population predominantly worked in the agricultural section, picking cotton and harvesting wheat.¹⁴³ However, due to the White "aversion" to touching or handling anything associated with an African-American, the Black citizens held a "virtual monopoly" on businesses such as barber shops, hair salons and mortuaries that dealt exclusively with their fellow citizens.¹⁴⁴

As Capeci concludes:

...despite modernizing modes of communication and transportation, the commercial links beyond the locale, their racial world turned on rigid communal mores. The "'traditional personality'" of white residents, including those from northern areas, required—however personal or paternal--segregation and social control. Townspeople of both races felt the impact of the Depression and, more immediately, the war; intrusions that fostered increasing political centralization, economic diversification, and social egalitarianism. Simultaneously, they operated in "'different spheres'" and move in "'contrary directions,'" a dichotomy shattered by the bombing of Pearl Harbor..."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Thomas Morris Spencer, *The Other Missouri History: Populists, Prostitutes, and Regular Folk*, (University of Missouri Press, 2004), p. 162.

¹⁴² 16th Census, *Population*, volume 2, p. 363.

¹⁴³ Capeci, p. 6

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Capeci, pgs., 11-12

By the summer of 1942, the Army had 1.5 million soldiers, and by the end of the year its numbers had surged to 5.4 million. At the end of the war in 1945, the Army had over 8 million officers and troops.¹⁴⁶ White men were entering the military in unprecedented numbers, causing fear in those families remaining behind—fear for their loved ones safety in the war and fear of their own safety at home. The continuation of the Great Migration was bringing unprecedented numbers of immigrants from the South to the St. Louis region. Between 1910 and 1940 over 97,000 African-Americans had moved from the South to the St. Louis area. With the run up to the US entry into the war the number grew larger yet.¹⁴⁷

This was the volatile mix of rising modern values regarding race versus the old southern ways, increased organizational activity and desire by Black citizens to claim their rights as citizens. These desires of African-American's to achieve equality was hindered by the racial and economic caste system held over them by a nervous White citizenry fearful of what war might mean to the community mixed with a long held fear of Black violence against White citizens. This was the atmosphere in which the lynching of Cleo Wright occurred.

¹⁴⁶ Rutgers Institute of Politics, “American Political History: World War II”, http://www.eagleton.rutgers.edu/research/americanhistory/ap_ww2-pearl.php, accessed April 14, 2016.

¹⁴⁷ Priceconomics, “The Great Migration: The African American Exodus from The South”, January 28, 2016, <http://priceconomics.com/the-great-migration-the-african-american-exodus/> Accessed April 14, 2016.

The Lynching of Cleo Wright, 1942

On the night of January 25, 1942 Wright broke into the home of Grace Sturgeon, her sister-in-law Laverne Sturgeon and Grace's seven year old son who was asleep on a cot in the kitchen. Both of the women's husbands had left Sikeston for military duty and the three lived there alone. Laverne was able to phone the police for assistance before leaving the house unharmed. Grace was not so lucky and fought off Wright when he attempted to slit her throat with a knife he had brought with him.¹⁴⁸

The police department and neighborhood men began an immediate search for the suspect and found Wright, appearing dazed, walking about a mile and a half away from the scene of the crime in clothes that were splattered with blood. He was immediately taken into custody and placed into the back seat of a police car where Night Marshall Hess Perrigan sat beside him on the way to the police department. Unfortunately, Hess had not thoroughly searched Wright after confiscating the knife they believed was the attack weapon and in an ensuing argument Wright pulled out a hidden knife and stabbed it up through the jaw and tongue of Perrigan, hitting a major artery and causing him to lose several teeth. Wright had already been hit several times in the head with Perrigan's pistol and Perrigan stated that Wright had continued to resist arrest until he had stabbed Perrigan.¹⁴⁹

The driver of the police cruiser, Jesse Whittley, Grace's neighbor (and not a peace officer) stopped the car and fired four shots into Wright's abdomen. Whittley then drove

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. pgs. 14-16. As she put her hand to her throat to protect herself, Wright's knife nearly sliced off three of her fingers, but she was unable to prevent him from slashing her across the abdomen, spilling her intestines from her body. Her son Jimmy slept through the entire incident until awakened by Grace who managed to get to the kitchen where he slept. Help arrived almost immediately and Grace was rushed to the hospital. Although severely wounded, she ultimately survived

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. pg16-18.

both Perrigan and Wright to the hospital where Perrigan was treated and ultimately survived. The hospital, however dressed the eight entry and exit wounds on Wright but because he was Black he was not allowed to be admitted into the hospital. Wright was gravely injured and the police decided to drive Wright back to his house in the Black housing tract of the Sunset Addition of Sikeston where he was placed in the custody of his wife. After several hours she and her neighbors feared the increasing rumors of lynching, and fearing possible White backlash to the Sunset area asked the police to return him to jail. He was then transported to the police station by Officer Grover Lewis and left semi-conscious in a jail cell.¹⁵⁰

This was a much different era than the lynching examples preceding Wrights lynching. By 1942 police cars had radios in them where they could talk to dispatch and have their communications relayed to them. The number of people who had telephones in their homes was much higher and gossip, rumor and factual information alike could be relayed much more quickly than in the era of Wyatt or Gilyard's lynchings: and the horrific details of Grace's assault flew fast and furious through the White divisions of Sikeston.

Talk of lynching began as early as 9:30 a.m. the morning following Wright's arrest. By 11:30a.m, a crowd began to form inside of the jail demanding Wright be released to them, but were quickly ordered out by State Trooper Melvin Dace. Outside a crowd of nearly 700 people had formed, demanding Wright's release to them. Dace was then joined by several other troopers and County Prosecutor Blanton who for "nearly an hour they...discouraged" several attempts by the mob to enter the building."¹⁵¹

The crazed crowd grew more frenzied and several White citizens in the front of the crowd broke through the men protecting the courthouse and the crowd then surged forward

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. pg. 18.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. pg. 20.

into the jail and began battering at the steel bars of Wright's cell until they were able to break through. Wright was then taken out of the jail, his body tied feet first to the bumper of a car and then dragged through the city to the Black populated Sunset Addition. It was here that he was killed within view of two black churches holding Sunday services¹⁵²

Once Wright was dead the crowd began to disperse, but not before members of the Black community began to flee Sikeston.¹⁵³ It has been estimated that about ten percent left the city permanently and this can be seen as a reaction to, as opposed to a reason for the lynching, although Wright's body was incinerated in view of two Black churches while their services were being held. There was no riot here, with full on White against Black residents as can be seen in the Pierce City and Springfield riots, and many African-Americans chose to stay or leave members of their families to stay and guard their homes with rifles and other weapons.¹⁵⁴

The newspapers were quick to weigh in on the events. As Capeci put it, C.L. Blanton, the publisher of the *Standard* and father of the County Prosecutor was an "unreconstructed southerner, influential editor."¹⁵⁵ In his paper, written on the day of the lynching, he stated that "vigilantism served as a solemn warning for the night prowlers to leave the community" and that they should seek to restore their "sense of order" by condoning the "display of brute force."¹⁵⁶ Black residents interviewed by the *Standard*

¹⁵² Ibid. p 20-28. On the easement of a railroad track and in full view of two Black churches (this was a Sunday so services were being at the time) his body was doused with gasoline and then lit on fire from a match tossed onto Wrights body. He was still alive at this time and the crowd could hear him cry out

¹⁵³ Ibid. p 24.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. pgs. 24-25

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p 29

¹⁵⁶ Clanahan, "The P.C. Editor Says", The *Daily Standard*, January 25, 1942, p. 1.

appeared to accept what had happened or were attempting to diffuse a tense situation when it was quoted that “everyone ought to forget about the whole thing.”¹⁵⁷

After the lynching, the local papers were divided in their interpretation and judgement of the event. Blanton, 72 years old at the time of the lynching of Wright was a staunch supporter of the Democratic Party and in his paper he had previously supported, “acting almost explosively,” to anything he perceived as threatening the “racial status quo.” For example he “endorsed the... lynchings of alleged black rapists at Charleston in 1924 and Braggadocio in 1927... [and] advocated horsewhipping the primary black organizer... of the roadside demonstration centered at Sikeston in 1939.”¹⁵⁸

In this lynching, Blanton continued his same views. He writes in his editorial that “The mobbing of the negroe, Cleo Wright, was an unfortunate incident, but was deserved... This should be a warning for... negroes to stay out of Sikeston.”¹⁵⁹ Interestingly, however in this same edition, Blanton featured a story about the possible inquest into the lynching and reported on his son, then County Attorney David Blanton, and placed him in almost a hero’s light because of David’s attempt to stop the violence from happening. “Twice attempting to talk the crowd out of violence, Blanton relayed that he had been struck twice in the stomach during the mele(sic)...” “I saw that I was going to be knocked down and trampled so all I could do was back up.”¹⁶⁰ Whether this reporting was to exonerate his son in the incident as trying to stop it is a possibility since his other reporting on the lynching is decidedly pro-mob.

¹⁵⁷ *The Daily Standard*, February 6, 1942.

¹⁵⁸ Capece, p.141.

¹⁵⁹ Blanton, “The P.C. Editor Says”, *The Sikeston Standard*, January 27, 1942, p.1

¹⁶⁰ “Grand Jury Lynch Probe is Indicated”, *The Sikeston Standard*, January 27, 1942, p.1.

A few days later as the news of the lynching reached around the country, Blanton threatens Black groups from interfering with Sikeston affairs when he writes:

We notice where delegations of negroes from different sections of the State are preparing to call on Governor Donnell to discuss the lynching of Cleo Wright in Sikeston last Sunday. Don't know what they expect to accomplish as Wright is dead and buried and the Prosecuting Attorney of Scott County [his son David] is investigating the case at this time. So the best thing to do is to keep out of this mess if they don't want to cause more trouble among their race in Sikeston and Southeast Missouri.¹⁶¹

On the other side of the issue is the *Sikeston Herald*, a liberal paper published by C.H. Denman. Calling the lynching a “Regrettable Tragedy”, he deliberately left David Blanton’s name out of the body of an article praising those involved in trying to stop the mob from reaching Wright in his cell. It may well have been an oversight, but it also could have been omitted in part due to Blanton’s relationship to Denman’s rival.¹⁶²

Denman makes no threats and places no collective blame on Black citizens of Sikeston. He covers the ongoing coverage from other newspapers who decry the lynching, but makes no editorial stance himself.

In examining this lynching one can see an element of ethnic cleansing within it, but certainly not to the degree of the Pierce City, Springfield, Joplin and Cairo lynchings. In Sikeston, the war had entered into the mix and fear of the unknown and fear for their loved ones lives overseas, coupled with the idea that those men not in the Armed services were somehow less worthy than those serving in the military may have spurred them on in the extreme manner in which this lynching was performed.

¹⁶¹ Blanton, “The P.C. Editor Says”, *The Sikeston Standard*, January 30, 1942, p. 3.

¹⁶² “Five Officers Who Did Their Duty During Sunday’s Regrettable Tragedy,” *The Sikeston Herald*, January 22, 1942, p. 3.

Regardless, the overarching theme to this lynching as outlined from newspaper sources appears to be the breakdown of the accepted patriarchal and White dominated society being upset with changing economies, increased industrialization along with the requisite change in modernity that began allowing Black citizens limited but some improvements in their employment and consumerism status. Sikeston was not going to allow the burgeoning Black movement for equality that had begun with the beginning of the NAACP and was growing stronger with the United States entry into World War II to upset that careful White supremacy indoctrination endemic to southern Missouri. Wright was a Black man with a criminal record who not only assaulted a White woman whose husband was fighting in the war, but Wright also assaulted a police officer and put his life in immediate danger. With the war in play, Sikeston was being pushed to the very limits of tolerance of the changing role the Black population was beginning to have on its own self-determination. Their increasing numbers brought on by the war industry, the loss of white able bodied White men leaving the community to fight a war, leaving their vulnerable loved ones at home alone, the Black activism that was being seen played out in communities in an around Sikeston all contributed to the fear that created increasing tensions in an already tense situation between the races.

CONCLUSION

Strange Fruit

Southern trees bear a strange fruit
 Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
 Black bodies swingin' in the Southern breeze
 Strange fruit hangin' from the poplar trees
 Pastoral scene of the gallant South
 The bulgin' eyes and the twisted mouth
 Scent of magnolias sweet and fresh
 Then the sudden smell of burnin' 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 the tree to drop
 Here is a strange and bitter crop
 --Billie Holliday

Most lynchings occurring in the United States following the failed Reconstruction era had at its core a reason or set of reasons for the lynching to have occurred. Regardless of the victim's race, the location of the act or the reason behind the action, mob violence played its part. But just as Brundage, Woods and Pfeifer sought to explain beyond that common denominator and seek answers to why lynchings were occurring at all, this paper seeks to examine why lynchings that occurred outside of the South were different than those that have been studied in-depth within the established lynch-belt.

What I have determined by placing a series of lynchings in chronological order and examining each one within the context of the local newspapers reporting of those lynchings is that unlike the South that rarely used lynching to run African-Americans out of their towns, Southern Illinois and Southern Missouri many times used lynchings to racially

cleanse their respective cities. This expulsion can be most clearly seen in the lynchings in Peirce City, Joplin, Springfield and Cairo. Illinois and Missouri saw the Black labor pool as competition for more industrialized jobs that minority citizens could potentially take away from them by working for much lower wages. This was the case in the 1901 lynching of Will Godley in Pierce City, the 1903 lynching of Thomas Gilyard in Joplin, Missouri, Scott Burton and William Donnegan in Springfield, Illinois, 1908 and to a degree the 1909 lynching of Will James in Cairo, Illinois.

Vigilantism in individual lynching cases in the South reinforced *de Jure* laws that were already in place. In Illinois and Missouri, however, a well-defined judicial system (especially in Illinois) was in place that theoretically afforded persons of color due process in criminal proceedings. Lynchings by the White population in the border states where the lynchings occurred refused to acknowledge the law as a basis for equality and thus took their perceived right to mete out justice as they deemed necessary and expedient. Their White citizens either mistrusted the law and its possible outcomes or dismissed laws for African-Americans outright. This is the case in the 1903 lynching of David Wyatt, to a degree the 1909 lynching of Will James in Cairo, the lynching of Henry Salzner in Cairo as well as the 1942 lynching of Cleo Wright in Sikeston, Missouri.

However, it cannot be definitely said that these were the sole reasons for any of the lynchings examined in this paper, nor of the unexamined remaining lynchings that occurred throughout the rest of southern Illinois and Missouri, or for that matter the northern regions of these states. By limiting the scope of just 10 incidents from the over 150 cases of lynchings that occurred within Missouri and Illinois it might be determined that other reasons existed that should be examined. A much broader cross section of lynchings should be

examined with the addition of the other “Border States” so that anomalies, inconsistencies or that the consensus of Brundage and Woods might be more representative in other cases above the lynch-belt. In addition, the consequences of the lynchings with regards to racial cleansing is a wide area that will require a more extensive research and analytical base upon which to draw conclusions about accidental, incidental and intentional that is beyond the scope of this paper.

As an under-researched area, lynchings that occurred outside of the South and in this case in southern Illinois and Missouri this paper’s methodology, analysis and conclusions have varied findings other than many researchers that have used the Southern lynchings as cases for examination and the conclusions of causation that they have determined. Therefore this paper adds to the existing body of knowledge we currently possess about where and why lynchings occur. In a current climate where United States citizens have examined and continue to have discussions on race relations and way the media continues to reflect those discourses back to us makes this paper relevant not only to discovering past actions and reactions to racial disharmony, but can better enable us to understand present actions/reactions as the press recounts them.

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