"White Man's Heaven": The Expulsion of Blacks in Southwest Missouri, 1894-1906

"White Man's Heaven": The Expulsion of Blacks in Southwest Missouri, 1894-1906

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

By

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of the lynching and expulsion of African-Americans in Southwest Missouri from 1894 to 1906. Monett, Pierce City, Joplin, and Springfield, Missouri, each experienced racial violence as a result of post-war vigilantism combined with the rapid economic and social changes of the New South era. This thesis uses the existing scholarship of W. Fitzhugh Brundage, Michael Pfeifer, Edward Ayers, and Stewart Tolnay and E.M. Beck to examine the lynchings and expulsions that occurred in the southwest region of the Missouri Ozarks.

This thesis is approved for
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Acknowledgements

When I was an undergraduate at Missouri Southern State University, Dr. Steven Wagner remarked to my senior thesis class, "History done well should make you uncomfortable." His words stayed with me. They became much more poignant as I worked on "White Man's Heaven." I hope that I have achieved some measure of justice for those who were forced to flee Southwest Missouri.

I must thank the many individuals who have helped me in the course of my research. First and foremost, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to my thesis adviser, Dr. Patrick Williams, who sparked my interest in the history of Reconstruction and the vivid period of history that followed. He endured many office visits, e-mails, and questions with patience, provided me with invaluable advice, and brilliantly edited my thesis. I could not ask for a better thesis adviser. For that, I thank him.

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This thesis is for the victims, the survivors, and my family.

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Introduction

As midnight approached on April 16, 1903, a train slowly pulled into Pittsburg, Kansas. With a loud hiss from its brakes, the train came to a halt along the station platform, its journey from Joplin, Missouri, finished. Several black passengers disembarked, some carrying small bundles of belongings, others empty-handed. Many seemed shaken as they cautiously surveyed their surroundings, wary of what awaited them in the darkened city. Others appeared to be in shock. As an elderly black couple was helped from the train, a reporter from the *Pittsburg Headlight* approached them for their story.

Just hours earlier, the unnamed couple had been forced to flee from their home in Joplin as a howling mob set fire to it, leaving them destitute. The man, a former slave from Mississippi, had been rescued just before the flames engulfed him. He and his wife, both roughly eighty years old, fled to the outskirts of the city. There, they huddled in a shed until daybreak when they could make their way to safety in Pittsburg. It was not the first time they had been forced to flee.

Over the preceding two years, they had escaped the wrath of an angry mob when a race riot erupted in the Oklahoma town they lived in, and blacks were expelled. The couple then moved to Pierce City, Missouri, to live with their son. But in August, 1901, a mob lynched three black men and expelled that town's black residents. In the panic that ensued, the couple lost track of their son. They escaped to Joplin, but their son was less fortunate. Wounded, he traveled to the safety of Springfield, only to die of his injuries. The couple, once again penniless and without relatives nearby, settled at Joplin. The wife

worked as a washerwoman to support herself and her husband who was crippled from injuries he received as a teamster for the Union Army. But when a Joplin mob of over one thousand whites lynched Thomas Gilyard, a young black migrant, for the alleged murder of a white police officer the couple had once again to run for their lives. When asked where they were headed, they said they were bound for Kansas City, as they had relatives there.[1]

In his brief interview, the reporter captured the experience of hundreds of African-Americans in southwest Missouri in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A series of brutal lynchings and black expulsions erupted in 1894 and ended only in 1906. These lynchings and ethnic cleansing were part of a pattern of racial violence repeated across the nation.

At the end of Reconstruction, African-Americans had been left to fend for themselves, abandoned by their fellow Americans. Blacks gained significant rights under the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution, but after the end of Reconstruction, these newly acquired rights were quickly eroded by various legal and legislative strategies. Court decisions like *Plessy v. Ferguson*, poll taxes and grandfather laws sought to segregate and disenfranchise African-Americans citizens. Lynching also served as an effective tool of subordinating blacks.

During a twenty-year period, from 1882 until 1902, a reported 3,080 were lynched across the United States. Of those 3,080 individuals, 1,941 were black men and women. It is unlikely that every lynching was reported and subsequently recorded, so

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[1] *Joplin Daily News*, 20 April 1903, p. 1. The unnamed couple may have been the parents of St. Louis – San Francisco Railway porter George Brady. Brady, who, along with his wife and son, appears in the 1900 Federal Census, was the only black resident of Pierce City, Missouri who listed Mississippi as his birthplace. *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Population Schedule,* "Lawrence County" (National Archives Microfilm Publication T623, roll 870).

many more probably met their fate at the hands of an angry mob.[2] The motives behind each lynching often varied, ranging from economic, social, political or criminal factors.

The majority of lynchings occurred in the South, but mob violence was not exclusive to Southern states. As historian Michael Pfeifer has documented, lynchings also occurred in the Midwest and West as well.[3] As a border state, Missouri stood at the edge of these regions. Missouri had entered the Union in 1821 as a slave state. But Missouri's slave population was concentrated in central Missouri along the Missouri River in an area known as Little Dixie. The Ozark region was slowly settled from 1830 until the outbreak of the American Civil War. Those who made their home in the Ozarks primarily came from three Southern states: Tennessee, Kentucky and Virginia but, as Ozark geographer Milton D. Rafferty has pointed out, because wealthy planters preferred better land, "slaves were not numerous in the interior sections of the Ozarks."[4] By 1860, Greene County was the only county in southwestern Missouri that held a slave population of more than ten percent of the total population.[5]

Southwest Missouri, with strong Unionist sentiments, was a hotbed of Confederate guerrilla activity during the Civil War, yielding considerable violence between residents. As historian Matthew Stith contends in his study of Jasper County, Missouri during the Civil War, "warfare in southwest Missouri was as close to total war

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2 Tuskegee Institute, *Lynchings by States and Race 1882 – 1959* (Tuskegee, AL: Tuskegee Institute Department of Records and Research, 1959), 1-2. Historian Christopher Waldrep has raised questions about the reliability of these figures in his article, "War of Words: The Controversy over the Definition of Lynching, 1899-1940," *Journal of Southern History*, 56, (February 2000), 75-100.

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

4 Russell L. Gerlach, *Immigrants in the Ozarks: A Study in Ethnic Geography* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1976), 29. In this study, Southwest Missouri comprises the following counties: Jasper, Newton, McDonald, Lawrence, Barry, Greene, Christian, Stone and Taney. ; Milton D. Rafferty, *The Ozarks: Land and Life* 2nd rev. ed. (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2001), 58.

5 Milton D. Rafferty, *Historical Atlas of Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 42.

as any facet of fighting during the Civil War."[6] Historian Lynn Morrow has shown how this left a legacy of bitterness along the Arkansas-Missouri border but also economic hardship. "Loss of land and property destruction radically impacted the landscape and impaired agricultural production--the prospect of recovery amid spiraling debt taxed the resources and imagination of Missourians who looked toward a daunting future of inflation and escalating taxes."[7]

After the war, some who had belonged to the small slave population remained and other freedpeople immigrated into this troubled area. As the era of the New South dawned, Union veterans from northern states such as Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio began to relocate to southwest Missouri. Former Confederates from Virginia, Arkansas, and Kentucky also settled there.[8] A local populace with limited contact with African-Americans prior to the war, a small influx of former slaves from the South, "carpetbaggers," and bitter ex-Confederates combined to create a cauldron of racial disharmony. The arrival of the railroad, industrialization, and black suffrage added to the building pressure. It was perhaps only a matter of time before the simmering cauldron boiled over.

Little scholarship exists on the string of lynchings and expulsions that occurred in Monett, Pierce City, Joplin, and Springfield, Missouri, between 1894 and 1906. In 1970, Mary N. Clary was the first to examine the Springfield lynchings in her master's thesis.[9] Her work was expanded upon by Professor Katherine Lederer in *Many Thousands Gone:*

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6 Matthew Stith, "At The Heart of Total War: Guerrillas, Civilians, and the Union Response in Jasper County, Missouri, 1861-1865" (M.A. thesis, University of Arkansas, 2004), 1.

7 Lynn Morrow, "Where Did All the Money Go? War and the Economics of Vigilantism in Southern Missouri," *White River Valley Historical Quarterly*, 34, (Fall 1994): 1-2.

8 *History of Newton, Lawrence, Barry and McDonald Counties, Missouri*, (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1888), 909-910.

9 Mary N. Clary, "The Easter Offering: A Missouri Lynching, 1906." (M.A. thesis, Southwest Missouri State University, 1970).

Springfield's Lost Black History.[10] In 1987, Burton L. Purrington and Penny L. Harter compared the Joplin and Springfield lynchings in their essay, "The Easter and Tug-of-War Lynchings and the Early Twentieth-Century Black Exodus from Southwest Missouri."[11] In 2006, Jason Navarro published a narrative account of the Pierce City lynching in the *Missouri Historical Review.*[12] Journalist Elliot Jaspin devotes a chapter in his book, *Buried in the Bitter Waters: The Hidden History of Racial Cleansing in America* to the Pierce City lynching.[13] But no study has looked at all four episodes together. This work will examine each episode as part of a larger, interconnected regional experience.

For several reasons, the greatest attention here will be placed on the Pierce City lynching and expulsion. First, local newspapers from the era survived, unlike many local newspapers that may have covered the 1894 lynching in Monett. Second, the surviving Pierce City newspaper, the *Peirce City Empire*, devoted considerable attention to the town's black community from the time African-Americans first arrived until their expulsion. Black weddings, deaths, minstrel shows and crimes were all reported. Thus it has been much easier to explore race relations in Pierce City prior to the outbreak of mob violence than in Joplin, where newspapers devoted little attention to local African-Americans. Third, the Lawrence County Historical Society has several dedicated members who have devoted considerable time to researching Pierce City's black

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10 Katherine Lederer, *Many Thousand Gone: Springfield's Lost Black History.* [S.l: s.n.], 1986.

11 Burton L. Purrington and Judith A. Brooks, "The Easter and Tug-of-War Lynchings and the Early Twentieth-Century Black Exodus from Southwest Missouri," *Visions and Revisions: Ethnohistoric Perspectives on Southern Cultures,* ed. George Sabo (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 59.

12 Jason Navarro, "Under Penalty of Death: Pierce City's Night of Racial Terror," *Missouri Historical Review* 100 (No. 2, (2006): 87-102.

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

community. By contrast, Joplin, despite its size, lacks a strong historical society involved in such work.

This study will employ the definition of lynching that W. Fitzhugh Brundage adopted in his work, *Lynching New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880 – 1930*, and was originally formulated by antilynching advocates in 1940: "there must be legal evidence that a person has been killed, and that he met his death illegally at the hands of a group acting under the pretext of service to justice, race, or tradition."[14]

The events in southwest Missouri fit within a framework offered by a larger body of scholarship on racial violence. Lynching has been studied since the beginning of the twentieth century, but it was only until the last half of the century that the field began to attract greater attention. The scholarship of lynching really came into its own in 1992 with Edward Ayers's *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*, which would be followed by the work of Brundage, Michael Pfeifer, and Stewart Tolnay and E.M. Beck. The lynchings and black expulsion that occurred in southwest Missouri might serve to test their varying models and also shed light on regional difference in racial violence.

Central to Ayers' understanding of racial violence was the economic revitalization of the South that followed the close of Reconstruction. The railroad, according to Ayers, was crucial, bringing economic development, urbanization and in-migration to many parts of the region. Blacks, one group most affected by the emergence of the New South, experienced the growing pains of a new society in which their role was still unclear.

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[14] W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South Georgia and Virginia, 1880 – 1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 291. Historian Christopher Waldrep has raised questions about the definition of lynching in his article, "War of Words: The Controversy over the Definition of Lynching, 1899-1940," *Journal of Southern History* 56 (February 2000): 75-100.

Ayers contends that the primary factor encouraging lynching was black in-migration into areas that had not previously harbored significant black populations. He argues that lynchings often occurred in sparsely populated areas where black transients and strangers lived and worked. These areas had, "few towns, weak law enforcement, poor communication with the outside, and high levels of transiency among both races." As a result, whites feared that, "black criminals could get away with harming a white person...that the lack of retribution would encourage others." Lynching, then, served to provide whites with an answer to "weak governments..." and a method with which to "terrorize blacks into acquiescence." [15]

Brundage's *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880 – 1930,* released to great acclaim in 1993, likewise links racial violence to social change, contending postwar violence signaled white refusal to accept black strides towards economic and political success. But he sees the roots of lynching as lying in the slavery era. The South's predilection for mob violence stemmed from antebellum disregard for legal authority. Prior to the war, slave owners punished their slaves without regard for the law, rather than have their own autonomy challenged, or their own property sequestered. Postbellum Southerners continued this tradition of extralegal justice, which manifested itself most commonly in lynch mobs. But what protection their status as valuable property had afforded African-Americans disappeared, leaving freedman all the more vulnerable.[16]

The turbulent transformation of the South, both Brundage and Ayers contend, often placed young, migrant blacks at the mercy of whites. As Ayers notes, "Lynchings

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[15] Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 156-157.

[16] Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 4-14.

tended to flourish where whites were surrounded by what they called 'strange niggers,' blacks with no white to vouch for them, blacks with no reputation in the neighborhood, blacks without even other blacks to aid them."[17] Brundage, in his examination of lynching, asserts that, "Any blacks who led a nomadic life as laborers in a rural industry – railroad workers, miners, lumber and turpentine hands, for example – kindled hostility even without committing a crime."[18] Other blacks, such as those "who failed to maintain good relations" with local whites were also subject to racial violence.[19] Like Ayers, Brundage found that, "lynchings were most likely to occur in sparsely settled rural counties where police protection was inadequate, if present at all, and local officials had neither the means nor the ambition to stop mob violence."[20]

For both Ayers and Brundage, lynching was often used to discipline African-American communities. As Ayers notes, "The sporadic violence of lynching was a way...to terrorize blacks into acquiescence by brutally killing those who intentionally or accidentally stepped over some invisible and shifting line of permissible behavior."[21] For Brundage, the actions of lynch mobs confronting an influx of black migrants into southwest Virginia, "was not an inarticulate, irrational reaction to inchoate fears, but rather a focused effort to control, not stop or reverse, change."[22]

Stewart Tolnay and E.M. Beck's *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882 – 1930*, published in 1995, also sees lynching as a means of maintaining social control over the black population through violence. But they give greater emphasis

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17 *Ibid.*, 157.
18 Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 81.
19 *Ibid.*, 84.
20 Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 104.
21 Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 157.
22 Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 144.

than Ayers or Brundage to lynching as a method by which to eliminate black economic, political and social competition with whites. For them, lynching perpetuated the existing white class hierarchy and maintained the status of the white elite.[23]

In *A Festival of Violence*, Tolnay and Beck note that after communities experienced an economic downturn, the number of lynchings rose. Whites, they argue, saw any black economic success as a loss for whites. Tolnay and Beck also contend that white elites feared that white and black labor would unite to press for better working conditions. As a result, white elites seized upon opportunities to lynch in order to drive a wedge between the white and black communities to prevent challenges to their status. Whites were not threatened by the act of one black, but by the social, political and economic progress of local black communities.

Economics does not play as large a role in Michael Pfeifer's *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874 – 1947*, released in 2004. Instead, Pfeifer focuses on what he terms "rough justice." For Pfeifer, rough justice was the product of a struggle between middle-class advocates of due process and the working class over the American legal system as it evolved in the late nineteenth century. Middle-class reformers advocated adherence to the rule of law which clashed with the rural and working class belief that criminal justice system was too weak, too slow, or incapable of dispensing justice. Rough justice, to its adherents, preserved social order. Pfeifer contends that postbellum mobs in the West and Midwest drew upon, "memories of the history of popular violence in their regions, revived the elastic doctrine of popular sovereignty as an antidote to changing practices of criminal justice in an era of economic and social

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[23] Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 50.

consolidation."[24] As time passed, however, lynchings slowly faded away. Pfeifer argues that as the working class gained belief in the legal system, due to states' enforcing capital punishment, they felt less motivated to take justice in their own hands.

The work of Ayers, Brundage, Tolnay and Beck, and Pfefier can all contribute to our understanding of racial violence in southwest Missouri from 1894 to 1906. The lynchings that occurred in Monett, Pierce City, Joplin and Springfield were, in some ways, resembled Southern lynchings. In other respects, however, mob violence in southwest Missouri differed from that in many parts of the South.

Blacks in southwest Missouri were lynched because, as Pfeifer suggests, whites perceived the local legal system as weak and ineffectual. Mob participants acted to punish black criminal offenders, not black economic or political competitors as Tolnay and Beck would have it. In essence, the local legal system failed to satisfy whites' expectations in the tumultuous and violence-prone Ozark region.

A sparsely populated region with a history of vigilantism and a culture of violence rooted in the Southern ancestry of its earliest settlers, the Ozarks were a place where crime, whether perpetrated by blacks or whites, was not tolerated and dealt harshly with little regard for the legal system. The area, which many residents fled from during the war, did not quickly recover from the wounds inflicted by war. In his study of the Ozarks Milton D. Rafferty pointed out that after 1865, "A certain class of citizens had grown accustomed to a shiftless way of life and held little regard for laws and the property of their neighbors."[25] As a result, violence continued to plague southwest Missouri. In

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[24] Michael J. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874 – 1947* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 14.

[25] Rafferty, *The Ozarks*, 93.

response, vigilance committees were formed to enforce peace in an area that had been ravaged by bushwhackers and left with little in the ways of law and order.

In 1868, the *Missouri Weekly Patriot* reprinted a vigilance committee notice in Barry County that appeared in the *Cassville Banner*. The notice, addressed to members of the Ku Klux Klan warned, "The prime movers in this organization are known, as well as the barbarous and hellish purpose for which it is gotten up. We wish to say to such persons, that we deprecate all such movements to disturb the peace and quiet of our county, and the first act of violence will be met with a vengeance both quick and terrible." The group warned Klan members that for every vigilance committee man injured, ten Klan members would be killed in retaliation.[26] A few years later, in 1871, the *Neosho Times* reported that a vigilance committee had killed Aleck King in Barry County.[27] Taney and Christian Counties experienced significant vigilante activity with the rise of the Bald Knobbers. Taney County Bald Knobbers, angered by the conduct of local Democratic office holders, attempted to wrest power from their political foes. Christian County Bald Knobbers, meanwhile, concerned themselves primarily with enforcing law and order. They quickly became, however, a source of trouble.[28]

Vigilantism also manifested itself in individual mobs that surfaced when the occasion arose and then quickly melted away after imposing extralegal justice. In the winter of 1885, a man named Grubb was lynched by a mob in McDonald County for the murder of Irwin Anderson, a deaf mute.[29] The following year, near the Newton County

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26 *Missouri Weekly Patriot* (Springfield), 18 June 1868.

27 *Neosho Times*, 12 October 1871.

28 Thomas M. Spencer, ed., *The Other Missouri History: Populists, Prostitutes, and Regular Folk* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 32-45.

29 J.A. Sturges, *Illustrated History of McDonald County, Missouri, From the Earliest Settlement To the Present Time* (Pineville, MO: J.A. Sturges, 1897), 119-120.

line in McDonald County, a man known as "Canada Bill," after allegedly assaulting a woman, was lynched by a mob while being escorted to the county seat.[30] J.A. Sturges, an attorney who compiled a history of McDonald County, remarked that at the time of publication in 1897, there, "had never been a legal execution in McDonald County."[31] Other counties in southwest Missouri, however, did have legal executions. But many appeared to be the exception in southwest Missouri, not the rule.

But if southwest Missouri, like some midwestern and western regions, had a vigilante tradition visited on both whites and blacks, it also experienced the "southern" conditions that Ayers and Brundage have seen as recipes for racial violence. As in much of the "New South," Missouri underwent a significant economic transformation after Reconstruction. The New South period, characterized by the influx of railroads, industrialization, and modernization, was a time of great social and economic change. Markets expanded because of the intrusion of the railroad into backwater areas. The Southern countryside was transformed, as were urban locales, as cities and towns exploded across the South. Many whites and blacks were drawn together in ways that whites were not prepared to accept. African-Americans moved to cities in order to pursue employment opportunities, but they also migrated to rural areas that were unaccustomed to members of their race, creating an uneasy tension between whites and African-American newcomers.[32]

Yet if both the southern conditions cited by Brundage and Ayers and the broader traditions examined by Pfeifer help explain the lynchings that occurred in southwest Missouri, they are less useful in accounting for what followed racial killings in Monett,

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30 *Ibid.*, 111-113.
31 *Ibid.*, 120.
32 Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 1-33.

Pierce City, and Springfield – the sometimes permanent expulsion of entire black communities. Such expulsion by no means inevitably followed lynching. To the contrary, Brundage finds such expulsions not to have occurred in southwest Virginia. In Monett and Pierce City, rather than simply showing a black community how it was expected to behave, white mobs entirely destroyed black communities. Unfortunately, the expulsion of African-Americans remains an understudied aspect in the extensive literature of racial violence. At best, one can argue that expulsion was one of the most extreme forms of social control, African-Americans were forced to leave behind everything they had worked for, demonstrated their weakness as they could not prevent their expulsion, and it sent a message to nearby black communities to remain complacent or else face the same fate.

The first, and so far only major work on the subject, is sociologist James Loewen's polemical *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism.* Loewen recounts a significant number of expulsions, but fails to adequately explain why entire African-American communities were expelled.[33] Journalist Elliot Jaspin's *Buried in the Bitter Waters: The Hidden History of Racial Cleansing in America* also examines the expulsion of American Americans in states such as Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas and Georgia.[34] Like Loewen, however, Jaspin fails to explain why communities chose to expel African-Americans en masse rather than simply punish the individuals who had allegedly committed the crimes – murder or rape – that precipitated the mob action. The circumstances of southwest Missouri might help us better understand why some communities lynched and expelled and others just lynched. Southern

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[33] James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: Touchstone, 2006).

[34] Jaspin, *Buried in the Bitter Waters*, 11.

communities dependent upon cheap black labor, whether to service plantations or growing extractive industries, might use violence to keep African-Americans subordinate but could hardly afford to displace their working class. In southwest Missouri, by contrast, blacks were not a critical component of the regional economy, thus their forced departure did not threaten the labor needs of area industries. For whites in such areas, the goal of discipline could give way to disappearance.

If the settings of the lynchings recall places studied by Ayers, the lynchings in southwest Missouri defy Ayers' interpretation that transient blacks without ties to the local community were the chief targets of lynching. In Pierce City, the men lynched were part of a black community that had existed for twenty-one years, and were not transients or seasonal laborers. At least one generation of blacks had grown up in Pierce City. The white community granted "Uncle" Ben Kelly, an elderly black man and resident for thirty years, two days to sell off his chickens. As Kelly said (as rendered by a *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reporter), "I don' know why dese white folks want to run pore ol Uncle Ben outen dis town. I be'en heah thirty years, an' I ain't nevah done nobody no hahm, sah, nobody at all, sah."[35] This study seeks to answer Kelly's question.

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35 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 25 August 1901, p. 1.

Pierce City: Life Before the Lynchings

Fitzhugh Brundage, in his examination of Southwest Virginia, finds a situation that closely parallels that of Southwest Missouri. Southwest Virginia, a mountainous region that had an insignificant African-American population prior to the Civil War, underwent extensive industrialization after the war. Coal mines and lumber camps drew young, single black migrants to the region. It was not long before the black newcomers and local whites clashed. Lynchers, Brundage argues, "intended to establish codes of acceptable behavior rather than to purge the region entirely of blacks."[36]

Edward Ayers echoes Brundage's contention in *The Promise of the New South* with his assertion that the cotton uplands (areas of expanding cotton production in Mississippi, Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana) and mountain regions of the South were highly susceptible to mob violence. Both areas shared "a relatively low population density and high rates of black population growth."[37] As in Southwest Virginia, young, single African-Americans arrived in search of work in the coal mines of Appalachia and the cotton fields of Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana. The white community often found itself at odds with these black newcomers, and relied upon lynching as a mechanism to ensure that African-Americans remained compliant.

Michael Pfeiffer depicts a similar situation in the eastern Florida parishes of Louisiana. Like many other regions of the revitalized South, this area of Louisiana lacked a sizeable black population prior to the Civil War. After the war, however, black migrants

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36 Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 146.
37 Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 156.

flooded the area in search of work in the new industries that had emerged. In addition, the eastern Florida parishes were a region of "Piney-woods folkways that emphasized personal honor and independence encouraged extralegal solutions, such as feuding and whitecapping, to disputes between individuals and within communities." The area also lacked the "racial arrangements" of the cotton and sugar belts of Louisiana in which white planters manipulated the legal system rather than resort to mob violence. Thus it was not long before mob violence erupted in the eastern Florida parishes.[38] The tension caused by rapid industrialization in combination with the influx of carpetbaggers and African-Americans in the region proved deadly, "The eastern Florida parishes suffered the highest rate of lynching in southern Louisiana."[39]

Southwest Missouri underwent the same transformation. Railroads served as the main agent of change. As railroads reached into rural areas markets emerged where before there might have been only a single country store to serve the nearby populace's needs. This economic change brought new towns, new ideas, new in-migrants and new opportunities to the formerly isolated countryside.[40]

Until about 1870, inhabitants of the Missouri Ozarks engaged in subsistence agriculture, with corn and wheat as their main crops. But with the coming of the railroad in the 1870s, farmers in southwest Missouri switched to market farming, which persisted up until the turn of the century. In the 1890s, many farmers turned to the fruit industry, which enabled them to make the most out of marginal land.[41] Apple and peach orchards sprang up across the area. The "Ozark Berry Belt," comprising Newton, McDonald,

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38 Pfeifer, *Rough Justice*, 24.
39 *Ibid.*, 83.
40 Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 7.
41 Rafferty, *The Ozarks*, 153-156.

Jasper, Lawrence and Barry Counties, became famous for its strawberry production.[42] Agriculture was not the only mainstay of southwest Missouri. The region also held significant lead and zinc deposits. Granby, just west of Pierce City, was, prior to the Civil War, the area's leading producer. Joplin later eclipsed Granby, but miners continued to work throughout the region, part of the Tri-State mining district.[43]

During the early postbellum years, some black southerners moved to other states to pursue jobs in the cotton fields, coal mines and lumber camps of the region.[44] Southwest Missouri would be a destination for some of these southern blacks seeking new opportunities. These new arrivals sought to establish a better life for themselves far removed from their lives as slaves. They created schools, established fraternal organizations, participated in the political process by voting and welcomed their white neighbors to celebrate their freedom with them on Emancipation Day. At the same time, the black community of Pierce City had to battle the racial prejudices of the white community. Their struggle to create a new life, in tandem with the rapid, unsettling changes of the New South, combined to ignite the slow burning fuse of a powder keg.

Pierce City was established in 1870 as the St. Louis-San Francisco Railroad extended westward. It was originally named Peirce City, after Andrew Peirce, President of the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad Company. Peirce donated the land for the town on the condition that the town be named after him. The spelling of the town's name was changed later, however, when the relationship between the railroad and the town's citizens soured. The Atlantic and Pacific eventually merged into what later became the

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42 G.K. Renner, "Strawberry Culture in Southwest Missouri." *Missouri Historical Review* 1 (Oct 1969): 18 -19.

43 Rafferty, *The Ozarks*, 132-134.

44 Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 22-24.

St. Louis – San Francisco Railway Company, commonly known as the "Frisco" railroad, which connected Pierce City to Springfield, Missouri.[45]

Within a year of its founding, Pierce City was a bustling railroad town, with an estimated population of 700 residents.[46] The town had several hotels, among them the Lawrence Hotel from whose balcony Will Godley would be hanged during the 1901 lynching. It was built in 1872 at a cost of $11,000. The town also boasted the New Windsor Hotel, built in 1884, a three-story structure with 70 rooms and $10,000 worth of furniture. The town had an Anheuser-Busch beer depot, three cigar factories, a wagon factory, two banks, and a booming lime kiln among its many businesses. In addition, it was home to an opera house, the Pierce City Baptist College, and several churches. Pierce City had a small professional class composed of doctors, dentists and lawyers. The town was particularly proud of its water works system and the electric street lamps that lined the city's gravel avenues.[47]

But its good fortune was not to last. In 1880, the Frisco railroad decided to add a rail line to Fayetteville, Arkansas, and on to Texas. However, the new line was built four miles southeast of Pierce City where the land was not so hilly. The *Peirce City Empire* reported, "there are some fears and speculations on account of the line run by the present engineer following the main line to a point four miles southeast of the city" Despite fears of abandonment, the newspaper trumpeted, "That fortune favors Peirce City cannot be doubted." Unfortunately, within a few years, the city's fortunes were far from golden.[48]

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45 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 17 May 1900.
46 *Ibid.*, 15 April 1901, p. 3.
47 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
48 *Peirce City Weekly Empire,* 8 April 1880.

Despite boosters' claim that, "Peirce City is master of the situation, and will be the railway center of the Southwest," officials from the St. Louis – San Francisco Railway Company had other ideas. A junction was created for a small depot and a telegraph office east of Pierce City that became known as "Plymouth Junction."[49] Soon thereafter, plots of land began to sell at Plymouth Junction. A hotel, blacksmith shop and other buildings soon followed.[50] The *Empire* snorted at Plymouth's future, "it is not likely to prove a formidable rival to a town as well established as Peirce City."[51]

By 1886, however, the handwriting was on the wall. The Frisco had purchased two hundred acres of land at Plymouth. The *Empire* mournfully declared, "All would feel more confident of the future of Peirce City if the junction of the Arkansas branch proper was at this city, instead of Plymouth."[52] For a brief moment, it appeared that despite the progress Plymouth had made, it would be abandoned due to a lack of a reliable source of water.[53] Pierce City was home to several large springs and it was thought that the Frisco management would change their mind in favor of Pierce City's plentiful water supply.[54] Shortly thereafter, Plymouth changed its name to Monett, and fortune soon followed.[55]

An article appeared in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* boosting the promise and opportunity that Monett now offered, "It is leaping forward like some phenomenal mining camp. Houses are going up as fast as lumber and building material can be procured."[56] The *Peirce City Empire* sourly remarked as the end came, "The Frisco boys

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49 *Ibid.*, 7 October 1880.
50 *Ibid.*, 20 October 1880.
51 *Ibid.*, 27 October 1881.
52 *Ibid.*, 21 October 1886.
53 *Neosho Miner and Mechanic*, 23 April 1887.
54 Goodspeed Publishing Company, *History of Newton, Lawrence, Barry and McDonald Counties, Missouri* 525-526.
55 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 5 May 1887.
56 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 20 September 1887.

pulled out Saturday evening with seven engines going to Monett, and the change of divisions was made." The *Empire* cynically speculated the move was a method for the Frisco bosses to line their pockets.[57] Several articles claimed that the railroad chose to create Monett in order to profit from land speculation. Exasperated, Frisco Vice President John O'Day sent a letter to the editor of the *Empire* to explain, "the extra cost of running Arkansas and Texas trains from Monett to Peirce City and return, a distance of ten miles, would at least equal twenty-five thousand dollars a year, saying nothing of the loss of time and annoyance to the public caused by this unnecessarily increased mileage. I regret as much as any citizen of Peirce City the inexorable logic of the situation which made it necessary to remove the division headquarters from Peirce City to Monett."[58]

The *St. Louis Daily-Globe Democrat* estimated that, "The railroad alone will furnish employment for 300 people, and the transfer of its interests from Peirce City will cause the removal from that place to Monett of not less than 1200 persons."[59] The *Daily-Globe Democrat* was not far off. Before the move to Monett, the population of Pierce City reached 3,500 inhabitants, but fell to roughly 2,000 by 1901. That year the *Empire* bravely declared, "After they left the company said that grass would be growing on our streets in a year, but you can see different, for when a town has enterprising business men like ours, nothing can kill it."[60] But Pierce City was never the same.

The intrusion of the railroad into southwest Missouri brought more than just capital, access to new economic markets, and boom and then bust to Pierce City. The railroad also brought the next wave of settlers to the region. From the 1870s through the

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57 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 6 October 1887.
58 *Ibid.*, 10 November 1887.
59 *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 22 October 1887.
60 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 15 April 1901, p. 3.

1880s, the area in and around Pierce City experienced the in-migration of European families. German settlers, who traveled to Missouri from the eastern United States, settled in Monett, Verona, Pierce City, and Freistatt. In 1875, French families settled near the future site of Monett. Finally, in the 1880s, a contingent of forty-five Polish families settled at Pulaskifield.[61] White Southerners who had settled in Lawrence County before the Civil War found themselves with foreigners in their midst. In Pierce City, whites also watched as African-Americans arrived.

Among those who experienced the rapid boom and bust of Pierce City were black migrants who arrived from Kentucky. While the exact year that blacks began to settle in Pierce City is unknown, an item from the *Lawrence County Chieftain* reprinted in the *Empire* reported in November, 1879, "Two colored families with wagons and teams passed through this place last Saturday bound for Peirce City. They were direct from Warren county, Kentucky and had started from home with a view of locating in this county."[62] It seems many came as a group. Census and Civil War pension records reveal that an overwhelming majority migrated to the region from Warren County, Kentucky. Of the seventy-eight blacks enumerated in the 1880 Federal census for Pierce City, fifty-seven were born in Kentucky, many belonging to families of the black Union Army veterans from Warren County. [63] The pension records of George Page, John Farnsworth, John Scott, Alexander Godley and Washington Robison reveal that the men had been

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61 Gerlach, *Immigrants in the Ozarks*, 47.

62 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 20 November 1879.

63 Lem Compton, *1880 Federal Census: Lawrence County, Missouri* (Mt. Vernon, MO: Lawrence County Historical Society). Of the remainder, ten were born in Arkansas, six born in Missouri, two in Tennessee, and four from Texas, Virginia, Georgia and Indian Territory, respectively.

slaves on neighboring plantations in Warren County, Kentucky until they seized upon the opportunity to escape and sign up with the Union Army.[64]

Some of the men joined United States Colored Volunteer Heavy Artillery units, while others joined the United States Colored Volunteer Infantry. After the men were discharged, they returned to Warren County, then headed west with their families in the late 1870s. They probably chose to travel together. Their pension files contain affidavits from each other attesting to their service and their time as slaves in Kentucky, which suggest a tight-knit community.[65]

Among the families who came from Kentucky were the Godley, Kelley, Hampton, Thomas, Robison, White and Page families.[66] The three men lynched in Pierce City, Pete Hampton, French Godley and Will Godley, were members of these families. A handful of other blacks came from Tennessee and Arkansas. These new arrivals to southwest Missouri may have been linked with the Exoduster movement in which blacks from former slave states headed west in search of a better future. It is possible that some took jobs on the railroad gangs working on the Frisco and stayed in the area, but no evidence has been found to support this speculation.[67] A few others came from within Missouri. Charles S. Hunter, who served as schoolmaster of Pierce City's black school,

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64 Pension file, Washington Robison, 109th U.S. Colored Volunteer Infantry; Pension file, John Farnsworth, 4th Regiment U.S. Colored Volunteer Heavy Artillery; Pension file, George Page, 13th Regiment U.S. Colored Volunteer Heavy Artillery; Pension file, John Scott, 108 U.S. Colored Volunteer Infantry; Pension file, Alexander Kelly, 115th Regiment U.S. Colored Volunteer Infantry, United States Army, NARA Record Group 15: Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 1773 - 2001.

65 Pension file, Washington Robison, 109th U.S. Colored Volunteer Infantry; Pension file, John Farnsworth, 4th Regiment U.S. Colored Volunteer Heavy Artillery; Pension file, George Page, 13th Regiment U.S. Colored Volunteer Heavy Artillery; Pension file, John Scott, 108 U.S. Colored Volunteer Infantry; Pension file, Alexander Kelly, 115th Regiment U.S. Colored Volunteer Infantry, United States Army, NARA Record Group 15: Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 1773 - 2001.

66 Compton, *1880 Federal Census*, 194-195.

67 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 15 July 1880.

came from St. Louis.[68] Others also apparently came from St. Louis, where they had worked as servants. According to one estimate, thirty black families lived in Pierce City by the 1890s.[69]

The presence of black newcomers seems to have stirred trouble early. Little is known about Reuben Thomas, beyond the information provided in the 1880 federal census. Born in Kentucky circa 1832, he worked in the city's limestone quarry. His wife, Mary, was born in St. Louis, Missouri.[70] Apparently Thomas had troubles with his white neighbors late in the summer of 1877 that spurred him to write to the following letter to the editor of the *Peirce City Empire*:

> "Ed. Empire: I wish to say that I live one mile west of Peirce City, and that myself and family have on more than one occasion been attacked by some human beings in the shape of men, using the most obscene language that their poor tongues could devise. One of these attacks were made on Friday evening, of last week, about 8 or 9 o'clock p.m. and again at about 11 or 12 that same night. Now, Mr. Editor, I wish to say that I am a black man and have a black family and work for our living, never contract a debt but what we pay, and never get anything but what we get it in an honorable way: we were once slaves, and so far as I know, gave satisfaction to our masters. We have come west and bought land and intend to make a living, but do not intend to be scared away, but intend to live so as to have the respect of all good people, and my just rights I intend to defend at risk of all that I possess. Never were we treated in such a manner before, not even when we were slaves, and I do not think we deserve it now, as we are free, for which we are not responsible, neither are we responsible for being black."[71]

The Thomas family remained in Pierce City until 1901, when Reuben's widow Mary and son John were forced to flee.

The economic opportunities that awaited the new arrivals to the city were few. Despite the variety of businesses in Pierce City, blacks were restricted to menial jobs. An

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[68] *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Population Schedule,* "St. Louis County, Missouri" (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, Roll T9-727).

[69] Miriam Keast Brown, *The Story of Pierce City, Missouri, 1870-1970* (Cassville, MO: Litho Printers, 1970), 47.

[70] Death Certificate for Mary Thomas, 13 December 1910, File No. 38993, Missouri State Archives.

[71] *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 11 August 1877.

examination of the 1880 Federal Census for Pierce Township shows that most blacks worked a limited number of occupations. Men primarily worked as day laborers, teamsters, and farm hands. A handful held jobs as blacksmiths, shoemakers and quarrymen. Despite the railroad boom, none of the black men were listed as working for the Frisco, although it is possible that those described as "day laborers" were employed in some capacity by the railroad. Women worked as servants and washer women.[72] Little changed over the next twenty years.

The 1900 Federal Census for Pierce Township illuminates the economic and social status of its African-American citizens a year prior to the lynchings. They still held the least desired jobs, ones that placed them in a subservient role. Out of the forty black men who held jobs, only five men described themselves as farmers. Four men worked as lime burners at the Pierce City lime kiln and fifteen as day laborers. Only four worked as Frisco railroad porters. The remaining occupations were: hotel porter, hotel waiter, plasterer, minister and teacher. Women either worked as washer women or servants. But skilled positions as varied as railroad brakeman, carpenter, cigar maker, and machinist and such white collar employment as clerks were denied to blacks. Whites overwhelmingly held such positions and, in addition, dominated the day labor market. As a result, there appeared to be little, if any economic competition between African-Americans and lower class whites in Pierce City.[73] In newspaper accounts after the lynching, their homes are described as rough shanties or cabins, indicating that blacks in Pierce City had not yet achieved a significant foothold in the local economy. This might

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[72] *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Population Schedule,* "Lawrence County, Missouri" (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, Roll T9-698).

[73] *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Population Schedule,* "Lawrence County" (National Archives Microfilm Publication T623, roll 870).

suggest that the lynching in Pierce City was most likely not motivated by economic factors, an argument espoused by Tolnay and Beck.

Despite the limited economic horizons faced, black children in Pierce City did have the opportunity to attend school. Public education, however, was segregated, as mandated by the 1875 state constitution. In addition, opportunities beyond the eighth grade were rare.[74] Yet the ability to read and write was an accomplishment that gave young blacks an advantage their parents did not have. It was also an achievement that could not be taken away.

As early as 1879, the *Peirce City Empire* reported, "A colored school is being taught on the corner of Elm Street south of the railroad."[75] By 1881, "The average attendance at the colored school is about fifty."[76] School programs were held at the Pierce City Opera House, in which the children performed skits and sang songs. The *Empire* applauded their achievement, "The pupils taking part, all performed very credibly indeed, were all well prepared, and manifested enthusiasm in the exercises they rendered."[77] The editor of the *Empire* boasted, "Judging from the words of commendation and praise which constantly comes to us, and the evident enthusiasm manifested by the pupils in all grades...certainly some good has been wrought."[78] It was a relief to know that the good will of the white community had not been wasted. A small news item in 1892, however, indicated that blacks were not always satisfied by the educational opportunities offered. "The colored people are so thoroughly displeased with the ward school conducted for

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74 Greene, Lorenzo, et al. *Missouri's Black Heritage*. rev. ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 107.
75 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 24 April 1879.
76 *Ibid.*, 10 November 1881.
77 *Ibid.*, 2 June 1887.
78 *Ibid*, 16 November 1899.

their benefit that the Rev. Mr. Jones has opened a subscription school at the colored Baptist church."[79]

African-Americans in Pierce City also received a spiritual education. The town boasted the Second Baptist Church as well as the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Both were founded in 1880 and enjoyed a close relationship.[80] The two held joint revival meetings in which many participants were saved.[81] The Second Baptist also reached out to the white community. Having invited neighboring churches from Neosho, Springfield, Carthage, Granby, Newtonia, and Hopewell to attend a rally the Second Baptist was hosting, an invitation was also extended to, "the white citizens as we feel they desire to see our church prosper. We feel assured they will help us. We want to raise on that day $100."[82] The African Methodist Episcopal Church also provided its members an opportunity to engage in literary pursuits with its literary society. Members sang, read papers they had composed, and recited literary items.[83]

Churches were not the only social institution that blacks could participate in and manage for themselves. Pierce City also boasted a black Masonic lodge. One of the earliest Lawrence County histories mentioned in passing, "Campbell Lodge, A.F. & A.M. (colored), holds regular meetings and has a good working membership."[84] It was organized in September, 1886.[85] Their activities appeared infrequently in the local newspaper, most often when the Masons held benefits to raise money for the organization. One benefit in 1891 was advertised in the *Empire*, "Ice cream and

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79 *Ibid.*, 22 September 1892.
80 *Ibid.*, 8 July 1880; *Ibid.*, 30 June 1881.
81 *Ibid.*, 9 February 1888.
82 *Ibid.*, 25 July 1899.
83 *Ibid.*, 4 January 1893.
84 Goodspeed Publishing Company, *History of Newton, Lawrence, Barry and McDonald Counties, Missouri*, 538.
85 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 30 September 1886.

raspberries and other refreshments will be served. An excellent supper for 15 cents...Object to pay off indebtedness...The public are respectfully invited. Come out and help us."[86]

This vibrant black community with its schools, churches, and fraternal organizations actively engaged in local politics. Black political activism earned the ire of the local white population early on as an article reprinted from the *Cassville Republican* in 1886 indicates, "This is the way the *Peirce City Democrat* describes Matthews the colored appointee for Register of Deeds vice Fred Douglass: 'A black cotton-eyed, thick lipped, wooly headed, knock kneed, cucumber shinned, pigeon toed, gizzard footed nigger."[87] But the *Pierce City Empire*, the only surviving local source from this period, shows that African-Americans persisted in their efforts to maintain a political presence despite such hostility.

Two elections from 1886 and 1891 illustrate the important role blacks in Pierce City played in the political process. Their contribution may have earned them the enmity of white Democrats, who, at the state level, enjoyed overwhelming success but could not tolerate a challenge to their power at the local level. Despite the erosion of black suffrage across the South during the 1890s, blacks in Pierce City remained politically active until an angry white mob expelled them in August 1901.[88]

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86 *Ibid.*, 25 June 1891.

87 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 4 November 1886.

88 It does not appear that Missouri enacted legislation to prevent African-Americans from voting. The premier history of African-Americans in Missouri, *Missouri's Black Heritage*, does not indicate that blacks were disenfranchised. Blacks, however, could still be intimidated at the ballot box with dogs, guns, and lawyers. Greene, Lorenzo J., Gary R. Kremer, and Antonio F. Holland, *Missouri's Black Heritage*, revised edition, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993). Alexander Kessyar does note that the 1865 Constitution of Missouri required voters to be able to read and write after January 1, 1876. See Alexander Kessyar, *The Right To Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (USA: Basic Books, 2000), Table A.13.

In April, 1886 the newspaper crowed, "The Victory Belongs to the People" when Republican mayoral candidate P.O. Snyder was elected as mayor of Pierce City. The *Empire* was edited by Thomas Carlin, a staunch Republican who had served in a local Union militia during the war and had been the town's postmaster from 1882 to 1885 when he was removed for being "an offensive partisan."[89] Snyder had beat Washington Cloud, the Democratic incumbent and a Confederate veteran, 318 votes to 252 votes. This political victory would have been more difficult without the votes of the black citizens who had supported Snyder. Unfortunately, as with many blacks across the South, their votes became a source of antagonism in the political battle that followed.[90]

On June 7, 1886, Cloud sent a letter to the Board of Aldermen contesting the election, arguing that vote fraud had taken place. He claimed, "That a great number of persons were permitted to vote for P.O. Snyder at said election who were not legally qualified to vote at said election which is believed...to be, in number, two hundred." He alleged that votes had been bought at the ballot box and that several voters had been coerced to vote for his opponent.[91] Cloud then went on to introduce what he termed "Exhibit A" and "Exhibit B." Exhibit A, Cloud stated, was a list of one hundred and seventy-two voters who were not lawfully qualified to vote. Of these, twenty-eight were black. Among the twenty-eight listed were six members of the Godley family, one of whom was the father of Will Godley. The father of Pete Hampton was also included.[92] Significantly many of the others listed, as well as their children, such as Anson Farmer, Gentry Bly, Ben Kelly, the Godleys, the Ropers, and the Brinsons remained in Pierce

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89 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 10 June 1886, p. 4; Goodspeed Publishing Company, 907.
90 *Ibid.*, 27 May 1886, p. 2.
91 *Ibid.*, 10 June 1886, p. 2.
92 *Ibid.*, 10 June 1886, p. 2.

City until the lynching in 1901.[93] Of the one hundred and thirty-one individuals listed in Exhibit B, only two were black, Virgil Godley and Adam White. Virgil was Will Godley's older brother.[94] Cloud had every black Republican voter in town in his sights as he fought to keep his seat as mayor.

The *Empire* reported an incident, in which "Young Ogilvie" proclaimed that, "niggers and trash" had voted for Snyder.[95] The role that blacks played in the election, despite their small representation among the voters of Pierce City, did not go unnoticed. Editor Carlin ran a satirical skit in the *Empire* about the "Kurnel And His Klan," which suggested Cloud and his Democratic cronies would go to any length to thwart the will of the voters. [96]

Voters of the First Ward, many black citizens among them, subsequently published a petition in the *Empire* protesting their aldermen's refusal to certify Snyder's election. Voicing their belief that aldermen George Solomon and Joseph Newman had supported Cloud and his dubious efforts, the voters of the First Ward proclaimed, "we do one and all denounce the course of the Aldermen as illegal and corrupt and unworthy of a man or a set of men, and we believe done simply to rob us of the fruits of our election and choice."[97] The petitioners then demanded the resignation of both aldermen and asked that they be replaced with men that, "will regard their promises and the wish of their constituency as expressed at the ballot box...and who will have the brains enough to know it is not their business to legislate for themselves and the manhood enough not to

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93 *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Population Schedule,* "Lawrence County" (National Archives Microfilm Publication T623, roll 870).

94 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, June 10, 1886, page 2.

95 *Ibid.*, 17 June 1886, p. 5.

96 *Ibid.*, 24 June 1886, p. 2.

97 *Ibid.*, 1 July 1886, p. 2.

do it." Among the petitioners who signed the document were nine black voters, including George Page, Tilford Kelley, Sam Brinson, Robert Ewing and Luke Hampton.[98] At least one of the signers, George Page, was a black Union veteran. That black men signed a petition that challenged the intelligence and character of white Democratic establishment may have garnered them ill will.

As the November elections approached, Democrats attempted to tar Republicans with their association with black voters. The *Empire* recounted, "In its endeavors to be funny, the *Democrat* names colored men for the Republican county ticket. These colored men do not take this as especially complimentary coming from the source it does, but at the same time, they are confident they could carry as much strength as any of the ring outfit."[99] A "Colored Voter," in response to the *Democrat*, expressed their sarcasm to the editor of the *Empire*, "I wish in behalf of the colored ticket recently proposed...to recommend the election of J.W. Deaton, to the office of Recorder. The days of the ring in Peirce City are numbered, and he will not be able long to obtain support from the city government, hence Lawrence county should support him for a while."[100]

But, according to the *Empire*, the Democratic establishment also sought to use black voters to its own advantage. "It is stated on good authority that a gentleman of this city tried to persuade a colored man to work for a few candidates on the Democratic ticket, and finally offered him $10 if he would do it. But the colored man was not even tempted." The small news item that followed noted that on Halloween there were, "a lot of ku klux around having lots of fun."[101] Carlin, a Republican and editor who seems to

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98 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 1 July 1886, p. 2.
99 *Ibid.*, 19 August 1886, p. 3.
100 *Ibid.*, 26 August 1886, p. 5.
101 *Ibid.*, 4 November 1886, p. 3.

have taken an even-handed approach to race relations, in that his paper did not portray blacks in the blatantly racist, stereotypical views of the era, failed to elaborate on the presence of the Ku Klux Klan. Halloween, just days before the November election, certainly gave members of the Klan an excuse to make their presence known to the black voters of Peirce City, one that was meant to intimidate and instill fear.

Ultimately, Snyder and the African-American voters who had supported him so passionately lost their struggle. On March 21, 1887, the Missouri Supreme Court found that Snyder had not lived in Pierce City for the necessary amount of time to be qualified as mayor. Despite their defeat, the black community continued to be a presence in public life.[102] In late August 1888, the *Peirce City Empire* reported that Greene Campbell, the black postal clerk on the Arkansas branch of the Frisco railroad, had been dismissed from his patronage post. According to the *Empire*, Campbell, "knew that the prejudices against his color could not be overcome except by excellence, and he was a close and hard student." The newspaper claimed that he made such a high score on the exam that no Democrat in the area had exceeded it, although many had tried and failed. The reason for dismissal, the *Empire* reported, was that Campbell had temporarily misplaced a registered pouch. While not lost, the pouch's arrival had been delayed, and thus, "it was a chance to decapitate a colored official with a better record than any Democrat upon the line, and he is let out."[103]

The *Empire* also reprinted the *Peirce City Democrat's* take on the matter. Unsurprisingly, the *Democrat* crowed over Campbell's dismissal, "not discharged either because he was a colored man or because he was a Republican, but because of his neglect

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102 *State ex rel. Snyder v. Aldermen of Pierce City*, 3 S.W. 849 (1887).
103 *Peirce City Empire*, 23 August 1888.

in attending to his duties." The newspaper claimed that Campbell had also been negligent in earlier postings at Monett and at Fort Smith. The source of the *Democrat's* information, allegedly the Pierce City postmaster, reportedly said, "only his color kept him in this position so long." The defense of Campbell by the *Empire* was just a, "flimsy tissue of falsehoods intended to cater to the prejudice of the colored people."[104]

The *Empire*, though, did not let the matter stand. It rebutted the allegation made by the *Democrat* that Campbell held his job solely due to his color. "Democratic politicians howled for his removal, and were informed by a Democratic U.S. Senator that no excuse for his removal could be found in his record; that he stood No. 1 on the records at Washington." Editor Carlin took a bold swipe at Campbell's detractors, "and there are a few Democratic postmasters who have periodical spells when they would not distinguish a striped register pouch from a garter snake."[105] Campbell's dismissal remained in effect and no further mention was made of the matter. A month later, Wash Robinson, a leading member of the black community and Union veteran, was selected as a county delegate at the local Republican convention held in Pierce City.[106] His selection suggests that Pierce City Republicans had not given in to the lily whitism beginning to emerge in some southern Republican parties. The selection of a black delegate is telling of Robinson's standing in Pierce City. For every defeat, there was a small victory to be had there.

The next challenge surfaced in April 1891, when Pierce City held an election for city aldermen. Republicans chose not to run for election, save in one race for alderman in the Fourth Ward, home to many black residents, who undoubtedly made up a significant

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104 *Ibid.*, 23 August 1888.
105 *Ibid.*, 23August 1888.
106 *Ibid.*, 13 September 1888.

number of Republican voters. Louis Conner, the Republican candidate for alderman, beat Democratic candidate Elijah D. Deaton by just two votes. The final tally was forty-six votes to forty-four.

The Democrats chose to contest the election because, they argued, Conner had not paid his street taxes. Soon after, an ad appeared in the paper announcing a mass meeting of the Fourth Ward, "without regard to race, color, or previous political affiliation, who are opposed to official discrimination for political reasons." It was held at Pierce City's African Methodist Episcopal Church.[107] The struggle that emerged catapulted one of Pierce City's black citizens into the forefront of the battle for alderman of the Fourth Ward.

On May 28, 1891, the newspaper reported that Henry Colwell, a black citizen of Pierce City, had been nominated in Conner's stead,

> "It is sincerely hoped that the citizens of the fourth ward will unite in the support and election of Mr. Colwell. It will then be interesting to see if the present council will make discriminations on account of color. They have refused to seat a white Republican and now should be given an opportunity to either accept or reject a colored alderman."[108]

The *Empire* went on to say that if Colwell was elected by the voters of the Fourth Ward, "it will be an emphasis of their determination to have their votes respected by the council."[109] The newspaper continued, "Voters of the fourth ward elected an anti-ring white man, who was refused a seat, and they should now elect a colored man against the same Democratic candidate, and see if present authorities treat one better than the other." The *Empire* impishly noted that it was rumored if Deaton, who Democrats had renominated, lost once again, "that the whole territory will be declared by ordinance

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107 *Ibid.*, 20 May 1891, p. 4.
108 *Ibid.*, 28 May 1891, p. 4.
109 *Peirce City Empire.*, 28 May 1891, p. 6.

attached to the state of Arkansas."[110] But the Democrats had little to fear, as, according to Republicans, they relied once more upon their chicanery and tricks to ensure victory. The *Cassville Republican* sneered, "Anything to keep a Republican from office seems to the policy of the Peirce City Democracy."[111]

Deaton defeated Colwell fifty-five votes to forty-four votes. As Carlin, the editor of the *Empire* put it, "Some voters of the fourth ward were persuaded to vote for the Democratic candidate in the belief that if the colored man should be elected that he would not permitted a seat in the council." Carlin may have expected too much of his fellow Republicans. Some may have simply voted for Deaton because they themselves did not accept a black candidate.[112] Democrats had drawn the color line. Deaton, despite running as a Democrat, placed his name on a ballot titled "White Man's Ticket." It was clear that the Democrats had, as the *Empire* angrily noted, played the "race and color line" to their advantage. One Republican was overheard to say, "We are painted black, very black for our support of Colwell. We heartily wish the subject could be made yet more black if thereby could be made apparent our contempt for the partisan methods adopted by our council in overriding the will of our voters."[113]

James A. Vance, a local attorney, claimed that, "the tickets used by Deaton were unlawful, that no heading with a design of intimidation, nor distinction as to race is a lawful ticket."[114] Carlin, the *Empire's* editor, as well as an attorney, pointed out that Deaton's use of a ballot entitled "White Man's Ticket" violated state law, which only allowed the name of the candidate and the office on the ballot. Any ballot that did not

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110 *Ibid.*, 28 May 1891, p. 6.
111 *Ibid.*, 18 June 1891, p. 2.
112 *Ibid.*, 4 June 1891, p. 5.
113 *Peirce City Empire,* 4 June 1891, p. 5.
114 *Ibid.*, 4 June 1891, p. 5.

conform to state law, "...shall be considered fraudulent, and the same shall not be counted."[115]

Vance went before the Democratic controlled city council to argue against Deaton's methods, but his efforts were in vain. The *Empire* wryly declared, "Mr. Vance may as well present his arguments to the ballot box manipulators in Crittenden county Arkansas, where the colored people were driven before the Winchester rifles, as to attempt to utter a fair or reasonable conclusion before the Democratic board of Aldermen of Pierce City."[116] Deaton retained the seat. Yet the black community continued its struggle to gain a political voice through the years that ensued. Examinations of national and local election returns reveal that African-Americans may have been able to serve as a deciding factor in hotly contested political races. In local elections, for example, Democrats lost ground from 1894 through 1900 to their Republican opponents.[117]

Yet in this period the political attitude toward blacks expressed in the Republican *Empire* had changed. By 1900, Thomas Carlin had sold the newspaper to Alex T. Boothe.[118] It is unclear whether or not Boothe accurately represented the majority opinion of Pierce City's white citizens towards their fellow black citizens, but Boothe's attitude may have reflected the wave of lily-white Republicanism that began to sweep across the South.[119] White Republicans in Pierce City seem to have become agitated by the black activism, that persisted in Pierce City even as African-Americans were disfranchised across the South. Boothe's *Empire* noted, "A few of the colored voters in this city met in

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115 *Ibid.*, 4 June 1891, p. 5.

116 *Ibid.*, 4 June 1891, p. 5.

117 Missouri, *Official Manual of the State of Missouri, 1897-1898* (Jefferson City, MO: Office of the Secretary of State, 1898), 153; *Official State Manual of the State of Missouri 1901-1902* (Jefferson City, MO: Office of the Secretary of State, 1902), 204.

118 *Peirce City Leader-Journal*, 23 January 1925.

119 C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877 – 1913* rev. ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 219.

the Methodist Episcopal church recently and organized...The object of the meeting was stated to be for the betterment of their condition."[120] Those present elected Wiley Godley, cousin of Will Godley, as the president of the Independent Colored Voters Club of Pierce City. This independence clearly agitated the editor of the Republican *Empire*. He warned the members of the club that they would do well to, "read up on the election held in North Carolina...This disenfranchisement of about 80,000 voters in that Democratic State ought to be soothing syrup for those belonging to the 'club' in this city." In the same issue, the newspaper noted that,

> "...Today a number of our colored citizens went to Neosho to celebrate Emancipation day, and we noticed several members of the 'Independent Colored Voters club' in the crowd, but we couldn't hardly understand why they should want to go, as they claim the Republican party has never done any thing for them."[121]

Evidently disenchanted with local Republicans, black voters nevertheless resisted attempts by Democrats to seduce them. The *Empire* took notice of the violent welcome given to two traveling black supporters of the Democratic Party. The men attempted to lobby support for William Jennings Bryan but were met with such fierce resistance by the local black community that they, "caught the first train they could and departed for greener fields and newer pastures, and probably concluded that the colored people of Peirce City were not in touch with the party they were paid to represent this year."[122] In early November 1900, the *Empire* refuted the *Peirce City Democrat's* claim that a Republican in town offered to pay black voters four dollars for their allegiance at the ballot box as "absolutely false."[123] Whatever the truth was, the dispute between the two

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120 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 17 May 1900.
121 *Ibid.*, 9 August 1900.
122 *Ibid.*, 25 October 1900.
123 *Peirce City Weekly Empire,* 7 November 1900.

newspapers suggested that surrounded the pivotal role black voters played in Pierce City, as well as increasing tension over black political participation.

Until the lynching of Will Godley, Pete Hampton, and French Godley and the subsequent expulsion of the African-American community, then, African-Americans remained politically active in Pierce City. Fears of black influence in local affairs may have fed preexisting anxieties that Pierce City whites felt toward their black neighbors who had only arrived in the late 1870s. Such fears prompted southern Democrats to limit black suffrage, and began to devise various methods to disenfranchise blacks. At the same time, southern Republicans began to turn away from black voters, leaving them adrift in a region without a reliable political ally.[124] By 1900, a year prior to the lynching in Pierce City, blacks had formed the "Independent Colored Voters Club."[125] The black community now posed a potential political threat to Republicans. Significantly, French Godley, Will Godley and Pete Hampton were among the politically active African-American community in Pierce City. The support of the Independent Colored Voters Club could have solidified the Democrats' preeminence over the Republicans. Club members ultimately did not throw their lot in with the Democrats. The black community opted to hold out in order to make their vote more valuable and contested. This stubbornness garnered animosity from both of the parties.

This political independence on the part of Pierce City African-Americans came at a time of ever increasingly strained relations between whites and blacks in America. Edward Ayers, in his study of the New South, points out, "It seemed to many observers, black and white, that the two races grew farther apart every year." Both former slaves and

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124 Tolnay and Beck, *Festival of Violence*, 173-174.

125 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 9 August 1900.

Confederate soldiers had grown old, replaced by a new generation of whites and blacks who had not grown up in the antebellum South, yet inherited its legacy of racial division. This new generation had grown up in a turbulent period rocked by economic depression, rising fears of black crime, and an uncertain future. Significantly, these younger African-Americans often did not abide by the old racial etiquette. Ayers contends, "Whites feared that race relations had deteriorated so much that only violence could purge the South."[126]

In Pierce City, anger at black criminals who seemingly went unpunished likely combined with fear of black influence in local political elections to create an atmosphere of racial tension that exploded with the murder of Giselle Wild. The white community's perception of the local black community as expressed in the *Empire* prior to the lynching reflected common racial stereotypes of the era. Though Republican in its sympathies, the *Empire* often depicted African-Americans as both comical and uncivilized in their behavior. One can only imagine how blacks were portrayed in the *Peirce City Democrat*, which failed to survive for posterity. The day after the town's Emancipation Day celebration the newspaper reported, "The colored folks closed their celebration...This has been a rather dull day compared to yesterday, which was equal to an ordinary circus."[127] The *Empire* recounted on another occasion, "A couple of colored women had a lively tussle south of the railroad yesterday afternoon. They went at it in a regular pugilistic style and those who witnessed it say it was quite an amusing scene."[128]

Without the memory of slavery to guide their actions in the midst of white society, the black youth of Pierce City may not have readily accepted the racial hierarchy, in which blacks were inferior to whites. The lack of opportunity, racial prejudice and

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126 Ayers, *Promise of a New South*, 427.
127 *Ibid.*, 11 August 1881, p. 4.
128 *Ibid.*, 25 September 1884.

boredom of country life may have led some young blacks in Pierce City to act out against the racial boundaries imposed upon them by society. Ayers points out that, "towns and cities contained those blacks in the early stages of family formation and of working lives, those most likely to move often, look out for new opportunities, resist indignities and join new organizations, adopt new forms of music and dress, commit crimes or be accused of crimes."[129] Whether or not black crime actually became more prevalent, southern urbanization made it more evident as more people lived in increasingly close quarters.

Black crime was a subject that seized the attention of Americans in the 1880s and 1890s. Accounts of horrific murders, rapes, and theft committed by blacks dominated the front pages of many newspapers across the country, not just the South.[130] Graphic descriptions of brutal crimes carried out by blacks captured the public's imagination. News of lynch mobs across the South also featured prominently on the front page. Editorials supporting mob justice could be found in hundreds of newspapers across the South. As Ayers succinctly puts it, "Southern whites...were persuaded that black crime was out of control."[131]

Stewart Tolnay and E.M. Beck echo Ayers's assertion that, "many whites believed that there was an increasing wave of black crime against the white community - that blacks were out of control, especially those who, recently born, had not known the 'domesticating' influences of slavery." In addition, "Many whites found little to separate law-abiding from law-breaking blacks."[132] As a result, many whites across the South believed that the legal system was slow and ineffective.

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129 *Ibid.*, 68.
130 Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 155.
131 *Ibid.*, 154-155.
132 Tolnay and Beck, *Festival of Violence*, 17-18.

In Pierce City reports of black crime were common. Horse thieves, drunkards and brawlers appeared on a regular basis in the *Empire.* Both black on black and black on white crimes made the paper. In 1889, John Young, a thirty-year-old black resident of Pierce City, was caught "in a very compromising position" with Dell Sullivan, an eleven-year-old white girl by suspicious observers who had followed the pair to the Pierce City roundhouse. Young fled, but was captured soon after. The *Peirce City Empire* reported, "Considerable indignation was expressed in the streets...the negro waived examination and requested to be taken to the jail at Mt. Vernon as soon as possible."[133] He was charged with one count of rape as well as one count of assault with intent to rape. Young was acquitted of the rape charge, but was fined one hundred dollars.[134] The fine was not enough for some area residents. The editor of the *Aurora Advertiser* reportedly called for Young to be "hanged by the neck until dead." Young, however, apparently escaped the noose.[135] Andy Boyd, another black man accused of raping a young white girl in nearby Verona, was also acquitted.[136]

In 1899, Phil Bly, the son of Reverend Gentry Bly, got into an altercation with Roland Reed, a young white man. Bly repeatedly hit Reed's head against the street gutter, injuring him so badly that it appeared Reed would not survive. Bly was jailed.[137] When Reed recovered, however, Bly was released.[138]

Black on black crime was not uncommon in Pierce City. One cold January day, after French Godley, later a victim of the 1901 lynching, expelled his son Joe from the

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133 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 7 February 1889.
134 *Mt. Vernon Fountain and Journal*, 12 September 1889.
135 *Ibid.*, 5 September 1889.
136 *Lawrence County Chieftain*, 6 September 1894, p. 3.
137 *Peirce City Weekly Empire,* 6 July 1899.
138 *Lawrence County Chieftain*, 13 July 1899.

family home for being intoxicated, Joe began throwing rocks at the house. French came outside to stop Joe, but instead, French was hit in the head with a rock. He fell to the ground, unconscious, with a five inch gash in his head. Joe was taken to the city jail.[139] Joe was later killed in Mt. Vernon when he and D. J. McKinzee, a white man, got into an altercation while both were drunk.[140]

In 1891, Robert "Bob" Hampton, the brother of Pete Hampton, another of the lynching victims, brutally assaulted a black minister. Hampton was among a group of young black men who disrupted a meeting at the Second Baptist Church. When Reverend McMillan intervened, Hampton "took offense at what was said and left the house." He then waited outside the church with a pick handle and struck Reverend McMillan on the head when he stepped outside after the meeting. Hampton subsequently fled town. By Monday, Reverend McMillan was reportedly "in a serious condition." When Bob Hampton could not be found, his brother Pete was taken into custody instead, but Pete denied any involvement.[141]

Pierce City thus appears to fit Ayers' and Tolnay and Beck's social control arguments as well as elements of popular justice theory. Black crime was a reality in Pierce City. With a small African-American population in their midst, the white citizens of Pierce City were well aware of the crimes committed within its city limits, and watched to see if criminal offenders were punished. As newspapers across the region, state, and nation published sensationalized accounts of black crime, in addition to accounts of mob violence, Pierce City citizens may well have not been able to separate law abiding blacks from black criminal offenders. The acquittals of black suspects such

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139 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 17 January 1889.
140 *Mt. Vernon Fountain and Journal*, 3 September 1891.
141 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 19 March 1891.

as John Young and Andy Boyd may have led some southwest Missourians to believe that local judiciary failed to uphold the law. The crimes of a handful may have condemned an entire race in the eyes of the southwest Missourians.

If Pierce City's African-American community was small (by Mayor Cloud's estimate no more than 10 percent of the community's 2000 residents) and did not offer the job competition as Tolnay and Beck posit as contributing to racial violence, then the fear of black crime, in addition to black political activism, is one of the key factors remaining that could have sparked mob violence. The people of Pierce City watched local black criminal offenders like John Young and Andy Boyd acquitted of rape and may have perceived the legal system as too slow, too weak and too ineffective to punish guilty individuals.

But, the victims of mob violence in southwestern Missouri were not the young black transients who traveled from place to place looking for work that Ayers and Brundage believe were most frequently targeted. The men lynched in Pierce City, Will Godley, French Godley and Pete Hampton, were not black migrants or seasonal workers. French Godley was in his seventies and had lived in Pierce City since the late 1870s. Will Godley and Pete Hampton, both young men, were raised in the Pierce City after they arrived from Kentucky with their families. In essence, the men lynched in Pierce City were part of an established, vibrant black community. In the wake of several lynchings in southwest Virginia, as well as the opportunity presented by the coal mines of West Virginia, blacks left.[142] The blacks of Pierce City, however, were not given a choice. They were forcibly driven out by whites.

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[142] Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 144-146.

The life that blacks knew prior to the lynching disappeared on August 18, 1901, the day of Gisele Wild's murder. The blood, sweat and tears that they had put into building a life for themselves in Pierce City were swept away by a raging mob armed with rifles and rope. The lives of those who fled into the dark of that hot August night were forever changed, as was Southwest Missouri.

Pierce City Lynching

In 1901, Mark Twain lamented, "And so Missouri has fallen, that great state! Certain of her children have joined the lynchers, and the smirch is upon the rest of us."[143] Though the events of August 19, 1901 in Pierce City only briefly captured the country's attention, Twain felt compelled to write an essay entitled "The United States of Lyncherdom" in response. But Missouri's most famous son had overlooked the fact that mob violence had long been a part of the state's history.

On August 19, 1901, Will Godley and Eugene Barrett were wanted men in Pierce City, Missouri. Both had been arrested earlier in the day on suspicion of murdering a young white woman, Gisele Wild, who had been found on the side of the road with her throat slit. There was evidence of an attempted sexual assault. By evening, a mob of nearly one thousand men converged outside the jail, standing in the glare of electric streetlights. Men stood with shotguns, rifles and pistols as darkness settled over the town. Still, no one attempted to storm the jail until 9:15 p.m. A lone man secured a rope from a nearby hardware store and approached the jail. The mood of the mob immediately went from tense to riotous at the sight of the rope. Sledge hammers were procured and men began to batter down the steel door to the jail. Officers inside the small building attempted to reason with the crowd to no avail. Godley and Barrett were forcibly taken from their cell and nooses placed securely around their necks. The lives of the two black men were now in the hands of the mob.

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143 Charles Neider, ed., *The Complete Essays of Mark Twain* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963), 673.

Godley and Barrett were dragged down the street as gunfire erupted around them in a violent salvo of anticipation. The mob stopped and demanded the identity of Gisele Wild's murderer. Both men remained silent. The two black men were pulled further down the street with their hands on their heads before the mob stopped one last time. Eugene Barrett broke down. Professing his innocence, he claimed that the murderer was Joe Lark, a black porter on the St. Louis and St. Francisco Railway who conveniently left town after the murder. Barrett was released and taken to safety. Will Godley, however, kept silent. In a matter of moments, he was strung up over the second story balcony of the Lawrence Hotel and hanged. Members of the mob fired wildly. Bullets riddled Godley's body as he dangled in the air, but the shots also struck spectators, killing one boy.[144] As the mob lynched his friend, Pete Hampton attempted to shoot at the mob but unnamed men stopped him.[145] Within hours, two more black men died at the hands of the mob, and the black community had been expelled from Pierce City. For the blacks of Southwest Missouri, the lynching of Will Godley confirmed a radical change in race relations, one that forever changed the racial composition of the Missouri Ozarks.[146]

White hostility towards blacks had manifested itself with the first major outbreak of racial violence in Southwest Missouri in the summer of 1894. An earlier, minor incident had occurred in 1877 in Pierce City when a young black boy named George Gray was strung up for stealing railroad tickets. He lived, but even four days later, "The trace of the rope can be seen encircling his neck."[147] On June 20th, 1894, a group of young white men attempted to chase black residents of Monett, Missouri from the town.

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144 *Fayetteville Democrat Weekly*, 22 August 1901.
145 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 21 February 1903, p. 8.
146 *Fayetteville Democrat Weekly*, 22 August 1901.
147 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 30 May 1877.

The next evening, Robert Greenwood, a Frisco railroad brakeman, went out on the town with friends. At some point, the men ran into some of the blacks who had been harassed the previous day.[148] Words were exchanged between the two parties and Hughlett Ulysses Hayden, a black man, was knocked to the ground. His friends reacted by shooting Greenwood in the chest. He died of his injuries a day later on June 22. The *Cassville Republican* reported, "The killing of Greenwood was brought about by the differences between the whites and blacks. The blacks thought they had been run over too much and decided to make a stand. Arming themselves, a number seemed to put themselves in the way for trouble and soon found it."[149]

Hayden was arrested for Greenwood's murder in Neosho, west of Monett, the next day. He was to be taken by train to Cassville with a stopover in Monett. Alerted to his presence in Monett, a crowd gathered, but Hayden was ushered back onto the train. The marshal escorting Hayden placed his prisoner in an empty railroad car for safekeeping. Men boarded the train without tickets as the train began to roll out of town. When confronted a mile and half south of Monett, the men demanded the train stop, and then seized Hayden. The prisoner was dragged from the railroad car to a telegraph pole alongside the tracks and promptly hanged. The *Neosho Times* reported "the railroad men have driven every negro out of Monett and won't let a colored man or woman live there."[150]

The absence of blacks in Monett was a point of pride seven years later when the Pierce City lynchings occurred. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported that, "For seven

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148 Barbara P. Easley and Verla P. McAnelly, Eds., *Obituaries of Benton County, Arkansas Volume I 1884-1898* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, Inc., 1994), 164-165.
149 *Cassville Republican*, 5 July 1894.
150 *Neosho Times*, 5 July 1894, p. 4.

years, whenever a colored man had dared invade Monett, he has heard the warning cry: 'Get a rope!'" The *Chicago Tribune* also emphasized the animosity that remained in the town towards blacks in 1901, "Across the main street of Monett for years there has been a sign reading: 'Nigger, don't let the sun go down.'"[151]

In 1899, Price Hamlin and Witt Cummings, black men, were threatened by an impromptu mob in nearby Stotts City. According to the *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, Hamlin felt "a little bit uneasy when he saw the crowd of fifteen actually coming for him with a rope, and that the rope looked powerful big." Hamlin said he thought it was a bluff, but "he would rather get to some other town if it's all the same."[152] Later that year, in May, an unnamed black man passed through Carthage and told of his experience in Monett. Unaware of Monett's ban on blacks, he stopped in at a restaurant. "In about ten minutes a crowd of railroad men appeared at the front door and at the same time a lot of them came in the back way. They carried a long rope..." The men placed a noose around the black man's neck and led him to the depot. There he was given three minutes to leave town. The black man said he was, "plumb skeered to deff" and vowed never to travel through Monett again.[153] In November, Bob Carter, a black man, was strung up for two minutes and beaten by a crowd in Granby on his way to court in Neosho. Carter was allegedly punished for incest.[154]

The lynching in Monett set an example for Pierce City of how a community might rid itself of African-Americans entirely. An article in the *Neosho Times* stated that the coroner's inquest into Hayden's death declared he had died at the hands of unknown

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151 *Chicago Tribune*, 21 August 1901.
152 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 2 February 1899.
153 *Ibid.*, 11 May 1899.
154 *Ibid.*, 30 November 1899.

men.[155] Thus those who were complicit in Hayden's death were allowed to go free, doubtlessly emboldening the mob at Pierce City a few years later. Without Pierce City, Monett would have been an isolated event. Instead, Pierce City served as the turning point for the rest of southwestern Missouri, confirming the acceptability of lynching and expulsion. The mob had two choices as it crowded the town that August night. It could either let the legal system take its course or it could impose its own justice. When the mob seized Godley, it turned a fatal corner. After Pierce City's use of Monett's methods, the pattern was repeated over the next decade across Southwest Missouri and in an adjacent county in Arkansas.[156]

The lynchings and the subsequent expulsion of blacks from Peirce City began August 18, 1901, with the discovery of Gisele Wild's lifeless body. Gisele's parents, Bernhard and Elizabeth Wild, immigrated in 1873 to the United States from Germany.[157] By 1900, the Wilds had seven children, Gisele being born in 1878. The Wilds settled near Pierce City in the hope that Bernhard's investment in land there would pay large dividends. Unfortunately, Pierce City never became the railroad boom town that Bernhard Wild anticipated, and the family went into debt.[158]

On the morning of August 18, 1901, Gisele and her younger brother, Carl, attended Sunday school, then church services. Gisele chose to walk home alone that afternoon. She was within half a mile of the Pierce City business district when she was brutally attacked. Her brother later found her lying in a ditch alongside the road. Gisele's

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155 *Neosho Times*, 5 July 1894, p. 4.

156 Jacqueline Froelich and David Zimmerman. "Total Eclipse: The Destruction of the African-American Community of Harrison, Arkansas, in 1905 and 1909," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 58 (Summer 1999): 131–159.

157 *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Population Schedule,* "Lawrence County" (National Archives Microfilm Publication T623, roll 870)

158 Brown, *The Story of Pierce* City, 21.

throat had been slit, and there were signs of a struggle. Carl Wild ran to the nearest residence and telephoned Pierce City Marshal J.T. Johnson, then returned to the scene with others, only to find his sister had died. As the news of the crime reached Pierce City, the town's fire bell rang frantically, summoning a large crowd. Will Roark claimed he had seen a black man sitting on the culvert near where Gisele's body had been found. Search parties were formed and spread out to hunt for the murderer. The *Empire* proclaimed, "No such crime should ever go unpunished, and every citizen should constitute himself an officer for the time being to help down the murderer...when discovered no punishment is too bad."[159] Bloodhounds arrived from Barton County, Missouri. The dogs led law enforcement officials to the home of Joe Lark, the black porter for the Frisco railroad that Barrett would finger. Lark was not at home. In the meantime, Will Godley and Eugene Barrett were arrested by authorities and placed in the city jail.[160]

Lawrence County Sheriff John Manlove, for reasons unknown, did not transport Godley and Barrett to the safety of the county seat at Mt. Vernon. Despite threats of violence against the two men, Manlove left Pierce City to return home that afternoon. As a mob gathered, Mayor Cloud and other city officials were able to disperse the crowd, arguing for law and order. Missouri National Guard Captain Cuendet of Company E, based in Pierce City, offered his assistance to Mayor Cloud. Cloud, however, insisted he could handle the mob.[161] Unfortunately, for Will Godley, Cloud was proven wrong.

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159 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 22 August 1901 p. 3

160 *Ibid.*, 5 September 1901, p. 3.

161 *Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of Missouri for the Year 1901* (Jefferson City, MO: Tribune Printing Company, 1901), 16-19.

Will Godley was no stranger to trouble. In October, 1890, an intoxicated black man reportedly raped sixty-year old Johanna Filo as she and her son were returning home from church. Godley was suspected of the crime as the Godley farm was located between Pierce City and the Filo farm. Small knots of men gathered on the city streets and talked of lynching, but they "insisted that they must know beyond doubt that they had the right man before acting." Godley, arrested at Monett, was brought back to Pierce City. Men continued to linger in the streets and the mayor contacted Governor David Francis to obtain permission to call out the Missouri National Guard. In the meantime, Captain Stellhorn ordered Guard members to report to the Guard armory in Pierce City. Thirty men reported for duty and received orders to put four rounds in their belts, but as no attempt to lynch Godley was made, they were later dismissed. Extra police were also sworn in to prevent mob violence.

Still, the threat of a lynching lingered. Peter Filo, who saw the man who attacked his mother, identified Godley in a lineup. Two or three men reportedly tried to form a mob but no one joined their cause because, "...the main thing to carry out this purpose was lacking, a leader." Pierce City Marshal Reuben Chappell, a former Confederate from Virginia, loaded Godley into a carriage, and with night watchman Wright took Godley to Mt. Vernon "at a brisk trot." Someone called out, "Come on, boys, if there is any good in you!" But no one gave chase.[162]

In August 1891, Godley was sentenced to ten years in the state penitentiary for the rape of Johanna Filo. The penitentiary Dressing Register provides the only known description of Will Godley. He stood five feet, eleven inches tall, weighed one hundred fifty eight pounds, and had a bald spot on the crown of his head. It was noted that he

[162] *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 23 October 1890.

could read and write. His signature appears in the register, written in shaky, spidery handwriting. Godley was released early on March 10, 1899 and returned to Lawrence County where his family resided.[163]

Godley remained in the public eye, branded as a miscreant. Roughly a month before he was lynched, the *Empire* reported that Will Godley and Charley Price, another black resident, had been arrested on suspicion of murdering Pierce City night watchman Chappell the previous year. Godley and Price were released after they provided an adequate alibi to authorities.[164]

Chappell, who had saved Will Godley from a possible lynching in 1890, was a popular figure in Pierce City. He was killed as he investigated the report of a shot fired on a miserable November night marked by snow and rain. Ironically, one of the later victims of the mob, Pete Hampton, joined Chappell to see what was going on and was with the officer when they encountered three men coming into town. As Chappell questioned one of them, the man fidgeted with his pocket, and when Chappell grabbed his hand, a shot discharged. Chappell was struck in the left eye. Pete Hampton returned fire but missed. One man was later captured; the other two remained at large. Marshal Chappell later died of his injuries.[165]

The city was clearly growing tired of trouble. A reporter for the *Carthage Evening Press* noted for his readers, "Pierce City railroad yards are the scene of some of the most dastardly thug crimes in the whole southwest, and what is worse, the criminal so

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163 Missouri State Penitentiary, *Record of Inmates, Volume R, 1891-1893* (Jefferson City, MO: Missouri State Archives) no page.

164 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 4 July 1901.

165 *Ibid.*, 19 November 1900, p. 3.

frequently gets away."[166] Exactly one month before the lynching, some local toughs sought out the Pierce City marshal and night watchman. While shots were exchanged between the night watchman and one of the would-be gunslingers, no one was hurt. The *Pierce City Empire* growled, "After some one or more of these fellows who have come in to shoot up the town have been killed they will learn that we are going to have peace, if we have to fight for it."[167] The town did just that in August 1901.

During the chaotic time that followed the murder of Gisele Wild, two young white women stepped forward to accuse Will Godley of attempted rape after he had been taken into custody. According to the women, he had stopped them on their way home from choir practice and attempted to "outrage them." Before he fled at the approach of other whites, their assailant threatened them with death if they revealed his identity, thus their previous failure to identify their assailant. The aborted attack was well known to the town. Interestingly, this incident appears to be the same one reported by the *Empire* in March as a robbery, rather than a rape attempt.[168]

In any event, the women's story was supported by Godley's criminal record. Whether or not the women told the truth, the accusation was enough to seal Will Godley's fate that evening. A few hours later, his lifeless body hung from the balcony of the Lawrence Hotel.

A *Carthage Evening Press* reporter arrived in time to watch the lynching and then lingered in the streets. His detailed account provides insight into the events that followed. The reporter looked on as a drunken Polish immigrant hit at Godley's leg, cursing at the corpse. The murder of Wild, the daughter of German immigrants, may have sparked

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166 *Carthage Evening Press*, 20 August 1901, p. 1.
167 *Pierce City Weekly Empire*, 26 July 1901.
168 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 21 March 1901, p. 3.

outrage in the nearby Polish and German communities at Pulaskifield, Freistatt and Sarcoxie.[169] The extent of the participation by members of the nearby immigrant communities remains unknown, but people from other communities did take part in the lynch mob. The *Empire* noted, "The city was full of Monett people today, all intent upon assisting in the search for the man who committed the murder...and for the citizens of Peirce City we want to thank them."[170]

A "shirt sleeved businessman" jumped on top of a water trough and yelled, "Boys, the ladies at the hotel want the body cut down. What do you say, boys, in the name of the ladies of Pierce City?" The crowd agreed. After Godley's body was cut down, people gathered around his corpse. Peanut shells were thrown on his face and boys gazed at the bullet wounds their fathers had inflicted.[171] Newspaper accounts do not record any attempts to take a piece of the rope or Godley's clothing as a souvenir of the event.

Another cry went up, "Make way boys, the ladies!" A dozen women were escorted to view the remains, a common practice at Southern lynchings.[172] Godley's body was then taken off the street when it became clear that a coroner's inquest would not be held. An observer remarked to the *Press* reporter of the Lawrence County Sheriff John Manlove's absence, "'The idea,'" said the onlooker, "'of his leaving this nigger here all day.'"[173]

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169 *Carthage Evening Press*, 20 August 1901, p. 1; Gerlach, *Immigrants in the Ozarks*, 48-50.
170 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 22 August 1901, p. 3.
171 *Carthage Evening Press*, 20 August 1901, p. 1.
172 Michael J. Pfeifer, "The Ritual of Lynching: Extralegal Justice in Missouri, 1890-1942," *Gateway Heritage*. 13, no. 3 (Winter 1993): 22-33.
173 *Carthage Evening Press*, 20 August 1901, p. 1.

Even whites were not safe from the mob's frenzy. Jasper County Deputy Sheriff John Plummer stepped off the train only to be stopped at gunpoint. A member of the mob stationed at the depot, recognizing Plummer as an officer of the law, warned him not to go near the mob. Plummer tried to pass by the guard, but when the barrel of a shotgun was shoved in his face, he meekly complied. Plummer watched as Godley was lynched, and then jumped on the next train as it came into the depot, making his escape to Barry County.[174]

But the mob had not finished its work. When word spread that Pete Hampton had attempted to shoot at the mob during the lynching, the news enraged the lynchers.[175] Someone cried out, "Come on boys, you with guns - out to run the niggers out of town."[176] The crowd quickly moved to the black section of Pierce City. As the *Empire* described it, "the frenzied men thought of some other negroes who needed attention, and the march was taken up to the residence of Pete Hampton."[177] Hampton, like Godley had a prior criminal record. As late as 1900, he had been the defendant in a seduction case.[178] Hampton was referred to as a "thoroughly bad man and was feared by all, both white and black."[179] Between 1899 and 1900 alone, Hampton made at least six court appearances. He plead guilty in 1899 to carrying a concealed weapon, disturbing the peace, burglary and larceny.[180] In 1900, Hampton pled guilty to common assault when he participated in an attack on Roland Reed, a young white man, in Pierce City.[181] Later that year, he pled

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174 *Ibid.*, 23 August 1901, p. 5.
175 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 21 February 1903, p. 8.
176 *Carthage Evening Press*, 20 August 1901, p. 1.
177 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 20 August 1901.
178 *Ibid.*, 30 August 1900.
179 *Ibid.*, 5 September 1901, p. 3.
180 "Record of Bills of Cost on Information 1898-1901," Lawrence County Historical Society, Mt. Vernon, Missouri.
181 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 6 July 1899.

guilty to carrying a concealed weapon and, in a separate case, was found guilty of seduction by a jury of his black peers. It did not help matters that in 1891, his brother Bob, who also had several run-ins with the law, killed a black preacher after Bob took offense at something the man said.[182]

The mob came to a halt in front of the house of Hampton's stepfather and Will Godley's uncle, French Godley. The crowd demanded that Hampton leave town once and for all. Hampton "assumed the attitude of the desperado he was, reviled the messengers, and, first began hostilities by firing on the people, wounding four white men." The mob returned fire, killing Hampton and French Godley, then set the surrounding houses on fire. Their charred remains were later buried after being viewed the next day by curious spectators. But the mob had undertaken a larger task – expulsion. The *Empire* claimed that "up to this time there was no thought of driving the negroes from the city." The newspaper further asserted that no women or children were shot at, but that contradicts eyewitness accounts.[183]

One eyewitness, First Lieutenant W.C. Gillen, told the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*,

> "It was the wildest mob I ever saw, and I have seen several. I watched the attack on the negro quarters from the veranda of the Windsor Hotel. After the torch was applied, the whole scene was brightly illuminated. The crack of Springfield rifles which the mob had taken from the armory was incessant. Old soldiers said it looked like an attack on a fort at night. The members of the mob were yelling and hooting. The negro women and children were crying and screaming. "

Another citizen, whose name went unrecorded, reported that black men, women and children took shelter in their homes as bullets and flames threatened their lives. One

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182 *Ibid.*, 19 March 1891.
183 *Ibid.*, 5 September 1901, p. 3.

woman took shelter in a cellar after three bullets hit the trunk that she had taken cover behind.[184]

Out of ammunition, men broke into the Missouri National Guard armory in town, and took rifles and ammunition. Some intoxicated men hollered, "Here's cartridges – who wants a Springfield!" The *Press* reporter heard one man exclaim, "Our wives and daughters – come on!" He estimated at least fifteen hundred rounds were used in the assault on the black section of Pierce City. The journalist confided in his readers, "It was my first battle – and I felt that it was the real thing."[185] Unfortunately for many blacks in Pierce City, it was a one-sided battle that they lost.

Reverend S.S. Pitcher of the African Methodist Church of Carthage and Reverend L.M. Smith of the Colored Cumberland Presbyterian Church of Lamar left behind their camp meeting tents in Pierce City, and fled to the outskirts of town. There, at the home of James Cobb, a black railroad porter, they came under attack by the mob. Pitcher estimated the house was hit two hundred times before he and Smith made their escape. They made their way to Carthage after walking an estimated twenty five and a half miles to Sarcoxie. A white man armed with a shotgun watched them pass his farm near Sarcoxie. Pitcher and Smith assured him they wanted to leave the area, but the man, "seemed so savage that we did not have too much to say to him."[186]

A black resident, Miss Pinky Cobb, told the *Post-Dispatch* her story. Cobb, whom the *Post-Dispatch* reporter described as almost white, said that she and her sister had gathered her sister's children and gone to the family cellar. Afraid that she would burn alive, Cobb fled the cellar, and ran outside into the darkness. Members of the mob shot at

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184 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 25 August 1901, p. 1.
185 *Carthage Evening Press*, 20 August 1901, p. 5.
186 *Ibid.*, 21 August, 1901, p. 2.

her continuously but she escaped unscathed, only to return to her family home to take refuge there again. "They made a monkey out of me that night," she told the reporter. Finally the embattled black citizens "chose to risk bullets outside rather than both flames and bullets inside." The refugees ran for their lives as the violence raged on through the night until five in the morning. A brave few returned only to be told that they must leave Pierce City and never return on pain of death.[187]

For some, the excitement was not over. Iola E. LeGrande, a young woman from Pierce City, wrote to a friend about the scare the town experienced several days after the expulsion: "the cry came through the streets, 'The negros are coming, coming in bunches.'" Reports of a mob of blacks headed for the town spread quickly and ladies who had been walking on the streets took shelter in the town post office. She remarked of the hysterics she observed, "such screaming, fainting, and crying." Miss LeGrande feared that if she opened the door a black man would force his way into the building. After the chaos had subsided, she took comfort in the presence of her "sweetest little .38" revolver.[188]

For the black citizens of Pierce City, life would never be the same. In 1900, there were approximately two hundred eighty-three blacks in Lawrence County; it is estimated one hundred and sixty-six lived in Pierce City.[189] By 1910, only ninety-one blacks remained in the entire county.[190] Many of the black residents of Pierce City traveled to Joplin and Springfield. Members of St. Paul's Baptist Church, one of the two black

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187 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 25 August 1901, p. 1.

188 Mieswinkel, Fred, ed., "The Strawberry Letters," *Lawrence County Historical Society Bulletin*, January, (Mount Vernon, MO: Lawrence County Historical Society, 1986), p. 7.

189 *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Population Schedule,* "Lawrence County" (National Archives Microfilm Publication T623, roll 870)

190 Department of the Census, *Negro Population 1790 – 1915* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), 818.

churches in Pierce City, reunited in Joplin and decided that the property be transferred to the Second Baptist Church of Carthage, Missouri, as Carthage was "a haven for the colored race."[191]

Some residents, like Pinky Cobb, fled to Springfield. The Cobb family found refuge in the home of James Abernathy, a black railroad porter. It was in Springfield that the matriarch of the Cobb family, Arminta Cobb, gave an interview to a *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reporter. Referring to Kentucky, her birthplace, Mrs. Cobb stated, "That's the South too, but give me the South in preference to Peirce City. They are supposed to hate colored people down South, but I was never treated like this. Kentucky is good enough for me, and I want no more of Peirce City."[192]

The *Carthage Evening Press* somberly noted the appearance of a "rattle-trap old wagon drawn by a pitiful recollection of a horse," loaded down with black women, children and belongings. Refugees from Pierce City, the group was on their way to Joplin in the hope of a new life.[193]

J.V. Taylor traveled to Pittsburg, Kansas, where he met a cool reception. According to an article in the *Pittsburg Headlight*, Taylor had lived in Pierce City for thirty years, owned his own home and rented farm land. Prior to his arrival, Pittsburg banned refugees from Pierce City, but Taylor told a reporter that "he can show good recommendations as to his character and past life." When he left town the night of the lynching, Taylor left behind five hundred bushels of wheat.[194]

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191 *Cassville Republican*, 24 October 1901.
192 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 25 August 1901, p. 1.
193 *Carthage Evening Press*, 31 August 1901, p. 4.
194 *Pittsburg Daily Headlight*, 27 August 1901, p. 2.

The violence apparently prompted blacks outside Pierce City also to flee southwest Missouri. Willis DeHoney, reportedly the only black citizen living in Barry County, sold his farm and moved to Kansas. Several black families that lived to the west of Pierce City in the Jolly area packed their wagons and traveled to Oklahoma to start a new life after they "received a 'request' to vacate, decided that discretion was the better part of valor," and "sold their property at a sacrifice."[195]

For some, the violence continued in the immediate aftermath of their flight. The *Pittsburg Headlight* reported that a small mob in Stroud, Oklahoma attacked its small black population and expelled them from the town. The reason for the violence, the article noted, was because "insolence on the part of certain negroes toward the whites, and a heavy immigration of negroes within the past few days, believed to come from Pierce City." The *Headlight* reported the same day that law enforcement officials were on their way to Sapulpa, Oklahoma to prevent a mob spurred on by town officials from running black residents out of that town.[196]

Reverend Gentry Bly, the former pastor at the Pierce City Colored Baptist Church, returned to Pierce City briefly to check on his home. It is surprising he was not chased out of town, although after living in Pierce City for twenty-one years, he may have been looked upon more kindly than other African-Americans. Reportedly, some of Pierce City's citizens had written to him, asking him to return. His nine-room home, Bly discovered, was not damaged during the mob's attack, but he declined to stay on.[197] Almost a month after the lynchings the Peirce City *Empire* reported that a black man

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195 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 19 September 1901, p. 3.
196 *Pittsburg Daily Headlight*, 23 August 1901, p. 3.
197 *Carthage Evening Press*, 30 August 1901, p. 5.

stepped off the Oklahoma train and walked around Pierce City until young boys began to yell, "Get a rope." The man quickly left town.[198]

While unwanted in Pierce City, its former African-American residents were not unwanted elsewhere. According to the *Carthage Evening Press*, Pierce City Mayor Washington Cloud received a letter from F.S. Castering of Vicksburg, Mississippi, saying that he was interested in bringing the black citizens of Pierce City to Vicksburg. He offered to pay for their transportation to Mississippi, hire them to pick cotton and harvest corn, in addition to offering many other employment opportunities. Castering was willing to rent or sell land and promised the land was capable of producing four hundred to seven hundred pounds of cotton per acre. He boasted, "This is the finest country on top side of the globe for the negro. He can earn his money and living with less exertion than anywhere else on earth."[199] Having fled from the horrors of Pierce City, it was unlikely than any of the survivors were willing to take Castering up on his offer, probably fearing the terror of the Deep South.

But the offer is illuminating nonetheless. The loss of African-American labor in Pierce City, confined primarily to service and unskilled labor jobs, was inconsequential. But in Mississippi, the African-Americans expelled from Pierce City would have been welcomed into the local work force, where their labor was sorely needed. Mississippi was hardly free from the epidemic of lynching, but in the Deep South, where black labor was a valuable commodity, expulsion was rare.

The white press in surrounding communities generally agreed that the lynchings and expulsion were justified. The *Pittsburg Daily Headlight* proclaimed its sympathies

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198 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 26 September 1901, p. 3.
199 *Carthage Evening Press*, 12 September 1901, p. 2.

with Pierce City's white community. "For years Pierce City has been cursed with a large population of a vicious class of negroes who are continually committing some sort of a depredation or another...it is a great wonder that Pierce City withstood their insulting and impudent ways so long as they did."[200] An editorial in the *Joplin Daily Globe* argued,

> "The negro who is self-respecting, law abiding and industrious is entitled to all the protection the law can give but a negro that lives in idleness and begs, or steals or exacts by threats of violence, is not so entitled. He is a cancer upon the body politic, a disgrace to our civilization, a menace to virtue and chastity and a living threat to peace and dignity of the community. Something should be done with HIM."

The editorial went on to remind readers that it was easy to criticize the actions of others when the problem of delinquent blacks could easily be their own.[201] In nearby Aurora, the editor of the *Aurora Argus* pontificated, "Better hang a dozen innocent black brutes than let one guilty one escape."[202] The *Galena Times* sent the following to the *Empire*, "As the Peirce City man oiled his old shotgun, He hummed with ghoulish glee, The strains of his grand old battle hymn, All coons look alike to me."[203]

The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reporter in Springfield wrote after the lynchings, "Down here they call it white man's heaven." The reporter chronicled the anti-black sentiment expressed in several Southwest Missouri communities, among them Webb City, Monett, and Aurora. White animosity towards African-Americans was so severe after the lynchings that a white man with a dark suntan was almost asked to "migrate." The reporter compared the exodus of blacks from the area to the impact of Order No. 11 issued in 1863 that oversaw the depopulation of parts of Missouri. The reporter, however,

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200 *Pittsburg Daily Headlight*, 23 August 1901, p. 3.
201 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 21 August 1901.
202 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 25 August 1901, p. 1.
203 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 9 September 1901, p. 3.

felt that Order No. 11 was less severe in its punishment than the actions of the mob at Pierce City.[204]

But while whites celebrated expulsions, they did not necessarily want their towns held responsible for them. The *Monett Times*, ever mindful of Monett's image, snorted, "The tendency on the part of certain Peirce City people to lay blame of the lynching on the Monett crowd is far from commendable."[205] Within a few weeks, the *Times* boasted, "Monett is the only city in the state with a population of over 3000 without a resident negro within its borders."[206]

Emmett Newton, Quartermaster General of the Missouri National Guard, gave some of the most telling evidence that many white Missourians approved of the lynchings. He admitted to a *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reporter that he had left Springfield so that he could not receive orders to take back rifles stolen from the National Guard armory in Pierce City by the mob. He told the reporter that officially he did not know there was a lynching, he did not know that National Guard rifles had been used during the violence, and that he was going to go where there was no mail or telegraph service. Newton stated that the lynching was right, and that the people of Southwest Missouri knew how to take care of matters. When asked if he felt the wrong man had been lynched, Newton replied, "No; they burned the right man. They did not burn the man who attempted to assault the young woman...but they caught a brute who had made two previous attempts to worse than murder white women..."[207]

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204 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 25 August 1901, p. 1.
205 *Monett Times*, 22 August 1901, p. 2.
206 *Ibid.*, 2 September 1901, p. 2.
207 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 22 August 1901.

Not every area paper approved of mob violence. The *Neosho Miner and Mechanic* implored Governor Dockery to offer a reward for the prosecution of individuals who participated in the lynching. The *Fayetteville Democrat Weekly* mentioned the plight of one of their own black citizens, Tobitha Taylor, who was visiting Sarah Godley, her sister in Peirce City. It then said simply, "Comment is not necessary on this awful affair."[208]

Nationally, the violence was condemned. *The Nation*, one of the country's leading journals, examined area population statistics and then concluded, "The colored population of the town, as of all that section of the State, is but a trifling percentage of the whole number of people. It is impossible that the whites should live in the dread of the blacks which undoubtedly exists in regions where the blacks outnumber them..."[209] In Chicago, where the second annual National Negro Business League convention was being held, S.S. Cooper, of Washington, remarked to the *Chicago Tribune,* "It is a disgrace to American civilization that such atrocities are committed. Look at the participants as individuals – the black who committed the crime against a woman, and the white men who committed a crime against innocent blacks – do they not belong in the same sentence of condemnation?" Booker T. Washington, President of the League, refused to comment on the events at Pierce City. Washington said it would be too difficult to express his view on the matter without being misunderstood. But other members in attendance at the convention also spoke out against the lynchings when their leader chose not to.[210]

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208 *Fayetteville Democrat Weekly*, 22 August 1901.
209 "The Lynching Horror," *The Nation*, Vol. 73, August 29, 1901, 162.
210 *Chicago Tribune*, 22 August 1901.

Some area whites also expressed indignation at the lynchings. Dr. H.O. Scott, minister at the First Presbyterian Church of Carthage, decried the mob violence from his pulpit. "We have advocated the death penalty to such an extent that we have been exploited before the community as hard-hearted. But we must utter our protest against mob violence that hangs men...and runs people out of town because the Lord who made them gave them black skins. It is simply lawlessness, anarchy, savagery." Dr. Scott went on to declare that mob violence was antithetical to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution before concluding, "It is a curse to any country in which it takes place."[211]

Local African-Americans also voiced their disgust at the mob violence in Pierce City. Reverend George Abbott of Wesley Chapel in Carthage, former resident of Lawrence County, sent a letter to the editor of the *Carthage Evening Press* to express the feelings of Carthage's black community. "We are opposed to race colonization, we believe in universal citizenship, that is to say that character should take pre-eminence over color." He went on, "I have faith in almighty God, if we as a race be true and faithful, at his own time he will interfere and stop the murder lynching and burning of so many helpless victims." Abbott asserted that the phrase "all men are created equal" had lost its meaning over time, but because blacks were not going to leave America, "the sooner each race lays down race prejudice and labors for each others interests the better it will be for all." Sadly, Abbott would again write a similar letter to the *Press* in 1903, after the lynching of Thomas Gilyard in Joplin.[212]

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211 *Carthage Evening Press*, 24 August 1901, p. 2.
212 *Ibid.*, 27 August 1901, p. 5.

The *Joplin Daily Globe* reported that in Springfield the blacks of the city, "want a country of their own." It noted that, "The dream of a new black republic somewhere within the later territorial acquisitions of the United States now seems almost a realization to the excited colored men of Springfield." The article concluded, "The negro must seek liberty and the pursuit of happiness in some other land." A meeting to discuss colonization in the Philippines was to meet at a later date.[213] But other Springfield blacks passed a resolution condemning the lynching and announced, "the negro is at home in this country," and resolved to stay.[214]

Residents of Pierce City answered the criticism their town received in the aftermath of the lynchings. When interviewed by Robertus Love, reporter for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Mayor Washington Cloud seemed weary of the affair. "Print the facts, but don't make this thing worse than it is. It is bad enough, God knows. I do not believe that the sentiment of our people is against the negroes as a race, but this thing has happened because they fear their wives and daughters are not safe." He noted that the town had thirty-five black voters and estimated the black population at roughly two hundred before they were expelled.[215] Cloud, a local attorney, had represented black clients in the past. He served as counsel for Andrew Boyd, accused of raping a young girl, and won an acquittal for his client.[216] Cloud, however, was not typical. During the same interview, a young man told the *Post-Dispatch* reporter that the life of Gisele Wild was worth more than all "the 'niggers' in the United States."[217]

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213 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 24 August 1901.
214 *Carthage Evening Press*, 28 August 1901, p. 4.
215 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 25 August 1901, p. 1.
216 *Lawrence County Chieftain*, 23 August 1894 p. 3; 6 September 1894 p. 3.
217 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 25 August 1901, p. 1.

A week after the violence, Mayor Cloud issued a proclamation that appeared in the *Carthage Evening Press*. Cloud stated that law and order had been reestablished in Pierce City and that, "...there is no danger of any person who is peaceably going about his business without being molested on or interfered with on account of his color." The mayor specifically pointed out that the town held no animosity towards "railroad and Pullman porters on account of their color," and promised that authorities would not allow anyone to be harassed while "discharging their duties."[218]

For its part, the Peirce City Citizens Committee, formed to tell the town's side of the story and defend it from criticism, claimed full responsibility for the lynchings. It also expressed disappointment with the black community, to whom every advantage and opportunity had been granted yet tolerated criminal behavior:

> "They were provided with first class educational facilities. They had two churches supported by the best white people...They were given abundant opportunity to be industrious...Though it was widely suspicion[ed] that nearly all the crimes committed in Peirce City, were perpetrated by negroes, it could not be fastened upon them because of the impossibility to get a negro to testify against another negro...One of them said, "That under the circumstances he could find no fault with the way the people had done.""[219]

The committee offered its hope that no other town should have to go through the horror that Pierce City had experienced. Ultimately, it concluded, "What was done was done by a force that nothing on the ground could stop."[220]

A Pierce City businessman, Mr. Noel Perrott, told the *Joplin Daily Globe*, "The mob that did the work...it was a well organized body of determined men. They were not excited...but instead cool and deliberate." Perrott also went on to elaborate that the mob

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218 *Carthage Evening Press*, 31 August 1901, p. 5.
219 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 26 September 1901, p. 3.
220 *Ibid.*, 5 September 1901, p. 3.

was not composed of ruffians, but of the finest citizens of Pierce City. He concluded the interview by stating, "I believe that the majority of the Peirce City people are glad that there are no more negroes there, although many did not approve of the lynching." Mr. Perrott spoke of a rational, calculating mob that exacted justice for Miss Wild, not a wild, out of control rabble.[221]

Iola E. LeGrande, a seventeen-year-old resident of Pierce City wrote to a pen-pal in Minnesota, "We are condemned by some one every day, but as you say should it come to one's own doors many would act differently. Of course I do not exactly endorse mob law neither mob defense but in this case I am glad the mob took things in their own hands."[222] LeGrande shed further light on the character of Pierce City in another letter she later wrote on October 26, 1901. "You asked me if I feel guilty of anything you named - No not a bit. Thats not P.C. Style. We deny every charge and generally end it with a duel or a hanging." She then told her correspondent that since his last letter, the mayor and an attorney had fought in the street, followed by a murder and an additional fight that, if not for the intervention of law officers, would have resulted in death. "Can you beat it?" she asked.[223]

The only official government statement on Pierce City was an investigative report submitted to Governor Dockery, who had remained silent throughout the entire affair, by Adjutant-General W.T. Dameron of the Missouri National Guard. The report assigned blame squarely to one individual. Sheriff John Manlove was condemned for his failure to transport Godley and Barrett to the safety of the county seat at Mt. Vernon. Despite threats of violence against the two men, Manlove left Pierce City to return home

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221 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 29 August 1901.
222 Mieswinkel, "The Strawberry Letters," p. 7.
223 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

that afternoon and failed to intervene when news of the mob raced over the telephone lines. Mayor Cloud was also cited for his failure to accept assistance from Missouri National Guard Captain Cuendet.

Adjutant-General Dameron, after investigation, declared that none of the men of Company E "aided or assisted directly or indirectly, the mob." Instead, they stood by and waited for Sheriff Manlove to ask the Guard for assistance, but Manlove remained silent. But Mayor Cloud also refused to ask the Guard to assist in quelling the mob. In 1891, when Will Godley could possibly have been lynched, had it not been for swift action of city officials and Marshal Reuben Chappell, a tragedy was avoided. City officials swore in additional police, called upon the Guard, and kept the situation under control until Chappell could take Godley to the safety of Mt. Vernon. Sheriff Manlove and Mayor Cloud, by contrast, failed to act.[224]

As the embers of the firestorm burnt out, the bodies of Will Godley, French Godley and Pete Hampton were laid to rest in Pierce City. Joe Lark, whom Eugene Barrett implicated in the murder of Gisele Wild, was more fortunate. He would face a jury in the coming months instead of a lynch mob.

While the identity of Gisele Wild's murderer remains a mystery, the causes behind the lynchings and subsequent expulsion of blacks from Pierce City are not. The events of August 19, 1901 provide an opportunity to test the explanations that recent historiography has provided. In the case of Southwest Missouri, with its limited black population and traditional culture of violence, it is probable that lynching served two key functions. First, it ensured that suspected criminals were punished, should the legal

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224 *Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of Missouri for the Year 1901* (Jefferson City, MO: Tribune Printing Company, 1901), 16-19.

system fail. Second, it served as the ultimate form of social control, as blacks were reminded of their subservient role in white society through their expulsion from Pierce City. African-Americans in Pierce City left with the memory that the white community could and did dictate where they were allowed to live. [225]

For Brundage, Ayers, and Tolnay and Beck, lynching served as a method of social control through the mechanism of exemplary justice. The lynching of Will Godley, who was later deemed innocent after his death, served two functions: to punish Godley for his transgressions and to send a message to the black community that criminal behavior would not be tolerated. Both Godley and Pete Hampton had previous scrapes with the law. Godley had been convicted of the rape of a sixty-year-old white woman. Hampton was a local criminal with a lengthy criminal record. The Peirce City Citizens Committee, in its public statement, noted that it was a commonly held belief that most crime in town was committed by African-Americans, and because blacks refused to testify against one another, black criminals went unpunished.

Not only did the mob want to punish Godley, but the whites of Pierce City wanted to send a message to the local black community, as Ayers and Brundage suggest. In this most extreme form of social control, blacks were ordered from the town, never to return. The message was received. Blacks caught the last trains out of town or left in wagons loaded with what they could carry.

As Brundage asserts, "blacks who failed to maintain good relations with 'good local white folk' were extremely vulnerable to mob violence."[226] Both Will Godley and Pete Hampton, because of their criminal histories, were viewed with contempt by the

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225 Tolnay and Beck, *Festival of Violence*, 18.

226 Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 84.

local community. The two men, in addition to French Godley, had the misfortune of living in an area where, "rural folkways...bred, and in turn, glorified mob violence."[227] In the southern Ozarks, an area racked by brutal guerrilla warfare, postwar vigilantism and a tradition of extralegal violence, it was almost a certainty that the murder of a young white woman would lead to further violence.

Brundage, Ayers, and Pfeifer all suggest lynchings were most likely to occur in areas where law enforcement was weak and, in Brundage's words, "local officials had neither the means nor the ambition to stop mob violence."[228] Sheriff John Manlove, who was in Pierce City and witnessed the growing crowd, did not transfer Godley to the safety of Mt. Vernon. Marshal J.T. Johnson could have tried to face down the mob, but there is no indication that he did so. Aside from Sheriff Manlove, it appears that Pierce City only had a small number of full-time law enforcement officers, possibly three. One, City Marshal J.T. Johnson, worked during the day while two night watchmen tended to the city in the evening. In a town of an estimated two thousand inhabitants, the handful of law officers was spread thin.

The lynching in Pierce City also confirms elements of Michael Pfeifer's theory of rough justice. According to Pfeifer, lynchers in the Midwest, West and South "shared a commitment to this notion of rough justice, a cultural complex that demanded the harsh, personal, informal, and communally supervised punishment of what was perceived as serious criminal behavior." As he notes, the definition of serious criminal behavior "was heavily mediated by factors of race, gender, class and circumstance."

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227 *Ibid.*, 104.
228 *Ibid.*, 104.

In Pierce City, like much of the South, the murder of a young white woman was just cause for extralegal justice. But Pfeifer shows how Pierce City, perched on the border of South, Midwest, and West participated in other regional patterns that "postbellum rural and working-class midwesterners and westerners, drawing on memories of the history of popular violence in their regions, revived the elastic doctrine of popular sovereignty as an antidote to changing practices of criminal justice in an era of economic and social consolidation."[229] Adherents of rough justice, Pfeifer points out, "were usually rural residents or members of the urban petty mercantile or working class."[230] Among the members of the mob, a later lawsuit revealed, were members of both classes. For example, J.A. LeGrande, one of the more prominent members of the mob, was a lumber and coal dealer in Pierce City. William Abbott, on the other hand, was a young working class white man.[231]

As Pfeifer argues, rough justice demanded punishment for criminals who engaged in serious criminal behavior. The murder of Gisele Wild, a young white woman at the prime of her youth, could not go unanswered by the citizens of Pierce City. Whites in Pierce City may have felt that the local African-American community was culpable because they were unable to control the alleged criminals in their midst, thus the savage turn whites made against the black community as a whole. Pfeifer contends, "Racist whites throughout much of the country viewed lynching as the most effective means of

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229 Pfeifer, *Rough Justice,* 14.

230 *Ibid.*, 3-4.

231 *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Population Schedule,* "Lawrence County" (National Archives Microfilm Publication T623, roll 870)

responding to instances of African-American resistance and interracial criminality." Nor could racist whites, Pfeifer asserts, trust the legal system to punish criminal offenders.[232]

Will Godley was proof enough for any Pierce City citizen to believe that the law tolerated black rapists by handing out light sentences. With the legal process seemingly unable to prevent black on white crime, the mob lynched Godley and then expelled the black community, acting as a substitute for the law in order to accomplish what the legal system had failed to do.

The *Stotts City Sunbeam* ran an interview with Mr. Fisher of Pierce City who claimed that because of the lynching, "white women could go their way without being molested and insulted by the black skunks, as heretofore."[233] The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported that several Pierce City citizens claimed that its black residents had committed crimes similar to the murder of Gisele Wild for the last ten years prior to the lynching.[234] A letter to the editor of the *Post-Dispatch* offered an answer as to the cause of the lynchings, "When the negroes let white women alone there will be no 'nigger burning.'"[235]

While explanations for the lynchings may be numerous, explanations for the expulsion of Pierce City's African-American community are not. Ayers, Brundage, Pfeifer and Tolnay and Beck do not offer satisfactory explanations for the mob's decision to expel the town's black population rather than being satisfied that the lynching would cow them into submission.

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232 *Ibid.*, 67.
233 *Stotts City Sunbeam*, 30 August 1901.
234 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 21 August 1901.
235 *Ibid.*, 26 August 1901.

For those who survived, life did not get easier after Pierce City. Many who fled settled in Joplin, which underwent its own struggle with mob violence in April 1903. America Godley and Beedie Hampton, according to census records, lived in the relative safety of Kansas City, Missouri by 1920. Neither woman had remarried since their husbands had died at the hands of the Pierce City mob. Gentry Bly, the pastor of Pierce City's black Baptist church, moved to Topeka, Kansas. After working as a janitor, he was once again a pastor by 1920.[236] His son Henry, who was eleven when he had to flee Pierce City, died in action as a cook during World War One.[237]

Mary Thomas, whose husband Reuben had written the *Empire* about their ill-treatment in 1879, created a stir when she returned in 1902 to take care of property matters. Her arrival came in the wake of lawsuits filed by the widows of the men lynched and the *Empire* reported, "Our people are dead sore over the suits...and don't think that the negro should be permitted to stay any longer than to get in and transact her business and get out." If she were to stay long, "then after a while more of them would come and want to do the same, and directly we would have the whole caboodle back on us."[238] She did not stay. Her fate after her departure remains unknown.

As for the people of Pierce City, many of them lived long after the events of 1901. J.A. LeGrande, who figured prominently in the mob violence, died in 1923 at the age of sixty-six.[239] William Abbott died alone at forty-five from excessive drinking in 1916.[240]

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236 *Thirteenth Census of the United States*, 1910, Population Schedule, "Lawrence County" (National Archives Microfilm Publication T624, roll 795), *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, 1920, Population Schedule, "Lawrence County" (National Archives Microfilm Publication T625, roll 932).

237 *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Population Schedule,* "Lawrence County" (National Archives Microfilm Publication T623, roll 870); *Shawnee County, Kansas; World War One Honor Roll*, Topeka Genealogical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

238 *Pierce City Empire*, 11 September 1902.

239 *Pierce City Leader-Journal*, 9 February 1923.

240 Death Certificate for William Abbott, 9 July 1916, File No. 27024, Missouri State Archives.

Sheriff John Manlove died at seventy-seven in 1917.[241] Mayor Washington Cloud died at the State Hospital Number Three for the Insane in Nevada, Missouri in 1929.[242]

The Godley family faced one final tragedy. On the evening of December 25, 1902, in Pittsburg, Kansas, police officer Milt Hinkle came upon a noisy group of black men who had reportedly been drinking. The group, which included Gus, Mumpford and Jess Godley, refused to comply with the officer's command to quiet down. Officer Hinkle then attempted to arrest Joe Godley, but Godley resisted. His companions stepped in to stop Officer Hinkle and a struggle ensued. Hinkle blew his whistle for backup and continued to desperately struggle with the group. During the fight, one of the men grabbed the officer's revolver and shot him in the back of the head, and then they fled. Officers coming to Hinkle's aid quickly caught the Godleys, but Hinkle died a short time later. Upon hearing the news of the officer's death, a mob formed. Just as in Joplin, others stepped forward to try and stop the mob, but to no avail. Mumpford Godley, identified by a young boy as the murderer, was dragged outside the city jail and lynched.[243]

The *Pittsburg Daily Headlight* reported, "The Godleys came here from Pierce City at the time the citizens of that place drove the colored people from their population." The Godleys, since coming to Pittsburg, worked at the Pittsburg Vitrified Brick Works.[244] Jess and Gus Godley escaped murder charges as the prosecutor lacked evidence that linked them to the murder of Officer Hinkle. They did, however, plead guilty to public

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241 *Pierce City Leader-Journal*, 15 June 1917.
242 *Lawrence Chieftain*, 12 September 1929.
243 *Pittsburg Daily Headlight*, 26 December 1902, p. 3.
244 *Ibid.*, 26 December 1902, p. 3.

intoxication.[245] Jess Godley was also charged with resisting an officer and fined fifty dollars.[246] Henry Godley, the father of Will Godley, Mumpford Godley and Jess Godley, sued the city of Pittsburg over his son's death. He asked for ten thousand dollars in damages. The court case dragged on from 1903 until 1905 when the case was settled for four hundred dollars. The money was little consolation to a man who had lost two sons within the last two years. After 1905, the Godley family disappeared from record.[247]

But in Pierce City, one Hampton reportedly lingered. In March, 1902, a ghost was reported by several witnesses near the bridge on Elm Creek. The ghost was allegedly white and devoid of arms and legs. The town buzzed with speculation as to its origin. One of the most popular theories, the *Peirce City Empire* noted, was that "it is the spirit of the departed Pete Hampton, who left Peirce City so suddenly one night last August." Still, upon further investigation, the *Empire* concluded the source of the ghost was really the electric plant.[248]

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245 *Ibid.*, 8 January 1903, p. 6.
246 *Ibid.*, 9 January 1903, p. 5.
247 *Henry Godley v. The City of Pittsburg*, 1903, Crawford County District Court, Crawford County Courthouse, Girard, Kansas.
248 *Peirce City Empire*, 6 March 1902.

In the aftermath of the Pierce City lynching, many residents of Pierce City and area newspapers blamed the outbreak of mob violence on the prevalence of black crime. According to the Peirce City Citizen's Committee, "Though it was widely suspicion[ed] that nearly all the crimes committed in Peirce City, were perpetrated by negroes, it could not be fastened upon them because of the impossibility to get a negro to testify against another negro."[249] In this case, the legal system could test this claim of black culpability. Joe Lark would stand trial for the murder that Will Godley had already been lynched for.

In 1902, Sarah Godley, the widow of French Godley, undertook a legal proceeding of a very different sort. She launched a lawsuit against her husband's murderers. Sarah Godley's case, unlike that of Joe Lark, is unique as her lawsuit is one of a few known cases of a black victim pursing legal action against her attackers.[250] But Sarah Godley had little left to lose. Her husband and son were dead and her home in Pierce City gone. Her bold effort to seek justice must have disconcerted whites. A victory for Sarah Godley would have opened the floodgate for lawsuits by other blacks who had lost their homes and property in Pierce City. Whites might then pay a heavy price for lynching and expelling the black community from town.

As the embers of the firestorm burnt out, the bodies of Will Godley, French Godley and Pete Hampton were laid to rest in Pierce City. Joe Lark, whom Eugene Barrett implicated in the murder of Gisele Wild, was more fortunate. He was arrested in

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249 *Peirce City Weekly Empire*, 26 September 1901, p. 3.

250 The literature on antilynching efforts mentions few cases of African-American victims pursuing legal action. Henry and Sarah Godley may have been two of many blacks to sue their assailants, but it remains unknown at this time.

Springfield by August 21st as he stepped off the train from St. Louis. The *Joplin Daily Globe* described Lark: "He is tall and heavy set, with a ferocious jaw and broad forehead, and has a scar over his left eye. His color is light yellow...dressed in the uniform of a Frisco Porter."[251]

If Joe Lark was scared, his demeanor did not betray it. The reporter described him as confident that he would be found not guilty of Gisele Wild's murder. Lark told the reporter, "I had nothing at all to do with the crime." He then went on to say that he had been in Pierce City the day of the murder. Lark claimed he came in off the train that morning, proceeded to go downtown at eleven that morning to run errands, then returned home at noon. His wife, Lulu, went to church while Lark laid down to rest. Later, after his wife had returned, the couple heard the fire bell ringing but thought little of it.

Lark returned to the depot at nine o'clock that night to catch the train he was scheduled to work on and noticed there was a "great commotion going on." He spoke with several people that he knew while waiting for the train, but none mentioned that he was suspected of involvement in the crime. Lark boarded the train and left town. On his return trip, another black railroad porter informed him that there was a warrant out for his arrest, and subsequently Lark was taken into custody at Springfield. Of this Lark said, "I am glad I was, for if I had landed in Pierce City, they would have killed me sure."[252]

If Joe Lark was confident he would be set free, his wife was not. Lulu Lark, who had fled east in the ensuing chaos of the lynching, was staying with friends near Boonville when a Springfield reporter met her. "The woman seems to be uneasy and says but little except to answer direct questions..." Still, others appeared to believe in Lark's

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[251] *Joplin Daily Globe*, 21 August 1901. In some newspaper accounts, Eugene Barrett is referred to as Eugene Carter.

[252] *Joplin Daily Globe*, 21 August 1901.

innocence, including Greene County Sheriff W. J. Bradshaw, "...who believes the prisoner is innocent and that is the opinion of nearly all the people who have seen Lark." The reporter added, "It is not at all reasonable that such a man as the Frisco porter would have any hand in a crime of that atrocious character."[253]

William Favors, a black Frisco porter who had later been implicated in the murder, was arrested in Oklahoma City. He was released on a writ of habeas corpus, only to be immediately rearrested when a telegram from Missouri Governor Dockery was received, stating that requisition papers were on their way to Oklahoma City for Favors.[254] The requisition order was reportedly issued on condition that if honored, Favors would be transferred to Kansas City for safekeeping.[255] Favors insisted that he could prove his innocence with five witnesses who saw him at the Pierce City depot from 10:10 am until the fire bell rang alert the town to the murder.[256] For the time being, it appeared that Governor Dockery wanted no further bloodshed, despite the failure of the Governor's office to publicly condemn the lynchings at Pierce City.

By August 26, witnesses from Pierce City were escorted to Springfield by Lawrence County Prosecuting Attorney Isaac V. McPherson in an attempt to identify Joe Lark as the man they had seen in the vicinity prior to Gisele Wild's death. On the day of the murder, William Roark and his wife had been traveling along the right of way next to the railroad track in the vicinity of the crime scene when they encountered a "ginger-cake negro going west." Mr. Roark and the man exchanged a few words and then continued on. Sheriff Bradshaw gathered thirteen men from Springfield's black community and

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253 *Ibid.*, 23 August 1901.
254 *Ibid.*, 24 August 1901.
255 *Ibid.*, 25 August 1901.
256 *Carthage Evening Press*, 21 August 1901, p. 1.

placed Lark in among them for the witnesses to identify. William Roark failed to recognize any of them as the man he and his wife encountered.

Mrs. Roark, however, identified two of the Springfield men as similar looking to the man she and her husband had met, but did not positively identify either of them. Major I. P. Lindsey, who had been riding on the train's caboose the day of the murder when it had stopped on the tracks near the murder scene, was called next. Like the Roarks, Lindsey recalled seeing a "ginger-cake negro" pass by and look him directly in the face, but failed to find him in the lineup. Lindsey pointed at Lark and said, "That man I have seen frequently in Peirce City, but I did not see him on the day of Miss Wilds' murder." At that, a roar of elation came from the blacks in the line-up, Joe Lark reportedly, "...the happiest in the bunch."[257]

Prosecuting Attorney McPherson, however, was not satisfied. He told the reporter that there was other evidence against Joe Lark and that he would hold him until a thorough investigation was completed.[258] To add to the continuing drama, the following day Frisco employees in Springfield reported a rumor that Carl Wild, Gisele's brother, was responsible for the murder of his sister. They insisted he would be arrested in a short matter of time. His alleged motive was to collect on a life insurance policy taken out on Gisele. A source from Pierce City, however, called to inform the paper that there was no truth to the story.[259]

Pierce City citizen Noel J. Perrott was in Joplin shortly after the lynching and gave an interview to the *Joplin Daily Globe* in which he weighed in on the culpability of Carl Wild. When asked about the accusations, Perrott replied, "Do I think there is any

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257 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 27 August 1901.
258 *Ibid.*, 27 August 1901.
259 *Ibid.*, 28 August 1901.

ground for the statement that Miss Wild's brother killed her? Well, not by a jug full. That report was started by somebody with a view to allure the attention of the people from the negroes." He then continued, "Why, young Wild is a mere boy, 13 years old, I believe, and the young lady who was killed was about 20. It would have been impossible...That part of the story is fake pure and simple." The citizenry of Pierce City agreed. The accusations against Carl were quickly forgotten and attention remained on Joe Lark and William Favors.[260]

One of the area's most racist newspapers, the *Stotts City Sunbeam*, vented, "We will bet a doughnut to a nickle that Joe Lark, the nigger porter, who has been held at Springfield supposed to be implicated in the murder of Miss Wild at Peirce City will go free as there is being so much 'monkey business' about getting him tried. Lawrence county officers ought to stick to it until they either prove him innocent or guilty."[261] The *Sunbeam* did not have long to wait.

The trial commenced with a successful request for change of venue after his attorney argued Lark could not receive a fair trial before Justice of the Peace E.H. Lambert. Lambert had overseen the inquest into Gisele Wild's death in August. Still, he was unable to escape depositions taken during a coroner's inquest on the day after Gisele Wild's murder.

On that hot August day, Lambert had ordered Pierce City Marshal J.T. Johnson to summon "six good and lawful men" to hold an inquest into the murder. The morning of August 19, 1901 the coroner's jury and witnesses made their way to Pierce City's town hall. Proceedings began, but were adjourned when it became clear that not all witnesses

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260 *Ibid.*, 29 August 1901.

261 *Stotts City Sunbeam*, 6 September 1901, p. 3.

could be examined in one day. The following day, the jury traveled to Mt. Vernon to listen to Eugene Barrett's testimony, then returned to Pierce City to continue proceedings on August 22.

It was on August 22, 1901, just three days after the lynching, that the coroner's jury reached its conclusion. Having viewed the body, examined the crime scene and listened to witness testimony, the jury reported, "that the deceased came to her death by having her throat cut by a knife or some sharp instrument in the hands of some person or persons unknown to the jury, but from the evidence have reasons to believe that William Favors, Joe Lark and William Godley were implicated in the crime."[262] The witness testimony, however, paints a complicated picture of the day Gisele Wild was murdered that brings more questions than answers.

William W. Roark, one of the witnesses taken to Springfield to try to identify Joe Lark, was called to testify before the coroner's jury. Roark did not live far from the murder scene. According to his testimony, prior to the murder, he encountered a black man sitting on the end of the railroad trestle where Wild's body was later found. The man, Roark recalled, "a negro of yellow cast too dark to be called yellow, and had a small mustache." Roark did not recognize him. When asked if people traveled often in the same area, Roark replied that people passed through most every day. After Carl Wild discovered his sister's body, he ran screaming past the Roark's home. When William Roark arrived at the scene, he could see Gisele's throat had been cut, and that she had been dragged from the tracks down into the culvert next to the railroad trestle. The attacker, after fighting with Gisele, went to the nearby creek and fled south as indicated

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262 *State v. Lark*, 1901, Lawrence County Circuit Court, Lawrence County Courthouse, Mt. Vernon, Missouri.

by a bloody handkerchief identified as Gisele's that was found on the south creek bank. When asked what kind of girl Gisele Wild was, Roark responded, "She was a very nice girl, a good girl."

Frank Stalter, the next witness, had been swimming with friends nearby that morning. When he decided to return home, he walked along the railroad tracks, and encountered a black man sitting on the trestle. Stalter recalled the man was wearing a white shirt, black pants and black, stiff hat and had a small mustache. He did not recognize the man. Stalter greeted the man with a "how do", to which the man replied in return, but nothing else was said. Five to ten minutes after passing the man, Stalter turned and looked back, only to see the man still sitting on the trestle. When asked if that was all he knew about the murder, Stalter replied, "Yes sir only what I have heard."[263]

The most complete testimony regarding the day's events came from Eugene Barrett, the young black man seized with Will Godley by the mob, only to be saved upon implicating Joe Lark as the murderer. He was the only black individual, besides one other witness who was asked about Lulu Lark, who was questioned in detail. The two statements he provided are the only substantial surviving testimonies from the black community, but even they are filled with contradictions, further complicating the search for exactly what transpired that hot day in August, 1901.[264] While the most lengthy, his testimony is also among the most confusing, due to the lack of a clear line of questioning. Barrett recounted the day of August 18th from the moment he went down to the depot when he joined a craps game that was going on in one of the boxcars. Both white and

263 *State v. Lark*, 1901.
264 *Ibid.*

blacks were present, playing for money. Will Favors joined the game, his pants rolled up to the knees.

After Favors went on a winning streak some of the players left, while the group that remained decided to go get beer, and proceeded to Hickey's where they bought the last quarter's worth of the beer on tap. Barrett could not remember if Favors came with them. Thirsting for more, they stepped outside, hoping that Quinn's would have beer to sell. The group saw Pierce City Marshal J.T. Johnson rush out of the Lawrence Hotel, ask a boy for his bicycle, then race off as fast as he could pedal. Thinking nothing of it, Barrett and the others proceeded to Quinn's where someone told them that a girl had been killed down on the railroad tracks. Pete Hampton asked Barrett, since he had not been drinking, to go investigate what was going on, and Barrett agreed .[265]

On his way, Barrett ran into John Slaterly and Perry Howard, both young white men. As they reached Vance and Perrott's grain mill, Marshal Johnson raced past them back towards town on his borrowed bicycle. The group called out to him as to what was the matter and Johnson shouted back, "Nothing much but Eugene you better not go down there." Proceeding a little farther, they met Ike Suttles, the night watchman. Suttles informed them that, "Some darn nigger has cut Wild's daughter's throat and Johnson has gone to ring the fire bell and get up a mob to go out and hunt for him." At that, Barrett and the two other young men started back to town. As the fire bell began to ring, the group took off at a run, once again meeting Marshal Johnson who warned them, "You better not go out because the people are so excited they will hang the first nigger they see." The young men heeded his advice and returned to town. Still, other young black

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265 *Ibid.*

men did visit the crime scene; among them Will Young, Charley Price and George Debow.

Eugene Barrett, in his testimony, fingered not Lark but William Favors. Very little can be found about Favors as early employee records from the Frisco Railroad have not survived.[266] William Favors, sometimes referred to as Flavors, was a porter with the Frisco Railroad. On August 6, 1901 the last land lottery was held in El Reno, Oklahoma, bringing a wave of an estimated forty to fifty thousand people to the small town.[267] To deal with the large number of people traveling to El Reno on the Frisco Railroad, Barrett stated that the Frisco, "...used all the extra porters they could get..." One of the porters on the line was injured and Favors was called upon to replace him on the run from Monett to Oklahoma City for a short period of time. Favors stopped off at Pierce City when, "...the other fellow went to work, and said that Mr. Quinn was going to give him a job on that end of the road."[268]

According to Barrett, William Favors had been waiting in Pierce City for two weeks when Gisele Wild was murdered. He indicated in his statement to the coroner's jury that Favors lodged with Lark and his wife Lulu. Barrett stated, "When he had money he stayed at Norris' place and slept at Monett. But he generally stayed at Joe Lark's."[269] The bloodhounds that were used in an attempt to track the murderer led to Joe Lark's home, which led many to believe Joe Lark was guilty, but the dogs may have well followed Favors' scent. Favors, according to Barrett, left Pierce City the morning after Gisele Wild's body was found. "He came down on a train from Monett and caught that

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266 *Ibid.*

267 E.H. Linzee, "Registration and Drawing For Opening of Kiowa and Comanche Country, 1901," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* Volume 25, No. 3 p. 289.

268 *State v. Lark*, 1901.

269 *Ibid.*

train and I never seen him again until the next morning. He wanted me to loan him my cap and he said he was going to Oklahoma to bring back an excursion train."[270]

When asked what led him to believe that William Favors committed the murder, Barrett responded, "Because he answered the description, and the fact that he had his pants rolled up and he was dirty." His pants were "not exactly wet but they were damp" which possibly indicated he had run through the creek near the scene of the murder. When questioned if anyone ever gave their opinion about Favors, Barrett responded, "Why I heard Pete Hampton and some of those colored people say that he was the colored man that answered that description." Apparently at some point after the murder was discovered, Favors talked about shaving off his mustache, after fellow blacks told him that he matched the description of the man sitting on the railroad trestle near the murder scene. Favors was told, "Why you are innocent and they will think you guilty if you shave."[271]

Still, Joe Lark was also implicated in the murder, and not only because the bloodhounds tracked someone to his home from the murder scene. J.E. Garrett, along with Marshal J.T. Johnson, former Marshal J.H. Vick, Aurora City Marshal Connor, and two other individuals searched the Lark premises because Lulu Lark, Joe's wife, had been heard telling individuals that Joe had suffered a nose bleed the day of the murder, leaving blood on his shirt. Suspecting that Lulu was protecting her husband, the party searched the home for evidence on Tuesday, August 20th, two days after the murder. The men found that a shirt had been burned in the stove. In addition, according to Garrett, a

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270 *Ibid.*
271 *Ibid.*

knife was found in a bedroom that bore evidence of blood on it. Aurora City Marshal Connor took it into custody for examination.[272]

The evidence led the coroner's jury to conclude that while Gisele Wild's murderer remained unknown, the evidence implicated Joe Lark, William Favors and Will Godley in her death. The irony in the presumed guilt of William Godley is that the testimony given to the coroner's jury mentioned Godley only a few times in regards to his participation in the craps game held on the day of the murder, and never in reference to any alleged role in the death of Gisele Wild. Having already been lynched, Will Godley was condemned for a second time, a conviction from which he could not escape.[273]

Despite the findings of the coroner's jury, both Favors and Lark prevailed, for when the evidence came before the jury in Lark's murder trail, there was enough room for reasonable doubt, despite what the *Empire* had to say, "it is about conceded by parties who had heard the evidence that there would certainly be a conviction."[274] On November 26, 1901, the jury acquitted Lark. The *Stotts City Sunbeam* sneered, "He will no doubt go now for the fields as he well knows the feelings of the people of Pierce City and Monett toward him and his guilt. He will not likely to attempt to take his old run as porter on a train through Pierce City."[275] Favors was released after Lark's acquittal when it became clear that there was insufficient evidence against him.[276] Favors declared upon his release he would be a "good niggah."[277] It is unclear where Joe Lark and William Favors went after their release. But it is certain they did not stay in Lawrence County, Missouri.

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272 *Ibid.*
273 *Ibid.*
274 *Pierce City Empire*, 25 November 1901.
275 *Stotts City Sunbeam*, 29 November 1901, p. 2.
276 Jason Navarro, "Under Penalty of Death: Pierce City's Night of Racial Terror," *Missouri Historical Review* 100, No. 2 (2006): 96.
277 *Pierce City Empire*, 26 November 1901.

Another battle was soon to be fought, one that surprised many in Pierce City, but one waged without violence. Local authorities had taken no action against members of the mob. In some cases, lynch mob members were prosecuted for their participation in Virginia and Georgia. [278] But this was not the case in southwestern Missouri. After the lynching in Pierce City, there was no mention of prosecution against members of the mob. A few newspaper editorials called for prosecution, but they were a vocal minority, and no legal action was taken by local authorities. But in late 1902, Sarah Godley, America Godley and Beedie Hampton, widows of the men killed by the Pierce City mob, filed suit in Jasper County, Missouri against several alleged mob participants. Each widow sought five thousand dollars as compensation for the death of their loved ones.[279] Sarah Godley's case was selected as the first to go to trial. It was miraculous that the widows were able to bring suit at all. As the *Joplin Daily Globe* speculated, "This case probably would have never been brought had none of the gentlemen who were made defendants not left Lawrence county. Had all of them remained there it would have been necessary to bring suit in that county which would not have been practical on account of the prejudice that which existed there against the negro."[280] John Rogers, one of the defendants, moved to Carthage in Jasper County. Thus the widows of French Godley, Will Godley and Pete Hampton eagerly seized upon this newly opened avenue for legal recourse.

At first, the suit was filed against twenty-one individuals, among them four members of the Tate family, two from the Decker family, Harrison Rogers, Edward Greer

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278 Brundage, *Lynching in the New* South, 94-95.

279 *Sarah Godley v. Rogers,* 1902, Jasper County Circuit Court, Jasper County Records Center, Carthage, Missouri.

280 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 21 February 1903, p. 8.

and Robert Hamilton. Prior to the trial, the lawyers for both the plaintiff and the defendants met at the law office of Thomas Carlin, former editor of the *Pierce City Empire*, to take depositions. Attorney John Taylor represented Sarah Godley, while Pierce City attorneys Joseph French and R.H. Davis represented the defendants.[281]

Norman Hudson and Edgar Hayden, young men who admitted that their occupation consisted of loafing, both testified that Harrison Rogers was with them on a camping trip on the Cowskin River in McDonald County, Missouri the day of the lynching. Herbert Vance, who also went on the camping trip, backed up the testimony of Hudson and Hayden as to the whereabouts of Harrison Rogers. John Taylor, in his cross-examinations of the three young men, repeatedly asked if they had spoken with the defendant's attorneys about what to say during the depositions. All three answered that they had not, but Taylor had his suspicions.

Walter Tate, one of the twenty-one defendants, was the subject of the next depositions taken. Henry Mollering testified that Tate was with him and several other men who set out for Neosho to look for Gisele Wild's murderer. After taking the morning train to Neosho on the day of the murder, some of the men, including Tate and Mollering, walked from Neosho to Granby by wagon road to look for the culprit.

Abe Casey, one of this group, gave similar testimony. He claimed, "Did not exactly anticipate any trouble between the whites and blacks except the man who did the work, did not think the colored people would be run out of town." The town, Casey recalled, was quiet when he returned that night. He watched as one of the bodies was retrieved from the ruins of French Godley's house. He assumed, from its size, that it was French. He remembered, "One side looked like a cannon ball had went through and came

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281 *Sarah Godley v. Rogers, 1902.*

out on the other." Both Abe Casey and Ross Cappock also recalled that William Guthrie, another defendant, went with them on their futile search for the murderer.[282]

As the depositions continued, witness testimony did not waver. According to the witnesses, none of the defendants had been in Pierce City during the lynching. Joseph Kuntz, who, along with his wife, testified that defendant William Abbott had been at their home during the violence had this to say, "I know a good many people about Peirce City. I would swear that I did not know a soul in that crowd, did not want to know them, to tell the truth." Kuntz remarked that, "After the thing was over I thought of the matter and was glad that I did not know anybody in the crowd. I do not mean to swear that there were no Peirce City people in the crowd. I did not examine them closely with a view of finding if there was anybody I knew."

According to Carrie Miner, her father, Charles Decker, never left home the night of the lynching. Decker's neighbor, Rady Crawford, backed up her testimony. W.H. Owen's father, Samuel Owen, swore his son was not a member of the mob. He and his son, Owens testified, watched from his porch as three homes in the black section of town burned. They then went to bed. W.H. Owen's brother, however, admitted he and his brother watched as Will Godley was lynched by the mob, but then they returned home.[283]

Defendants Taylor Tate, William Tate, Ed Greer and Frank Sheets also had relatives and neighbors who testified they were not in the mob that night. William Abbott and William Guthrie were meagerly represented in testimony by friends, family and neighbors. But none of the depositions helped distance A.J. LeGrande and John Rogers from the mob. By the time the case reached trial, four men remained defendants from the

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282 *Sarah Godley v. Rogers, 1902.*
283 *Ibid.*

original twenty-one: William Abbott, A.J. LeGrande, John Rogers, and William Guthrie.[284]

William Abbott, twenty-six years old at the time of the lynching, worked as a day laborer, presumably for his father, a brick manufacturer. Born in Tennessee, he lived at home in Pierce City with his parents. J.A. LeGrande, a coal dealer, was born in Virginia in 1856. He likely carried memories of the Civil War with him on his westward trek to Missouri. His contemporary, William Guthrie, was born in Illinois in early 1855. Like LeGrande, Guthrie had a respectable job, as he listed his occupation as "engineer, stationary." John Rogers, the man whose decision to move to Jasper County sparked the lawsuit, was a married thirty-nine-year-old grocer born in Alabama.[285]

Three of the men were who went to trial were Southerners by birth, then, while one was a Northerner. One, Abbott, was single. The other three were married with children. Three of the men held well-to-do jobs, while Abbott, the youngest of the quartet, was a mere day laborer.

The first stage of the lawsuit got off to a rough start for Sarah Godley. During the deposition process in Pierce City, plaintiff attorney John Taylor called for only one witness to give testimony at a time, as the rule of law directed. Defense attorney Joseph French objected and demanded that all the witnesses remain in the room, contrary to the law. Notary Thomas Carlin sided with French.[286] All of the witnesses were allowed to stay and listen to the testimony given by others. Presumably, the witnesses could alter their own testimony based on the previous accounts. In an earlier failed motion to

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284 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 19 February 1903, p. 8.

285 *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Population Schedule,* "Lawrence County" (National Archives Microfilm Publication T623, roll 870).

286 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 20 February 1903, p. 8.

suppress the pre-trial depositions, plaintiff attorney John Taylor alleged that, "refusing to have the said witnesses separated was peculiarly unjust and unfair to the plaintiff."[287] His co-counsel, George E. Grayston, sneered that an attorney who believed in his witnesses would not have objected to the rule.[288]

The trial began on February 18, 1903 in Judge Dabbs' division of the Jasper County Circuit Court. Sarah Godley was the first witness to take the stand. The *Joplin Daily Globe* remarked upon her aged appearance and her apparent illiteracy. The *Globe* reporter failed to take into account that despite being only fifty-seven years old, Sarah Godley had lived a hard life. Born into slavery, she was accustomed to hard work with little reward. She helplessly watched as a mob killed her husband and son and then fled into the darkness as all that she knew burned to the ground behind her. It was no wonder Sarah Godley looked old. She applied to sue as a poor person, having little to her name.[289] Unfortunately, the newspaper did not elaborate on her eyewitness account of the mob's actions. The reporter only noted that she stated she had recognized the four defendants in the mob that night and that French Godley had been her only means of financial support.[290]

Another black witness, Shedrack "Dock" Brinson, the neighbor of French and Sarah Godley, testified. He stated that he saw Abbott and LeGrande in the mob, as well as other men who were not defendants, the night of the lynching. Brinson lived, according to the *Globe*, in Joplin at the time of the trial. Charles Hunter, another black survivor, took the stand. Hunter, Pierce City's eloquent schoolmaster, had found a job

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287 *Sarah Godley v. Rogers, 1902.*
288 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 20 February 1903, p. 8.
289 *Sarah Godley v. Rogers, 1902.*
290 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 19 February 1903, p. 8.

teaching at a Joplin colored school after he fled Pierce City. He, like Brinson, was near the Godley residence at the time of the attack. Hunter testified he saw LeGrande at the head of crowd and that he was holding either a club or a gun in his hand.[291]

Next, one of French Godley's sons testified, traveling from the relative safety of Kansas City to do so. The son's name was not given, but it may have been Joel Godley. French's other son, Wiley, stayed in the area after the lynching. He stated he saw the mob at Pete Hampton's house and watched as it approached French Godley's home in search of Pete. He then wisely hid in a nearby basement as the mob drew closer, but was able to hear LeGrande say, "Help, Mord, help." He may have been hit by one of his comrade's stray bullets during the fracas.

French's son was then asked if he had attempted to kill John Rogers in revenge for the lynching. The previous summer, an assailant had fired at Rogers through the window of Rogers's home, but failed to hit his target. The gunman fled and was never apprehended. The witness denied he had attempted to kill Rogers or made threats about traveling to Pierce City to kill members of the mob.[292]

Will Young, a black lime kiln worker, testified he watched the mob lynch Will Godley. He then went home, which was near Pete Hampton's residence, and watched the mob call for Pete to come out. After Pete failed to appear, Young then bravely followed the mob "at a safe distance" to the home of French Godley. It was there, he said, that he heard LeGrande's voice above the din of the throng. LeGrande had run into Young earlier after the discovery of Gisele Wild's body and, according to Young, asked Young

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291 *Ibid.*, 19 February 1903, p. 8.

292 *Ibid.*, 19 February 1903, p. 8. When the witness stated he heard LeGrande call out, "Help, Mord, help," he may have heard LeGrande say, "Help, Lord, help." It is also possible that the newspaper made an error in the printing process. No one named "Mord" is referenced as a mob participant in any of the surviving newspaper accounts.

who murdered the young woman. Young responded he did not know, to which LeGrande reportedly replied, "If you know you had better tell, for if we find out who committed the act it will go as hard with you as any of them." After such a threat, it is surprising that Young was bold enough to follow the mob.[293]

Jessie Hampton, Sarah Godley's sister-in-law, was next on the witness stand. She testified that the morning after the lynching, she was with Sarah Godley at the ruins of the Godley home when LeGrande walked up. He allegedly told the two women, in sight of the charred bodies still in the ashes, "They called for Pete Hampton and as soon as they called shots were fired at the crowd and the crowd returned the fire. They did not intend to kill French Godley; they intended to kill Pete Hampton." Hampton noted that LeGrande's statement led her to believe that LeGrande was a member of the mob. After her testimony, the plaintiff's attorney rested their case.[294]

The defense immediately filed a demurrer. During testimony, it was divulged that both Sarah and French Godley had been previously married to other individuals. The defense pounced upon this. They argued that there was no evidence that Sarah Godley had divorced her first husband, thus she was not legally married to French Godley. As a result, the case did not have a leg to stand on. But Judge Dabbs overruled the defense's demurrer. He pointed out, "in order to sustain their motion it would be necessary to show that one or both had been married before, that the husband of Mrs. Godley was still living and that no divorce had been granted." The court then adjourned for the day.[295]

The next day, when court resumed, the defendants took the stand. LeGrande was the first to take the witness chair. He immediately claimed he was at the Godley home in

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293 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 19 February 1903, p. 8.
294 *Ibid.*
295 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 19 February 1903, p. 8.

an attempt to, "prevent any harm coming to the old people." LeGrande recounted the day of the lynching. He spent most of the day of the lynching unloading lumber. Later that evening he was sworn in as a deputy marshal to, "preserve the peace and quiet of the city." After LeGrande retrieved his rifle from home, he returned in time to find a mob of people in the city streets. He claimed he did not know there was a black man in the crowd until he saw Will Godley strung up over the balcony of the Lawrence Hotel. LeGrande heard a voice call out, "Let's go get Pete Hampton." The mob surged in the direction of Hampton's home. LeGrande followed. He allegedly pleaded with the leader of the mob to not harm the "old people." The mob leader then pointed a gun in LeGrande's face and retorted, "Who in the hell is running this affair?" LeGrande backed off, and then telephoned the, "light plant to turn out the lights to prevent the negroes from killing members of the mob." His phone call did not go unheeded.[296] The previous day's testimony indicated that the city lights were off at the time of the attack on the Godley home. The *Globe* reported, "All the witnesses testified that there was no moon on the night of the killing and that there were no electric lights close." The oil used to burn the Godley home provided all the light the mob needed to view their ghastly work. [297]

LeGrande had only a few more things to say while on the witness stand. He declared that he had always been on friendly terms with the black citizens of Pierce City. In fact, LeGrande recalled, Sarah Godley had carried his daughter home after she was thrown by a horse. Lastly, he professed, he did not know a single soul in the mob that night. When questioned where he thought the members of mob had come from, he

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296 *Ibid.*, 20 February 1903, p. 8.
297 *Ibid.*, 19 February 1903, p. 8.

expressed his belief that they came from "the east." LeGrande undoubtedly referred to Monett.[298]

Stonewall Pritchett, one of Sarah Godley's attorneys, cross-examined LeGrande. When asked how he planned to stop a mob with only a handful of recently sworn in deputy marshals, the defendant replied, "Persuasion." LeGrande denied threatening Will Young at the lime kiln. He also insisted he had not spoken with Jessie Hampton or Sarah Godley as they stood near the charred ruins of Mrs. Godley's home. LeGrande repeated that he did not have a gun while at the Godley residence. Nor did he call for Pete Hampton to come out as witnesses for the plaintiff testified.

LeGrande was not the only slippery defendant to take the stand. John Rogers swore he was at home the night of the lynching. Several witnesses were introduced to support his claim. William Abbott did the same. The plaintiffs produced Robert Hampton, the brother of Pete Hampton, as a rebuttal witness. Hampton stated he was in city hall when Abbott stormed in with gun in hand. Abbott, he said, pointed the weapon at Eugene Barrett. The defendant then allegedly bellowed, "There is the ---- ---- ---- ----, shoot him!"[299]

William Guthrie, who, like LeGrande was sworn in as a deputy marshal the night of the lynching, stated he was only at the Godley residence to protect them from harm. Under cross-examination, Guthrie asserted that intervention, "would have been of no use; that there was a crowd of several hundred men there and that it would have been impossible for a few deputy marshals to do anything with them." Just after a shot was fired from the second story window of the Godley home, Guthrie was hit in the arm by a

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298 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 20 February 1903, p. 8.
299 *Ibid.*, 20 February 1903, p. 8

bullet, and left to find a surgeon. He did not see the gun battle and fire that ensued. Lastly, witnesses testified as to the good character of the defendants and the poor reputation of black witnesses Will Young and Robert Hampton. Final arguments followed.

Defense attorney Joseph French stood up from his chair and began. Although it was a civil case that the jury was participating in, French said, there were overtones of a criminal case. If any of the four defendants paid even one dollar in damages to Sarah Godley, he mused, they could then be held criminally liable for the death of French Godley and Pete Hampton. Besides, French asked the jury, were they, "going to believe the testimony of crap shooting negroes or that of good reputable citizens." He also emphasized that French Godley, at the time of his death, was unable to earn a living. Attorney French then coldly added, "Sarah Godley...was better off by reason of his having been killed." Plaintiff attorney John Taylor and defense attorney R.H. Davis followed.[300]

Stonewall Pritchett, attorney for Sarah Godley, delivered the closing argument. He stalked the courtroom, packed with people from Pierce City. There were also a sizeable number of African-Americans in the audience who had once called the town home. Pritchett turned on defendant LeGrande, seated close to the jury box. They locked eyes. Pritchett thundered, "Why did you not attempt to protect the colored people from the mob by requesting the mob go to their homes?" He then turned on William Abbott and growled, "Abbott, why didn't you remain at home and protect your own family?" It was, the *Globe* remarked, "an excellent address."[301] The jury faced a decision.

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300 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 20 February 1903, p. 8.
301 *Ibid.*, 20 February 1903, p. 8.

The next morning, on February 20th, 1903, the all-white jury reached its verdict. It found in favor of the defendants after only "a few ballots." Sarah Godley, the widows of Pete Hampton and Will Godley, and the former black residents of Pierce City had lost. Had she won, the *Globe* speculated, "many other cases of a similar nature would be brought."[302] Despite their loss, Godley's attorneys immediately filed a motion for a new trial. The motion alleged errors in the jury instructions, juror misconduct and racial prejudice. Jurors Henry Sapp and W.A. Brittain, despite instructions from the court not to do so, spoke about the case outside of the jury room. In regards to racial prejudice, the motion stated, "That the verdict against her was the result of passion and prejudice against her because of the fact she is a negro, that husband was a negro and that her witnesses were all negroes."[303]

But Judge Dabbs ruled that the trial had been fair. No new trial was necessary. The cases filed by America Godley and Beedie Hampton were subsequently dismissed.[304] The not guilty verdict embodied a particularly extreme mechanism of social control. It was a message to the black community that the senseless killing of blacks was acceptable to certain members of the white community.

Michael Pfeifer, in his study of lynching, notes that in the South, white planters often manipulated the local criminal justice system for, "the social control of an African-American labor force." Such action was more effective than lynching as Southern planters did not wish to displace their valuable black workforce.[305] In southwest Missouri, the justice system, while not free of racial prejudice, seemed to work better for

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302 *Ibid.*, 21 February 1903, p. 8.
303 *Sarah Godley v. Rogers, 1902.*
304 *Ibid.*
305 Pfeifer, *Rough Justice*, 22.

black defendants. Lark, a black railroad porter tried by an all-white jury in the very county in which Gisele Wild was murdered, walked free. But, ironically, it might have been the thoroughness of the mob's work that saved Lark. The fate of a lone black man paled in comparison to the mass expulsion of Pierce City's African-American community. Additionally, because blacks in Pierce City were not a vital part of the area's labor force, the local economy did not suffer as a result. This perhaps allowed white anger to cool off by the time Lark was acquitted.

Lark's social position might also have helped save him. In *The Promise of the New South* Edward Ayers argues that lynchings often targeted black transients and strangers.[306] Exactly when Lark arrived in Pierce City remains unknown. But as a railroad porter, part of the black economic elite in rural areas, he was a well known figure in Pierce City. The fact that Lark was not a transient may well have saved his life when he came before a jury. As the *Joplin Daily Globe* put it, "It is not at all reasonable that such a man as the Frisco porter would have any hand in a crime of that atrocious character."[307]

Lark's case was followed by area newspapers. The *Joplin Daily Globe* was one of the many who reported the latest developments in the case. When Lark was found not guilty, the jury's decision may have struck some of the paper's readers as just another example of a weak, slow, ineffective legal system. The tedious, bureaucratic legal system had allowed passion to subside by the time Lark went to trial and once again a black criminal was permitted to go free. As a result, the memory of Joe Lark's acquittal may

306 Ayers, *Lynching in the New South*, 156-158.
307 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 23 August 1901.

have sparked members of the Joplin mob in 1903 to act, ensuring that another alleged black murderer would not walk.

Joplin: "Have Mercy on My Soul"

On the afternoon of April 26, 1903, Deputy Marshal O. F. Souder sat in the Joplin, Missouri city jail reading his copy of, "Correct Dress for Policemen." He was assigned to lock-up duty. A murmur of voices floated in on the early spring breeze. Souder sat up. The murmurs grew louder. Alarmed, Souder grabbed his rifle, trying to think of who was in lock-up that, "the people wanted to lynch." He was fearful that "Joplin was to be the scene of another necktie party." The sound of voices became more distinct as the crowd drew closer to the jail. Suddenly, a large group of almost one hundred women with parasols in hand marched into the jail, accompanied by a male escort. A lone voice called out, "Mr. Policeman, we want to see the place where the mob broke into the jail."

Relieved, Souder put away his gun. The women had traveled all the way from Columbus, Kansas. Souder gave the women a tour of the jail where just eleven days earlier Thomas Gilyard, a young black migrant, had been dragged from his cell and hanged just a short distance away. The visitors insisted on seeing the spot where the mob had broken through the jail wall to seize their victim. The ladies thanked Souder profusely for his time, then departed, satisfied. Deputy Marshal Souder returned to his chair and remarked of the visit, "Gee, but it's lucky we had this here shack scrubbed out last week."[308]

It might have been the only peaceful mob in the history of Joplin. The town, founded in 1873, built its fortunes upon the lead and zinc deposits beneath it. Prior to the

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308 *Joplin Daily News Herald*, 26 April 1903, p. 7.

Civil War, individuals had engaged in pick and shovel mining in the area, but it was not until the 1870s that the Joplin mining industry began its journey to modernization.[309] Having emerged after the Civil War, Joplin was one of many cities that sprang up during the New South period, and the railroads played a crucial role in its development. They provided Joplin's booming lead and zinc mining industry access to distant markets.

Joplin's early days were rough. The fortunes of the city rose and fell with economic depressions that came and went in the late nineteenth century.[310] In 1875, Joplin reportedly had two hundred and twenty-five businesses.[311] In 1880, Joplin was home to 7,038 residents, 246 of whom were African-Americans.[312] By 1890, the population swelled to almost 10,000 inhabitants. By the end of that decade, its population had reached 26,023.[313]

Joplin was home to thousands of men and women from all across the nation who came to eke out a better living from the treacherous mines. Among those who flooded into the city were blacks from across the country. An examination of the 1900 Federal Census shows that many came from Southern states such as Kentucky, South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana. Others came from Kansas and Texas.[314] Of the 26,023 residents of Joplin, 773 were African-Americans.[315]

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309 F.A. North, *The History of Jasper County, Missouri* (Des Moines, IA: Mills & Co., 1883), 393.

310 Dolph Shaner, *The Story of Joplin* (New York: Stratford House, 1948), 30-33.

311 Lawrence O. Christensen and Gary R. Kremer, *A History of Missouri: Volume IV, 1875 to 1919*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 40-41.

312 United States Census Office, *Compendium of the Tenth Census* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), 392.

313 Christensen and Kramer, *A History of Missouri*, 92.

314 *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900.* Washington, D.C.: "Jasper County" (National Archives Microfilm Publication T623, roll 865).

315 Dept. of Commerce, Thirteenth Census of the United States 1910 Vol. 2 Population 1910 Alabama - Montana, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913). Table I - Composition and Characteristics of the Population for the State and for Counties, 625.

Unlike whites, however, blacks did not work in the mines. Like the railroad industry, the mining industry was segregated. An examination of the 1900 Federal Census reveals that only a handful of blacks worked as miners. Those few may have worked their own claims. A visitor to the area in 1910 remarked that he was, "...surprised to find that there are practically no Negroes at work in the mines of Joplin. What Negroes are there are employed in other occupations than mining. There are scarcely any foreigners."[316]

Mining was not the only industry that was segregated. On April 2, just days before the lynching of Thomas Gilyard, seventy white workers at the Freeman Foundry in Joplin threatened to strike when J.W. Freeman hired Sidney Martin, a black man. The workers demanded Martin be fired. A worker told a *Joplin Daily Globe* reporter , " ...while they would not raise such strenuous objections to the one colored man, they believe that if one is allowed to work here it will be but a short time until more are employed, and they want it understood right in the beginning that colored men are not wanted."[317] Freeman promised workers Martin would be gone by the first of May. Instead of industry, blacks worked as cooks, waiters, barbers, porters, servants, hod carriers and dressmakers. Many were boarders.[318]

If whites held better paying jobs in the mines, they also stood a better chance of losing their lives to cave-ins, premature explosions and bad air. As a result, the miners sought the entertainment and pleasure of Joplin's many saloons, drinking away their pay

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316 Arrell M. Gibson, *Wilderness Bonanza: The Tri-State District of Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1972), 202.

317 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 3 April 1903, p. 2.

318 *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900.* Washington, D.C.: "Jasper County" (National Archives Microfilm Publication T623, roll 865).

almost as fast as they had received it. Violence, fueled by the alcohol, followed. The town could be as dangerous aboveground as beneath.[319] Thus it was no surprise when news spread that a young black man had been lynched on the streets of Joplin. It was not the first. In 1885, a mob had lynched a white criminal, Joe Thornton, who had killed a popular police officer.[320]

Thomas Gilyard's ill-fated story began on the evening of April 14, 1903, when Joplin hardware merchant Sam Bullock arrived at the Joplin Police Department. He reported the theft of two pistols and aired his suspicion that two "colored" men were the culprits. The men had visited Bullock's store prior to the theft. A black man had approached Bullock with information as to the whereabouts of the two suspects. According to the informant, the men were hiding in the Kansas City Southern railyards, located in north Joplin. Officer Ben May, Bullock, and the informant set out for the railyards.

Just minutes after the trio left the police station, Officer Theodore Leslie arrived. Leslie, a married father of four children, had earned the reputation as a fearless officer. The thirty-six year old worked one of the toughest beats in the city and had been on the police force exactly one year. After he reported to Night Constable Loughlin, Loughlin told Leslie to join Officer May in searching the railyards. Unable to find Officer May, Leslie began his search in the railyards alone.[321]

As night fell, Leslie noticed an unfamiliar black man standing inside a stock car. The officer cautiously approached the stranger and proceeded to pat him down. Just as the officer finished his search, a single shot rang out from inside the boxcar. Leslie drew

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319 Shaner, *The Story of Joplin*, 62-71.
320 *Ibid.*, 67.
321 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 15 April 1903, p. 1.

his revolver and fired back into the shadows a total of eight times, emptying his revolver at his unseen assailant. After his last shot, however, the officer fell to the ground mortally wounded, struck once in the eye and once in the chest. A black man then jumped down from inside the boxcar and fled north down the railroad tracks into the darkness, away from the lights of Joplin.

The gunfire aroused the attention of bystanders watching roughly one hundred yards away. They saw Leslie crumple to the ground. One of them, seventeen-year-old Ike Clark, ran to the fallen officer's side. After determining there was nothing he could do for Leslie, Clark and the other three men set off in pursuit of the officer's killer. After getting within fifty feet of the assailant, Clark fired two rounds, only to receive return fire. Clark fired again, but his shots failed to hit his target, allowing Officer Leslie's murderer to escape. The men returned to the scene of the shooting to discover the first black man in the custody of Officer Rhuhart, whose grasp he fell into as he fled the scene. The man was escorted to the city jail as news of the shooting spread quickly through Joplin. Citizens were not going to let Leslie's killer escape.[322]

Within an hour of the murder, hundreds of armed men flooded the streets of Joplin. Many visited the scene of the crime, which was roughly one hundred yards north of Broadway Street. Ripples of excitement and fear ran through the crowds. A request was sent to the marshal of neighboring Webb City to bring his bloodhounds to track the murderer. The hounds arrived by nine o'clock that night and five hundred eager men stood ready to follow them. The dogs were taken to the crime scene and found the scent of the suspected murderer. In the meantime, officers questioned the black man whom Officer Leslie had searched prior to his death, but the black man was of little help. He

322 *Ibid.*, 15 April 1903, p. 1.

claimed that he did not know the man who shot Officer Leslie as they had only been acquainted for five minutes before the officer arrived. Nor had he learned the man's name. The officers, it was reported, believed he told them the truth "after all sorts of attempts to get the negro to change his story."[323]

Joplin's police force had faced loss before. Two years earlier, on April 23, 1901, Officers Bert Brannon and Charles Sweeney had been shot as they attempted to arrest a gang of vagrants. Ironically, the officers were killed in the same railyard where Officer Leslie later died, as they shared the same tough North End beat. None of the assailants were ever apprehended.[324]

This time, the citizens of Joplin did not allow the alleged murderer to escape. Nor did they act alone. Citizens from neighboring towns came to Joplin in the wake of Officer Leslie's death. The *Joplin Daily Globe* enticed many with the promise of a $100 reward for the capture of Leslie's murderer which quickly swelled to $1650.[325] For others, however, the matter went beyond money. It was a chance to partake in a thrilling manhunt, one in which the mob's quarry was the most vulnerable prey of all, a lone black man.

Webb City Marshal Marquiss, his bloodhounds, and a group of twelve armed men followed the man's scent three miles outside the city. Burl Robison, who handled the dogs, slowed their progress. Robison, a rather rotund man, could not ride in a buggy so long as the dogs kept to the railroad tracks. By eleven o'clock the search was called off. Irritated by the delay, Joplin officers telegraphed the Vernon County sheriff in Lamar,

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323 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 15 April 1903, p. 1.
324 Shaner, *The Story of Joplin*, 67.
325 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 15 April 1903, p. 1.

Missouri to bring his dogs to continue the search. In the meantime, men gathered in the city streets, standing in small groups. It was a long night for all.[326]

Rumors ran rampant through the streets of Joplin the next morning. Sightings of a strange black man were reported in Asbury, sixteen miles north. Groups of volunteers from Joplin, Asbury, Carl Junction and Galena spread out to hunt Leslie's killer. Passions flared when a large black man reportedly said he sided with the actions of Officer Leslie's murderer. Immediately, a handful of men seized him. The men dragged the unnamed black man several blocks before they whipped and severely beat him. At one point, rumors swirled that the killer was surrounded in a brush pile in the railyards. Dozens of armed men rushed to the scene only to be disappointed. The *Joplin Daily News Herald* reported, "Other Joplin men are going to all towns within a radius of fifty miles to stir up enthusiasm in the chase."[327] The mobs of men who lingered at the Joplin police station did not have long to wait.

A black servant girl, Cora Lane, who witnessed the shooting, reported that the individual who fled from the boxcar appeared to be wounded. After he crossed a nearby iron bridge, Lane said she observed, "he was limping as if it pained him to walk."[328] B.C. Drake, who lived just outside Joplin, reported that a black man approached him just an hour after the shooting. The man's trouser legs were bloody and wet. He begged to stay at Drake's barn for the night, but Drake refused to help him. G.W. Smith also reported seeing a "negro" pass near Midway Park that evening. The stranger caught Smith's

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326 *Ibid.*, 15 April 1903, p. 1.
327 *Joplin Daily News Herald*, 16 April 1903, p. 3.
328 *Ibid.*

attention because he forded Turkey Creek instead of taking the more convenient bridge.[329]

Between three and four o'clock on the afternoon of April 16, 1903, just one day after the death of Officer Leslie, his alleged killer was captured. The man was discovered in the Bauer Brothers slaughterhouse by Lee Fullerton and M.R. Bullock. The slaughterhouse, near Midway Park, was just off the St. Louis – San Francisco Railway line. Fullerton, a Bauer Brothers employee, told the *Joplin Daily Globe* that he had just finished feeding the livestock at the slaughterhouse when he encountered a black man walking up the hill towards him. His presence struck Fullerton as unusual as the slaughterhouse was in an out-of-the way location. He admitted to the reporter, "I was just the least frightened at first for the fellow was one of the meanest looking men I ever saw." Fullerton called out to the man who then approached Fullerton to ask if he could stay at the slaughterhouse as he had been in a shootout. He reportedly promised to befriend Fullerton one day and that he would not harm anything at the slaughterhouse. Fullerton, alone and unarmed, agreed. He had noticed that the black man was armed with "a big gun."[330]

The two sat and talked until M.R. Bullock arrived. Bullock, who lived nearby, conferred with Fullerton outside the slaughterhouse. The two agreed that the black man inside fit the description of Officer Leslie's assailant. Fullerton and Bullock went back inside the slaughterhouse. Fullerton began to cut tallow near the man as Bullock stood nearby. Fullerton suddenly lunged out with his knife, bringing it to within an inch of the stranger's throat. As the man tried to pull his Colt .38 revolver, Bullock knocked it from

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329 *Ibid.*

330 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 16 April 1903, p. 2.

his hand. "After we had the negro's gun we had no trouble with him." The pair loaded the black man into a wagon and took him into Joplin.[331]

As the men made their way to town, the prisoner admitted he was in the boxcar that Officer Leslie approached, but that he was not alone. Two other black men and one white man were also in the car, he claimed. One of the others shot Leslie, he asserted. As the wagon rolled into Joplin, men watched quietly, eyes locked on the prisoner.[332] Shortly after his arrival, at a quarter past four o'clock, "a shout went up, from somewhere, nobody perhaps knew where. But that shout echoed far and wide. 'They have the murderer' was the cry."[333]

After the man was taken into custody at the Joplin police department, Officer Frank Belford sat down to interview him. The young black man stated his name was Thomas Gilyard and that he had just arrived the day before from Mississippi. As Officer Belford conducted the interview, crowds began to form in the streets. Sheriff Owen and Mayor Trigg, sensing trouble, ordered all saloons closed for two hours. The two men hoped to keep the furious rabble in check, but instead, left angry men without a place to congregate. Large mobs of men gathered near the jail as did women and children. A lone voice called out, "Get a rope!" Another voice cried, "Hang the nigger!" Nervous, Thomas Gilyard continued his interview with Officer Belford. He admitted he was in the rail car when Officer Leslie approached, but that there were three other men present in the car. Gilyard denied he fired on Leslie. Someone outside shouted, "Hang the murderer!"[334]

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331 *Ibid.*
332 *Ibid.*
333 *Joplin Daily News Herald*, 16 April 1903, p. 1.
334 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 16 April 1903, p. 1.

Within half an hour of Gilyard's arrest, the streets of Joplin were packed with an estimated two thousand people. Tension ran high as men clustered together on street corners, talking to one another in hushed voices, their faces grim and strained. The crowds continued to grow. Officers in the city jail, apprehensive at the size of the mob and the continued calls for violence, moved Gilyard to a separate cell. Fearing the mob might storm the jail, they ensured Gilyard was alone, as they did not want, "the wrong prisoner taken."[335]

Joplin's City Attorney, twenty-eight-year-old Perl Decker, pushed his way through the throng of people. Decker, a former oratory champion at Park College, addressed the crowd from the steps of the jail. In a strong, clear voice he called upon the crowd to let "the law run its course." Decker reminded the men and women gathered before him that Gilyard might not be guilty. The tension that had built up over the last few hours appeared to subside. The *Globe* remarked that he "had great influence over the crowd." Two hundred individuals who had cried for blood turned away from Decker and began to leave. Decker's silver tongue still held plenty of charm.[336]

But whatever spell Decker had woven was soon broken. Another group of individuals stepped forward to stir up the mob once more. These men were, "...as equally determined as the leaders who preceded them." Joplin Mayor John C. Trigg and Joplin Mayor-elect Cunningham took over from Decker and appealed for the crowds to leave. The crowd listened for a few minutes, only to turn a collective deaf ear.[337] Someone barked out, "Break the jail down!"[338] Men, women, and children gathered in front of the

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335 *Ibid.*
336 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 16 April 1903, p. 1.
337 *Ibid.*
338 *Joplin Daily News Herald*, 16 April 1903, p. 1.

jail were shoved out of the way as several men rushed through the crowd with a ten foot long battering ram. The men began to pound away at the wall of the city jail. It was five o'clock in the afternoon. Thomas Gilyard had been in police custody for only about an hour when the men began their brutal assault on the jail.[339]

The men ferociously battered at the wall near the police court room. Their efforts were stymied by an iron door. Not to be denied, the attackers moved to the east side of the jail where they continued to ram the building. When police officers confiscated one battering ram, another soon appeared in the hands of yet another group of determined men. Sweat drenched the shirts of those who heaved the ram over and over again. Within a matter of ten minutes, the wall was breached.[340] Men flooded into the jail, tossing aside police officers who attempted to intervene. Members of the crowd began battering the lock on Thomas Gilyard's cell door with a sledge hammer. In just a few moments, Gilyard had been seized by the mob.[341]

The *Joplin Daily Globe* and the *Joplin Daily News Herald* provided different accounts of Gilyard's last moments in the jail. Both make it clear that all hell broke loose when the wall came down. The *Globe* reported that Gilyard lay as if asleep while members of the mob worked to unlock his cell. As soon as the cell door was opened, Gilyard reportedly sprang to his feet. He lunged at his attackers and "fought like a demon."[342] The *Herald*, however, reported that when the cell door was breached, "Thomas Gilyard, from the floor where he lay, looked at those who came after him with a face from which hope had fled." The reporter described Gilyard's attackers, "...like

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339 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 16 April 1903, p. 1.
340 *Ibid.*
341 *Joplin Daily News Herald*, 16 April 1903, p. 1.
342 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 16 April 1903, p. 1.

devouring wolves..." Despite Gilyard's powerful build "...he was tossed about like a feather in the sea of humanity of which he was now the center."[343]

Just before Gilyard was taken from his cell, he told the *Herald* reporter his name and that he was twenty years old. Gilyard managed to gasp that he was on his way from Murphsyburg, Illinois to Asbury, Missouri to work on a railroad gang. According to Gilyard, he had worked on railroad section gangs for the entirety of his brief adult life. This is the only substantial information, besides his brief interview with Officer Belford, as to how Gilyard ended up in Joplin.[344]

Gilyard was quickly dragged into an alley east of the jail and onto Second Street. The mob surrounded him from all sides. Arms reached out to hit him, legs kicked at him. Desperately, Gilyard fought to free himself to fight back, but his effort was useless. The mob now numbered an estimated three thousand participants. Even if he broke free, there was nowhere to go. As the *Globe* described the scene, "Men shouted and women and children screamed."[345] Thomas Gilyard fell to his knees. He asked to be allowed to say something before he was lynched. "Gemmen, I knows I's done wrong, and I knows I got to die, but lemme pray. Yes, for God's sake, lemme pray." The mob ignored his pleas. As he was dragged down the street, the mob paused again. "Did you kill Theodore Leslie?" "Lor' gemmen, I didn't kill him. If you kill me, you's killin' an innocent man."[346] The men holding Gilyard began running with their captive, then suddenly stopped at the corner of Wall Avenue and Second Street, only to find that the man with rope had been lost in the crowd. Men and children scrambled up onto nearby roofs and climbed trees to

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343 *Joplin Daily News Herald*, 16 April 1903, p. 1.
344 *Ibid.*
345 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 16 April 1903, p. 1.
346 *Joplin Daily News Herald*, 16 April 1903, p. 1.

obtain a better view. Women with their parasols stood on tiptoe to try to see what was going on.[347] Dr. Francis E. Rohan struggled to stop the mob, but to no avail.[348]

As the man with the rope struggled to reach Gilyard, Perl Decker rode through the screaming mob on horseback, pushing aside those who stood in his way. The young attorney had not given up on saving Gilyard's life. He called to the mob to return Gilyard to jail. Decker again insisted Gilyard might be innocent. He had Ike Clark, the seventeen-year-old carpenter who witnessed Leslie's death, hoisted on the horse. From this vantage point, Clark tried to tell the crowd that Gilyard was not the man he had shot at, and definitely not the man who murdered Leslie. His testimony fell on deaf ears.[349]

Mayor-elect Cunningham stood in a wagon and again asked the mob to stop. He, too, asked that Thomas Gilyard be returned to jail until it could be proven he was the murderer. The mob seemed to pause but then a sudden roar of protest signaled its rejection of Cunningham's efforts.[350]

A rope snaked through the air as someone in the crowd tossed it at Gilyard. It landed on his shoulder. The reporter for the *Herald* recounted, "Those who saw Thomas Gilyard's face at that moment will never forget it." As men attempted to pull on the rope to hoist Gilyard into eternity, Cunningham tried to push them away, but failed. Dr. Jesse May shouted to Mayor-elect Tom W. Cunningham that he had cut the rope. Cunningham ordered May to cut the rope again. Cunningham then recounted that as one of lynchers was pulled from the rope, the man yelled at him, "Cunningham, you must be a negro

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347 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 16 April 1903, p. 1.
348 *Joplin Daily News Herald*, 16 April 1903, p. 1.
349 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 16 April 1903, p. 1.
350 *Ibid.*

lover!" The mayor-elect replied, "No, but I want justice."[351] E. D. Nix argued with the men preparing to hang Gilyard. When reason failed, Nix pulled out his knife, then began to cut the rope. When a man threatened to shoot him, however, Nix backed away.[352] Several voices bellowed, "Kill the next man who does that!" At last, a rope was placed around the condemned man's neck. Gilyard cried out, "Oh, God don't!" He fell to his knees and began to pray an inaudible prayer.[353]

At the same time, two men climbed the nearest telephone pole, their hands stretched out to the mob below. The other end of the rope was thrown up to one of the men and he draped the rope over the arm of the pole. The mob roared, "Up with him!" As reported by the *Globe*, Gilyard pleaded with his captors, "Lor' God knows dat I am innocent. Gemmen, I's got a father an' a mother. Please, foah de luhb o' massey, send foah my poor old mother before you kill me." As members of the mob on the ground began to pull at the rope to lift Gilyard, other men rushed forward. They grabbed on to the rope and hung on in "a tug of war" with those determined to lynch Gilyard. Among the men who fought to save Gilyard's life that day were Perl Decker, Dr. Francis E. Rohan, Raymond Dagley, Lee Yeakee, Bert Luther and several unnamed others who clung to the rope. But the men were savagely driven off and Gilyard was hoisted skyward. A metal spike on the pole hit Gilyard's head, but he did not respond if he felt any pain. His eyes closed, his jaw fell slack. Thomas Gilyard was dead.[354]

Gilyard, lynched at 5:50 in the afternoon, was taken down thirty minutes later. Judge Potter ordered Gilyard's body taken to the Joplin Undertaking Company to ensure

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351 *Ibid.*, 17 April 1903, p. 1.
352 *Ibid.*, April 17, 1903, p. 2.
353 *Joplin Daily News Herald*, 16 April 1903, p. 1.
354 *Ibid.*

it would not be mutilated.[355] But crowds lingered in the twilight, and a quiet hush fell over Joplin. Saloons, which had remained closed for two hours, reopened. Men began to drink. Just before 8 o'clock a few dozen paraded down Main Street. Many were reportedly from the mining camps just outside Joplin. As they marched, the men yelled out, "Hang the coons!" and "Down with the negroes!" They fired rifles and pistols into the night air. The growing mob demanded that all blacks leave Joplin at once. The *Globe* chillingly reported that, "As they swarmed down Main Street, over a hundred boys, ranging in age from seven and eight upward, followed in their wake and yelled like young demons." They pushed bystanders aside and knocked down street cars. The Joplin police attempted to intervene but to no avail. It was clear that, "there was a thirst for blood in that motley crowd that nothing else but rapine could slake." According to press accounts, city leaders asked businessmen to intervene, as was Mayor-elect Cunningham, but the mob ignored them.[356]

The Imperial Barbershop, which employed only black barbers, was one of the first businesses targeted by the crowd. A few barbers who were in the building made their escape out the back as men broke down the front door. Officer Ben May, who stood just across the street, ran to intervene. He jumped in front of the wild crowd and ordered them to leave. Disappointed to find there were no blacks in the shop, the mob left, but its members had embarked a new wave of violence.[357]

A white man known as "Hickory Bill" was arrested for disturbing the peace and firing his gun. He was taken to the city jail and locked up. When some members of the mob realized what had transpired, they marched to the jail, where they demanded

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355 *Ibid.*, 16 April, 1903, p. 1-2.
356 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 16 April 1903, p. 1.
357 *Ibid.*, 16 April 1903, p. 2.

Hickory Bill be released. The police refused. The mob then threatened to dynamite the jail. A brief standoff ensued in which a few individuals tried to reason with the angry crowd. After thirty minutes the police realized that the mob meant business. They reluctantly released Hickory Bill.[358]

The angry throng continued to grow in size as it roamed Joplin's downtown. Between Broadway and A Streets, the mob threw rocks and other objects, "at houses, through windows and at fleeing negroes." The aim of the mob was apparently good, "There is scarcely a whole window pane in a window." between the two streets. The crowd managed to overturn one house before it moved on.[359]

The mob fired pistols into the air as they boldly paraded unchallenged in the night air. The boisterous crowd provided adequate warning of their approach as they thundered, "White folks, get in line." They also warned, "White folks keep your lights burning." The crack of rifles and bursts of pistol fire were accompanied by the sound of glass breaking. Curiously, a quartet of young men followed the mob, singing songs that lightened the mood. Their repertoire went unrecorded.[360]

The horde of rioters swept past Fifth and Main Streets, headed for the black section of town located at the north end of Main Street.[361] The area had previously been inhabited by "lewd women" who were driven out by a mob just months earlier. After the prostitutes were chased out, black families moved in, including several from Pierce City. Some of Joplin's black residents had already fled earlier that day. The blacks who were chased from Pierce City undoubtedly knew that they were about to be caught up in

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358 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 16 April 1903, p. 2.
359 *Ibid.*, 16 April 1903, p. 2.
360 *Joplin Daily News Herald*, 16 April 1903, p. 2.
361 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 16 April 1903, p. 1.

another explosion of racial violence. They wisely fled before the mob called on them. Callers from Webb City and Galena phoned to let Joplin officials know that both cities had been inundated by a flood of black refugees, "as soon as possible after the mob began to form to hang the murderer of Theodore Leslie."[362]

Bob Carter was one of the first to leave shortly after the lynching. Carter told a reporter he left because the lynching brought back, "disagreeable memories" of a time when, "owing to a little unpleasantness some citizens of Granby forced him to stretch a new rope for several minutes about two years ago." According to the *Herald*, Carter went on to say, "Ah jes took one look at dat nigger when he went up in de aiah, cause I wanted to see how I looked once an' den I went home. Ah had my turn already."[363]

The mob torched six homes. The Joplin Fire Department raced to the scene to try to prevent the blaze from spreading. As the firemen frantically worked to stop the fire, members of the mob yelled and jeered at them. The mob returned to East Seventh Street, another black area of Joplin, and set more houses on fire.[364] At one of the fires, the firemen were "unable to do much good. As fast as a line of hose was strung the mob stuck knives into it."[365] In contrast to those at the north end of Main Street, blacks in this section of town, located between Seventh and Tenth Streets, reportedly felt "perfectly safe. They were taken by surprise."[366]

The *Carthage Evening Press* reported that as the mob attacked Joplin's black neighborhoods it was only then that the majority of black residents chose to flee. While the survivors of Pierce City may have left at the first signs of a mob, many blacks stayed,

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362 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 16 April 1903, p. 2.
363 *Joplin Daily News Herald*, 20 April 1903, p. 2.
364 *Ibid.*, 16 April 1903, p. 1.
365 *Ibid.*, 16 April 1903, p. 2.
366 *Ibid.*

thinking they were safe. As the mob ran rampant, though, Joplin's streets filled with blacks too scared to wait on trains to take them to safety. Instead, many left on foot with what little they could carry. Ike Beechum, a black resident of Carthage, told the *Press* reporter that his nephew was among those who fled Joplin at the last minute. When asked if his nephew arrived in Carthage by train from Joplin, Beechum replied, "Lord, no, he beat the cars – he came over a foot."[367]

Galena, Kansas, took on "somewhat of an emancipation day appearance" the night of the lynching. Others, however, "went far west" in the direction of Columbus and Baxter Springs. Those who remained anxiously inquired for the latest copy of the *Joplin Daily Globe* "to see what was done to the place."[368] Some of the refugees, it was reported, returned to Joplin the next day. Their return was bittersweet. Joplin was no longer home. The *Joplin Daily Globe* gave a "conservative estimate" of blacks who planned to leave and never return at around 200 individuals out of an estimated population of 700.[369] Unlike Pierce City or Monett, though, Joplin's ethnic cleansing would not be permanent. By 1910, 801 African-Americans lived in Joplin, up from 773 in 1900.[370]

The *Globe* noted that the homes burned by the mob belonged to some of Joplin's "best negroes."[371] One such example was that of "Aunt Lou," a car cleaner for the Missouri Pacific Railroad, who lived at 315 East Seventh Street. She had purchased the home with her hard-earned salary, only to have it destroyed by the mob. The homes of

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367 *Carthage Evening Press*, 16 April 1903, p. 6.
368 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 17 April 1903, p. 3.
369 *Ibid.*, 18 April 1903, p. 1.
370 Dept. of Commerce, *Thirteenth Census of the United States 1910 Vol. 2 Population 1910 Alabama - Montana,* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913). Table I - Composition and Characteristics of the Population for the State and for Counties, 1122.
371 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 17 April 1903, p. 1.

Joe Cox, Mary Davis and "Aunt Eliza" also lay in ruins. "Aunt Eliza," a Joplin resident for thirty years, stood on the corner of Third and Main Streets as five hundred volunteers called upon by Mayor John C. Trigg to prevent further mob violence marched past on April 16. Eliza, a red handkerchief on her head, bowed and saluted as they passed. But while Eliza stayed, others caught the train for Galena, Webb City, and other places thought to be safe.[372]

Carthage, the county seat of Jasper County, was on edge the night of the lynching. Sheriff Owen, who stayed in Joplin during the mob's wild frenzy, telephoned his deputies in Carthage to keep a lookout for any sign of mob activity there. Two black prisoners, Dan Bullard and Joseph Clark, were spirited to Carthage after they were arrested in Joplin shortly after Officer Leslie was killed. Both admitted that they were in the railcar with Thomas Gilyard before the shooting but insisted they played no part in the crime. They were fortunate to be taken out of the mob's reach, but Thomas Gilyard was not afforded the same privilege for reasons unknown. Owen ordered his deputies to take the prisoners from the jail and hide them when it became apparent that Thomas Gilyard was to be lynched. A handful of deputies and some hastily deputized citizens spirited the men from jail and hid them in Carthage. Whenever the men suspected their presence was detected, they moved the prisoners to a new location, hiding the men in three separate houses during the night.[373]

The *Press* reporter briefly interviewed Clark and Bullard. Bullard admitted he had patronized Sam Bullock's hardware store shortly before the theft of two pistols, but insisted that he was not involved in the crime. He blamed two other black men for the

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372 *Ibid.*, 17 April 1903, p. 2.
373 *Carthage Evening Press*, 16 April 1903, p. 6.

theft. Clark, allegedly the man Leslie searched just before the officer was shot, stated he did not know Gilyard. According to Clark, Gilyard was a "Mississippi levee negro" who was on his back to Missouri as a muleskinner somewhere down South. Gilyard told Clark that he was headed to Asbury to work on the Carthage and Western railroad just before Leslie appeared. Clark and Bullard lived to tell their tale. The Carthage mob Sheriff Owen anticipated never materialized.[374]

The *Carthage Evening Press* reported the early reaction of Monett and Pierce City, two of Southwest Missouri's most infamous towns, as news of the mob in Joplin spread. Both towns kept abreast of developments by telegram. Carthage resident J. W. Meredith, in Monett when the lynching occurred, reported that "at a drop of the hat a special train could have been organized" to go to Joplin. Several residents of Pierce City reportedly caught the first train to Joplin upon hearing the news. Another Carthage resident, Dr. L.E. Whitney, was on business in Pierce City when news of the mob reached the town. While in a hotel, Whitney overheard Pierce City residents as they discussed "the negro question." He interjected to suggest that blacks should not be treated harshly because of their skin color. At that, "the crowd seemed perfectly dazed for a moment, then the debate began, Dr. Whitney holding out against odds, and a hot time ensued."[375]

As the fires burned out the next day, April 16, Dr. Samuel Grantham conducted an autopsy on Thomas Gilyard's remains. A coroner's jury witnessed the event. Gilyard had sustained a bullet wound to his left leg just above the thigh. The bullet appeared to have shattered his hip bone before it traveled upward into his body and stopped near the base of Gilyard's spine. Dr. Grantham believed that the shot had been fired at Gilyard

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374 *Ibid.*

375 *Ibid.*, 16 April 1903, p. 5.

from below, which gave credence to the mob's belief that Gilyard was the man Leslie shot as he fired upward at his assailant in the boxcar.

Dr. Grantham was fortunate even to have a corpse to examine. During the previous night as the mob prowled the streets, someone raised the idea of burning Gilyard's remains. The body, which was stored at the Joplin Undertaking Company, was spirited away by Warren Armington, the undertaker, to Fairview Cemetery. Once there, he secreted Gilyard's corpse in the sexton's shed. The mob converged on the undertaker's facility, prepared to invade the premises to steal the body, but left when told that Gilyard had been moved. The mob then broke up into small groups to search for the remains, but failed to locate them.[376]

But the coroner's inquest served another purpose beyond conducting an autopsy. During witness testimony, the names of those who led the mob were disclosed. Assistant Prosecutor David E. Blair, present during the proceeding, took detailed notes. He promised, "everybody who had participated in the mobbing of the negro would be prosecuted." At the top of his list were three men: Sam Mitchell, Ellsworth "Hickory Bill" Fields, and B.H. Barnes. Little is known about these men. Mitchell is the only one who appears in the 1900 Federal Census. The thirty-year-old lead and zinc miner was living in Galena, just outside of Joplin, with his wife and son.[377]

George E. Wheaton testified that he recognized Sam Mitchell, his former employee, as he climbed the telephone pole. Wheaton said he then watched as Mitchell threw the rope over the arm of the pole prior to Thomas Gilyard's lynching. The other

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376 *Joplin Daily News Herald*, 16 April 1903, p. 2.

377 *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900.* Washington, D.C.: "Jasper County" (National Archives Microfilm Publication T623, roll 865).

men, he said, he did not recognize. Officer Ben May identified a member of the mob as a teamster named Barnes.[378]

Barnes, who lived on East Eighth Street, had "charge of the Saturday night dances at the hall corner Ninth and Joplin streets." The previous day, Barnes stopped by the police station to inform May that he was in the mob that lynched Gilyard, but did not take part in the mob that ransacked black neighborhoods. The officer stated that Barnes was one of the men who pulled on the rope that lifted Gilyard into eternity. Barnes, however, was not the only man May recognized. The policeman named Sam Mitchell as one of the men who manned the battering ram as well as the man who lifted the rope over the arm of the telephone pole prior to Gilyard's death. Finally, Officer May implicated "Hickory Bill" Fields as another man who played a prominent role in the lynching. Fields assisted the raid on the jail as well as manned the rope. According to May, Fields, Barnes and Mitchell were the ringleaders of the mob.[379]

The coroner's jury agreed. After thirty minutes of deliberation, the jury found Barnes, Mitchell and Fields responsible for the death of Thomas Gilyard. Fields was already in jail. After the mob had sprung him on Wednesday night, he sauntered back into the jail on Thursday, at which time Officers May and Loughlin placed him in lock-up. Sheriff Owen and Officer May escorted Fields to Carthage to avoid any further hostilities in Joplin. Ed Smith, arrested for rioting on Wednesday night, was also taken to Carthage. As two hundred spectators watched, the two unruly men were ushered to the corner of Fourth and Virginia Streets to await transportation, handcuffed under heavy

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378 *Joplin Daily News Herald*, 16 April 1903, p. 2.
379 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 17 April 1903, p. 2.

guard. Sheriff Owen announced Fields faced charges of arson. Smith, who allegedly stole from many of the black homes that were torched, was charged with petty theft. [380]

A coroner's jury, overseen by Judge Potter and Assistant Prosecutor David E. Blair, also examined the fallen officer's body. Witnesses were called to testify. Ike Clark, the young carpenter who told the mob that Gilyard was not the man who killed Leslie, changed his story. At the coroner's inquest, Clark testified that Gilyard was the man that shot Leslie. Clark recalled that he chased the man up the tracks as he fled the scene. "I shot at him five times. He returned the fire three times. My last shot staggered him." Cy Landis, a black former police officer, also testified. Landis had been in the railyard talking to an acquaintance when the shooting broke out. He stated that he thought the black man who fired on Leslie was shot as he jumped from the railcar. All of the rounds that Leslie managed to fire at his assailant were found in the railcar, except one. The coroner's jury believed the missing bullet was the one found in Thomas Gilyard's body.

A cursory examination of the bullet that exited Leslie's temple led the coroner's jury to believe it was a round from a .38 revolver, the same type of gun that Thomas Gilyard had in his possession when captured. Judge Potter introduced a shiny brass button into evidence that he found when he examined the railcar. The button reportedly matched the buttons of Thomas Gilyard's overalls. Ten minutes after all of the evidence and testimony were presented, the six-member coroner's jury found Thomas Gilyard guilty of the murder of Officer Theodore Leslie. "We, the jury, after hearing the testimony at the inquest held over the body of T.C. Leslie, find that he, T.C. Leslie, came

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380 *Ibid.*

to his death by a pistol shot from a 38-calibre pistol in the hands of a wounded negro, who was afterwards lynched, and whose name is to us unknown."[381]

This did little to calm Joplin down. Rumors circulated of another mob that would not only "destroy the negro quarters but burn and pillage the homes of the white men who oppose the mob." Miners were to receive their pay and were expected to patronize Joplin's many saloons. Once a mob was formed, "thousands of miners with liquor to fire them, would make...Wednesday night pale into insignificance."[382]

In response to the fears, Joplin Mayor John C. Trigg issued a proclamation that called for five hundred volunteers to put an end to the "violence and mobocracy that have held high carnival in the city to the disgrace and humiliation of all law abiding citizens." Men were asked to step forward so that "the supremacy of the law may be vindicated and upheld, that peace may be preserved and the rights and liberties of all classes of our citizens may be protected." Those who wished to participate were asked to come armed and meet at five o'clock at the courthouse. In addition, Mayor Trigg ordered all saloons closed by six o'clock that evening.[383] Some local miners were angered by an earlier proclamation that required all "minors" to stay home after 8 p.m. The men, who thought the order applied to them, "were making loud protest until it was explained to them."[384]

The *Carthage Evening Press* interviewed a Joplin broker in Carthage on business about the possibility of another mob. The unnamed businessman wearily voiced his belief that a mob was likely. But he added, "Many of the Joplin colored people own their own homes and places of business. They are a quiet, peaceful lot of citizens, but there is going

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381 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 16 April 1903, p. 1.
382 *Carthage Evening Press*, 18 April 1903, p. 3.
383 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 17 April 1903, p. 1.
384 *Carthage Evening Press*, 18 April 1903, p. 3.

to be some shooting done on both sides tonight if the mob tries to drive the negroes out, and white men will be found lined up with the colored ones in protecting the homes of the latter." The *Press* also reported that, "A message came from Aurora, Monett, and Peirce City saying 2,000 men from those towns will visit Joplin this evening to take part in the demonstration."[385]

Fortunately, Trigg's plan worked. At the appointed time, more than three thousand citizens stood on courthouse lawn, ready to enforce law and order. After he found the courtroom designated for the meeting occupied by a lawsuit, the mayor asked everyone to meet at the Odd Fellows Hall located at Seventh and Main Streets, which turned out to be too small to hold everyone. Instead, Mayor Trigg addressed those who crowded inside, followed by attorney J.W. McAntire. McAntire's denunciation of the mob was met with great applause. Four companies of volunteers were created. The meeting then adjourned and returned to the courthouse where another crowd waited.[386]

As Mayor Trigg climbed onto a wall outside the courthouse, the muffled sound of thousands of men taking off their hats filled the air. A motion for the volunteers to march down Main Street met with hearty approval. The group seemed to be under elite leadership. Joel T. Livingston was appointed commander-in-chief, while W.E. Morgan, Lee Shepherd, and John McManamy served as captains. Livingston, who served as a colonel in the Missouri National Guard, was a local Democratic leader and attorney.[387] Shepherd, a young assistant prosecuting attorney, was a Republican who had volunteered for service when the Spanish-American War broke out. His regiment did not, however,

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385 *Ibid.*, 16 April 1903, p. 8.

386 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 17 April 1903, p. 1.

387 Joel T. Livingston. *A History of Jasper County Missouri and Its People*, vol. 2, (New York: Lewis Publishing Co., 1912), 1078-1079.

see active service.[388] W.E. Morgan had been Joplin's Chief of Police from 1897 to 1898. John McManamy, a Republican, joined the Joplin police department in 1890 before serving multiple terms as Joplin's Chief of Police.[389]

Livingston, at the head of the militia, bellowed, "Gentleman, the mayor has given orders that this mob must disperse. Company, forward march."[390] The group began their march down Main Street in a show of force to dissuade potential rioters. The volunteers were met with cheers and applause from spectators before they disbanded for dinner. The marchers then regrouped after seven o'clock. They were joined by members of the Knights of Pythias as well as graying Union veterans from the John Morton Camp of the Grand Army of the Republic. The crowd of volunteers was armed to the teeth with every type of weapon imaginable. Men draped rifles and shotguns over their arms. Gleaming squirrel guns were clasped tight in the hands of younger participants. Pistols hung from the belts of many. But as fearsome as they appeared, not everyone listened to their order to get off the streets.[391]

Many unnamed men were forcibly removed from the streets after they refused to disperse when ordered to do so. Among the stubborn was John Halliday, the former police court judge at Pittsburg, Kansas. He reportedly was, "used to doing just about as he pleased in Pittsburg."[392] When he refused to obey an order from the volunteer force, someone hit him. Halliday spent the rest of the evening "dealing out abuse to Joplin and her citizens." Trigg's volunteers went home at 9:30, but promised to respond if the

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388 *Ibid.*, 696-697.
389 *Ibid.*, 1049.
390 *Joplin News Herald*, 17 April 1903, p. 1.
391 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 17 April 1903, p. 1.
392 *Ibid.*

whistle of the Joplin brewery sounded an alarm. The evening, however, passed uneventfully.[393]

Joplin did not yet relax. The following day, Saturday, April 18, 1903, the *Joplin Daily Globe* published a front-page warning to anyone who still harbored hope for another mob. The paper boldly declared, "Violence Has Had Its Inning – Rioters Warned". The warning mentioned a rumor that "the dangerous element of neighboring cities would flock in here tonight" to create another mob. While the names of the "neighboring cities" were not given, the paper undoubtedly referred to Pierce City and Monett, as both cities had engaged in racial expulsion in the wake of lynchings.

Though some had suggested miners might compose the feared mob, the *Globe* seemed anxious to emphasize that miners had not been the ones who had pillaged and destroyed the city's black neighborhoods. "For the most part they are men who spend six days a week in the mines. They are honest toilers between whom and the rioters who blaze a trail for the mob there is a chasm as wide," the paper solemnly proclaimed. Should the mob reemerge in Joplin, the *Globe* warned, the volunteer force, "If need be it will strike and strike hard." In addition, another proclamation from Mayor Trigg was printed, in which he asked the volunteer force to stand ready for any further threat of mob violence.[394] No mob, much to Trigg's relief, emerged.

While Joplin remained quiet, area newspapers did not. Immediately after Thomas Gilyard was lynched, the *Joplin Daily Globe* published a paradoxical editorial. The editorial voiced support for the lynching. After the death of three police officers in two years, it was "a foregone conclusion that Judge Lynch would act swiftly and certainly

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393 *Ibid.*, 17 April 1903, p. 2.
394 *Ibid.*, 18 April 1903, p. 1.

when the murderer was caught." Yet, the paper continued, "All communities deplore lynchings. But all communities have them sooner than later." The *Globe* continued, "the people of Joplin deplore the unlawful act and give much credit to City Attorney Decker, Mayor-elect Cunningham and many others."[395]

The next day, the *Globe's* editorial page decried the attack on Joplin's black community. "As a matter of fact the colored people of Joplin had no part in the murder of Officer Leslie, and they condemn the act in unmeasured terms. There a number of very disreputable colored people in Joplin, but so are many disreputable white men." But such outrage on the part of the *Globe* may have been based less in any sense of racial justice than solicitude for white property. The paper pointed out that the houses burned belonged to white citizens and that "taxpayers of the city will have to pay for all property destroyed." The mob should be punished, it argued, for this careless disregard for the property of others. The piece ended, "...arson is a crime that should always be punished." Lynching, on the other hand, did not appear to be a punishable offense except to the extent that it sullied the city's good name.[396] Both the lynchers and the arsonists had sundered the reputation of Joplin and inflicted great injury upon its citizens. The *Globe* then went on to boldly suggest, "...the men who sent lurid, distorted and exaggerated special reports to the various papers throughout the country did Joplin the greatest injury, and they – well, they ought to be lynched."[397]

The *Springfield Republican* carried some of this bad press. An editorial from the *Republican* snarled, "If the reports from Joplin are true that a mob of white men burned the homes of innocent men and women at that place because God made them black, then

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395 *Ibid.*, 16 April 1903, p. 3.
396 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 17 April 1903, p. 4.
397 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 18 April 1903, p. 3.

there was perpetrated a wrong of which it is difficult to characterize." The paper called for justice at the hands of the court, not at the end of a rope. "If men and women and even prattling children are to be hunted like wild beasts by enraged monsters it is time something should be done." Mob participants were savages who were needed to be taught the rules of civilized society as well as prosecuted for their crimes. If they were not, then American society would soon be in "perpetual danger." Men would turn on each other until blood flowed through the streets. The solution was to teach "people to respect the rights of their fellowmen." Yet, if that failed, the *Republican* suggested, "There is nothing that cures such marauders so suddenly as cold lead from Gatlin guns and Krag-Jorgensen rifles. Grover Cleveland showed that he knew what to do for them when they organized at Chicago, and that treatment is still good."[398] Yet three years later, Springfield itself fell victim to a lynch mob.

Other newspapers condemned the lynching and mob violence. In a reprint published in the *Carthage Evening Press*, the *Kansas City Star* declared, "The most wholesome lesson this country could have would be the shooting down of a dozen mob leaders." The *Saint Louis Globe Democrat*, referring to the rule of mob law, reasoned, "If that rule were adopted all races would be doomed. The laws of the country are founded on reasonableness. They are the safeguard of the innocent and of stable society. It is best for man, woman and child that the laws be respected." The *Kansas City Journal* applauded the effort made by Joplin's citizens to save Thomas Gilyard.[399]

The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* proclaimed that, "The violence of the mob was born of the insane spirit of anarchy. Missouri cannot endure the disgrace of such violence."

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398 *Joplin Daily News Herald*, 19 April 1903, p. 10.
399 *Carthage Evening Press*, 18 April 1903, p. 2.

The paper called upon Governor Dockery and other state officials to take note of the violence as "Joplin repeats the orgy of Peirce City almost in detail and enlarges the blot upon the good name of Missouri." The *Post-Dispatch* then concluded, "No community can hold up its head while such vicious terrorism and anarchy go unpunished and unchecked. The stigma must be removed, the stain upon the honor of the state washed out."[400]

Two white Carthage pastors discussed the events at Joplin from the pulpit. At the Cumberland Presbyterian church, the Reverend A.E. Perry condemned the mob. He argued that the actions of the mob were "brutal, anarchistic and atheistic." As Perry thoughtfully concluded at the first half of his sermon, "Men who believe in God, even though never so closely interested in or related to those who have been wronged, can afford to wait." He urged his congregation to support law and order and refuse to support mob law. At the Carthage Congregational Church, Reverend J.B. Toomay asked his congregation, "Were the officers surprised or did they do their best? Have we not learned yet that the way to quell a mob is not by begging them to subside? A better way is to let them hear the bark of the Winchester which on such occasions speaks eloquently for law and order." Those who had participated in the mob violence, Toomay thundered, should "wear stripes in the penitentiary."[401]

The *Globe* editorials that bemoaned the destruction of property and the injury to Joplin's good name showed that Joplin had learned from Pierce City's experience and did not wish to repeat it. In the wake of the lynching and expulsion of its black residents, Pierce City came under attack from papers across the state of Missouri, and earned a

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400 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 17 April 1903.
401 *Carthage Evening Press*, 20 April 1903, p. 5.

reputation as a belligerent, unrepentant city that did not regret what had happened. A booming mining town, Joplin did not fear a loss of business, but it did not want to attract negative labels that might dull the gleam of its appeal.

Not surprisingly, Pierce City itself endorsed the Joplin mob's action, citing black crime as a menace that threatened white society just as it had after its own lynchings in 1901. The *Peirce City Democrat* snidely noted that, "Burglaries, hold-ups and even murders are very frequent where there are many niggers." Joplin, it observed, was full of blacks. The *Democrat* pointed out for its readers that since the lynching and subsequent expulsion of blacks in Pierce City that crime had dropped. "To get rid of them means to get rid of less crime of all kinds, Peirce City never wants another negro and we believe our people will never again allow them to live here again."[402] The editor of the *Democrat* newspaper believed that perceived short-term benefits trumped a national reputation for bigotry. A few days later, the *Democrat* crowed that many Joplin blacks met a frosty reception on their eastward trek to Springfield. "They should all go to Africa where they belong. It is impossible to mix white and black and have harmony."[403]

Yet the *Democrat's* rival, the *Peirce City Empire*, wanted to absolve its own citizens when it came to the Joplin mob. It lashed out in anger at the state press for having linked Pierce City's name with that of Joplin in the wake of the lynching. The paper claimed that no one from Pierce City played a role in the mob violence at Joplin and that Pierce City citizens were against mob violence. The *Empire* whined, "The Peirce

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402 *Peirce City Democrat*, 17 April 1903, p. 5.
403 *Ibid.*, 24 April 1903, p. 7.

City 'Nigger Chasers' referred to in the dispatches exist only in the imagination of sensational correspondents."[404]

The *Monett Star* echoed these claims. The little newspaper claimed that no one in Monett knew of the excitement in Joplin until it was over. The *Star* admitted, "Monett people don't love a negro very much but they are not inclined to be looking for trouble in that direction."[405]

African-Americans in Southwest Missouri offered their own response to events. The *Joplin Daily Herald* published an article regarding a former black Joplin resident. The unnamed man declared,

> "I, undereducated and ignorant, once a slave and now a freeman, have lived in Joplin for about thirty years. I have been a property owner and taxpayer, and if I refuse to pay my taxes, by the law of my country my property would be taken away from me. I suppose the money I have paid in the way of taxes has gone to the school funds to educate people such as came to my house last Wednesday night and broke out my window panes and routed my wife and children and scared them nearly to death. I found them in a box car near the railroad track, crouched in there for a place of safety, and I sit in my house and hear the howling fiends utter oaths that drove me mad. I appeal to heaven. My country first I call, and if no response, then I guess the last resort of a poor, defenseless, hooted, downtrodden and unfortunate man, who happens to be born with a dark skin, is to at last rid myself of this unfair life, and on the other side of the border lands of eternity there will be equal rights and special privileges to no one. I would say, oh, Lord, if there is any, have mercy on my soul, if a black man, who lives in Joplin, has any."[406]

His was not the only black voice that emerged. Carthage, home to several limestone quarries, mills, and lead and zinc mines, was a prosperous Southwest Missouri town. As a result, it had a sizeable black population that offered shelter to those who fled Joplin.

The *Carthage Evening Press* published a notice announcing a "Colored Citizens Meeting" a few days after Thomas Gilyard was lynched. The meeting, to be held at the

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404 *Joplin Daily News Herald*, 20 April 1903, p. 4.
405 *Ibid.*
406 *Joplin Daily News Herald*, 21 April 1903, p. 6.

Second Baptist Church in Carthage, called for black citizens to "imbibe inspiration from the greatest and purest to the humblest of men of our race along industrial, moral and religious lines." The public was invited to attend to see for themselves that the meeting would not serve the desires of any one individual or group. The meeting was organized by the Reverend George B. Abbott of the Sixth Street Methodist Episcopal Church and J. A. W. Young of the Second Baptist Church. Abbott, a former slave who served with the Union during the Civil War, lived briefly in neighboring Mt. Vernon prior to the lynching and expulsion of blacks from Pierce City.[407] He had had enough of the violence.

At the meeting, which Abbott was elected to preside over, members of the black community stepped forward to speak their mind about recent events. While their words went unrecorded, those in attendance adopted a resolution proposed by R.W. Elmore, which condemned the killing of Officer Leslie as well as general lawlessness. The measure read, "We disclaim responsibility as a race for that atrocity and that we regard as unjust vengeance leveled against us collectively for a crime committed by an individual of our own race." In addition, the resolution applauded the efforts made by Joplin citizens to stop the mob from lynching Thomas Gilyard, and asked "to become good and useful citizens."[408]

But the black community did more than just adopt a resolution. The *Press* announced, "the negroes of Carthage are at work on the organization of a law and order league, and hope later to spread the organization to state-wide proportions." Warren Hansford, a well-known black barber in Carthage, spoke to a *Press* reporter about the

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[407] *Carthage Evening Press*, 18 April 1903, p. 6 ; *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900.* Washington, D.C.: "Jasper County" (National Archives Microfilm Publication T623, roll 865); Pension file, George Abbott, Co. D, 10th U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery, United States Army, NARA Record Group 15: Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 1773 - 2001.

[408] *Carthage Evening Press*, 22 April 1903, p. 4.

proposed league, "We propose to run the bad element out of town, or else help the officers of the law send them to the penitentiary if necessary." In other words, so that black criminality might not become an excuse for lynching and expulsion, the African-American community would police itself. Blacks would be expected to observe civil marriage services, abstain from gambling, and send their children to school. Hansford assured the reporter, "Our people are ready and willing to do what is right in society." He proudly pointed out the black Knights of Pythias Lodge as well as the black Odd Fellows Lodge that had been in existence for twenty years. No further mention of the Law and Order League appeared in the press, however.[409]

The Joplin lynch mob was distinct from that of Pierce City. Unlike the violence in Pierce City in which long-time black residents of the town were lynched, the victim in Joplin, Thomas Gilyard, was a transient – just the sort of person, Ayers argues, that Southern whites held responsible for the high crime rates of the late nineteenth century. Joplin did not have any vagrancy laws prior to the lynching, but afterwards many prominent citizens endorsed the establishment of a workhouse where "the vagrant weary willie...might be provided with an 18-pound sledge."[410]

Joplin served as a junction point for the Saint Louis – San Francisco Railway, the Missouri Pacific Railway, the Fort Scott and Gulf Railroad, the Kansas City Southern Railway and the Girard branch of the Saint Louis – San Francisco.[411] The railroads brought labor to the area as seasonal migrants traveled the rails in search of work. Thomas Gilyard, like many Southern blacks, was part of this movement. Originally from Mississippi, he was on his way to work on a railroad gang at Asbury, Missouri. He had

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409 *Ibid.*, 28 April 1903, p. 6.
410 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 19 April 1903, p. 1.
411 North, *The Story of Joplin*, 393.

the misfortunate to arrive in an area where, due to Joplin's size, "most blacks and whites did not know one another, much less share ties of several generations."[412]

As a young transient black newly arrived in Joplin, Thomas Gilyard was on his own. He lacked crucial ties with both the white and black communities in Joplin that might have saved him from the mob. As Brundage notes, "Whites feared that floaters, freed from the supervision of whites, and the traditional controls of the black community, posed a continual threat to white women and children."[413] Suspected of murdering Officer Leslie, Gilyard was condemned by whites because he was an unknown black transient allegedly responsible for the murder of a man who kept white society safe from black criminals.

Brundage observes, "Few crimes were more provocative in the eyes of whites than confrontations between law officers and blacks." Law enforcement officials, according to Brundage, represented and upheld white superiority. They ensured law and order, as well as the stability of the color line. Violent encounters between blacks and white police officers occurred when "law officers attempted to arrest criminals charged with petty crimes as gambling, theft, or vagrancy." Officer Leslie, when he was shot, was in the railyard searching for two black men accused of stealing pistols from a Joplin hardware store. As Brundage contends, "The wounding or killing of a law officer, which whites perceived to be an unmistakable attack on the white community at large, called for elaborate, ritualized, and unambiguously public mob violence."[414]

Unlike many of their Southern counterparts, however, city officials in Joplin attempted to stop the lynching. According to Brundage, when officials did choose to act,

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412 Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 157.
413 Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 82.
414 *Ibid.*, 76-77.

it was out of fear of the state government and the media, to preserve their own authority.[415] Mayor Trigg and Mayor-elect Cunningham may have sought to end mob violence because they disagreed with it. The fact that Joplin's white elite did not support the actions of the apparently largely working class mob was evident with the elite's establishment of a militia to prevent any further unwanted mayhem. Had the elite supported and even assisted the lower class in their violent crusade, there would have been no militia and no post-riot trials. It is also clear that Trigg and Cunningham were well aware of the financial burden that additional mob violence could inflict upon the city. The *Joplin Daily Globe* emphasized that the houses destroyed by the mob belonged to white citizens and that "taxpayers of the city will have to pay for all property destroyed."[416]

Yet others failed to act. There is no indication that the Joplin Police Department and the Jasper County Sheriff attempted to stop the lynch mob when it began its raid on the city jail. Law enforcement officials, as crowds gathered in Joplin, could have sensed the trouble that was brewing. Once Gilyard was in custody, he could have been sent to Carthage or Springfield for safekeeping as two other black suspects were. After the lynching, several individuals, including one Carthage minister, suggested that the officers should have dispersed the mob with a show of force. But the police may have been prejudiced against Gilyard as he was the alleged murderer of one of their fellow officers.

Gilyard also had the misfortune to travel through an area of Missouri where an established Ozark culture of violence, despite the modernizing forces of the New South, clung to existence. The inclination to use violence to settle scores may have been

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415 *Ibid.*, 82.

416 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 17 April 1903, p. 4.

exacerbated by Joplin's rough mining industry. In 1949, a poem written by a local miner published in the *Joplin Globe* fondly recalled Joplin's early days,

> "Way down yonder in Southwest Missouri,
> Where the women drink and curse like fury;
> Where the barkeepers sell the meanest liquor,
> Which makes a white man sicker and sicker,
> Where the tinhorns rob you a little quicker,
> That's where Joplin is."[417]

This mindset, which Michael Pfeifer calls rough justice, played a large role in the events at Joplin. Pfeifer argues that lynching "in postbellum America was an aspect of a larger cultural war over the nature of criminal justice waged between rural and working-class supporters of 'rough justice' and middle-class due-process advocates." In Joplin, the battle for Thomas Gilyard's life literally became a tug of war between working class lynchers and middle class advocates of due-process – Joplin City Attorney Perl Decker, Mayor John C. Trigg, Mayor-elect Tom W. Cunningham, and Assistant Prosecutor David E. Blair.[418]

These men fought for due-process, "as a guarantor of social order and the free flow of capital." Many of those who fought to stop the lynching were lawyers, who, Pfeifer contends, saw lynchings as "destructive to the cause of law and order."[419] Their opponents were primarily "rural residents or members of the urban petty mercantile or working class." The three men charged with the murder of Gilyard, Sam Mitchell, B.H. Barnes and Ellsworth "Hickory Bill" Fields were all members of the working class.

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417 *Joplin Globe*, 13 May 1949.

418 Livingston, *A History of Jasper County*, 600-603. In 1908, Assistant Prosecutor David E. Blair, the former law partner of Perl Decker, was elected as the Republican candidate to the Jasper County circuit court.

419 Pfeifer, *Rough Justice*, 4.

Barnes was a teamster, Mitchell was a paint company employee, and Fields' occupation was unknown.[420]

This culture of violence was not new to Missouri, but its focus had shifted. In his article on the history of lynching in Missouri, Pfeifer points out that prior to 1900, "some of Missouri's lynchings reflected the state's frontier heritage: lynch mobs in underpopulated regions lacking strong legal institutions murdered almost as many whites as blacks." After 1900, however, eighty-nine percent of those lynched were black, reflecting "southern patterns of racial violence."[421]

In contrast to Pierce City, the events at Joplin not only bolster Pfeifer's argument but fit elements of Stewart Tolnay and E.M. Beck's argument that lynching, in addition to punishing offenders, and enforcing social control over blacks also intended to eliminate black social and economic competition.[422] Statistically, blacks did not appear to pose a social or economic threat to whites. Of Joplin's 26,023 residents, 773 were African-Americans.[423] The mining industry was segregated. Blacks were left with menial, lower class jobs such as waiter, servant, washer woman and porter. Yet working-class whites may have nevertheless anxiously viewed blacks as rivals for jobs, as the Freeman Foundry episode illustrates.[424] Thomas Gilyard's death may have been used, then, as an opportunity to reinforce white superiority by working class whites. Perhaps the working-class character of the lynching left local officials more willing to prosecute members of the mob than their counterparts in Pierce City.

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420 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 17 April 1903, p. 1-2.

421 Michael J. Pfeifer, "The Ritual of Lynching in Missouri: Extralegal Justice in Missouri, 1890 – 1942," *Gateway Heritage*, 13 (Winter 1993): 23.

422 Tolnay and Beck, *Festival of Violence*, 18.

423 Dept. of the Interior, *Twelfth Census of the United States 1900*, Volume I, Population Part I, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901), Table 23, p. 625.

424 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 3 April 1903, p. 2.

Ironically, the brothers of Gisele Wild may have fired the last shots of the Joplin episode. The *Peirce City Democrat* reported that two black men had the misfortune of passing by the Wild family farm west of Pierce City. As the men approached the yard, Mrs. Wild screamed, "Niggers!" Her cry of alarm prompted her sons to seize their rifles. The boys fired several rounds at the men as they fled but it was not clear if anyone was wounded in the melee. The *Democrat* speculated that the men were among those who had left Joplin days earlier. The ghosts of Pierce City lived on.[425]

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425 *Carthage Evening Press*, 23 April 1903, p. 2.

Mitchell Trial

On the morning of Saturday, April 18, 1903, the courtroom of Judge Hugh Dabbs buzzed with activity. Saturdays were reserved for motions and the courthouse was crowded with attorneys who waited to make their next legal maneuver. Among those present were the attorneys representing Sarah Godley, the widow of French Godley. It was Mrs. Godley's last chance to win a motion for retrial. But the efforts of her attorneys were in vain. Dabbs, a thirty-something Missouri lawyer turned judge, denied their motion. He ruled that Mrs. Godley had previously received a fair trial.[426] With the simple stroke of Judge Dabbs's gavel, it was made clear that justice would not be served in Jasper County, Missouri. Just as the legal proceedings stemming from the Pierce City violence ended, those related to Joplin began – in the same courtroom. Sam Mitchell, the alleged ringleader of the mob that rampaged through Joplin, and who allegedly played a major role in the death of Thomas Gilyard, was present in Judge Dabbs's court room that day. Mitchell, along with his accomplices "Hickory Bill" Fields and a teamster named B.H. Barnes, had been charged with the murder of Gilyard.

Unfortunately, the case files of Sam Mitchell, Ellsworth "Hickory Bill" Fields and B.H. Barnes have disappeared, leaving an unclear picture of the proceedings that followed.[427] The *Joplin Daily Globe* and the *Carthage Evening Press*, however, provide a

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426 *Carthage Evening Press*, 20 April 1903, p. 3.

427 The Jasper County, Missouri Records Center does have the original murder charge against Mitchell, Fields and Barnes. The trial records, however, are missing. See Box 2189 #3188 for the charges against Fields and Barnes.

glimpse of the trials. Jasper County Prosecuting Attorney Andrew H. Redding made the decision to press charges.[428]

Mitchell and Fields, when brought before the court, pleaded not guilty. Judge Dabbs refused to grant bond to the two men.[429] At the same time, the *Joplin Daily News Herald* reported, a subscription was being raised for Mitchell's family. Lee Shepherd, Mitchell's attorney, circulated a petition to ensure that Mitchell's wife and children would not be left destitute while he was in jail. A number of Joplin citizens signed the petitions and promised to support Mitchell's family.[430]

"Hickory Bill" Fields, along with Mitchell and Barnes, was among thirteen prisoners transferred from Carthage to Joplin for a court appearance. The deputies who escorted the group, however, did not chain Fields to any of the black prisoners also present. After court, the motley group of prisoners stood outside to await transport back to Carthage, when a crowd of curious spectators approached, a number of whom were African-American. Fields, seething with anger, drew himself up straight and bellowed, "Well, this is Hickory Bill, if that's who you're looking for." Then when Fields caught sight of the blacks, he snarled, "All you niggers get away from there. Get you, d--- you. Hit the grit."[431]

After a series of continuances, Mitchell went on trial in early June. This was not the first time Sam Mitchell had been in trouble. An article on the lynching in Joplin from the *Empire City Journal* wryly remarked he "seems born to trouble." According to the

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428 Redding, a Union veteran who attained the rank of Major, was a Republican. He served one term as Prosecuting Attorney in 1902, followed by one term as a police judge from 1910-1912, and finished with one term as Joplin City Attorney from 1914-1916 before his death in 1929. *Joplin Globe*, 9 January 1929.

429 *Carthage Evening Press*, 20 April 1903, p. 3. Barnes is also referred to as "D.H. Barnes".

430 *Joplin Daily News Herald*, 19 April 1903, p. 3.

431 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 23 April 1903, p. 3.

Journal, Mitchell was a former Empire City assistant marshal who because of his "scrappy and contentious disposition, had trouble a plenty and to spare." He fought local tough Jim Slatton seven times and repeatedly lost. Mitchell also tangled with one John Norton, who promptly shot Mitchell in the neck.[432] At his trial Joplin police officer Ben May, the head of the Joplin Improvement Association A. V. Boswell, City Councilman Andy Donnan and mining engineer George Wheaton testified they saw Mitchell climb the telephone and string up the rope used to hang Thomas Gilyard. But A. J. Morgan, proprietor of the Morgan Paint Company and Mitchell's employer, testified that Mitchell had been at work the day of the lynching until six in the evening. One of Mitchell's co-workers also vouched for Mitchell's whereabouts on the stand. The defense called witnesses who swore that Mitchell was not the man who secured the rope used to lynch Gilyard. The *Joplin Daily Globe* reported that many spectators felt as though the state had presented a weak case against Mitchell. In light of the conflicting testimony of the witnesses, the paper went so far as to speculate that Mitchell had a double.[433]

After a series of continuances, Mitchell's fate was placed in the hands of the jury, which overwhelmingly composed farmers. The *Globe* confidently predicted that Mitchell would be acquitted as the defense had done an excellent job of casting doubt upon his participation in the lynching.[434] The *Carthage Evening Press* reported that at first it appeared the case would end in a hung jury. But once the five holdouts were convinced that Mitchell was the man who secured the rope, a guilty verdict was reached. The jury recommended ten years in the state penitentiary, the minimum sentence for second degree murder. This decision came as a great shock to some, while others claimed, "I told

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432 *Carthage Evening Press*, 27 April 1903, p. 3.
433 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 3 June 1903, p. 2.
434 *Ibid.*, 4 June 1903, p. 3.

you so; it couldn't be anything else."[435] Mitchell's attorneys quickly filed a motion for retrial.[436]

In the meantime, Ellsworth "Hickory Bill" Fields and B.H. Barnes went on trial. The two were to go on trial together, but Barnes was eventually granted a severance. Witnesses for the state testified they saw Barnes battering down the door of the Joplin city jail and heard him yell, "Hang the negro!" Several defense witnesses testified that while they saw Barnes in the mob, he did not participate in the lynching of Thomas Gilyard, but was a mere bystander. Barnes's defense attorney, W.N. Andrews, took the stand to testify he saw the owner of the St. James Hotel and "Hickory Bill" Fields break down the jail door. He then asserted a man named Frank Shafer was the leader of the mob. The defense presented many more witnesses than the state, and their testimony may have been enough to sway the all-white jury.[437]

When the not guilty verdict was read that same day, clapping erupted and a cheer went up in the courtroom, "Hurrah for Hickory Bill." The judge ordered those responsible for the noise to step forward, but when no one acknowledged their guilt, the court deputy singled out "Hickory Bill" Fields, Mrs. Sam Mitchell, and G.W. Smith. Mrs. Mitchell and her lady friends were excused from the court. Fields and Smith, however, were not as lucky. Both were sentenced to ten days in jail for their disruption. As he was led out of the courtroom, Fields admitted he meant to cheer for Barnes, but accidentally cheered himself. "I did not mean to toot my own horn," he stated earnestly. Both Smith and Fields were later acquitted of the misdemeanor offense and did not serve jail time.[438]

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435 *Carthage Evening Press*, 4 June 1903, p. 5.
436 *Ibid.*, 5 June 1903, p. 3.
437 *Joplin Daily Globe*, 18 June 1903, p 3.
438 *Carthage Evening Press*, 18 June 1903, p. 5.

The trial of "Hickory Bill" Fields appears to be lost to history. There is no mention of it in the *Joplin Daily Globe* or the *Carthage Evening Press*. Fields may have been acquitted just as Barnes was. Or, perhaps the prosecutor withdrew the charges against Fields after Barnes's acquittal feeling further proceedings would be futile. Interestingly, while witnesses allegedly saw both Barnes and Fields take part in burning down black homes, the Jasper County Prosecuting Attorney failed to file arson charges, whether due to disillusionment with Jasper County juries or sheer apathy.

Sam Mitchell faced his second trial in November, 1903 after his attorneys' motion for a new trial was granted on technical grounds. According to the *Carthage Evening Press*, Mitchell proved to be a model prisoner during his time in jail. One jail official stated Mitchell was "one of the best prisoners." His attorneys argued that Mitchell was not present at the lynching and that Thomas Gilyard was already dead by the time he was lynched. This argument was crafted to counter the state's damning eyewitness testimony from the first trial.[439]

Despite the testimony of several witnesses for the state to the contrary, defense witness J.C. Siegfried swore that he and Mitchell were together at Morgan Paint Company during the lynching. He claimed they arrived at the scene of the lynching to find that Gilyard had already been hanged. The jury was out for an hour before it returned its verdict of not guilty. The *Carthage Evening Press* reported that the jury's first vote returned several ballots in favor of a guilty verdict with a lesser sentence. Someone in the jury room, however, successfully argued that Mitchell should not be punished for the crimes "committed by hundreds of men in his company." Siegfried was charged with

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439 *Ibid.*, 20 November 1903, p. 4.

perjury and arrested.[440] Yet no further action was taken and Sam Mitchell, "Hickory Bill" Fields and B.H. Barnes walked free.

The subsequent fates of B.H. Barnes and "Hickory Bill" Fields are unknown. Mitchell, however, remained in Joplin. He died just after Christmas in 1926, nearly sixty years of age, much older than Thomas Gilyard, who had been dead for twenty-three years. At the time of his death, Mitchell worked as a smelterman for the Eagle-Picher Lead Company, which is still in operation today.[441]

As for the man who attempted to stop the mob, Perl Decker enjoyed a successful career as an attorney. In 1912, he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives as a Democrat, and served three terms. Ironically, in his final congressional campaign in 1918, Decker was defeated by Isaac V. McPherson, the former Lawrence County Prosecuting Attorney who oversaw the trial of Joe Lark for the murder of Giselle Wild.[442]

During the 1920s, Decker railed against the Ku Klux Klan. But when the Jasper County Bar Association proposed a resolution that would force Klan members to resign their bar membership because the Klan's advocacy of religious intolerance was "a violation of...the Constitution of the United States." Decker disagreed. While he reminded his fellow bar members that he loathed the Klan, he argued that the Klan had the constitutional right to oppose whatever religion it so desired.

Yet Decker went on to say, "I believe in the enforcement of the law, but I do not believe in the taking of human life as a punishment for wrong doing, except after a trial by jury, the sentence of a judge and at the hands of a sheriff." Decker continued, "The

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440 *Carthage Evening Press*, 21 November 1903, p. 5.

441 Death Certificate for Samuel Kirkwood Mitchell, 28 December 1926, File No. 38525, Missouri State Archives.

442 William Rufus Jackson, *Missouri Democracy: A History of the Party and Its Representative Members – Past and Present.* Vol. 3 (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1935), 158-159.

fact that murder can be condoned and lightly held by respectable citizens bespeaks a dangerous condition of society..." It was as if Decker was arguing with the ghosts of 1903 from the steps of the Joplin city jail. The Jasper County Bar Association promptly passed a resolution that condemned the Klan and asked that any Klan member present resign his membership with the bar.[443]

Decker, eulogized as one of the most gifted orators to grace the House of Representatives as well as a masterful attorney, lost the case of his life when a mob successfully sought extralegal justice at the end of a rope.[444] If Decker could not win their hearts, then no one else could have.

Studies of lynching seldom mention the prosecution of lynch mob participants because local authorities often declined to press charges. Brundage notes that authorities who pursued legal action risked alienating the local community. In Jasper County, Missouri, though, local prosecutors pressed charges against the three men held responsible for the death of Thomas Gilyard despite the possibility they might do so. There is no evidence to suggest that they suffered politically because of their action. It is possible that because it was members of the working class that were accused that prosecutors saw less chance of career suicide by pursuing action. The state of Missouri would not sanction the violence wrought by the Joplin mob by idly standing by. What is even more remarkable than the action of the prosecuting attorney is that Sam Mitchell, thought to be the man who secured the rope used to lynch Thomas Gilyard, was found guilty of second degree murder and sentenced to ten years by an all-white jury.

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443 Perl Decker Papers, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Ellis Library, University of Missouri-Columbia.

444 *Joplin Globe*, 24 August 1934, p. 1.

Newspaper accounts do not offer a clear picture of why the jury chose to convict Mitchell. It remains unclear if jurors used Mitchell as a sacrificial lamb in order to put the bloody events of April behind them or if they truly believed in the rule of law. Their decision does, however, indicate that whites were not always united in the wake of mob violence.

The second jury flinched, however. One newspaper account indicates that the jury was close to securing a guilty verdict when one juror argued Mitchell could not be held accountable for the actions of hundreds of other men in the mob.[445] If Mitchell were convicted, then collectively, every man, woman and child in the mob would have been symbolically guilty of lynching Thomas Gilyard, an admission that ultimately the jury did not want to make. It was better that Mitchell go free than admit that an entire community had participated in the lynching and expulsion of blacks from Joplin.

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445 *Carthage Evening Press*, 21 November 1903, p. 5.

Conclusion

One more lynching came to haunt southwest Missouri before the era of mob violence came to an end in the region. In early April 1906, three black men were lynched in Springfield, Missouri, by mob of thousands. The violence began after a white woman was allegedly assaulted by two masked black men. Horace Duncan and Fred Coker, who had been at work at the time of alleged crime, were arrested. As the news spread, crowds began to gather in the streets. "Come on, follow me!" a young boy cried. With that, the mob stormed the jail and dragged Coker and Duncan to the town square with shouts of "Hang the ---- nigger!" and "Damn the law!" There, in a terrible twist of fate, the two men were lynched under the watchful gaze of a replica of the Statue of Liberty. Their corpses were then set on fire.[446]

The mob next seized Will Allen, an African-American, who was accused of murdering an elderly Confederate veteran.[447] After fighting for his life, Allen chose to walk to the square, "with head up." The mob held a mock trial. Allen, a noose around his neck, listened as he was condemned. When members of the crowd dared him to jump, Allen did so, reportedly breaking his neck instantly. His corpse was then strung up on display for all to see. The triple lynching of Fred Coker, Will Allen, and Horace Duncan became known as the "Easter Offering."[448]

Missouri Governor Joseph Folk, a Democrat, took immediate action to halt the mayhem. The Missouri National Guard was called out to stop further mob violence. Governor Folk visited Springfield and denounced the mob's action as an attack on law

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446 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 16 April 1906, p. 1-2.

447 Dominic J. Capeci, *The Lynching of Cleo Wright* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 184.

448 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 16 April 1906, p. 1-2.

and order. He also said that members of the lynch mob were "outlaws" and that every known mob participant should be prosecuted. Letting the matter slip under the rug, Folk argued, "This would be the greatest disaster possible. It would put Springfield and the State back a quarter of a century."[449]

Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of the state to prosecute members of the lynch mob, no one was convicted for the lynching of Fred Coker, Will Allen, and Horace Duncan. In contrast to Monett and Pierce City, though, the vibrant African-American community in Springfield tenaciously survived. But after the deaths of eight African-Americans in southwest Missouri from 1894 until 1906, the message was clear that blacks were not welcome in the region. African-Americans left southwest Missouri in significant numbers

In 1900, Jasper County, Missouri, had a total population of 84,018 with 1,428 black residents. By 1910, the total population of Jasper County was 89,673 which included 1,368 African-Americans.[450] In 1920, the total population had decreased slightly to 75,941 with 1,227 African-Americans living in Jasper County.[451] In 1930, Jasper County's total population had fallen to 73,810 with 1,094 black residents present.[452] The trend was more significant in neighboring counties. In 1890, 364 African-Americans called Lawrence County home, but by 1900, only 283 blacks remained. In 1910, after the Pierce City lynching in 1901, there were only 91 African-Americans left in the entire

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449 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 19 April 1906, 1-2.

450 Dept. of Commerce, *Thirteenth Census of the United States 1910 Vol. 2 Population 1910 Alabama - Montana,* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913). Table I - Composition and Characteristics of the Population for the State and for Counties, 1109.

451 Dept. of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Vol. 3 Population 1920,* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 555.

452 Dept. of Commerce, *Fifteenth Census of the United States 1930, Population Vol. 3, Part I, Alabama – Missouri*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932), 1332

county.[453] Their numbers only continued to decline. In 1920, the total population of Lawrence County was 24,211 with 81 African-Americans.[454] By 1930, only 74 blacks remained.[455] Barry County, to the immediate south of Lawrence County, was home to 97 African-Americans in 1890. After the expulsion of blacks from Monett in 1894, only 9 lived in Barry County in 1900. By 1910, only 6 remained.[456] In 1920, only one African-American lived there. McDonald County never had a large black population, but it steadily fell in the postbellum decades, from 37 in 1870 to 2 by 1900 and 0 by 1920.[457] The only other counties in southwest Missouri that retained a significant black minority, besides Jasper County, were Newton and Greene. In 1920, Newton County had 318 African-Americans and Greene County had 2,261 African-American residents.[458] The region truly became a "...white man's heaven."[459]

For the blacks who were driven from the region, life would never be the same. A resilient number returned to Joplin and Springfield. But blacks would not move back to the rural countryside of southwest Missouri until the end of the twentieth century as the region's isolation began to break down with the advance of a new wave of economic growth. Black people might have felt more secure in the region's larger cities, but even

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453 Dept. of Commerce, *Thirteenth Census of the United States 1910 Vol. 2 Population 1910 Alabama - Montana,* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913). Table I - Composition and Characteristics of the Population for the State and for Counties, 1110.

454 Dept. of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Vol. 3 Population 1920,* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 556.

455 Dept. of Commerce, *Fifteenth Census of the United States 1930, Population Vol. 3, Part I, Alabama – Missouri,* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932), 1332.

456 Dept. of the Interior, *Twelfth Census of the United States 1900, Volume I, Population Part I,* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901), Table 19, pg 546.

457 Dept. of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Vol. 3 Population 1920,* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 551-558.

458 Dept. of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Vol. 3 Population 1920,* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 551-558.

459 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 25 August 1901, p. 1.

there their safety was not ensured. In 1921, Tulsa, Oklahoma, witnessed a brutal episode of racial violence as blacks were attacked and chased from town.[460]

As W. Fitzhugh Brundage has observed, "Of the various forms of lawlessness prevalent in the United States during the past two centuries, lynching remains one of the most disturbing and least understood."[461] Economic and social explanations for mob violence fail to explain why whites turned on their black neighbors in Pierce City and why some tried to save Thomas Gilyard, while others fought to murder him.

Instead, economic, social and political factors must be considered in combination with a culture of violence. This culture of violence scorned the law as well as the criminal justice system. The men who adhered to its harsh code favored swift, brutal punishment in reaction to perceived criminal behavior. These factors, combined with the historical absence of blacks in the region, came together to create unique conditions for a tempest of mob violence in southwest Missouri during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

As historian Dominic Capeci observes, "Mob members of Lawrence and Greene Counties in the southwest took the most lives in a single lynching, three apiece. They drew from similar heritages, though more of the original settlers brought Republican Party politics from East Tennessee, and, by the end of the century, resided in mining areas and farmlands adjoining commercial centers such as Pierce City and Springfield."[462] Southwest Missouri, like its Southern counterparts in the state's Little Dixie region on the Missouri River and the Bootheel area on the Mississippi River, was entrenched in a southern mindset. Only when Governor Joseph Folk swiftly and firmly

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460 Loewen, *Sundown Towns*, 92-93.
461 Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 1.
462 Capeci, *Lynching of Cleo Wright*, 177.

responded to the Springfield mob, did southwest Missourians gradually cast mob violence aside.[463]

The region's Southern heritage of violence, in tandem with a vigilante view of justice in a postbellum nation, led to mob violence when blacks began to settle in substantial numbers for the first time. While blacks may not have been true economic, social or even political competitors in the region, whites viewed blacks as a threat to their wives and daughters and police officers. But whites were able to go beyond the traditional method of disciplining African-Americans through the use of mob violence to the actual expulsion of blacks from the area. African-Americans in southwest Missouri had the misfortune of residing on the region's economic margins. The failure of whites to integrate black labor into the regional economy kept African-Americans economically insignificant. This was in contrast to black-majority regions of the South, where inexpensive and readily available black labor composed a significant segment of the local economy, making African-Americans indispensable to local white employers. In southwest Missouri towns like Pierce City and Joplin, however, cheap white labor was prevalent, and as a result, respective black communities could be driven out with little to no impact on the regional economy.

The rising visibility of black crime in the late nineteenth century fueled by the rapid growth of southern cities and the transience of working people helped create a fear of blacks that exacerbated preexisting white anxieties. As Brundage notes, it was widely believed that women were not safe in the country or the city, so long as black men roamed free.[464] In Pierce City, the citizens acted to prevent further black criminal

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463 Christensen and Kremer, *A History of Missouri*, 179-180.

464 Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 60.

behavior at the expense of three black men. In addition, the late nineteenth century was an era in which any attack on a white individual by an African-American was held to be an attack on all whites. Thus in Monett and Joplin the white community responded by lynching the individual thought to be guilty in order to punish the offender as well as send a message to the regional African-American population that blacks were at their mercy. But while a few men were held responsible, an entire race was condemned.

"And so Missouri has fallen," lamented Mark Twain upon hearing of the Pierce City lynching.[465] However, for all the fury and angst the aging novelist exhibited in the essay that ensued, he chose not to publish it in his lifetime. In his own way, Twain captured the nature of southwest Missouri at the turn of the century. It was a land and people not quite Southern, but definitely children of the Confederacy, still locked in the traditions and customs of their rebellious forefathers. In this unusual childhood, introduced to their long neglected brothers, violence ensued, leaving a dark mark upon the land yet to be removed.

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[465] Charles Neider, ed., *The Complete Essays of Mark Twain* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963), 673.

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