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2022

The Socioeconomics of Lynching in Central Mississippi

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Recommended Citation

Haynes, Shai; Stutts, Phoebe; and Lewis, Ashley, "The Socioeconomics of Lynching in Central Mississippi" (2022). *The Red Record: Lynching, Literature, and Black Flesh in the Press*. 1.
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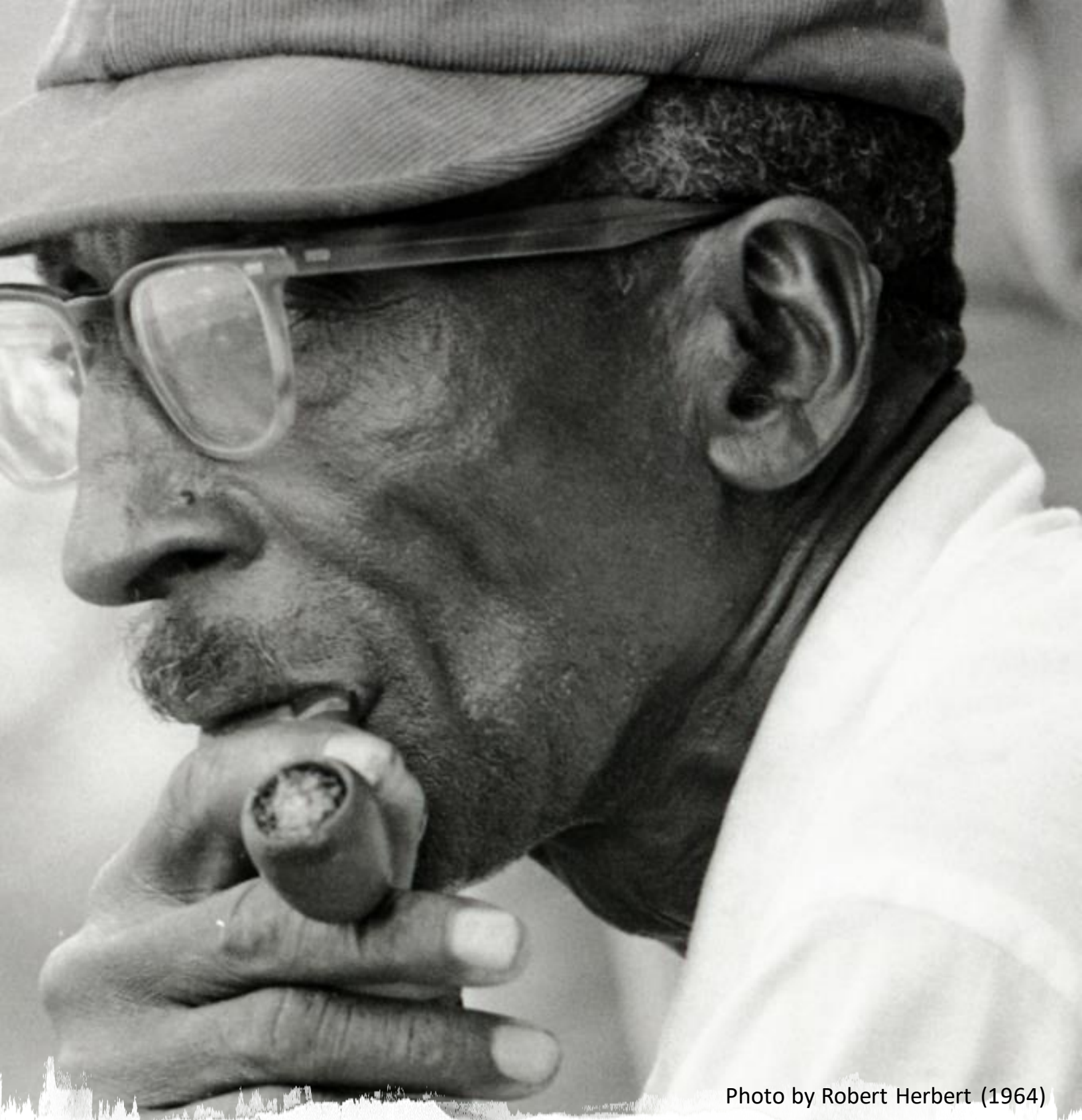


Photo by Robert Herbert (1964)

THE SOCIOECONOMICS OF LYNCHING IN CENTRAL MISSISSIPPI

BY SHAI HAYNES, PHOEBE STUTTS, & ASHLEY LEWIS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Economics of Lynching

II. Lynching and its Effect on the
Cotton Industry

III. Lynching in Poetry

III. Works Cited



LYNCHING

(Without Sanctuary, image 23)

LYNCHING REPORTS PER COUNTY IN CENTRAL MISSISSIPPI

Many of the approximated "central" counties in Mississippi had significant numbers of reported lynchings when viewing the state as a whole. These include but are not limited to:

- **Leflore County – 48**
- **Carroll County – 29**
- **Kemper County – 24**
- **Lowndes County – 20**
- **Yazoo County – 18**

EXCUSES FOR LYNCHING

EXCUSES SUCH AS RAPE AND MURDER WERE PREDOMINANTLY USED TO CONVICT LYNCHING VICTIMS OF CRIMES. THEY WERE THEN BRUTALIZED AND MURDERED.



(Without Sanctuary, image 14)

Lynching.

Booker Washington is the negro president of the negro A. & M. College at Tuskegee, Ala., and was born a slave and educated himself by his own efforts at manual labor until he has risen to the very topmost position of his race in America, for which he deserves great credit. He is a good man and loves the South, and is an honor to it and his race. He has recently given publicity to his views on lynchings, in which he states that the evil is on the increase and that it has extended largely beyond the limits of infliction for rape alone, and gives the statistics to prove his position which we do not deny. He counsels adherence to law and has been sustained by some of the most influential papers of the South. For the crime of rape, every race of men on earth will stand alike. No teaching, no law, no army, not even hell itself will prevent men from defending their women from brute ravishment, and it is utterly useless to discuss the matter any further. If such action begets disregard for law in other crimes, let ravishers and their apologists stand responsible for it. Let them stop the cause and prevent the effects. As an evidence of our opinion as to the universality of opinions and action for rape we have only to instance the Northern lynchings for rape, and the case of the negroes in a Panola county lynchings a negro for this offense and the white people of Texas a few days ago burning alive at the stake a white man for ravishing a three-year old girl. We are the friend of the negro, we are the friend of all men and we are the friend of right, and we say kill, and kill quickly, the salacious brute whose uncontrollable passion impels him to rape and is a perpetual menace to female purity. One great daily advocates evisceration and mayhem, so that the victim might become an impotent walking advertisement of the penalty of such crime, but this will not suffice. It retains a demon amongst mankind, embittered by his imbecility, to wreak his vengeance upon society in some form. Besides, this will not satisfy the friends of the injured and ruined. The damnable brute must die. In order to realize that this must be so, bring the matter home to your own family be ye white or black. What would you want to do to the brute that would forcibly ravish your own pure and tender little girl or wife. You are no man, no father, no good citizen, if you do not row death to such a brute and not stop until he is dead. It is useless to talk about law, men are not going to stop for law, it is too slow and too uncertain, besides, what man would bring his pure womanhood into a court to humiliate them in a disgusting trial with all its heinous features, to give a demon one single chance of escape. Never will this be done as long as honor, chivalry

and love of women, dwells in Anglo-Saxon hearts. We have yet to hear of a committed rape where the wrong man was lynched, and we here call upon any man, white or black, to give us an instance. A. G. Alstork, a colored presiding Elder of the Canton district, in our issue of the 16th, talks like a man, and a negro especially ought to talk. He says of the negro race: "If we want lynching and mob violence to stop, let us begin in our homes to elevate our condition by right living and condemn crime of every kind. I can't blame any person or people for protecting their women when they strive to protect themselves. I would be glad to see the time come when our women would strive to imitate the white women of the South. This too would tend to stop crime. Yes, I say protect them by the best methods possible. I myself will assist in protecting women, let them be white or black, from brute violence." He further says in substance, if the negroes want lynchings to stop, stop sympathizing with the brutes who commit the deeds. These are the words of a MAN. No white man could express purer or better sentiments, and he pays the highest tribute to Southern womanhood. The color of a man's hide cuts no figure when it comes to principles, the road to virtue, honor and position, is open to all alike. Nor does the pigment of a man's skin release him from responsibility for crime or exemption from a just and righteous punishment for the outrages he commits on society. Humble as Alstork's position may be, he towers high above any negro we have yet heard speak upon lynching. However moralists may argue or people vapor about lynching, the rapist must die at once by the hands of the outraged society where the deed is done.

It is in the Verdict's minds to be cynical. And why not? These be days to make one bilious, and bile is the parent of cynicism. Idleness in purple, industry in homespun! Honesty at hard labor, while Crime wears the crown! Ah, well; it has been so in all the ages! True worth was ever a peasant and tilled the soil, and scum comes easily to the top. Futility is the fashion and Fashion is the king. Let us all crowd to the throne room. Labor is at a sad discount, and the Verdict, unsettled by general example, will not even make itself the work of sequence and connection in what will follow. How go the currents political? If the Verdict were manager of Democracy, it would of a verity invoke a different system: There be a good fact or two. Bryan is to be nominated. It is so written; his coming may not be prevailed against. For which give thanks. And because his selection as the ticket's head is sure, his folk should be of better guard and practice silence as an art. It has been the Verdict's task before to remind men that a nomination is not an election, and the polls a different commodity of politics from mere conventions. There be those who in the name of Bryan go loudly about. They say, among other

ON MARCH 9TH 1892, THREE BLACK MEN WERE LYNCHED FOR BEING COMPETITION TO THEIR WHITE BUSINESS COMPETITION IN MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THEIR NAMES WERE CALVIN MCDOWELL, HENRY STEWART, AND THOMAS MOSS.

THE THREE WERE BRUTALLY MURDERED FOR BEING AN ECONOMIC THREAT TO WHITE COMMUNITIES INTENDING TO THRIVE AS THE SUPERIOR CHOICE. (EJI, 2022) BY WIDENING THE SCOPE OF THIS AS A POSSIBLE "REASON" FOR THE LYNCHINGS REPORTED IN MISSISSIPPI, ONE CAN SEE THAT THIS IS NOT BE AN ISOLATED INCIDENT.

LITTLE OR POOR REASON WAS USED TO CONVICT LYNCHING VICTIMS OF ANY CRIME. IT IS UNDENIABLE THAT SIMILAR INSTANCES TO THE ONE IN MEMPHIS OCCURRED IN CENTRAL MISSISSIPPI. (*EJI Calendar*, online, 2022)



CALVIN MCDOWELL
03.09.1892

HENRY STEWART
03.09.1892

THOMAS MOSS
03.09.1892

(*EJI Calendar*, online)

ANTI- LYNCHING REACTIONS TO THE MOB

Reactionaries sought to define lynching as a crime through the implementation of anti-lynch laws and civic engagement. In reference to the news coverage on the right, Mrs. Dan Comfort, a well-known political figure in Durant, organized a two-meeting event in 1937 in which the "economic problems" of lynching and mob activity would be discussed on a political basis.

How does this case of advocacy reflect other similar actions by Mississippians?

The Durant news. (Durant, Miss.), 09 Dec. 1937. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.* Lib. of Congress.

ANTI-LYNCHING GROUP TO CONTINUE MEETINGS

STATE CONFERENCE HERE
ENDS DECEMBER 3

Arrangements for further conferences in the state next year to carry on a campaign against lynching were made here December 2-3, as the second conference came to a close. Mrs. Dan Comfort, leader for this district, will arrange the meetings.

The two day meeting presented addresses and discussions of an educational program, the cause of lynching, economic problems under lynch mob action and co-operation should a Federal anti-lynching law be passed. Speakers: the Southern Conference for Prevention of Lynching; the Rev. Charles G. Hamilton, rector of the Aberdeen Episcopal Church; the Rev. J. L. Sendlin, pastor of the Clarksdale Christian Church; Miss Constance Rumbough of Rosedale associate director of the Delta Co-operative Association, and the Rt. Rev. Theodore Dubose Bratton of Jackson.

Dr. E. S. Lewis, pastor of the Durant Methodist Church, where the conference was held, welcomed the conferees.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SOCIOECONOMICS OF LYNCHING APPLIED TO CENTRAL MISSISSIPPI

vagrants. Labor troubles have been widespread over there for years; this in spite of the fact that her once largest landowner and leading citizen, the late Lee Wilson was once a sharecropper. If they'd work more and fuss less it might help. The honor of the great

(See works cited)

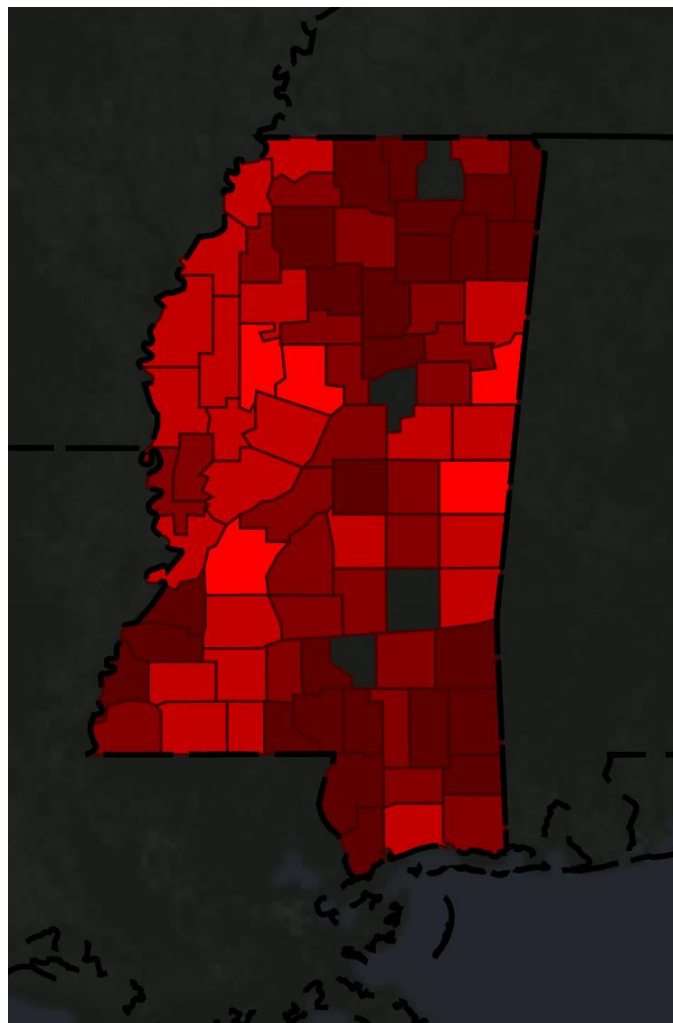
From the 1890's to the 1940's, it can be observed that the act of lynching, defined as being a murder committed by three or more (Smith, 2007), was been used by white populations to assert control over black populations in the social, economic, and political spheres of their time. This racial violence still affects much of the socioeconomic issues in today's society. With fear tactics such as lynching and other violent acts, Southern black populations were forced into economic submission by their white competitors and restricted from political processes due to their race. Lynching was utilized to reinforce this abusive system.

Social theories surrounding lynching typically revolve around the same base idea—white communities believed they belonged to an upper class, while black communities were reduced to a lower class. When this hierarchy was threatened by the success and thrive of black workers, black business owners, and families, white communities resorted to violence to discourage any further progress among black communities. (Williams et al, 2021)

Socioeconomic theories include one particular one regarding labor control, proposed by Tolnay and Beck in 1993b, which can be described as follows: "...As southern white economic disadvantages coincided with stagnation in the southern economy throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whites and Blacks began to compete for the same jobs, and lynching occurred as a result." (Williams et al, 2021) From this, support is created for the concept of lynching as a population control tactic.

The area of "central Mississippi," which we approximated for research purposes, has some of the highest reported numbers of lynchings per county. Counties like Leflore and Kemper have sky-high numbers, with a reported 48 and 24 respectively. (EJI, 2022) We sought to look into specific newspaper articles and recollections of these areas to provide a greater emphasis with this project.

As described by Thompson, "Economic matters were harsh for black Mississippians... 'In 1910, 90 percent of rural blacks were either sharecroppers, tenants, or contract laborers. Wracked by poverty and disease, men and women had a life expectancy of 30 years.' Against this general background, of course, stood the Jim Crow system and its continued impact..." (Thompson, 2007) Such economic systems were perpetuated with the goal of maintaining dominance over black Mississippians, physically, mentally, and economically.



(EJI, *Lynching in America*)

“Poor Long-Time Jim”

He kilt a man

Named Mr. Hare.

Dey go to his cabin,

But he aint dere.

He's in de canebrake

Hidin' in a hole

Shakin' in July,

Lak hit's freezin' cold.

Shakin' in July,

Lak hit's freezin' cold---

Knows Gant's bloodhounds

Gwine find dat hole.

Gwine find dat hole---

Ole river's wide

An' too far to swim

To de other side.

Poor Long-time Jim

No more will we see.

He'll be swingin' in de
mawnin'

From de limb of a tree.

Swinging' in de mawnin'

From a limb so high.

Poor Long-time Jim,

Good-bye, good-bye!

- Kate McAlpin Crady, 1938

(Sampled from *Free Steppin'*)

Untold History in the Heart of Mississippi

Written by Ashley Lewis

Jody Bell was the name of an African American lynched in 1901 in Terry Mississippi, a city 15 miles southwest of the capital, Jackson (CMPDD). According to the article, Jody Bell was accused of attempted robbery and consequently hung on a "railroad trestle" one mile north of Terry (*Weekly Clarion-Ledger* 1901). The article presented describes the collective murder of Jody Bell by the town of Terry as justly deserved (*Weekly Clarion-Ledger* 1901).

When delving deeper into the history of the Town of Terry, it can be found on the official website that the railroad (found quite literally in the heart of Terry) was "established in 1867" (CMPDD). Subsequently, the railroad allowed for the economic growth and sustainability of the small town for decades after its construction. The lynching of Jody Bell occurred on the symbol of economic growth and curated prestige. The lynching of Jody Bell at the most recognizable feature of Terry sent out a message. This act of unregulated violence spoke to the surrounding communities that the Town of Terry will not hesitate to lynch African Americans at the slightest trace of trouble. This is more noticeably seen within the article as it essentially states that the Town of Terry will not see judicial ramifications if the case is pursued in a court of law (*Weekly Clarion-Ledger* 1901).

The Terry Lynching.

Citizens of the Terry neighborhood lynched a negro named Jody Bell, who was discovered in the room of a young lady visitor at the residence of Mr. R. C. Terry, by hanging him to a railroad trestle, and left him dangling in the air, the negro having confessed his crime. The *Clarion Ledger* has always contended that these lynchings will occur as long as the cause for them exists. Declamations against them do no good, and efforts to prosecute the people engaged in them always fail. It is impossible to convict a mob, and it is useless to attempt it. No grand jury can be found to indict in such cases, and no petit jury would convict were indictments found, for juries are composed of men who share the same feelings as the lynchers, willing at all times to string up men who attempt to outrage women.

The Terry people who engaged in this lynching do not seem to fear an investigation, and have no regrets to express for their action. They have only done what other communities North or South, would have done under similar circumstances, and what the sentiment of the country approves. They have made no special efforts to hide their identity behind masks, and doubtless the name of every man engaged in the lynching could be obtained without the least trouble; but they would be in no danger, if their names were given to the public through the columns of the newspapers.

The *Clarion-Ledger* doubts if any effort is made to prosecute, and would advise against a course so vain and impotent.

The people of the Terry community are as good, as intelligent, as honorable and law-abiding as any in the United States, and the lynching of a negro found in a young lady's bedroom will not lower them in the estimation of the public. The old home of Governor Brown will not suffer by the incident.

(*Weekly-Clarion Ledger*, 28 March 1901)

Untold History in the Heart of Mississippi



(CMPDD, Image of Terry Depot)

The murder of Jody Bell in 1901 was not some hammer of justice led by the fed-up commonfolk of Terry, Mississippi. No, the brutal murder of Jody Bell was committed as a form of control. This is hinted at in the article as it stated, "it is impossible to convict a mob, and it is useless to attempt it" (*Weekly Clarion-Ledger* 1901). This portion of the text emphasizes the power over anyone who disagrees with the lynching by stating the fruitless nature of trying to pursue such a case in court. Essentially, the people who committed this act knew there would be no consequences for their actions as the so-called justice system at this point in 1901 was specifically curated to cater to the white majority. Therefore, the cries of this unfortunate black man lynched in central Mississippi fell upon deaf ears as he was hung from the local railroad trestle.

Written by Ashley Lewis

(Newspapers compounded by Derrion Arrington, Copiah-Jefferson Regional Library)

Jody Bell, colored, aged 25, was lynched near Terry, Miss. He was charged with entering a young lady's room and attempting an assault.

(*The Grenada Sentinel*, 30 Mar 1901)

Lynching in Mississippi.
Jody Bell, a negro, was discovered in the room of a young woman visiting a family at Terry, Miss. The young woman retired wearing several diamond rings, which had attracted the attention of the negro. The alarm was given and the negro fled. He was arrested at Byram, seven miles north of Terry, tried, and bound over to the circuit court, placed in jail, and was to be taken to Jackson for safekeeping. Citizens from miles around the country rode in quietly to hold court, to be presided over by Judge Lynch. The posse formed promptly at 9 p. m., took the negro to the iron bridge one mile north of Terry, where he was hanged. He made a full confession. Later developments implicated another negro, a very desperate character, named Charlie Hollingsworth. He was also arrested and placed in jail. The mob meant to hang him at the same time and place with Bell, but this negro fought his way through the small army of men, and although many shots were fired at him, he escaped in the darkness.

(*The Weekly Corinthian*, 27 March 1901)

"Jody Bell has gone to h—" is about the way they put it at Terry. Jody entered the room of a young lady the night before, and when she awoke and screamed he was holding her by the hands, and fled. When caught he was fully identified. When last heard from he was dangling from a railroad bridge.

(*Vicksburg Evening Post*, 25 Mar 1901)

The Killing Fields of the Deep South: The Market for Cotton and the Lynching of Blacks, 1882-1930

Stewart Tonerly and E. Beck gave insight to the relationship between economic impact and the cotton industry during the time period 1882-1930. We were able to take our studying further by examining the effects of lynching on the cotton industry. The authors explain to the readers how when slavery came to an end, the cotton industry started to decline due to the need for laborers. Not wanting to pay African Americans as regular citizens so many previous slave owners tried to force the African Americans to work for free as they had been doing for many years. When African Americans started to push back, this caused the whites to be angry and resort to a viscous act; lynching. The article also spoke on how unfairly black farmers were treated compared to white farmers. While white farmers were able to sell their product for top dollar, blacks had laws against them where they were forced to sell at a lower price. In The article to the right is evidence that this also directly affected Central Mississippi.



JACKSON, Miss. Feb. 8 (DSN)
—Mississippi Negro cotton farmers hard hit by acreage reductions for the 1954 crop already in effect are looking forward to obtaining some relief as a result of the new Cotton Acreage Allotment law signed by President Eisenhower last week.

Under the law on which the previous acreage allotments were set for the 1954 crop a farmer might have his acreage reduced as low as 15 per cent of what his planting was in 1953, and in most cases, Negro farmers, especially those with enough acreage to rent or to have tenant families on their farms have been given the lowest allotments; as in the case of a Negro farmer with six families on his place who had an acreage reduced from 110 in 1953 to 42.8 for 1954, and another who had his acreage reduced from 79 to 28 for 1954 also with six families on his place. With such evidence prevailing the charge has been made that Negro farmers have been given the lowest possible allotments, while white farmers of the same class have been given much larger allotments.

Throughout the state Negro farmers are pointing to the share of the acreage received by Negro farmers as compared to that of white farmers of the same class, as evidence of the need for Negro members on the County ASC Committee which has the authority for setting cotton acreage quotas.

Under the law signed by the President last week the small far-
(Continued on Page Five)

The Jackson Advocate, 23 Feb. 1929

Cotton Pickin'

Snatch dat cotton,

Snatch it fast.

Dis good weather

Ain't gwine last!

Tote it to de cotton house,

Dump it on de floor,

Suckle yo' baby,

Den back for more.

Load it in de waggin,

Run, open de gate,

Gwine to de gin-line

To set an' wait.

Ole gin a puffin',

At twelve she'll blow,

Our time comin',

Jes rarin' to go.

Snatch dat cotton,

Snatch it fast.

Dis here weather

Too good to last!

Analysis

This article gives insight to how African Americans were only viewed as a tool for economic gain. Crady never mentions the slave's personal life, only the life of picking cotton. The more cotton that African AMERICANS picked, the more money the slave owner made.

By Kate McAlpin Crady

Visual Representation



(Image by H. P. Moore)

We chose these images to represent the labor of African Americans actively working in the cotton field. Without these African Americans, the cotton industry wouldn't have been a success.



(Photograph by Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division, 1900)

Why was Lynching in Poetry Important?

During this time period, African Americans had to be creative and inventive when it came to spreading the wrongs of lynching in the South. Though some took more of a journalistic approach, there were also individuals who helped to spread knowledge through poetry. These poems can be easy to read and typically not that long. These poets used metaphors and analogies to help the readers understand the context of the poems. Although short, such poems were very knowledgeable and helped to educate individuals on lynching. Poetry regarding lynching from the 1890's-1940's showed the blaring hierarchy of race in the South and how such a system perpetuated racial violence. Central counties in Mississippi have some of the highest reported numbers of lynchings to date. (EJI, 2022) These poems illustrate the hardship, violence, and despair brought on by racial violence.

Photograph by: E. Jackson

The image to the right is a photo of Jon Woodson. Jon Woodson was born in Oxford, Mississippi and advocated for African American rights through poetry. One of Jon Woodson's most famous works is *Sonnets, and Chants: Recovering the African American Poetry of the 1930s* (2011). Jon Woodson is now a professor at Howard University teaching creative writing.



"The South"

“The lazy, laughing South,
With blood on its mouth;
The sunny-faced South,
Beast-strong,
Idiot-brained;
The child-minded South
Scratching in the dead fire’s ashes
For a Negro’s bones.
Cotton and the moon,
Warmth, earth, warmth,
The sky, the sun, the stars,
The magnolia-scented South;
Beautiful, like a woman,
Seductive as a dark-eyed whore,
Passionate, cruel,
Honey-lipped, syphilitic—
That is the South.
And I, who am black, would love her,
But she spits in my face;
And I, who am black,
Would give her many rare gifts
But she turns her back upon me;
So now I seek the North—
The cold-faced North,
For she, they say,
Is a kinder mistress,
And in her house my children
May escape the spell of the South.”



(Photograph 18, *Without Sanctuary*)

- (Langston Hughes, 1922)

“He Was a Man”

“It wasn’t about no woman,
It wasn’t about no rape,
He wasn’t crazy, and he wasn’t drunk,
An’ it wasn’t no shooting scrape,
He was a man, and they laid him down.

He wasn’t no quarrelsome feller,
And he let other folks alone,
But he took a life, as a man will do,
In a fight to save his own,
He was a man, and they laid him down.

“He worked on his little homeplace
Down on the Eastern Shore;
He had his family, and he had his friends,
And he didn’t expect much more,
He was a man, and they laid him down.

He didn’t abuse Tom Wickley,
Said nothing when the white man curst,
But when Tom grabbed his gun, he pulled his own,
And his bullet got there first,
He was a man, and they laid him down.

Didn’t catch him in no manhunt
But they took him from a hospital bed,
Stretched on his back in the n----- ward,
With a bullet wound in his head,
He was a man, and they laid him down.

It didn’t come off at midnight
Nor yet at the break of day,
It was in the broad noon daylight,
When they put po’ Will away,
He was a man, and they laid him down.
“Didn’t take him to no swampland,
Didn’t take him to no woods,
Didn’t hide themselves, didn’t have no masks,
Didn’t wear no Ku Klux hoods,
He was a man, and they laid him down

They strung him up on Main Street,
On a tree in the Court House Square,
And people came from miles around,
To enjoy a holiday there,
He was a man, and they laid him down.

They hung him and they shot him,
They piled packing cases around,
They burnt up Will’s black body,
Cause he shot a white man down;
“He was a man, and we’ll lay him
down.”

It wasn’t no solemn business,
Was more like a barbecue,
The crackers yelled when they fire
blazed,
And the women and the children too—
“He was a man, and we laid him
down.”

“The Coroner and the Sheriff
Said “Death by Hands Unknown.”
The mob broke up by midnight,
‘Another uppity N----- gone—
He was a man, an’ we laid him down.”

— (Sterling Brown, 1932)

Retrieved from *Witnessing Lynching:
American Writers Respond* (Anne Rice, 2003)

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