

Mississippi Tell It:
*An examination of the lynching deaths of
James Sanders, Lavert “Bert” Moore, and
Chester “Dooley” Morton*



**Simone N. Cotton, Northeastern University School of Law '18
Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Clinic
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I. INTRODUCTION

“Bolton Citizens Slay Negro Held as Girl’s Insulter.”¹ These are the words of a local Jackson, Mississippi newspaper headline in reference to the death of James Sanders on July 16, 1934. The mistreatment of African Americans after the Reconstruction era was no better than the involuntary servitude during slavery. Blacks, especially those in the South, were the constant targets of whites trying to reassert their power and racial dominance.

This paper examines the lynchings of three victims by piecing together various historical documents. Further, it discusses efforts of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) lobbying for the termination of lynching through federal anti-lynching legislation. It also examines the lynchings of James Sanders, Lavert “Bert” Moore, and Chester “Dooley” Morton, in Mississippi on July 14, 1935, just a year after James Sanders was murdered by a lynching mob.

II. ORIGINS OF THE “RAPE MYTH”

Historically, African-American men have been subjected to the harsh realities of a white-dominated America, which has perpetuated an environment of “black-blaming.” The notion of “black-blaming” has been used to subject black men and women to sinister concocted criminal charges and punishments at the hands of their white counterparts and law enforcement officials.²

1 Daily Clarion-Ledger, Jackson MS. July 17, 1934. *Bolton Citizens Slay Negro Held as Girl’s Insulter*. Pg.1. Papers from investigator.

2Stephen, Roderick, T., *Incredible Injustice: Lynching in the Southern United States* (May 2010). https://wakespace.lib.wfu.edu/bitstream/handle/10339/14823/Incredible_Injustice%5B1%5Dpdf%5B1%5D.pdf

The “Rape Myth” was created by whites to justify murders and lynchings of blacks through the illusion that black men were barbaric and wanted to “ravage the virginal white woman.”³ During the post-Reconstruction era, miscegenation laws were passed in an attempt to keep black men away from white women.⁴ The passage of miscegenation laws sought to perfect the white mastery of fabricating “an elaborate system of boundaries, taboos, and etiquette in order to establish purity [whiteness] and therefore impurity [blackness] by distancing black people from white and making proximity dangerous.”⁵

Black activists like Ida B. Wells published editorials regarding black matters and was able to further elaborate on the emergence of the “Rape Myth” sensation. Wells wrote: “Eight negroes lynched since last issue of the *Free Speech*...five on the same old racket—the new alarm about raping white women.”⁶ Well’s reference to the “new alarm” as the “same old racket” alludes to the rising and widely accepted depiction of black men “all of a sudden” being drawn to harm and sexually assault of white women.⁷ How did this illusion of black male attraction to white females develop into an uncontrollable sensation? It all goes back to the foundations of slavery.

Ever since blacks were enslaved, they have been around white women. As Ida B. Wells contended, “while the master was away fighting to forge the fetter upon the slave, he left his wife and children with no protection to save the Negroes themselves,” thereby, virtually forcing the

3 *Id.* https://wakespace.lib.wfu.edu/bitstream/handle/10339/14823/Incredible_Injustice%5B1%5Dpdf%5B1%5D.pdf

4 Matthews, Donald, *The Southern Rite of Human Sacrifice; Part II: Religion as Punishment* (6).

5 *Id.* at 7. This treatment of black people, men in particular, not only created public uproar and increased hostility towards blacks, but also made southern life for blacks even more of a living hell.

6 Wells-Barnett, Ida B., *On Lynchings*. New York: Humanity Books, an imprint of Prometheus Books, 2002 (29)

7 *Id.* at footnote 2.

https://wakespace.lib.wfu.edu/bitstream/handle/10339/14823/Incredible_Injustice%5B1%5Dpdf%5B1%5D.pdf

black men to fulfill the role as protectors of the white woman.⁸ The transition of the role of blacks from slaves to protectors took another shift after the North won the Civil War. W.E.B. Du Bois described that Northern victory had a “devastating psychological impact on the white planter class;” further highlighting that:

The mere fact that a man could be, under law the actual master of the mind and body of human beings had to have disastrous effects. It tended to inflate the ego of most planters beyond all reason; they became arrogant, strutting, quarrelsome kinglets; they issued commands; they made laws; they shouted their orders; they expected deference and self-abasement; they were choleric and easily insulted. Their “honor” became a vast and awful thing, requiring wide and insistent deference.⁹

The abolition of slavery and new “freedom” of blacks meant that white slave owners were no longer masters, therefore, no longer able to “protect” their white women from the “uncontrollable” black man.¹⁰

Ida B. Wells recounted in *The Red Record*, an apology from Bishop Haygood, who stated:

“But it is their misfortune that the chivalrous white men of that section, in order to escape the deserved execration of the civilized world, should shield themselves by their cowardly and infamously false excuse...”¹¹

Lisa Garoutte emphasized that white men who participated in anti-black violence were often regarded as chivalrous and just, imposing no sense of consequence or wrongdoing on the

8 Wells-Barnett, Ida B., *On Lynchings New York: Humanity Books*, an imprint of Prometheus Books, 2002 (62)

9 Dray, Philip. *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America*. New York: Random House (31) (2002).

10 *Id.* at footnote 2.

https://wakespace.lib.wfu.edu/bitstream/handle/10339/14823/Incredible_Injustice%5B1%5Dpdf%5B1%5D.pdf

11 Wells, Ida B. *A Red Record*, Digital History (1895).

http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/active_learning/explorations/lynching/wells2.cfm

perpetrators and accomplices.¹² When deconstructing the “Rape Myth,” it becomes clear that the Myth served as a true separator for both blacks and whites and became so ingrained in American culture that it helped to formulate substantial aspects of the Jim Crow era.¹³

Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918, a book published by the NAACP, compiled a list of recorded lynchings within the United States. Between 1889 and 1918, 2,472 black males and 50 females were lynched at the hands of their white counterparts.¹⁴ Walter White, author of *Rape and Faggot*, credits “the deep-seated hatred of southern whites towards African Americans” to three principles adopted by white supremacists:

- 1) Negroes are given to sex crimes:
- 2) Only lynching can protect white women; and
- 3) Unmentionably horrible deeds can be prevented through the extreme use of brutality.¹⁵

In a culture operating under these misconceptions, black men stood no chance of escaping irreversible harm at the hands of white men after the Civil War. The white man’s reclamation of mastery and justice came through lynching because it produced fear and control. Miscegenation was unlawful. Whites believed all relations between black men and white women were rape, yet “mulatto faces decorated the South.”¹⁶

12 Garoutte, Lisa. *Lynching in the U.S. South: Incorporating the Historical Record on Race, Class and Gender*, The Ohio State University, (2007). Many white lynchers justified their violence towards blacks as a means of protecting their women.

13 *Id.* at footnote 2. https://wakespace.lib.wfu.edu/bitstream/handle/10339/14823/Incredible_Injustice%5B1%5Dpdf%5B1%5D.pdf

14 NAACP, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889- 1918*.

15 Walter White, *Rape and Faggot* (8).

16 *Id.* at footnote 2.

https://wakespace.lib.wfu.edu/bitstream/handle/10339/14823/Incredible_Injustice%5B1%5Dpdf%5B1%5D.pdf

III. BLACK MEN, LETTERS AND LYNCHING

Lynching served as a means of social control over African Americans. Lynching instilled fear in African Americans by supporting grave and uncontrollable injustice at the hands of mobs and county officials participating in extralegal murders.¹⁷ Lynching became the “primary vehicle for discussions of sexual relations between white women and black men,¹⁸ which evolved to encompass the black man and the “indecent letter.”

The evolution of the rape myth, in conjunction with gender classification and sexualization practices and beliefs, reinforced the need to “protect” white women from the oversexed black man. Lynching was viewed as an extralegal means of protecting a white woman’s integrity and virginity at the hands of black men.¹⁹

Gender construction plays a crucial role in molding the public image of the victim. Newspaper and media outlets often described many of the alleged white “victims of indecent letters” from black men as young or beautiful.²⁰ Shaping the characterization of the alleged victims was meant not only to illicit public outrage, but also to allow the supporters of lynching a platform to establish the need for extralegal “justice.” In contrast, the same characterization²¹

17 <http://uncpress.unc.edu/browse/page/302>

18 <http://uncpress.unc.edu/browse/page/302>

19 <https://historyengine.richmond.edu/episodes/view/354>

20 Romano, Renee, C., *Narratives of Redemption: The Birmingham Church Bombing Trial and the Construction of Civil Rights Memory*: The invocation of the term young essentially serves to suggest the status of the girls is blameless. This type of gender classification, which was used in the context of the four victims of the Mississippi bombing, can also apply to the media portrayal of white girls and women who allegedly received indecent letters or proposals from black men. Willie James Howard, sent Christmas cards to fellow-employees at his job, including a pretty white girl whom he learned was upset about the letter. Howard wrote her an apology. The girl’s father (Mr. Goff) saw the letter and was enraged, upon which, he drove with two friends to the boy’s house. The three men threatened young Howard with a gun and drove him to the Suwannee River. Mr. Goff admitted in writing that he tied the boy’s hands and feet on the way to the river. Upon getting to the river, he pointed the gun at the boy’s head and told him to jump. Howard did so, only to drown. The three men involved never had to answer for their crime.

<http://www.tbo.com/list/news-opinion-commentary/justice-for-willie-james-190797>

21 Terming many white victims as “young” or “beautiful”

used to describe alleged white victims of black violence, are not often used to describe black victims of white violence.

The language newspapers used to shape audience perception reinforced the need to protect alleged white victims against black violence by using wordplay to convey a certain level of purity and innocence. This is reinforced in Shawn Michelle Smith's book, *Photography on the Color Line*, where she states,

“[White womanhood]...is that phantom that is resurrected over and over again as a symbol of white racial purity defining the limits of the white lynch mob...the figure of a threatened or raped white woman, evoked as the innocent victim of a ‘terrible’ crime,” was conjured in attempts to justify lynching as the ‘understandable’ retribution of white fathers, brothers, and lovers.”²²

As highlighted in the rape myth ideology, white women were seen as the “lily of the South,” thereby reinforcing the prevailing ideology of protecting them at all costs.²³ White women only had to scream to set off a network of fathers, brothers, and lovers to come to their rescue and murder any black man who supposedly threatened the security of the “always doting and innocent” white woman.²⁴

The end of the Civil War meant that blacks were freed from the formal legal restrictions of slavery but they were not free from the resentment of their white counterparts. William Springs, suggests in *The American and German Holocausts: Common Behavioral Threads as seen from The Evolutionary Perspective*, that “...winning the Civil War by the North and the forceful freeing of the slaves formed the basis of resentment by the South of being forced to do

22 Daniels, Jessie, *White Women and the Defense of Lynching* (February 11, 2014).

<http://www.racismreview.com/blog/2014/02/11/white-women-defense-lynching/>

23 *Id.* Marion Jones, a white woman, screamed when Rubin Stacy, a black man, merely asked for food. Stacy was arrested and, as he was being transported, a mob seized him, murdered him, and hung him in sight of Jones' home.

24 *Id.*

something that was contrary to its beloved behavioral foundation.”²⁵ In a scholarly discussion of the impact of black women on race and sex, Paula Giddings cites the work of Dr. Cesare Lombroso (author of *Criminal Man*, 1876). Dr. Lombroso “proved” through this work that non-white men and men with non-white features tended to love “idleness and orgies, which essentially forced whites to unfairly and unjustifiably categorize all non-white men as desiring nothing more than to murder and satisfy their immense sexual appetites.”²⁶ Interestingly, Dr. Lombroso’s “findings” were not based on any empirical evidence, but rather based on differences in physical qualities against a group of people who were already treated as though they were inferior. Therefore, Dr. Lombroso only “proved” what whites already wanted to be right: blacks did not belong and whites had to find a way to eliminate them. The Civil War freed blacks from slavery, but lynching became another means for white men to assert their superiority and control over blacks.

IV. DYER ANTI-LYNCHING BILL

Between 1901 and 1929, more than 1,200 black men and women were lynched in the South.²⁷ Mississippi was recognized as one of the most violent states, with 245 lynchings between the years of 1901 and 1929.²⁸ James Weldon Johnson, the NAACP Secretary, was not

25 William Springs, *The American and German Holocausts: Common Behavioral Threads as seen from the Evolutionary Perspective*, (5).

26 Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter, The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, (79).

27 Carter et al., *Historical Statistics of the United States: Government and International Relations* 5: 252–255.

28 Carter et al., *Historical Statistics of the United States: Government and International Relations* 5: 252–255.

only a significant leader of public opinion, but also vigorously pushed for anti-lynching reform, alongside NAACP assistant executive secretary Walter White.²⁹

The drafting of the Dyer Anti-lynching bill came in response to wartime racial violence in the summer of 1917 in East St. Louis, Illinois, when white assailants drove through a black neighborhood firing indiscriminately.³⁰ The shootings killed forty African-American men, women and children.³¹ Representative Leonidas C. Dyer, a white congressional ally, received pressure from residents fleeing the racial violence and utilized the House floor to publicly denounce the violence as “the most dastardly and most criminal outrages ever perpetuated in this country.”³² The racial violence in Illinois showed the necessity for legislative action and compelled Representative Dyer to introduce H.R. 11279 (The Dyer Bill).³³

The Dyer bill was meant to “protect citizens of the United States against lynching in default of protection by the States...” and provided the blueprint for all subsequent NAACP-backed anti-lynching legislation.³⁴ The legislation sought to charge lynch mobs with capital murder and to try lynching cases in federal courts.³⁵ Additionally, it would have imposed

29History, Art & Archives: United States House of Representatives. *Anti-Lynching Legislation Renewed*,

<http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Essays/Temporary-Farewell/Anti-Lynching-Legislation/>

30The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, Encyclopedia Britannica, *East Saint Louis Race Riot of 1917* (September 14, 2011)

<https://www.britannica.com/event/East-Saint-Louis-Race-Riot-of-1917>

31 *Id.* <https://www.britannica.com/event/East-Saint-Louis-Race-Riot-of-1917>

32 *Id.* at footnote 29

<http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Essays/Temporary-Farewell/Anti-Lynching-Legislation/>

33 *Id.* at footnote 29

<http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Essays/Temporary-Farewell/Anti-Lynching-Legislation/>

34 *Id.* at footnote 29

<http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Essays/Temporary-Farewell/Anti-Lynching-Legislation/>

35 *Id.* at footnote 29

<http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Essays/Temporary-Farewell/Anti-Lynching-Legislation/>

on each county where a lynching occurred a fine between \$5,000 and \$10,000, which had to be paid to the victim's family immediately, and if no family existed, to the U.S. government to aid in prosecution of the case.³⁶ The bill also authorized jail time, imposed a fine, up to \$5,000 on local law enforcement officials who refused to make any reasonable efforts to prevent a lynching or who surrendered a prisoner in their custody to a lynch mob. Lastly the legislation sought to establish courtroom guidelines for lynching proceedings by preventing participants of lynch mobs from participating in the jury considering a lynching case.³⁷

The legal premise of the Dyer bill was simple: Lynching—and states' refusal to prosecute the perpetrators violated victims' 14th Amendment rights.³⁸ The intense lobbying pressure from the NAACP influenced the House, first in adopting the rule for consideration, and then in the House consideration of the legislation.³⁹ The Dyer Bill was vehemently opposed by many members of the House. In order to advance the Senate legislative agenda, the Senate Republican Conference decided to abandon the Dyer Bill, in an effort to address “more important” topics. With the abandonment of the bill, the number of lynchings only continued to grow.

V. JAMES SANDERS

[ell/Anti-Lynching-Legislation/](#)

36 *Id.* at footnote 29

<http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Essays/Temporary-Farewell/Anti-Lynching-Legislation/>

37 *Id.* at footnote 29

<http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Essays/Temporary-Farewell/Anti-Lynching-Legislation/>

38 *Id.* at footnote 29

<http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Essays/Temporary-Farewell/Anti-Lynching-Legislation/>

39 *Id.* at footnote 29

<http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Essays/Temporary-Farewell/Anti-Lynching-Legislation/>

On July 16, 1934, C.D. Lancaster and John Lancaster killed James Sanders.⁴⁰ The Lancasters shot Sanders five times, the first bullet pierced Sanders' heart and was itself fatal. The James Sanders slaying was reported differently in various newspaper accounts.

The July 17, 1934 *Daily Clarion-Ledger* alleged that Sanders was accused of writing a vulgar and indecent proposal to a prominent young white girl in Bolton.⁴¹ It was reported that Sanders signed the name of another black man in an attempt to "double cross him." Before Sanders was arrested, "a score" of other blacks were arrested and held in jail relating to this "indecent" letter.⁴² It was alleged, that they were questioned and gave handwriting samples as a basis of comparison.⁴³ On the morning of July 16, 1934, Deputy Thornton Hale and Sheriff Ferguson reported they received a tip that James Sanders alias James Lewis was the author.⁴⁴

Given this information, Deputy Thornton Hale and Sheriff Ferguson stated that they began an exhaustive three-day investigation to find the alleged letter and its alleged author.⁴⁵ It was reported that the Lancaster men found James Sanders near the Methodist Church in Bolton while he was enroute to catch a bus.⁴⁶ The Lancasters alleged they hunted Sanders to hold him for safekeeping in an attempt to prevent him from being seized by a larger mob.⁴⁷ They reported that Sanders grabbed the younger Lancaster's pistol from its holster, ran from the car and threatened the Lancaster group.⁴⁸ C.D. Lancaster alleged that he shot Sanders in his shoulder and

40 *Daily Clarion-Ledger*, Jackson MS. July 17, 1934. *Bolton Citizens Slay Negro Held as Girl's Insulter*. Pg.1. Papers from investigator

41 *Id.*

42 *Id.*

43 *Id.*

44 *Id.*

45 *Id.* The deputies were said to have apprehended Sanders, whom they believed to be the suspect. It was also alleged by Hale and Ferguson that they called upon civilians to assist in finding Sanders, but urged them to refrain from acts of violence.

46 *Id.*

47 *Id.*

48 *Id.*

chest. This did not stop Sanders who allegedly ran several more feet, and, as he continued to run, John Lancaster fired several more shots. Sanders was reportedly hit a total of five times by the Lancaster group.⁴⁹

Another news account reported that on July 16, that C.D. Lancaster, John Lancaster, Wallace Lancaster, and Wallace Lancaster Jr. had seized Sanders from a mob, who was strung out on lynching him.⁵⁰ The Lancaster men alleged they “rescued” Sanders from the mob and drove Sanders into the woods for “questioning” regarding the “indecent proposal” that was allegedly in the letter.⁵¹ The Lancasters alleged that Sanders attempted to gain his freedom from the Lancaster men by reaching for a gun and “shooting it out,” whereupon he was riddled with bullets.⁵²

There was never any indication that a letter was ever found or what the contents of the alleged letter were. However, in a preliminary hearing, C.D. Lancaster was exonerated by a Justice of the Peace, who was backed by District Attorney Hugh B. Gillespie.⁵³

Although the attempted passage of the Dyer Anti-lynching bill failed prior to the lynching of James Sanders, the absence of any federal anti-lynching law in 1934 illustrates how its enactment could have provided a federal means of restorative justice for the Sanders family and other members of the black community in Bolton. The lynching of James Sanders further fueled the determination of members of the NAACP to actively lobby in support of federal

49 *Id.* at 7.

50 Atlanta Daily World. July 18, 1934, *Mississippi Youth, Rescued From Mob, is Slain!: Claim Negro Wrote Letter*. Pg. 1.

51 *Id.*

52 *Id.*

53 Daily Clarion-Ledger, July 18, 1934. *Bolton Slaying Passed to Files*. Pg. 14.

anti-lynching legislation.⁵⁴ The NAACP soon began its new legislative efforts to lobby for another federal-anti lynching bill.

VI. COSTIGAN-WAGNER ANTI-LYNCHING BILL

In 1934, Senators Edward P. Costigan and Robert Wagner, along with NAACP national secretary Walter White, launched a campaign to introduce the Costigan-Wagner Anti-Lynching Bill.⁵⁵ The goal of the Costigan-Wagner bill was to place responsibility on local authorities by holding local sheriffs accountable for their inaction in the protection of prisoners taken by mobs and lynched in their custody.⁵⁶ The Costigan-Wagner Bill came at a time that was pivotal for anti-lynching politics—after the death of Claude Neal, who was the victim of a horrendously brutal public lynching in Jackson County Florida, in October, 1934.⁵⁷

The introduction of the bill obtained support from nine state governors, fifty-eight churchmen, and fifty-four university and college presidents.⁵⁸ In 1935, Walter White mobilized

54 The Baltimore Afro-American. *Lynchings in 1934 Are Now Up to 14, NAACP Wires F.D.* July 28, 1934. Walter White sent a telegram to Governor Connor of Mississippi requesting him to “bring to trial immediately and punish to the full extent of the law” every person connected with the lynching of James Sanders.

55 NAACP –Anti-lynching bills in the 1930’s- Student resources context

56 NAACP –Anti-lynching bills in the 1930’s- Student resources context. A provision was also made to compensate the families of those who were victimized by mob action.

57 NAACP –Anti-lynching bills in the 1930’s- Student resources context. In October 1934, Claude Neal, a Black man in Florida, was accused of murdering a young white woman. Neal, an employee of the white woman’s father, was later arrested by authorities in a neighboring state. Before Neal was taken to greater safety, a mob arrived, forcibly removed him from the jail, and returned him to Jackson County, Florida. The following day, invitations were sent out for his lynching, newspapers and radio stations alike, announced that a “Negro would be mutilated and set afire.” The NAACP caught wind of the news and moved the Florida governor to offer the assistance of the state’s national guard, which the governor refused. The mob forced Neal to eat his penis, stabbed him with a knife repeatedly, and cut off several of his fingers and toes. After nearly two hours of being tortured, Neal died before he was lynched. An enraged crowd resumed the mutilation before burning and hanging Neal’s body from a nearby tree.

58 NAACP –Anti-lynching bills in the 1930’s- Student resources context.

the NAACP to advocate for the passage of the bill and pressed President Roosevelt and his Attorney General to make public their support for the bill, to no avail.⁵⁹

When the bill reached the Senate floor it was met with strong opposition.⁶⁰ When the bill finally reached the Senate floor, southern senators invoked a filibuster. After the bill was laid aside three times, it still failed to pass. After six days of the filibuster, which delayed other pressing Senate matters, a motion to adjourn passed.⁶¹ While those in opposition made every effort to prevent the passage of the anti-lynching bill, its backers made minimal effort to overcome the filibusters.⁶² With no anti-lynching bill in place the lynchings only continued and in July 1935, a monumental double-lynching occurred in Lowndes County, Mississippi.

VII. LAVERT “BERT” MOORE & CHESTER “DOOLEY” MORTON

On July 14, 1935, Lavert Moore (Bert) & Chester Morton (Dooley) were lynched by a mob of about thirty-five people on an oak tree outside the Zion Negro Church. The Zion Negro Church was a black church eight miles south of Columbus, Mississippi.⁶³

59 NAACP –Anti-lynching bills in the 1930’s- Student resources context.

60 NAACP –Anti-lynching bills in the 1930’s- Student resources context. Southern state Senators strong opposed the bill and believed that lynching was a matter that should be left to the states based on the Constitution.

61 Dissertation Paper: There was no effort made to break the filibuster through round-the-clock sessions or calling a vote to end the debate. Southern Senator’s used all resources to frustrate the passage of the Costigan-Wagner bill.

62 Dissertation Paper: Most Democrats were unwilling to risk party unity and the coalition that allowed them to have national power for the anti-lynching bill, who many believed only benefitted a small group of voters.

63 Jackson Daily News, July 15, 1934, *Lowndes Jury Probes 2 Hangings: Jury unable to find clue in quiz into lynching of 2 state assault suspects*. Pg. 1

Lavert (Bert) Moore was a twenty-five year old farmer born in 1910 in Lamar County, Alabama.⁶⁴ He was the son of Charles Moore born in Caledonia, Mississippi and Becky Moore born in Pickens County, Alabama.⁶⁵

Chester Morton (Dooley) was a seventeen-year-old farmer who was born in 1918 in Lowndes County, Mississippi.⁶⁶ He was the son of Chester Morton born in Thomas Place, Lowndes County, Mississippi and Adaline Morton (Hunnicut) born in Pickens County, Alabama.⁶⁷

Morton and Moore were accused of two alleged attempts to criminally attack a 40-year old white woman, who was the wife of a farmer. These alleged attacks were said to have taken place two weeks before they were hung on July 14, 1935.⁶⁸ The first reported attack alleged that the two men appeared at the white woman's home and told her they were going to attack her before being frightened away by an automobile coming to the house.⁶⁹ In the second attack report, it was alleged that one of the men returned only to meet a guard outside the woman's house, at which time a scuffle ensued.⁷⁰ It was also reported that the woman became involved in the fight and threw a lit kerosene lantern at the African-American man.⁷¹

64 1930 Census, Lowndes County,44-15 (13A), Beat 3, April 29, 1930

65 *Id.* The 1930 census reported that Bert Moore had four siblings, Rebecca Moore, Roy Moore, Bettie L. Moore, and Harvey Moore. By 1940, Bert Moore, also had one niece, Bessie Mae Moore, and one nephew, John Will Upchurch. Bert Moore's death certificate contains discrepancy about his marital status; on one end it is written that he is "Single" on the other hand, another account of the same census has "Husband" circled, but does not list a spouse.

66 1930 Census, Lowndes County,44-15 (14B), Beat 3, April 30, 1930

67 *Id.* The 1930-1940 censuses reported that Dooley Morton's siblings were Maggie Morton, Easter Morton, Chess (Chas) Morton, Scott Morton, Grady Morton, Sallie M. Morton, Mandy Morton, and Bessie Morton.

68 The New York Times, July 16, 1934, 2 *Negroes Lynched By Mississippi Mob: Deputy Sheriff Overpowered as He Takes Men From Columbus for Safekeeping.*

69 Hudson, Fraser Berkley, *Possum Town 'Photo-Biography': Culture, History, and Identity Through the Mississippi Lens of O.N. Pruitt, 1920-1955*, Chapel Hill (2003).

70 *Id.* It was said that whoever returned either allegedly took the guard's gun or fired an ineffectual shot.

71 *Id.* He fled.

By Sunday morning, July 14, 1935, Morton and Moore had been arrested and were in the custody of Sheriff Parker Harris.⁷² Sheriff Parker alleged that while transporting Moore and Morton to Aberdeen for safekeeping,⁷³ he was overpowered by a mob of about thirty-five citizens.⁷⁴ The infuriated mob took the two men to outside of the Zion Negro Church, about one mile from the home of the white woman.⁷⁵ The mob tied the hands and feet of the two men, placed them on top of cars, and hung them from an oak tree behind the church.⁷⁶

News accounts do not say exactly when the lynching occurred, but the newspaper reported that the bodies were cut down at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, “more than twelve hours” after the lynching occurred and after “hundreds visited the spot of the execution.”⁷⁷ Photographer O.N. Pruitt was summoned to photograph two images of Bert and Dooley hanging lifelessly from the oak tree.⁷⁸ The *Associated Press* reported that Columbus and Lowndes County were in a high state of excitement during the double lynching, but when the mob dispersed they quieted down.⁷⁹

July 17, 1935, the *Atlanta Daily World* reported that “the verdict of the coroner’s jury reached after short deliberation, is regarded as meaning the state of Mississippi will find itself unable to ascertain the identity of any of the members of the mob that took part in this unusual double lynching.”⁸⁰ The photographic image that Pruitt took depicts the lifeless bodies of Moore

72 *Id.*

73 Jackson Daily News, July 15, 1934, *Lowndes Jury Probes 2 Hangings: Jury unable to find clue in quiz into lynching of 2 state assault suspects*. Pg. 8. The Sheriff’s alleged they were transporting the pair to Aberdeen for safekeeping in a fear of mob violence.

74 Fraser at 248. The Baltimore Afro-American, *2 Men Lynched in Miss. Churchyard*, July 20, 1935. Deputy Harris reported that he was unharmed by the mob, but also unable to resist them.

75 Daily Clarion-Ledger, *Mobs Handle Three Blacks: Two Lynched in Lowndes, Third Chased Across River Following Attacks*, July 16, 1935.

76 *Id.* When given the signal, the cars were driven from under the two men, leaving them suspended from the tree.

77 Fraser at 249.

78 Fraser at 250. The Pruitt photo did not accompany any of the news stories.

79 *Id.*

80 Atlanta Daily World, *Same Old Verdict*, July 17, 1935.

and Morton hanging from an oak tree behind the church, with wrenched necks, torn clothes, and a man kneeling with a straw hat holding their feet in an effort to keep the bodies from swaying.⁸¹

VIII. REFLECTIONS ON LYNCHING AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

In order to understand the direction of our country today, we have to recognize the reasons we are here as law students in the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice clinic, working to learn the history, techniques, tools used by earlier advocates for civil rights and restorative justice. Researching and uncovering the mysteries of the southern culture has led us to a more profound understanding of how racial violence in Mississippi functioned as a critical tool in the lynching phenomenon. Unfortunately, the tragedy surrounding James Sanders is barely mentioned in the historical archives of Bolton, Mississippi. Prior to the research conducted by the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Clinic at Northeastern University's School of Law, the main collection of information about his death was in Arthur Raper's book.⁸²

However, simply identifying and reporting on the events that occurred in particular lynchings is not enough to restore justice to the families of victims and others plagued by the lasting horrors of the bloody South. The harsh reality is that any presentation of a lynching victim's story skews the lens through someone else's version of events. Due to the nature of these atrocities, the victim's voices are never heard.

As future lawyers and advocates of justice, it is the job of Northeastern law students to shed light on the legal short-comings of the past and use the tools and technologies available today to avoid making those same mistakes in the future. As researchers and professionals, it's critical that we do our best to aid in adjusting the lens through which we view stories like those of

81 Fraser at 251.

82 Raper, Arthur, *The Tragedy of Lynching*.

Sanders, Moore, and Morton. The memories of these three victims have left traumatic lasting impressions on members of their local communities.⁸³ Although the memory and horrific events of what happened to Sanders, Morton, and Moore should never be forgotten in history, by telling their stories through a critical lens, we can promote restorative justice for their families as well as those individuals affected by the memory their stories leave. While there are reasons victims' families opt not to talk about the lynchings of their loved ones,⁸⁴ enabling them to read thoroughly carefully researched accounts of their kin's deaths can be an extraordinary form of restorative justice.

Restorative justice is not so much about compensation as it is researching and retelling a story with a speculative eye while acknowledging that these victims are never able to express to the world their recount of events. Mississippi is still plagued with the effects of the lynching era, but unfortunately not all lynching stories get retold in a way that provides for questioning. Many lynching accounts published in white newspapers cater to the white population, while the accounts in black newspapers may provide more speculation about the events and motivation of the actors. Although the latter accounts may not be based on careful research and documentation, they can offer alternative perspectives that challenge the assumptions, viewpoints and missing or misleading information in the white newspaper accounts.

It is important that we learn from the past and retell even the most gruesome stories to prevent history from repeating itself. Ida B. Wells once said, "Somebody must show that the

83 Fraser at 255. Helen Randolph, an African American woman, said members of the Zion Negro Church told her that the church was having a revival service on the Sunday of the lynching. Church members said the mob "broke up the service" and "forced some of them to watch." Her husband, John Randolph, who was five years old at the time, said he remembers walking through the woods and seeing the corpses hanging from the tree. He says the image still haunts him to this day.

84 Many of the family members alive today choose not to talk about these events, either because it has sothe events badly traumatized their families, or because at the time of the lynching they were so young, that adult did not discuss the topic around themwhen they were listening.

Afro-American race is more sinned against than sinning, and it seems to have fallen upon me to do so.” As new leaders and members of the legal profession it is up to us to redefine justice. The lives of African-Americans have been sinned against for centuries and the wrongs and harms to their lives have taken multiple forms.⁸⁵ It is up to us to change the black experience, but this does not mean prioritizing the lives of one race over another. Instead, we need to come together and correct the mistakes of the past while setting a new foundational standard for how we want to be remembered in history. Change does not happen overnight, but in order to grow we must be willing to acknowledge the necessity for change.

⁸⁵ African Americans have continuously been sinned against in an effort to eliminate their presence. Contemporary examples include the introduction of crack in urban neighborhoods, the “War on Drugs,” and now police officer brutality towards African-Americans (men in particular). These issues, too, are part of a long history of efforts to control African American citizens and their communities through violence and intimidation.