

# **A Legal History of the Murder of Malcolm Wright**



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## I. Introduction

Born in 1900, Malcolm Wright grew up in Chickasaw County, in the northwest part of Mississippi. On July 2, 1949, he was killed as his wife and children looked on in horror. The Tuskegee Institute in Alabama listed the incident as a lynching.<sup>1</sup> This story demonstrates how perpetrators of racial violence would justify killings and avoid penalty for their acts even when prosecuted in court. James Moore was acquitted on a charge of murdering Malcolm Wright. The trial did not address the underlying racial crime against Wright and the trial also provided the community with a false sense that justice was served. Researchers, political officials, and various practitioners need more information about such instances of injustice to promote civil discourse that can examine the driving force behind racial violence ..

## II. The Incident

Saturday afternoon on July 2, 1949, Malcolm Wright and his family began their weekly shopping trip to Houston, Mississippi, .<sup>2</sup> which was approximately three to four miles from their farm.<sup>3</sup> Traveling in a mule-drawn wagon,<sup>4</sup> the Wrights took the back route on Thorn Road.<sup>5</sup> As the family headed to town, Virginia Wright, handed each of her five children a stick of gum.<sup>6</sup>

Malcolm Wright was steering the wagon with Virginia Wright next to him in the front.<sup>7</sup> Five of their seven children, whose ages ranged from four to fifteen years old,<sup>8</sup> were sitting in the

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<sup>1</sup> “Two Lynchings in 1950, Tuskegee Reports: 7 Victims Saved From Mob Attack”, *The Chicago Defender*, January 6, 1951.

<sup>2</sup> Alice “Wright” Robinson, interview by Robert Sanderman, July, 23; Henry Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 20, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Mary “Wright” Clark, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 30, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Inez Fouch, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 29, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 20, 2012.

back of the wagon with umbrellas to shade themselves from the hot sun. Sid and Malcolm, Jr., the Wrights' oldest sons, were not in the wagon that day; they were at work.<sup>9</sup>

As the family headed to town, James Moore, James Kellum, and Eunice Gore, all in their early twenties, came from the opposite direction in a black 1941 Ford truck.<sup>10</sup> Moore pulled up next to the wagon and yelled the "N" word to the family.<sup>11</sup> The occupants of the Ford shouted to Wright to "stop hogging the road."<sup>12</sup> However, the trio had plenty of room to pass.<sup>13</sup> As he pulled over as far to the left of the road as he could, Wright told Moore "I was not hogging the road."<sup>14</sup> The trio passed the wagon and Wright continued towards town.<sup>15</sup> Surprisingly, the Ford made a U-turn and pulled up alongside of the wagon.<sup>16</sup> As the Ford drew close to the wagon, one of the children warned Mr. Wright, "There go them folks again."<sup>17</sup> The trio started to yell at Wright accusing him again of "hogging the road."<sup>18</sup> Moore drove past the wagon and parked further up the road, blocking Wright from passing.<sup>19</sup>

Wright's wagon was next to the side of the road; he repeated to the men, "I already pulled over so there was ample space for you to pass."<sup>20</sup> Local officers later noted that there were

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. The five younger children in the wagon were Mary "Wright" Clark, Inez "Wright" Fouche, Henry Wright, Columbus Wright, and Alice "Wright" Robinson.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> "Outraged Community Pushes Case Against Three White Men who Fatally Beat Negro," *The Delta Democratic-Times*, July 8, 1949.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 20, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Mary "Wright" Clark, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 30, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

two wheel tracks in a ditch at the side of the road, indicating that Wright had pulled over to the side of the road.<sup>21</sup>

The three men got out of the truck. Moore grabbed a bumper-jack from the trunk.<sup>22</sup> Although the trio had been drinking earlier in the day, they did not seem excited at the time.<sup>23</sup> The family grew quiet and frightened, wondering what would happen next.<sup>24</sup> Wright told the children to be quiet.<sup>25</sup> The men struggled with Wright as he sat in the wagon, and dragged him out of his seat and onto the road.<sup>26</sup> As Wright lay on the ground, Moore struck him in the head with the bumper-jack.<sup>27</sup> The struggle startled the mules, who lunged forward.<sup>28</sup> Some of the children who had been sitting on a board laid across the wagon, fell off and landed on the floor of the wagon.<sup>29</sup>

Using the bumper-jack, Moore struck Wright repeatedly until he bashed in his skull.<sup>30</sup> Moore, who was a six-foot, 180 pound young man, would later claim in court that he acted in self-defense.<sup>31</sup> However, according to the children who witnessed the killing, Wright did not have a weapon of any sort with which to defend himself.<sup>32</sup> A deputy, who arrived at the scene shortly after the killing, reported that Wright's brain was "popped wide open. His skull was bust

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<sup>21</sup> "Outraged Community Pushes case Against Three White Men Who Fatally Beat Negro," *The Delta Democrat-Times*, July 8, 1949; "Accused of Hogging the Road, Negro beaten to Death as Wife, Children Look On," *Times-Post*, July 7, 1949.

<sup>22</sup> Mary "Wright" Clark, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 30, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Henry Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 20, 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Inez "Wright" Fouch, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 29, 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Mary "Wright" Clark, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 30, 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Henry Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 20, 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Mary "Wright" Clark, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 30, 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Henry Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 20, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> "Verdict Expected Today in Bumper Jack Slaying," *Tupelo Daily Journal*, April 4, 1950.

<sup>32</sup> Henry Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 20, 2012.

wide open clear down the temple.”<sup>33</sup> His brains seeped out of his skull as he laid there on the ground.<sup>34</sup> After the mules stopped moving, Inez looked back and saw that her father was still moving. Then she saw that he suddenly stopped moving.<sup>35</sup> Her sister, Mary, also looked back and noticed that her father was still moving, but only seconds later his body laid still.<sup>36</sup> Malcolm Wright died at approximately at 3pm, Saturday July 2, 1949.<sup>37</sup>

Virginia Wright picked up the fragments of her husband’s brain off the road and placed them in the hem of her dress.<sup>38</sup> Then she told Henry, the eldest son in the wagon, to take one of the mules to town and to tell his brothers that their father was dead.<sup>39</sup>

### III. After the Murder

While the family remained in the wagon, Henry rode off on the mule to tell his older brothers Sid and Malcolm Wright, Jr. about what had happened.<sup>40</sup> By the time Henry arrived in town, people had already heard about the murder.<sup>41</sup> Moore also left the scene.<sup>42</sup> He went to the sheriff’s office to.<sup>43</sup> tell the law enforcement officials about the incident.<sup>44</sup> Houston Town

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<sup>33</sup> “Accused of Hogging the Road, Negro Beaten to Death as Wife, Children Look On,” *Times-Post*, July 7, 1949.

<sup>34</sup> Henry Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 20, 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Inez “Wright” Fouch, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 29, 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Mary “Wright” Clark, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 30, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> “Accused of Hogging the Road, Negro Beaten to Death as Wife, Children Look On,” *Times-Post*, July 7, 1949.

<sup>38</sup> Alice “Wright” Robinson, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 23, 2012.

<sup>39</sup> Henry Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 20, 2012.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> “Moore Aquited In Bumper Jack Slaying: Not Guilty is Verdict of Calhoun Jury,” *Times-Post*, April 6, 1950.

<sup>43</sup> “Accused of Hogging the Road, Negro Beaten to Death as Wife, Children Look On,” *Times-Post*, July 7, 1949.

<sup>44</sup> Henry Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 20, 2012.

Marshall Jim Alexander placed Moore in custody and took him to the scene of the crime.<sup>45</sup> Deputy Sherriff T.A. Bryant later arrived at the scene, as did an undertaker.<sup>46</sup> Deputy Bryant questioned the family about the incident and then took everyone into town.<sup>47</sup> There, Bryant placed Moore, Kellum, and Gore under arrest on a charge of murder.<sup>48</sup>

On July 4, 1949, after the funeral service, Malcolm Wright's body was buried in Prospect Graveyard, two miles south of Houston, Mississippi.<sup>49</sup> Wright's immediate family and his cousin, Columbus Wright were present for the service, For some of the children, this was the first funeral they had ever attended.<sup>50</sup> It was hard to accept that their father would never return home. When interviewed by CRRJ, Inez recalled that even after the funeral she would wait at the front door, still expecting her father to walk through it. The children also recollected the great times they shared with their father. They recalled that his death took an enormous toll on their mother, who became extremely protective of them. She would run in to check on them whenever a black vehicle passed the house.<sup>51</sup>

#### **IV. The Reaction of the Community**

As word of Wright's death spread, the whole community in Houston was outraged at his violent death. He was a highly respected, well-mannered individual who had good relations with

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<sup>45</sup> "Accused of Hogging the Road, Negro Beaten to Death as Wife, Children Look On," *Times-Post*, July 7, 1949.

<sup>46</sup> Mary "Wright" Clark, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 30, 2012; "Accused of Hogging the Road, Negro Beaten to Death as Wife, Children Look On," *Times-Post*, July 7, 1949.

<sup>47</sup> Mary "Wright" Clark, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 30, 2012.

<sup>48</sup> "Accused of Hogging the Road, Negro Beaten to Death as Wife, Children Look On," *Times-Post*, July 7, 1949.

<sup>49</sup> Mary "Wright" Clark, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 30, 2012.

<sup>50</sup> Inez "Wright" Fouch, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 29, 2012.

<sup>51</sup> Inez "Wright" Fouch, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 29, 2012.

those in his community, both black and white.<sup>52</sup> The killing of Wright was so brutal and its provocation so trivial that even white people were outraged.<sup>53</sup> Deputy Sherriff T.A. Bryant told a journalist covering the story that “the area was ‘pretty hot’ against the three white men because Wright was respected as a hard-working man who minded his own business.”<sup>54</sup> According to Deputy Sherriff T.A. Bryant, residents contributed several thousand dollars to aid in the prosecution of Moore.<sup>55</sup> Jasper Rich, the owner of the farm where the family worked, also assisted in raising funds to prosecute Moore.<sup>56</sup> Some residents demanded that the court deny bond to the accused.<sup>57</sup>

More than 1,000 residents attended the preliminary hearing of Moore, Kellum and Gore in Chickasaw.<sup>58</sup> Moore was related to one justice of the peace, who recused himself from the hearing.<sup>59</sup> Mrs. Elmer Price, a lawyer from the lower house of the Mississippi Legislature was retained by Chickasaw community members to aid in the state’s prosecution of the murder case.<sup>60</sup> Members of the Masonic Lodge to which Malcolm Wright belonged collectively raised funds to help prosecute Moore.<sup>61</sup>

## V. The Indictment

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<sup>52</sup> “Lynched for Hogging Road; Even Miss. Whites Outraged”, *The Chicago Defender*, July 16, 1949.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Henry Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 20, 2012.

<sup>57</sup> “Lynched for Hogging Road; Even Miss. Whites Outraged.” *The Chicago Defender*, July 16, 1949.

<sup>58</sup> “White Men Denied Bond In Murderer of Negro,” *Jackson Advocate*, July 16, 1949.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Henry Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 20, 2012.



On October, 10, 1949, a grand jury indicted Moore, Kellum, and Gore for the murder of Malcolm Wright.<sup>62</sup> The court appointed counsel for all three defendants.<sup>63</sup> Moore and Kellum were released under appearance bonds of \$5,000 each, while Gore posted a \$2,000 appearance bond.<sup>64</sup> On October 15, all three defendants filed a motion to sever the trials, which the court granted.<sup>65</sup> As a result of the strong support for the victim in the community, the defense attorney for James Moore asked for a change of venue, which was granted on October 17, 1949.<sup>66</sup> The trial would proceed in neighboring Calhoun County.<sup>67</sup>

## VI. Trial

The trial commenced in Calhoun County on March 31, 1950.<sup>68</sup> Moore, Gore and Kellum were all present at the first trial, although Kellum and Gore's trial dates had not yet been set.<sup>69</sup> Choosing a jury was an all day process.<sup>70</sup> The twelve jurors were chosen at 4:53p.m. "Several men were excused after saying they would be influenced in measuring testimony because the defendant was a white man and the deceased was a [N]egro." Three hundred and fifty people packed the courtroom, a remarkable crowd, since the village of Pittsboro in Calhoun County,

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> "Slain Negro's Widow is First Witness Today As White Youth Faces Trial" *Tupelo Daily Journal*, April 1, 1950.

<sup>65</sup> Grand Jury Proceeding: Minutes of Circuit Court, 1st. District, Chickasaw County.

<sup>66</sup> Grand Jury Proceeding: Minutes of Circuit Court, 1st. District, Chickasaw County.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> "James Moore Trial In Chickasaw Killing Set For Friday" *Tupelo Daily Journal*, March 29, 1950.

<sup>69</sup> Mary "Wright" Clark, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 30, 2012; "Slain Negro's Widow is First Witness Today As White Youth Faces Trial" *Tupelo Daily Journal*, April 1, 1950.

<sup>70</sup> "Slain Negro's Widow is First Witness Today As White Youth Faces Trial" *Tupelo Daily Journal*, April 1, 1950.

had a population of only three hundred. Courtroom observers told journalists that they had never seen such a large crowd at the county courthouse.<sup>71</sup>

District Attorney A.T. Patterson was in charge of the state's case.<sup>72</sup> The courtroom was completely segregated, with African Americans seated upstairs on the second floor balcony.<sup>73</sup> Virginia Wright and two of her children, Mary, then 15 years old; and Henry, 14 years old were among the thirteen witnesses subpoenaed for the State.<sup>74</sup> The other children who had witnessed the crime from the back of the wagon, Columbus, Inez and Alice were too young to attend the court proceedings.<sup>75</sup>

On the first day of the proceedings, Virginia Wright testified that she saw the three white men about a mile from the spot on Thorn Road near Houston where the slaying occurred.<sup>76</sup> Mary Wright Clark, the eldest daughter who was 15 years old at the time of the trial, also testified. She told CRRJ that she was afraid to testify because she feared retaliation.<sup>77</sup> After her testimony, she was moved to a separate waiting room.<sup>78</sup> She said that she never felt safe afterwards because she was in constant fear that someone would intercede on the perpetrators' behalf.<sup>79</sup> She told CRRJ that she had a sense of the outcome of the trial before it even commenced.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Mary "Wright" Clark, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 30, 2012; "Slain Negro's Widow is First Witness Today As White Youth Faces Trial" *Tupelo Daily Journal*, April 1, 1950.

<sup>75</sup> Alice "Wright" Robinson, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 23, 2012.

<sup>76</sup> "Moore Acquitted in Bumper Jack Slaying: Not Guilty is Verdict of Calhoun Jury," *Times-Post*, April 6, 1950.

<sup>77</sup> Mary "Wright" Clark, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 30, 2012.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Mary "Wright" Clark, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 30, 2012.

<sup>80</sup> Mary "Wright" Clark, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 30, 2012.

Henry Wright, then 14, was the state's star witness.<sup>81</sup> He pointed to Moore during the trial when he was asked if he recognized the man who killed his father.<sup>82</sup> Although Moore was the only defendant who was actually tried, all three men were present during the court proceedings.<sup>83</sup> Attorneys on both sides asked Henry if he seen the man who struck his father; Henry responded, "I did."<sup>84</sup> "That is the man who was hitting my daddy," said Henry.<sup>85</sup> "With what?" he was asked. "That jack there," he replied, pointing to a bumper-jack about three feet in length which was introduced into evidence by the prosecution. Henry demonstrated the posture of his father, who was already in the road and on his knees when Moore struck him.<sup>86</sup> "And you saw him strike your daddy?" he was asked. "Yes, Sir," Henry replied.<sup>87</sup>

When Henry Wright referred to the white defendants by their names, the judge promptly and sharply corrected him, warning him that in his court, he had to address white men as "Mr.," or he would be charged with contempt. In relating the incident to CRRJ, Henry recalled, that he was nervous and did not believe that an all white jury would convict Moore of murder.<sup>88</sup>

James Moore testified on his own behalf. He was married by the time the trial took place, and he appeared in court, neatly dressed, with his mother and new wife. He testified that he blew his horn at Malcolm Wright and then asked him why he would not pull over. Wright responded, Moore claimed, by stating "you boys are drunk." Moore testified that Wright grabbed

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<sup>81</sup> "Chickasaw County Youth Cleared in Killing Case," *Tupelo Daily Journal*, April 5, 1950.

<sup>82</sup> Henry Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 20, 2012.

<sup>83</sup> "Slain Negro's Widow is First Witness Today as White Youths Faces Trial Jury," April 1, 1950. Alice "Wright" Robinson, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 23, 2012; Henry Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 20, 2012.

<sup>84</sup> Henry Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 20, 2012.

<sup>85</sup> "Youth Expected to Take Stand: Pittsboro Jury to Get Case This Afternoon," *Tupelo Daily Journal*, April 2, 1950.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Henry Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 20, 2012.

a piece of iron from the wagon. He stated that when Wright refused to go down the road, he (Moore) went for the bumper jack. He also stated that he went into Houston to tell the authorities about the incident.<sup>89</sup>

Gore testified that the defendants drove off but returned, stopping again shortly because they thought that Wright was cussing at them. He asserted that he got of the car and, when the wagon pulled up, he asked Wright if he was cussing at them earlier. He further testified that Wright responded to the three men by standing up in the wagon with a piece of iron and saying: "You White S.O.Bs are fixing to get it." Gore asserted that James told Wright that the three men did not want any trouble and had said that Wright should put down the iron and go down the road. According to Gore, Wright said he was not going "any dam where." Gore further testified that Wright held his right hand back with the piece of iron in it, and that Kellum has jumped back as a result. Gore stated that Moore went to the trunk of the Ford for the bumper jack, walked to the wagon and asked Wright to put the piece of iron down. He testified that Wright then swung at Moore. Moore ducked and swung the bumper jack at Wright, hitting Wright in his head. Gore stated that, as a result, Wright fell out of the wagon.<sup>90</sup>

The defense presented several corroborative witnesses, some of whom testified to seeing injuries that they claimed Moore had sustained.<sup>91</sup> However, four Chickasaw County officers testified that they saw Moore right after the killing and found no blood or marks of violence on Moore.<sup>92</sup> Many of the witnesses were either relatives of Moore or lived in the Thorn community where he resided, according to newspaper accounts.<sup>93</sup> Kellum, a 220 pound young man, and

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<sup>89</sup> "Verdict Expected Today In Bumper Jack Slaying," *Tupelo Daily Journal*, April 4, 1950.

<sup>90</sup> "Moore Acquitted in Bumper Jack Slaying: Not Guilty, is Verdict," *Times-Post*, April 6, 1950.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

Gore, who was enlisted in the army, also corroborated Moore's claim of self-defense.<sup>94</sup> On cross-examination, Kellum admitted that he had drunk "some beer and a glass of home brew" earlier, on the day of the killing. Moore had also admitted, on his cross-examination, to drinking some home brew.<sup>95</sup>

In closing arguments, defense counsel focused on self-defense, asserting that Mississippi law protected the right of a man to stand his ground and to meet force with force.<sup>96</sup> The defense attorney Bob Smith pointed out to the jury that the case had attracted widespread attention, and then urged the jury to ignore the racial elements of the case, stating "I still do not think that we're so jittery that we would convict a white man for killing a Negro simply because of this situation."<sup>97</sup>

For his part, the prosecutor, Albert T. Peterson argued that "the only question is: how much punishment for the defendant...you would indeed be doing violence to your conscience to find him guilty of manslaughter only."<sup>98</sup> He held up Mr. Wright's trousers, pointing to the scuffed torn cloth, and argued that they substantiated Henry's testimony that his father had been knocked to his knees.<sup>99</sup> Finally, he pleaded with the jury, "You cannot murder for pastime. Let's cut that out and we will save our reputations and our boys."<sup>100</sup>

The range of verdicts available to the jury, included capital murder, manslaughter and acquittal. If found guilty of manslaughter, under Mississippi law at the time, Moore would have

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<sup>94</sup> "Chickasaw County Youth Cleared in Killing Case," *Tupelo Daily Journal*, April 5, 1950.

<sup>95</sup> "Verdict Expected Today in Bumper Jack Slaying," *Tupelo Daily Journal*, April 4, 1950.

<sup>96</sup> "Youth Expected to take Stand: Pittsboro Jury to Get Case This Afternoon," *Tupelo Daily Journal*, April 2, 1950.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> "Verdict Expected Today in Bumper Jack Slaying," *Tupelo Daily Journal*, April 4, 1950.

either been fined not less than \$500 or imprisoned for not more than a year.<sup>101</sup> District Attorney Albert T. Patterson did not request a death sentence for Moore, although the jury could nevertheless have imposed a capital sentence.<sup>102</sup> According to some contemporaneous reports, had he been sentenced to death, Moore would have been the first white man to be executed for killing an African American in the state of Mississippi in 60 years.<sup>103</sup>

The case took three full days and part of a fourth.<sup>104</sup> The jury deliberated the verdict from 3:18 p.m. until nine o'clock the next morning.<sup>105</sup> In the end, it returned a verdict of not guilty in the case against Moore.<sup>106</sup>

## VII. The Wright Family

Malcolm Wright's family had deep roots in Chickasaw County. His father, Ed Watkins, was a white man who abandoned his son when he was a child, and his mother, Queenie Wright passed away when Malcolm was a child.<sup>107</sup> Queenie Wright's cousins, Kevon and his sister Catherine took care of young Malcolm.<sup>108</sup> Malcolm Wright married Virginia and the couple had seven children together.<sup>109</sup> Wright was a tenant farmer on Jasper Rich's farm.<sup>110</sup> The family grew cotton and soybeans, which they sold.<sup>111</sup> The Wright children recalled that their daily chores

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<sup>101</sup> "Youth Expected to Take Stand: Pittsboro Jury to Get Case This Afternoon," *Tupelo Daily Journal*, April 2, 1950.

<sup>102</sup> "Chickasaw County Youth Cleared in Killing Case," *Tupelo Daily Journal*, April 5, 1950.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Columbus Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 25, 2012.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Malcolm Wright, Jr., interview by Robert Sanderman, June 28, 2012.

<sup>111</sup> Henry Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 23, 2012.

included cutting wood, feeding the animals, chopping and picking cotton.<sup>112</sup> After the murder, the family no longer felt safe in the county.<sup>113</sup>

Three years after her husband's death, in 1952, Virginia Wright moved her family to Pointsville, Missouri where they lived and farmed with Malcolm Wright's cousin, L.C. Wright.<sup>114</sup> Virginia moved back and forth between Missouri and Mississippi, in part because she was interested in what became of her husband's killers. A strong woman, she raised her children alone and also tended to the neighbors' children. After their father's death, the older brothers, Malcolm Wright, Jr. and Sid continued to work in Mississippi to care for the family. Henry dropped out of school to do the same.

Between 1958 and 1960, the family moved to Chicago for better economic opportunities.<sup>115</sup> Some of the children continued their education in Missouri and later, in Chicago. Malcolm Wright, Jr. drove a truck for over forty years in Chicago, and Inez graduated from business school there before she moved to Israel. Mary worked at the United States Postal Service for most of her career. Alice worked at a candy company, and Columbus was also a truck driver. Virginia Wright passed away in Chicago in December 4, 1983 at the age of 83.<sup>116</sup> Sid Wright, the oldest sibling died in 2005. Of the seven Wright children, the six who are still alive today live in Israel, Texas, Illinois, Arizona, and Virginia. The Wright family meets for a family reunion on July 4, the date of their father's death, each year.

## VIII. Conclusion

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<sup>112</sup> Columbus Wright interview by Robert Sanderman, July 25, 2012.

<sup>113</sup> Inez "Wright" Fouch, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 29, 2012.

<sup>114</sup> Inez "Wright" Fouch, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 29, 2012; Henry Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 20, 2012.

<sup>115</sup> Henry Wright, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 20, 2012.

<sup>116</sup> Alice "Wright" Robinson, interview by Robert Sanderman, July 25, 2012.

Ever since the Wright family witnessed the tragic killing of Malcolm Wright in 1949, there has been no redress or public apology from public officials in the county or the state. The family was forced to move from their hometown to be safe from reprisal. They were never afforded an opportunity to reconcile the deep hurt they suffered from losing a loved one to senseless racial violence. Although the prosecutor called out the violence of Malcolm Wright's death as "murder for pastime," the jury found the white trio not guilty, rejecting even a manslaughter verdict that was within their power to impose.

The "not guilty" jury verdict—a miscarriage of justice by an all-white jury that ignored the racial elements of the case -- only intensified the pain and despondency that the family endured. The Wright family has been silenced for over sixty years. No one had asked them for their story and there was no one to whom they could turn for counseling after their father's killing. Today the family is searching for closure. They want recognition of the injustice that befell Malcolm Wright on that fateful day. The family should not be isolated from the town where they were born; they have deep roots in that community and much to share with the current residents of Chickasaw.

For families like the Wrights, it is essential to acknowledge the past injustice that they suffered so that they and the communities that ignored them can begin to heal. Otherwise they and the social institutions and forces in the community that harmed them are doomed to a cycle of injustice and oppression. Public recognition of Malcolm Wright's murder could begin the healing process for the Wright family and the community. Stepping up to ensure justice for all its residents is nothing new to the Chickasaw community. In 1949, members of the black and white community raised over a thousand dollars to aid in the prosecution of the accused murderers of Malcolm Wright; they also supported the hiring of a special prosecutor to assist in the case. The



city and county should continue these efforts, initiated over sixty years ago. The family needs peace of mind, and the opportunity to share their story, which can inform younger generations of their history.