ABOUT CRRJ

CRRJ researches the legal sequela and the political context of racially motivated homicides in twelve southern states, 1930-1970, including community resistance to the violence.

WHAT WE DO

The Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project (CRRJ) at Northeastern University School of Law is a mission-driven program of interdisciplinary teaching, research and policy analysis on race, history, and criminal justice. Our original investigations, transformative pedagogies, and top-level scholarship facilitate local and national initiatives to uncover an accurate history of racial harms during the Jim Crow era and reconcile the ongoing damage.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE
HTTPS://CRRJ.ORG

VISIT THE ARCHIVE
HTTPS://CRRJARCHIVE.ORG
BEGINNINGS OF A COLLECTION...

CRRJ was launched in 2007 by Northeastern University Distinguished Professor Margaret Burnham. That same year, CRRJ held a conference titled *Crimes of the Civil Rights Era*, an event that brought veterans of the 1960s-era civil rights movement together with scholars, lawyers, and journalists.

After this gathering, MIT Chancellor Melissa Nobles, and Margaret Burnham, began independently collecting material on cases of anti-Black homicide that were outside of the scope of the Emmet Till Act. As they searched newspapers for contemporary reports on these older cold cases, it became clear that there were hundreds of incidents that had never been investigated.

What started as a rather scattered effort to investigate these incidents and work with the affected families, eventually became a well-defined project to collect data on racially motivated killings of Black people in the Jim Crow South, leading, ultimately, to the *Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive*. 
BEGINNINGS OF A COLLECTION...

Since 2009, these incidents have been investigated by law students, graduate students in journalism and public history, and undergraduates. About four hundred students have worked on the project.

In 2022, after months of work by CRRJ and Northeastern Library staff, faculty, students, and volunteers, the Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive was officially launched. It remains one of the most comprehensive digital records of racial homicides collected to date, and home to more than 1,000 case files.

It is an invaluable resource for examining the extensive scale of killings in the Jim Crow South, from 1930 to 1954, offering users the opportunity to learn how violence affected people's lives, defined legal rights and shaped politics during the Jim Crow era.

VISIT THE ARCHIVE
HTTPS://CRRJARCHIVE.ORG
We collected the data in the Archive over the course of 15 years, and yet it is not complete. Our collection contributes to a rapidly proliferating field of research projects and databases seeking to analyze and redress the history of racial violence in the United States.

Our data set includes much of the homicidal racial violence that took place during the Jim Crow-era in the region of the study, and it expands significantly on previous collections, but because federal records were often not available, and state records non-existent, we can only speculate as to the true scope of the violence.
WHAT IS THE ARCHIVE?

Our research is ongoing. We continue to collect material for cases in states currently represented in the Archive, while our research moves beyond the Deep South and into the border states.

States represented in the Archive:

- Alabama
- Arkansas
- Florida
- Georgia
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maryland
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- North Carolina
- South Carolina
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Virginia
WHAT IS THE ARCHIVE?
WHAT SOURCES DO WE USE?

Documents created or maintained by:

The Department of Justice
The Federal Bureau of Investigation
The War Department
The federal courts
State vital records departments
State police agencies
State and local prosecutors and courts
Coroners
National and local civil rights advocacy organizations
Victims’ families, including photographs and oral history
Journalists and publishers

VISIT THE ARCHIVE
HTTPS://CRRJARCHIVE.ORG
The work of journalists is critical to our research. The Archive includes 9,000 newspaper records from 400 newspapers, including: the Atlanta Daily World, Baltimore Afro-American, Birmingham World, Chicago Defender, and the Pittsburgh Courier.

Notably, Black journalists and newspapers documented racially motivated homicides, lynching and police killings, incidents often left under-reported, if mentioned at all, in white publications.
The team developed a **data dictionary** of 180 elements. These elements included information about the victim and their family, occupation, military service, prior convictions, mental illness, disability. Other facets cover perpetrators, investigators, coroners, judges, and the various civil rights groups which intervened.

These data dictionary elements served as “tags” to capture information about the individuals and incidents themselves. The current website contains over fifty elements of the data dictionary.

The web application, built by NU library staff, aligns the incident data with the relevant records in the repository. Users search by name, geographic location, or date, and they will retrieve items in all three categories - people, incidents, and documents - which match that search term.
HOW THE ARCHIVE CAN BE USED

Cold case investigations

Historical research

Family genealogy

Finding historical context for current events, eg. police brutality, voter suppression racial violence, white supremacy.

From the archive: NAACP advocacy and a mother’s fight to find her son
OCT 10, 2023 / CATHERINE McGLOIN

The history of racialized violence during the Jim Crow era is elevated and preserved in the letters housed in the Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive.

READ MORE

Thurgood Marshall Letters Reveal Importance of Grassroots Activism
OCT 5, 2023 / CATHERINE McGLOIN

This correspondence with Thurgood Marshall, civil-rights attorney, head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP) Legal Defense Fund and Supreme Court justice, housed in the Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive, reveals Marshall’s integrated approach to advocacy.

READ MORE
MEDIA COVERAGE

NEW YORK TIMES

Felix Hall, a Soldier Lynched at Fort Benning, Is Remembered After 80 Years

No one was ever charged in his death in 1941. This month, a memorial was dedicated in Georgia — and a historian finally found a photograph of the young soldier.

By Jacey Fortin and Alexa Mills
Aug. 20, 2021

Felix Hall joined the Army in 1940, just as the United States was emerging from the Great Depression and on the verge of deploying millions of troops to fight in World War II.

Private Hall, a Black teenager from Alabama, was stationed at Fort Benning, a segregated base just across the state line in Georgia. But instead of fighting overseas, he lost his life on American soil. He was hanged at Fort Benning in February 1941, when he was 19.

This month — more than eight decades after Private Hall’s death — a plaque at Fort Benning was dedicated in his memory. But major details about his death remain unclear. Officials have been accused of failing to fully investigate what happened, and no one was ever charged.
A black man accused of rape, a white officer in the Klan, and a 1936 lynching that went unpunished

By Michael S. Bloomfield
July 19, 2020 at 7:00 a.m. EDT

The lynching began with a knock on the door.
It was 3 a.m. on Sept. 12, 1936, a stormy late summer morning in Atlanta.

Albert King Is Not Forgotten

In 1941, the U.S. military papered over the killing of a young Black soldier by a White officer. Can there be justice 80 years later?
The Lynching of Henry "Peg" Gilbert tells the story of a man whose unjust death resonates as much today as it did 70 years ago. Gilbert was sitting in church one evening in 1947 when a calf wandered into a nearby road, leading to a sequence of events that eventually ended in his lynching.

He was beaten, tortured, and killed in a jail cell, after being arrested without any evidence. His death is a searing example of the racial injustice that has led to the death of Black men throughout American history.

Two CRRJ students uncovered Gilbert's story and, after proving that Gilbert was lynched, their work led to an official apology from the current sheriff of Harris County, Georgia. A version of this film was released on streaming service Hulu in 2021.
In June 2021, the PBS investigative series, FRONTLINE, published Un(re)solved, “a major initiative telling a story of lives cut short, and examining a federal effort to investigate more than 150 cold case murders that date back to the civil rights era.”

As a collaborator for Un(re)solved, CRRJ shared case documents and connected the producers with descendants and other relevant parties. Professor Margaret Burnham served on the advisory council and former CRRJ student Collyn Stephens (M.S. Media Advocacy ’21) served as a producer for the project.