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"Let Us Be Law Abiding Citizens" Mob Violence and the Local Response in Harrison County, Texas, 1890-1925

BY
BRANDON JETT

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the problem of mob violence permeated American society. Mobs harassed, assaulted, and even killed social outcasts at alarming rates. From the 1890s through the mid twentieth century, however, mob violence became increasingly racialized as white mobs across the South shot, hung, and burned thousands of African Americans for perceived rebukes to the racial hierarchy implemented during Jim Crow. At the regional level, the number of lynchings reached their highest point in the early 1890s and declined throughout the subsequent decades. As the southern economy changed, southern African Americans migrated to northern cities, and southern whites relied more on the formal legal system to police racial boundaries. Lynching was a regional phenomenon. Nonetheless, the history of lynching played out differently from county to county throughout the South. Despite the trend in recent lynching scholarship to move away from case studies and focus on larger regional and national trends, it is important to understand the nuances to the history of lynching at the local level.¹

An examination of these processes in Harrison County, Texas, provides an interesting case study that complicates some of the larger trends in lynching in the South. First, the number of lynchings in Harrison County between 1890 and 1910 was relatively low, but from 1910 to 1920, the number of lynchings rose dramatically. Second, the underlying causes of lynchings changed from the 1890s to the 1910s and 1920s.

Only one lynching occurred in the 1890s and grew out of a personal dispute. During the first decade of the twentieth century, whites in Harrison County resorted to lynching twice after African Americans

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murdered local law enforcement agents. During 1910s, the peak years of lynching in the county, evidence suggests that community whites response to a downturn in the local economy. In these hard economic causes of lynchings became increasingly trivialized as whites lynched African Americans for alleged crimes ranging from sexual assault in 1911 to attempted robbery in 1917.

Finally, the local white response to lynching tended to follow the larger national/regional pattern of acceptance in the 1890s and early 1900s to disapproval by the 1920s and 1930s. However, it was the rise of the area Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s that prompted local white authorities to condemn vigilante violence in an unprecedented manner as the Klan not only attacked local blacks, but also threatened local whites with violent intimidation and political subordination.

The roots of extralegal violence run deep in Harrison County. From 1839 to 1844, the Regulator-Moderator War engulfed the county's frontier settlements. Regulators originally organized to protect the local populous against cattle thieves that occupied the Neutral Ground, a previously disputed strip of land that ran east of the Sabine River from the Gulf of Mexico to the Red River, that until 1821 was claimed by both the United States and Spain. The Regulators soon ran unbridled throughout the Neutral Ground counties. In response, a group called the Moderators arose in an effort to control the Regulators, who began not only attacking cattle thieves, but operating more like a gang. In Harrison County, these two organizations battled each other in the early 1840s over personal disputes and for vigilante control of the region. After years of rampant violence, the vigilante groups disbanded when Texas president Sam Houston sent the militia to pacify the region. The dispute between the Regulators and the Moderators ended when both agreed to cease hostilities and join together to serve in the Mexican War.²

The economic development of Harrison County coincided with the end of the Regulator-Moderator War. Citizens developed the thriving agricultural potential of the county. "Rich, loose, and easily cultivated" soil abounded and the county was heavily timbered. Easily accessible transportation promoted growth. Water transportation allowed for easy export of agricultural goods to larger markets. Caddo Lake in east Harrison County connected to the Red River, which flowed directly

into the Mississippi River about seventy miles northwest of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. From there, agricultural products made it to New Orleans. The county quickly became one of the major cotton producing areas in Texas. By 1860, the output of cotton increased by 366 percent from the previous decade and ranked third in all Texas counties. This production prompted the introduction of railroads. The Southern Pacific Railroad connected Marshall, Texas, the Harrison County seat, to Shreveport, Louisiana. It made the transportation of goods to New Orleans faster and more efficient. This railroad was one of only ten other railroads in the entire state prior to the Civil War. Agricultural production boomed in Harrison County because of the large supply of labor, fertile soil, and easy access to markets.³

Improvements in transportation and favorable environmental conditions encouraged the growth of slavery in Harrison County. Harrison County claimed the largest slave population in Texas and by 1860, 8,726 slaves were held in the county and slave based agriculture dominated the economic landscape. Slave labor produced 94 percent of the total cotton output for the entire county in 1859. Not only did slaves produce the vast majority of agricultural goods, they also accounted for the most significant economic investment for whites in Harrison County. Slavery was an invaluable part of the local economic system and social structure and was completely disrupted by Emancipation and Reconstruction.⁴

When Union forces arrived in Texas in 1865, Harrison County became a focal point for Union occupation forces and the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands because of its black belt status. During Reconstruction, the main thrust of Freedmen's Bureau efforts in the county centered on getting the freedmen into labor contracts with local landowners. Although this goal benefitted local landowners, resistance to federal encroachment and attempts at equality were met with heavy resistance. White employers took advantage of the freedmen, withheld wages, enforced mobility restrictions on black laborers, and used the threat of violence to ensure black compliance. Most whites in the region approved of this violence. The Bureau leaders attempted to enforce fair treatment of the freedmen, but proved "less than effective" at containing violence, especially outside of the city limits of the county seat, Marshall. One of the Bureau representatives in Marshall, 1st Lt. Isaac M. Beebe,

complained that local whites, "upon the slightest provocation beat, knock down, and shoot" freedmen. Ku Klux Klan violence against blacks proliferated. The Klan also targeted freedmen's schools and burned them to the ground. Lawlessness defined the three and a half years of the Freedmen's Bureaus efforts in Harrison County, as "outlaws and vigilantes, not federal law, ruled."⁵

Despite violence and intimidation, freedmen and Republicans remained politically active. Republicans, supported by the large black population that voted for them, dominated local politics from the 1860s up through 1880 and helped local blacks realize their political power. From 1868 to 1879, for example, eleven blacks represented the county in the state legislature. In response to the political force of "carpet-baggers" and the local black population, the Ku Klux Klan organized in an attempt to gain a political advantage in the county. However, as the editor of the *Tri-Weekly Herald* reported, "The political status of this county is settled for years to come; nothing that we can do will change it." Because of the overwhelming black majority in Harrison County, Republicans won local, state, and national elections easily. For example, in the presidential election of 1876, the Republican nominee, Rutherford B. Hayes, carried Harrison County by a margin more than 1,600 votes.⁶

White conservatives did not "redeem" Harrison County until 1880. Local blacks and Republicans continued to win local and state political offices. To regain control of local politics, a coterie of conservative whites formed the Citizens' Party and began a campaign against blacks and their Republican supporters. During the 1880 county election, allegations of fraud and intimidation were rampant, but a misplaced polling box allowed the Citizens Party to gain complete control of the local government. County Election Officials allegedly placed the polling place for the third precinct outside of the precinct's jurisdiction. Therefore, the votes cast in the precinct three box were cast by people voting in the wrong precinct. If officials did count these votes, Republicans would remain in control of the county. Harrison County's Citizens Party contested the election results to the state. Conservative white Democrats dominated state courts and, not surprisingly, declared that the votes would not be counted. Due to a misplaced box, the Citizens Party defeated the Republicans and controlled the county politically. Historian Randolph Campbell

described the Citizens Party victory as “a virtual *coup d'état* thwarting majority rule through a trifling technicality.” Local whites realized that violent intimidation was an effective way to limit the political ambition of the black majority. Furthermore, when white Democrats controlled the levers of state and local power, there was no need to fear retribution. Local whites so thoroughly dominated local politics that no blacks represented the county in any state office after 1880 until the 1950s, when the Citizens' Party finally lost political control of the county.⁷

However, the loss of political power did not eliminate all opportunities for local blacks. Education, the chief means of social advancement, flourished in the county. In the two decades following emancipation, churches established two black colleges in the county. In 1873, the Freedmen's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church established Wiley College, and in 1881 the Baptist Home Missionary Society founded Bishop College. Both schools followed the Booker T. Washington approach and focused on vocational and religious training. Wiley College offered courses in printing, farming, shoemaking, gardening, shorthand, typing, cooking, sewing, and housekeeping. According to the 1887 Wiley catalogue, these skills had a “healthy influence” on the black students. By 1915, enrollment in Wiley and Bishop reached 755. The vast majority of Harrison County blacks, however, did not attend either school, although local blacks looked up to the students as role models. White residents also supported the industrial education programs promoted by the two black colleges. When introducing Booker T. Washington on October 21, 1911, to a crowd at Wiley College, the former county superintendent of public schools, Chesley Adams, praised Washington and his educational ideology. He also commented on the local black population, stating, “They are intelligent, peaceful and law-abiding, largely because of the influence of these two schools.” In a black belt county, whites viewed vocational education as an important tool that promoted black subordination by channeling blacks into low-level positions.⁸

In spite of the social and political turmoil that followed the Civil War and Emancipation, the local economy and population thrived. From 1870 to 1880, Harrison County's manufacturing sector flourished. Capital investment in manufacturing expanded during the decade from \$43,750 to \$93,275. Although initial growth was slow, the manufacturing sector grew exponentially over the next several

decades. From a total investment of \$93,000 in 1880, capital investment in manufacturing grew by more than 700 percent to \$720,286 by 1890. Growth continued throughout the 1890s, but slowed compared to previous decades. By 1900, the total capital investment in countywide manufacturing came to just over \$1,000,000. By 1904, Harrison County whites boasted of the foundries, mills, nurseries, two wagon factories, soda water apparatus factory, impressive quantities of iron ore, and three banks. More importantly, however, was the fifty-ton cotton oil and seed mill with the capacity to press 45,000 bales of cotton annually.⁹

Agricultural production also expanded. Cotton drove agricultural expansion. The total value of agricultural production increased from \$878,745 in 1870 to \$948,421 in 1880. Total agricultural output declined somewhat in the 1880s and fell to \$874,040 by 1890, but rebounded in the next decade and totaled over \$1,520,427 by 1900. Growth seemed almost inevitable in the two decades following 1890 and by 1910 agricultural growth climaxed and the total value of all crops totaled \$2,378,144.¹⁰

Accompanying the economic expansion and diversification, more and more people migrated to the county. The most dramatic population growth came during the 1870s when the population nearly doubled from 13,241 to 25,177. Population growth remained steady and by 1910 had grown to 37,243. Although faced with some slumps in overall growth, the trend in Harrison County at the end of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the 1900s was one of modernization and growth.¹¹

Despite the history of vigilantism in Harrison County, economic growth and diversification seemed to limit the number of lynchings during the 1890s. In fact, the only lynching in the decade seems to have grown out of a personal dispute, not a communal defense of white supremacy. On April 27, 1897, Hal Wright and his son, Paul, proceeded to the local courthouse after being summoned to appear before the magistrate. Authorities charged Wright with the crime of having "words with white men the day previous." Public displays of disrespect by blacks against whites often resulted in violence as whites struggled to maintain their superiority in the face of increasingly resilient blacks. Such minor violations of social customs demanded strong reaction by local whites, especially in a black belt county, in

which they were a numerical minority. On the way to the courthouse a small mob of four white men "met and accosted" the Wrights, killed Paul, and wounded Hal. Hal fled, only to return a few hours later with a friend, Bob Brown, to recover the body of the deceased child. Upon their return, another mob of masked men finished the job, killing the wounded Hal Wright and fatally wounding Brown. According to historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage, mob actions of this sort are best understood as "a form of private vengeance." Although the actual mob involved in the killing was small, a crowd of nearly seventy-five curious onlookers watched as the white mob murdered the men in broad daylight and suggests the larger community approved of the mob action. Investigators arrived on the scene the next day, but "the officers could not find one who knew who did the shooting" and the ephemeral investigation came to naught. The lynching near Harleton, in the northwest corner of the county, did not attract major attention in the local paper and did not appear to cause major disruptions in county. Whites had little sympathy for any black who stepped out of place and often used violence as a means to enforce social mores and racial hierarchies.¹²

In the first decade of the twentieth century, white mobs lynched two African Americans. Both of these lynchings followed the death of law enforcement officials at the hands of black suspects. African Americans often distrusted southern law enforcement and perceived the legal system as corrupt. At times this resulted in violent conflicts between southern law enforcement and African Americans. On October 1, 1903, for example, Walter Davis, a local black man, was arrested by Constables Charles Hayes and Sid Keasler. Although Hayes and Keasler arrested Davis, he did not go quietly and "when some distance from the place of arrest they [Hayes and Keasler] were fired on by negroes from ambush." During the ambush, Davis' brother and some of their friends shot Constable Hayes. Following the constable's murder, authorities arrested Walter Davis, Mich Davis, and their stepfather, Nathan Hilton, and placed them in the county jail at Marshall.¹³

The murder of a white law officer by a group of blacks epitomized the major fear among southern whites: armed and organized blacks willing to kill whites. While the three black men sat in jail, news of the constable's murder spread. Men from adjoining towns crowded

into Marshall, "and by 7 o'clock it was plain to everyone that an effort would be made to hang one or more of the Negroes." In response to the growing mass of agitated men, Sheriff Calloway, according to reports, called "out the Marshall Company to protect the jail and prisoners;" however, the militia did not assemble quickly enough. Only six militiamen had gathered by 7:30, but in a move that suggests local law enforcement's complicity in the lynching, all six men left their post together and went to the local telegraph office to send a message. At the exact moment that the guards left their post, a man "on the square raised his hand above his head whistled a low whistle, and quickly half a dozen men closed in around him." These six men, along with an unspecified number of other spectators, grabbed a telephone pole, broke down the jail wall, entered the jail, and brought Walter Davis out with a noose around his neck. Davis was marched to a nearby bridge, hung, and "a number of shots were fired into his body as it hung." Following the lynching, "the mob dispersed as quietly as it assembled..." and life in Marshall continued as though nothing had happened.¹⁴

Authorities appeared to make only token efforts to maintain a semblance of law and order in their city. The actions of the militia and the authorities to enforce law and order were nothing short of negligent. In addition to the suspicious activity of the six-man militia, law enforcement was also noticeably absent from the affair, thus leaving the two black prisoners at the mercy of the mob. As the Marshall Messenger reported, "The Musketeers got out on very short notice, but the mob...got to the jail and had the prisoner on shorter notice." In addition to the tardiness of the local militia, the sheriff and other law officers did nothing to stop the mob. Even though "the mob had been organizing for hours," the sheriff and many of his officers had apparently gone fishing. Far from coincidental, these circumstances demonstrate local authorities' approval and complicity in the lynching.¹⁵

African Americans from outside the county who were unfamiliar were almost as troubling to southern whites as were armed and organized local blacks. Itinerant blacks had no local family ties, no "restraining, taming, legitimizing white-man link to the white man's world," and in the eyes of many southern whites, had poor character, and often corrupted local blacks. Therefore, when three peripatetic

blacks killed a local sheriff, whites alleviated their fears through violence. On April 26, 1909, Deputy Sheriff Mark Huffman raided a craps game with Deputy Constable Alex Cargill. During the raid, both deputies were shot, Huffman died and Cargill was seriously injured. "Creole Mose" Hill, Mat Chase, and Jesse Jefferson, all from Louisiana and with no local ties, emerged as the three prime suspects. Authorities captured the black men in Wascom, Texas, twenty miles east of Marshall, charged the black men with the murder, and took them to the infamous county jail in Marshall. The militia from Longview was called in to "take charge and prevent a lynching but it [was] thought there [was] no danger of a mob dealing out summary justice." Nonetheless, as an extra precaution, local authorities closed all saloons and ensured a "speedy trial for slayers of Huffman."¹⁶

Despite the superficial attempts of authorities to thwart any semblance of mob violence, local papers stoked the flames of discontent. The *Marshall Messenger* painted a negative picture of the black prisoners. One report emphasized that "a worthless gambling cap-follower" had murdered Sheriff Huffman and further warned, "That if the crime went unpunished, similar crimes might be committed at any time." Many southern whites believed that all black criminals threatened the safety of the community, and especially white womanhood. For several days it appeared the law would take its due course. Men from all over the region flooded into Marshall, but "the assurance of a speedy trial satisfied most of them, and many returned home."¹⁷

Authorities essentially promised a quick conviction and death for the three black men, but the sluggish nature of the legal system failed to appease the white community. The grand jury was called and issued bills of indictment against the three men for murder, assault to murder, and for robbery with use of firearms to murder. With charges being brought against them, authorities felt the threat of mob violence passed and the militia was relieved from duty at 11:30 a.m. on August 29. "Now that the critical moment has passed and the machinery of the law well in motion," one reporter stated, "it is hoped that no further talk of mob law will be indulged in and the law will be allowed to takes its course." The man responsible for relieving the militia was the brother of the injured officer Alex

Cargill. Three hours after the militia left, a mob stormed the jail and lynched Hill, Chase, and Jefferson. Again, local law enforcement allowed the mob to lynch black men after the wheels of justice began spinning. Whites did not lynch in lieu of ineffective courts, but instead demonstrated to the black majority that legal protection and rights was inaccessible to blacks. No condemnation of local law enforcement surfaced, but the local newspaper praised the mob as "quiet and orderly."¹⁸

The potential for further violence amplified as the economic growth from previous decades disappeared during the 1910s. Agricultural production, the base of Harrison County's economy, plummeted. The total value of all crops produced throughout the decade fell by just over seventy-five percent from \$2,378,144 to a meager \$578,545. The decline in the overall value of crops pushed more people into farm tenancy. From 1910 to 1920, the number of tenants rose from 2,381 to 3,353, with the overwhelming majority, eighty-two percent, being black; however, the number of white tenants also increased during the same period from 381 to 581. Tenancy meant black dependency on white property owners, increasing debt, and single-crop agriculture. Across the South, the combination of economic and social crises "heightened tensions and exacerbated violence" especially in regions and counties where whites sought to reinforce the racial distinctions so crucial to the plantation economy.¹⁹

Although the economic downturn hit black farmers the hardest, whites projected their fear about harsh economic times onto local blacks and blamed the weak agricultural returns on poor farming techniques and the abundance of tenant farmers. "The tenant farmers," one local posited, "ruin the soil by growing the same crop on it year after year and seldom if ever replenishing it with fertilizer of any sort." In actuality, local tenants had no control over the crops they produced. White property owners demanded tenants grow cotton on all available land. The author further expressed local discontent with the economy, stating, "The total value of farm property in this county is on \$6,683,461 and it should be ten times that and would be ten times that if we had better farming methods."²⁰

Despite the faltering agricultural economy, the Harrison County population grew by 6,322 inhabitants during this period. Although

struggling economically, the county still offered many opportunities that most rural places did not. Education, easy access to world markets, and a burgeoning manufacturing sector brought in migrants from around the region. This population growth further strained the struggling economy. The increase of people coupled with the decline in the agricultural economy corresponded with an eruption of violence aimed against local African-Americans.²¹

Rough economic times impeded rural white males from providing for their families, driving these frustrated men to find another way to protect their women and children: eliminating the purported threat of rapacious blacks. In October 1911, whites in Harrison County came to the "defense" of "Mrs. Green," a local white woman. The *Marshall Messenger* reported that Will Ollie, a twenty-four year old black man, attacked Mrs. Green and threw a rope around her neck in an attempt to choke her. Mrs. Green lay prostrate on the ground while Ollie went to her house to get matches. As he came to the house, he was startled by Mrs. Green's daughter, who alerted neighbors and the local sheriff. Ollie fled, but for several days following the incident, hundreds of local men scoured the region "for miles in every direction in search of him [Ollie]." During the search, the local press described Ollie negatively. The paper even attacked Ollie's family background, postulating, "Will Ollie's father...has spent a good portion of his life in the penitentiary."²²

These character attacks did not stop with Ollie and his father and, as one local editorial illustrated, were aimed at the entire black population of the county. During the manhunt for Will Ollie, the local paper printed a commentary entitled "The Negro in the Country." This commentary illustrated the perception held by some whites regarding the region's black population. The writer explained "the conditions that surround us in this section of Texas," and offered advice for rural citizens who lived outside of the protection of urban law enforcement. The writer stated, "No white woman is safe at any time in the country with the low, vicious negro for a neighbor." He argued that law-abiding African Americans were rare among the community and concluded that "when a negro of the brute class attacks a white woman or a white man for brute reasons it is time to eliminate the brute." The Ollie story is emblematic of southern claims of white women's victimhood, regardless of the implausibility of the claims, in times of economic recession.²³

An editorial in the *Marshall Messenger* expressed the fears of whites living in a black belt county. Blacks comprised around sixty percent of the total population of the county throughout much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This made whites uncomfortable. The best way to deal with the "brutes in the Negro race," argued the commentator, was "by sheer Caucasian domination." The solution offered up by the commentator was to encourage mass white settlement in the county in an effort to "crowd him [blacks] out, show him that he is not wanted and then give good white men his place." However, whites, in the author's opinion, would not settle in the county "unless we...rid ourselves of the Negro brutes."²⁴

In this atmosphere of fear and resentment, a lynching was imminent. Local posses captured Ollie twenty-two miles west of Marshall in Longview, Texas. Upon capture, the angry mob, not local authorities, hustled Ollie into a car and brought him back to Mrs. Green's residence. By this time, "it was pretty generally known in Marshall and the surrounding country and a mob began to form in the neighborhood of the Green residence." Mrs. Green identified Ollie as the perpetrator, essentially signing his death warrant. The mob hurried the young black man to the Texas and Pacific railroad and continued their interrogation. Ollie denied all accusations and even implicated another local black man, Jim Nesbitt, but to no avail. According to *the Marshall Messenger*, "Ollie was swung up to a limb and hanged" by a mob of several hundred men at about 2:15 in the morning. Reports described the mob as "quiet and orderly and not a shot or loud, boisterous word was said to have been heard." Although several hundred people witnessed the lynching of Will Ollie, the coroner reported Ollie died at the hands of "parties unknown." Authorities did not question anyone, including Mrs. Green, the alleged victim. County officials also did nothing to apprehend the lynchers, suggesting many of them participated in or knew members of the mob.²⁵

Defending the white community also encompassed protection from black murderers. In October 1912, when authorities found white Harrison County resident Paul Strange murdered in Elysian Fields, located eighteen miles southeast of Marshall, Texas, they feared a lynching was likely. Following the murder, authorities quickly arrested a local black man named Tennie Sneed on unsubstantiated evidence. In their efforts to ameliorate the potential for mob violence, Harrison

County officials placed Sneed in the Gregg County jail in Longview, Texas, twenty-three miles west of Marshall. The fears of authorities were well founded, as ten men visited the Harrison County jail around midnight on February 9, 1912. According to the jailer on duty, these men were there to make an "inquiry about the negro." The men were from the same neighborhood where both Paul Strange and Tennie Sneed resided. In addition to the ten men from Elysian Fields, "many more in the city...came here [to the Harrison County jail] for the same purpose." Some local authorities, however, told local whites where Sneed was incarcerated and a small group of men quickly traveled by train to Longview to verify the rumors regarding Sneed's location. Less than six months after the lynching of Will Ollie, authorities understood that lynching remained a real threat. Therefore, authorities acted proactively to eliminate the threat of mob violence and preemptively removed Sneed to the state penitentiary at Rusk for "safe keeping."²⁶

Not to be deterred, local whites' thirst for black blood was satisfied nonetheless. On the night of February 15, 1912, authorities found Mary Jackson and George Sanders hanging from a limb. Jackson and Sanders lived in the same house as Sneed and whites accused them of furnishing Sneed with the gun used to murder Paul Strange. The mob lynched the two blacks near the place where Strange was murdered. According to the county commissioner, Sanders was sixty years old and "always considered a good negro," and the forty-year-old Jackson "protested all along" that they had no involvement in the murder of Paul Strange. While locals "protected" white women during the difficult economic times, they held no regard for black women. It did not matter to whites if their victims were innocent or guilty; a white man died at the hands of a black man and someone had to pay. The mob would have their vengeance and until they did, no blacks were safe.²⁷

Authorities called a grand jury to investigate the killing of Paul Strange, George Sanders, and Mary Jackson. According to reports, even though the grand jury examined several witnesses, it failed to find sufficient evidence to indict any member of the lynch mob. Black life was cheap in the black belt county and the grand jury demonstrated that blacks fell outside of the protection of the local legal system. However, the grand jury did find sufficient evidence to indict Tennie Sneed for the murder of Paul Strange. The indictment against Sneed meant a trial would be held in Marshall.²⁸

In the wake of the Sanders and Jackson lynching, authorities limited the threat of mob violence in an unprecedented manner. Two militia companies, the Marshall Musketeers and the Timpson Company, were brought in to protect the jail. Not only did authorities protect the county jail, but District Judge H. T. Lyttleton also "ordered that the local express company offices not to deliver any whisky, beer or intoxicating beverages." In addition, authorities searched everyone in the vicinity of the courthouse for firearms and other weapons. Authorities hoped these steps would decrease the threat of mob violence and guarantee a fair trial would occur in Marshall. It appears that the precautions worked—"Quiet Prevails About The Jail" ran across the front page of the local newspaper as local militiamen turned Marshall into a makeshift military camp.²⁹

Authorities defended this exceptional defense of a black criminal to local whites. They quickly proclaimed that their actions did not stem from sympathy for the alleged murderer. One editorial vehemently assured the public that "Tennie Sneed...is not being protected as much as are law and order." The editorial comforted citizens of Harrison County by explaining that authorities' actions represented not the protection of African-Americans, but more so the integrity of the state and local laws. It identified two things that local authorities and citizens must understand if the sanctity of law and order was to prevail in Harrison County. Law enforcement, according to the editorial, must enforce laws "without regard to the standing of anybody in any way, and see that no illegitimate law, like that of the mob, interfere with the action of the state law." The writer pleaded with the citizenry to understand that "if we expect to maintain decency we must obey the law."³⁰

Local whites apparently bought the argument and the trial of Tennie Sneed commenced. Sneed's lawyers first requested a change of venue stating as justifications "the fact that the defendant is a negro and had killed a white man, the prominence of the Strange family, the hanging of the two negroes...the attempt to get Sneed by the mob, newspaper articles...and various other reasons, it was impossible to get a fair and impartial trial in Harrison county." In spite of these claims, the local judge denied the request and the trial continued as originally planned, in Marshall. Tennie Sneed claimed he killed Paul Strange in self-defense and both the prosecution and the defense brought in witnesses who either vouched for or argued against Sneed's claim. The burden to sub-

stantiate Sneed's claim was based mostly on Sneed's own testimony, because many witnesses were hesitant to testify on the defendant's behalf. According to the *Marshall Messenger*, the defense team submitted a document that suggested why no witnesses would come forward. This document showed "that the two negro witnesses of the defense had been hung and could not be brought into court...witnesses had [also] been whipped and threatened." Sneed's defense team realized that vigilante violence threatened the legal system in many ways.³¹

Upon hearing testimony from local witnesses, the judge handed the case over to the jury. The jury deliberated for two days and returned to the courtroom deadlocked. They told Judge Lyttleton that they could not reach an agreement. Ten of the jurors believed Sneed was guilty and two wanted an acquittal. Despite the lack of evidence and intimidation of witnesses, the jury refused to find Sneed not guilty. The judge accepted this and demanded a retrial. Sneed remained in custody and Sheriff Sanders took him back to Rusk penitentiary for safekeeping as he awaited a new trial. It is unclear what happened to Tennie Sneed after he was placed in Rusk Penitentiary. "The War Is Over" exclaimed one local newspaper. Sneed was now the responsibility of the state of Texas, authorities relieved the militia, and the judge dissolved the ban on alcohol in Marshall. "Marshall," the report continued, "is again at its normal condition that existed before the Negro was brought to the jail ten days ago." Authorities seemed more willing to protect Sneed only because whites already wreaked vengeance on two blacks for the murder of Paul Strange, and further vigilantism could descend into real chaos.³²

As the economic recession deepened, even blacks accused of petty crimes were targets for white frustrations. In February 1913, two young black men, Robert Perry and George Redden, faced trial for theft of a hog. Larceny carried serious penalties for blacks in the South that sometimes resulted in harsh prison sentences and even death. Following their appearance before local Justice of the Peace W. S. Baldwin in Karnack, Texas, Constable Ed Odom escorted the men seventeen miles to the Harrison County jail in Marshall to await Grand Jury action. The jury would have undoubtedly found the two men guilty, but in the year after the Tennie Sneed debacle, locals took the law into their own hands. On the way to Marshall, a mob of whites "overpowered" Constable Odom and killed Perry and Redden. Authorities' commitment to protecting black prisoners proved ephemeral. Just one

year after authorities had demonstrated their ability to protect blacks in custody from lynch mobs, Harrison County authorities confirmed that their loyalties laid with lynch mobs and not with law and order.³³

Even trivial offenses such as attempted burglary soon became reason enough to lynch blacks, as stories and allegations of rape became more far-fetched. By 1917, whites became increasingly desperate and in their attempts to demonstrate their manhood in tough economic times they began to conjure up the black rapist more frequently. In late August 1917, Harrison County authorities arrested nineteen-year-old Charles Jones for burglary. Allegedly, Jones cut the screen out of the window of Reverend Heggins' home and entered. The Reverend was not home, but his daughter and wife were. It is unclear why Jones entered the house, or why he left. Authorities arrested him eleven miles southeast of Marshall in Elysian Fields and took him to the county jail in Marshall, where Jones confessed to the attempted burglary.³⁴

While Jones sat in jail, tensions escalated. In addition to attempted burglary, Heggins' wife and daughter claimed Jones "approached the bed and touched the hand of one of the young ladies." Local county sheriff, John C. Sanders, understood the threat that accompanied the alleged crime and "had jail [sic] doubly guarded." This did not deter local white from "protecting" the white women. On the next day, at about noon, five men with handkerchiefs covering their faces entered the jail. This small force of locals apparently overpowered the large force of guards on duty and forced Raymond Cain, the jailer, to open the cell that held Charles Jones. The mob then hurried Jones into a waiting automobile parked outside of the jail and headed south. Raymond Cain, the jailer, accompanied by the local sheriff proceeded to chase down the small mob, but unfortunately for Charles Jones, the two men were too late and "Jones had been hung" by the time they arrived.³⁵

Local authorities seemed utterly incapable, or more likely unwilling, of defending Jones. In spite of Sheriff Sanders' inability to protect Jones, he knew "who composed the mob," and vowed, "that they will be prosecuted." Initially, Sheriff Sanders appeared to be a man of his word and filed charges against five men for their alleged involvement in the lynching of Charles Jones. Following their arrest, however, the five men were released on bond of \$5,000 each and

“since the grand jury has not yet met, there is so far no formal charge against them.” The grand jury proved as committed to law and order as the men who guarded the jail.³⁶

As the number of lynch victims climbed higher, some local whites feared this trend. Following the lynching, an editorial was published that illustrated the changing mood in Harrison County. An editorial in the *Marshall Messenger* expressed concerns regarding the prevalence of unchecked vigilante violence in Harrison County. The author began with the question, “Will the day ever come in Harrison County when mob violence will have ceased and give place to the proper execution of the law?” The outcry following the lynching of a man accused of assault or murder of a white citizen was limited and did not seem to alarm whites, but the murder of a black man for theft of a hog worried some. As the author stated, “to deliberately take the life of a man, a negro...for no other purpose...than stealing a hog makes the value of the man that of a hog.” Although appearing in favor of the black man’s life, the author’s concern actually focused on the fate of white men if mob violence continued in the county. The author worried, “human life will become cheaper and cheaper and white men will be killed because they do not vote for certain people and we will have a reign of terror.” Mob violence was an acceptable form of social control, but some whites feared the mobs would eventually turn against them.³⁷

As the motivations for lynching became increasingly trivial, local blacks struggled to make sense of their plight. It is difficult to gauge black responses to lynching and mob violence in Harrison County. No black press existed and, if the African-American community did protest, no records remain. According to census records, the black population continued to grow from the 1870s to the 1930s, which suggests no large-scale black out-migration occurred as a response to racial violence.

However, in 2001, local black man George Dawson published an autobiography that offered insight into the lives of blacks in Harrison County. Newspapers provide important insight into life in Harrison County, but as Dawson noticed when looking at Marshall newspapers, “this paper was not about the Marshall that I knew...[articles] only had white people in them.” Dawson discussed the lynching of his friend Pete Spillman in the opening chapter of his book. He also noticed that nothing in the local paper discussed this lynching. “I don’t even find that in the newspaper. They didn’t talk about those things. I guess I am

the only man alive that knows the truth about Pete Spillman.”³⁸

Dawson’s retelling of the lynching of Spillman illustrated the effects racial violence, especially lynching, had on local blacks. Dawson described Pete as an average black man who picked cotton and did other odd jobs for local whites. According to Dawson, a local white woman accused Spillman of raping her and the mob was determined to “make that boy pay and show all the niggers that they can’t get away with this.” The author specifically remembered the lack of effort on behalf of the local sheriff to stop the mob as they cheered and laughed at the sight of a lynched black man “like it was a picnic.” As a young boy who did not fully understand the implications of Jim Crow, Dawson remembered his feelings immediately following the lynching. “This hurt...I cried and my daddy wrapped his arms around me and held me to his chest...I cried for me. I cried for Pete. I cried for the little ones and for Mama and Papa. I cried for all the pain that there was in this world. Papa had his own tears and he just held me.” The impact of lynching on blacks was clear in Dawson’s account. Both the image and message of the lynching were obvious, even to a young black child, and etched into his memory: “I didn’t forget...I’m one hundred and one years old now. But I still remember.”³⁹

Lynching and racial violence did not just haunt the memories of local blacks, but also affected the way they lived their everyday lives. Segregation had legal backing; it was codified, and predictable. However, lynching was arbitrary and unpredictable. Anyone at any time could face the threat of mob violence which ensured that blacks lived in fear of upsetting local whites and local customs. As Dawson remembered, racial violence was not an everyday occurrence, but “we could always feel” the threat of violence lingering. The fear of mob violence and Dawson’s memories of the lynching of Pete for associating with a white woman discouraged Dawson from interacting with white women as much as he could. When approached by a young white girl on a farm that he worked on, Dawson, even as a young boy, knew he should not engage in conversation with the girl. In fact, Dawson refused to even talk with the white girl. He “kept [his] mouth shut...[he] knew that saying too much could just cause trouble.” Dawson knew that interacting with a white girl could upset any number of whites and, he remembered, “It’s a white man that will decide when a colored man is in trouble.” Dawson’s story tells us that lynchings had the desired effect

on blacks, especially in terms of propagating a desire to stay away from white women and a respectful fear for the unbridled authority of white men.⁴⁰

Following a decade of recession, the Harrison County economy resurged throughout the 1920s. Between 1920 and 1930, capital investment in manufacturing rose from \$2,260,828 to \$2,688,548. More importantly, however, the agricultural sector recovered. The total value of all crops skyrocketed by more than 700%. Starting at the depressed value of only \$578,545 in 1920, by the end of the decade the value of all crops totaled a staggering \$4,341,741. Harrison County's population also continued to increase during the 1920s, growing by 12.3 percent and totaling 48,937.⁴¹

As the status of the economy changed, so did the character of mob violence in Harrison County. In previous decades, local mobs only targeted local blacks, but in the 1920s, mob violence threatened local whites as well. This was a direct result of the second Ku Klux Klan, which emerged between 1915 and 1924. The Klan of the 1920s differed from the Klan of Reconstruction and attracted a more broad-based coalition of support among white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants. The revitalized Klan of the 1920s championed anti-Catholicism, white supremacy, anti-Semitism, anti-radicalism, anti-immigration, and a "drive to maintain crumbling Victorian standards of personal conduct."⁴²

The Klan steadily grew in influence in Texas during the early 1920s. The maintenance of Victorian values became the "most powerful stimulus for the prodigious growth of the Klan in Texas." The Klan quickly became a dominant force in Texas. It challenged the state and local political structure and dictated community mores. In 1922, for example, Texans elected Earle B. Mayfield, an open supporter of the KKK, to the United States Senate. At the local level, the Klan became so dominant that in Dallas, former governor Jim Ferguson reported, the Klan "elected nearly all the county officials."⁴³

The Klan also grew in response to increased organizational efforts by Texas blacks. Beginning in 1918, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People organized a strong membership drive in Texas in an effort to eradicate lynching and end political, social, and economic discrimination. Across the state, branches opened in cities such as Houston and Dallas, and in more rural locations like Marshall.

Locally, the NAACP officially organized in January 1919. Fifty blacks comprised the initial charter members, but by the end of the year, membership had risen to ninety-seven. White vigilance committees formed to control the increasingly organized and boisterous black community. Their efforts appear to have succeeded, because the local NAACP chapter did not survive to the end of 1920.⁴⁴

The organization of vigilance committees culminated in the formation of a Harrison County chapter of the Ku Klux Klan. The local Klan chapter 168 announced its presence on January 27, 1922. Upwards of 10,000 residents gathered on the streets of Marshall as the Klan paraded through the town. Onlookers watched in subdued fascination as three horsemen carrying a cross led by 371 "cloaked, hooded men marched through the streets of downtown."⁴⁵

Klan 168 also pursued an all-out campaign to gain support and members among the citizens of Harrison County. In a published statement in the local Marshall newspaper, the Klan announced its mission and encouraged locals to join. The statement challenged the manhood of locals and described the quality of their members as:

men whose constant thought is MY COUNTRY; may she ever be right, and never wrong, but right or wrong, MY COUNTRY; men who teach their children to see in the nation's flag the sacrifice of martyrs on the altar of liberty, justice and freedom; the eternal vow of a proud race that America shall be white, the fond hope of our souls, that America is the hope of humanity from the oppression of tyrants and shackles of hierarchy. Men who believe in true freedom of conscience and teach their children that the Holy Bible is the book of life and the true guide to their faith and practice.

The Klan put on concerts and banquets to help gain local support, and as a result it enjoyed the approbation of many citizens in Harrison County. For example, on September 22, 1922, the Klan held a rally in Harrison County just four miles outside of Marshall where "1000 of the hooded figures were present, and that 102 were being initiated into

the order.” Through such elaborate spectacles, the Klan made their presence known to citizens of Harrison County.⁴⁶

Reminiscent of punishments in the antebellum South, the local Ku Klux Klan turned to the whipping post as a form of social control. The *Marshall Morning News* reported on March 7, 1922, that a small mob “caught a negro...who had some booze on him, strapped him to a log and gave him 100 licks of the lash.” Mack Abney reported that the mob assaulted the black man in an effort to end bootlegging in the county.⁴⁷

Klan mobs often turned deadly. A local black man, Isaiah Sanders, had his feet tied to one tree and his hands bound to another tree with his face on the ground. The mob whipped his legs, back, and shoulders for two hours. The beating was so severe that Sanders died a few hours later. The Klan attacked Sanders because he allegedly insulted Robert Green, a local white property owner, and “called him a liar” after Green accused Sanders of mismanagement of his crops. White landowners throughout the south consistently cheated black tenants out of their fair share of the harvested crop. When blacks questioned the fraudulent practices of white property owners, the result was often deadly.⁴⁸

Klavern no. 168, however, also targeted local whites who did not comply with traditional Victorian customs. According to historian Charles Alexander, the Klan of the 1920s focused more on “moral authoritarianism” than racial superiority. The KKK demonstrated this authority through threats and outright violence. In Harrison County, at least fifteen white citizens received warning letters from the Klan due to their breach of proper social ideals promoted by the KKK. Local white business owner Ray Daniels became the first victim of outright vigilante Klan justice in Harrison County. On February 20, 1922, the Klan abducted Daniels as he left the Marshall post office. Daniels “was knocked on the head, loaded in an auto that had no lights burning or number showing, carried a half mile or more out of town, partially stripped, tarred and feathered, brought back to town, dumped out on the sidewalk, bloody and wounded.” The abductors then dropped Daniels on the steps of the Marshall National Bank at the feet of Chief Sheriff’s Deputy Ellis Johnson. Although the men were not hooded, Daniels had previously received orders from the KKK to leave town. Many citizens, including the members of

the Marshall Chamber of Commerce and the Marshall Rotary Club, concluded that the Klan was behind the attacks.⁴⁹

The Klan attack on a local white troubled many citizens of Harrison County. In an editorial in the local newspaper, one citizen argued that the Klan directly threatened the laws of the United States. The Klan, the writer argued, threatened the sanctity of the United States government and "the fundamental doctrines of our republic and if persisted will bring on an era of anarchy." Another plea to let law and order prevail in Harrison County came a few days after the abduction of Daniels. The author pleaded, "Let us be law abiding citizens and co-operate with our officers and courts, in punishing criminals as prescribed by our sufficient LAW." The abduction of Ray Daniels caused an outcry among many whites in ways that mob violence against local blacks did not. The earlier fear that mob violence would not be reserved for local blacks had come true: whites now faced the looming threat of mob violence.⁵⁰

The fear of local Klan domination encompassed more than just vigilante justice, and reflected concerns for KKK political domination. Klan membership throughout the state exploded in the 1920s and by 1922 the total state membership was between 75,000 and 90,000.⁵¹ The Ku Klux Klan became a political powerhouse that controlled many local, state, and national political races. According to one estimate, the Ku Klux Klan held the majority of the state House of Representatives in 1923 and, in the opinion of some locals, "overwhelmingly rule[d] the house." The Klan was also a local political force. As one reporter exclaimed, "The Klan is no longer something to be looked on as being in Atlanta. Its [sic] here in Texas, here in Marshall." The Klan penetrated all aspects of local politics and even "invaded the courthouse," to the extent that, "Men are chosing [sic] their lawyers right here in this county, not on account of their legal ability, but because of their supposed friendliness to the Klan."⁵²

The combination of Klan violence and Klan attempts to impose influence on local politics and economy sparked trepidation in many white residents. They feared the Klan, and soon that fear turned to anger. One editorial blasted the hypocrisy of the Klan for neglecting the community's protection of the laws and due process, but when authorities captured members of the KKK whipping parties, the organization

called "for all the protection of the law and howls for the benefits of the Bill of Rights, the Constitution, the Magna Charta." Citizens of Harrison County also attacked the Klan on religious grounds. Another editorial in the *Marshall Morning News* asked, "Did the religion of Jesus Christ say that in order to enter the Inner Shrine a man must be a native of America, a member of the white race, a Gentile?"⁵³

Backlash against KKK attempts to dominate state and local politics elicited the most ardent anti-Klan rhetoric. Residents questioned the manhood of Klansmen and demanded "they take off their nighties and masks, [as] they have lost the respect of their more intelligent sympathizers, who will not now join a secretly manipulate star chamber group to function in politics in a democracy where the people directly or indirectly control." They fought vigorously against KKK domination of politics, especially in the 1924 election for governor. Felix D. Robertson was the Klan-backed candidate in the Democratic Gubernatorial Primary. "If this city and county votes for Robertson," one author posited, "it will be proclaimed to the world as a Klan city and Klan county and before 60 days you will see '100 Per Cent' business houses in Marshall, '100 Per Cent' doctors and '100 Per Cent' lawyers." Prominent whites feared the growing influence of the Klan would hurt their traditional role as social, political, and economic leaders of the county. They decried the Klan and their use of violence as hypocritical and un-American.⁵⁴

During the Democratic primary, the anti-Klan candidate Miriam "Ma" Ferguson defeated Robertson. Robertson's loss and similar defeats at the local level was symbolic of defeats the Klan would later face. Overt support for the Klan waned and the Klan was on the decline in Texas. Governor Ferguson proposed several anti-Klan laws, including an anti-mask law and publication of Klan membership. After an arduous local battle against the Klan, *The Marshall Messenger* signaled the triumph of anti-Klan advocates. Headlines read, "Convention Denounces The Klan," "Klan Considered Buried As Texas Political Faction," and "Funeral of Klan." According to one editorial, "The Ferguson caucus during the night was in the nature of a ceremony depicting the funeral pyree [sic] on which the Klan, as a political factor, was cremated." Once denunciations against the Klan appeared, many people felt more comfortable criticizing the terrorist organization. One editorial illustrated the disdain many Harrison County lo-

cals felt towards the Klan. It proudly criticized the Klan's fears of Catholics and African-Americans, mocked Klan efforts to "put on a mask to protect womanhood," and ridiculed the hypocritical notion of enforcing the law by "putting a hood over his face instead of openly and fearlessly fighting wrong." Following the defeat of Robertson in the Democratic primary, Klan number 168 suffered a major setback and never rebounded. By 1925, then, mob violence became associated with the discredited Ku Klux Klan in Harrison County. From 1890 to 1920, whites in the county supported mob violence as it targeted African Americans who seemingly posed threats to white supremacy. However, as the KKK of the 1920s targeted whites as well as blacks, the support for extralegal violence from white locals waned and lynchings became a thing of the past.⁵⁵

Harrison County transformed from a bucolic frontier settlement into a county defined by economic growth and modernization. Accompanying this transformation, the nature of vigilante violence became increasingly racialized after Emancipation. African Americans in Harrison County faced the threat of mob violence throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Despite the looming threat of hostility, the black population continued to increase each decade from 1870 to 1930. Economic and educational opportunities for blacks outweighed the threat of violence as many chose to live like George Dawson and avoid trouble with whites. From 1870 to 1930 the local black population grew even more, by more than three hundred percent. Although not perfect, Harrison County continued to attract blacks to the county and keep them there.

As a regional phenomenon, southern lynchings peaked in the early 1890s and steadily declined throughout the next several decades. However, the trend in Harrison County is different. In the 1890s, white mobs lynched one African American and from 1900 to 1910 mobs lynched two African Americans. As the economy declined in the 1910s, white blamed much of the economic woes on blacks, and lynchings became more common as whites vented their frustration through violence. As the idea of economic independence dwindled and threat of increasing white tenancy loomed, local whites reclaimed their manhood through lynching. From 1910 to 1917, six African Americans died at the hands of a mob for offenses ranging from murder, assault, hog theft, and attempted robbery. The ability

of whites to provide for their families decreased, new ways to defend their families emerged, mostly in the form of community defense from alleged black criminals. In this climate, lynching grew in popularity and acceptance and local authorities proved unwilling or unable to protect blacks.

As the economy resurged in the 1920s, the economic condition of the county's whites improved and the need to vent frustrations through violence against blacks diminished. Thus, it appears that in Harrison County, whites were more prone to lynch blacks during times of economic hardship. This reflects the idea posited by Arthur Raper that, "periods of relative prosperity bring reduction in lynching and periods of depression cause an increase." The decline in the value of farm products means fewer jobs and the growing population further stressed this already tenuous situation. The competition for jobs pitted whites against blacks and as stated previously, whites blamed the poor farm conditions on blacks. As the economy rebounded, more jobs meant less competition and the competition between blacks and whites became less tenuous.⁵⁶

However, an improving economy was not the only reason why lynching declined during the 1920s. The acceptance of mob violence among the local city leaders faded away as the Ku Klux Klan expanded into Harrison County in the 1920s, and whites faced the threat of mob violence for the first time in many decades. The Klan regulated both black and white behaviors, and more importantly, threatened the influence of city leaders. Local whites faced political, social, and economic subordination at the hands of the Klan. The Klan pledged to use mob violence to promote their goals; however these goals, at times, ran counter to traditional city leaders'. This pitted city leaders against the Klan. As part of a larger effort to discredit the clandestine organization, city leaders condemned vigilante violence as a Klan tactic to impose their will on the county's whites. Attacks against the Klan and mob violence grew more vociferous and as the KKK became increasingly discredited, so too did vigilante violence. By the late 1920s, city leaders succeeded in discrediting the Klan, and in the process, ultimately eliminated mob violence from Harrison County.

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