

Marker Language for EJI-Lee County, AL Historical Marker

Side 1 - LYNCHING IN LEE COUNTY

Between 1877 and 1950, white mobs lynched at least 361 African Americans in Alabama. In Lee County, at least 4 Black people were lynched. During this era, Black people faced a presumption of guilt that made them vulnerable to accusations of crime and mob violence, often without investigation. In 1886, cousins John Moss and George Hart were part of the search party that found the body of a missing white man in Waverly. Hearing that a lynch mob accused them of the murder, the cousins attempted to get to safety. On Nov. 3, the white mob kidnapped Mr. Moss. Despite his pleas of innocence, the mob tortured him, hanged him and burned his body.

Mr. Hart was seized in a “citizen’s arrest” and taken to the Montgomery jail to avoid mob violence. On Nov. 1, 1887, he returned to Opelika for trial. News soon broke that the evidence against Mr. Hart was not strong enough for a conviction. On Nov. 5, over 60 armed white men kidnapped him from the Opelika Jail. Although legally required to protect people in their custody, police were often indifferent or ineffective at protecting Black people. The white mob hanged Mr. Hart from the same tree as John Moss and pinned a placard to his back to terrorize the Black community. It said: “this negro was hung by 100 determined men; whoever cuts him down will suffer his fate.” Local officials were complicit in each of these lynchings, including local law enforcement. No one was ever held accountable.

EQUAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE
LEE COUNTY REMEMBRANCE PROJECT

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Side 2 - LYNCHING IN AMERICA

After the Civil War, the ideology of white supremacy led to violent resistance to equal rights for Black people. Lynching emerged to enforce racial hierarchy through arbitrary and deadly violence that terrorized all Black people. Thousands of African Americans were lynched - often by large crowds - and their corpses were left on display for hours or days. On Nov. 3, 1902, an armed white mob seized Samuel Harris, a Black man who was picking cotton in a field when two white women reported a robbery and assault nearby in Salem. Mere hours later, with no evidence implicating Mr. Harris, over 125 men shot him to death. His pregnant wife, Beatrice, was arrested as an accomplice. Newspapers did not report what happened to Mrs. Harris after her arrest.

On March 17, 1900, a white teenager reported being startled when she saw Charles Humphries, a young Black employee of her father, in her room. The next morning a mob of white men went to his home near Phenix City and shot him over 40 times. During this era, white people’s fears of interracial sex extended to any action by a Black man that could be arbitrarily interpreted as seeking contact with a white woman. White communities were often supportive of violence against Black people, and the lynchings of many victims were not recorded and remain unknown. Lynching inflicted lasting traumatic wounds for Black people in the South and thousands fled the region as refugees of racial terrorism.

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