

**THE TRENTON MASSACRE:  
A RECONSTRUCTION ERA LYNCHING IN TENNESSEE**

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THE "WAR OF RACES."

THE VICTIMS OF MURDER AND FUGITIVES—SHOWING ALONG THE BORDERS OF CROWN POINT—DECEMBER 10, 1870. (See page 10.)



## **THE TRENTON MASSACRE: A RECONSTRUCTION ERA LYNCHING IN TENNESSEE**

This paper examines the Trenton Massacre, an abduction and lynching of multiple victims that occurred in West Tennessee during the Reconstruction Era.<sup>1</sup> The Trenton Massacre took place just outside of Trenton, the county seat of Gibson County, Tennessee, in August of 1874. Contemporary accounts are contradictory and confusing but agree that 16 African American men were abducted from the Trenton jail and some number of them were lynched in an incident connected to activity by the Ku Klux Klan. The abduction of such a large group of prisoners caught the attention of both state and federal authorities and the case was widely reported in local, state, and national newspapers.

From the first responses to the abduction and lynching, state authorities vied with federal for jurisdiction over the case. Tennessee's white power structure did not want the case to serve as a reason for any form of federal intervention and thus attempted to take control of the investigation and prosecution themselves. Eventually, both federal and state authorities tried several accused lynchers but did not obtain convictions. The case provides an instructive study of the competing interests of state and federal authorities, the limits of what the federal government could accomplish in the South, and

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<sup>1</sup> Scholarship on lynching usually focuses on cases occurring from the early to mid-1880's on into the twentieth century; much less is known about earlier cases. This emphasis in the literature should not be interpreted to mean that lynchings were necessarily less frequent in earlier decades. In fact, it is possible that the period of Reconstruction and its immediate aftermath saw higher numbers of lynchings than other better documented periods. Studies that have collected systematic data on lynching in the Reconstruction Era have documented large numbers of cases. George Wright found that one-third of the total number of lynchings he documented in Kentucky occurred between 1865 and 1874. George C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings"* (Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 41. Gilles Vandal found 239 lynching victims in Louisiana between 1866 and 1884. *Rethinking Southern Violence: Homicides in Post-Civil War Louisiana, 1866-1884* (Ohio State University Press, 2000), 94-95.



the failure of all levels of authority to protect the lives of African Americans during the Reconstruction Era.<sup>2</sup>

## Background

Tennessee went into the Civil War divided and came out divided. The eastern part of the state, mountainous in topography, was the site of significant abolitionist effort in the early part of the nineteenth century and had strong Unionist sentiment. Before the war, support for secession had existed in the western part of the state, where slavery was an entrenched part of the economy, which was heavily based on cotton production. In February 1861 Tennessee voted against sending delegates to a secession convention, with voters in West Tennessee supporting the convention, Middle Tennesseans divided, and East Tennesseans opposing. Events at Ft. Sumter turned the opinion of many toward secession in all but East Tennessee, where about two-thirds of the voters remained Unionists; in a referendum held in June of 1861, the state voted to secede with overwhelming margins in Middle and West Tennessee.<sup>3</sup> It is difficult to judge the true extent of support for secession, however, because supporters “used intimidation and fraud very effectively on election day .... Secessionists patrolled West

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<sup>2</sup> The importance of Reconstruction has been recognized in recent scholarly and popular works. Among the many recent books on Reconstruction are Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow* (Penguin Press, 2019); David Prior, *Between Freedom and Progress: The Lost World of Reconstruction Politics* (Louisiana State University Press, 2019); Allen C. Guelzo, *Reconstruction: A Concise History* (Oxford University Press, 2018); Brooks D. Simpson, ed., *Reconstruction: Voices from America's First Great Struggle for Racial Equality* (Library of America, 2018); Richard White, *The Republic for Which it Stands: The United States during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1896* (Oxford University Press, 2017); Douglas R. Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America's Most Progressive Era* (Bloomsbury Press, 2014). For the role and importance of the Reconstruction Amendments, see Eric Foner, *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution* (W.W. Norton, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Robert E. Corlew, *Tennessee: A Short History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 291-94; Jonathan M. Atkins, *Parties, Politics, and the Sectional Conflict in Tennessee, 1832-1861* (University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 247-50.



Tennessee prior to the June election and threatened to punish those who voted against secession.”<sup>4</sup>

Tennessee was the last state to join the Confederacy.

Tennessee’s divided loyalties continued during the war, with more men from Tennessee serving in the Union forces than from all other Confederate states combined.<sup>5</sup> Some West Tennessee counties had more soldiers in the Confederate Army than they had voters.<sup>6</sup> By the end of the war, Tennessee had suffered heavy loss of life, the economy was destroyed, and much of the state was “a land of waste and barrenness.”<sup>7</sup> Although West and Middle Tennessee were occupied by Union troops early in the war, residents suffered from conditions that were close to anarchy. The area was the focus of guerrilla fighting and raiding, much of it led by Nathan Bedford Forrest, who attacked Union posts in various parts of West Tennessee. His attack on Fort Pillow in 1864 resulted in the massacre of some three hundred Union soldiers, most of them black.<sup>8</sup>

After Union forces captured Nashville in early 1862, President Lincoln appointed Andrew Johnson as military governor of Tennessee, thus beginning Reconstruction in Tennessee less than a year

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<sup>4</sup> Derek W. Frisby, “The Vortex of Secession: West Tennesseans and the Rush to War,” pp. 46-71 in *Sister States, Enemy States: The Civil War in Kentucky and Tennessee*, edited by Kent T. Dollar, Larry H. Whiteaker, and W. Calvin Dickinson (University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 63-64. See also James B. Jones, Jr., “‘The Reign of Terror of the Safety Committee Has Passed Away Forever’: A History of Committees of Safety and Vigilance in West and Middle Tennessee, 1860-1862,” *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 63 (2010), 1-28, 10-13, noting a “veritable reign of terror” at the time of the secession vote (p. 10).

<sup>5</sup> Wayne C. Moore, “A Path Divided: Tennessee’s Civil War Heritage Trail” (Tennessee Wars Commission, 2013), 2. Calculations made from the National Park Service Civil War pages indicate that 53,557 Tennesseans served in the Union’s forces, while the other 10 Confederate states had 45,967 (<https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/index.htm>).

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Cole Williams, *Beginnings of West Tennessee: In the Land of the Chickasaws, 1541-1841* (Watauga Press, 1930), 177.

<sup>7</sup> Corlew, *Tennessee*, 328.

<sup>8</sup> James D. Lockett, “The Lynching Massacre of Black and White Soldiers at Fort Pillow, Tennessee, April 12, 1864,” *Western Journal of Black Studies* 22 (1998): 84-93; John Cimprich and Robert C. Mainfort, “The Fort Pillow Massacre: A Statistical Note,” *Journal of American History* 76 (1989) 830-37.



after the outbreak of the war.<sup>9</sup> Slavery officially ended in Tennessee in April of 1865, when the state legislature ratified the Thirteenth Amendment.<sup>10</sup> There was significant resistance to abolition; in West Tennessee, some planters refused to free their slaves until forced to do so by Union troops; in some counties, slaves were not freed until the summer of 1865.<sup>11</sup>

After Johnson became Vice President in early 1865, William G. Brownlow, a Unionist from east Tennessee, replaced him as governor.<sup>12</sup> Tennessee ratified the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment in July of 1866 and was the first Confederate state to be readmitted to the Union, thus avoiding being placed under military rule by the Reconstruction Act of 1867.<sup>13</sup> Reconstruction in Tennessee could be said to have ended with the state's readmission to the Union.<sup>14</sup> Everette Swinney notes, however, that "Reconstruction was in essence a federal program to aid and protect the Negro in his political and civil rights, and it therefore

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<sup>9</sup> Edward John Harcourt, "Who Were the Pale Faces? New Perspectives on the Tennessee Ku Klux," *Civil War History* 51 (2005): 23-66, 41.

<sup>10</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (Harper & Row, 1988), 44; Corlew, *Tennessee*, 332.

<sup>11</sup> William Gillespie McBride, "Blacks and the Race Issue in Tennessee Politics, 1865-1876" (Vanderbilt University dissertation, 1989), 37; Lester C. Lamont, *Blacks in Tennessee 1791-1970* (University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 40.

<sup>12</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 43-45.

<sup>13</sup> White, "The Republic," 82-83. Tennessee's ratification was not a smooth or easy process; it involved the arrest of two Representatives who refused to attend in order to prevent a quorum; a judge's grant of their habeas corpus petition; the legislature's refusal to recognize the jurisdiction of the court; and finally the sheriff and a posse storming the capitol to gain the release of the two Representatives. Corlew, *Tennessee*, p. 333-34; Lucy Dunaway Zeier and Charles D. Zeier, "Tumultuous Times: Tennessee's Passage of the Reconstruction Amendments to the U.S. Constitution," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 73 (2014): 90-115.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Tracy McKenzie, "Reconstruction." In Carroll Van West, ed., *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Tennessee Historical Society, 1998). Available at <https://tennesseencyclopedia.net>.



continued as long as the national government was making any serious effort to enforce the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.”<sup>15</sup>

In the aftermath of the war, white resentment of the new rights of blacks was pervasive and often vicious.<sup>16</sup> Edward John Harcourt noted that “the maintenance of white supremacy became the social and political goal for most whites” in the years following the war.<sup>17</sup> Clinton B. Fisk, assistant commissioner in Tennessee of the Freedman’s Bureau, reported that some whites in Tennessee refused to accept the new rights of the freedmen, noting, “it is lamentable and astonishing with what tenacity the un-subjugated cling to the old barbarism.”<sup>18</sup>

Voting was a particularly fraught issue. The *Memphis Avalanche* said of the Radicals, “they propose to give a greasy, filthy, stinking negro the right to crowd them from the polls, to exercise those rights of franchise which belong not to indians and negroes, but to white men....”<sup>19</sup> The *Memphis Daily Appeal* wrote of the possibility that blacks might be allowed to vote:

It would be better for the whole black breed to be swept away by a pestilence.... If one had the power and could not otherwise prevent that curse and inconceivable calamity [black suffrage] ...

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<sup>15</sup> Everette Swinney, *Suppressing the Ku Klux Klan: The Enforcement of the Reconstruction Amendments, 1870-1877* (Garland Publishing, 1987), 284.

<sup>16</sup>Paul H. Bergeron, Stephen V. Ash, and Jeanette Keith, *Tennesseans and Their History* (University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 172-76. For detailed accounts of Ku Klux Klan activity in Tennessee, see Alan W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (Harper & Row, 1971); Thomas B. Alexander, “Kukluxism in Tennessee, 1865-1869,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 8 (1949): 195-219.

<sup>17</sup> Edward John Harcourt, “The Whipping of Richard Moore: Reading Emotion in Reconstruction America,” *Journal of Social History* 36 (2002): 261-282, 264.

<sup>18</sup> John A. Carpenter, “Atrocities in the Reconstruction Period,” *The Journal of Negro History* 47 (1962): 234-247, 237.

<sup>19</sup> April 22, 1866, quoted in Thomas B. Alexander, *Political Reconstruction in Tennessee* (Russell & Russell, 1950), 128.



it would be a solemn duty for him to annihilate the race.... The right to vote might just as well be given to so many South American monkeys as to the plantation negroes of Mississippi and Louisiana. (February 22, 1867, p. 2.)

The *Trenton (Gibson County) Gazette* wrote, "This giving to the African social and political equality is a stupendous crime against humanity, and a desecration of the sublime truths and beneficent teachings of the Founder of the Christian religion."<sup>20</sup>

The discontent and resentment of whites was not confined to editorials and politics. West and Middle Tennessee were the sites of much disorder and violence in the post-war years. It is possible that the pattern of guerrilla activity established during the war contributed to continuing violence in the following years.<sup>21</sup> The deadliest racial conflict in Tennessee's post-Civil War history was the Memphis Massacre of early May 1866, which resulted in the deaths of two whites and at least forty-six African Americans; many other blacks were raped, robbed, or injured. None of these crimes resulted in indictment or prosecution.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in McBride, "Blacks and the Race Issue," 244-45.

<sup>21</sup> Stephen V. Ash describes Civil War conditions in rural Tennessee: "Local government collapsed, law enforcement evaporated, and in that vacuum of authority appeared bandit gangs that preyed ruthlessly on inhabitants." Stephen V. Ash, "Civil War Occupation," In Carroll Van West, ed., *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Tennessee Historical Society, 1998). Available at <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net>.

Melinda Meador discusses the possibility that such war time guerrilla activity contributed to the extremely high number of lynchings in Lake and Obion counties in northwest Tennessee and Fulton County in southwest Kentucky. Melinda Meador, "Strange Fruit: The Forgotten Lynchings of Northwest Tennessee and Southwestern Kentucky, 1869-1931," Murray State University thesis, 2021, 22-28, available at <https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/etd/229>.

<sup>22</sup> See Steven V. Ash, *A Massacre in Memphis: The Race Riot that Shook the Nation One Year after the Civil War* (Hill and Wang, 2013); Marius Carriere, "An Irresponsible Press: Memphis Newspapers and the 1866 Riot," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 60 (2001): 2-15; Kevin R. Hardwick, "'Your Old Father Abe Lincoln is Dead and Damned': Black Soldiers and the Memphis Race Riot of 1866," *Journal of Social History* 27 (1993): 109-128.



In 1868, the Ku Klux Klan began activities in West Tennessee, using “open, systematic, purposeful political terror” to achieve its goals, focusing many attacks on freedmen’s schools and teachers.<sup>23</sup> The Klan created a “reign of terror” in parts of Tennessee, according to a state legislative committee that investigated reports of Klan activities. The committee found that Klan members were

robbing poor negroes of their fire-arms; taking them out of their houses at night, hanging, shooting and whipping them in a most cruel manner, and driving them from their homes. Nor is this confined to the colored men alone; women and children have been subjected to the torture of the lash, and brutal assaults have been committed upon them by these night- prowlers....<sup>24</sup>

In response to the continuing disorders, the Tennessee General Assembly passed two bills targeting the Klan. This legislation provided for fines and imprisonment of persons involved in terrorist activities and also provided penalties for public officials who did not enforce the law and for citizens who aided those directly involved. The Assembly reestablished the state militia in order to deal with “lawless bands of desperadoes” and gave the governor the authority to establish martial law in areas where law could not be enforced.<sup>25</sup> Governor Brownlow declared

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<sup>23</sup> Richard A. Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A Political History of Struggles for Emancipation* (University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 29. See also Paul David Phillips, “Education of Blacks in Tennessee during Reconstruction, 1865-1870.” Pp. 146-167 in Carroll Van West, ed., *Trial and Triumph: Essays in Tennessee’s African American History*. (University of Tennessee Press, 2002) and Dorothy Granberry, “Origins of an African American School in Haywood County.” Pp. 169-183 in West, 2002.

<sup>24</sup> Senate Journal of the Extra Session of the Thirty-Fifth General Assembly of the State of Tennessee (S.C. Mercer, Printer to the State, 1868), 131.

<sup>25</sup> Corlew, *Tennessee*, 338-39; Chapter II, An Act to Preserve the Public Peace and Chapter III, An Act to Enforce the Laws of the State, Acts and Resolutions of the State of Tennessee passed at the extra session of the Thirty-Fifth General Assembly, convened at Nashville, July 27th, 1868 (both bills passed September 10, 1868).



martial law in 1869 in nine counties of Middle and West Tennessee where the Ku Klux Klan was especially active. Gibson was one of these counties.<sup>26</sup>

The Freedmen's Bureau left Tennessee in 1869 and the state election of the same year resulted in a Democratic majority. The new governor, DeWitt Senter, restored civil authority in counties that had been under martial law and disbanded the militia.<sup>27</sup> Legislative actions abolished many of the legal gains blacks had made under Governor Brownlow's administration.<sup>28</sup> In 1870, a new constitution was written and approved, allowing black male suffrage in principle but restricting it in practice through the use of a poll tax.<sup>29</sup>

Despite their political ascendancy, whites feared developments that might allow Republicans to retake power or that might result in federal intervention. The Democratic party was divided, giving the Republicans an opening to regain power in the state.<sup>30</sup> While Klan related violence decreased between 1870 and 1873, it reemerged in 1874, with widespread violence occurring in Middle and West Tennessee.<sup>31</sup> William Gillette wrote that the 1874 elections in Tennessee were "the most heated and most bloody since secession .... An incendiary press arousing prejudice, spreading fear, and retailing

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<sup>26</sup> Frederick M. Culp and Mrs. Robert E. Ross, *Gibson County, Past and Present: The First General History of One of West Tennessee's Pivotal Counties* (Gibson County Historical Society, 1961), 43-44; Swinney, *Suppressing the Ku Klux Klan*, 287.

<sup>27</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 440.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph H. Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow: Tennessee Race Relations in the 1880s* (University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 13-15.

<sup>29</sup> William Edward Hardy, "'Fare Well to All Radicals': Redeeming Tennessee, 1869-1870." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Tennessee, 2013. Available at: [https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_graddiss/2432](https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/2432).

<sup>30</sup> William Gillette, "Anatomy of a Failure: Federal Enforcement of the Right to Vote in the Border States during Reconstruction," pp. 265-304 in Richard O. Curry, ed., *Radicalism, Racism, and Party Realignment: The Border States during Reconstruction* (Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), 269-70.

<sup>31</sup> Swinney, *Suppressing the Ku Klux Klan*, 286-87; Couto, *Lifting the Veil*, 44-46.



rumor was just the beginning. Organized violence was also resumed for a brief but brutal campaign.”<sup>32</sup>

Gibson County was “one of the strongholds” of the Klan.<sup>33</sup> Everette Swinney concluded, “Nowhere were conditions worse than in Gibson County.”<sup>34</sup> It was in this tense atmosphere that one of Tennessee’s worst incidents of violence in the Reconstruction Era occurred.

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<sup>32</sup> Gillette, “Anatomy of a Failure,” 270.

<sup>33</sup> Culp and Ross, *Gibson County*, 43. Gibson County was created by the Tennessee General Assembly in 1823 and Trenton was established as the county seat. In 1870, Gibson County had a total population of 25,666, with about 73% white and 27% African American. Trenton, the county seat, was the largest town wholly in the county, with 1,909 residents in what the Census classified as the town of Trenton and a total of 3,816 in the township. Humboldt was a town of 2,296 that lay mainly in Gibson and partially in Madison County. Milan had a population of 1,548 and published the *Milan Exchange*, a weekly that reported extensively on the events covered by this article. Of Gibson County’s total population of persons older than ten, 4,401 were unable to read. Among whites 21 and older, 578 were unable to write and among blacks 21 and older, the number was 2,277 (Ninth Census of the United States, volume 1, Tables II, III, and X). A detailed account of the early history of the county is available in W. Green, *Gibson County, Tennessee: A Series of Pen and Picture Sketches; Comprising a Passing Glance at the History, Progress, and Present State of Industrial and Social Development in Gibson County* (Nashville, Press of Gospel Advocate Publishing Co., 1901).

<sup>34</sup> Swinney, *Suppressing the Ku Klux Klan*, 287. William Gillette agreed with this assessment, writing of Tennessee in 1874, “Violence was worst in Gibson County, West Tennessee.” Gillette quotes the U.S. Marshal’s report that on election day, August 6, 1874, “there was a mob at every poll and created a perfect reign of terror.” Gillette, “Anatomy of a Failure,” 271.



## The Trenton Massacre

The Trenton Massacre was covered extensively by local, state, and national papers. All sources agreed that 16 black men were abducted from jail in Trenton, Tennessee, the night of August 25-26, 1874, and that some or all of them were lynched.<sup>35</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the killings, there were strong denunciations of the mob by citizens and newspapers in Tennessee. The condemnation of the lynchers soon gave way to condemnation of the federal authorities who moved to prosecute the case. Ultimately there were two trials, one in federal court in Memphis and one in the Gibson County circuit court, but neither resulted in conviction. *(Map images of the places mentioned in the text are at the end of the paper.)*

### 1. Precipitating events

Whites in West Tennessee in 1874 feared that blacks were planning organized violence. The Memphis newspapers carried articles with lurid reports of conflict and armed uprisings by blacks in Kentucky, Arkansas, and Mississippi and warned that these uprisings were a threat to Tennesseans as

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<sup>35</sup> There was much confusion in early reports as to the number of the dead. Initial accounts in the press reported that all 16 prisoners had been lynched, but were quickly followed by reports of 15, 14, six, five, and four as the number of those killed with the rest escaping. Authors who relied only on the earliest newspaper accounts of the event reached the conclusion that all 16 prisoners were lynched (Lamont, 1981, 49; Alruthus Ambush Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee, 1865-1880* (Associated Publishers, 1941, reprinted 1974, The Reprint Company), 103-05; Christopher Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch: Extralegal Violence and Punishment in America* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 86; Equal Justice Initiative, "Reconstruction in America: Racial Violence after the Civil War" (Equal Justice Initiative, 2020), 49, 55, 76. For an accurate recent account, see Trish Gannon, *A Shot in the Dark: The Mysterious Death of Emma Langford McEwen* (Trish Gannon, 2022).

There is no doubt that some of the abducted prisoners survived since they were called as witnesses in federal proceedings against the accused lynchers. The most authoritative statement on the number of dead is a letter from W.W. Murray, U.S. District Attorney, to George H. Williams, U.S. Attorney General, stating that four men were killed on the spot and one died later of his wounds. W.W. Murray to U.S. Attorney General George H. Williams, October 2, 1874 [Reel 4, images 340-49]. Tennessee: Source-Chronological File: Middle Tennessee: January 1884-August 1884/Western Tennessee: January 1871-July 1884, Record Group 60. National Archives and Records Administration.



well.<sup>36</sup> White residents of West Tennessee contacted Governor John C. Brown in July and early August 1874 asking for protection from a riot they asserted that blacks were planning.<sup>37</sup> Headlines reporting on the events leading up to the Trenton Massacre set the events within the context of this perceived conflict: "Another Outbreak," (*Daily Memphis Avalanche*, August 26, 1874, p. 1); "More Bloodshed," (*Memphis Daily Appeal*, August 26, 1874, p. 4); "The War Begun!" (*Milan Exchange*, August 27, 1874, p. 3).

The chain of events leading to the Trenton lynching seems to have originated in a trivial dispute over the price of food at a barbeque held by blacks near the small settlement of Pickettville (now called Gibson) in the southern part of the county. The *Memphis Daily Appeal* (August 26, 1874, p. 1) reported that a white man named J. P. (Joe) Hale, accompanied by several of his friends, paid less than the asking price for barbeque and angered Joshua Webb, a black man. Words were exchanged and Hale was

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<sup>36</sup> These are examples of headlines from the *Memphis Daily Appeal*: "Peace: The White Reinforcements from Memphis ... in Possession of Austin [Mississippi]" (August 13, 1874, p. 1); "Troubles in Chicot County [Arkansas]" (August 19, 1874, p. 3); "Kentucky: The Color Line on the Dark and Bloody Ground – The Negroes and Whites at War in Lancaster" (August 25, 1874, p. 1); "The Last Negro Uprising" (August 26, 1874, p. 1).

Writing of the situation in Reconstruction Louisiana, Gilles Vandal noted, "The simple rumor of a black insurrection was enough to generate an upheaval of all whites of the surrounding areas.... This periodic and exaggerated fear of black insurrections brought frightful and bloody retribution on the black community." Vandal, *Rethinking Southern Violence*, 80. There are obvious parallels to white fears of slave uprisings before the Civil War. In Tennessee, the worst panic over a feared uprising occurred in 1856 in the area of Clarksville, where enslaved people worked in the mines. See Charles B. Dew, "Black Ironworkers and the Slave Insurrection Panic of 1856," *Journal of Southern History* 41 (1975), 321-338.

<sup>37</sup> W.A. Rives et al. to Governor Brown, July 30, 1874 and G.M. Whithorne et al. to Governor Brown, August 5, 1874. John C. Brown papers. Box 7, folder 5, Telegrams, 1871-75 [Reel 3, frames 0492 and 0498]. Tennessee State Library and Archives.

John C. Brown was a general in the Confederate army. He served as President of Tennessee's constitutional convention in 1870 and was elected as governor, serving two terms. Anne-Leslie Owens, "John Calvin Brown," In Carroll Van West, ed., *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Tennessee Historical Society, 1998). Available at <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net>. Harcourt notes that Brown was "a Klan associate from Pulaski and the son of an antebellum governor"; he became the "redeemer's governor" Harcourt, "'Who Were the Pale Faces'?", 62. Gillette also notes that Brown had been a member of the Klan. Gillette, "Anatomy of a Failure," 269.



prevented by his friends from attacking Webb. According to the *Daily Appeal*, in the weeks following the time of this incident “the negroes have frequently made threats of revenge, and more than one rumor of rioting was spread about, though not generally believed.” White accounts of subsequent events pointed again and again to the perceived threat of organized African American violence.

The initial violence associated with the Trenton Massacre occurred around midnight Saturday, August 22nd.<sup>38</sup> Two young white men, James Warren and Monroe Morgan, reported that they had been fired upon by a group of 30 to 40 blacks hidden in the woods near Pickettville. Warren and Morgan escaped and ran to Pickettville where they told their story. A posse pursued the “dusky fiends” (*Milan Exchange*, August 27, 1874, p. 3). “A party of citizens, in command of an officer of the law” questioned a black man named Ben Ballard, who made a sensational confession: according to Ballard, local blacks had organized themselves to protect Joshua Webb from the Ku Klux Klan (*Memphis Daily Appeal*, August 26, 1874, p. 4). News of this confession created near panic among whites, who interpreted it to mean a general uprising was being planned to carry out wholesale murder of whites in Gibson County. They promptly arrested some of the men Ballard had named and continued searching for others. One suspect, John Reagan, was shot by the posse and escaped, but was arrested later at Humboldt ([*Jackson*] *Whig and Tribune*, August 29, 1874, p. 3).

Unfortunately, no written records directly provide the point of view of African Americans in Gibson County as to these events. A letter from W.W. Murray,<sup>39</sup> U.S. District Attorney for West

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<sup>38</sup> The following description of events is taken from Swinney, 1987, 287-291, and from various issues of the *Daily Memphis Avalanche*; the *Memphis Daily Appeal*; the [*Memphis*] *Public Ledger*, the *Nashville Union & American*, the *Milan Exchange*, and the *New York Times*. Specific citations are given for quoted material.

<sup>39</sup> W.W. Murray grew up in Carroll County, next to Gibson County. He joined the Union Army in 1862; he was captured with his regiment by Nathan Bedford Forrest and taken to Georgia, where he managed to escape and rejoin the Union Army in Pensacola, Florida. After the war he worked as an attorney and in 1873 was appointed to be U.S. District Attorney by President Grant. [Goodspeed’s] *History of Tennessee from the Earliest Time to the Present; Together with an Historical and a Biographical Sketch of Carroll*,



Tennessee, written in October of 1874, indicated that the trouble had its origin in Klan activity. Far from finding that blacks intended to assault innocent whites, Murray wrote that Joshua Webb had been threatened by the Klan, and that a number of his black neighbors banded together to defend him. These men were fired on by masked white men on horseback. The authorities responded by arresting black men and extracting confessions through third degree methods. The forced confessions then provided whites with “evidence” supporting their belief that they were in danger.<sup>40</sup>

The prisoners were held at the local jail in Pickettville, where they were guarded and protected by town marshal J. A. Dungan against a band of masked men. On Monday the 24<sup>th</sup>, the prisoners were arraigned and charged with shooting with intent to kill and with inciting to riot. One of the men expanded on Ballard’s earlier confession, telling his captors that Gibson County blacks had planned to shoot Klan members, to kill whites in the area, and to take their lands. He provided the names of more men supposedly involved in the conspiracy. Around 4 p.m., Marshal Dungan and two constables with an escort of 40 or 50 armed men left Pickettville, taking 16 chained prisoners to the jail at the county seat of Trenton, about 10 miles distant. Twice they were intercepted by masked horsemen who demanded the prisoners. Dungan refused to yield the prisoners and was able to convey them to the jail in Trenton (*Memphis Daily Appeal*, August 26, 1874, p. 4).<sup>41</sup>

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*Henry and Benton Counties, Besides a Valuable Fund of Notes, Original Observations, Reminiscences, Etc., Etc.* (Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1887 [reprint Southern Historical Press, 1978]), 875-76.

<sup>40</sup> W.W. Murray to U.S. Attorney General George H. Williams, October 2, 1874 [Reel 4, images 340-49]. Tennessee: Source-Chronological File: Middle Tennessee: January 1884-August 1884/Western Tennessee: January 1871-July 1884, Record Group 60. National Archives and Records Administration.

<sup>41</sup> The *Memphis Daily Appeal*, August 28, 1874, p. 4, listed the 16 prisoners: Bob Baten, Stephen Bryant, Jarret Burrows, George Greene, Bill Ivey, Nick Ivey, Dug Jamison, Bob Love, Nelson McGhee, Hays Peebles, John Reagan, Dick Shaw, Tom Shelton, Albert Williams, Dan Williams, and Robert Williams. There are discrepancies between the *Appeal*’s list and those found in legal documents. Gibson County listed only 14 of the 16, leaving out Stephen Bryant, Albert Williams, and Robert Williams, and adding Daniel Sandford. The federal indictment gave 16 names, all of which match (with variant spellings)



## 2. The lynching

The prisoners should have been more secure in the county jail at Trenton than in the local jail at Pickettville. Trenton was building a new jail at the time; there is contradictory information as to whether the prisoners were placed in the old or new jail.<sup>42</sup> The guards who had brought them from Pickettville remained to protect them Monday night. It appears that this guard was not on duty the next night, when a masked mob variously estimated as consisting of between 75 and 500 men abducted the prisoners at around one or two in the morning, Wednesday, August 26<sup>th</sup>. A detailed account in the *Daily Memphis Avalanche* (August 27, 1874, p. 1) described the mob as consisting of 100 disguised men carrying double-barreled shotguns, rifles, and revolvers.<sup>43</sup> An eyewitness quoted in the *Nashville Union and American* reported that the mob consisted of about 80 men, with another 10 to 20 townspeople who gathered and observed: “The full moon lit up the indescribable scene ... and horses, mules, men, and most of the grotesque costumes, were distinctly visible” (August 28, 1874, p. 4).

After surrounding the jail, the leaders of the mob demanded the keys from Wilse Alexander, the jailer, and Sheriff Johnson Williams, who initially refused, but yielded after the mob leaders pointed their guns and said, “We have come for those niggers and intend getting them; turn over the keys, or we will blow your brains out” (*Daily Memphis Avalanche*, August 27, 1874, p. 1). The mob then entered the

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those listed by the *Appeal*, with the exception of the omission of Robert Williams and the addition of David Sanderford.

<sup>42</sup> The *Daily Memphis Avalanche* (August 27, 1874, p. 1) reported that the prisoners were “put in the old jail, the new one in course of construction being full of prisoners.” This description does not fit well with a statement by Jailer Alexander, quoted in the *Memphis Daily Appeal* (August 28, 1874, p. 4), that he was awakened by voices of “men on the square, opposite the jail,” a description that fits the location of the new jail. An eyewitness account of the mob published in *Nashville Union and American* (August 28, 1874, p. 4) also indicates that the abduction took place from the new jail.

<sup>43</sup> This account is written as though the reporter was present at the events or interviewed someone who was, with details of actions and conversations presented. Nonetheless, the number of deaths reported is inaccurate.



jail, unlocked the cells, and brought the prisoners into the corridors. There they tied them two by two and took them into the street.

The mob headed east out of Trenton on the Huntington road for about half a mile toward Forked Deer Creek. Six of the prisoners were taken to the side of the road, untied, and told to run. When they did so, the mob shot at them, hitting them all and killing four.<sup>44</sup> The remaining 10 prisoners were taken another couple of miles out of town, cut loose, and told to run. The *Avalanche* reported, “The poor frightened wretches tried to [run], but ... they were shot down .... [The lynchers] dropped every one of the fleeing negroes dead in their tracks.” At that point the mob dispersed, “disappearing in the dark shadows of the adjacent forests like spirits of the damned [sic] who had been called forth to a festival of death, and from which they were reluctantly forced by the gray light of dawn” (*Daily Memphis Avalanche*, August 27, 1874, p. 1).

Subsequent accounts by witnesses contradicted the early newspaper accounts on several significant points. Benjamin E. Davis, a young man who had been part of the mob, became a prosecution witness. Davis gave a detailed interview to a reporter from the *[Nashville] Republican Banner* (September 19, 1874, p. 1). The reporter described Davis as not over 17 years old and noted he “speaks in a free, frank and easy manner.” Davis’ account of the abduction from the jail tracked closely with what newspapers had reported but added a few details, such as the mob getting rope to tie the prisoners from “old man Loveswell” and that 10 prisoners were tied two by two, three together, and one by himself. But Davis’ account of the lynching differed substantially from newspaper accounts. According to Davis, the abductors did not tell the prisoners to run, as had been reported: “while crossing the bridge one of the negroes said, ‘Go,’ and all the negroes save five attempted to spring over the bridge, and the greatest confusion followed. The shooting was indiscriminate.... The five negroes who

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<sup>44</sup> The *Memphis Daily Appeal* (August 28, 1874, p. 4) reported that the dead prisoners were Bill Ivey, Bob Williams, Bob Love, and Nick Ivey. Bob Baten was wounded and expected to die; Tom Shelton was expected to recover.



didn't go were shot down. When he [Davis] left there were ten of them lying face downwards upon the ground. They were left for dead. Davis never did know what became of the six negroes that ran away." Davis told the reporter that the lynchers "were all in a mighty big hurry, and left the place mighty fast. After getting a short distance away they all separated."

A second eyewitness account of the events was given to the *Memphis Avalanche* by Dug Jamison, one of the abducted prisoners who had escaped the mob, while he was held as a witness in jail in Memphis. Jamison described his escape, saying that he had managed to untie his hands as he came down the steps of the jail. He recounted being taken out of town to the bridge, where the prisoner behind him "dropped suddenly, just as if he was dead" and one of the lynchers shot and killed him. Taking advantage of this distraction, Jamison ran into the underbrush, swam across a creek, and ran into a field of corn. While lying there, he heard 30 to 40 shots fired (*Nashville Union and American*, September 15, 1874, p. 3, quoting the *Avalanche*).

In the immediate aftermath of the lynching, Sheriff Johnson Williams with several citizens followed the route of the mob and brought the two wounded men back to town where they received medical attention (*Memphis Daily Appeal*, August 27, 1874, p. 4). The bodies of the four men killed were brought back to town and were left overnight in the graveyard before being buried at county expense (*Memphis Daily Appeal*, August 28, 1874, p. 4). The day after the lynching, Justice J. M. Caldwell of Trenton took 40 men out to look for the bodies of the ten missing prisoners and found none of them.

After the killings, rumors flew among whites that blacks in the area were armed, organized, and preparing an attack. A man who had been visiting Trenton described the reaction to a rumor that 300 armed black men were approaching Trenton: "There was a momentary paralysis ... swift couriers shot out on the road one by one with awful dread on their faces; women and children gathered in groups, trembling with terror at a danger so awful.... Finally after an age of apprehension, terrors, bloody



resolves and dreams of carnage” the rumor was traced back to the hysterical report of one woman (*Nashville Union and American*, August 28, 1874, p. 4).

The panic spread to other towns. Nearby Humboldt, Tennessee, was reported to have been “wild with excitement all day.... Dispatches were received from Trenton this morning calling upon [Humboldt] for assistance as about five hundred armed negroes were reported to be near that place and intended making an attack upon it for revenge....” Two “companies” of armed whites arrived in Trenton from Union City and the area (*Daily Memphis Avalanche*, August 27, 1874, p. 1). Sheriff Williams (quoted in the *Memphis Daily Appeal*, August 27, 1874, p. 1) said that armed men had arrived from Union City, Kenton, Troy, Rutherford, Dyer Station, Idlewild, and Skull Bone; offers from other towns had been refused. Given the level of panic among whites and the number of armed and frightened men coming into Trenton, it is perhaps surprising that further largescale violence was averted.<sup>45</sup>

### 3. Reactions

Many white residents of West Tennessee were distressed and troubled by the Trenton lynchings and denounced them in extremely strong terms. The fervor with which some prominent white citizens and white newspapers denounced the killings is somewhat surprising. West Tennessee newspapers were strong proponents of white supremacy and some of them, especially the small town weeklies, gave at least qualified approval to other lynchings in the area well into the twentieth century.<sup>46</sup> It is difficult to determine how much of this expression of outrage was driven by a concern for the welfare of black

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<sup>45</sup> Other incidents around the time may have been related to these tensions. The [*Nashville*] *Republican Banner* of September 1, 1874, p. 2, reported that a “party of masked marauders took an old negro man from his house, near Milan, Gibson County, Tennessee, and shot him dead .... The act was without a shadow of provocation.” One accidental death was associated with the Trenton Massacre. A young white man had joined others arming and assembling themselves against the attack they imagined to be coming. Grasping his gun by the muzzle, he shot himself in the side and was killed (*Milan Exchange*, September 3, 1874, p. 3).

<sup>46</sup> For examples concerning a 1929 West Tennessee lynching, see Margaret Vandiver, *Lethal Punishment: Lynchings and Legal Executions in the South* (Rutgers University Press, 2006), 107-09.



citizens, how much by fear of a breakdown of law and order that could adversely affect economic development,<sup>47</sup> and how much by dread that the incident would lead to increased federal involvement in state affairs. The latter concern may have been the most compelling. The *Milan Exchange* (September 17, 1874, p. 3) criticized the coverage of the lynching writing, “The Northern press will repeat it and say the South cannot govern itself or control its citizens.... The Southern press has as completely played into the hands of the North as did the kuklux that killed [the prisoners].” Governor John C. Brown shared this concern, as will be shown below through his statements and correspondence with officials.

#### **A. Reactions by the press and the public**

The arrests, abduction, and lynching received a large amount of publicity locally, in Tennessee, and nationally. The *New York Times* reported on the lynching and the popular weekly *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* ran an issue with a cover illustration of the mob shooting the prisoners.<sup>48</sup> Initially, the Memphis press had emphasized the threat posed by the alleged plans for black rebellion, but after the lynchings occurred, the press quickly turned to denouncing the mob in strong terms. Within one day, headlines in the *Memphis Daily Appeal* made a dramatic shift, from referring to the 16 men as “black scoundrels” to calling them “unfortunate prisoners.” On the 26<sup>th</sup>, the paper had warned that Gibson County blacks intended a “general massacre”; on the 27<sup>th</sup>, the lynchings were termed a “massacre.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The *Memphis Daily Appeal* expressed concern over the economic impact of the case in an editorial published August 27, 1874, p. 1. The paper lamented that Tennessee was “bidding for the capital in money, brains and muscle of Europe” and that a crime like that in Trenton “furnished another club wherewith our enemies at the north and the south may beset us.”

<sup>48</sup> The *New York Times* mentioned the case in at least eight articles; *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, September 19, 1874, cover illustration and articles on pages 19 and 23.

<sup>49</sup> By September, the paper’s sympathies had changed again; a headline September 19, 1874, p. 4 referred to the survivors of the lynching as “Escaped Pickettsville [sic] Negro Marauders – a Very Hard Lot.”



The *Appeal* ran a frontpage editorial on August 27<sup>th</sup>. Under the heading “The Outrage and Massacre at Trenton,” the paper wrote, “We blush for our State, and with the shame of the bloody murder, the disgraceful defiance of law, of order and of decency, are at a loss for language....” The editorial went on to note that whites “are as a thousand to one in moral and physical force to the negro; we are in possession of the State, of all the machinery of government.... Why should we put the government of our own selection under our feet and defy and set at naught the men whom we have elected....” A similar tone was taken by the *Nashville Union and American* (August 29, 1874, p. 1) which wrote there could be no excuse for lynching prisoners “who were already under the strong arm of the law.... When we remember that the whites outnumber the blacks in Gibson county three to one, and poll two Democratic votes to one Radical, the resort to such desperate remedies becomes atrocious.” The [Knoxville] *Press and Messenger* ran excerpts from what they called the “conservative state press,” noting the papers’ “universal detestation of the crime” (September 2, 1874, p. 4).

The next day, August 28<sup>th</sup> (p. 1), the *Appeal* implied in a general sense that the “Radical party” was to blame for the killings, calling them “incendiary malcontents” who “excite trouble and sow the seeds of enmity and perpetuate hatred in the black man’s breast against us.” By August 30<sup>th</sup>, the *Appeal*’s assignment of blame became much more specific. One headline read, “Developments Tending to Implicate White Radicals as the Authors of the Dreadful Murders” (p.1). The paper published on the same day an unsigned special from Humboldt (near Trenton) citing the beliefs of “many of our best citizens” that the violence was “instigated by certain unprincipled white members of the Republican party in this county, acting with the negroes for political purposes” (p. 1). The *Memphis Public Ledger* (August 28, 1874, p. 2) took the same tone: “The Radical party ... is responsible for all these outrages and crimes. It is now time for the negro to discover who are his best friends ... and to attach himself to the Southern white people....”



Several papers issued forceful demands for the prosecution and conviction of the lynchers. On August 28<sup>th</sup> (p. 2), the *Appeal* called for the lynchers to be “hunted down, brought to trial, convicted and hanged for murder.” The *Daily Memphis Avalanche* of August 28, 1874 (p. 1) echoed this call for the death penalty: “Let the gallows in Trenton, with the felons swinging from it, be the evidence that the State and county authorities are equal to the emergency.” The *Nashville Union and American* also demanded legal action in an editorial titled “Be Just and Fear Not” (September 2, 1874, p. 2): “Proclamations, indignation meetings and flaming editorials against acts of lawlessness go for naught except as indicating good intentions.... A pound of punishment will be more fruitful of peace than a ton of invective, official and unofficial.”

White and black residents of West Tennessee responded to the Trenton Massacre with indignation meetings, resolutions, and calls for the arrest and prosecution of the lynchers. Prominent white residents of Memphis published a call for the public to attend an indignation meeting (*Memphis Daily Appeal*, August 28, 1874, p. 4), saying that “the laws of the commonwealth of Tennessee have been egregiously violated by a band of unknown men in the wilful [sic] and deliberate murder of sixteen unarmed and helpless citizens.” Over one hundred signatures of individuals and businesses followed. The meeting was well attended by both races and was widely reported in the local newspapers. Among a number of speakers were Jefferson Davis and Nathan Bedford Forrest. Davis’ speech is a classic example of paternalistic white racism:

Every southern man in his memory runs back to the negro woman who nursed him; to the boy who hunted and fished with him; to the man who first taught him to ride and swim; and as he grew to manhood, the cordial welcome given him by the old nurse, with a tenderness scarcely inferior to that of his own mother; and while he has such memories clustering around him, he cannot be the enemy of that useful race which was the main strength of our country when we stood in this relation, which I believe God intended us to occupy.... the only feeling of indignation I have is against the white men who have disturbed this relation between us; who have fomented discord; who have led the imaginative negro into evil; against them, I say, hurl the thunderbolt of your vengeance. (*Memphis Daily Appeal*, August 29, 1874, p. 4)



Forrest, who as the first Grand Wizard of the Klan, might be expected to bear some responsibility for its actions, said to cheers that he “was there to enter his protest against the late outrage, and he was ready to start to-morrow to hunt the murderers and bring them to justice” (*Memphis Daily Appeal*, August 29, 1874, p. 4). An indignation meeting was held at Jackson, Tennessee, as well; it was addressed by prominent citizens who denounced mob action and commended the governor for his prompt response ([Jackson] *Whig and Tribune*, August 29, 1874, p. 2).<sup>50</sup>

In Nashville, a group of African Americans met and passed resolutions in response to the Trenton massacre and other recent killings: “Whereas none of the assassins in the above cases have been brought to justice, therefore be it Resolved, That in justice to ourselves and those we represent, we ask the white people of the State ‘How long is such a state of affairs to be tolerated, and is there no redress for these outrages?’” (*Nashville Union and American*, August 28, 1874, p. 4). On Monday, August 31<sup>st</sup>, about 200 people, black and white, met in Pickettville, scene of the initial events related to the Trenton Massacre, to discuss the situation. Speeches were delivered, including one by Scott Cocolo, an African American, and the group passed a resolution condemning both the shooting at the young white men near Pickettville and the abduction and murder of the prisoners. The Pickettville group also condemned the Memphis and Nashville press for doing a “great injustice in charging us by implication with lawlessness and disorder” (*Milan Exchange*, September 3, 1874, p. 3).

The stand taken by large city newspapers led in turn to a defensive posture by the *Milan Exchange*, published in Gibson County, which quoted newspapers critical of the lynching and denounced them in strong terms. The *Exchange* stressed the perceived danger presented by African Americans and uncritically accepted that they were well organized and ready to commit overwhelming violence against

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<sup>50</sup> Nathan Bedford Forrest and others “sought to avoid responsibility for post-1869 Klan outrages, but they shouldered no small measure of blame for creating and structuring an organization devoted to promoting white supremacy through extralegal means. They unleashed forces they later could not control, but unleash them they did.” J. Michael Martinez, *Carpetbaggers, Cavalry, and the Ku Klux Klan: Exposing the Invisible Empire during Reconstruction* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 23.



whites in the area. The paper gave lurid accounts of the effort and intent of blacks, asserting they had bought up the buckshot in local stores and were planning to “exterminate [the whites] and take charge of the farms and rule this country as they see fit” (August 27, 1874, p. 3). In a long article published September 17<sup>th</sup> (p. 3), the *Milan Exchange* wrote that local blacks had been “in the very act of carrying out the most diabolical and fiendish designs known to our courts or placed upon the records of history,” to “burn and kill as they went ... only the young ladies and fair young wives were to be spared the sword and taken as wives for themselves.” The *Exchange* argued that any group of people so threatened would respond as Gibson County whites had done and stated that all objections “are nothing with us when we are under the threatnings [sic] of negro brutality. We will stop it by all means whatsoever, even if the Government fall, and so will any other people....” (*Milan Exchange*, September 17, 1874, p. 3).

The *Memphis Daily Appeal* of August 30 (p. 1) published a letter signed “Country Woman,” which strongly defended the lynching on grounds that it was done to protect whites from attacks by blacks, particularly white women from rape. The writer noted that she felt “grateful to those who in lieu of a tardy *legal* justice take matters in their own hands and strike for our safety.” A similar defense of the lynching was published in the *Nashville Union & American* (September 4, 1874, p. 1), written by an anonymous “prominent citizen of Gibson County.” In a long column, the author referred repeatedly to the “insurrection” of the local African Americans in lurid terms, claiming that the whites of Gibson County were “exposed to the fury of demons and savages” who planned on “slaughtering the whites indiscriminately, sacking and destroying their property and violating the persons of their wives and daughters....” In response to such danger, the author argued that the lynching was justified and indignantly requested that the press and public cease their denunciations of the lynchers and citizens of Gibson County.



## B. Official and legal responses

Around 8 a.m. the morning after the lynching, Justice J.M. Caldwell held an inquest for the four murdered men; the finding was death by gunshot carried out by unknown parties (*Memphis Daily Appeal*, August 27, 1874, p. 4). A special court session was convened in Trenton, Judge Talliaferro presiding. The judge denounced the action of the mob in strong terms and charged the grand jury to “use all possible means to discover the perpetrators” (*Memphis Daily Appeal*, August 28, 1874, p. 4).

Governor John C. Brown of Tennessee promised severe action by state authorities against the mob, in an explicit attempt to avoid federal action. Brown wrote to John Skeffington, Attorney General of the 13<sup>th</sup> judicial district, which included Gibson County, pledging all resources necessary for prosecution:

If we fail in this, it will afford the most plausible pretext of bringing the military power of the General Government into requisition, of which, God knows, we have already had enough.... To my mind this is an important crisis, not merely for the people of Gibson county but for the State and the whole South. (Letter from Gov. Brown published in *Milan Exchange*, September 10, 1874, p. 2)

Brown published a proclamation offering a reward of \$500 for the arrest and conviction of each of the lynchers ([*Jackson*] *Whig and Tribune*, September 5, 1874, p. 1) and instructed the sheriff of Gibson County “bring all the law breakers to punishment” ([*Memphis*] *Public Ledger*, August 27, 1874, p. 2). Governor Brown visited Trenton in early September to organize a special session of the local court in response to the lynching ([*Nashville*] *Republican Banner*, September 5, 1874, p. 4 and September 8, 1874, p. 8; *Milan Exchange*, September 17, 1874, p. 3). The court in Trenton held special session for ten days, resulting in 41 indictments and orders for arrests.<sup>51</sup> Many of the indicted men turned themselves in and were released on bond (*Milan Exchange*, September 24, 1874, 3).

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<sup>51</sup> The indictments charged the defendants with forced entry into the jail and with making an assault upon the victims with guns while “unlawfully and feloniously prowling, traveling and riding through the town and county of this State in the aforesaid jurisdiction masked and disguised,” relying on Tennessee’s 1868 laws targeting the Klan (see note 26 above and accompanying text). Gibson County Circuit Court Minutes, Civil and Criminal, volume I, July 1869 – April 1876 [microfilm roll 20], September 14, 1874,



Despite this action by the state, the federal authorities also began an investigation headed by U.S. District Attorney W. W. Murray. On the night of September 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>, several suspects were arrested in connection with the lynching. Lieutenant S.R. Whitall, commanding officer of the Military Post at Humboldt,<sup>52</sup> filed a detailed report of the events connected with these arrests. Responding to a request from a Deputy U.S. Marshal, Whitall led 28 troops to assist the marshals in making the arrests. They left the garrison in Humboldt at around 11 o'clock at night and went first to the home of J. P. (Joe) Hale, near Pickettville. Their attempt to arrest him was not successful; Hale shot at a deputy U.S. marshal and escaped. Using one arrested man as their guide, the troops were able to make arrests at several other outlying houses and then entered Pickettville. Whitall commented that each house except one that they approached was guarded by armed men who said they were there to protect against an uprising by blacks. Whitall wrote that he learned later that "they were expecting to be arrested by the civil authorities of the County." By dawn, the troops had covered some 20 miles and had five prisoners in custody. The next afternoon, three more suspects, including Hale, surrendered at the garrison.<sup>53</sup>

Whitall wrote that the eight prisoners were taken to jail in Memphis on the 11<sup>th</sup>. They went by rail and were guarded by the marshal, his assistant, a corporal, and eight privates. In a letter of September 17<sup>th</sup>, Whitall wrote that at the request of the marshal, he provided a sergeant and nine men

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pages 163-69. (Microfilm available at Gibson County Memorial Library, Trenton, Gibson County, Tennessee. These records are available online through Family Search).

<sup>52</sup> For a description of the Military Post at Humboldt, see War Department, Surgeon-General's Office, *A Report on the Hygiene of the United States Army, with Descriptions of Military Posts* (Washington, 1875), 129-31.

<sup>53</sup> The prisoners were H.M. Fly, J.P. (Joe) Hale, F.L. Hudson, J. L. Morgan, Monroe Morgan, W.T. Peoples, J.F. Warren, and Constable W.S. Eldridge. Hale's dispute with Joshua Webb over the price of barbeque was the initial incident; Monroe Morgan and J.F. Warren were the two young men supposedly shot at by a group of blacks (*Public Ledger*, September 12, 1874, p. 3). (Note that Peoples' middle initial is variously given as "T" and "P".) W.S. Eldridge was one of the officers who participated in the arrests of the 16 Trenton defendants (*The Tennessean*, August 28, 1874, p. 3) and who escorted them from Pickettville to the jail in Trenton ([Knoxville] *Press and Messenger*, September 2, 1874, p. 7).



to assist in arresting Madison M. Knight, who was a Gibson County deputy sheriff. Knight was taken to Memphis as well.<sup>54</sup>

If the *Milan Exchange* and Jackson *Whig and Tribune's* reactions are an indication of how local whites responded to the arrests made by the federal authorities, they were resented as unjustifiable. The *Exchange* wrote, "It is very strange that, after Gov. Brown had gone to Trenton and organized a special term of our court to ferret out the perpetrators, the Federal authorities ... should take the matter in hand and arrest some of our best citizens.... All of the citizens of Pickettville arrested by the Federal authorities are peaceable and law-abiding" (September 17, 1874, p. 3). The *Whig and Tribune* blamed Southern newspapers for raising a "screech owl cry" over the lynchings, leading to the federal response at the "instance of irresponsible negroes," with white men being "hunted down by United States soldiers, hand-cuffed, taken to Memphis, and thrown into prison with thieves and murderers" (September 19, 1874, p. 2). On September 19<sup>th</sup>, the prisoners appeared before United States Commissioner S. S. Garrett. A number of witnesses gave testimony, including Dug Jamison and two other survivors of the abduction, David Sandford and John Reagan. Three of the defendants were discharged; the others posted bonds of \$3,000 and returned to Gibson County (*Memphis Daily Appeal*, September 19, 1874, 4; September 20, 1874, 4).<sup>55</sup>

The day before this hearing, Gov. Brown wrote to President U.S. Grant, reporting that 41 people had been indicted by the Gibson County grand jury and that most of those had been arrested. Brown wrote, "The State authorities have manifested the most earnest desire to enforce the law against the guilty parties, and have demonstrated by these indictments and arrests, not only their disposition but

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<sup>54</sup> S.R. Whitall to Assistant Adjutant General, September 11, 1874 and September 17, 1874. Letters Received by the Office of the Adjutant General. Main Series, 1871-1880. 1874, 3585-3906 [M666, Roll 174, images 441-43 and 633]. The National Archives and Records Administration. Note that Whitall wrote the last name as "Knight," but subsequent records give the name as "McKnight."

<sup>55</sup> The three discharged prisoners were Constable W.E. Eldridge, James L. Morgan, and W.P. Peoples (*Memphis Daily Appeal*, September 20, 1874, 4.)



ability to enforce the law and protect all citizens without regard to race, color, or prior condition of servitude.” Brown went on to complain about the arrests made by the federal authorities and to request that jurisdiction over the men under federal arrest be transferred to the state (Brown’s letter quoted in *New York Times*, September 19, 1874, p. 6). Responding by telegram the next day to Governor Brown, President U.S. Grant reminded him that “the constitution makes it my duty to enforce the acts of Congress and Congress has passed laws giving the United States jurisdiction in such cases....”<sup>56</sup> President Grant referred Brown’s request to the Attorney General, George H. Williams, who requested a report from the U.S. District Attorney for the Western District of Tennessee.<sup>57</sup> On October 10, Attorney General Williams wrote to Gov. Brown enclosing the report and informing him that President Grant did not “feel at liberty to interfere with the judicial proceedings referred to, and they will therefore, be allowed to proceed in the usual way to a final determination in the courts of the United States.”<sup>58</sup> The *Nashville Union and American* noted that this action “is received here with considerable indignation” (October 14, 1874, p. 2). Two days later, the same paper referred to the federal prosecution as a program for “the crucifixion of the South” (October 16, 1874, p. 2).

Perhaps in reaction to these developments, the grand jury in Gibson County continued its work in October. The *Nashville Union and American* reported that the grand jury was preparing to indict the surviving **victims** of the Trenton lynching “for the riotous proceedings that led to the Trenton massacre.” Under the headline, “WORSE MIXED THAN EVER. The Conflict of State and Federal Jurisdiction in West

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<sup>56</sup> President U.S. Grant to Governor Brown, telegram, September 19, 1874. John C. Brown Papers. Box 1, folder 4, Correspondence, Incoming, August-September 1871 [Reel 1, frames 0207-09]. Tennessee State Library and Archives. (Note that this item is misfiled in 1871 correspondence rather than in 1874.)

<sup>57</sup> Attorney General Williams to District Attorney W.W. Murray, September 21, 1874, letter. Instruction Books, 1867-1904. Record Group 60: General Records of the Department of Justice, 1790-2002. [M701, Roll 5, image 73 (page 43)]. The National Archives and Record Administration.

<sup>58</sup> Attorney General Williams to Governor Brown, October 10, 1874, letter. General and Miscellaneous Letter Books, 1818-1913. Record Group 60: General Records of the Department of Justice, 1790-2002. [M699, Roll 1, images 288-90 (pages 500-02)]. The National Archives and Record Administration.



Tennessee,” the paper reported that six of the survivors were in Memphis, held by the federal authorities as witnesses. The paper noted that W.W. Murray had made it clear that he would not comply with any request to send the men back to Gibson County (October 21, 1874, p. 4).

The federal grand jury met in Memphis in October. The government’s case depended heavily upon the testimony of Benjamin E. Davis, a young man who had been part of the mob, as well as that of survivors of the lynching.<sup>59</sup> The grand jury returned two indictments. The first indicted 52 men for violations of Sections 6 and 7 of the First Enforcement Act (1870); the second charged 53 men with violations of Section 2 of the Ku Klux Klan Act (1871).<sup>60</sup> The defendants challenged both indictments. Judges Halmer H. Emmons and Bland Ballard quashed the first indictment on grounds that the federal courts lacked jurisdiction, but after several months of deliberation allowed proceedings under the second indictment to move forward under counts that charged the defendants “with conspiring to

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<sup>59</sup> Davis almost certainly is the “young boy” referred to in a letter from Attorney General Williams to W.W. Murray approving employing a guard to protect the witness from potential tampering. Davis provided evidence in both the state and federal proceedings. Attorney General Williams to W.W. Murray, October 13, 1874, letter. Instruction Books, 1867-1904. Record Group 60: General Records of the Department of Justice, 1790-2002. [M701, Roll 5, image 86 (page 86)]. The National Archives and Record Administration. Despite this caution, Davis was removed from federal custody and taken by defense counsel to Gibson County for a period of about three weeks. W.W. Murray to U.S. Attorney General George H. Williams, December 21, 1874 [Reel 4, images 384-87]. Tennessee: Source-Chronological File: Middle Tennessee: January 1884-August 1884/Western Tennessee: January 1871-July 1884, Record Group 60. National Archives and Records Administration.

<sup>60</sup> The Enforcement Acts were passed in response to violence by the Klan; the Acts were an attempt “to employ federal power to remedy the breakdown of law and order” (Foner, *Second Founding*, 118). The effect of the Acts was undercut by a series of Supreme Court decisions in the 1870s and early 1880s. Robert J. Kaczorowski, “Federal Enforcement of Civil Rights During the First Reconstruction,” *Fordham Urban Law Journal* 23 (1995): 155-186.

The Trenton defendants were prosecuted under Section 2 of the 1871 Act, which prohibited two or more persons from conspiring to deprive another of equal protection of the laws. This section was found unconstitutional in 1883 because the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment was held to provide protection only from state actions, not from acts by individuals (*United States v. Harris*, 106 U.S. 629, 1883). The Harris case arose from a mob attack in Crockett County, adjacent to Gibson County, in 1876. The mob, led by Sheriff R. G. Harris, abducted four prisoners and killed one of them. W. W. Murray prosecuted the case and it was his indictment that was considered by the Court. Pamela Brandwein, *Rethinking the Judicial Settlement of Reconstruction* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 153-160; Waldrop, 2002, 77-78.



prevent the State of Tennessee from extending to [the 16 prisoners] the equal protection of its laws” (*Memphis Daily Appeal*, March 26, 1875, p. 4; *Nashville Union and American*, March 30, 1875, p. 2).<sup>61</sup>

Fourteen of the defendants faced trial in federal court in Memphis the spring of 1875.<sup>62</sup> The struggle between the federal and state authorities continued, as Tennessee Attorney General Joe B. Heiskell argued in federal court that the prisoners should be released so that they could be tried by the state under the indictments issued in Gibson County (*Memphis Daily Appeal*, April 3, 1875, p. 4). This request was denied, with Judge Ballard delivering his opinion from the bench (*Nashville Union and American*, April 6, 1875, p. 1). The prisoners went to trial in early April. Coverage of the trial in the Memphis papers was strikingly brief, especially in comparison with the extensive articles written at the time of the lynching. The *Memphis Daily Appeal* reported the conclusion of the trial: “United States vs J.P. Hoe [sic], et al [sic], jury, verdict not guilty” (April 11, 1875, p. 1). In the same edition, a slightly longer description appeared on p. 4: “The Gibson county prisoners ... were acquitted yesterday by the jury in obedience to the recommendation of Judges Emmons and Ballard, that the evidence in the case did not sustain the charge and was not sufficient to convict.” Judge Ballard ordered the release of the defendants, “as the evidence failed to establish their guilt” (*Nashville Union and American*, April 11, 1875, p. 1).

A fuller account of the trial is available in the form of the “Special Report in Gibson County Ku Klux Cases,” submitted by W.W. Murray to U.S. Attorney General George H. Williams. Four survivors of

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<sup>61</sup> W.W. Murray to U.S. Attorney General George H. Williams, December 21, 1874 [Reel 4, images 384-87], March 25, 1875 [Reel 4, images 482-83], and September 1876 [Reel 4, images 603-07]. Tennessee: Source-Chronological File: Middle Tennessee: January 1884-August 1884/Western Tennessee: January 1871-July 1884, Record Group 60. National Archives and Records Administration. The *Memphis Daily Appeal* of April 4, 1875, p. 1, reported Judge Ballard’s opinion quashing the first indictment as he delivered it from the bench. Victor Howard notes that “Judge Ballard was in complete sympathy with federal efforts to protect civil rights.... [H]e had written Lyman Trumbull... ‘It will not do to leave the civil rights of the Negroes unprotected’.” Victor B. Howard, *Black Liberation in Kentucky: Emancipation and Freedom, 1862-1884* (University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 133.

<sup>62</sup> It is not clear how the 14 were chosen for trial out of the 53 indicted.



the abduction from the Trenton jail and Benjamin E. Davis, the mob member who had turned state's evidence, were called to testify. The prosecution was greatly hampered, however, by the understandable fear and reluctance to testify felt by surviving victims. Murray described the intimidation of his witnesses in the courtroom:

[They] were confronted not only by the very men who had attempted to murder them, but the sherriff [sic] of Gibson County or his deputy came into open court and demanded of the court in their presence these witnesses to be taken to that county and tried for a trumped up charge of felony now pending there against them and these witnesses therepon [sic] became so terrified that some of them in tears and piteous tones besought the court to allow them to be excused from testifying.

Murray went on to state that Davis's testimony had changed from his grand jury testimony and that multiple alibi witnesses testified for each of the defendants. Given the resulting weakness of the government's case, Judge Ballard instructed the jury to acquit. Murray asserted that he believed Judge Ballard thought the defendants were guilty and he himself was "as well convinced of their guilt as I ever have been of a criminal indicted in this court."<sup>63</sup> After the acquittal of the defendants, the 39 other men under indictment were released.<sup>64</sup>

Unwilling to give up even after an outcome that he called "disastrous," Murray wrote to A.G. Williams proposing the investment of sufficient resources to further investigate and build stronger proof, including discrediting the alibi witnesses whose testimony he believed to be false. Murray wrote that this would require experienced detectives, since "the whole county is more or less implicated and the difficulties in the way of ferreting out sufficient proof to convict are numerous and of a grave nature." Noting the crime was "of the most outrageous character" and that "justice loudly cr[ies] for

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<sup>63</sup> Special Report in Gibson County Ku Klux Cases. W.W. Murray, U.S. Attorney to George H. Williams, Attorney General, April 26, 1875. Box 998, folder 8. Source Chrono Files, 1871-84; Letters Re. Western TN, 1/1871-9/1876." Record Group 60. National Archives and Record Administration.

<sup>64</sup> Swinney, *Suppressing the Ku Klux Klan*, 289-90.



vindication,” he urged further efforts – but only if they were not “half-way measures,” saying it would be better to end the effort than to “make another abortive attempt at a trial.”<sup>65</sup>

On May 4<sup>th</sup>, A.G. Williams instructed Murray by telegram to deliver the witnesses to the state authorities.<sup>66</sup> In a letter written the same day, Williams expanded on his order, saying there was no way to proceed until the Supreme Court ruled on the constitutionality of the Enforcement Acts. He conceded that “a great outrage has been committed, and ... the parties concerned therein ought to be punished,” but concluded that nothing further could be done until the Court acted.<sup>67</sup> Murray seems to have inquired as to whether he should dismiss charges against the remaining defendants; Williams responded on May 12<sup>th</sup> that unless Murray believed that all further prosecution would be useless, he should let the case remain “in statu quo” until the Supreme Court ruled.<sup>68</sup> It is unclear exactly when the indictments were dismissed.

The *Morristown [Tennessee] Gazette* wrote in the aftermath of the trial, “Thus ends the miserable attempt of certain intermeddling Federal subordinates to make political capital out of an aggravated violation of State law” (April 14, 1875, p. 1). While the federal case had ended, the state still had the option of proceeding with trials of the suspects indicted by the Gibson County grand jury in October of 1874. Governor James D. Porter, who had assumed office in January of 1875, refused to

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<sup>65</sup>Special Report in Gibson County Ku Klux Cases. Presumably Murray was referring to bringing to trial some or all of the remaining defendants still under indictment.

<sup>66</sup> Attorney General Williams to DA W.W. Murray, May 4, 1875, telegram. Instruction Books, 1867-1904. Record Group 60: General Records of the Department of Justice, 1790-2002. [M701, Roll 5, image 273 (page 443)]. The National Archives and Record Administration.

<sup>67</sup> Attorney General Williams to W.W. Murray, May 4, 1875, letter. Instruction Books, 1867-1904. Record Group 60: General Records of the Department of Justice, 1790-2002. [M701, Roll 5, images 273-74 (pages 443-44)]. The National Archives and Record Administration.

<sup>68</sup> Attorney General Williams to W.W. Murray, May 12, 1875, letter. Instruction Books, 1867-1904. Record Group 60: General Records of the Department of Justice, 1790-2002. [M701, Roll 5, images 282-83 (pages 461-62)]. The National Archives and Record Administration.



continue the employment of lawyers to prosecute the case against the suspected lynchers. In a letter to counsel employed by the state, published by the *Milan Exchange*, he noted that the prosecution had been undertaken by the federal authorities and thus he decided to reject any additional expenses for the state (*Milan Exchange*, April 15, 1875, p. 2). Governor Porter stated that Gibson County could proceed against the suspects but would have to do so without state assistance.

Thirteen of the men indicted for “felonious Ku Kluxing” were tried in Gibson County on August 7, 1875, and were acquitted by a jury apparently made up of local men. The Gibson County Attorney General immediately nolle prossed the indictments for the other men who had been indicted but not tried. The court records note that “the costs of this prosecution” were to be presented to the Comptroller of the State for payment; it is unknown if that payment was ever made.<sup>69</sup> A brief article in the *Milan Exchange* of August 12, 1875 (p. 3) noted that Benjamin Davis, the white prosecution witness, “could not recognize any one of the prisoners as being present at the jail breaking.” It is extremely unlikely that any of the surviving victims of the abduction testified at the Gibson County trial.

## **Conclusion**

Both the state and federal attempts to prosecute the Trenton Massacre lynchers were unsuccessful; no one was ever held legally accountable for the jailbreak and murders. The men who abducted the prisoners and killed several of them remained free, and apart from the inconvenience of arrest and trial, paid no penalty. Still, the fact that any prosecution was undertaken is notable. In the

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<sup>69</sup> Those tried were James Barksdale, Bob Barksdale, Cage Fly, John P. Harper, Joe Harper, Jimmie Love, E.W. McClauhan, Joe Massey, W. R. Massey, J. W. Waldrup, W. T. Waller, James Warren, and John Woodard. Spellings of names are given as written in the Gibson Court records. There was substantial overlap between the men tried in federal and in state court. Gibson County Circuit Court Minutes, Civil and Criminal, volume I, July 1869 – April 1876 [microfilm roll 20], August 7, 1875, pages 452-53.



years after the federal government ended its efforts to protect the rights of African Americans until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, serious attempts to bring lynchers to justice were nearly nonexistent.<sup>70</sup>

The prosecution undertaken by Gibson County authorities was likely only pro forma, but the federal authorities, especially W.W. Murray, seem to have made the best effort they could. Their failure is an illustration of the intransigence of Southern whites faced with Emancipation, the Reconstruction Amendments, and a newly assertive federal government. In state trials where juries were composed of local white men, acquittal was by far the most likely outcome. If juries were integrated and/or composed of people from outside the immediate area, as happened in federal prosecutions, witnesses could undercut the prosecution's case by sudden failures of memory or by providing alibis for the defendants. Cooperative witnesses for the prosecution, both black and white, had reason to fear for their own and for their families' safety. In addition, the federal courts of the Reconstruction Era were terribly overburdened with cases and had limited ability to investigate. As William Gillette summarized, "Federal marshals and attorneys were whipsawed between awesome presidential commitments, inadequate federal support, local governmental sabotage, and individual apathy."<sup>71</sup>

Given the extremely high likelihood that prosecution would fail, was the effort worthless? Perhaps even failed prosecutions served some purpose by indicating that the authorities recognized and condemned the crime. More pessimistically, one could argue that failed attempts to hold perpetrators accountable simply signaled their impunity from punishment. In the case of the Trenton massacre, Swinney concludes that the prosecution had "a salutary effect," and that "the day of the Klan was over,"

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<sup>70</sup> For a partial list of attempted state prosecutions of persons accused of lynching between 1899 and 1937, see Monroe Work, "Legal Punishment of Lynchers," Department of Records and Research, Tuskegee Institute, 1937, available at: <https://statesanctioned.com/list-of-lynching-prosecutions> (note this is misidentified as being compiled by the NAACP).

<sup>71</sup> Gillette, "Anatomy of a Failure," 276; Kaczorowski, "Federal Enforcement," 155-186. Gillette counted 22 Enforcement Act convictions in Tennessee between 1870 and 1880; these constituted just 3% of the cases brought under the Acts during those years. Gillette, "Anatomy of a Failure," 298.



while cautioning that federal prosecution alone could not be credited with this result.<sup>72</sup> It may be that the prosecution of the accused lynchers did have some temporary local deterrent effect, as 16 years passed before the next documented lynching in Gibson County.<sup>73</sup>

There is much we do not know about the Trenton Massacre and probably will never know, although this lynching is much better documented than most.<sup>74</sup> The lack of a clear legal resolution and the obscurity of the case raise the question of whether it has only historic interest or whether it retains any modern relevance. As an illustration of the terror imposed on newly freed persons and the limits of what state government would do and what federal government could do to protect them, this nearly forgotten case is a painful reminder of the destructive power wielded by motivated and organized perpetrators who act with confidence that legal authority is weak and illegitimate. In this regard, the echoes of the case for the current situation in the United States are all too clear.

Reconstruction occurred a century and a half ago and lasted only a few brief years, but it had enormous influence on subsequent American history, including the present; indeed, many of the most painful and intractable issues in American society remain unresolved from that era. In his classic book on the period, Eric Foner aptly called Reconstruction “America’s unfinished revolution.”<sup>75</sup> W. E. B. Du

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<sup>72</sup> Swinney, *Suppressing the Ku Klux Klan*, 290.

<sup>73</sup> Evidence is scattered and fragmentary, but serious attempts to bring lynchers to justice may have had some temporary local deterrent effect. See Margaret Vandiver, “Two Years of Terror: Lynchings in North Florida, 1893-1895,” *Criminal Law Bulletin* 48 (2012): 515-36. The next documented lynchings in Gibson County occurred 16 years after the Trenton Massacre: Henderson Fox, August 16, 1890, rape of white child; Thomas Woodward, August 16, 1890, robbery of white man (Vandiver, *Lethal Punishment*).

<sup>74</sup> For a thoughtful discussion of the limits of what we can learn about most lynchings, see Vincent Vinikas, “Specters in the Past: The Saint Charles, Arkansas, Lynching of 1904 and the Limits of Historical Inquiry,” *The Journal of Southern History* LXV (1999): 535-564. One of the most painful unresolved questions of the Trenton Massacre is what became of the families of the men who were lynched and what happened to the survivors, especially those who testified, and their families. Trish Gannon’s research reveals a few details, e.g., that John Reagan was living in Gibson County in 1880, working as a barber. Gannon, *Shot in the Dark*, 144.

<sup>75</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*.



Bois wrote in 1934 that if the aims of Reconstruction had been accomplished, “we should be living today in a different world.” Nearly 90 years later, his words unfortunately remain true.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (Russell & Russell, 1935 [1963]), 708.



The following images are taken from "Map of Gibson County, Tenn: From actual surveys and official records," Philadelphia: D.G. Beers & Co., 1877. Available from Library of Congress:

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3963g.la000872/?r=0.414,0.496,0.215,0.136,0>





