

BUILDING IT OF BRICK AND HOLLOW TILE: LEE WILSON AND BLACK LABOUR

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Building it of Brick and Hollow Tile: Lee Wilson and Black Labour

As historian Steven Hahn and others have argued, the nineteenth century was not only the age of industrialization, it was also the age of emancipation, when servile labor systems fell away as serfs and slaves found freedom in both Europe and the Americas. What is remarkable about the experiences in both worlds is the extent to which similar forms of bondage emerged to replace the slave/serf systems. From long-term apprenticeships to debt peonage, planters found ways to coerce and control labour. What complicated the scenario in the Americas was the racial demography of the freed people, and nowhere was this more acute than in the American South, a place where a horrific war accompanied the end of slavery. The war left a legacy of physical and economic devastation and severe psychological trauma that influenced white attitudes toward freed people whose own dreams and aspirations conflicted with the expectations of whites of both the planter and the yeomen classes of the South. Although the white classes had different economic and political interests, southern Democrats became skilled at manipulating racist ideology to serve their own ends and keep the working classes divided and at bay. By the end of the century, planters had erected a system of labour control, particularly over Black labour, that resembled “another kind of slavery” but their use of racist rhetoric to divide Black and white labour contributed to acts of terrorism against African American sharecroppers that did not serve the interests of the planters for whom Blacks worked. As landless whites began to compete with Black labour for the sharecropping and tenancy positions on southern

plantations, Blacks found themselves on dangerous and shifting ground and often under the dubious protection of white planters.¹

Despite the apparent uniformity of lien and labour laws, segregation and disfranchisement statutes, which worked together to challenge Black advancement in the post Civil War South, a great deal of variety existed amongst planters in terms of the size of their operations, the extent to which they were able to influence local and state officials, and their ability to exercise control over Black labour. Some so-called planters owned as little as a few hundred acres and contracted with merchants in agricultural communities to advance supplies to their sharecroppers and tenants; they relied on the more prosperous planters to gin their cotton and provide access to cotton factors to market the crop. The larger operators, like Robert E. “Lee” Wilson of Mississippi County Arkansas, owned sizeable estates, ran their own commissaries, furnished their own tenants and sharecroppers, owned cotton gins and cotton factorage businesses, and operated their own banks which provided a much wider world of capital opportunities. They exercised significant influence with the local, state, and federal officials, and helped shaped agricultural and flood control policies in the twentieth century.²

Lee Wilson, who turned a 400-acre inheritance into a 50,000-acre empire, began operations in 1880 harvesting lumber from his northeastern Arkansas property. He was fifteen-years old, the orphan son of a former plantation owner, and his patrimony consisted mostly of mosquito infested swamplands made particularly vulnerable by its proximity to the Mississippi River. Over the course of the next few decades, he bought tax-forfeited and cut-over lands – leveraging every piece of collateral he owned in order to expand operations. Crucial to his success was an aggressive campaign to secure flood protection and create drainage districts, both requiring local, state, and federal aid. Although he continued to engage in the timber business,

he began plantation agriculture, and by 1889, he had over a hundred tenants and sharecroppers in thirty tenant houses and furnished them through his own commissary. In 1905 he incorporated as Lee Wilson & Company, claiming a capital stock of a million dollars, and in 1908, he opened the Bank of Wilson, and established relationships with bankers and financiers in St. Louis, Chicago, and New York. He would later rethink incorporation after corporate income taxes gave him pause for thought, and reorganized in 1917 as a Massachusetts form of trust, with members of his immediate family as the holders of “certificates of trust,” but whether incorporated or not, he acted as though he was the sole proprietor of his vast and expanding enterprise, and no one, not family member nor employee ever questioned his authority. By 1923, one journalist was characterizing him as “like a feudal baron of old” but this was not entirely accurate as Wilson created an industrial model plantation that was highly organized and efficient, with central barns housing equipment and mules, and several cotton gins, commissaries, and tenant houses. He was more rural Rockefeller than feudal baron.³

Another important component of Wilson’s successful operation was his recruitment of and control over labour, and over time Lee Wilson gained a contradictory reputation for his treatment of Black labour. According to some in the African American community, he was not unlike other large operators in the mechanisms of control that he could bring to bear, particularly the use of local law enforcement officers to confiscate personal property – like mules and implements – if a given sharecropper left the premises without first settling his debt. George Stith, a Southern Tenant Farmers Union organizer in the late 1930s, recollected his sister’s decision to leave the Wilson plantation with her husband and family, departing in the dead of night, for fear of being held ransom for a debt they did not believe they owed.⁴ On the other hand, even Scipio Jones, a Black Civil Rights activist in early twentieth century Arkansas,

acknowledged Wilson's reputation for treating Black labour fairly. Jones might have been thinking of the better housing, health care, and educational facilities Wilson offered Black employees, and they certainly seemed almost unparalleled in the chaotic and rapidly expanding plantation system of eastern Arkansas.⁵

Between 1880 and 1920 four hundred thousand acres of land were brought into cultivation in Mississippi County alone; and over two million additional acres came into production in the five counties of northeastern Arkansas.⁶ These counties were late developing because they were swampy and vulnerable to floods from the Mississippi River or one of its tributaries, but by the late nineteenth century, the rush to the western frontier slowed as available land there began to disappear, and men looking for the "main chance" looked closer to home to find opportunity. Wilson was one of the few who invested some of his profits -- \$50,000 for a state-of-the-art Black school, for example -- in providing better facilities for Black labour. He professed to be grateful to them for having "helped to make what I have," but his benevolence also worked to his advantage as it played a role in attracting Black labour to his operation and the reputation he gained for providing a "safer" environment in the violent northeastern Arkansas delta also aided his recruitment efforts.

Just as men with some means came to the area to lay down roots and establish plantations, Black and white landless men came to work the lumber industry, railroads, and plantations that began to emerge. Many of them hoped for much more than "working for the man," but few of them were able to move beyond landlessness. To put it into context, the population of Mississippi County more than quadrupled between 1880 and 1920, a phenomenon paralleled in adjacent counties. The Black population alone rose from 2,654 to 19,907, representing 42 percent of the overall population.⁷ As the rabid racism of the 1890s fastened its

hold over the South and competition for lumbering and plantation jobs in Mississippi County became more intense, white nightriders began to terrorize African American labour in attempt to secure the employment opportunities. This nightriding or white-capping phenomenon occurred all over the cotton South, from Alabama to Mississippi to Arkansas, and planters sometimes found themselves the targets of such activities. Barns, cotton gins, and tenant houses were burned, all in an effort to send a message to planters to hire white instead of Black labour. Planters often found it difficult to apprehend and prosecute the perpetrators. In nearby Cross County, a church that allowed Black worshipers to use its facility when whites were not in attendance, was destroyed by fire. Early the next year, a white detective hired by planters to track down the nightriders was murdered. Men later arrested in connection with this incident avoided conviction because over a hundred witnesses developed amnesia.⁸ A decade later, in Mississippi County, the \$50,000 school building that Wilson built for his African American laborers was burned to the ground on the morning it was scheduled to be dedicated. Wilson pledged to rebuild it – and did do so – saying “this time I will build it of brick and hollow tile” so that the arsonists would have a more difficult time disposing of the edifice. The perpetrators were never identified or apprehended.⁹

Occasionally nightriders were apprehended and convicted. Such was the case in March of 1915 when nightriders threatened African Americans working near O’Donnell’s Bend – about twenty-five miles north of the town of Wilson -- and destroyed property belonging to planter J. D. Spann. The episode began when unidentified men posted notices warning Blacks to leave and threatening one white man that “if he continued to employ Negroes his property would be burned.” On March 17th they torched one of Spann’s tenant houses, prompting the county sheriff to dispatch deputies to hunt down the perpetrators. Using bloodhounds, the deputies

apprehended seven men, although other “marauders escaped to the Tennessee shore.” The court convicted two of them, Mart Rogers, the alleged ring leader, and Giles Simpson; Judge William J. Driver sentenced them to prison for seven and four years respectively. Adah Roussan, editor of the *Osceola Times*, believed that “this probably finishes the night riding business in the Osceola District for some time to come,” but she lamented that “there has been considerable activity along the same line in other parts of the county.” Judge Driver warned that “parties found guilty of this offense in the future will not get off as light as these three men did.”¹⁰ Judge Driver moved on to the U.S. House of Representatives, however, and Adah Roussan’s optimism proved unwarranted.¹¹

Embracing what C. Vann Woodward referred to as a conservative position on race relations, Lee Wilson accepted the premise of Black inferiority, but he eschewed the violent racism that arose in the late nineteenth century, and attempted to create an environment in which Black families could find some peace and security, but only on his terms, and Wilson did not necessarily set the tone for race relations in the broader community. The destruction of the school he built for African Americans exposes the limits of Wilson’s power but, more important, demonstrates the depth of white animosity to African American progress and their determination to maintain white supremacy. At the same time, however, Wilson actually benefitted from the violence perpetrated against African Americans in the vicinity because of the reputation – whether deserved or not – that Blacks were safer on his plantation.¹²

If African Americans elected to work on the Wilson plantation because they believed they were safer there, they paid a high price in terms of loss of control over their own lives. Wilson’s “industrial” model of plantation agriculture included a decentralized management structure, making it possible for him to exercise a high degree of supervision over his tenants and

sharecroppers. He organized his empire into fourteen separate plantations, each with its own general manager, who had responsibility for the commissary and cotton gin attached to each plantation. A small cadre of farm managers and riding bosses reported to the general manager and together they wove a web of supervision and control that few other plantations achieved. Wilson delegated authority to his general managers, and he expected them to exercise a certain degree of autonomy and authority, but he supervised them closely and intervened if they were not performing to his standards. When he received word that one of them, Charles Crigger, who had responsibility for the 6500-acre Armored (Ar-Mo-rel – standing for Arkansas, Missouri, and R.E. Lee) operation, was not performing as expected, he wrote a stern letter to him. “I am informed that some of the Farm Managers and other people at Armored do not think or consider you their Boss. I am surprised to get this information.” Indeed, Wilson’s surprise was almost certainly genuine. He had placed Crigger in charge of the Armored operations precisely because of his maturity and experience. “I wish you would get out there and read the riot act to every God-damn man on all the places, the store crew, office crew and all. Tell them that you are the boss and that I am holding you personally responsible for all the transactions at Armored, in every line. The thing for you to do is to get hard and raise hell.”¹³

General Managers like Crigger maintained meticulous books on all supplies advanced to tenants and sharecroppers and were required to file monthly reports to the company office detailing transactions. They were exhorted to keep their accounts in order and their shortcomings were noted. For example, Wilson wrote to the store manager at Armored, William M. Williams, in October 1932, when he noted a failure to collect on debts owed to the company: “I want you to arrange to put somebody on this collecting that is aggressive and hardboiled. If you cannot get the money take cotton, corn, hogs, or cattle on the account, but see that something

is done on collecting these accounts.” He made the same point with Jesse Clinton, who managed both the plantation operations and the store at Wilson’s Idaho Grocery Company at Bassett.

Wilson emphasized that their debtors were most likely to have funds during harvest and “if the accounts are not collected now or in the next thirty days, they never will be collected.”¹⁴

Wilson required that all tenants and sharecroppers sign chattel mortgages, either directly with the store or general managers on the various plantations or at the company headquarters. He was intimately familiar with many of this tenants, a fact that one of his new executives, Hy Wilson (no relation to Lee Wilson), discovered shortly after going to work from the company in early 1931. One morning Hy was interviewing a tenant who had applied for a chattel mortgage and as he listened, he carefully listed all the man’s personal property – mules, cows, implements, etc. He issued the tenant a check on the company account and turned to find Wilson standing over him, reviewing the document, a frown on his face. Sheepishly, Hy asked “What did I miss?” “A spotted heifer named Bessie,” replied Lee Wilson, and then encouraged Hy to do better in the future.¹⁵

The weekly reports filed by his farm managers reveal the high degree of oversight endured by his tenants and sharecroppers. Pee Wee Morris, one of the farm mangers at Armored, visited no fewer than a dozen farms in one week in the summer of 1932, reporting on the appearance of the cotton and corn crops, the progress on ridding the fields of weeds and grass, and on the condition of the livestock on the various farms. He also found it necessary to move “a load of choppers” from one farm to another, and he spent part of his day in the office “checking up trucks and various items.” He praised some of his farmers and found fault with others, such as D.K. Morgan, a white man, who had to be notified to better plow and chop his cotton crop and to take better care of his mules. A week later Morris, his patience exhausted, moved Morgan off

the farm and into the town of Wilson. Jesse Greer, the local constable, served notice on Morgan, confiscated “all his tools and mules” and moved them to one of the other Wilson farms.

Morgan’s status in town remains unknown, but he owed too much to the company store and was likely required to work off the debt.¹⁶

The level of supervision endured by Wilson tenants and sharecroppers was supposedly tolerated or accepted because of the better conditions – housing, health care, educational facilities – available on his operation but also because they felt safer there. But certain incidents occurred on the Wilson plantation that call into question the accuracy of this reputation. In May of 1932, Scipio Jones, a prominent African-American attorney in Little Rock wrote Lee Wilson concerning clients he represented. Jones was the best known Black attorney in the state, having represented twelve Black men condemned to death in the wake of the Elaine riots of 1919. He was instrumental in securing their release, and he was certainly aware of conditions on the eastern Arkansas plantations. In May 1932 he wrote to Wilson that he had “always heard of your eminent fairness to my people,” but he was writing in reference to a suit he planned to file in federal court against Wilson “for damages based upon alleged acts of peonage,” and his remarks were presumably calculated to elicit concessions from Wilson.¹⁷

Jones represented two African American men and the estate of a third man, all of whom claimed to have been hired by Wilson’s labour agents in Little Rock to pick cotton on one of the Wilson farms in November 1931. They had arrived at the end of the severe drought of 1930-1931, a time when planters and those who labored for them endured additional hardships because of the extent of the natural disaster. Jones’ clients had been expected to work off their transportation costs to Mississippi County, but “they were interrupted in their picking of cotton by excessive rainfall [a rainfall that was serious enough to interrupt harvest but too late to insure

a bountiful one] and being unable to work they were charged for their room and board and began getting deeper into your debt . . .” When they attempted to leave “they were seized by your agents and employees, brutally beaten and restrained of their liberty until they finally effected their escape. From the beatings administered one of the men died.” Jones wrote the letter in the hope that Wilson would voluntarily make restitution, but Wilson’s response was curt and dismissive. “Replying to your letter . . . and note contents relative to my men, farm managers or anybody in my employ mistreating any one. This is not true. You can take any steps that you see fit.”¹⁸ No record can be found that Jones followed through on filing the suit.

Wilson presided over an enormous enterprise made alive by the labour of twenty-five-hundred people, some of whom were unwilling participants. Whether Wilson liked to think so or not, African Americans on his plantation lived in fear of their lives and worked under the threat of violence. What they lived with on a daily basis became manifest to one particular African American who was just passing through on his way from St. Louis to visit family in Mississippi for the 1932 Thanksgiving holiday. Virgil Branch worked for St. Louis financier Thomas Dysart who had orchestrated a \$500,000 loan for Wilson nearly a decade earlier, a connection that influenced Wilson’s response to the episode. Two sheriff’s deputies, H.B. Carpenter and Jake Thraikill, stopped Branch as he was driving through the town of Wilson. They accused Branch of speeding and being intoxicated, and as security for a \$75 fine they levied against him, they took all the money Branch had (\$10), the horn off the car, a pistol, and a shot gun, after which they allowed him to continue on his way. Although the money, the horn, and the pistol belonged to Branch, the “very fine Remington double barrel shotgun” belonged to Dysart.¹⁹

Upon learning of what had occurred, Dysart wrote to Lee Wilson, and Wilson, who had yet to pay off his indebtedness to Dysart’s company, responded immediately. In fact, Dysart was

then an instrumental player in Wilson's latest scheme to recycle his debt and save his company, which, given the agricultural depression and the severe drought of 1931, was near bankruptcy. Dysart's described the situation in language that Wilson could understand. "I got this man in Vicksburg many years ago. He is a real southern nigger; was raised by white folks and I know he is honest. He claims that it was raining hard and that he was driving along at a moderate rate of speed. . . . I will certainly appreciate it if you will look into it and see that my gun is returned and also, if possible the nigger's horn and his \$10.00." The message Dysart was delivering was clear. He had "gotten" Branch from Vicksburg, thus Branch was "his" man. Furthermore, he was no northern African American who might have behaved in a way unacceptable to southern whites. But Dysart also wanted his property returned as well as that of his "man."²⁰

On the day Wilson received Dysart's letter, he responded "I had Carpenter in my office this morning and I told him to get off the premises and stay off and I have also written to the Sheriff of Mississippi County to have his commission as deputy sheriff revoked. I am very sorry this happened." In a revealing admission, Wilson next said "Of course, I have no control over it, but I am positive that no sons-of-bitches like this can stay on any of my property. I will express to you, this afternoon, your gun and horn." Good at his word, Wilson wrote to County Sheriff W.W. Shaver the same day, explaining the circumstances and appealing to him "as a friend and a citizen of Mississippi County to revoke their sheriff deputyship at once." Wilson had reason to believe that the sheriff would comply with his demands as Shaver was indebted to Wilson-Ward & Company and seriously in arrears.²¹ To underscore his dissatisfaction with the men, Wilson further announced that "I am today notifying Carpenter and Thrailkill to get out of Wilson and stay out as far as I am concerned. . . . I don't think it is right for people to be robbed in any such manner, and I am sure you don't approve of any such action."²² Wilson subsequently issued

eviction notices to the two deputies and supported the Sheriff when he lodged “hijacking,” charges against them, charges which became public.²³

While Wilson rejected Scipio Jones’ assertions abruptly and without ceremony, he responded immediately and decisively to those of Thomas Dysart. The reasons for such different reactions are obvious – Dysart, a power white financier with whom Wilson did business, was instrumental in Wilson’s refinancing plan; Jones, a Black attorney who had had the temerity to represent Blacks implicated in the murder of whites during the Elaine Race Riot, had no connection to Wilson. But there were other important differences. Jones’ complaint involved day laborers, one of whom allegedly died at the hands of Wilson employees. Day laborers constituted an important part of Lee Wilson’s operation, particularly during the harvest, and any publicity about mistreatment had the potential of interfering with Wilson’s ability to attract labour. Virgil Branch was just passing through Wilson, had no connection to Wilson’s operation, and the offense against him was easily remedied.

While these incidents failed to rise to the level of public scrutiny, a notorious lynching occurred less than a decade earlier which should have severely damaged Wilson’s reputation for better treatment of Black labour. Henry Lowery came to Mississippi County in 1919 from Magnolia, Mississippi and went to work on Owen T. Craig’s Stonewall plantation. Craig was Lee Wilson’s brother-in-law (they were married to sisters). Unfortunately for Lowery, his tenure on Craig’s plantation coincided with the post World War I drop in cotton prices and a deepening agricultural depression. Many planters absorbed their losses by shorting their tenants and sharecroppers at settlement time, but even those who shared the misfortune with their plantation laborers faced disappointed and sometimes angry workers. Craig enjoyed the position of a planter, but he operated on a much smaller scale than Lee Wilson and did not have the assets to

easily negotiate the downturn in the economy. For example, in 1920, Craig claimed \$2,825 in personal property; Lee Wilson registered \$175,415.²⁴ Craig was heavily in debt to F.G. Barton Cotton Company, cotton factors operating out of Memphis, and to several other creditors, Lee Wilson among them.²⁵ Craig had turned the management of his plantation over to his son, Richard “Dick” Craig, and under these circumstances, the younger Craig may have found it impossible to resist the impulse to short change his tenants and sharecroppers at settlement time.²⁶ If that was the case, he had little fear that he would face repercussions. Tenants and sharecroppers, both Black and white, typically understood the consequences of confronting a planter and knew that the law almost always sided with the landowner in disputes over settlement of the crop. Henry Lowery, however, not only violated the customary acceptance of planter settlements but he also engaged in a gun battle that left two prominent whites dead and two others wounded.²⁷

At first, Lowery seemed to thrive in northeast Arkansas. He gained a reputation as a hardworking and efficient farmer and quickly integrated himself into the Black community in the vicinity. He commanded the respect of his peers in the three Black lodges he became a member of: the Masons, the Knights of Pythias, and the Odd Fellows. Hundreds of other Black men in northeast Arkansas affiliated with these three organizations or with the Mosaic Templars (headquartered in Little Rock), the United Brotherhood of Friendship, or the Masons. In 1905, approximately 21,867 Black men in the state belonged to three of these organizations – Masons, Odd Fellows, or Knights of Pythias.²⁸ They were simply a fact of life in the African American community and were, in many cases, closely affiliated, if not exactly connected to, Black churches. The Black church was another crucial institution in the African American community and a number of them, though Lowery’s own connection to the church is unknown. Although

there was a period in the late nineteenth century when Black church women were suspicious of fraternal organizations, that had long since been overcome, and many preachers sponsored and held positions as officers in them. Even if the preacher himself was not personally affiliated with one of them, because of the poverty of the Black community, Black churches had to stand in as meeting places for fraternal organizations.²⁹

Lowery's troubles began in the fall of 1920, when a precipitous plunge in cotton prices threatened the well being of many farmers, rich and poor, white and Black. Prices had reached unprecedented levels during World War I, encouraging many to assume new indebtedness in order to expand operations. When the post war recession struck, they were almost uniformly unprepared. Even large planters like Wilson found it necessary to maneuver creatively to address the emergency. Smaller planters and farmers had much less maneuvering room, and many of their tenants and sharecroppers suffered the consequences. When Lowery received less than he expected from Dick Craig, he demanded a written account, exhibiting an unexpected level of assertiveness. The hot tempered young Craig resented what he viewed as Lowery's defiance of his authority and struck him "and admonished him not to come again for settlement." But Lowery intended to seek a better situation elsewhere and understood that if he left the Stonewall plantation without a reckoning, he risked accusations of absconding owing a debt, and "all his household goods would be 'attached,' and he and his family might be attached, too." Angered by his treatment, he let it be known among the Black community that he intended to return and secure his written accounting.³⁰

Lowery decided to confront the entire Craig family as they gathered for dinner on Christmas Day, 1920. This may well have been calculated to appeal to them on a day when they might be expected to feel in a more generous mood, but he came armed and apparently ready to

do battle if necessary. Owen Craig was the first to reach the door, where he found Lowery already on the threshold. They exchanged heated words. Craig “with appropriate language, told him to leave the place, and emphasized his remark with a billet [chunky piece] of wood which he hurled through the door, striking Lowery.” The rest of the Craig family, including a daughter, May Belle Craig Williamson (a 27-year-old married woman), “came pressing through the door” as Lowery backed off the porch. Dick Craig then “rushed out the door and shot Lowery” who, slightly wounded, fired his own gun several times, “unfortunately killing the father and the married daughter and wounding the two sons,” Hugh and Dick. Lowery then made his escape, leaving a bloody scene and a decimated white family.³¹

The prominence of the two whites killed in the encounter complicated the response of the white community, and their connection to Lee Wilson pitted certain members of the Black community – who came to Lowery’s aid -- against the most powerful man in the Arkansas delta. Wilson had known Owen Craig since arriving in Mississippi County in 1880 and the men and their families were closely allied. Though older than young Wilson and already married to Mercy Beall in 1880, Craig would later come to rely on Wilson in a variety of ways. He lived in a Wilson house in the early twentieth century while building his place near Nodena Landing, and he relied on loans from the Bank of Wilson, ginned his cotton through a Wilson gin and brokered it through Wilson-Ward & Company.³²

Wilson would have viewed the shooting of a neighboring planter and his daughter by a tenant – white or Black – as a crime deserving of the most severe punishment, but his outrage was almost certainly greatly heightened because of the familial relationship with the Craig family. The Bank of Wilson posted a \$1,000 reward for Lowery, “dead or alive,” and soon posses of an estimated one hundred white men went in search of Lowery, and the newspapers

carried lurid, if inaccurate, details of the confrontation. Nothing more dramatically demonstrates the unwillingness of whites to discuss the systemic causes of the confrontation than the language used to describe Lowery and the misinformation conveyed in the various reports. None of the newspapers reported the episode as a dispute over settlement of the crop. According to some accounts he was drunk and beating his wife when Owen Craig tried to intervene. These assertions were later retracted by the newspapers that printed them but still they refrained from a coherent explanation. Instead they described Lowery as a “Negro fiend,” a phrase calculated to invoke the image of the Black marauder and rapist, an image that preyed on the imagination of white southerners not so far removed from Reconstruction and the alleged primacy of African Americans in that era. The film, *Birth of a Nation*, had only a few short years earlier (1913) imprinted that idea firmly in the minds of whites, and those whites living in a predominantly Black area were particularly susceptible to suggestion.³³

In the days immediately following the tragedy, Lowery hid in the swamps of Mississippi County while one of his lodge brothers, John T. Williams, “cooked meals” for him and “carried them back and forth.”³⁴ As “scores of armed [white] men scouted thru the bottoms in search of . . .” Lowery, his lodge brothers raised sufficient funds amongst themselves to enable Lowery to purchase a ticket on the Missouri Pacific train headed south out of Earle, Arkansas, on Dec. 29th.³⁵ He reached El Paso, Texas, safely, but lacking sufficient funds to cross the border and reluctant to do so anyway without his wife and children, he assumed an alias and went to work as a building janitor in the Texas city. Lowery fully understood the fate that waited him if apprehended but anxious to have his family join him in a planned escape to Mexico, he made a fatal error. He entrusted a letter to an acquaintance, asking him to deliver it by hand to his lodge brother Morris Jenkins in Turrell (Crittenden County) with directions “to go to the home of J.T.

Williams . . . and learn the whereabouts of his (Lowery's) wife." They were, in fact, being kept in a house behind the Craig home, allegedly for their "protection," or, more likely, being held as hostages in the hope that Lowery would try to reach them. Jenkins foolishly posted the letter to Williams in the mail instead, and authorities intercepted it, exposing the complicity of his lodge brothers in helping Lowery escape and discovering his alias and his location in El Paso.

Lowery, unaware that authorities now had all the information they needed to secure his arrest, was busy firing a furnace at the bank building in which he worked when two El Paso officials arrested him in mid January 1921. "Please kill me boss," he said to Captain Claud Smith, "if they take me back to Arkansas, they'll burn me sure."³⁶ Mississippi County authorities dispatched two sheriff's deputies, Hart Dixon of Osceola and Jesse Greer of Wilson to El Paso to take charge of the prisoner. Greer, a long time employee of Lee Wilson & Company, was widely regarded as representing Lee Wilson's interests, but the matter took a hopeful turn for Lowery when a prominent Black doctor and NAACP activist in El Paso, Lawrence A. Nixon, visited him in jail. Nixon was a major civil rights figure in the state of Texas, mounting challenges to the white primary which led to two important Supreme Court decisions in 1927 and 1933. After visiting Lowery, Nixon was convinced of the likelihood that Lowery's life was in danger if he was returned to Arkansas and secured the services of a notable white attorney in seeking to prevent his extradition to Arkansas. The governor of Texas elicited a pledge from the newly-elected governor of Arkansas, Thomas C. McRae, who promised to have Lowery transported to Little Rock where he would receive a fair trial.³⁷ But Jesse Greer worked for Lee Wilson, not for the two governors. Instead of taking Lowery across Texas through Texarkana and then straight to Little Rock on the Missouri Pacific, they went east across

Texas to New Orleans where they took the Illinois Central train north toward Memphis and straight into the hands of a posse.

Meanwhile, twenty-five armed men in six vehicles closed in on Sardis, Mississippi, arriving half an hour before the train bearing the two deputies and their prisoner. When the train stopped as scheduled, the men boarded it and “caught the deputies by surprise,” disarming them and taking Lowery. Governor McRae later said he “could not understand why the Negro should have been taken by the round-about way” and remarked that deputies Greer and Dickson surrendered Lowery “with lamb-like docility.” Newspaper reports had earlier that day already announced that Lowery would be paraded through the streets of Memphis and then taken to the scene of the crime and burned at the stake. Memphis officials, alerted that Lowery had been abducted, posted guards on the likely route through the city, but the car carrying Lowery skirted east of Memphis, and made Richardson’s Landing, to the north in Tipton County, Tennessee, sometime after dark that day. They crossed the river to Nodena Landing where they found a crowd of six hundred people awaiting their arrival, eager for the event that the county sheriff said “every man, woman, and child in Mississippi County” believed should take place.³⁸

Descriptions of Lowery’s behavior during the fateful trip from Sardis, Mississippi, to Nodena Landing characterize him as a hapless African American, apparently unaware of the gravity of his situation. This hardly credible perspective – especially given Lowery’s appeal upon his arrest in El Paso – is another stereotype preferred by the white press. Blacks were “good negroes” or “Black fiends” or foolish and even silly. Lowery was said by his captors to have laughed and joked with them in the car carrying him to certain death. A newspaper report from Millington, Tennessee offered a more sobering and probably more accurate description of his demeanor. His abductors stopped in Millington to eat and took Lowery into the restaurant to

keep him under observation. “A number of Millington citizens were attracted to the restaurant and conversed with him while the white men ate.” Lowery “showed the intense strain he was under” and understood that “he was on his way to his death.”³⁹ Black journalist and civil rights advocate, William Pickens, who had spent part of his childhood in Little Rock, Arkansas, later published a story in *The Nation*, questioning the caricature supplied by Lowery’s captors and suggested “it was an evident attempt to lend an air of romance to a bestial crime.”⁴⁰

The staging of the event itself was part vengeance, part festival, and, perhaps most important, part warning to the Black community. It was announced in the newspapers as planned for 6:00 p.m. on January 26th.⁴¹ It took place half an hour late. Describing the scene where the lynching occurred, one journalist called it a natural amphitheater. Virtually in sight of the Craig home, members of the posse chained Lowery to a log and piled dry leaves up around him – according to some sources up to his waist, according to others, up to his head. Two tall white men, one of them with a note pad, stood beside him, apparently questioning him. No official transcript of that “testimony” has surfaced although one newspaper account reported “Lowery maintained throughout the trip from Texas, and even while death was creeping over him, that he did not know why he killed Craig and his daughter,” but that he was not drunk at the time.⁴² In other words, while white authorities were willing to give credence to the idea that Lowery was not drunk at the time of the confrontation, they stopped far short of acknowledging the reason for the dispute. The crowd, said to be made up of Arkansas planters and curious onlookers, included a few women. They waited as Lowery, who asked to see his wife and children, made his farewell. Members of the posse then poured gasoline over the leaves, and set him aflame. Lowery “suffered one of the most horrible deaths imaginable,” yet “not once did the slayer beg for mercy . . .”⁴³ In fact, “even after his legs had been reduced to bones he continued

to talk with his captors, answering all the questions put to him.”⁴⁴ Other reports, however, suggest he refused to talk to the men questioning him and remained stoic and silent as his “tearful wife and children” stood nearby. “As the gasoline was poured over his chest and head, the Negro cried out some appeal of one of the many Negro lodges of which he was a member.”⁴⁵

The mention of the appeal to Lowery’s lodge speaks to the fate of his friends, seven of whom were under arrest for having aided him in his initial escape: John Williams, Mott Orr, Walter Johnson, John Reddick, Frank Capling, Henry Corbin, and Morris Jenkins. Jenkins wife, Jennie had also been arrested. Williams and Henry Corbin were in the Mississippi County jail in Blytheville while the remaining prisoners were incarcerated in the Crittenden County jail at Marion. Knowing that the men who had lynched Lowery also intended to do the same to his prisoners, Mississippi County Sheriff Dwight Blackwood secured a few dozen men to stand guard around and inside the jail in Blytheville. He later defended his failure to prevent the Lowery lynching, in the face of stiff criticism from Governor McRae, by arguing that nothing could have stopped the crowd of six-hundred strong from lynching Lowery, but he could, by staying in Blytheville, keep his two prisoners there safe. McRae, incensed over the savage killing of a man whom he had sworn would be safe if turned over to Arkansas authorities, was doubly determined to prevent further bloodshed. On the governor’s orders, Blackwood had Williams and Corbin moved to Little Rock. Those in the Crittenden County jail were moved to Memphis and later to the penitentiary at Little Rock. All but one of them was over fifty and “were considered good Negroes before they were arrested in connection with the escape of Lowery.” Jenkins’ association with the Wappanocca Outing [hunting] Club in Crittenden County apparently played a role in saving him and his compatriots. He had been employed by the club for over thirty years and after the Lowery lynching “several prominent Memphians . . . prevailed

on Sheriff William Fish [sheriff of Crittenden County] to protect the Negro, who is said to have been a faithful servant.” It appears that even the newspapers, which had up to this point conspired to celebrate and advertise the Lowery lynching, now conspired to minimize the threat to the remaining prisoners. The characterization of them as “good Negroes” and Jenkins as a “faithful servant” were calculated.⁴⁶

The morning after the event exposed the littered grounds of the amphitheater, suggestive of the debris left by a festival or public picnic – except for the aroma of burnt flesh and the remnants of Lowery’s corpse. Though reports vary as to whether some in the crowd took pieces of his body as keepsakes, a common enough practice at the time, there was probably little left to reclaim and take back to bury in Magnolia, Mississippi, as Lowery had requested. The mob had repeatedly poured oil over the body even after he was dead, in an apparent effort to obliterate every trace of him.⁴⁷ It probably fell to some in the Black church community to take on the grim task of gathering what remained of Henry Lowery, for his lodge brothers were either in jail or too reticent to come forward. His wife and children, now free from the “protection” of the Craig family, likely returned to Magnolia with the coffin and the memory of an almost unimaginable horror, one which none of them could easily erase.⁴⁸ Although Governor McRae openly criticized Sheriff Blackwood and called for legislation authorizing the removal of law enforcement officials who failed to prevent lynchings, no one was ever called to account for Lowery’s death. The legislature, led by the eastern Arkansas delegation, rebuffed the governor in his desire to launch a legislative investigation.

It seems inconceivable that such a well-orchestrated public event as the Lowery lynching could have occurred virtually on Wilson’s doorstep without at least his tacit approval. However, a report in the *Chicago Defender* that a \$1,000 reward had “been offered for the arrest of Lee

Wilson,” whom they characterized as an “owner of a sawmill at Wilson, Ark.,” seems highly unlikely. The *Defender’s* account, in fact, is the only one that mentions Wilson by name as having been implicated in the nefarious affair. According to this account, Wilson sent one of his employees, Jesse Greer, to Texas to bring Lowery back to be lynched. The only other mention that Wilson played a role in the plot to place Lowery in harm’s way is a postscript in a routine letter, dated January 20, 1921, addressed to the Bank of Wilson and written by a C.H. Dennis requesting the cashier to “advise me when the officers arrive with the Negro Lowery. It might be a favor to me.” He obviously had something in mind and thought the cashier would keep him informed.⁴⁹

The lack of direct evidence connecting Wilson to the lynching may reflect Wilson’s preference to remain detached, a tendency that kept him personally insulated from the violence perpetrated on his plantation by his riding bosses, farm managers, and labour agents. His silence on the matter of the deaths of his relatives, however, seems almost superhuman. It would have enraged him, and perhaps more important, violated his sense of control over the African Americans in the vicinity of Wilson, Arkansas. Whatever Sheriff Blackwood thought, if anyone could have stopped the lynching, Lee Wilson was that man. As both plantation baron and a member of the bereaved white family, he might have used his authority to orchestrate a very different outcome. The fact that he did not do so suggests that there were very real limits to his ability to control a white mob. Or that, at the very least, he preferred to allow matters to take their course and use the opportunity to remind the Black community of the wrath of the white community once aroused. However, in permitting Lowery’s *execution*, Wilson risked sacrificing his reputation as a protector of African American labour. On the other hand, the fact that the violence spread no further suggests an iron will behind the scenes. Seen in that light, Lowery

functioned as the sacrifice that satisfied the crowd's thirst for vengeance and retribution. Since Lowery did not work for Wilson his fate illustrates that the security provided by Wilson only extended to those who put themselves directly under his protection. Finally, Lowery's fate may simply illustrate that Wilson's paternalism by no means precluded the use of terror and sanctioning of violence where he deemed it necessary.

Class and racial strife remained a factor in Mississippi County throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and sometimes interrupted plantation operations. Wilson and other planters sought, often unsuccessfully, to control the threat to Black labour, supporting a 1909 night riding legislation and using the local authorities to apprehend and punish those who attacked African Americans and, sometimes, the property of plantation owners. Motivated by the desire to maintain an adequate supply of labour in the context of an expanding plantation economy, planters represented themselves as friends to African American laborers. Their friendship, however, came with a price. They used a variety of means to subjugate Blacks, including coercion and debt peonage. Planters like Wilson also attempted to attract Black labour with better housing, health care, and schools. But even Wilson's construction of a state-of-the-art industrial school for the children of his African American employees takes on a different meaning in light of the Lowery lynching. He indicated he owed something to the Blacks who worked for him, and he liked to believe that Black labour remained with him because of better treatment and conditions. But much of what *they* thought and believed remained unknown to him. They created their own institutions outside the view of Wilson and other whites. The willingness of Lowery's lodge brothers to come to his aid suggests an appreciation of the injustices and inequities in the economic arrangement between Blacks and white plantation

owners and more important, a willingness to defy white authority, to risk everything no matter the consequences.

Endnotes

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- ¹ "Class and State in Post Emancipation Societies: Southern Planters in Comparative Perspective," *American Historical Review*, 95 (February 1990). Reprinted in Michael Perman, ed., *Major Problems in the Civil War and Reconstruction*, 2nd edition (D.C. Heath, 1998); Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); M.L. Bush, *Servitude in Modern Times* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000); Stanley Engerman, *Terms of Labor: Slavery, Serfdom, and Free Labor* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).
- ² Daniel, *Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901-1969* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972); Gene Dattel, *Cotton and Race in the Making of America: The Human Costs of Economic Power* (Chicago: Ian R. Dee, 2009); Harold D. Woodman, *New South, New Law: The Legal Foundations of Credit and Labor Relations in the Postbellum Agricultural South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995); Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge [Eng.] and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Leon Litwack, *Been in a Storm so Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Knopf, 1979); and Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-enslavement of Black People in America from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).
- ³ Charles T. Coleman to J. H. Crain, Trustee, N.D., Box Lee Wilson & Company, 1941, C-D, Folder Charles C. Coleman. Lee Wilson & Company Archives, Special Collections Division, University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville, Arkansas. This document is actually misfiled in the 1941 box. In a letter written in September 1936, Coleman mentions that Jim Crain, who was running the company after Wilson's death, had asked him to write an evaluation of the trust agreement. See Charles T. Coleman to James H. Crain, September 5, 1936, Box Lee Wilson & Company, 1936, C-Cor, Folder Charles T. Coleman. See also Jeannie Whyne, *Delta Empire: Lee Wilson and Southern Agriculture* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, forthcoming 2011). For "feudal baron" reference, see Robert H. Moulton, "Wilson—That's all: A Whole Town is the Result of One Man's Ideas," *Illustrated World*, February 1923, v. 38, p. 847.
- ⁴ George Stith interview with Jeannie Whyne, Gould, Arkansas, March 28, 1983. See Also Jeannie Whyne, *A New Plantation South: Land, Labor, and Federal Favor in Twentieth Century Arkansas* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996).
- ⁵ Scipio Jones to R.E. Lee Wilson, May 25, 1932, Lee Wilson & Company Correspondence, 1932, I-Mc, Folder Scipio Jones, Lee Wilson & Company Archives.
- ⁶ In 1880, farmers had 102,010 acres in farms in Mississippi County; in 1920 they had 506,880. Tenth Census of Agriculture, 1880, Table VII: Farm Areas and Farm Values, By Counties (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), p. 105; Fourteenth Census of Agriculture, 1920, County Table I, Farms and Farm Property, 1920 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), p. 565.
- ⁷ In 1880, the county population stood at 7,342; by 1920 it had increased to 47,320. The black population increased from 2,654 to 19,907. By 1920, then, Blacks represented 42 percent of the population but that obscures some intra county differences. In the plantation areas, blacks constituted from 50 to 65 percent of the population. Census of Population, 1880, 1920.
- ⁸ Whyne, *A New Plantation South*, pp. 48-51.
- ⁹ Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville and Tallahassee: The University Press of Florida, 2006), pp. 262-263. For historiography on violence in the post bellum South, see the following: Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from*

Slavery to the Great Migration (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Nan Elizabeth Woodruff, *American Congo: The African American Freedom Struggle in the Delta* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Grif Stockley, *Blood in their Eyes: The Elaine Race Massacre of 1919* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2001); Robert Whitaker, *On the Laps of Gods: The Red Summer of 1919 and the Struggle for Justice that Remade a Nation* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2008); Whayne, *A New Plantation South*, p. 52; William F. Holmes, "Moonshiners and Whitecaps in Alabama, 1893," *Alabama Review*, 34 (Jan. 1981): 31-49. William Holmes has written several articles that look a variety of causes connected to nightriding in Georgia and Mississippi: "Moonshiners and Collective Violence: Georgia, 1889-1895," *Journal of American History* 67 (1980): 588-611; Holmes, "Whitecapping in Georgia: Carroll and Houston Counties, 1893," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 64 (1980): 388-404; Holmes, "Whitecapping: Agrarian Violence in Mississippi, 1902-1906," *Journal of Southern History* 35 (1969): 165-85; Holmes, "Whitcapping in Mississippi: Agrarian Violence in the Populist Era," *Mid America* 55 (1973): 134-48. See also Ayres, *Vengeance and Justice*, 260-62.

10 *Oseola Times*, March 19, 1915, p. 1; March 26, 1915, p. 1; and April 2, 1915, p. 1.

11 *Ibid.*, April 2, 1915, p. 1.

12 C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968); Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

13 Wilson to C.E. Crigger, Aug. 9, 1932, Lee Wilson & Co., Folder: Lee Wilson & Co., Armored.

14 Wilson to Charles Crigger, Oct. 15, 1932, Lee Wilson & Co., Folder: Lee Wilson & Co., Armored; and Wilson to Jesse Clinton, Oct. 15, 1932, Lee Wilson & Co., Folder: Idaho Grocery Co. See also Wilson To Charles Crigger, Jan. 11, 1933, Lee Wilson & Co., Folder: Lee Wilson & Co., Armored.

15 Skip Wilson, interview with Jeannie Whayne, March 6, 2009.

16 D.N. Morris Report, Week Ending 7/8/33, in Lee Wilson & Co., 1933 O-R, Folder: Pee Wee Morris Weekly Reports.

17 Scipio Jones to R.E. Lee Wilson, May 25, 1932, Lee Wilson & Company Correspondence, 1932, I-Mc, Folder Scipio Jones; For particularly thorough treatments of the Elaine Race Riot, see Nan Elizabeth Woodruff, *American Congo: The African American Freedom Struggle in the Delta* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Grif Stockley, *Blood in their Eyes: The Elaine Race Massacre of 1919* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2001); Robert Whitaker, *On the Laps of Gods: The Red Summer of 1919 and the Struggle for Justice that Remade a Nation* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2008).

18 Scipio Jones to R.E. Lee Wilson, May 25, 1932; and R.E. Lee Wilson to Scipio Jones, May 27, 1932, both in Lee Wilson & Company Correspondence, 1932, I-Mc, Folder Scipio Jones.

19 Thomas N. Dysart to Lee Wilson, Nov. 28, 1932; Lee Wilson & Co., Box 1932, D-E, Folder Thomas N. Dysart.

20 *Ibid.*

21 In May of 1933, Shaver owed Wilson-Ward Company the staggering amount of \$7,586.91 and by July Wilson was threatening to foreclose. See R.E.L. Wilson to W.W. Shaver, May 15, 17, July 29, 1933, in Wilson Correspondence, Box 1933, S-To, Folder W. W. Shaver. Lee Wilson to Thomas Dysart,

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- Nov. 29, 1932; Lee Wilson to W. W. Shaver, Nov. 29, 1932; and Roy Wilson to Thomas Dysart, Nov. 29, 1932, all in Wilson Correspondence, Box 1932, D-E, Folder Thomas N. Dysart.
- 22 Lee Wilson to Thomas Dysart, Nov. 29, 1932; Lee Wilson to W. W. Shaver, Nov. 29, 1932; and Roy Wilson to Thomas Dysart, Nov. 29, 1932, all in Wilson Correspondence, Box 1932, D-E, Folder Thomas N. Dysart.
- 23 F.A. Gillette, Wilson's executive officer, wrote to both Carpenter asking him to vacate the house he occupied in Wilson. Wilson to H. B. Carpenter, December 14, 1932, Wilson Correspondence, Box 1932 C, Folder H. B. Carpenter; have just read of the hijacking charges being preferred against Mr. Jake Thraikill and Harry Carpenter. C.H. Welch to F.A. Gillette, December 5, 1932, Box We-Z, Folder C.H. Welch. Records show, moreover, that both men had been having difficulty paying their obligations to Lee Wilson and Company – their rent and their accounts in the company stores – a factor that almost certainly contributed to their harassment of Virgil Branch in the first place. A number of dunning notices had been delivered to both Carpenter and Thraikill in the months prior to the incident. On February 18, 1932, Lee Wilson & Company executive, W.F. "Hy" Wilson (an employee, not a family member), wrote to Carpenter: referring to "quite an old balance and Mr. Wilson is very insistent that you now take care of same . . .". Subsequent correspondence that year indicates that Carpenter was unable to comply. On February 22, 1932, Hy Wilson wrote Thraikill about a balance owing. Subsequent correspondence indicates that he paid some of it off but remained in debt. See W.F. Wilson to Harry Carpenter, Feb. 18, June 17, July 13, 29, Aug. 19, 26, Sept. 1, 23, 1932, and Jan. 12, 1933, all in Wilson Correspondence, Box 1932 C, Folder Harry Carpenter. See also W. F. Wilson to Jake Thraikill, Feb. 9, 22, Aug. 19, 1932, and Jan 18, 26, 1933. Wilson Correspondence, Box 1932, Sti-WA, Folder Jake Thraikill.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 Appraisal, Estate of O.T. Craig, May 3, 1921, Probate Court, Mississippi County Court, Osceola, Arkansas, Docket 223, Osceola, Arkansas.
- 26 R.H. Craig (for O.T. Craig & Son) to Bank of Wilson, Feb. 13, 1919, June 3, 1919, August 6, 16, 1919, Dec. 2, 1919, Feb. 7, 1921, and loan document dated 1921 pledging mules and property of O.T. Craig & Son (eighteen mules, all farming implements, crop of cotton and corn) in return for a loan of \$3,000; Bank of Wilson to Craig, Dec. 2, 1919, Bank of Wilson, 1919, 1921-22, A.M. Folder: O.T. Craig & Company.
- 27 Mississippi County Real Property Records, Osceola Courthouse, 1922, 1933. Richard Craig, who took over management of the plantation, retained ownership of the 689 acres, at least until 1933.
- 28 According to John Gigge, there were 3,782 Masons in 1904 and 11,085 Odd Fellows and 7,000 Knights of Pythias in Arkansas alone in 1905. He cites W.E.B. DuBois, *Economic Co-operation Among Negro Americans* (report of a Study made by Atlanta University, under the Patronage of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, D.C. together with the Proceedings of the 12 Conference for the Study of the Negro . . . , held at Atlanta University, on Tuesday, May the 28th, 1907), p. 121-124.
- 29 Lois Myers and Rebecca Sharpless, "Of The Least and the Most': The African American Rural Church," in R. Douglas Hurt, ed., *African American Life in the Rural South, 1900-1950* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), pp. 73-75.
- 30 William Pickens, "The American Congo—The Burning of Henry Lowery," *The Nation* (Vol. 112, No. 2907), March 23, 1921, pp. 426-428. See also Todd E. Lewis, "Mob Justice in the 'American Congo': 'Judge Lynch' in Arkansas During the Decade After World War I," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* No. 2 (Summer 1993).

31 *Ibid.*, p. 427.

32 The Manuscript Census of Population, Golden Lake Township, 1880, indicates that Crate was then two years old. *Osceola Times*, October 2, 1897, p. 4.

33 For various newspaper accounts immediately following the incident, see *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, December 26, 1920, p. 1; *Arkansas Gazette*, December 26, 29 1920, p. 1; *Arkansas Democrat*, December 27, 28 1920, Jan. 8, 1921, p. 1.

34 *Memphis Press*, Jan. 27, 1921, p. 1.

35 *Osceola Times*, January 28, 1921.

36 *El Paso Herald*, January 19, 1921.

37 Thanks to Will Guzman for information about the El Paso connection. See *El Paso Herald*, January 19, 1921, p. 4, for the quote from Lowery. See also *Ibid.*, January 22, 26, 28, 1921, and Calvin R. Ledbetter, Jr., "Thomas C. McRae: National Forests, Education, Highways, and *Brickhouse v. Hill*," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* (Spring 2000), pp. 16-17. For Nixon and the Supreme Court, see *Nixon v. Herndon*, 273 U.S. 536 (1927) and *Nixon v. Condon*, 286 U.S. 73 (1932).

38 According to one report, Lowery's abductor's skirted Memphis after the city's commission of police "ordered out the reserves to prevent a parade through the city," *Arkansas Democrat*, January 26, 1921; *New York Times*, January 27, 1921. For the governor's remarks, see *El Paso Herald*, January 27, 1921.

39 *Memphis Press Scimitar*, January 26, 1921.

40 Pickens, "The American Congo," pp. 427-428.

41 In most studies of lynching and books on the Arkansas delta and race relations, the Lowery lynching is given some treatment. See particularly Nan Elizabeth Woodruff, *American Congo*; Jeannie Whayne, *A New Plantation South*; Sheldon Avery, *Up From Washington: William Pickens and the Negro Struggle for Equality, 1900-1954* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), pp. 114-15; Todd Lewis, "Mob Justice in the 'American Congo': 'Judge Lynch' in Arkansas during the Decade after World War I," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 52 (Summer 1993): 156-184; and Richard Buckelew "Racial Violence in Arkansas: Lynchings and Mob Rule, 1860-1930" (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 1999). For general studies on lynching, see James Elbert Cutler, *Lynch-Law: An Investigation in the History of Lynching in the United States*, (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1905); NAACP, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1899-1918* (New York, 1969); Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); Arthur M. Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Walter White, *Rope and Faggott: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (New York: Arno Press, 1969); Herbert Shipiro, *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); and Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

42 *The Memphis Press*, January 27, 1921, pp. 2. The *New York Times* reported, on the other hand,

that he admitted that he was drunk at the time of the shooting, *New York Times*, January 27, 1921.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

44 *Ibid.*

45 *The Memphis Press*, January 27, 1921, pp. 1, 2. Note that William Pickens mentions only a “wife and little daughter” as visiting Lowery at the scene of the burning. Pickens, “The American Congo,” *The Nation*, March 23, 1921, p. 427.

46 *The Commercial Appeal*, January 28, 1921, pp. 1, 12. According to one report, Williams and Corbin were first moved to Missouri and then later taken to Little Rock, *Arkansas Gazette*, January 28, 1921.

47 *New York Times*, January 27, 1921.

48 *The Memphis Press*, January 27, 1921, p. 1.

49 C.H. Dennis to Cashier, Bank of Wilson, Jan. 20, 1921, in Bank of Wilson, 1919, 1921-1922, A-M.