

MEMPHIS

May 22, A. D., 1917

An account taken solely from the Memphis white daily papers, save that we have added explanatory headings.

THE CRIME.

The brutal crime of the outrage and murder of Antoinette Rappal by Ell Persons, occurred early Monday morning, April 30.

The Negro Ell Persons worked a plot of ground on the Macon roadside, 300 yards from the scene of the murder. He admitted he had watched the little girl ride by morning after morning.—*Herald*, May 22.

THE ARREST.

He was twice arrested on suspicion and twice released by Sheriff Tate. He was first arrested Thursday following his crime, then again Friday.

The day following his second release he was seized by W. H. Wilfong, uncle of the girl, turned over to John Sailors and held at Binghamton.—*The Press*, May 22.

SWORN TESTIMONY OF THE SUPERSTITIONS OF W. H. WILFONG.

This is to certify that G. Hansen, the psychologist at 1120 Jackson avenue, Memphis, Tenn., came to me on Saturday morning, the fifth (5th) day of May, 1917, with Mr. Jacobi, the constable, in search for the murderer of Antoinette Rappel. Mr. Hansen described the scene of the crime, also a little log cabin, where he said the guilty one could be found, and also gave a thorough description of him, also his wife, before he ever saw them, and insisted that we go there, which we did.—Advertisement in *Herald*, June 3.

THIRD DEGREE AND "A LONG SIEGE OF BEATING."

He was turned over to the county jailer Saturday. His freshly washed pants and shoes were found on the premises of his home.

These facts were laid before Sheriff Tate, and then followed the dramatic enactment of third degree tactics to force a confession from the slayer.

After a long siege of beating, the officers tried strategy.

"There's blood on your shoes!" shouted City Detective Hoyle.

The Negro broke down and confessed.—*Press*, May 22.

DETENTION.

On Tuesday morning, May 8, he was rushed to Nashville by Deputy Sheriff M. W. Palmer and Detectives Brunner and Hoyle, landed in the state penitentiary, and then transferred to the Nashville jail for safekeeping. Since then the avengers have been stirring up things, and one night the Sheriff of Davidson County, Joe Wright, had to move him to Springfield on the report that a mob was coming to the capital after him.—*Herald*, May 22.

THE LYNCHERS.

Every preparation, with the exception of the presence of the prisoner, was made yesterday for the trial Friday in the first division, of the criminal court of Ell Persons for the murder of Antoinette Rappal.

While the court was assembling its machinery, men who had come in automobiles stood outside vowing vengeance of mob violence for the crime which has excited a whole people, and with a bitterness born of waiting and disappointment.

Lawyers, each protesting that for one reason or another he was disqualified, were appointed by Judge Puryear to defend the Negro. The date, time of the trial, was fixed for Friday morning at 10 o'clock.—*Commercial-Appeal*, May 22.

That the mob, which seems to be under the supreme leadership of one man who is unknown to the forces of the law, is determined to lynch the Negro is evident. It is said that it has established a systematic organization, and the fact that all members can be communicated with in less than 20 minutes' time, tends to bear out this statement. It is even rumored that they have elected a treasurer and assessed members for funds necessary to pay expenses of men who have been sent to Nashville to keep constant watch on the Davidson county jail.—*Commercial-Appeal*, May 22.

Practically every passenger train entering Shelby County from the north and east, it is said, was stopped and searched Monday morning by armed mobs bent upon finding Ell Persons.—*Herald*, May 22.

A Nashville telegram says that Deputy Sheriffs R. B. Wilroy and G. E. Thomas took the Negro Ell Persons from the Davidson County jail at 3 o'clock Monday morning to bring him to Memphis.

They put him on a Louisville & Nashville train going south, carrying him into Alabama, thence back up the Frisco toward Holly Springs.—*Memphis Herald*, May 22, A. M.

A special to the *Herald* from Potts Camp, Miss., thirteen miles southeast of Holly Springs, stated that the two deputy sheriffs in charge of Ell Persons seemed to be surprised when the fast Frisco train stopped at a coal chute about a mile from Potts Camp, and about twenty-five men—part of the Shelby avengers—climbed on and took Ell Persons from them. One report is that they were slow to give him up, but finally did so.—*Memphis Morning Herald*, May 22.

PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE COMING LYNCHING.

The avengers passed through Capleville just before 3 o'clock this morning with Ell Persons, en route to the Macon road bridge.

He will be burned at the stake by day-

light.—*Memphis Morning Herald*, May 22.

City folk who read in the morning paper that the mob was assembled at the Wolf River bridge, flocked to the scene by the hundreds in automobiles. Before 7 o'clock the crowd was greater than it had been at midnight.—*Commercial-Appeal*, May 23.

Prof. E. E. Smith of Central High School asserted he was shocked the morning of the lynching to find fifty boys absent. Later he was informed the boys, with their fathers or relatives, had gone to witness the lynching scene.—*Herald*, May 27.

Scores of parents sent notes to school by their children yesterday asking that they be excused so that they might witness the lynching of Ell Persons, slayer of Antoinette Rappal. This information came to the office of the board of education to-day.

The children were not excused.

County schools were dismissed early on account of examinations and hundreds of the pupils hurried to the scene of the lynching.—*Memphis Press*, May 23.

THE ORGANIZED MOB.

News of the capture was flashed by telephone and telegraph to the surrounding towns and country. Wherever the news was received armed men climbed into automobiles and started toward a rendezvous apparently known to all.—*Commercial-Appeal*, May 22.

The mob that burned Ell Person was wonderfully organized. Members were in touch with Nashville and all surrounding counties and towns.

Leaders were designated by number.—*Memphis Press*, May 22 (P. M.).

It is said this is the first time in the record of lynching that the mob lynched in the broad daylight, did not seek to hide their identity or wear masks.—*News Scimitar*, May 22.

"Traffic officers" and "policemen" to maintain "order" at the place selected for the execution of Ell Persons by Judge Lynch were among the details which went to show that the crowd of avengers was thoroughly organized by the "invisible government" which has had this case in charge.—*Memphis News Scimitar*, P. M., May 22.

PREPARATION.

It was like a holiday on the Macon road this morning. Hundreds of men and some women, too, had spent the night at the bridge over which Antoinette Rappal rode on her bicycle just before her murder. But most of the watchers had gone home and started to return early this morning. From every direction they came, many without breakfast. Men and women, some of them with their children, gathered by hundreds.

At 8 o'clock there were 3,000 persons gathered around with end of the bridge and the Macon road in every direction was black with those who came in autos and those who tramped on foot.

For a mile and a half up the road the autos were packed in an endless string by 9 o'clock. Those on foot struggled in and out

of the car. Mothers carrying children staggered from exhaustion as the word spread that the posse bringing Person had almost reached the bridge. An old man on crutches hobbled and bemoaned the fate that might keep him from arriving in time.—*Memphis Press*, May 22 (P. M.).

Conspicuous among the mob were several vendors of sandwiches and chewing gum. Their sales were enormous.—*Memphis News Scimitar*, P. M., May 22.

At 9 o'clock Mrs. Wood arrived in an auto, which halted on the levee in front of the crowd. Almost at the same time another auto, in which the Negro was seated, appeared on the bridge.

The master of ceremonies raised his hands to command silence, and announced that the mother of the murdered girl desired to make a statement. The crowd surged closer to catch her words, which proved to be audible for a distance of about 50 feet.

"I want to thank all my friends who have worked so hard in my behalf," she said. "Let the Negro suffer as my little girl suffered, only 10 times worse."

"We'll burn him," the crowd yelled.

"Yes, burn him on the spot where he killed my little girl," she said.

The crowd yelled at this, but the leader explained that the committee had decided to execute Persons in a cleared space on the opposite side of the levee, where more people could see. Mrs. Wood assented.—*Commercial-Appeal*, May 23.

The mob went wild as the Negro, heavily shackled, was lifted from the car and walked into the field where a place had been cleared for his execution.—*Press*, May 23.

THE "CONFESSION."

Then came word that the Negro wanted to make a confession and the crowd surged away from the tree with the rope and back to the road. Around an auto on the west end of the bridge stood dozens of men with rifles and shotguns.

The crowd surged around and fought for a view of the victim. Marshal Sailor of Binghamton pleaded with the crowd to be orderly. Sailor, knowing the determination of the mob, did his best to prevent any disorder and succeeded in doing so.

Sailor stood up in the car and beside him stood the Negro. The murderer was calm, but his eyes rolled white, for the crowd screamed when it saw him.

Leaders tried to get silence, and finally they succeeded.

"Person has a statement to make," shouted Sailor. But the Negro could not speak and the marshal spoke for him.—*Press*, May 22.

THE BURNING.

"Burn him," screamed a woman. "And burn him slow," shouted another one. The crowd cheered.—*Press*, May 22.

On one side was the road, 10 feet above the hollow into which the Negro was dragged and chained to a log. On the other

three sides was a forest, the trees black with the figures of men who had climbed into them for better views.—*Press*, May 22, P. M.

Ten gallons of gasoline was then poured over his clothing and a match applied. While the fire, starting at his feet, crept slowly toward his face a 10-year-old Negro boy was placed on the other end of the log.

"Take a good look, boy," someone told him. "We want you to remember this the longest day you live. This is what happens to niggers who molest white women."

Although he writhed in agony Persons made no outcry. While the flames were at their height several hundred members of the mob crowded about, fighting for bits of his clothing and the rope. Two men cut off his ears and carried them away as souvenirs.—*Memphis News Scimitar*, P. M., May 22.

They fought and screamed and crowded to get a glimpse of him and the mob closed in and struggled around the fire as the flames flared high and the smoke rolled over their heads.

Two of them hacked off his ears as he burned; another tried to cut off a toe, but they stopped him.

They crowded in and crowded out, so that all might see the burning body. And they were still surging around it when the flesh had been burned from the bones and the withered frame of what was once a human being lay crackling in the flames.—*Memphis Press*, P. M., May 22.

Persons went to his death terrified beyond the power of expression. His animal eyes rolled and shifted unceasingly, and he frequently moistened his parched lips, through which speech was scarcely audible, but he did not flinch when led to the funeral pyre nor cry out when the oil flames surged over his body.

His death was almost instantaneous. The Negro drank deep of the first sheet of flame and smoke, and relaxed upon his hellish couch. When the body had been burned sufficient to satisfy the lust of the executioners, one man in the crowd cut out the Negro's heart, two others cut off his ears, while another hacked off his head.—*Commercial-Appeal*, May 23.

The flames and smoke shot high in the air, and the frenzied men cheered as their victim writhed in agony and then was stilled in death.

The crowd looked on grimly. Many city women paled through the paint on their cheeks, and not a few others were sickened by the ghastly sight.—*Commercial-Appeal*, May 23.

A woman near me screamed not to use gasoline, "He'll burn too fast; he'll burn too fast," she cried, over and over again, and others took up the shout.—*Press*, May 22, P. M.

SOUVENIRS.

Two men darted in and with knives slashed the Negro's ears from his head. Other men fought the crowd back to keep it from following their example.

The bright flames caused by the gasoline

gave way to dense smoke when the flames attacked the moist wood and the body of the victim. Despite the smoke and the sickening smell of the burning flesh the thousands still struggled to get a glimpse. Men held other men on their shoulders. Women helped hold each other up.

The Negro lay in the flames in the center, his arms crossed on his chest. If he spoke, no one ever heard him above the shouts of the crowd. He died quickly, though 15 minutes later excitable persons still shouted that he lived when they saw the charred remains move as does meat in a hot frying pan.—*Press*, May 22.

Three men, presumably members of the mob which lynched Eli Persons, drove up in an automobile shortly before 1 o'clock Tuesday at Rayburn boulevard and Beale avenue and stopped before a crowd of Negroes.

"Take this with our compliments," one of the auto's occupants addressed the group of Negroes, and in their midst fell Persons' head and one of his feet.

The body had been dismembered at the scene of the lynching. Persons' head was taken down from the post near the bridge on which it had been placed shortly after the lynching. The men who brought it to town hurriedly drove off after dropping their grewsome burden.

Persons' head had been shorn of its ears and a portion of its nose. It was taken in charge by county authorities.—*Memphis News Scimitar*, May 22 (P. M.).

Women with children in their arms stampered with several hundred men in the rush for souvenirs. Bits of Persons' clothing were snatched from his burning body and the huge rope with which he was first secured was cut into shreds.—*Memphis News Scimitar*, P. M., May 22.

AFTER THE BURNING.

"They burned him too quick; they burned him too quick," was the complaint on all sides. The universal sentiment seemed to be that too much gasoline had been used.

When the fire had almost died down and no stretch of the imagination could have pictured the charred mass in the midst as the remains of a human being, men and particularly women still struggled to get near for a glimpse.

Thousands left. They walked and twisted and scrambled in and out among perhaps 3,000 machines that were parked so close that drivers could not move them in some cases for hours.

And all the way to Memphis those who were leaving passed the crowds which were just coming.

These bemoaned the fact that they were too late, but seized on every little cloud of smoke they saw as an indication that the fire was still burning, that some portion of the spectacle might still be left for them.—*Press*, May 22.

"A Negro automobile driver named Burt Ingram, close to the pyre, unbalanced by the excitement, caught up an American flag, and, waving it above his head, shouted:

"We're all through here, boys. Let's join the Germans."

"He tore the flag to shreds and was immediately grabbed by a crowd of white men who attempted to rush him to the dying blaze, where Persons' skeleton still hung. Five policemen rescued him. He will be turned over to the Federal authorities."—*Memphis Herald*, quoting *St. Louis Times*, May 24.

THE MAJESTY OF THE LAW.

Gov. T. C. Rye—Were you not fully and duly informed of all the facts in the Ell Persons outrage and horrible murder of little Antoinette Rappel?

Is it not a fact that you were asked to send soldiers to Memphis to protect Ell Persons so he could get a fair trial?

Did not Attorney-General Hunter Wilson ask you for two companies of soldiers in the trial?

Did not the two judges of the criminal courts, David B. Puryear and T. W. Harsh, fully represent to you the state of high feeling here, the mob prospect, and ask you for soldiers to protect?

Did not Mayor Ashcroft do practically the same?

In all these terribly menacing conditions, with these requests, these facts, the volume of newspaper publications, too, why did you not act to save Memphis and Shelby County from what happened and what the law officials told you was prospective?—*Herald*, May 27.

Everybody knows that Memphis was terrorized and intimidated by the avengers for days and nights preceding the final apprehension of Ell Persons in another state, and his return here to be burned at the stake.

The law was as powerless as if it had not existed. Not a law officer went to the front in the face of the situation to check it—not one.—*Daily Herald*, May 25.

A request for troops to protect Ell Person, Negro ax fiend, from a mob which had seized him at Potts Camp, was wired last night to Gov. Bilbo by the sheriff of Marshall County.

Gov. Bilbo wired the sheriff to organize a citizens' posse, as the state troops were in the Federal service, and not under his control.—*Memphis Press*, May 22, P. M.

AFTER THOUGHT.

"We, clergymen of the City of Memphis, met in solemn assembly, do hereby resolve that we, as clergymen and citizens, confess our dereliction of duty in not having warned an inflamed public opinion against mob violence, when it was apparent to every reader of newspapers that preparations had been made for lynching the brute who had committed an unspeakable crime."—*Press*, May 24.

We burned a Negro at the stake yesterday.

Let us underscore the word "WE."

So if we are proud of it, let us be proud of it together.

If we are ashamed of it, let us be ashamed of it together.

Let's not be cowardly enough to put it off onto someone else, claiming that we were at home attending to business.

It would be as senseless to put all the blame on the man who made the brimstone for the match that ignited the funeral pyre as it would to put it all upon the men who participated in the lynching itself.

Public opinion burned Ell Person—the stake yesterday.

Public opinion burned Ell Person—the minister of the gospel, the lawyer, the doctor, the newspaper editor, the man who talks to others on the street corner or the street car—he shared in it, that is he did unless he protested and there were few protests. The majority approved. The minority kept silent, and silence gives consent.

And so, to-day, when the reaction has come and we shudder at the story of the man who cut out the heart of the half-roasted fiend, of the men who severed his head and sped to town to throw it into the street, let us stop and see what part we played in it.

And if we find that we don't approve of it then let's start creating a public opinion that will uphold the majesty of the law.

Let us resolve that we will put into office only men who realize the responsibility they are assuming.

Let us resolve that when we are called upon to sit on a jury we won't shirk our duty and let chronic jurors bring in a verdict that causes the public to have only contempt for the law.

Many a lynching has been bred in the courthouse.

Let's realize that as citizens who may want society's protection we are members of that society and must make it strong.

It cannot be weak for others and strong for us.

It will be as strong or as weak as WE make it.

Editorial in the *Memphis Press*, May 23.

COLORED MEN LYNCHED BY YEARS 1885-1916.

1885	78	1902	86
1886	71	1903	86
1887	80	1904	83
1888	95	1905	61
1889	95	1906	64
1890	90	1907	60
1891	121	1908	93
1892	155	1909	73
1893	154	1910	65
1894	134	1911	63
1895	112	1912	63
1896	80	1913	79
1897	122	1914	69
1898	102	1915	80
1899	84	1916	55
1900	107		
1901	107	Total	2,867

What are we going to do about this record? The civilization of America is at stake. The sincerity of Christianity is challenged.

Interested persons may write to Roy Nash, Secretary, 70 Fifth Avenue, New York City.