

“Cloud Peak, Wyoming”

Cloud Peak is located in Wyoming’s Big Horn Mountains. Paint Rock Lodge is not far from Cloud Peak. In this issue’s Wyoming Memory, Mrs. Lucille Penwarden describes the lodge when it was owned and run by her and her husband, W. B. Penwarden. Courtesy American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

Information for Contributors:

The editor of *Annals of Wyoming* welcomes manuscripts and photographs on every aspect of the history of Wyoming and the West. Appropriate for submission are unpublished, research-based articles which provide new information or which offer new interpretations of historical events. First-person accounts based on personal experience or recollections of events will be considered for use in the “Wyoming Memories” section. Historic photo essays for possible publication in “Wyoming Memories” also are welcome. Articles are reviewed and referred by members of the journal’s Editorial Advisory Board and others. Decisions regarding publication are made by the editor.

Manuscripts (along with suggestions for illustrations or photographs) should be submitted on computer diskettes in a format created by one of the widely-used word processing programs along with two printed copies.

Submissions and queries should be addressed to:

Editor, *Annals of Wyoming*,  
 Dept. 3924, 1000 E. University Avenue  
 Laramie WY 82071  
 or to the editor by e-mail at the following address: [rewig@uwyo.edu](mailto:rewig@uwyo.edu)

Editor  
 Rick Ewig

Book Review Editor  
 Carl Hallberg

Editorial Advisory Board  
 Carl Hallberg, Cheyenne  
 Dave Karhka, Rock Springs  
 Phil Roberts, Laramie  
 D. C. Thompson, Laramie

Wyoming State Historical Society  
 Publications Committee  
 Barbara Bogart, Evanston  
 Rick Ewig, Laramie  
 Linda Fabian, Wheatland  
 Rowene Giarrizzo, Powell  
 Carl Hallberg, Cheyenne  
 Amy Lawrence, Laramie (ex-officio)  
 Phil Roberts, Laramie (chair)

Wyoming State Historical Society  
 Executive Committee  
 Sherry Taylor, President, Natrona County  
 Mary Kelley, 1st Vice President,  
 Campbell County  
 Judy Musgrave, 2nd Vice President,  
 Sheridan County  
 Charlene Busk, Secretary, Campbell County  
 Mary Lynn Corbett, Treasurer, Lincoln  
 County  
 John Reynolds, Platte County  
 Jeremy Johnson, Park County  
 Pam Thompson, Crook County  
 Rick Ewig, Albany County

Governor of Wyoming  
 David Freudenthal

Wyoming Dept. of State Parks and  
 Cultural Resources  
 Milward Simpson, Director

Wyoming Parks & Cultural Resources  
 Commission  
 Dan Bark, Gillette  
 Carolyn Buff, Casper  
 Linda Fabian, Wheatland  
 Dudley Gardner, Ph.D., Rock Springs  
 Karen Haderlie, Thayne  
 Mary Hawkins, Devils Tower  
 Ernest C. Over, Pavillion  
 William Vines, Wheatland  
 Barbara Vietti, Thermopoli

University of Wyoming  
 Tom Buchanan, President  
 Oliver Walter, Dean, College of Arts and  
 Sciences  
 Michael Brose, Chair, Dept. of History  
 Mark Greene, Director, American  
 Heritage Center

*Annals of*  
**WYOMING**

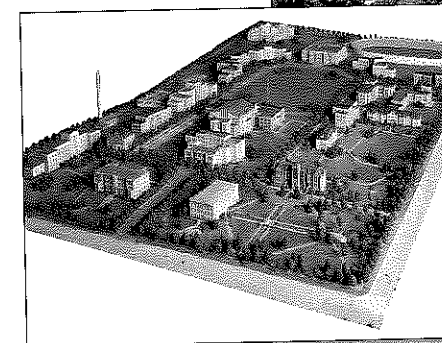
The Wyoming History Journal Spring 2009 Vol. 81, No. 2

CONTENTS

2



33



inside  
 back  
 cover

- 2 “The List of Good Negroes”: African American Lynchings in the Equality State by Todd Guenther
- 34 Wyoming Memories: “Paint Rock” by Lucille Penwarden
- 37 Book Reviews edited by Carl Hallberg
- 43 Index
- Wyoming Photo Inside back cover

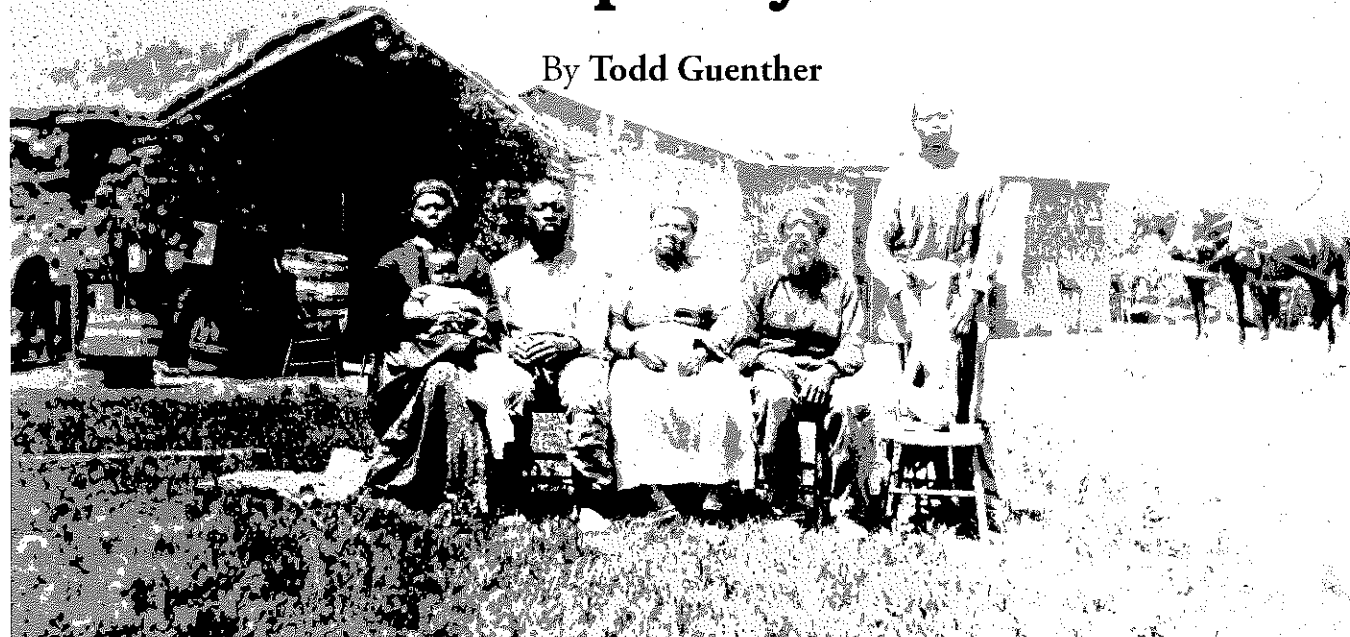
*Annals of Wyoming: The Wyoming History Journal* is published quarterly by the Wyoming State Historical Society in association with the Wyoming Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources, the American Heritage Center, and the Department of History, University of Wyoming. The journal was previously published as the *Quarterly Bulletin* (1923-1925), *Annals of Wyoming* (1925-1993), *Wyoming Annals* (1993-1995) and *Wyoming History Journal* (1995-1996). The *Annals* has been the official publication of the Wyoming State Historical Society since 1953 and is distributed as a benefit of membership to all society members. Membership dues are: single, \$20; joint, \$30; student (under 21), \$15; institutional, \$40; contributing, \$100-249; sustaining, \$250-499; patron, \$500-999; donor, \$1,000+. To join, contact your local chapter or write to the address below. Articles in *Annals of Wyoming* are abstracted in *Historical Abstracts* and *America: History and Life*.

Inquiries about membership, mailing, distribution, reprints and back issues should be addressed to Judy West, Coordinator, Wyoming State Historical Society, PMB# 184, 1740H Dell Range Blvd., Cheyenne WY 82009-4945. Editorial correspondence should be addressed to the editorial office of *Annals of Wyoming*, American Heritage Center, Dept. 3924, 1000 E. University Avenue, Laramie WY 82071. Our e-mail address is: [rewig@uwyo.edu](mailto:rewig@uwyo.edu)

Printed by: Pioneer Printing, Cheyenne  
 Graphic Design: Vicki Schuster

## “The List of Good Negroes” African American Lynchings in the Equality State

By Todd Guenther



Baseman Taylor, lynched in Torrington in 1913, married into the Nebraska Shores family. At the time of his lynching, he lived in Empire, Wyoming, an African-American farming community. Courtesy the author.

Wyoming, in reality, had during the 1910s established something of a tradition of implementing mob-justice against black men accused of the “unmentionable crime” or other infractions of the social order.

After a Rock Springs mob dragged a black man from jail, tied a rope around his neck, and threw him off a bridge in 1917, a Cheyenne newspaper editor wrote, “this Wyoming lynching will cause the ... west to plead guilty to the same reversion to type that characterizes the southern mob bent on ‘gettin’ a nigger.”<sup>1</sup>

The Cheyenne editor erroneously thought the Rock Springs incident was anomalous. Wyoming, in reality, had during the 1910s established something of a tradition of implementing mob-justice against black men accused of the “unmentionable crime” or other infractions of the social order. After another lynching, in Green River in 1918, the brother of a black man lynched in Torrington in 1913 wrote to a Cheyenne newspaper asking that whites live up to Wyoming’s nickname of the “equal rights state.”<sup>2</sup> That did not happen and the definition of the nickname changed to refer specifically to women’s rights. The reasons were that Jim Crow was so widespread and entrenched, and that these lynchings in Torrington, Rock Springs, and Green River were part of a series of killings so numerous during the 1910s that the Equality State earned a unique place in the West. Wyoming, in fact, had a lynch rate more than

<sup>1</sup> “A Blot on the State,” *Cheyenne State Leader*, December 14, 1917.

<sup>2</sup> Russel Taylor, letter to the editor, *Wyoming Tribune*, December 19, 1918.

thirty times higher than supposedly “lynch-prone” states in the deep South. Though “Judge Lynch” threatened the lives of individual blacks, Wyoming mobs, unlike their southern counterparts which depended on a large, well-controlled black labor pool, dreamed of more than just making examples of alleged black miscreants. So few African Americans lived in Wyoming, and were such an insignificant part of the statewide economy, that the mobbers saw a possibility of banishing them entirely and creating an all-white society. In the words of one Wyoming historian, “Understanding the prevalence of racial tensions in Wyoming, rather than focusing on the South, is pertinent to rounding out the study of the civil rights movement.”<sup>3</sup>

A lynching is an illegal killing, not necessarily a hanging, by a group acting under the pretext of serving justice. At least 4,742 people have been lynched in the United States since 1882 in what was a uniquely American phenomenon. Prior to the Civil War most lynch victims were white, but after the end of Reconstruction in the South the majority, some 73% of the total, were black. Most white lynchings were undertaken by citizens who, dissatisfied with their small town legal systems, attempted to impose their local brand of “rough justice” on criminals. The custom took on a different purpose after the slaves were freed. Many whites across the nation believed that blacks’ behavior could only be controlled by fear. The lynching of black people “became an institutionalized method used by whites to terrorize blacks and maintain white supremacy.”<sup>4</sup> Mobs sometimes fought for pieces of their victims’ clothing

and body parts. Parents brought their children to picnic near dangling corpses. Application of lynch law was a means of social control, not an attempt to preserve law and order. Had the latter been the case, some of Wyoming’s lynch victims from 1904-1920 would have been whites accused of violent crimes. Instead, all were African Americans. Lynching during this era was “utilized primarily to sustain the caste system”<sup>5</sup> not just in the South, but also in the Equality State. This trend has been called “the Negro Holocaust” and “the American Dark Age.”<sup>6</sup>

At least thirty lynchings, mostly of white men, took place in Wyoming from the late 1860s through 1903, when the last Wyoming whites were lynched. Some of these killings were premeditated, organized vigilante actions undertaken during early frontier days when the law was non-existent or impotent. Others were part of the class and property rights strife during the extraordinary range war violence between cattle barons, homesteaders, and sheepmen. Surrounding territories and states experienced similar though less deadly episodes.

The peak era of lynching of Wyoming black men occurred long after frontier vigilantism and “rough justice” was supposedly replaced by organized state government with an established judicial system. It resulted from spontaneous mob action, had somewhat different (race-based) intentions, and was not duplicated in surrounding states. Though unique among western states, Wyoming’s predilection for mob violence against black men was part of a national trend.<sup>7</sup>

Some people expected a different reality in

<sup>3</sup> Reagan Joy Kaufman, “Discrimination in the ‘Equality State’: Black-White Relations in Wyoming History,” *Annals of Wyoming* 77 (Winter 2005): 13-27, provides a good overview of civil rights in Wyoming.

<sup>4</sup> Robert A. Gibson, “The Negro Holocaust: Lynching and Race Riots in the United States, 1880-1950 (Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, n.d.), <http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1979/2/79.02.04.x.html>, accessed January 30, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Western here refers to the states of the Northern plains and Rocky Mountains in the immediate vicinity of Wyoming. There are three primary sources for lynching statistics; none cover the years prior to 1882 when the *Chicago Tribune* began keeping a record, followed by the Tuskegee Institute in 1892 and the NAACP in 1912. Because many, if not most, African American lynchings occurred in rural areas and small towns which were often not served by newspapers, and other killings occurred in private or by dark of night, unattended by hordes to publicize the spectacle, many lynchings probably escaped press or national notice. Examples in Wyoming include the previously undocumented lynchings in Torrington and Hudson, which have not been included in any studies prior to this paper. Both the national and Wyoming statistics are probably low. Confusion also enters the record in some cases due to disagreement about what actually constitutes a lynching as opposed to murder. The Tuskegee figures, though sometimes considered conservative, have been used in this paper. From 1882 through 1889, at least 467 blacks were lynched in the U.S. Another 1,111 were lynched from 1890 through 1899, and 791 more by 1910. During the 1910s, 622 more African Americans were lynched, followed by 301 more during the 1920s. By 1964 at least 4,742 black men and women had been lynched in the United States of America. Lynching is summarized in David J. Hogan, editor, *Civil Rights Chronicle: The African American Struggle for Freedom* (Lincolnwood, Illinois: Legacy Publications, 2003), pp. 39, 40, 59, 69; many other works provide more detailed and in-depth analyses.

Wyoming, which boasted the nickname the Equality State. When Wyoming Territory was created in 1868, the Civil War was over, slaves had been freed, and black men could vote back East and in the territories. Section Five of the Organic Act of Wyoming stated clearly that "Every male citizen of the United States above the age of twenty-one years ... shall be entitled to vote [and] hold any office in said territory. And the legislative assembly shall not at any time abridge the right of suffrage, or to hold office, on account of the race, color or the previous condition of servitude of any resident of the said Territory." When Wyoming's elected legislators resisted this, the federally appointed U.S. Attorney issued an opinion stating that black men's right to vote could not be terminated.<sup>8</sup> Surprisingly, there was no substantial effort to outlaw black residence in Wyoming, as had been accomplished for example in Indiana, California, and Oregon.

In 1870, Wyoming claimed 9,118 residents (not counting Indians). The paltry head count of 138 black men and forty-five black women, roughly two percent of the population, was too small to be a numeric or economic threat to white dominance, but blacks were regarded as social threats. To defend white privilege and supremacy in spite of Section Five, the first Wyoming legislature codified blacks' status as second-class citizens by enacting laws prohibiting marriage between blacks and whites and permitting racially segregated schools. Furthermore, many of the Democratic majority had been elected on a platform including repudiation of Negro suffrage. Partially in response to federal legislation and amendments which enfranchised black men, the first legislature also passed its most famous law, that granting suffrage to Wyoming women, concluding that, "Damn it, if [the feds] are going to let the niggers and pigtailed vote, we will ring in the women,

too."<sup>9</sup>

It is wonderfully ironic that for this— for being first in the nation to extend suffrage to women, and stubborn determination to preserve female enfranchisement over federal objections in 1890— Wyoming became known as the Equality State and the words "Equal Rights" were proudly displayed on the state seal despite that reputation being built at least in part upon a foundation of base racism. Inspired by Section Five of the Organic Act and the 1869 women's suffrage legislation, but ignoring the discriminatory laws approved by the first territorial legislature, some Pollyannas believed that equality would extend to everyone. The editor of the *Wyoming Tribune* was delighted that Wyoming Territory was in the vanguard of social change and wrote that in Wyoming,

the mere accident of sex, race, or color . . . should [not] operate as an impassable barrier to complete civil and political equality.

[Wyoming has adopted] an advanced position on the question of human rights . . . forgetting heathenish prejudices arising from race or sex, she invites them to stand with her upon 'the skirmish line of civilization,' [sharing] human rights, [and] equality before the law ... all mankind shall be politically regenerated, and stand upon an equal plane, as they will before the Throne of God.<sup>10</sup>

A black man named William Jefferson Hardin, from Cheyenne, was elected to the Wyoming legislature in 1879 and again in 1880 in what the *Cheyenne Daily Leader* called "a moral triumph."<sup>11</sup> Hardin helped repeal the original (but not the last) anti-miscegenation law. A decade later, the editor of the *Cheyenne Sun* described the celebratory

statehood parade through the streets of the capital city. Mentioning a float entered by hopeful African Americans he wrote that "our colored brothers feel a warm and patriotic devotion to the state in which all men and women are free and equal."<sup>12</sup>

At the same time Wyoming attained statehood in 1890, a quarter-century before the rash of black lynchings, the United States Census Bureau decided that the frontier was safely settled. Renowned historian Frederick Jackson Turner fretted over what would become of our national character without a frontier safety valve to release social pressures. Many writers, even of African American history, agreed that the frontier had disappeared by 1890, that life settled down, that the wildness of the Wild West ended, and that the twentieth century ushered in a progressive new era of law and order and civilization. Durham and Jones speaking of that period in their book, *The Negro Cowboys*, wrote that "lawless Wyoming had . . . disappeared [it] was still rough and occasionally bloody, but juries, judges and sheriffs dispensed justice." William Katz, in *The Black West*, observed that, "Life in the western territories was dangerous and often short until settlers filled in the last open spaces and law and order became a permanent resident" in newly created states.<sup>13</sup>

This may have been largely true for whites, but for blacks in Wyoming frontier-style violence continued to inspire fear for more than three decades beyond statehood. The Wyoming Constitution stated that, "In their inherent right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, all members of the human race are equal," and added, "Since the equality in the enjoyment of natural and civil rights is only made sure through political equality, the laws of this state

affecting the political rights and privileges of its citizens shall be without distinction of race, color, or any circumstance."<sup>14</sup> Given the realities of life in Wyoming and discriminatory statutes in Wyoming's legal code, the Constitution amounted to so many empty words. Blacks could not count on juries, judges, or sheriffs to dispense justice long after the Wild West frontier was gone and Wyoming boasted an established legal system.

The first documented blacks to attempt permanent settlement in Wyoming were regarded as white, at least culturally if not racially, by the Lakota and Cheyenne who killed them and their owner at their Oregon Trail trading post in 1863. These slaves came to the North Platte valley unwillingly and their reception established a long-lived pattern of hostility.<sup>15</sup> The following year, whites made clear the distinction between themselves and blacks who occupied an inferior place in the social and legal hierarchies. That September saw the first and perhaps most brutal lynching of an African American man in what would become Wyoming, at Fort Halleck near Elk Mountain. Asa, one of two slaves apparently belonging to the post surgeon, was accused by Ohio soldiers of insulting and kissing a white girl. "He tried to make his escape, but was overtaken"<sup>16</sup> by a soldier who dragged him back to the mob in the fort where he was,

. . . cuffed and kicked, tarred and feathered, set on fire, skinned alive, and finally stuck, half dead in a firkin [barrel], and exposed on the plains, until the flesh was eaten away by wolves and hawks ... [they] tacked the hide on the side of the hospital, where it remained the rest of the summer.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Cheyenne Sun*, July 24, 1890.

<sup>13</sup> Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1989), p. 260; Philip Durham and Everett L. Jones, *The Negro Cowboys* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 221; William Katz, *The Black West* (Seattle: Open Hand Publishing, 1987), p. 143. Some argue that Wyoming blacks still cannot count on the judicial system to provide justice, as with the acquittals of two white Casper brothers who left a bar, got a gun, returned, and shot to death the black bouncer in April 1991, see e.g., "Meenan to Decide 'Soon' on Dennis Wood Charges," *Casper Star Tribune*, January 2, 1992.

<sup>14</sup> Section 2, Article 1, and Section 3, Article 1, of the Wyoming State Constitution.

<sup>15</sup> Todd Guenther, "Could these bones be from a Negro?" *The Overland Journal*, 19 (Summer 2001): 43-53; Todd Guenther, "Lucretia Marchbanks: A Black Woman in the Black Hills," *South Dakota History* 31 (Spring 2001): 2,3.

<sup>16</sup> E. W. Whitcomb, "Reminiscences of a Pioneer, 1857-1869," as told to Mrs. E.I. Rivenburg, *Proceedings and Collections of the Wyoming State Historical Society, 1919-1920* (Cheyenne, Wyoming, 1920), p. 93; William Hepworth Dixon, *New America* (n.d., n.p.), quoted in Daniel L. Kinnaman, *A Little Piece of Wyoming* (Rawlins, Wyoming: self-published, 1996), p. 76; a renowned pioneer while at Fort Sanders (Laramie city) heard a report of this lynching in 1866, Judge William L. Kuykendall, *Frontier Days* (Denver: J.M. & H.L. Kuykendall, 1917), p. 102.

<sup>17</sup> Dixon, *New America*, quoted in Kinnaman, *A Little Piece of Wyoming*, 76; Whitcomb, "Reminiscences of a Pioneer," p. 93.

<sup>8</sup> Sidney Howell Fleming, "Solving the Jigsaw Puzzle: One Suffrage Story at a Time," *Annals of Wyoming* 62 (Spring 1990): 31.

<sup>9</sup> *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, April 28, 1870. These words were probably spoken by President of the Council (Senate), William H. Bright, a native of Virginia who fought for the Union during the Civil War and expressed these same sentiments upon returning home to South Pass City, Wyoming Territory, after the legislative session ended. Marion McMillan Huseas, *Sweetwater Gold: Wyoming's Gold Rush, 1867-1871* (Cheyenne: Cheyenne Corral of Westerners, 1991), p. 147; T. A. Larson, *History of Wyoming* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), p. 80, note 10; Michael A. Massie, "Reform is Where You Find It: The Roots of Woman Suffrage in Wyoming," *Annals of Wyoming* 62 (Spring 1990): 8; Roger D. Hardaway, "Prohibiting Interracial Marriage: Miscegenation Laws in Wyoming," *Annals of Wyoming* 52 (1980): 55-60.

<sup>10</sup> *Wyoming Tribune*, December 18, and December 11, 1869, quoted from Fleming, "Solving the Jigsaw Puzzle," pp. 39, 38.

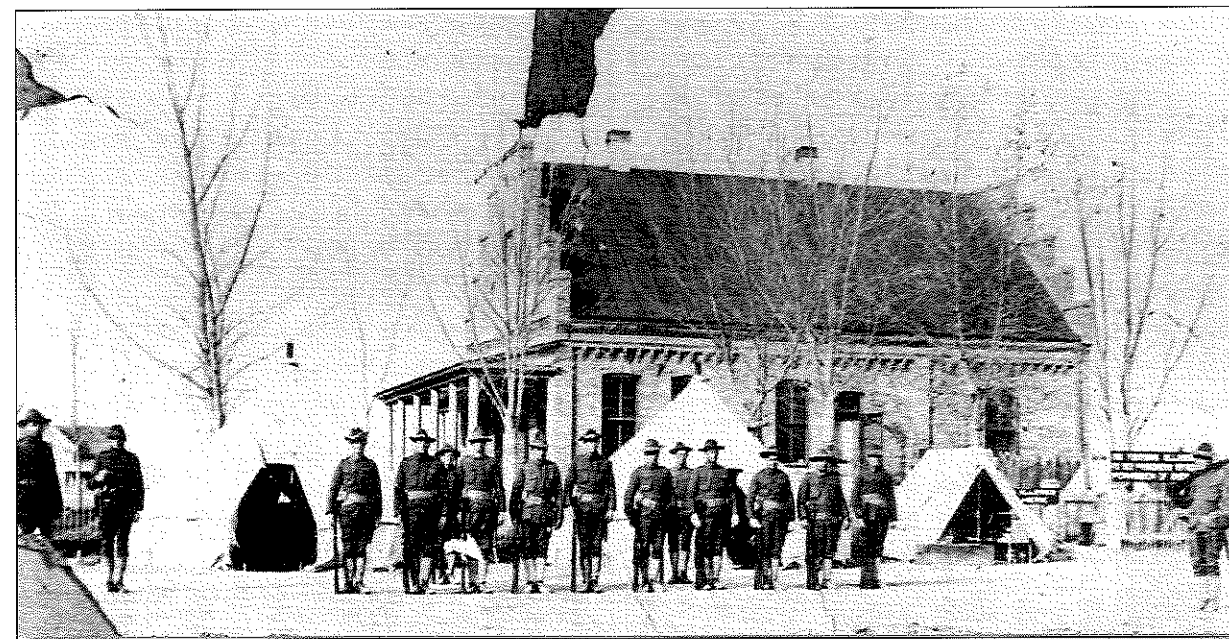
<sup>11</sup> Roger D. Hardaway, "William Jefferson Hardin: Wyoming's Nineteenth Century Black Legislator," *Annals of Wyoming* 63 (Winter 1991): 2-13; Eugene H. Berwanger, "Hardin and Langston: Western Black Spokesmen of the Reconstruction Era," *The Journal of Negro History* 64 (Spring 1979): 101-15.

The surgeon did not press the issue, understanding the need to control blacks' behavior. He merely noted in his diary, "Asa killed by the boys of Co. D for committing rape upon little girl just 12 years old – Dissected him – exciting time."<sup>18</sup> The surgeon's definition of rape was not the standard, but that was to be expected in allegations against black men, and truth was not the objective of a lynching. The soldiers went unpunished. Asa was merely property and thus his killing was not murder. Just a few years earlier the U.S. Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision had ruled that blacks were not citizens and could not then nor ever have rights under the Constitution. There is no evidence suggesting that the soldiers even had to reimburse the doctor for property damage. Some officers of the 11<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Cavalry probably approved of that lynching, among them Captain Jacob Lee Humfreville, who assumed command of the post a few weeks later. After the Civil War he was assigned to lead the Buffalo Soldiers of the black Ninth Cavalry, but was ultimately court-martialed and terminated from the Army in 1874 for racist attitudes and sadistic treatment of black soldiers under his command.<sup>19</sup>

Amanda Norris, a mulatto woman, who worked at the fort and became the wife of post trader Robert Foote, may have been more horrified than most observers by the brutality of Asa's lynching. The killing demonstrated unequivocally to her and other African Americans on the frontier that they ranked, like blacks in other parts of the nation, far below whites and that white hatred for their darker skin was condoned by the power structure. New pioneers to the frontier brought old ideas west with them in their covered wagons, and borrowed much from the constitutions of existing states and territories when writing new legal codes, thus disappointing idealists' hopes for innovative and just societies in the nascent territories. As in eastern and southern states, much of the West and especially Wyoming would engender a white supremacist society.

This idea was driven home time and again even though the Dred Scott decision was overturned by subsequent federal and territorial law which

supposedly gave African Americans the same rights enjoyed by whites. Stories around the town of Medicine Bow hold that a few years later, about 1868, a black man deposited funds in the bank and tried to purchase land nearby. Whites asserted that no "nigger" would settle there and killed him. About 1870, a black man was shot from behind in South Pass City, but law enforcement officials made no effort to bring his killer to justice. Weak evidence suggests that a black man may have been lynched in Lander about 1884. In spite of high hopes and high prose on the part of some newsmen and others, after statehood was achieved in 1890, Wyoming remained a dangerous place for blacks to live. Tradition maintains that a black homesteader was murdered by neighbors at the head of Negro Creek east of Casper during the late 1880s or early 1890s. After his body was hidden near the spring, his wife and children were driven from their home farther down the creek. The family's abandoned buildings were appropriated by neighboring ranchers in time-honored tradition, but uniquely and more interestingly, archaeological evidence suggests that someone brought horse-drawn scrapers and blades to level the homestead site and remove nearly every trace that anyone had ever lived there. In the aftermath of the Johnson County War, white civilians harassed and shot at black soldiers stationed in eastern Johnson County; the black soldiers had been sent by federal authorities hoping not so much to exercise martial law as to excite outrage among settlers who had migrated to the tension-filled area from the South. About 1900, a black army veteran and his father from Ohio disembarked from a train in Newcastle to answer advertisements from the Cambria mines for experienced coal miners. They were greeted by signs in the rail yard proclaiming "Nigger Go Home" shortly before Italian miners who did not want to compete with them for jobs beat them and drove them away. The older man apparently died from his injuries. Over and over again, Wyoming authorities provided little or no protection or aid to blacks whose lives and homes were in danger. African



Militia guarded the Big Horn County Courthouse in 1909 during the trial which convicted several ranchmen for killing sheepherders in what is known as the Tensleep Raid. Courtesy Colorado Historical Society.

Americans often did not expect justice. After a black laborer at Pacific Springs was clubbed senseless by a gambler wielding a pick handle, he commented upon regaining consciousness that, "Massa Palmer sure know how to handle niggers."<sup>20</sup>

As the new century began the lynching of Wyoming whites came to an end. According to historian Michael Pfeifer, society's "rough justice" element compromised with proponents of due

process so that capital punishment became a more common sentence by the courts, even though some were disappointed that executions were conducted in private behind prison walls. A prosecuting attorney in the Big Horn Basin said, "Wyoming has passed the border stage of her history. It has been a hard, bitter growth, but we have arrived and the world will know that the law is held in regard by the big majority of our people."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> United States Census manuscripts for Carbon County, Wyoming Territory, 1870 and 1880; Ernest Hornecker, "Before Lander Was Born: From Fort Laramie to South Pass," *Wyoming State Journal*, January 18, 1940; Jack Ravage, *Singletree* (Laramie, Wyoming: Jelms Mountain Publishing, 1990); Jack Ravage, personal communication, December 4, 2007; Phil Roberts, personal communication, December 5, 2007; Marvin Cronberg, author of late 1970s *Medicine Bow Post* "Curtin' Chute" columns, letter to author, December 11, 2007; J.S. Hoy, "History of Brown's Hole," unpublished manuscript, n.d., U.W. Coe Library collections, p. 172; Ruth Beebe, *Reminiscing Along the Sweetwater* (Boulder, Colorado: Johnson Publishing Co., 1973), p. 107; Todd Guenther, "At Home on the Range" (master's thesis, American Studies, University of Wyoming, 1988), Chapter 2: The Negro Creek Homestead, p. 66; Todd Guenther, "Y'all Call Me Nigger Jim Now, But Someday You'll Call Me Mr. James Edwards," *Annals of Wyoming* 61 (Fall 1989): 21; Frank N. Schubert, "The Suggs Affray: The Black Cavalry in the Johnson County War," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 4 (No. 1, 1973): 57-68; interview with Bill and Catherine Nuttall by Todd Guenther, Douglas, Wyoming, April 9, 1987; John Walter, personal communication, 1988, added that the anti-black signs in the Newcastle rail yard remained up until at least 1928; Lula Sherlock Topham in Betty Carpenter Pfaff, *Fine Gold* (self-published, n.d.), p.12.

The Tuskegee Institute's archival files about lynchings of African Americans in the United States suggest that a black man named J.S. Bedford was lynched near Big Horn, Wyoming, in mid-October 1892. According to email dated February 8, 2008, from John W. Davis, author of *Goodbye, Judge Lynch: The End of a Lawless Era in Wyoming's Big Horn Basin* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), pp. 30-31, there is no evidence to suggest that Bedford was black. This is echoed by Lawrence M. Woods, author of *Wyoming's Big Horn Basin to 1901: A Late Frontier* (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark, 1997), pp. 124-27, in the same email communication. Jack Bedford, a white cowboy, was murdered October 1 near Bonanza in the Big Horn Basin. There is no evidence that Bedford was black and race was not a factor in his murder which was part of the range wars between cattle barons and homesteaders that resulted in so many killings on the Wyoming frontier during the late 1880s and early 1890s.

<sup>21</sup> Michael J. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874-1947* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), p. 29; Arlan Coons, editorial, *Rocky Mountain News*, November 5, 1909, quoted in Davis, *Goodbye, Judge Lynch*, p. 196, was referring primarily to the lynchings and killings in Basin in 1903 and the convictions of several ranchmen for killing sheepherders in the famous "Tensleep Raid" of 1909, quoted in Davis, p. 196.

<sup>18</sup> Dr. John Finrock in Kinnaman, *A Little Piece of Wyoming*, p.67.

<sup>19</sup> Kinnaman, *A Little Piece of Wyoming*, pp. 68, 129; Charles L. Kenner, *Buffalo Soldiers & Officers of the Ninth Cavalry, 1867-1898* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), pp.141-45.

At least some in that majority seem to have wished that there was no race problem, or more accurately, that there were no blacks in Wyoming. The *Wyoming Tribune* spoke for many in March 1904 when the editor railed against blacks migrating into the West and wished that descendants of slaves would stay in the South where they belonged. Since shipping them all back to Liberia was not a realistic option, and western blacks kept insisting on exercising their right to suffrage, the editor ranted, "Let them get away from politics, build homes with four rooms in them, raise cotton and chickens and look out for themselves."<sup>22</sup> As white Wyomingites would demonstrate a few months later, Wyoming law and white society certainly would not look out for them.

The lynchings of black Wyomingites in the new twentieth century would not be cases of frontier vigilantes attempting to create an orderly and law-abiding society by taking the law into their own hands. By this time the state had a well-developed justice system with law enforcement officers and judges in every community; plus functioning courts, juries, and jails. "Twentieth century lynchings of black men were the work of vengeance-seeking white mobs defying the law in racially-inflamed mass hysteria intended to keep blacks in their place."<sup>23</sup> Lynching became "a tool for white Wyomingites to assert racial hierarchy," the white populace participated actively or vicariously, and "African Americans were supposed to apprehend the terrible consequences of breaching white supremacy."<sup>24</sup> The lynchers' primary intent was white domination – or even the complete elimination – of blacks. During the years from 1904 to 1920, when the majority of Wyoming's black lynchings occurred, none, not a single one, of the hundreds of Wyoming Caucasians accused of similar crimes was lynched.

Whites received the due process guaranteed by

the constitutions of the nation and state. But where blacks were concerned, the "Law was too capricious, too unpredictable, too formal, too abstract and too concerned with process and at least the procedures of fairness to regulate the crucial social distinctions of the color line." In the words of one vengeance-seeking man in Rock Springs, we need "more justice and less law."<sup>25</sup>

That brand of justice was served in August 1904 in Laramie, the home of the University of Wyoming. Joe Martin was incarcerated in the county jail on a misdemeanor charge. Apparently well-behaved, he became a jail trustee and enjoyed some freedoms denied other prisoners. Reportedly taking advantage of his privileges, and as improbable as it sounds, he was accused of using a razor to slash a young white woman employed at the jail after she refused his amorous advances. A mob soon stormed the courthouse and dragged him, fighting for his life, to a lamppost at the corner of Seventh Street and Grand Avenue. They threw a rope over the arm and pulled Martin up to kick and strangle in the Wyoming wind while the crowd used him for target practice.<sup>26</sup>

The *Laramie Boomerang* hooted on its front page that the citizenry of Laramie were "Poor Shots." Only one of the multitude of bullets fired at the strangling man struck him as he dangled and thrashed above their heads. The coroner's jury concluded that Martin "Came to his death by hanging by the neck until dead by parties unknown."<sup>27</sup> The county attorney records no longer exist; district court criminal files indicate that no charges were ever filed against anyone. No effort was made to bring the killers to justice.

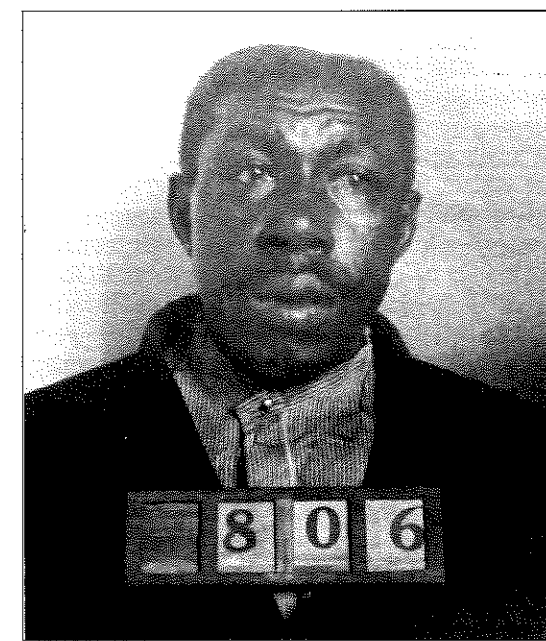
By modern standards, elected officials charged with upholding the law and preserving the peace failed in their duties. At the time, officials behaved just as the dominant white society thought proper. Justice was not color blind and the law was not expected to apply to blacks as it did to whites.

Because of Martin's color and the nature of his alleged offense, white society felt little or no distress that he was denied the rights and protections that every accused white rapist received. People were generally undismayed by the denial of due process and unconcerned by the question of Martin's guilt or innocence, or his murder by the crowd. It was considered an added benefit that the mob saved the county the cost of a trial. But one wonders with regard to this case, as to others, if Martin really committed the crime? Or was he perhaps an easy scapegoat for a white prisoner, or perhaps a guard, or even the "victim," who understood that such an accusation would instantly divert attention away from themselves and their clandestine activities, and result in an immediate, hysterical public conviction of any black man. Lacking a trial, no one will ever know what really happened or if Joe Martin really committed the assault of which he was accused.

The mob's purpose was not solely to punish the supposed perpetrator, but also to send an unequivocal message to other African Americans regarding their status and expected behavior. It was believed that black men naturally behaved as beasts around irresistibly desirable white women and the public was likewise expected to mete out the appropriate punishment. Yet, not every accused black man was lynched. Two years later, in 1906, an outraged Cheyenne citizenry threatened to lynch Private Walker Carroll, a Buffalo Soldier with the black Tenth Cavalry stationed at Fort D.A. Russell. He was accused of breaking into a Cheyenne house and attempting to rape an eleven year-old white girl. Local papers helped whip up the frenzy by referring to Carroll as a "Black Fiend" and a "black and very vicious negro," correlating skin color and savagery. The editors simultaneously tried to calm the city contending the established Wyoming legal system could adequately resolve the matter. Ultimately, in the capital city, the law was allowed to run its course and Carroll was sentenced to ten

years in the state penitentiary at Rawlins. This case suggests that things were changing in Wyoming and that perhaps the Martin lynching was anomalous. Time would prove otherwise.<sup>28</sup>

Most lynchings of Wyoming black men occurred during the 1910s. The first of this series took place on October 2, 1912, when, before Private Carroll's sentence expired, another black prisoner, Frank Wigfall, was lynched inside the state penitentiary in Rawlins. As in other accounts of African American crime, his appearance and color were repeatedly discussed and belittled in news and private accounts in efforts to dehumanize and make the accused seem like a crude animal and the black race predestined toward murder and rape. Many people today may wonder what a lynching was like and how the mobs behaved. Some newspaper accounts are revealing, but an extraordinary insider's view of the whole event was recorded in a convict's diary, which stated that earlier that year the



Frank Wigfall was lynched in the Wyoming State Penitentiary by inmates in 1912. Courtesy Wyoming State Archives.

<sup>22</sup> *Wyoming Tribune*, March 3, 1904.

<sup>23</sup> Pfeifer, *Rough Justice*, pp. 30, 48.

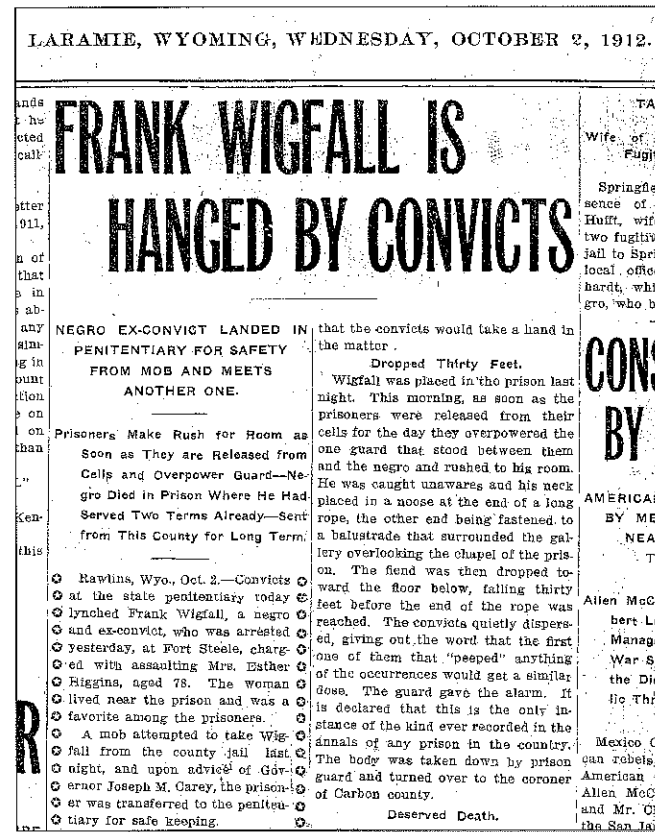
<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 29.

<sup>26</sup> *Laramie Boomerang*, September 1, 1904; see also, Stan Gustafson, *Vigilantes of Wyoming* (New York: Hearststone Press, 1971), pp. 127-31; and Frank Schubert, "The Black Army Regiments in Wyoming, 1885-1912" (master's thesis, University of Wyoming, 1970), p. 75, note 21.

<sup>27</sup> *Laramie Boomerang*, September 1, and September 4, 1904, editorial, p. 2; H.A. Robinson, "Coroner's Report," August 30, 1904, Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne.

<sup>28</sup> Information on the Carroll incident is from Schubert, "The Black Army Regiments," p. 75. In 1885, during the wild and woolly frontier era, a black soldier was taken from a civilian jail and lynched just across the South Dakota border, see Thomas R. Buecker, "Confrontation at Sturgis: An Episode in Civil-Military Race Relations, 1885," *South Dakota History* 14 (Fall 1984): 238-61. This incident is not included in the Tuskegee Institute lynching statistics, which state that no black men were lynched in South Dakota. White lynchings in Wyoming ended in 1903 with incidents in Newcastle and Basin.



The Laramie Republican reported on Wigfall's lynching in the October 2, 1912, issue.

old negro [had been] released from the prison after serving a fourteen year term for a revolting crime which is peculiar to the black race. he had previously served one or more terms for the same crime. he was always a good old darkey when in the prison and was well liked by the prisoners. he had been down town since his release [and] had repeated the same offense . . . he had chosen for a victim an old lady who lived near the prison. the peculiar circumstances surrounding the crime proved the negro to be possessed of a heart black as inky midnight. he . . . escaped across country and on foot.<sup>29</sup>

Thirty-nine year old Wigfall, "a big negro with a face more like a beast than a man,"<sup>30</sup> was a habitual

criminal. About 1902 he began serving an eighteen-month sentence for rape and assault with intent to kill. In 1904, the same year Joe Martin was lynched in Laramie, Wigfall was re-incarcerated after confessing that he attempted to rape a thirteen-year old girl he caught in a Laramie alley. He was released in April 1912 after serving about eight and one-half years. He worked in various cleaning jobs around Rawlins until battering in the door of seventy-eight year old Esther Higgins with an axe. The aged washer-woman was threatened with death and "outraged repeatedly" until the next morning when Wigfall fled.

He was arrested at Fort Steele, an old military post about twenty-three miles east of Rawlins on the Union Pacific Railroad. A vast crowd congregated at the Rawlins depot awaiting the train bringing him back and threatening to hang him. Local authorities were determined to prevent a lynching and the accompanying officers managed to sequester him in the jail. A deputy sheriff told the mob they would have to dynamite the building to get the man out. Upon this news, the rabble "retired for consultation." During the lull, a sheriff's deputy, a policeman, and the mayor of Rawlins spirited Wigfall to the apparent safety of the fortress-like state prison where he boasted of his crime to another prisoner.<sup>31</sup>

The inmate's diary continues its descriptive account of the brutality of the lynching. The morning after Wigfall's return to prison his fellow inmates were agitated. One asked a guard what would happen if the black man was lynched. The guard responded, "I don't think they would do anything." Upon hearing those words, prisoners craving death, not justice, commenced planning the attack and,

a small bunch of men came in the outside door as . . . hungry as wolves . . . but not for dinner . . . the rope was . . . thrown out on the floor where the kinks were run out. Brink said, now wait a minute fellows, two of you go into the cell house and capture [the guard] and take keys away from him and lock him into a cell, and dont hurt him . . .

the rest of the lynchers had went down the north side and were congregated in front of the negroes cell . . . Brink . . . grappled with [the guard] who struggled to free himself . . . [another prisoner] . . . grasped the bunch of keys which he jerked from the guards hand . . . and the door of Wigfalls cell unlocked in a twinkling. the ape-like form of the negro could be seen in the dark interior of the cell as he stood cowering in the farthest corner.

he was instantly grasped and yanked out through the door where the rope was thrown in a double half hitch about his neck. from the time when he was pulled from the cell he never had an oppurtunity to stand still, the outfit went at double quick time towards the stairs to the galleries. the negro was clothed only in a night shirt . . . they went up the stairs to the top gallery and stopped at the place where previously a man committed suicide by jumping off the gallery.

Wigfall was ordered to jump off the gallery, but didn't seem anxious to obey. he was menaced by a knife in the hand of Paseo. he asked that he be allowed time in which to pray. he was told that if he could make it short enough that he would have time to offer a prayer while making the descent. he was forded over the railing and he went down hand over hand like a sailor, or monkey, he dropped and caught the railing on the gallery below. he was instantly dislodged from there by one of the party who had went down stairs to forestall just such a move on the part of the negro. he fell to the end of the rope. he was then drawn up by those at the top and dropped the entire [three-story] distance again . . .<sup>32</sup>

The papers reported that "He fell nearly 30 feet and his neck was broken and nearly pulled from the body." "The tragedy was as thrilling as it was spectacular." An hour after the lynching, even though a guard had sounded the alarm, prison authorities had not responded to the murderous riot within the prison walls and the victim was still suspended by the rope. A warning circulated among the prisoners threatening that "the first man who squeals will be the

next man hung [and] had the effect of silencing any convict who later was questioned." Eventually, the body was cut down but a coroner's jury was unable to resolve the case. One prisoner identified some of the lynchers, but added personal enemies to the list making the whole document suspect; the warden chose to ignore it. The guards said they were unable to recognize any of the convicts who participated in the affair.

At the same time the inmates were lynching Wigfall inside the state prison, another lynch mob gathered at the city jail believing that he was still lodged there. Local citizens were preparing to batter down the jail doors when they learned "that the convicts had seized the Negro, and saved the citizens of Rawlins a tragic job." Many if not most residents expressed the view that he had received just what he deserved and they were glad it had happened. The local newspaper headlined that he had "Paid For His Crime," a theme echoed in the *Cheyenne State Leader*.<sup>33</sup>

Fury did not explode because an old woman was brutally violated. Wigfall was not lynched because he was a rapist. Many white rapists were tried and served out their convictions in the prison without being lynched by fellow inmates. No doubt some were part of the lynch-mob. Wigfall was thrown from the prison balcony because he was a black rapist. Outside the prison walls, "Certain ones of the colored population [of Rawlins] were much incensed with the parties who were supposed to have hung Wigfall but nothing happened."<sup>34</sup>

Some whites around the state deplored the event. The *Wyoming State Journal* in Lander wrote,

If the convicts in the penitentiary are to administer our laws they ought to be given more liberty. If men who have been convicted of crime are to commit more serious ones, once they are locked up, then perhaps it would be best to turn them loose in the first place . . . The lynching in the penitentiary last week was without excuse . . . taking human life is a

<sup>29</sup> Anonymous, *The Sweet Smell of Sagebrush: A Prisoner's Diary, 1903-1912* (Rawlins, Wyoming: Friends of the Old Pen, 1990), p. 145.

<sup>30</sup> "Negro Lynched By Rawlins Convicts," *The Wyoming Tribune*, October 2, 1912; "Paid For His Crime," *The Carbon County Journal*, October 4, 1912.

<sup>31</sup> "Paid For His Crime," *The Carbon County Journal*, October 4, 1912; Anonymous, *The Sweet Smell of Sagebrush*, pp. 145-49.

<sup>32</sup> Anonymous, *The Sweet Smell of Sagebrush*, pp. 145-49, 151.

<sup>33</sup> Quotes in this and preceding paragraphs are from "Paid For His Crime," *Carbon County Journal*, October 4, 1912; and "Convicts at Rawlins Lynch Boasting Black in Prison," and "While Mob Storms Jail, Convicts Lynch Their Victim," *Cheyenne State Leader*, October 3, 1912; "Lynch Negro in Wyoming Penitentiary," *Wyoming State Journal*, October 4, 1912.

<sup>34</sup> Anonymous, *The Sweet Smell of Sagebrush*, pp. 145-49.

serious matter even in Wyoming. The men who took part in the affair should pay the penalty.<sup>35</sup>

But of course they never did. One researcher explained Lander's liberal view toward blacks by claiming that when the Buffalo Soldiers arrived to garrison nearby Fort Washakie, Lander "already had its 'niggers' [the Indians], and, to further enhance the position of the [African American soldiers] in the community, their mission was to [control the Indians of] the Wind River Reservation, or to keep down the 'niggers.'"<sup>36</sup> Whites in Lander were grateful to black soldiers for protecting them from potentially hostile savages and treated the black troops with more respect than was common in other western communities.

Early the next year, 1913, African Americans' status as second-class citizens in Wyoming was underscored when the Wyoming legislature unanimously passed a law making interracial marriage a felony. The Equality State, like many other states during this racially troubled decade, was moving to "keep the niggers in their place." Nationally famous black spokesman Booker T. Washington stated, "I have never seen the colored people so discouraged and bitter as they are at the present time."<sup>37</sup> Across the nation, that bitterness led to rioting and increasingly determined resistance to the status quo. The brand new and rapidly growing National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was determined to secure for all people the basic rights guaranteed in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments to the United States Constitution, which promised an end to slavery, the equal protection of the law, and prohibited racial discrimination in voting rights. It would be a long fight and their disillusionment nationally, and in Wyoming, would worsen.

That fall, a black man from the African American farming community called Empire in eastern

Wyoming was lynched in Torrington. Baseman Taylor had become paranoid and threatening to family and neighbors who asked the court to declare him incompetent and send him for treatment to the state "Hospital for the Insane." Though Baseman offered no resistance, the Goshen County Sheriff used excessive force to take him into custody and apparently caused a head injury. Within hours Baseman began suffering seizures. According to a wrongful death suit filed by Taylor's brother and white witnesses, the sheriff, his deputies, and another prisoner subsequently "did beat, burn, choke, pinch, abuse and otherwise misuse" Taylor. Because the new county had no jail, prisoners were kept in the Torrington Hotel. Unlike the criminally-charged white prisoners, this black man, who was not charged with breaking any laws, was chained hand and foot. Baseman's torment was a public spectacle in those days before radio or television. People staying at the hotel described watching his attackers choke him in the lobby because he refused to be silent. Later they went upstairs to look through the open doorway of the room in which the helpless Baseman was shackled hand and foot in a bed during continued abuse. Apparent damage to his trachea from repeated chokings seems to have interfered with his breathing. On November 6, after three days of torture, Baseman died, leaving his nine-year-old daughter an orphan. This was a lynching, which is an illegal killing by a group acting under the pretext of serving justice. Baseman's infraction, according to the sheriff, was that he was "a crazy nigger." The local newspaper whitewashed the incident and reported that his death resulted from preexisting medical or neurological conditions. The authorities did not prosecute the sheriff and Taylor's brother dropped his suit when his attorneys informed him that "recovery ... was apt to be small and of little value." A black man's life was not worth much in the Equality State.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Untitled editorials, *Wyoming State Journal*, October 11 and 18, 1912.

<sup>36</sup> Schubert, "The Black Army Regiments," p. 49.

<sup>37</sup> Mary Beth Norton, et al., *A People and A Nation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1982), p. 591.

<sup>38</sup> The bitter family returned Baseman Taylor's body to Westerville, Nebraska, for burial beside his wife who died there in 1907. "To the Insane Asylum," and "Death of Baseman Taylor," *Torrington Telegram*, Nov. 6, 1913; Goshen County District Court, Baseman Taylor probates 1-10 and 1-11; Goshen County District Court Civil Case 25, "The State of Wyoming for the use and benefit of Russel Taylor, Administrator of the Estate of Baseman Taylor, Deceased vs. Michael A. Hayes and the United States Fidelity and Guaranty Company, Defendants" on file, Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne.



Baseman Taylor's brother, Reverend Russel Taylor, shown with college classmates, was an early Wyoming Civil Rights activist. Courtesy the author.

Many black residents of Empire had come to Wyoming expecting a better life for their children than they had experienced during several decades of successful homesteading in Nebraska. The 1913 anti-miscegenation law told them to lower their expectations. The God-fearing, church-building, educated Empire builders were stunned by Baseman Taylor's lynching. Like other blacks, they lost their optimism about life in the Equality State and their trust in the Wyoming legal system. During the mid 1910s, family by family, they began returning to Nebraska. By the early 1920s, hurried on by economic factors, nearly all had abandoned the Equality State and Empire crumbled into dust.<sup>39</sup>

But Wyoming mobs were not done with their work because other blacks remained in the state and Wyoming whites, like their counterparts who were

lynching hundreds of African Americans all across the nation, remained fearful. During and after World War I, many white Americans became concerned about the perceived flood of immigrants who seemed slow to assimilate into mainstream culture. Southern European Catholics with their "African antecedents rendering them incapable of any sort of progress," the "Yellow Peril," Hispanics, Jews, and southern blacks were believed to be threatening the whole fabric of American society. In 1915, whites in Wyoming numbered 138,331. The hordes of minorities that whites feared were sweeping over the Equality State included a combined total of only about two thousand blacks, Hispanics, Chinese, and Japanese, little more than one percent of the population.<sup>40</sup>

During the late 1910s, as World War One was raging in Europe, Wyoming's wartime economy was booming. There was no shortage of jobs in industry or agriculture and blacks were too few to be serious competition for white workers. American soldiers, including African Americans, among them blacks from Empire and elsewhere in Wyoming, were fighting for democracy abroad even while it was often denied to them at home. Rock Springs, a tough, blue-collar coal mining and railroad town, had a large, foreign-born population including many Hispanics and southern Europeans. These groups, sometimes overzealous in attempts to prove their whiteness and resentful of having to compete against blacks for jobs, were occasionally African Americans' worst enemies.<sup>41</sup> Whites in Rock Springs had already given the community a breath-taking record for racially defined mob violence that made the lynching of a single man pale by comparison. In an 1885 rampage they killed twenty-eight Chinese, wounded at least fifteen others, and drove hundreds more out of town, of whom between twenty-five and fifty probably died from exposure in an event known

<sup>39</sup> Todd Guenther, "The Empire Builders: An African American Odyssey in Nebraska and Wyoming," *Nebraska History Magazine* 89(4 Winter): 176-200, examines the history of the Empire community from its origins in antebellum North Carolina to its dissolution in the 1920s.

<sup>40</sup> Lawrence A. Cardoso, "Nativism in Wyoming, 1868-1930: Changing Perceptions of Foreign Immigrants," *Annals of Wyoming* 58 (Spring 1986): 21, 22, 26; Wallace Stegner, "Who are the Westerners?" *American Heritage Magazine* (December 1987): 35-41; non-white population figures exclude Shoshone and Arapaho Indians who were safely sequestered on the Wind River Reservation.

<sup>41</sup> Whites did not have a monopoly on prejudice and hostility is common among ethnic groups anywhere in the world. For example, in Wyoming minority communities, the few Sheridan blacks and Mexicans who fraternized together were ostracized by their peers for consorting with "them," interview with Marie Lewis by Todd Guenther, Sheridan, Wyoming, March 6, 1988. Jim Edwards, the wealthy black stockman near Lost Springs, Wyoming, "did not like Mexicans," personal communication, Catherine Nuttall, 1987.

**Biting Cold Experienced in Montana and Other States Today.**

Wilmington, Del., Dec. 12.—This city was subjected to a terrific bombardment today, as the result of a fire in the shell loading plant of the Bethlehem Steel company. The blaze started in the building in which were stored shells loaded with trinitrotolou. The contents flew in every direction. One guard was killed.

**SOME COLD WEATHER.**

Eleven Inches of Snow and Thirty-three Degrees Below, Helena, Mont., Dec. 12.—Along with the eleven inches of snow that fell last night, thirty-three degrees below zero was recorded. Snow and below-zero weather is general over the states east of the Rockies.

**SHOCKS FELT.**

Distinct Vibrations of Earth At Idaho Falls This Morning. Idaho Falls, Idaho, Dec. 12.—Distinct vibrations of the earth were felt here at 4 this morning. No damage was done.

**CAVALRY DIVISION.**

First in American Army Since the Civil War Days. Washington, D. C., Dec. 12.—A division of regular cavalry, the first the American army has had since Civil War days, is being formed at El Paso, Texas. Officials said the step was in preparation for eventualities abroad and had no significance so far as the Mexican border patrol was concerned.

**NEGRO HANGED BY MOB TODAY**

**MAN CHARGED WITH MOLESTING WHITE WOMEN AT BLAIR-TOWN STRUNG UP TO RAILROAD BRIDGE.**

Twenty-five Citizens of Town In Crowd That Overpower Jailer and Take Unidentified Negro Out, Going to Stream North of Rock Springs and Hanging Him—Body Was Found This Afternoon.

Rock Springs, Dec. 12.—An unidentified negro, charged with molesting white women residents of Blairtown, a suburb, was taken from the city jail early today and hanged to a railroad bridge north of Rock Springs. His body was found this afternoon. Twenty-five citizens were in the crowd that overpowered the jailer at the city prison to secure the negro.

The premier said that Allenby's proclamation insured the maintenance of protection of all sacred buildings and holy places. General Allenby was well received by the population.

University of Wyoming, with Mrs. M. David of Douglas, the presiding, before its adjournment day afternoon, unanimously the following resolution, following announcement of the resignation of Henry G. Knight as dean of agriculture and director of the experiment station of the University of Wyoming: "Resolved, That the resignation of Dr. Henry Granger Knight as the college of agriculture and of the experiment station has been accepted with regret by the board of trustees of the University of Wyoming. The board feels that the resignation of Dr. Knight entails a distinct loss to the University of Wyoming during his long service, both as professor of agriculture and in his connection with the college of agriculture. His work has been regarded by the board with satisfaction. He has been most helpful to the college and to the state. The board wishes Dr. Knight the best measure of success in his new field."

Will Confer With Hospital Trustees. The trustees appointed a committee consisting of Dr. Arvid Nelson, president of the university, Prof. Prof. Loy and Prof. Whitcomb, to confer with a committee, consisting of A. B. Hamilton and Miss Dunn, of the Ivinson Memorial hospital, concerning the establishment of a training corps in the university. The president of the university was authorized to establish a class in radio buzzer training for operators. Resolutions were also adopted by the board of trustees, including Judge Timothy F. Burke, a member of the board who was compelled to relinquish his duties both as president of the board and chairman of the board.

Newspaper article about the lynching of Wade Hamilton in the December 12, 1917, issue of the *Laramie Republican*.

as "the Chinese Massacre."<sup>42</sup>

In 1917, few were surprised when a black man accused of heinous crime was dragged from the Rock Springs jail and lynched. The town marshal proclaimed this "a bad nigger"<sup>43</sup> and the white community generally agreed that drastic action was warranted. They also knew that punishment of the lynchers was unlikely. A Rock Springs newspaper headlined,

**Colored Man Is Lynched for Attempts to Assault Women. Fiend Attempts to Assault Three Women**

**Who Escape With Many Bruises**

Rock Springs had its first lynching on Tuesday night, when Wade Hamilton, colored, was taken from the jail and hung on the bridge at the end of Elk Street and then shot . . . On Tuesday between one and two o'clock the man went to Blairtown [neighborhood] and attempted to criminally assault three white women, who were in their homes alone . . . He was arrested and in the preliminary trial the same evening, was found guilty of attempted assault and was bound over to the District Court under \$15,000 bonds . . . About 12:20 the same evening the office was broken

<sup>42</sup> Larson, *History of Wyoming*, pp. 141-44; Schubert, "The Black Army Regiments," pp. 54-55; Paul Crane and Alfred Larson, "The Chinese Massacre," *Annals of Wyoming* 12 (January 1940): 47-55; Paul Crane and Alfred Larson, "The Chinese Massacre, Part II," *Annals of Wyoming* 12 (April 1940): 153-61; Murray L. Carroll, "Governor Francis E. Warren, The United States Army and the Chinese Massacre at Rock Springs," *Annals of Wyoming* 59 (Fall 1987): 16-27.

<sup>43</sup> Testimony of W.C. Lewis, Rock Springs Town Marshall, in "The State of Wyoming, County of Sweetwater, In the matter of the death of Wade Hamilton (Colored)," on file, Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne.

into and the keys secured by the men . . . who took Hamilton out of the jail and to the bridge where he was hung . . . it is supposed the rope broke and that he attempted to run away when he was shot. The body was not [discovered] until about noon . . . on the creek bank.<sup>44</sup>

Five days after the lynching, blacks in Rock Springs abandoned their hopes that local officials would seek or bring Hamilton's killers to justice. They accused the mayor of saying that Hamilton committed the crime and the mob's punishment was justified. An African American minister in Cheyenne did not question Hamilton's guilt and called him a "degraded Negro—he must have been a bad sort." But he did protest the "race hate" that led to the lynching and argued that a United States fighting for democracy overseas must ensure justice at home.<sup>45</sup>

Following the lead of blacks in Cheyenne who called for an investigation, the black community in Rock Springs demanded a state probe of the incident and sent the following resolution to Acting Governor Frank Houx. The carefully chosen words were measured, but not subservient. They appear to be the work of a local African American preacher, the Reverend T.B.J. Barclay. The author did not defend Hamilton, but rather requested justice under the law.

Whereas, On the 11th day of this month there was committed in this community a heinous crime, which would shock the most hardened criminal [and]

Whereas, We believe that the most severe punishment that could be meted out by the law for such crimes, should have been administered [to him and]

Whereas, We believe and know that whatever the crime may be that the law and law only should determine the manner of punishment . . . and that mob rule should not be tolerated in any community; knowing as we do, that they who participate in or

contribute in any way to an execution by mob rule, take their place in the criminal line along beside their victim or intended victim, and should be punished with the same severe punishment that justice would have brought to the perpetrator of the crime; therefore,

Be it Resolved, That, we, the negro citizens of Rock Springs, Wyo., in mass meeting assembled, this the 17th day of December, 1917, do bitterly condemn the crime committed last Tuesday by Wade Hampton [sic], a member of our race, for which his life paid the penalty by mob rule, and that we condemn the mob and mob spirit equally and in the same manner; and be it further

Resolved, That since the mayor has already expressed his opinion that the crime was enough to justify the penalty, we call upon the governor of the state of Wyoming to cause a speedy and thorough investigation into the murder of Wade Hampton [sic] last Tuesday night by a mob, to the end that justice may be meted out to the parties responsible for the crime. And if it is made to appear, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the officers were lax in their duties that they be dealt with accordingly.<sup>46</sup>

Houx responded to their plea by writing to Sweetwater County Attorney Fred W. Johnson, "it is your duty as County Attorney to authorize the offering of a reward for the apprehension and conviction of those participating in this crime."<sup>47</sup> Two weeks after the lynching Johnson had accomplished nothing, perhaps either because he agreed with public sentiment, or feared to stand against public sentiment. Houx wrote again, on Christmas Eve, urging Johnson to offer a \$500 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the lynchers.

A *Cheyenne State Leader* editorial deplored the lynching and recognized that it was catalyzed by race not a thirst for justice. The editor believed that such confrontations were inevitable wherever

<sup>44</sup> "Negro Taken From City Jail and Lynched on Tuesday Night," *Rock Springs Miner*, December 14, 1917; "Colored Man is Lynched for Attempts to Assault Women," *Rock Springs Rocket*, December 14, 1917; "Negro Lynched at Rock Springs Tuesday Night," *Green River Star*, December 14, 1917.

<sup>45</sup> *Wyoming Tribune*, December 13, 1917.

<sup>46</sup> "Negroes Demand Lynching Probe," *Cheyenne State Leader*, n.d., clipping on file, "Lynchings" folder, Sweetwater County Historical Museum, Green River.

<sup>47</sup> Xerographic copies of Houx' letters on file, "Lynchings" folder, Sweetwater County Historical Museum, Green River.



whites and blacks coexist and pronounced the "negro degenerate" guilty without a trial. Like other contemporary Caucasian analyses, it ignored the fact that most blacks were upright, law-abiding citizens and blamed such incidents on African Americans' supposed bestiality and lack of sobriety which invited white vengeance, rather than on the brutishness of the mob. The underlying theory remained that if blacks would behave, they would not provoke whites and create problems for themselves. The column was nevertheless open-minded for the time in which it was written, calling for an end to Jim Crow racism, demonstrating awareness that lynch-law could no longer be equated solely with the deep South for the North and West were also guilty. It also illustrated change in the way Wyomingites perceived the state's nickname. Clearly, not everyone was equal in the Equality State. To help illustrate people's complex thought processes at the time of this wave of Wyoming lynchings, this powerful editorial appears in its entirety.

#### A Blot on the State.

Race prejudice should have no place in a democracy. It ill becomes us to preach about the equality of man when we cannot accord our negro citizens the same rights of justice and legal punishment that we give to our white members who offend against the laws of the state.

The lynching of the negro at Rock Springs is a blot on the fair escutcheon of Wyoming. Its perpetrators should be made to feel the weight of the law's hand—the hand which they undertook to supersede in meting out punitive measures on the head of the negro degenerate.

In communities in the South, where the negroes are thick and sometimes become bestial from too much cheap rum or gin, the temper of the white men breaks the bounds of propriety and wreaks a summary vengeance on the unfortunate and brutal black who had committed the unmentionable crime. Instances

of that kind have been of sufficient frequency in certain of the southern states to provoke the north and the west into assuming the holier-than-thou attitude toward their more fiery-tempered brothers of the southland and holding up that section to scorn and contumely at every fresh display of mob law. But the East St. Louis race riots<sup>48</sup> and now this Wyoming lynching will cause the middle west and the west to plead guilty to the same reversion to type that characterizes the southern mob bent on "gettin' a nigger." After all, human nature strikes a pretty general average, by and large. The south perhaps has had occasion to hang its head in shame more often than the rest of the country simply because the greater negro population provides a more frequent opportunity for clashes between the two races.

If conditions were reversed and the negroes were more populous in the north than in the south, we gainsay that lynchings would be more frequent in the north than in the south purely and solely because of the insensate prejudice that abides in the breasts of a certain proportion of all men, north and south, east and west.

The Rock Springs affair can only be deplored to the deepest by every citizen of Wyoming who has at heart the maintenance of the state's reputation for fairness and democracy and enlightened Christianity.<sup>49</sup>

The lynching was never prosecuted. The coroner's inquest cursorily investigating "the matter of the death of WADE HAMILTON (Colored)—who was found dead after being removed from City Jail by mob, at Rock Springs, Wyoming," discussed the allegations against and the circumstances of the arrest of the "bad nigger," but virtually ignored his murder by the white mob. No evidence has been located to indicate further investigation and district court criminal case files do not show that anyone was charged with the murder of Wade Hamilton. Once again, society had served justice on an accused black man without proving that he was indeed guilty.

<sup>48</sup> In early July 1917 racial tension in East St. Louis, Illinois, erupted into terrific rioting which left dozens of African Americans dead. Afterwards, massive protests across the country asking, "Mr. President, why not make America safe for democracy?" demanded that President Woodrow Wilson speak out against lynching, which he refused to do. Hogan, *Civil Rights Chronicle*, p.52.

<sup>49</sup> "A Blot on the State," *Cheyenne State Leader*, December 14, 1917, clipping on file, "Lynchings" folder, Sweetwater County Historical Museum, Green River.

The next lynching of an African American in Wyoming occurred almost exactly a year later in nearby Green River. It began during breakfast in the crowded Union Pacific Rail Road depot on December 10, 1918. Like the majority of Wyoming laborers during boom after boom, both white Edward Miller and black Joel Woodson came to the Equality State to work hard for good wages and probably intended eventually to return to their homes and families. They were but two of thousands of men in Wyoming's transient, male-dominated boomtowns. Woodson's wife and family lived in Omaha, from whence he had come only three months earlier. Miller had likewise arrived only a few months before and planned to get married back at his family home in Missouri just a month later in January.<sup>50</sup>

According to newspaper accounts, Woodson, a janitor in the U.P.R.R. depot, claimed the white waitress did not serve what he ordered. She either said they were out of that dish or that she brought what she thought he had requested. Then, as improbable as it sounds in the era of Jim Crow, he reputedly and publicly, in a room full of white men, called her, a white woman, "a damned liar." Whatever really happened, Edward Miller, a white railroad switchman dining nearby, ejected Woodson and "told him he had better get out and save further trouble."<sup>51</sup> This probably seemed like a necessary but comparatively insignificant act of public service to Miller who came from a part of southwestern Missouri that in 1901 used lynching and a barrage of gunfire from hundreds of whites armed with stolen National Guard weaponry to eject every single black resident from one town and over the next few years permanently banish all resident African Americans to establish a virtually all-white community across several adjacent counties. Throwing a black man out of a restaurant was a trivial event by comparison.<sup>52</sup>

After a lifetime of degradation, Woodson

snapped and chose to exact a terrible vengeance, quickly returning to the diner with a pistol. As Miller tried to flee, Woodson told him, "You will never lay a hand on me again," and started shooting. He shot the switchman through the heart and wounded another man. Woodson was quickly captured and taken to the county jail. Violence was common in the railroad, mining, and oil field communities and the authorities dealt with shootings and stabbings promptly, professionally, and often. When they were done, judges, juries, and courts took over and the legal system did its job. Had the issue of race not been a factor, Miller's death might have been just another boomtown murder. Instead, it became an event of significance.

Officers immediately recognized the volatility of the situation and tried to prepare for what they knew was coming. The following account by one of the guards conveys the desperate sense of urgency the jail employees felt, and Woodson's fatalism following his last act of defiance against white society.

I was down in a corral putting a tongue in a wagon and I saw Mr. Munn come running up the street and McCourt and Gail, so I hurried up and asked Munn what was the matter and he said a nigger shot a fellow down there, so when I got up here Gail and McCourt had him in the hall . . . There was quite a bunch coming up the street then.

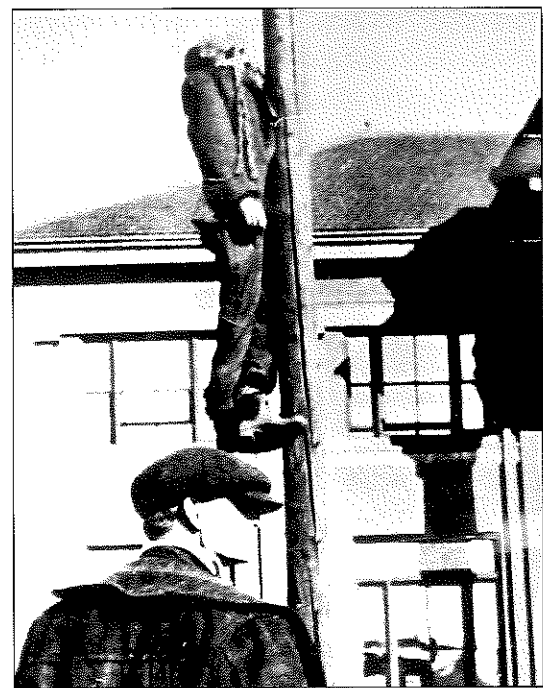
Someone got a key and locked the front door, they were yelling out there . . . Mr. Dixon come in and said . . . We had better get busy, they might mob this fellow, I think we ought to dispose of him some place. So we did--Mr. Kidd and I took him in the basement and put him in the coal bin . . . There was a mob formed already from here and they disappeared and it looked like they were going back to get more help . . .

I tried to put them off and we told them we

<sup>50</sup> "Race War Reports," *Wyoming State Tribune*, Dec. 11, 1918.

<sup>51</sup> "Switchman Shot, Another Wounded, Negro Lynched," *Green River Star*, December 18, 1918; see also, "Rawlins Woman Says Holes in Painting Made by [Woodson's] Shots," *Green River Star*, July 23, 1970.

<sup>52</sup> Miller was from South Greenfield, Missouri, about thirty miles north of Pierce City, where white residents during a one day reign of terror drove the entire local black community permanently out of the town. Several counties in that area have a 97% to 99% white population even to this day. Murray Bishoff, managing editor, *Moner* [Missouri] *Times*, "The Lynching That Changed Southwest Missouri," three part article published April 14, 15, and 16, 1991. See also Marco Williams, *Banished: the Film* (Berkeley, California: Center for Investigative Reporting / New York: Two Tone Productions, 2007).



A Green River mob lynched Edward Woodson, a janitor for Union Pacific Railroad Depot, after he shot and killed Edward Miller. Courtesy Sweetwater County Historical Museum, Green River, Wyoming.

would let four of them go thru the jail to satisfy them that he wasn't there. They said yes, but when we opened the door they pushed right in on us, as the whole mob was in the hall . . . Four or five hundred [men, I did not recognize any of them] . . . One of the prisoners made the remark [to the mob] that we had taken him out back . . . We [had in reality] put him in the basement and I got him down in the coal bin and told him to stay there, because if those fellows got him they might hang him. He said: "It is just as well now as any time." They would not have found him if he had stayed where I told him to, but there is a light hanging right down over the boiler and he came out and stood right under this light and someone must have looked thru the window, and they went down and got him and I never saw him after that until he was hanging on the pole.<sup>53</sup>

The mob beat Woodson, tied a rope around his neck, and then twenty or twenty-five men dragged him prostrate through the streets. As they crossed

<sup>53</sup> Deputy Sheriff Frank Kidd, "The State of Wyoming, County of Sweetwater, In the matter of the death of Edward Woodson (Colored)," on file, Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne.

<sup>54</sup> "Race War Reports From Green River Unfounded Says Mayor," *Wyoming State Tribune*, Dec. 11, 1918.

the railroad tracks his head struck a rail so violently that he was knocked unconscious. When the mob reached the depot the rope was thrown over the arm of a telegraph pole and he was hoisted up to strangle to death.<sup>54</sup> A local newspaper, the *Green River Star*, provided another account of the sensational incident,

#### Switchman Shot, Another Wounded, Negro Lynched

As soon as it was learned that Miller had died a large crowd gathered and marched to the jail demanding the negro. Attorney T.S. Taliaferro who was at the courthouse attempted to pacify the crowd by addressing them, but the infuriated crowd was beyond reasoning, and the negro being discovered in the coal hole of the heating plant of the jail, where he had been hidden by the officers, he was seized and dragged [sic] to the depot and hanged to a light pole in front of the depot, where it [the body] hung until the arrival of the coroner from Rock Springs.

Ten minutes after the hanging the town was quiet and no further demonstration was made.

Edward Miller, the switchman shot, was very popular among the employees and citizens of the town, he having been a resident of Green River for some months, and during such time had gathered about him many staunch friends. His home was in South Greenfield, Mo., where . . . the remains [were] shipped on [train] No. 22 last evening . . .

Switchman Curtis is reported getting along nicely [sic], and that his arm and hand will be saved.

The popularity of the two switchmen, brought about the high trend of excitement that existed, and the cold blooded manner in which the deed was done, made it utterly impossible to save the negro murderer from the infuriated mass of humanity that surrounded the jail. The officials seeing that they had no time to get the negro away, hid him as stated above, but when found by the crowd no power could have saved him from these determined avengers of the death of their

friend.

County Attorney Fred W. Johnson stated to the writer that he will call the grand jury to investigate as to who had a hand in the lynching, and will probe the matter to the fullest extent.<sup>55</sup>

Other men were murdered in and around Green River in those years and their killers received fair trials. Law and order as enforced by vigilante justice was not the objective of this racially preoccupied mob. Woodson was lynched because he was black, not because he was a criminal. The sympathetic reporter found it understandable that the mob would commit murder and claimed the townsfolk had somehow become deeply attached to Miller during the few short months he lived in Green River. It is unlikely, however, that Miller could have become so popular after such a brief residence in the town full of transient laborers. Few save the courageous Attorney Taliaferro seemed concerned that the Constitution was trampled and due process was violated.

The resolution of this case mirrors the others. Fred Johnson, who had been Sweetwater County Attorney when Wade Hamilton was lynched the year before, was still in office and directed another cursory investigation. Not one of the several hundred people who participated in the killing was charged with a crime.<sup>56</sup>

Some whites in Green River were not satisfied with lynching Woodson: they initiated a round of ethnic cleansing just a month after the nation finished fighting the First World War to make the world safe for democracy. Like their Sweetwater County predecessors, who drove the surviving Chinese fleeing for their lives from Rock Springs in 1885,

<sup>55</sup> "Switchman Shot. Another Wounded-Negro Lynched," *Green River Star*, December 18, 1918.

<sup>56</sup> Personal communication, Carl Hallberg, Senior Historian, Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne, February 1994; Personal communication, Michael Fox, Sweetwater County Historical Museum, Green River, Wyoming, February 1994.

<sup>57</sup> Crane and Larson, "The Chinese Massacre," and "The Chinese Massacre, Part II"; Carroll, "Governor Francis E. Warren, The United States Army and the Chinese Massacre at Rock Springs."

<sup>58</sup> See, e.g., "Negro Lynched By Mob of 500 At Green River," *Rocky Mountain News*, December 11, 1918; "Green River Mayor's Denial: Declares Negroes Had Never Been Ordered From Town"; unidentified December 12 or 13, 1918, Salt Lake City area newspaper clipping in Michael J. Pfeiffer personal collection; "Lynch Negro At Green River," *The [Evanston] Wyoming Times*, Dec. 12, 1918.

<sup>59</sup> "Rumor Race Riots in Negro Lynching Case is Discredited," *Casper Daily Tribune*, December 11, 1918.

<sup>60</sup> "Negroes Flee Green River," *Casper Daily Tribune*, December 12, 1918.

<sup>61</sup> "Green River Mayor's Denial," unidentified Salt Lake City area clipping in Michael J. Pfeiffer collection; see also, from the same Associated Press report, "Negroes Flee Green River," *Casper Daily Tribune*, December 12, 1918.

<sup>62</sup> "Rumors of Clash Between Whites and Blacks at Green River Unfounded," *Cheyenne State Leader*, December 14, 1918.

Green River whites forced local African Americans to abandon their homes and possessions and flee for their lives to Utah.<sup>57</sup>

Cryptic front page newspaper headlines and brief stories from Wyoming, Colorado, and Utah reveal what happened.<sup>58</sup> Rumors of race riots were rampant. The day after the lynching the press reported that "Tension is noticeable here . . . Reports that a trainload of negroes is coming here followed by another train of whites, has increased apprehension," "Arrests are pending."<sup>59</sup> That evening whites, fearful of black retribution and with or without official backing, told the handful of resident African Americans to leave town by 9:00 p.m. The black community, aware of the murder and mayhem that had occurred over and over in southern towns, panicked and fled without their belongings. The *Casper Daily Tribune* headlined, "Negroes Flee Green River."<sup>60</sup> On December 12, two days after the lynching, the Associated Press reported that "Negro refugees" arriving in Ogden, Utah, "declared that all colored men, women and children had been ordered to leave . . . following the lynching." The Green River mayor denied the report stating that "at no time has there been the slightest race feeling. The town is quiet and orderly [even though] all efforts to identify members of the mob that hanged a negro . . . have been fruitless."<sup>61</sup> By December 14, the *Cheyenne State Leader* could report of the newly white community of Green River that "Rumors of Clash Between Whites and Blacks At Green River Unfounded," and that the "Undersheriff of Sweetwater County says order has been restored . . . rumors which had become current regarding renewed outbreaks following the lynching . . . were without foundation."<sup>62</sup> That same day the NAACP weighed in with a letter to Governor

Houx demanding that "Wyoming take immediate steps to protect the lives and property of the colored citizens of Green River and to see that the lynchers of Edward [*sic*] Woodson are brought to justice."<sup>63</sup>

It is unclear how many people were forced to leave, or if those who fled abandoned their property permanently or were able to reoccupy, reclaim, or sell it. Within a few years blacks again lived in Green River, though it is unknown if they were the same people who had been driven out of town after the lynching. What is clear is that after the Chinese Massacre, black U.S. Army infantry soldiers had garrisoned the city to restore peace to the frontier. But no one protected Sweetwater County's black citizens in 1918. They could be murdered and driven from their homes without repercussion and Green River enjoyed a white Christmas.<sup>64</sup>

Woodson may have been buried without ceremony in an unmarked potters field grave in Green River, though no record can be found describing what became of his remains. Switchman Miller's family and fiancé mourned when his body arrived home for burial. But they probably appreciated the Green River whites' response to his murder, which validated their own values. Whites around South Greenfield, Missouri, believed that blacks and whites should not live near each other and had driven virtually all African Americans out of southwest Missouri just a few years before. As part of

that holocaust many blacks, like Joel Woodson, were lynched and, according to a local editor, their names "added to the list of good Negroes."<sup>65</sup> Whites in Wyoming were familiar with the frontier expression "the only good Indian is a dead Indian" and easily comprehended the newsman's meaning.

Probably during the first half of 1919 another Wyoming mob lynched yet another black man, this time with no fanfare, in the coal mining town of Hudson between Lander and Riverton. An African American man on a railroad repair crew had been relaxing in a Main Street saloon with white railroaders and miners when he decided to climb the well-used back stairs to the second story brothel next door. He did not make it. As in other western communities, black men could visit black prostitutes, but soiled white doves were off limits. The white crowd grabbed him and either threw him off the balcony to the ground or dragged him down and beat him to death behind the saloon. They hid the remains in a hastily dug grave just outside the Hudson Cemetery fence. It was later explained that, "They didn't want to be using the girls after a black man."<sup>66</sup> The town fathers subsequently asked railroad officials to withdraw all black workers from the Casper to Lander section of the line.

The Hudson killing was the last known lynching in the Equality State. Were the incidents recounted above the only lynchings of black men in twentieth

century Wyoming? Probably not. Not every lynching was a public spectacle. It is unlikely that the story of every covert example of mob violence has been discovered. Other secret lynchings, like that in Hudson, probably occurred and the events described here are merely the known incidents.

At the birth of Wyoming Territory in 1869, during the same election which created the first legislature, which in turn created the women's suffrage and racially discriminatory legislation discussed previously, U.S. Marshall Church Howe proved himself to be the first and perhaps the last zealous enforcer of the law for all citizens regardless of race. When a drunken, threatening, and potentially violent mob of South Pass City gold miners "tried to seize the polls and prevent Negroes from voting [Howe] marched a squad of 15 or 20 colored men up to the polls," "on election day ... gun in hand, [Howe] took Black men to the polls and made way for them by threatening to shoot any man who got in the way."<sup>67</sup> A similar riot over black men voting in Helena, Montana, a short time before left one black man dead. After Howe, Wyoming officials were less committed to protecting minorities from mobs or fulfilling their oaths to uphold the law. And so, white men in twentieth century Wyoming could join a lynch mob confident that their color would protect them from legal consequences and that the majority of their neighbors believed they were performing a service to society.

After the Green River lynching, Torrington lynch-victim Baseman Taylor's brother Russel, a Presbyterian preacher and public school teacher, who was often refused service in Wyoming restaurants and hotels while traveling for the church, wrote from Empire to a Cheyenne newspaper decrying the Jim Crow rules that governed Wyoming communities and businesses, and asking that whites live up to Wyoming's nickname of the "equal rights state."<sup>68</sup> That call was largely unheeded. Instead, in the wake of the lynchings during the second and third decades

of statehood, the expression "Equality State" came to have a more specific meaning in the popular mind. Once thought by some to signify that all men and women regardless of creed or color would be equal before the law, after the lynchings it came to signify solely that Wyoming women received the right to vote before women in other parts of the nation. No one believed any longer that equality extended to African Americans.

Affronted as only someone who has dedicated his life to the law could be, one Wyoming attorney and author commented that, "It seems never to have occurred to any of these people that the dignity and majesty of the law in Wyoming might have been offended" when mobs slaughtered citizen after citizen.<sup>69</sup> The shamed Wyoming legislature in 1919 adopted a Joint Resolution "Deprecating Mob and Lynch Law in the State of Wyoming" which began, "Whereas there has been in different localities in the State of Wyoming in recent years a tendency toward what is known as mob or lynch law. . . ."

No one has suggested that the crimes with which Martin, Wigfall, Hamilton, and Woodson were accused were anything but morally reprehensible, illegal, and deserving of trial and punishment. But were they guilty? And what of Baseman Taylor or the anonymous black railroad worker? What were their crimes? After 1903, in cases wherein white women were molested or men were murdered by Caucasians in the well established State of Wyoming, the accused were charged, tried, and, if found guilty, sentenced. The critical factor in the lynchings of black men was race--that a "bad nigger" had the audacity to threaten or assault Caucasians. In a society intent upon maintaining white supremacy such actions, even the mere suggestion of such actions, was not tolerable. Real guilt was of negligible importance behind sending an unequivocal message to the black community that they were unwelcome and had better behave if they wished to continue living here.

In Missouri, just a stone's throw from switchman

<sup>63</sup> Kaufman, "Discrimination," p. 23, note 56.

<sup>64</sup> *Wyoming Tribune*, December 10 and 11, 1918; *Green River Star*, December 10, 1918; Pfeifer, *Rough Justice*, pp. 88-91; The population of blacks in Sweetwater County increased from 101 in 1910 to 164 in 1920, but figures are not available for the town of Green River which might have lost population. It should be noted that any blacks in Green River in 1920 might have taken up residence after the 1918 lynching and ethnic cleansing.

<sup>65</sup> Tom Boothe, "A Good Nigger In Joplin," *Peirce [sic] City Empire*, ca. April 14-16, 1903, quoted in, "Pierce City, Missouri Area Lynchings," unpublished manuscript by Murray Bishoff, managing editor, *Monett [Missouri] Times*, n.d..

<sup>66</sup> Hudson historian and author, Donna Jean Boyle, guest lecture to "HIST2015-History of South Pass and the Wind River Basin" class, Central Wyoming College, April 5, 2007. Some locals have denied that this incident did, or could have, occurred in Hudson, but their not knowing about this covert killing does not mean it did not happen. No one is more knowledgeable about Hudson history than Mrs. Boyle as result of her extensive public and private archival research and her family / institutional memory. Mrs. Boyle is the granddaughter of one of Hudson's original saloon owners and is well versed in both the "legitimate" and "shady" aspects of Hudson history. Unlike much of what her grandfather taught her, no written records have been located to verify the killing, the town father's request that black workers be removed from the line, or whether railroad officials complied with the request. However, based on his reliability about other incidents and the fact that he "hated a liar," Mrs. Boyle has complete faith in his account of these events. Letter to author, February 18, 2008. For a history of the Hudson Bar and the adjacent rooming house/brothel, see Donna Jean Boyle, "A Brief History of Early Hudson," *Wind River Mountaineer* 18 (3 June 2006): 7, 8, 9, 11, 12. Retired University of Wyoming historian Jack Ravage has also heard of this killing, email to author, December 5, 2007. Although prostitutes were ordered out of town in January 1919 and Prohibition became effective the following July, prostitution and bootlegged liquor sales remained profitable industries in Hudson into the 1930s. The Hudson Bar may have remained in the liquor business, at least surreptitiously, as late as June 1921 when a court order may have finally forced its closure.

<sup>67</sup> Larson, *History of Wyoming*, p.72; *Cheyenne Leader*, September 3, 1869; Fleming, "Solving the Jigsaw Puzzle," p. 60.

<sup>68</sup> *Wyoming Tribune*, December 19, 1918. Based on his own experiences and those of his relatives, students, and congregation, Russel Taylor suggested that Joel Woodson was probably justified for not believing the white waitress who likely did not want to serve a black man.

<sup>69</sup> John W. Davis, *Goodbye, Judge Lynch: The End of a Lawless Era in Wyoming's Big Horn Basin* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), p. 109, was referring specifically to a 1903 lynching in the town of Basin but his words apply to Wyoming's entire lynching heritage.

Edward Miller's hometown, an extraordinary all-white jury found a black man not guilty of murder in 1901. The verdict was based not on lack of evidence, but on the evidence itself. Nevertheless, the infuriated local editor wrote, "It is just such verdicts as this which causes mob violence."<sup>70</sup> A black man's guilt or innocence was irrelevant. If an accusation was made, many whites wanted a dead nigger. Dominating the black community was more important than truth.

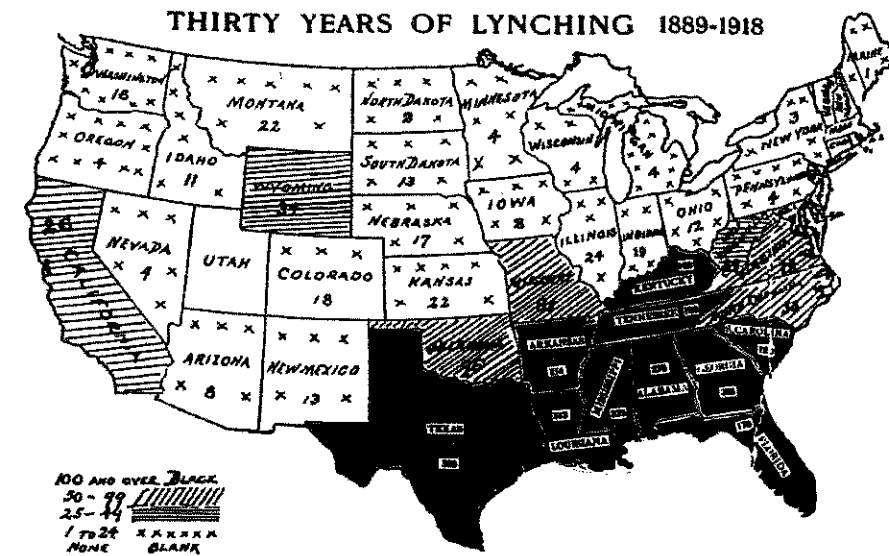
This was an era, as the editor of the *Cheyenne State Leader* described, when the lynching of black men for allegedly assaulting white women or for other infractions, real or imagined, was often applauded. The attitude expressed by the Rock Springs mayor—that the crime was committed and the punishment was deserved—was endemic nationwide. Few of the white majority anywhere burdened themselves with concerns about due process of law for blacks or guaranteed protection of rights until proven guilty. Yet lynching of African Americans nationwide, which peaked at more than 1,111 during the 1890s, decreased to 791 during the 1900s, and then declined further to 622 during the 1910s, the same decade in which lynching of black men peaked in Wyoming.<sup>71</sup>

Though not every black man accused of rape, murder, or assault on a white person was lynched,<sup>72</sup> African Americans in Wyoming could not assume the law or the Constitution would judge or protect them if they, or even their neighbors, were accused of a crime. Prudent black men paid heed to the warnings. Even wealthy Jim Edwards, "the greatest Negro cattle rancher in all the West,"<sup>73</sup> who ranched north of Lost Springs between Douglas and Lusk, understood Jim Crow's power in Wyoming. A few of his neighbors made no effort to veil their hostility

and stated openly of Wyoming that "this country is no place for a nigger."<sup>74</sup> Edwards knew that his life would likely be immediately forfeit even from an unsubstantiated accusation of impropriety and he therefore carefully, perhaps fearfully, avoided white women in order to preserve his own neck.

Was the handful of lynchings of black men in Wyoming significant? From African Americans' perspective, the answer is a resounding yes. The lynchings demonstrated irrefutably that blacks were not guaranteed the protections of the law, which the rest of us take for granted. Though there were very few incidents in Wyoming, they were sufficient to inspire deep-seated fear, as was intended. The situation might be compared to white settlers' fear of Indian attack. Only a tiny fraction of whites encountered let alone were attacked or killed by Native Americans on the Wyoming frontier, yet even into the 1900s the fear of Indians was pervasive except in urban areas. Only a few horrific events are necessary to scar the collective psyche of whole groups of people and affect their behavior toward other groups.

From the white perspective, some have claimed that black lynchings were too few to be important. Others contend that Wyoming was not perfect, but the treatment of blacks in the Equality State was comparable to other western states and better than in the South. The numbers do not support these contentions. According to the NAACP, 110 people were lynched in the Mountain West from 1889 to 1918, of whom 8% were Negroes. Of the people lynched in the Equality State during this period, 15% were black, which is disturbing since African Americans made up only about one percent of the Wyoming population.<sup>75</sup>



The NAACP compiled the numbers of lynchings in the country during a thirty-year period. Wyoming had 34 between 1889 and 1918. Courtesy the NAACP.

Comparisons of lynch rates are even more troubling. Federal and state agencies have long measured or compared crime statistics from place to place in incidents per 100,000 people. The average black population nationwide from 1910 to 1920 was 10,145,447, about ten percent of the total population. The national lynch rate from 1910 to 1920 was six per hundred thousand African Americans (622 divided by 10,145,447 = .00006).<sup>76</sup>

The average African American population in Wyoming from 1910 to 1920 was 1,355 (not including some nine-hundred Ninth Cavalrymen stationed temporarily at Ft. D.A. Russell near Cheyenne in 1910), slightly more than one percent of the total population. Five lynchings occurred in

Wyoming during that time: in Rawlins, Torrington, Rock Springs, Green River, and Hudson. The Wyoming lynch rate from 1910 to 1920 was 369 per hundred thousand African Americans (five divided by 1,355 = .00369). This is sixty-two times higher than the national lynch rate.

How does Wyoming compare with infamously racist states in the deep South during the same ten year period? Alabama's lynch rate was five per 100,000. Georgia's was twelve. Louisiana's was eight. The lynch rate in Mississippi was three.

Are the number of Wyoming lynchings and the populations of whites and blacks in Wyoming too small to be statistically valid samples—in other words, is the extraordinary Wyoming lynch rate misleading?

<http://www.ftrials.shipp.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/shipp/lynchingyear.html> accessed Jan 30, 2008 ) indicate 622 black lynchings occurred during this period. During this same decade, sixty-one whites were lynched in the U.S.

National African American lynching totals year by year: 1910-1920.

Year	Number victims.
1910	67
1911	60
1912	62
1913	51
1914	51
1915	56
1916	50
1917	36
1918	60
1919	76
1920	53
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>622</b>

<sup>77</sup> See, e.g., Martin Reed, "Death Rates: [Fremont] County's Figures Outpace Nation's," *Lander Journal*, January 30, 2008.

<sup>70</sup> A.T. Boothe, *Peirce [sic] City Empire*, in Murray Bishoff, managing editor, *Monet [Missouri] Times*, "The Lynching That Changed Southwest Missouri," three part article published April 14, 15, and 16, 1991.

<sup>71</sup> Lynching statistics provided by the Archives at Tuskegee Institute, accessed January 30, 2008 at <http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Base/8507/NLPlaces2.htm>.

<sup>72</sup> Larson, *History of Wyoming*, p. 72; *Cheyenne Leader*, September 3, 1869; Fleming, "Solving the Jigsaw Puzzle," p. 60; "Negroes Murder Casper Men," "Negro Women at Casper Face Trial for Murder," *Cheyenne Wyoming Tribune*, December 19 and 26, 1916, and January 1, 1917. Many black women were lynched in other parts of the country, there is no reason to expect that it would not have occurred in Wyoming where a white woman named Ellen Watson was lynched in 1889; see also Elnora L. Frye, *Atlas of Wyoming Outlaws at the Territorial Penitentiary* (Laramie, Wyoming: Jelm Mountain Publications, 1990), pp. 27, 43, 95, 186. It is not clear whether these black men committed crimes in which blacks or whites were the victims.

<sup>73</sup> "The Last Days of Jim Edwards," *Ebony Magazine*, March 1949, p. 39; Guenther, "Y'all Call Me Nigger Jim, Now," pp. 23, 33,35.

<sup>74</sup> Letter to author from Catherine and Bill Nuttall, November 16, 1987; Guenther, "Y'all Call Me Nigger Jim Now," p.22, 39, note 16.

<sup>75</sup> See, e.g., T.A. Larson, *Wyoming: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), p. 105; Kaufman, "Discrimination," p. 23.

<sup>76</sup> See note 3 above; Tuskegee Institute Archives as reproduced at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Law School website (<http://www.law.umkc.edu>).

Perhaps. But why then do federal, state, and local agencies continue to measure crime and other demographic trends this way? Even today, because our numbers continue to be so tiny, authorities use multipliers to compare Wyoming crime and other social issues to other parts of the nation. No good argument can be made for excusing lynching from this system.<sup>77</sup>

For the sake of debate, however, an alternative is to compare the actual number of Wyoming lynchings to those of other states. Southern states, after all, had so very many (see Table 1). But that immediately begs the question, are just a few lynchings excusable? Should we get away with murder because we lynched only five black men during that decade while more

populous southern states lynched tens or hundreds? How does the number of Wyoming lynchings compare to the number in bordering western states? Several neighboring states had larger numbers of blacks and whites than least-populated Wyoming so they would be expected to have had more lynchings. Wyoming with its tiny population and unmistakable pattern of repeated lynchings seems all the more extraordinary in comparison with neighboring states where lynchings of whites and blacks were fewer both in number and frequency. Most regional western lynch rates of black men from 1910 to 1920 in fact were nil: Nebraska lynched only one African American, South Dakota: zero, Montana: zero, Idaho: zero, Utah: zero, and Colorado: zero.

**Table 1. African American lynching statistics for select Southern and Western States from 1910 through 1920, the period of greatest lynching activity in Wyoming.<sup>78</sup>**

Location	Number of lynchings 1910-1920	Average black pop. 1910-1920	% black of total 1920 state pop.	Lynch rate (# / average black pop.)	Wyoming lynch rate how many times higher?
Wyoming	5	1,355	0.7%	.00369	
U.S. Total	622	10,145,447	9.9%	.00006	62
Alabama	45	904,467	38%	.00005	74
Georgia	144	1,191,676	42%	.00012	31
Louisiana	54	707,066	39%	.00008	46
Mississippi	56	1,944,671	52%	.00003	123
Colorado	0	11,386	1.2%	0	369
Idaho	0	786	0.2%	0	369
Montana	0	1,746	0.3%	0	369
Nebraska	1	10,466	1.0%	.000095	39
South Dakota	0	825	0.1%	0	369
Utah	0	1,295	0.3%	0	369

<sup>78</sup> Lynching statistics provided by the Archives at Tuskegee Institute, accessed January 30, 2008 at <http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Base/8507/NLPlaces2.htm>; population data obtained from Fourteenth U.S. Census of Population and Housing (1920), accessed January 30, 2008 at <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1920.htm>. Throughout the territorial and early statehood periods, Colorado lynched a total of 68 people of whom three were black; Nebraska lynched a total of 57 of whom five were black; only one black man was among the 27 people lynched in South Dakota; two out of 84 in Montana; no blacks were lynched in Idaho; and two of the eight people lynched in Utah were African Americans. Larry R. Gerlach, in "Ogden's 'Horrible Tragedy': The Lynching of George Segal," and "Justice Denied: The Lynching of Robert Marshall," in Stanford J. Layton, ed., *Utah's Lawless Fringe* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), pp.117 and 133, says that there are many errors in the accounts of Utah's lynchings, and states that at least twelve lynchings occurred in Utah of which three were black, including an unnamed "damned nigger" in Uintah in 1869 and Robert Marshall in 1925.

<sup>79</sup> For discussions of these issues see, Pfeifer, *Rough Justice*; Clare V. McKanna, Jr., *Homicide, Race and Justice in the American West, 1880-1920*

Wyoming was bloodthirsty in comparison both to its western neighbors and to the seemingly lynch-prone states of the deep South. The rest of the West was comparatively tolerant. Even the South was comparatively tolerant. The population of blacks in Georgia was 879 times higher than the population of blacks in Wyoming, and they made up nearly half the entire state population, yet the Wyoming lynch rate was thirty-one times higher than the Georgia rate. The Wyoming lynch rate is even more horrific when compared to other Southern states, as shown in Table 1. Contrary to the newsman's prediction, the number of resident blacks did not determine the lynch rate. White attitudes were the determining factor. Wyoming was anomalous. And Wyoming was guilty.

Why did the Equality State carry the national trend of nativism to such a deadly extreme during the 1910s, a time of booming economic growth and opportunity when a few blacks seeking some of the many jobs should not have been a threat? The varied Wyoming economy, based on agriculture, transportation, and energy production was stronger than some neighbors' and offered more opportunities for employment. Job competition does not provide an explanation. Origins of the white population in Wyoming did not differ significantly from surrounding states and do not provide an explanation. Was the lynching phenomenon somehow psychologically related to the always-high Wyoming suicide rate which in modern times is twice the national average? Is violence against ourselves and others acceptable in Wyoming?

Most westerners perceive a difference between the famous episodes of vigilantism in the Montana gold-fields and Wyoming frontier communities during the mid to late 1800s, and the later lynchings of blacks across the nation. The former has been justified as a way to bring order to a lawless frontier. Yet the fundamental purposes were much the same: to kill, reform, or drive out the "bad element" whether that

classification was determined by alleged participation in crime or skin color.<sup>79</sup>

Blacks in the Equality State were so few in number that they could be bullied without fear of uprisings, riots, or reprisals. Blacks in Wyoming were too few to play an integral role in the Wyoming economy, unlike the South which depended upon them as a necessary source of cheap labor. In Wyoming the situation was a little different. After the Chinese Massacre whites in Wyoming knew that a little properly applied violence could drive whole ethnic communities from the state— eliminate them all together. Consider the white miners driving black workers from the Cambria mines, Jim Edwards' neighbors' assertion that Wyoming "is no place for a nigger,"<sup>80</sup> signs telling blacks not to settle or even pause in many Wyoming communities, the effort to eliminate every trace of physical evidence that African Americans had made the fatal mistake of trying to homestead along Negro Creek, the Hudson town fathers asking the railroad to remove all black laborers from the line, the exodus from Empire to Nebraska, and the Green River refugees forced to flee in terror to Utah. White proponents of ethnic cleansing knew also that due to national attitudes during the 1910s and 1920s the federal government would not send troops to help the unwelcome minorities return as they had done for the Chinese in 1885. The motivation for African American lynchings in Wyoming was not so much to "teach that nigger a lesson" or govern behavior and race relations as was the case in the South. Rather, Wyoming's extraordinary lynch rate can be explained by an element in early twentieth century Wyoming—some members of the lynch mobs and their supporters—who hoped to drive African Americans completely out of the state to create not a white supremacist society, but a white society, period.

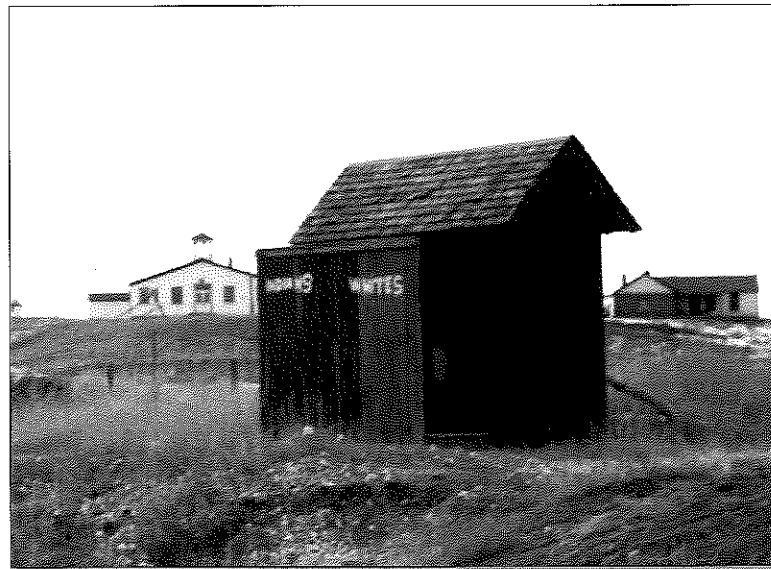
#### Epilogue: Wyoming's Lynching Legacy

What is the legacy of Wyoming's lynch-prone

(Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997); Davis, *Goodbye, Judge Lynch*, Chapters 7 & 8; Stephen J. Leonard, *Lynching in Colorado, 1859-1919* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002), Chapter 6.

<sup>80</sup> Letter to author from Catherine and Bill Nuttall, November 16, 1987; Guenther, "Y'all Call Me Nigger Jim Now," p.22, 39, note 16.

<sup>81</sup> Hogan, ed., *Civil Rights Chronicle*, p. 61; Robert A. Goldberg, "Beneath the Hood and Robe: A Socioeconomic Analysis of Ku Klux Klan



Jim Crow in the Equality State was not limited to blacks. This out-house was located at Arapaho, Wyoming (not dated). Courtesy the author.

heritage? Of the Equality State's contribution to "the Negro Holocaust?" Many Wyomingites, of whom some 90% to 97% have always been white, do not remember witnessing racism in Wyoming, and do not believe that it existed. But it did, and does. The ghosts of our forgotten and unacknowledged past deeds continue to walk among us. White society and many white individuals rarely relinquished power willingly. African Americans in Wyoming, as all across the nation, frequently had to *take* their equality. Powerful attitudes which had condoned, even encouraged, lynching, lingered for decades after the practice fell into disuse. Extreme examples of prejudice did not end with the apparent close of Wyoming's lynching era in 1920. The famous, highly-publicized civil rights struggles fought in the South and East during the 1940s, '50s and '60s were not isolated events. Whites did not suddenly step out of every schoolhouse door, proclaim that Jim Crow was dead, and welcome their colored neighbors into society. Smaller scale battles were fought out in virtually every town and hamlet of the South, and in much of the North and West. This included Wyoming. Those battles were fought store

by store, café by café, library by library, hotel by hotel, swimming pool by swimming pool, in Wyoming as they were in the rest of the United States. Resistance to change was sometimes organized.

The Ku Klux Klan is typically associated with Southern states of the old Confederacy, but the organization operated in Wyoming too. The Klan, with an estimated four million members nationwide in 1925, was called the most powerful social movement of the decade in terms of numbers and political influence. Denver, just south of the Wyoming border, was typical in how it succumbed to Klan rhetoric. This was a dramatic change from the late nineteenth century when Colorado was called a most promising destination for blacks. During the early 1920s, Denver's six thousands black residents were opposed by seventeen thousand Klansmen. The Denver Klan was so omnipotent that its leaders abandoned their usual secrecy and were willingly associated with the organization in news photos and articles. They even requisitioned men and vehicles from the police department for their own purposes. And yet no Colorado blacks were lynched during the 1910s.<sup>81</sup>

Membership in Denver, Colorado, 1921 - 1925," *Western Historical Quarterly* 11 (1981): 181, 184; Robert Alan Goldberg, *Hooded Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Colorado* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); George La Dura, *The Maelstrom: The Visible of the Invisible Empire* (Denver: Maelstrom Publishing Co. 1925); Susan Armitage, Theresa Banfield, and Sarah Jacobus, "Black Women and Their Communities in Colorado," *Frontiers* 2 (1977): 45-51; Eugene Berwanger, "Hardin and Langston: Western Black Spokesmen of the Reconstruction Era," *The Journal of Negro History* 64 (1978): 101-15; Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migrations to Kansas After Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred Knopf Co., 1977).

<sup>82</sup> "Riverton Klan Initiates Members," *Wyoming State Journal*, August 8, 1924.

In an effort to make the Equality State racially pure, KKK chapters were organized in several Wyoming communities. The Casper chapter was founded in 1924 by the Imperial Wizard himself. Cheyenne formed a KKK women's auxiliary restricted to "white, female persons ... of American birth." One hundred-fifty Klansmen from Riverton, Lander, Shoshoni, and Hudson initiated new members and burned "a huge fiery cross" on Griffey Hill (now Airport Hill) north of Riverton in August 1924. Hundreds of people in automobiles watched the spectacle "from a point as near as the hooded sentinels would permit."<sup>82</sup> Torrington Klansmen focused their attention on Mexicans and Catholics since most of the local and Empire African Americans had already abandoned the area. The Klan never became influential in Wyoming, however. Wyomingites traditionally have been independent-minded and disinclined to join any type of outside organization. Though perhaps sharing Klan philosophies, they showed little respect for adults hiding behind masks. Aven Nelson, president of Wyoming's only four year university and a prominent figure statewide, expressed their feelings thus,

Nothing more un-American could be devised than to entrust the administration of justice to unknown parties working under the cover of darkness and in disguise. This opens the way for a reign of terror.<sup>83</sup>

Nelson accused the Klan of being un-American. "Americanism," paradoxically, was the very thing that organization claimed it wanted to protect.

That was the environment in which a black man named Church Wood applied for a custodial position at the Sheridan County Courthouse during the early 1920s. This work was usually considered appropriate for black men anywhere in the nation.

But in this particular hall of justice he was informed by the county clerk that, "it was useless for a colored person to make application for the position."<sup>84</sup> The black community protested this situation with little effect.

All across the state businesses posted signs in their front windows reading, "No Indians, No Mexicans, No Negroes." In one remarkable display of witlessness, a Sheridan shopkeeper asked Marie Lewis why she never patronized his store. She pointed to the sign in his window and reminded him that she was a Mexican and her husband was a Negro. He responded that the sign did not exclude her because she was his "friend." Lewis nevertheless refused to shop in the store as long as the sign remained. During the 1930s, Sheridan's relatively large black community coordinated a boycott and demanded that the Chamber of Commerce force all stores to open to them. With experience gained in the Church Wood incident, but far in advance of the bus boycotts and lunch counter sit-ins of the Southern civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s, they organized nearly the entire local colored population and wielded sufficient economic leverage to coerce the business community into compliance with their demands. In the early 1950s, segregation resurfaced in Sheridan when the movie theater forced non-whites to sit upstairs in the balcony, in "Nigger Heaven." Anyone who has ever watched the film, *To Kill A Mockingbird*,<sup>85</sup> will recall the same type of arrangement in the courthouse where justice miscarried. Sheridan's black community complained to the city, again threatening economic retaliation, and the theater was forced to allow unrestricted seating.<sup>86</sup>

During the 1930s and 1940s, and continuing even into the 1950s, African Americans were

<sup>83</sup> Cardoso, "Nativism in Wyoming," pp. 31, 32.

<sup>84</sup> Petition to Sheridan County Board of Commissioners, March 1, 1924, from members of the "Colored People of Sheridan County," Sheridan County Clerk files, Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne.

<sup>85</sup> The Academy Award winning film, *To Kill A Mockingbird* (Universal Pictures, 1962), was based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Harper Lee, *To Kill A Mockingbird* (New York: Harper Collins, 1960). *Nigger Heaven* (1926) is a novel written by Carl Van Vechten (1880-1964), set during the Harlem Renaissance in the United States in the 1920s. The book and its title have been controversial since its publication. The title refers to the balconies of movie theaters, during the Jim Crow years, when balconies were reserved for African Americans, as the white audience sat below. From Wikipedia.

<sup>86</sup> Oral interview with Marie Lewis and Beatrice Wilkerson by Todd Guenther, Sheridan, Wyoming, March 6, 1988; Katz, *The Black West*, p. 56.

<sup>87</sup> "The Greatest Negro Cattle Rancher," *Ebony Magazine*, p.40; Catherine Nuttall letter to author, December 7, 1987; Gerald Adams, "The Casper

unwelcome in many Casper businesses. Blacks were largely segregated to a separate business district called the Sandbar between downtown and the North Platte River. Though regarded as a locus of brothels and saloons, churches, homes, retail sales businesses, and a few dining establishments were also located there. During World War II only one Casper restaurant served black soldiers passing through or stationed at the air base. Black soldiers relaxed in the “Colored Men’s Service Center” because they were unwelcome in other institutions.<sup>87</sup>

The black community, which Casper whites feared, was so small as to be nearly invisible. “There were no more than a dozen black families in the town, said some [not] enough blacks for people to be racist.”<sup>88</sup> And so some Casperites felt the town was untouched by racism. The black community was very aware of racist attitudes and Jim Crow life. One former Natrona County High School student recalled walking into a drugstore during the mid-1940s to get a Coke, but stopped when “his friend, a black girl, turned to him and said, ‘They won’t serve me.’”<sup>89</sup> In 1947, the same young man tried to arrange lodging for black athletes on a visiting ball team, but could not find a single hotel that would accommodate them.

Effie Mann, an African American woman who grew up in Casper during the 1930s and graduated from Natrona County High School in 1941, recalls being harassed verbally and physically by students and teachers, including being pushed down concrete school stairs. After she married, the family moved to Lander in the early 1950s, but not everyone greeted them with open arms. Attitudes had changed since black soldiers were warmly welcomed six decades earlier. When the couple purchased a home, neighbors circulated a petition complaining that adjacent property values were depressed by the new arrivals

and “white flight” came to the small town west when one neighbor family put its house up for sale. Unlike Southern businesses which directed black patrons to use the rear doors, at least one Lander businessman posted a sign in the alley stating, “No niggers served here.” On Sunday mornings, white churchgoers got up and moved to other pews rather than worship next to a family of black Christians.<sup>90</sup>

The situation was confused in Sweetwater County. The city of Rock Springs initiated an annual “International Day” holiday in 1924. One of the most religiously and ethnically diverse communities in Wyoming, the mining and railroad town was home to people of more than fifty different nationalities and ethnic groups. The festival was an attempt to bring people together to celebrate their uniqueness rather than allow the community to be torn asunder by differences. The holiday was created in the wake of mob violence and lynching which some members of the community feared would continue unless efforts were made to breed harmony.

A few blacks had returned to Green River by the late 1940s and early 1950s, but cafes, hotels, and other businesses there and in Rock Springs displayed window signs that read “No Colored Trade Solicited” and refused to accommodate African Americans. The Green River movie theater, The Oasis, restricted black patrons to the back two rows of seats. As in the South, blacks in small town Wyoming began to make it clear that they would not tolerate Jim Crow treatment any longer. Some began to choose their own seats and refused to move when asked. Others boycotted the theater, prompting the owners to send their black janitor to offer complimentary tickets to at least one family, hoping to entice them back to the still-segregated theater. The irate matriarch “told him in a very few words what to do, and to take them back.”<sup>91</sup>

Army Air Field in World War II,” *Annals of Wyoming*, 64 (Summer-Fall 1992): 11, 17; Walter R. Jones, *History of the Sand Bar: 1888-1977* (Casper, Wyoming: BASO, Inc., 1981); Edna Gorrell Kukura and Susan Niethammer True, *Casper: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk, Virginia: Donning Co., 1986).

<sup>88</sup> Catherine Warren, “Former Casper Minister Slain 20 Years Ago In Selma, Alabama,” *Casper Star Tribune*, March 10, 1985.

<sup>89</sup> Catherine Warren, “Former Casper Minister Slain 20 Years Ago In Selma, Alabama,” *Casper Star Tribune*, March 10, 1985.

<sup>90</sup> Coralina Daly, “Lander Woman Reflects on Being Black in Wyoming,” *Lander Journal*, February 22, 2006.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Elizabeth Crouch by David Kathka, Green River, Wyoming, April 14, 1975, in A. Dudley Gardner and David E. Johnson, Cultural Resource Inventory and Mitigation of Thirty-seven Mine Reclamation Sites in Sweetwater County, Wyoming, unpublished contract report by Archaeological Services, Western Wyoming College, prepared for the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, Land Quality Division, on file, Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office, pp. 71, 72.

<sup>92</sup> Charles E. Rankin, “Teaching: Opportunity and Limitation for Wyoming Women,” pp. 1-20, in Mike Mackey, ed., *The Equality State: Essays*

Wyoming’s law permitting racial segregation of schools remained on the books until 1955. It was reluctantly repealed after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregated schools were unconstitutional. Though several attempts to segregate Wyoming schools had occurred over the years, the only “separate but equal” school was in the almost exclusively black farming community of Empire during the 1910s. The teacher was lynch-victim Baseman Taylor’s brother, the Reverend Russel Taylor, a Presbyterian minister who held both bachelor’s and master’s degrees, probably a unique resume among rural Wyoming school teachers and making him far better educated than his peers, half of whom did not even hold high school diplomas. Local whites preferred ignorance to a black teacher as over-qualified as Taylor and opted not to send their children “to a school where a nigger could tell them what to do.”<sup>92</sup>

Wyoming law would not allow discrimination in the employment of teachers based on sex or religious belief when the applicants were equally qualified, but there was no provision against discrimination based on race. In 1880, thirty-one of the seventy teachers in Wyoming schools were men and thirty-nine were women. None was black. By 1910, there were three black teachers in Wyoming, two of whom were in Empire. Not hiring black teachers was often policy. About 1952 a well-qualified and very experienced black teacher was refused a position at a rural school near Pinedale because of her race. This event angered a local Republican legislator and rancher who preferred her to teach the school his children attended rather than the less well qualified Caucasian who got the job.<sup>93</sup>

In another example, after graduating from college in 1949, a twenty-three year old African American woman from Cheyenne, Harriet Elizabeth Byrd, applied for a teaching position in her home town.

Her family had lived in Wyoming for generations, ever since her great-grandmother arrived at Fort D.A. Russell with the family of an army officer for whom she worked. The State Superintendent of Schools refused Byrd’s application because whites did not want black teachers disciplining their children and thus, Wyoming did not hire “negro” teachers. In 1959, four years after Wyoming’s school segregation act was repealed, Byrd tried again. This time she met first with Governor J. J. Hickey who told her that “he wasn’t aware that they had a policy not to hire minorities” and so, ten years after her first application, she finally got the job.<sup>94</sup>

An ordinary event in a Wyoming restaurant in 1954 led to a significant, if anemic, Wyoming civil rights law. Two prominent Wyoming politicians, one a Democrat and the other a Republican, were dining in the Plains Hotel in downtown Cheyenne when an African American soldier, apparently a World War II veteran, proudly wearing the uniform of his country he was still serving, was removed from the table and with his wife ordered out of the building. The infuriated legislators tried unsuccessfully to intercede with the staff and management. Failing that, they began to guide a slowly building interest in civil rights in Wyoming as they worked with a series of legislatures to pass a law banning discrimination in many public places. Bars and swimming pools were excluded. Governor Milward Simpson compared Wyoming to Southern states when asking the legislature to approve the bill. After three years of sometimes contentious debate, the bill finally passed in 1957. Enforcement was problematic and left up to the various counties; no record exists of a test case and *de facto* segregation continued across the Equality State. Though described as perhaps only a “token of goodwill” on the part of a few well-intentioned legislators, this law “deserves at least a footnote in any study of racial relations in the Equality State.”<sup>95</sup>

*on Intolerance and Inequality in Wyoming* (Powell, Wyoming: Western History Publications, 1999); interview with Elsie and Cecil Rose by Todd Guenther, Rose Ranch, Sheep Creek, Wyoming, October 4, 1988; Kaufman, “Discrimination,” pp. 19, 20; Guenther, “The Empire Builders,” ms. in preparation, p. 17.

<sup>93</sup> Kim Ibach and William Howard Moore, “The Emerging Civil Rights Movement: The 1957 Wyoming Public Accommodations Statute as a Case Study,” *Annals of Wyoming* 73 (Winter 2001): 2-13.

<sup>94</sup> Michael Shay, “Liz Byrd Has A Dream,” *Wyoming All Arts Newsletter*, October 1992, p. 3.

<sup>95</sup> Ibach and Moore, “The Emerging Civil Rights Movement,” pp. 8-10.

<sup>96</sup> *Wyoming State Journal*, February 23, 1965; Kaufman, “Discrimination,” 21, 22; Hardaway, “Prohibiting Inter-racial Marriage,” 57, 58.

In 1965, the Wyoming Legislature grudgingly reacted again to federal court and legislative actions. Of course, federal action resulted from legal and civil pressure brought to bear by African Americans, not a new white magnanimity. In the capitol in Cheyenne, Wyoming's elected representatives decided that the anti-miscegenation law passed in 1913 would have to be rescinded to avoid federal wrath. The whole nation was watching black demonstrators, U.S. Marshals, and federal troops enforce the end of Jim Crow in the South. Nevertheless, the Wyoming proposition faced die-hard opposition from some Equality State lawmakers, though whether out of resistance to federal interference or persistent desire to prevent mixing of the races is unclear. The vote to rescind was 51-8 in the House and 21-3 in the Senate.<sup>96</sup>

During March 1965, just after the Wyoming legislature debated terminating the law prohibiting inter-racial marriage, a white man who grew up in Casper joined with other civil rights activists from across the nation to follow Dr. Martin Luther King in the famous and horrifying marches from Selma, Alabama, over the Edmund Pettus Bridge to Montgomery. Thirty-eight year old Reverend James Reeb, the father of four small children, was completely dedicated to the cause of equality for all. Perhaps he was offended when Effie Mann was pushed down the school stairs, or when other black students were treated cruelly by students and teachers, and wanted to do something about it. Following a rally two days after the infamous terror of "Bloody Sunday," Reeb was attacked and clubbed to death by white men in Selma. He was "the first white Protestant martyr of the Civil Rights movement."<sup>97</sup> The Executive Director of the NAACP flew to Casper for the hometown memorial service and called Reeb a "twentieth century Good Samaritan."<sup>98</sup> Though his ultimate sacrifice was appreciated, it was also

"painfully clear that Reeb's death would awaken the conscience of more Americans than the [preceding] murders of Jimmie Lee Jackson"<sup>99</sup> or other black men. And indeed, Reeb's shocking murder helped catalyze greater white involvement in the Civil Rights movement during the mid-1960s. Martin Luther King delivered Reeb's funeral eulogy at the national service, and President Lyndon B. Johnson mentioned Reeb a week later when he introduced the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Selma was not the only community troubled by civil rights debates. Several Casper ministers "were up in arms. They saw it as a moral issue"<sup>100</sup> and advocated passage of civil rights laws. Some of their parishioners were opposed. Controversy raged in Casper churches and through the community which was forced by Reeb's death to confront these issues. The controversies over Jim Crow and civil rights were no longer restricted to the South or eastern urban centers.

Three hundred stunned and grieving people, black and white in nearly equal proportions, marched through Casper from the courthouse to Natrona County High School for the hometown memorial in what was called Casper's first civil rights march. Many of the hundreds who watched from curbside wept. Others cursed. One woman queried, "Why did he go down there? He had no business getting involved."<sup>101</sup> Before leaving for the South, Reeb told his wife that "he couldn't just stay home and do nothing."<sup>102</sup> Reeb's local eulogizers, prominent politicians and professionals who had counted him among their close friends, recounted evidence of racism they had witnessed while growing up in 1940s Casper. They concluded that "Casper didn't seem so far from Selma" and that "Reeb died trying to change that."<sup>103</sup> Frank Bowron, a Casper attorney and classmate of Reeb's said,

Jim Reeb was taught, right here in Casper, Wyoming, that his going to Selma was the right thing, the decent thing, the Christian thing to do. It is because we helped shape his tragic destiny that Casper, Wyoming, must share the shame of Selma, Alabama . . . Today, all America is standing trial for the murder of James Reeb. If we fail James Reeb, may God have mercy on our souls.<sup>104</sup>

Four years later, in the autumn of 1969, race and religion were at the forefront again. Black football players were kicked off the University of Wyoming team for wanting to wear black armbands to protest Mormon Church racial policies during a game with Brigham Young University. They also intended to demonstrate support for and unity with other civil rights campaigners around the nation. According to U.W. President William Carlson, football was more important than civil rights. This incident caused a statewide furor, but was generally supported and not reversed. After the "Black Fourteen" incident when Episcopal Bishop Thornberry retired in 1976 he said, "The affair concerning the black athletes revealed deep racial prejudices in many places in Wyoming where it was unsuspected. People were as much incensed because they were black as they were because they broke discipline . . . the people in Wyoming have as far to go as any people in eliminating their racial prejudice."<sup>105</sup> His defense of the athletes had divided his church, much as happened in the Casper churches ten years earlier.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Wyoming legislators and voters debated whether the Equality State should let the federal government "boss us around" and establish a Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. Though most Wyoming voters supported Ronald Reagan's presidency, many were less than pleased when, in 1983, he signed a bill creating a federal Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday on the third

Monday of every January. A common explanation was, "Wyomingites want to work, not add another federally mandated holiday to the calendar." In addition to the state's rights perspective (shades of the antebellum South), many people thought that King and the Civil Rights movement were irrelevant to Wyoming history, believing that few blacks lived here and those who did were treated well. Dick Wallis, a state legislator from Campbell County, for example, stated that discrimination against blacks in Wyoming "isn't too bad."<sup>106</sup> Some believed, like other whites across the nation, that King was a subversive trouble-maker whose life should not be celebrated. A Cheyenne schoolteacher editorialized, "All this to honor a man who is [*sic*] a seditionist, hypocrite, apostate [and] borderline anarchist."<sup>107</sup> After nine years of acrimonious debate, a sort of compromise was reached and Wyoming calendars now mark "Equality Day" on the third Monday in January.<sup>108</sup>

In the popular mind there is a belief that everybody had it good in good ol' Wyoming and that ours is a happy history. Darker aspects of our collective heritage—including black faces and black agony, the limp arms, bulging eyes, and twisted lips of lynch victims—have been whitewashed away, leaving a soft-focus, nostalgic view of a past consisting of singing cowboys, bucking broncs, and voting women. The assertion has been made that black lynchings were not incidents of racial discrimination, arguing that in Wyoming we lynched anybody, including women. And there may be some truth to that allegation for in fact, in the words of Reagan Joy Kaufman based only on the simple number (not the rate) of mob killings of both whites and blacks, "Wyoming 'out-lynched' all of the other western states," and despite our tiniest population ranked fifteenth of forty-four states in the nation.<sup>109</sup> In 1989, an irate letter to the editor of the *Casper Star Tribune* discussing lynching stated that,

<sup>97</sup> Catherine Warren, "Former Casper Minister Slain 20 Years Ago In Selma, Alabama," *Casper Star Tribune*, March 10, 1985.

<sup>98</sup> Joseph P. Murphy, M.D., "Rev. Reeb's Martyrdom Honors a Dream," *Casper Star Tribune*, March 9, 1985.

<sup>99</sup> *Wyoming State Journal*, March 16, 1965; David J. Hogan, editor in chief, *Civil Rights Chronicle: The African American Struggle for Freedom* (Lincolnwood, Illinois: Legacy Publications, 2003), pp. 281, 286, 291, 292, 309; "Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration," *Casper Star Tribune*, January 17, 2006.

<sup>100</sup> Catherine Warren, "Former Casper Minister Slain 20 Years Ago In Selma, Alabama," *Casper Star Tribune*, March 10, 1985.

<sup>101</sup> Catherine Warren, "Former Casper Minister Slain 20 Years Ago In Selma, Alabama," *Casper Star Tribune*, March 10, 1985.

<sup>102</sup> Catherine Warren, "Former Casper Minister Slain 20 Years Ago In Selma, Alabama," *Casper Star Tribune*, March 10, 1985.

<sup>103</sup> Catherine Warren, "Former Casper Minister Slain 20 Years Ago In Selma, Alabama," *Casper Star Tribune*, March 10, 1985.

<sup>104</sup> Catherine Warren, "Former Casper Minister Slain 20 Years Ago In Selma, Alabama," *Casper Star Tribune*, March 10, 1985.

<sup>105</sup> Larson, *History of Wyoming*, pp. 593-96; James E. Barrett, "The Black 14: Williams v. Eaton, A Personal Recollection," *Wyoming History Journal* 68 (Summer, 1996): 2-7; Thornberry quote is from Larson, *Wyoming: A Bicentennial History*, p. 106.

<sup>106</sup> "Educator Says History Shows Discrimination," *Casper Star Tribune*, March 13, 1989.

<sup>107</sup> Tom Lindsey, letter to editor, *Wyoming State Tribune*, February 23, 1990, quoted from, Evelyn Haskell, "Harriet Elizabeth 'Liz' Byrd: Wyoming Trail Blazer in Education and Politics," *Annals of Wyoming* 78 (Winter 2006): 24.

<sup>108</sup> Timothy B. Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004), pp. 111, 285; Hogan, ed., *Civil Rights Chronicle*, p. 401.

<sup>109</sup> Kaufman, "Discrimination," p. 22.

<sup>110</sup> Pat Stewart, "Pioneer Families Treated Blacks Just Like Everybody Else," *Casper Star Tribune*, March 19, 1989. Was there another Wyoming



"Pioneer families treated blacks just like everybody else. The charges of discrimination against Negroes in Wyoming history . . . are irresponsible."<sup>110</sup> Any statistical evaluation of our lynching history makes that statement delusional.

Early in the new millennium, the "World Church of the Creator," a white supremacist organization, moved its national headquarters to Riverton, attracted by Wyoming's lack of hate-crime legislation and what they perceived as our right wing political orientation. The church's objective was "the survival, preservation and expansion of the white race" and, ultimately, an exclusively Caucasian society devoid of "mud people" as they termed Indians, blacks, and others of color. The church was greeted with greater resistance than the KKK met upon its venture into Wyoming during the 1920s. Most locals supported the church's First Amendment rights, but not the church's history of violent acts. One Lander man said, "We do not have a right to go and lynch them – we just don't. But we do have a right to perhaps make them a little less comfortable."<sup>111</sup> Huge protest rallies and marches against the church brought a rare sense of unity to the multi-cultural Wind River basin community and the organization soon returned to the Midwest.

According to the *New York Times*, during 2005 when the U.S. Senate debated apologizing to African Americans for failing to pass an anti-lynching law

despite many requests from the NAACP and other organizations throughout much of the twentieth century, the Wyoming delegation was among a tiny minority of only eight senators, including Trent Lott, who chose not to sponsor the bill.<sup>112</sup> After the bill passed by voice vote, Senator Enzi said that while he chose not to co-sponsor he had supported it, explaining that if he had objected the bill would have failed. Other Wyomingites supported the view that we should forget all that old stuff, put it behind us, and focus on the future. That is an easy attitude for members of the dominant white society. It is not one that we are inclined to accept from Japan, which is criticized by many for its ongoing refusal to apologize for its role in World War II.

More recently, when Senator Craig Thomas visited Lander in September 2006, he spoke to a mixed Native American and white group which asked him about the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and their activities nationwide and on the Wind River Indian Reservation. The topic was newsworthy because the Eastern Shoshone Tribe had recently joined that organization, a move which perplexed many white people. Thomas was unfamiliar with the NAACP's history or activities. The editor of the *Lander Journal* wrote, "Discrimination comes in many forms, but certainly the most prevalent is ignorance. When we don't know, we don't have to do anything."<sup>113</sup>

lynching during this recent era? In 1998, Matthew Shepherd, a young, white homosexual from Casper attending the University of Wyoming, was beaten, tied to a fence, and left to freeze to death in Laramie. Some have termed this murder a lynching and continue to question Wyoming's version of equality. Others point to the generally horrified statewide revulsion inspired by this crime, which was perpetrated by only two individuals who received long prison sentences for their deed. Some point out that Wyoming people tend towards an attitude of "live and let live," "you can do your thing just don't interfere with me and mine" and resent attempts by outsiders to paint Wyoming with a violently homo-phobic brush. David Walsh and Jerry White, "The Anti-Gay Lynching in Wyoming: Who is Responsible?" October 13, 1998, <http://cc.msnsnscache.com/cache.aspx?q=72453768177006&mkt=en-UW&lang=en-US&w=5aee5ecd&FORM=CVRE6>.

<sup>111</sup> Fred Baehr in Howard Berkes, "A White Supremacist Church and a Small Town," *All Things Considered* (Washington, D.C.: National Public Radio, broadcast February 10, 2003), transcript available at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=992253>.

<sup>112</sup> Sheryl Gay Stolberg, "The Senate Apologizes Mostly," *New York Times*, June 19, 2005. Most notable of the anti-lynching proposals were the Dyer and Wagner-Costigan bills. The former would have made lynching a felony and passed the House of Representatives in 1922, but was defeated by a filibuster in the Senate. The latter, co-sponsored by Colorado Democratic Senator Edward P. Costigan in 1935, would have made it a federal crime for authorities to stand by during a lynching and for anyone to participate in a lynching. This bill also failed to pass the Senate. On June 13, 2005, the U.S. Senate passed a resolution "apologizing for its failure to enact federal anti-lynching legislation decades ago. . . ." Prior to the vote, Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu noted, "There may be no other injustice in American history for which the Senate so uniquely bears responsibility." The resolution was passed on a voice vote with 80 senators cosponsoring, causing some to point out that the remaining 20 did not have to take a position on the matter through either cosponsorship or a recorded vote in favor or against. The resolution expresses "the deepest sympathies and most solemn regrets of the Senate to the descendants of victims of lynching, the ancestors of whom were deprived of life, human dignity and the constitutional protections accorded all citizens of the United States." *Washington Post*, June 14, 2005, page A12. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/06/13/AR2005061301720.html>, retrieved June 26, 2005.

<sup>113</sup> Coralina Daly, *Lander Journal*, September 6, 2006; personal communication, Helsha Acuna, December 2007.

<sup>114</sup> Tom Morton, "Expert: Schools Damaged Tribes," February 7, 2007; "Tribal Member Details Disputes," February 9, 2007, "Former Candidate

In October 2005, five members of the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes from the Wind River Reservation filed a federal lawsuit against Fremont County in a case that sounds like something from the 1960s South. The plaintiffs claimed that county election procedures violate the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments and Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. President Johnson had cited Wyoming's own civil-rights martyr, James Reeb, when he introduced the act to Congress. The suit remains undecided.<sup>114</sup>

Wyoming history cannot be separated from issues of race, whether with regard to white relations with blacks, Hispanics, Asians, or Native Americans. But

are racial issues relevant in Wyoming today—is there room for improvement in race relations? Things are fine if you ask most white folks. But step across the color line and a different answer often awaits. Do hopes that people of color could be removed from Wyoming communities, the attitudes that resulted in lynchings, linger? In affluent, supposedly liberal, socially-conscious Jackson Hole, the worst insult that fans of Jackson High School basketball could scream at the Arapaho and Shoshone athletes on the Lander girls basketball team recently was, "Go home you prairie niggers!" Afterwards, teenaged children cried during the long bus ride home.

*TODD GUENTHER is a professor at Central Wyoming College teaching courses in Anthropology, History, and Museum Studies. He also directs the Western American Studies program at the college. Formerly he worked at the South Pass City State Historic Site and as director of the Pioneer Museum in Lander, Wyoming. Todd has written many articles, including "Could these bones be from a Negro?" in The Overland Journal, "Lucretia Matchbanks: A Black Woman in the Black Hills" in South Dakota History, "The Empire Builders: An African American Odyssey in Nebraska and Wyoming" in Nebraska History Magazine, and "Y'all Call Me Nigger Jim Now, But Someday You'll Call Me Mr. James Edwards" in Annals of Wyoming.*

Notes Slurs," February 13, 2007, *Casper Star Tribune*. This author was summoned in February 2007 by the plaintiffs to testify regarding the history of civil rights in Wyoming. This paper documenting some racist aspects of Wyoming's remarkable past results in part from that trial. Richard Rideout, a Cheyenne attorney representing Fremont County, implied in court that the author's testimony was less than truthful or accurate and was motivated by ill-will from a decade-long dispute and earlier civil rights lawsuit between this author and the Fremont County Commissioners. See Walter Cook, "Voting Trial: Historian Compares Fremont County's Past to 'Jim Crow' South," *Riverton Ranger*, February 14, 2007. But, as explained in court, that battle was won and the county dismissed their board and built the new museum. This paper provides a thoroughly referenced overview of black-white race relations and civil rights issues in the Equality State and also provides a framework for future research to document the experiences of other minorities including Native Americans and Latinos.