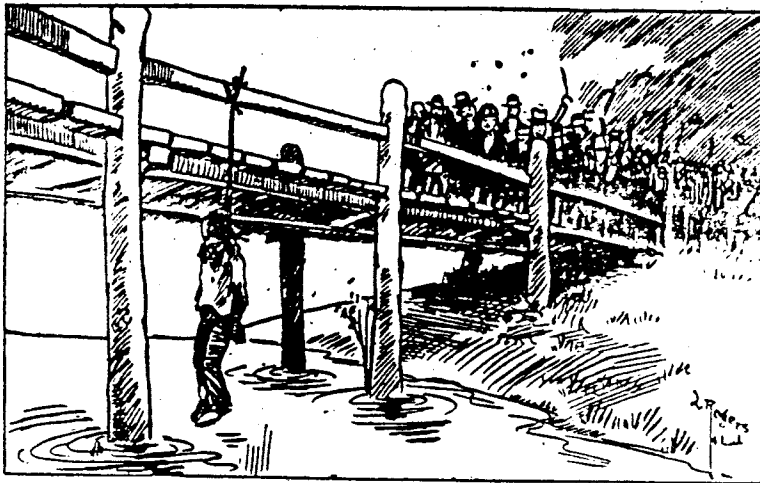


**Town versus Gown:
The James T. Scott Lynching and the Social Fracture
between the University of Missouri and the Larger
Columbia Community**

College Sports



While our athletes showed their mettle and upheld the laurels of their respective states and colleges in the recent Penn relay carnival—



White students in the University of Missouri showed their mettle and "upheld" the laurels of their state by lynching a black man.

Chicago Defender, 12 May 1923

Patrick J. Huber

An undergraduate honors thesis presented in partial fulfillment for
the B.A. degree in history with honors

thesis directors: Sundiata K. Cha-Jua and Robert Hinton

17 July 1990

**They got the judges
They got the lawyers
They got the jury-rolls
They got the law
 They don't come by ones
They got the sheriffs
They got the deputies
 They don't come by twos
They got the shotguns
They got the rope
 We git the justice
 In the end
 And they come by tens. . . .**

**Størling Brown
"Old Lem"**

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PJH
1990

Introduction

Despite lynching's central role in race relations and Southern history, historians have, for the most part, ignored the phenomenon.¹ In response to the repressively racist climate in America during the late 1970s and 1980s and the increasing instances of racial violence, historians are beginning to examine the American institution of lynching, the most blatant form of white oppression against blacks.² Each of the more than 5,000 lynchings which occurred in the United States since 1882 is significant in its own right. Historically, each lynching denied an individual his or her civil rights and most times deprived the individual of life itself.

¹ Sociologist and social activists of the 1920s and 1930s have produced the bulk of the studies on lynching: Ida B. Wells-Barnett, On Lynchings: Southern Horrors: A Red Record: Mob Rule in New Orleans First published in 3 vols., 1892, 1895 and 1900. (New York: Arno Press, 1969); James Elbert Cutler, Lynch-Law: An Investigation into the History of Lynching in the United States (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1905); National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918 First published in 1919. (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969); Walter White, Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929); Arthur F. Raper, The Tragedy of Lynching (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933); James Harmon Chadbourn, Lynching and the Law (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933); Jesse Daniel Ames, The Changing Character of Lynching (Atlanta: Commission on Interracial Cooperation, 1942).

² See for example, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); James R. McGovern, Anatomy of a Lynching: The Killing of Claude Neal (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Dominic J. Capeci, Jr., "The Lynching of Cleo Wright: Federal Protection of Constitutional Rights during World War II," Journal of American History vol. 72, no. 4 (March 1986), 859-887; Howard Smead, Blood Justice: The Lynching of Mack Charles Parker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Stephen J. Whitfield, A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till (New York: Free Press, 1988).

Through its inherent assertion of power, each lynching altered race relations in the community and the region where it occurred. Before racial relations in America can be fully understood, lynchings must be examined collectively and as individual case studies in order to realize a comprehensive analysis of this complex, problematic phenomenon. The following is one such case study.

Unlike most of the previous 4,154 lynchings which occurred in the United States between 1885 and 1922, the lynching of James T. Scott, a black janitor, at Columbia, Missouri in the Spring of 1923, occurred in a city whose most prominent feature was a state university. While at least four prior lynchings³ were executed in college towns, the 1923 Columbia lynching is significant because of the pivotal role the university played in the event's aftermath. Accepting the notion of the modern American university as a beacon of learning and enlightenment, the national press emphasized the supposed role the University of Missouri should have played as a "humane and steadying influence upon the whole community" and thus prevented the lynching. The University of Missouri's mere presence and alleged student participation in the lynching attracted front-page headlines of newspapers across America and intense media coverage. Concerned for the university's reputation, image-minded officials sought to discredit these charges and vindicate the institution. Other groups within the university community, especially students, condemned the lynching and testified against alleged mob members.

In contrast, some members of the larger Columbia community, especially the white elite, defended the community's reputation against the press's attack and condoned the mob's actions. While the

³ The lynching figure is based on Monroe N. Work, Negro Year Book: An Annual Encyclopedia of the Negro, 1925-1926 (Tuskegee, AL: Negro Year Book Publishing Co., 1925), 399. Two prior lynchings occurred in Columbia, one in 1853 and another in 1889. These two are discussed below. In 1880, fellow cadets lynched the first black cadet at West Point Military Academy. In The Crisis, W.E.B. DuBois mentioned a lynching of a black near the University of Georgia in the 1910s. See Ralph Ginzburg, 100 Years of Lynching (New York: Lancer Books, 1962), 9; W.E.B. DuBois, "A University Course in Lynching," The Crisis vol. 26, no. 2 (June 1923), 55.

South's upper class had often applauded lynchings and defended the murderers, its members rarely acknowledged their role as actual lynchers. Traditionally, liberals, social scientists and Southern elites have saddled the "ignorant, poverty-stricken" white working class with the blame for lynchings.⁴ Despite this contention, upper and middle class whites have customarily joined the lower class to lynch blacks throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in America. In the Columbia incident, upper and middle class whites instigated, planned and led the mob which lynched James T. Scott on an early Spring morning in 1923.

Although enraged and unsettled by the lynching, Columbia's sizable African-American community appears to have made no public response, except for a local Baptist minister. While the community's churches and fraternal societies provided an organized mass base, the city's blacks lacked the strong infrastructure upon which political protests are built. The absence of a NAACP chapter in the city, or other politicized organizations, and the impoverished, virtually nonexistent, tradition of social protest among Columbia's blacks left the community politically impotent. Furthermore, the looming threat of additional racial violence and sanctions against the local community may have extinguished any indigenous black protest. In the aftermath of Scott's murder, militant black protest and pressure to prosecute the lynchers came from outside Columbia, especially from St. Louis and the NAACP national headquarters in

⁴ As early as 1905, sociologist James Cutler attributed the increased mutilation and torture of lynch victims to "a lower class of whites" executing the lynchings. In his classic, The Tragedy of Lynching, Arthur F. Raper characterized lynchers as "unemployed, rambling, irresponsible people, many of them with court records." "Upper-class people," John Dollard related in Caste and Class in a Southern Town, "are apt to say that lynching is done only by lower-class whites." In 1938, Frank Shay identified elites as the instigators of most lynchings, but he characterized the actual lynchers as "the underprivileged, the unemployed, the dispossessed, and the unattached." See Cutler, Lynch-Law, 276-277; Raper, The Tragedy of Lynching, 11; John Dollard, Caste and Class in a Southern Town First published in 1937. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., third edition, 1957), 332; Frank Shay, Judge Lynch: His First Hundred Years (New York: Ives Washburn, Inc., 1938), 86-89.

New York. Thus, local blacks allowed the struggle to be resolved by the white community, with the University of Missouri pitted against the larger white community, and allowed militant African-Americans outside of Columbia, removed from the local whites' threats of censure and additional sanctions, to assume the black leadership role. While a unified white response defending the lynching would have forced the city's blacks into a more accommodated position, the division between the university and Columbia's white society afforded local African-Americans a larger buffer zone within which to conduct their daily lives.

The contrasting responses of the University of Missouri and the larger white community pose an illustrative, yet problematic, example of societal dynamics and tensions within a community in the wake of a lynching. While the evidence is not conclusive, the lynching of James T. Scott appears to have exacerbated already-present tensions between at least some segments of the University of Missouri and the larger Columbia community. Certain groups within the university condemned the atrocity, and two students testified against alleged mob members in the subsequent trial. In contrast, numerous members of Columbia's white elite, especially businessmen and merchants, publicly defended the lynching, posted bond for the five men indicted as mob members by the grand jury and testified for the alleged lynchers in the trial.

The consequent tensions between the university and Columbia's elite are best exemplified in the conflicting reactions of the two Columbia daily newspapers: the university-owned and student-operated Evening Missourian and the more traditional Democratic Daily Tribune, the most influential newspaper in shaping local public opinion. Although these two newspapers cannot be assumed to be the representative voice of the university, on the one hand, and the larger white community, on the other, nevertheless the Evening Missourian and Daily Tribune certainly expressed the opinions of at least some segments of their respective groups, and the two newspapers' conflicting responses to the lynching indicate the exacerbated social tensions and tense atmosphere the incident

provoked.

Traditionally, lynchings have united whites in communities where they occur, blurring class distinctions in support of racial solidarity. Conversely, black communities in those areas were often forced to accept a more accommodated position, fragmenting and weakening the group.⁵ However, as we shall see, Columbia did not follow this traditional pattern of social transformation in the wake of the lynching of James T. Scott.

⁵ For discussions of lynching's repercussions in black and white communities, see Raper, The Tragedy of Lynching, 20-21, 47-48; Hall, Revolt Against Chivalry, 139-141.

Chapter One: "The Value of a Negro"

Founded in 1821, Columbia sits almost at Missouri's east-west center--130 miles east of Kansas City and 125 miles west of St. Louis--and 30 miles due north of Jefferson City, the state capital. Located in Boone County, a link in the chain of Missouri River counties known as "Little Dixie", Columbia and the surrounding area was settled predominantly by families from Kentucky, Virginia and Tennessee.⁶ These settlers from the upper South brought with them their distinctive social, political and economic institutions, including slavery. A plantation economy, heavily dependent on slave labor, dominated the region from its earliest settlement; the rich alluvial river bottomland, worked by slaves, produced abundant cash crops of hemp and tobacco. Slavery was so firmly entrenched in the area's development that by 1860, Boone County claimed the third largest slave population in the state.⁷

The Civil War created strong political divisions between slaveholders affiliated with the University of Missouri, such as James S. Rollins and Odin Guitar, and those slaveholders not directly involved with the school.⁸ Despite Boone County's strong Southern sympathies, the Federal Army, with the support of men like Rollins and Guitar, secured Columbia as a Union stronghold during the War, establishing a military headquarters and barracks on the state

⁶ In the 1850 Boone County census, 49.4% of family heads listed Kentucky as their place of birth and 22.9% listed Virginia. James W. McGettigan, Jr., "Slave Sales, Estate Divisions, and the Slave Family in Boone County, Missouri, 1820-1865," (M.A. Thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1976), 1.

⁷ With a total population of 19,433 in 1860, Boone County slaves numbered 5,034, accounting for 25.9% of the population. Robert W. Duffner, "Slavery in Missouri River Counties, 1820-1865," (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Missouri-Columbia, 1974), 3, 13, 16.

⁸ William F. Switzler, History of Boone County, Missouri (St. Louis: Western Historical Co., 1882), 406-409, 804-805.

university's campus in December 1861.⁹

Columbia grew slowly throughout the rest of the nineteenth century as the site of the University of Missouri and as the terminus for the Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railroad (M.K.T.), reaching a population of 5,651 by 1900.¹⁰ By the early 1920s, Columbia was shaking off the slumbers of a sleepy, rural Southern community. The city's population had nearly doubled to 10,392 since the turn of the century, with native-born whites comprising slightly more than 80% of the population and African-Americans just under 19% (See Table 1). As Boone County's industrial center, Columbia had twenty-five industries (employing over 375 workers), including a branch of the St. Louis-based Hamilton-Brown Shoe Company.¹¹ The newly-completed U.S. Highway 40 and 63 intersected Columbia, causing a growth of retail stores and roadside businesses in the city's north end.¹²

The University of Missouri's rapid expansion between 1895 and 1914 provided the greatest impetus for Columbia's development. Since 1870, the university had channeled its energies and resources into creating a "true" modern university, composed of various colleges with academic departments offering a diverse curriculum, but it was not until the late 1890s that the university experienced its greatest advancement towards realizing that goal. Between 1895 and 1908, the student body of the university more than tripled

⁹ Frank E. Stephens, A History of the University of Missouri (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1962), 156.

¹⁰ In 1900, in addition to the University of Missouri, established in 1839, two denominational women's colleges were located in Columbia, Stephens College (originally named Columbia Female Academy), founded in 1833, and Christian College (later renamed Columbia College), founded in 1851. Walter Williams, The State of Missouri: An Autobiography (Columbia: n.p., 1904), 334-335.

¹¹ Fourteenth Census of the United States. Taken in the Year 1920: Manufacturing vol. 9 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1923), 781, 784; John C. Crighton, A History of Columbia and Boone County (Columbia: Computer Color-Graphics, 1987), 281.

¹² Richard S. Kirkendall, A History of Missouri: Volume V, 1919-1953 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971), 76.

from 681 to 2,307.¹³ Likewise, the faculty increased during that period from 45 professors and 11 instructors to 100 professors and 54 instructors.¹⁴ The university's physical plant experienced a similar development, expanding by twelve buildings, including a hospital, an agriculture building, a women's dormitory and a gymnasium, between 1895 and 1914.¹⁵

The university's expansion during this period spelled a boom for Columbia's economy, which revolved, in large part, around the school. The evolution of the various colleges and their departments provided hundreds of professional positions for the city's white middle class as low level administrators, clerks and secretaries. The working class, including some blacks, pursued employment in the increased demand for janitors, laborers, domestics and cooks. Local construction firms, concrete companies and lumber yards prospered on the lucrative contracts doled out by the university to erect campus halls or supply building materials. The city's clothing shops, restaurants and other retail stores thrived on the vigorous business of their enlarged student and faculty clientele.

During the period of the school's maturation as a "true" modern American university, Columbia experienced a parallel, not unrelated, development as an urban, industrial center. Between 1900 and 1910, the city's population increased an astounding 71%.¹⁶ In 1904, the city constructed a \$100,000 municipal waterworks and electric plant, and paved Broadway, the city's main thoroughfare, between

¹³ Jonas Viles, The University of Missouri: A Centennial History (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1939), 251-254; Stephens, A History of the University, 360-361.

¹⁴ Catalogue of the University of the State of Missouri. Fifty-Fourth Report of the Curators to the Governor of the State, 1895-1896 (Columbia: n.p.), 8-11; University of Missouri Catalogue. Sixty-Sixth Report of the Curators to the Governor of the State, 1907-1908 (Columbia: n.p.), 18-52.

¹⁵ Viles, The University of Missouri, 253-254; Pamela Ann Miner, "The Creation of a 'True' University in Missouri, 1866-1896," (M.A. thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1988), 100.

¹⁶ Elizabeth C. Grant, "Some Colored Working Mothers in Columbia" (M.A. thesis: University of Missouri, 1935), 15.

Sixth to Tenth streets in the Summer of 1906. Three years later, the city erected a new post office and county courthouse. The Hamilton-Brown Shoe Company established a factory in Columbia in 1906 which employed over two hundred workers.¹⁷

While the city reaped its share of the benefits from the University of Missouri's expansion, the school's institutional development aggravated relations between its substantial faculty and student body, on the one hand, and members of the larger society, especially Columbia's upper class, on the other. Since 1839, Boone County elites regarded the university as a local institution largely because they won the bid to locate the school in Columbia by contributing \$118,300 in cash and land. These philanthropists assumed that their children would be the primary beneficiaries of the institution, which would operate under their watchful supervision. In the year 1854-1855, fifty-five of the university's 129 students were from Boone County. Eight of the fifteen members on the 1843 Board of Curators were from Boone County, and while that Board was exceptional, there were from three to five Boone County representatives on every Board between 1841 to 1889.¹⁸

Because of the control Boone County elites wielded over the university, many Missourians perceived an inevitable, although perhaps unjustifiable, link between the institution and the Southern cause. The university's third president, James Shannon (1850-1856), a fiery, evangelical Irish minister, frequently delivered state-wide lectures during his administration on the Biblical justification of slavery. The two succeeding presidents, William W. Hudson (1856-1859) and Benjamin A. Minor (1860-1862), were both from Virginia, the keystone of the South. In October 1861, several members of the Board of Curators refused to take the loyalty oath required of all civil officials. Vice-President Eli E. Bass, the wealthiest man in Boone County, and another Boone Countian, Treasurer Walter T. Lenoir, were among the curators who

¹⁷ Crighton, A History of Columbia and Boone County, 280, 281.

¹⁸ Frank E. Stephens, A History of the University, 16-17, 40, 106, 322.

resigned.¹⁹

However, by 1910, the University of Missouri had shifted from a Boone County-dominated institution with an elitist, Southern ideology to a more independent, state and federally funded institution. The antebellum university focused on furnishing the children of the upper class, with a religious and classical education, but by 1880, its educational emphasis had shifted to providing the sons and daughters of the rising middle class with scientific or professional training.²⁰ In the year 1910-1911, Boone County still provided the majority of the university's students, 393, but the figures on enrollment were not as one-sided as sixty years ago, with Jackson County accounting for 205 students and the City of St. Louis for another 145, and a sizable number of students now came from outside of Missouri, such as Oklahoma (39), Illinois (31) and Iowa (16).²¹ Boone County appointees no longer dominated the Board of Curators since the state legislature had revised the residential qualifications for the Board in 1889 and provided that no more than one member be appointed from each congressional district.²² The administration had upgraded its faculty by acquiring Ph.D.s trained abroad and in Eastern universities, especially Harvard and Johns Hopkins, and securing nationally known scholars, such as the economists Herbert J. Davenport and Thorstein B. Veblen and zoologist George Lefevre.²³

"In 1901 the townspeople and the faculty were still a rather unified group," Winterton C. Curtis, a Johns Hopkins Ph.D., recalled when he first arrived in Columbia. "Within the next decade the situation was entirely changed. The faculty increased in size, many of the newcomers did not become well acquainted with any of the

¹⁹ Ibid., 79-81, 119, 127, 158, 160.

²⁰ Miner, "The Creation of a 'True' University," 11, 21.

²¹ The University of Missouri Bulletin. General Series. volume 12. number 5: Catalogue, 1910-1911. Sixty-Ninth Report of the Curators to the Governor of the State, 1907-1908 (Columbia: n.p., 1911), 495-499.

²² Stephens, A History of the University, 322.

²³ Ibid., 419, 513; Viles, The University of Missouri, 249.

'born-and-raised,' and the faculty became large enough to have a social life of its own." Curtis, a zoology professor, taught at the university for 45 years, retiring in 1946. As a recorder of community life, he discussed the effects this change in social patterns had on the Columbia townspeople: "I had the impression that this separation was resented by the natives, particularly by those who had dominated the town's unified social activities, and that a certain loftiness, which became apparent in the local 'Four-hundred,' was a defense reaction following the loss of something long cherished."²⁴

As late as 1901, many Columbia residents retained the traditions of their vibrant Southern heritage. Professor Curtis recounted that a local merchant from an old Boone County family confided to him, after failing to recognize his New England accent: "Perfessor, you don't know how good it makes me feel to have a fine upstanding young southerner like you come here on the faculty, instead of another one of those damned Yankees we been getting so many of lately."²⁵

Not only were faculty and students alienated from local townspeople by tradition and values, they were physically separated from the larger community. The campus was virtually an oasis: faculty homes, fraternities and sororities, and student boardinghouses were clustered around the campus in the southern part of the city, while the the wealthy businessmen, bankers and merchants resided in the prestigious, eastern neighborhoods of the city, and the white working class lived in modest houses north of the central retail district.²⁶

These divisions, seemingly only physical, extended into the social and political life of both the university and the greater community. While the faculty and some students were Columbia residents, no

²⁴ Winterton C. Curtis, A Damned-Yankee Professor in Little Dixie. Originally published in Columbia Missourian, 2 to 20 April 1957. (Columbia: Columbia Missourian, n.d.), 22. On Professor Curtis, see Columbia Missourian, 17 June 1966.

²⁵ Quoted in Curtis, A Damned-Yankee Professor, 14.

²⁶ Alan R. Havig, From Southern Village to Midwestern City: Columbia. An Illustrated History (Woodland Hills, CA: Windsor, 1984), 16, 19.

member of either group held political office in the county or city government; the city council and the public school board was composed exclusively of the local business elite.²⁷ Nor was it considered appropriate for faculty to be involved in political affairs. "You can't mix in politics," a local advised Doctor Curtis, "the people of Columbia think of a professor as they would a judge in political matters."²⁸ Similarly, Columbia's various civic organizations, such as the Masons and Kiwanis and Columbia Commercial Club, did not have a strong faculty membership although most local bankers, lawyers and businessmen belonged to several such organizations.²⁹

Such deep-rooted social divisions fixed the University of Missouri on a collision course with the larger community, especially with the city's entrepreneurs. Many businessmen regarded the university as only means to profit,³⁰ but the university's infringement on their established business practices during the first decade of the twentieth century thrust the two factions into heated conflict. The increased student enrollment compelled the University to begin building dormitories, a solution which incensed many local boarding-housekeepers because it interfered with their business. Another conflict arose when the university decided to recess for Christmas vacation a week earlier than usual one year, prompting representatives from Broadway stores to complain to the president that their holiday business would suffer because outbound students

²⁷ See Columbia city directories, 1900-1918, various publishers; Annual Report of the Public Schools, Columbia, Missouri, 1919-1922 (Columbia: n.p., n.d.), 3.

²⁸ Quoted in Curtis, A Damned-Yankee Professor, 15.

²⁹ For two social clubs membership, see Columbia Masonic Directory, 1911 (Columbia: n.p., 1911), 5-54 passim; Columbia Kiwanis Club, Names of Officers and Committees and Short Account of Members and the First Year's Work (Columbia: n.p., 1923), 3-16 passim. See also Curtis, A Damned-Yankee Professor, 25-26, for his comments on faculty membership in such clubs.

³⁰ For example, Professor Curtis charged that Columbia grocers used a three-price system for goods, charging students and faculty the highest rates. Curtis, A Damned-Yankee Professor, 23.

would purchase their gifts in their hometowns rather than in Columbia. Disgruntled Boone County farmers perennially grumbled about the College of Agriculture selling the eggs, vegetables and meat which students raised at the Agricultural Experiment Station during research, at market prices because such practices undercut their enterprises.³¹ The School of Journalism's student-operated daily, the Evening Missourian, and the most influential newspaper in shaping local public opinion, the Daily Tribune, exemplified the diverging interests of the university and larger community. Columbia's two dailies also documented the increasing incidents of conflict between the two groups.

From 1910 to 1920, tensions between the university and the community intensified. During the 1916 election for Boone County representative to the state legislature, B. M. Anderson, a former state senator, focused his campaign on the university. If elected, he promised to remove President Albert Ross Hill and "the bunch that has mismanaged the institution for years." But his bid proved unsuccessful. Three years later, Anderson and two other Columbia residents, a local physician and an employee of the State Board of Agriculture, unsuccessfully attempted to secure a hearing before the Missouri legislature's appropriations committee to bring charges against President Hill and have him discharged.³²

Despite the broiling controversies, the city's Commercial Club and the University of Missouri campaigned separately to promote the community to interested students and prospective residents and businesses. The city's central location and seemingly progressive atmosphere attracted numerous students and new residents to the community. The University of Missouri's 1923 Catalog briefly described the school's ideal location in the "model city":

The University of Missouri, being at Columbia, is about half way between St. Louis and Kansas City, near the center of the state. It is reached by the Wabash and the Missouri, Kansas & Texas railways. Columbia is progressive and prosperous, with a population of approximately 13, 000 and more than thirty miles of paved streets.

Columbia may be characterized as a town of schools, homes, and churches, with enough industrialism to make it efficient. It offers the conveniences of a larger city

³¹ Ibid., 25; Stephens, A History of the University, 377.

³² Quoted in Stephens, A History of the University, 434-435, 460-462.

without the distractions. The student is a predominant factor in Columbia.³³ However, this picturesque description represented only white Columbia.

Reflective of its Southern heritage, Columbia was segregated. Except for two small, isolated areas, blacks were confined to a large, unimproved central section³⁴ characterized by overcrowded, dilapidated housing and abject living conditions. Dirt roads intersected the community, and the Flat Branch, a large open sewer, flowed the length of it. While city water and electricity provided modern convenience to the white residential neighborhoods, few blacks could afford such luxuries, relying rather on unsanitary wells and coal oil lamps.³⁵ Frederick Douglass School, five black churches and a dozen black businesses were scattered throughout the impoverished community.

The black institutions played a predominant role in the city's African-American community. Although poorly funded and understaffed, Frederick Douglass School, established in 1885, had a 15 room brick facility which had both grade and high school departments. The school with both liberal arts and manual training

³³ The University of Missouri Bulletin, Volume 24, Number 1, General Series, 1923, No. 1: Catalog, Eighty-first Report of Curators to the Governor of the State, 1922-1923 (Columbia, n.p., 1923), 18. The population figure of 13,000, which had also been used in the 1922 Catalog, appears inflated.

³⁴ In the early 1920s, the largest black neighborhood ran north of Broadway and extended from the center of Columbia westward to McBaine Avenue. A smaller district near Cemetery Hill was located south of Broadway and west of the M.K.T. tracks. The third black section stretched along the north of Wilkes Boulevard and east by the Wabash Railroad line. Audrey Nell Kittel, "The Negro Community of Columbia, Missouri," (M.A. thesis, University of Missouri, 1938), 10.

³⁵ On the impoverished conditions in Columbia's black community around the turn of the century, see William Wilson Elwang, The Negroes of Columbia, Missouri: A Concrete Study of the Race Problem (Columbia: University of Missouri Sociology Department, 1904). A community study done over thirty years later revealed little improvement in material living conditions for the group. In 1938, only one black family in 89 surveyed had a furnace, only 15 had an inside bathtub and only 20 had an inside toilet. Kittel, "The Negro Community of Columbia," 41.

departments employed a total of fifteen teachers, including Principal J. E. Jones. The Columbia School Board, consisting of an all white, six-member panel, supervised and controlled the hiring of faculty, funding and curriculum.³⁶ While the community had at least twelve fraternal societies, including the Masons, Odd Fellows and Knights of Pythias, it had no NAACP chapter or other highly politicized organization.³⁷ The community's five churches were a limited substitute for the more militant, protest-oriented NAACP. The oldest, and most important, church was Second Baptist Church, established in 1866. Second Baptist traditionally had the largest congregation, with a large upper-middle and middle class base. In 1894, the congregation had erected a prominent church on the corner of Fourth Street and Broadway, Columbia's main thoroughfare.³⁸ Reverend J. Lyle Caston, a St. Louisan, had assumed the pastorship in 1920.³⁹ The community's professional class was composed exclusively of teachers and ministers since there were no local black doctors or lawyers.⁴⁰

The socio-economic status of blacks in Columbia resembled the

³⁶ Annual Report of the Public Schools, 1919-1922, 3, 14, 16-17.

³⁷ R. E. Hackman's Columbia City Directory, 1915 (Quincy, IL: R. E. Hackman, 1915), 61; Elwang, The Negroes of Columbia, 29-30.

³⁸ Wilbur D. East, "A Descriptive Survey of the Negro Churches in Columbia" (M.A. thesis: University of Missouri, 1938), 35-55, passim. In 1938, Second Baptist Church's membership was 465, composed largely of upper-middle and middle class blacks. Fifty-six of its members had college training. Its congregation included 18 teachers, 26 former teachers, 1 physician and 16 merchants.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 44. Before he assumed pastorship, Rev. Caston had resided in St. Louis, Missouri, where his father, Dr. Jonathan T. Caston, was a leading black physician. A graduate of Lincoln Institute (Jefferson City, Missouri), the younger Caston opened a tailoring shop and cleaners in St. Louis in 1915. In 1918, he served as secretary and treasurer of the C. K. Robinson Printing Company, and the following year, worked as an agent of the National Relief Assurance Company. St. Louis Argus, 5 August 1915; Gould's St. Louis Directory, 1918 vol. 47 (St. Louis: Polk-Gould Directory Co., 1918), 654; *Ibid.* vol. 48 (St. Louis: Polk-Gould Directory Co., 1919), 663.

⁴⁰ See Columbia and County Directory, 1923 (Columbia, n.p., n.d.), passim, which identifies residents by race.

position of many blacks in the deep South. While they had accounted for almost 40% of Columbia's population in 1890, that figure had fallen off to less than 19% by 1920. Between 1910 and 1920, African-Americans had actually decreased by 327 persons (a drop of almost 15% of the black population). This decrease suggests two migrational push factors at work for blacks in the city: hostile racial conditions and scarce employment opportunities. Black women found jobs as domestics, cooks and laundresses in white residences and student boarding houses. However, employment opportunities were bleak for black men, forcing many to leave the area in search of jobs. The 1920 Census figure reveals a skewed sex ratio of approximately 83 black men per hundred black women in Columbia compared to a state average of 104.3 black males per hundred black females.⁴¹ The university employed at least a dozen black men as temporary janitors and day laborers.⁴² "A colored man has to earn his living in the hardest way there is," one local black commented in 1938. "Here in [Columbia] if he gets a job as a cook or a porter or janitor he's really in the upper crust among the workers."⁴³

The prevailing white viewpoint expressed in an 1899 Columbia Herald editorial, "The Value of a Negro," proved just as popular among townspeople in 1923:

The negro must attend to his own business. He must not seek to intrude where his presence is distasteful. He must not loaf on the streets. He must work and pay his debts. He must not aspire to be a political boss. The negro who dabbles in politics, save to go to the polls and vote as any other citizen, soon makes himself a tool of designing demagogue and loses the respect of his neighbors.⁴⁴

On the eve of Scott's murder, however, Columbia's African-Americans were chipping away at the system of racial accommodation, making incremental, yet significant, economic and social gains. A fifteen room, brick facility was erected to

⁴¹ Grant, "Some Colored Working Mothers," 15, 22.

⁴² Based on correlation of the Columbia Directory, 1923 and listing of temporary workers employed at the University of Missouri, in Official Manual of the State of Missouri, 1923-1924 (Jefferson City: Hugh Stephens Press, n.d.), 607-614.

⁴³ Quoted in Kittel, "The Negro Community of Columbia," 75.

⁴⁴ Columbia Herald, 27 January 1899.

accommodate the Frederick Douglass School in 1917 at a cost to Columbia taxpayers of \$30,000.⁴⁵ In 1922, the Missouri Attorney General compelled a Boone County school district to establish a school for black children.⁴⁶ Black janitors and day laborers employed by the university were earning wages equal to those earned by white men in comparable positions.⁴⁷ In 1920, the Second Christian Church congregation built a large, red brick church with a seating capacity between 350 and 400 on Fifth and Walnut streets for almost \$35,000. That same year, work was completed on the St. Luke's Methodist Church's \$5000 stone structure on the corner of Fifth Street and Sharp Avenue. It is probable that some segments of the white population perceived blacks as becoming too self-assertive, too prosperous.⁴⁸

Such economic and social advancements triggered violence in some whites who felt their way of life threatened. In the face of such advancements, Southern whites of all classes resorted to lynching to intimidate, degrade and control blacks. While whites justified lynching to protect white women against the rape of black men, lynching had little to do with rape.⁴⁹ As sociologist Arthur F. Raper and other scholars have noted only one-sixth of lynch victims between 1889 and 1929 were even accused of rape.⁵⁰ Lynching's real motive as a tool of social control was vested in impeding or eliminating black progress, especially economic progress. Sociologist Oliver C. Cox defined lynching as "an act of homicidal

⁴⁵ Annual Report of the Public Schools, 1919-1922, 14.

⁴⁶ Kirkendall, A History of Missouri, 105.

⁴⁷ Official Manual of the State, 1923-1924, 607-614;

⁴⁸ East, "A Descriptive Survey of the Negro Churches," 14, 92.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of the myth of the innate black rapist, see Hall, "A Strange and Bitter Fruit," Chapter 5, Revolt Against Chivalry, passim 129-157.

⁵⁰ Arthur F. Raper, The Tragedy of Lynching (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1933), 37. However, the charge of rape against a black almost ensured his lynching. Between 1885 and 1924, mobs lynched 862 blacks accused of rape or attempted rape compared to only 60 whites charged with the same offense. Work, Negro Year Book, 1925-1926, 398.

aggression committed by one people against another through mob action for the purpose of suppressing some tendency in the latter to rise from a position of accommodation or for subjugating them further to some lower social class." And Walter White, who investigated many lynchings for the NAACP, observed, "Lynching has always been the means for protection, not of white women, but of profits."⁵¹

⁵¹ Oliver C. Cox, Caste, Class and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1948), 549; White Rope & Faggot, 82 (original emphasis).

Chapter Two: "Swift Justice"

James T. Scott's tragic ordeal began Saturday night, 28 April 1923, at the Boone County jail and ended in the early morning hours on Sunday, in view of almost 2,000 spectators at Stewart Bridge. According to city policeman Ples T. King, a mob composed of fifty men gathered at the corner Eighth and Walnut streets, on the Boone County courthouse square, around 10:00 p.m. At 10:45 p.m. the mob approached Sheriff Fred C. Brown and Deputy Sheriff Wilson Hall, the only officers on duty at the jail that night, and demanded they turn the prisoner over to them. When the sheriff and his deputy refused, the mob leaders replied they would get Scott anyway.⁵²

Earlier in the day, farmers and their families from the county drifted into Columbia, in the rural, Saturday tradition, to discuss the week's events, purchase groceries and catch the current gossip. Many trooped home for supper in the late afternoon, only to return to Columbia in the evening in anticipation of the expected lynching. Rumors broadcast from Columbia that day speculated on the possibility of mob violence, and several St. Louis newspapers dispatched reporters to the city on the afternoon train to cover the possible lynching.⁵³ By 8:00 p.m. a bustling crowd thronged downtown streets near the courthouse square and jail. "All Columbia," a local paper observed, "seemed to have a premonition something would happen. . ."54

A tense, smoldering atmosphere had loomed over Columbia since

⁵² For the policeman's account of the storming of the jail, see Columbia Daily Tribune, 11 July 1923.

⁵³ St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 30 April 1923. Post-Dispatch reporter Francis W. Misselwitz, a UM journalism graduate, arrived in Columbia at 6:30 on Saturday night on the Wabash. The newspaper dispatched Misselwitz because of "reports reaching the Post-Dispatch that there had been threats of violence against the negro."

⁵⁴ Columbia Daily Tribune, 30 April 1923.

Friday, April 20, when an unidentified black man attacked Regina Almstedt, a fourteen-year-old white girl, in a wooded area near Stewart Bridge, an automobile and pedestrian overpass in the city's south end. According to the girl, the daughter of University of Missouri professor Hermann B. Almstedt,⁵⁵ an unfamiliar black man lured her down to the M.K.T. railroad tracks below Stewart Bridge and assaulted her in the nearby woods around 3:30 p.m.⁵⁶ The stranger reportedly struck her several times in the face, choked her with his belt, gagged her and threatened to kill her. However, he was scared off by a passing railroad crew on a handcar before a sexual assault could be committed.⁵⁷

As news of the attack spread, hysteria clutched the restless white community, and the local press, especially the Columbia Daily Tribune, stoked the combustible situation with its inflammatory coverage of the "brutal attack." "Her clothing was torn to shreds," the newspaper graphically depicted the battered victim, "and her person was lacerated by the hands of the impassioned beast. Her lower limbs were scratched and bleeding and other parts on her person were torn and bruised." The brushfire of small town gossip swept through Columbia's white community. Whispered rumors

⁵⁵ Professor Almstedt was chair of the university's German department. On Professor Almstedt, see Missouri Alumnus vol. 25, no. 3 (November 1936), 13.

⁵⁶ The approximate time of the attack remains unclear. The Columbia Evening Missourian reported the attack occurred around 3:30 p.m.; however, the Columbia Daily Tribune placed the attack "between 2 and 3 o'clock." The NAACP lynching report later charged that the attack occurred at 2:30 p.m. but when the suspect, James T. Scott, established an alibi, the time was later changed to 3:30. See the Columbia Evening Missourian, 21 April 1923; Columbia Daily Tribune, 21 April 1923; letter from George L. Vaughn to Walter F. White, 2 May 1923, 9 pages, "Lynching, Missouri, 1923," National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Papers, Administrative File, group I, series C, box 361, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Hereafter cited as "NAACP Lynching Report."

⁵⁷ Columbia Evening Missourian, 21 April 1923; Columbia Daily Tribune, 21 April 1923. According to the doctor who treated her, Regina was "suffering from bruises and cuts on the face, head and body" and "from the shock of the experience," but her condition was "not dangerous."

circulated that, contrary to the news reports, the "black brute" had raped the girl, and other horrific accounts described how the "fiend" had used his knife "to cut her underclothes."⁵⁸ Enraged and anxious residents flooded the police department and sheriff's office with telephone calls inquiring whether the assailant had been apprehended.⁵⁹

The Columbia police force and the Boone County sheriff's department conducted an intensive week-long manhunt for the assailant. Sheriff Fred C. Brown dispatched a deputy to McBaine, another to Rocheport and others to watch trains running out of Columbia.⁶⁰ He also telephoned Boone County farmers and several central Missouri sheriff's departments, alerting them to be on the lookout for a man fitting the description of Regina's assailant.⁶¹ Police Chief Ernest Rowland and his patrolmen had tracked the assailant with two bloodhounds, on loan from the Moberly, Missouri police department, but their efforts proved unsuccessful.⁶²

The white community, especially Columbia's elite, united to ensure the apprehension of the attacker. Local government and civic organizations, composed of Columbia's "leading citizens," contributed a \$1,125 reward, for any information leading to the arrest of the assailant.⁶³ Working class men formed armed posses,

⁵⁸ Columbia Tribune, 23 April 1923. Many of these sensational rumors were used by the mob members' attorneys during the course of the trial. See, the Columbia Daily Tribune, 11 July 1923.

⁵⁹ Columbia Daily Tribune, 21 April 1923;

⁶⁰ McBaine is a small Boone County community located southwest of Columbia on the Missouri River. The town of Rocheport is situated near the western border of Boone County. In 1923, both communities had a large concentration of black residents.

⁶¹ Columbia Evening Missourian, 21 April 1923; Columbia Daily Tribune, 21 April 1923. Regina described her assailant as a black male, about 25 to 30 years old, with a Charlie Chaplin mustache and wearing brown trousers, a dark coat and a cap.

⁶² Columbia Evening Missourian, 21 April 1923; Columbia Daily Tribune, 21 April 1923.

⁶³ Columbia Evening Missourian, 21 April 1923. The Boone County Court contributed \$300, Columbia city council subscribed \$200, the Commercial Club, Rotary Club, Kiwanis Clubs and the Lion's Club offered \$500 jointly, and the "Best

combing the city's black districts for the assailant.⁶⁴

Over the next several days, Columbia law enforcement officers devoted their undivided attention to the case. Any black man in Boone County, regardless of whether he fit the description or not, became a suspect. Officers harassed the city's African-American community, arresting black men, grilling and browbeating them and taking them before the victim for identification.⁶⁵

On Friday, April 27, one week after the attack, authorities located a witness who saw James T. Scott, a 35 year old suspect who had been jailed since Saturday, walking past the Dalton Coal Office on Fourth Street and apparently heading towards the university campus around 4:15 on the afternoon of the attack. When arrested, Scott told authorities that he had been at the Medical Building, where he was employed as a janitor, on the university campus all afternoon on the day of the assault. Confronted, he denied ever having left the university and maintained that he worked at the Medical Building all afternoon, cleaning and polishing floors, stairs and woodwork, until he locked up at 5:00 p.m. Two white witnesses saw him at the building about 3:00 p.m. and again at 5 o'clock, but Scott was unable to account for the interim two hours.⁶⁶

Unfortunately Columbia police arrest records are not extant for this period,⁶⁷ but other documents provide us with a relatively detailed profile of James T. Scott. The only physical description of Scott describes him as "a copper colored negro," with a Charlie

People On Earth," the Elks donated \$125.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 21 April 1923; Columbia Daily Tribune, 21 April 1923.

⁶⁵ Columbia Evening Missourian, 23 April 1923. According to a 12 year old white girl, an unidentified black man had stopped her near Stewart Bridge on the day of Regina's attack, but the frightened girl fled.

⁶⁶ Columbia Daily Tribune, 27 April 1923; "NAACP Lynching Report," 7, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Papers, box 361.

⁶⁷ "Columbia, Missouri, Police Records, 1882-1946," collection 2380, reel 5, volume 9-11, Joint Collection, University of Missouri, Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Columbia and State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscripts.

Chaplin mustache, weighing about 130 to 135 pounds, and standing about five feet three or four.⁶⁸ His death certificate states that he was born on 5 October 1887 in New Mexico, the son of James Scott and Sarah Brown.⁶⁹ We also know that he served overseas in the U.S. Army with the Eighth Illinois Infantry during World War I and received a decoration for valor. It remains unclear, however, exactly when he moved to Columbia, but he was a relatively new resident, probably having moved sometime in 1919 or 1920 from Chicago, Illinois, where he lived for many years. Presumably a widower, Scott was the father of three children, Anna, Helen and Carl, who resided with relatives in Chicago. Both of Scott's parents resided in Columbia, but little is known about them.

On 23 February 1921, Scott married Gertrude Carter, the 24 year old daughter of a local couple, James and Annie Carter, in a ceremony performed by Rev. J. Lyle Caston at Second Baptist Church.⁷⁰ A native of Columbia, Gertrude Scott had attended Lincoln Institute's Normal School in Jefferson City, and later she taught first and second grades at Frederick Douglass School Grade School, probably beginning sometime in 1921 or 1922.⁷¹ The couple resided at 501 North Third Street, two blocks from Douglass School, and were members of the Second Baptist Church.⁷²

Compared to others in the African-American community, Scott was well paid. While the university employed some blacks as

⁶⁸ Columbia Daily Tribune, 27 April 1923.

⁶⁹ Death certificate of James T. Scott, 29 April 1923, no. 11912, Bureau of Vital Records, Missouri Division of Health, Jefferson City, Missouri.

⁷⁰ Marriage license of James Scott and Gertrude Carter, issued 19 February 1921, Boone County Recorder of Deeds Office, Boone County Courthouse, Columbia, Missouri; Charles A. O'Dell, comp., "Black Households in Columbia, Missouri, 1901-1909: A Directory," (Columbia: n.p., 1988), 10.

⁷¹ Forty-Eighth Annual Catalogue of Lincoln Institute, Jefferson City, Missouri, 1919-1920 (Jefferson City: Capital News Printing Co., n.d.), 93; Annual Report of the Public Schools, 1919-1922, 17; Interview with Sarah Belle Jackson by Patrick Huber, 17 April 1990, John W. "Blind" Boone Community Center, Columbia, Missouri.

⁷² Columbia Directory, 1923, 157; "NAACP Lynching Report," 8, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Papers, box 361.

janitors and day laborers, most worked only as temporary help. Scott, however, was a full-time employee. As a janitor, Scott had steady, year-round work which paid a good wage, earning \$65.00 a month or \$780 a year--a substantial income during a time when most of the city's black men found it difficult to find part-time employment.⁷³

Scott was financially secure enough to purchase a "practically new" Hupmobile auto for almost \$600. At that time, few blacks in Boone County owned automobiles and even many whites were unable to afford one. A 1938 Columbia study showed only 15 black families out of 89 surveyed owned automobiles.⁷⁴

It is highly probable that James T. Scott was an exceedingly visible member of the city's African-American community since he was a newcomer, his wife was a school teacher, he held a good paying job and owned an automobile. James and Gertrude Scott were members of the Second Baptist Church. They lived near Frederick Douglass School in a black middle class neighborhood where most of the school's other teachers lived.⁷⁵ As only one of fifteen teachers in the city's African-American community, Gertrude Scott would have been regarded as a professional and a community leader.

On Saturday, April 28, one week after his arrest, authorities officially charged Scott with assaulting Regina Almstedt,. At 10:30 a.m., Scott, accompanied by his white attorney, Emmett C. Anderson, appeared before Judge H. A. Collier in Boone County Circuit Court and entered a plea of not guilty. The judge set Scott's trial date for May 21 and ordered him held without bond in the county jailhouse.⁷⁶

⁷³ "James Scott," Payroll Appointment Cards, Columbia: Box 1, Roll 3 (1916-1940, Ogle, G.C.--Zwanzig, S.A.) C:1/84/1. University of Missouri-Columbia Archives. In 1922 the average monthly wage for a farm laborer, a seasonal position, in the Midwest was only \$47.14. Lorenzo J. Greene and Carter G. Woodson, The Negro Wage Earner (New York: Russell & Russell, 1969, originally published 1930), 204, 208.

⁷⁴ Columbia Evening Missourian, 30 April 1923; Kittel, "The Negro Community of Columbia," 89.

⁷⁵ Columbia Directory, 1923, 239-240.

⁷⁶ Columbia Evening Missourian, 28 April 1923. Scott signed over the deed of his

The spark that ignited the smoldering atmosphere came later that day. Columbia Daily Tribune's Saturday edition reported that Regina Almstedt had "positively identified" James T. Scott as her assailant. "It is generally believed," the newspaper asserted, "that Scott is guilty of the crime and Miss Almstedt's identification makes certain now that he is the man that attacked her."⁷⁷ The Tribune's editor, Edward Watson, explicitly challenged all "red-blooded" white Columbia males to assume their roles as champions of womanhood and mete out "swift justice" to Scott. He also included two other jailed black suspects, Ollie Watson and Jadie Scott, charged with the rape of two black school girls,⁷⁸ in his call for a lynching. Watson's editorial, "Columbia's Proud Pre-Eminence," read in part:

Columbia has the distinction of having in jail three rapists. The victims of all three have identified them and testified to their guilt. So there is no doubt of the justice of the claim of this town, the center of education and refinement in Missouri, of wearing the belt for heinous and revolting crimes. . . . These brutes and super-criminals should be dealt swift justice by the courts, of course. . . . Murder and homicide can be committed under stress of anger or insult, but the rapist is guilty of premeditation, malice--in fact every degrading and criminal act. A man killer is a mild-mannered and desirable citizen compared with a despoiler and ravisher of innocent girlhood. . . . This trio should feel the "halter draw" in vindication of the law.⁷⁹

automobile to Anderson to cover legal fees.

⁷⁷ Columbia Daily Tribune, 28 April 1923.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 26 April 1923; Columbia Evening Missourian, 27 April 1923.

According to the victims, on April 13, the two men drove them out Rocheport Road where the assault took place. The attack on one of the girls, the Tribune reported, was said to be "extremely brutal and revolting." Both defendants pleaded not guilty to the charges and were held without bond. There appears to be no familial relationship between James T. Scott and Jadie Scott.

⁷⁹ Columbia Daily Tribune, 28 April 1923. Columbia and Boone County have a long tradition of lynching. In 1853, after one failed lynching attempt, a mob removed Hiram, a slave who confessed to attempting to rape a fifteen-year-old white girl, from his jail cell and hanged him on the outskirts of Columbia. During Hiram's trial, the state prosecutor had urged enraged citizens to hang the slave "coolly and do it decently and in order." In late August 1889, a mob of seventy-five to 100 "Regulators" rode into Columbia twice with a twenty-four hour period looking for Squire Divers, a 21 year old black man accused of attempting to rape his white employer's daughter, but the mob was

Less than five hours after this edition hit the street, a mob would come for Scott.

After the sheriff and deputy refused to turn over Scott, mob members regrouped in the jail yard, plotting another approach. At 11:00 p.m. one of the vigilantes returned with a sledge hammer and chisel from a nearby garage, and broke the padlock off the jail's south door. Meanwhile, Sheriff Brown telephoned Boone County prosecuting attorney Ruby M. Hulen to come to the jail and help stay the mob. The door open, the mob rushed into the jail, but two white prisoners, confined in a nearby cell, falsely informed them that the sheriff had removed Scott, for his protection, to the nearby Fulton jail that afternoon. Not believing their story, the vigilantes pressed on to the other cells.⁸⁰

By this time, many residents had rushed from their homes to watch the expected lynching.⁸¹ Hundreds of curious spectators, including a number of university students, both male and female, assembled outside the jail on the courthouse lawn, anxiously awaiting the opportunity to witness a lynching.⁸² Nearly fifty unsuccessful in both of their attempts. However, George Bush was not so fortunate. Less than two weeks later, in early September, 1889, a band of 23 heavily armed, masked men removed Bush, a 17 year old black youth accused of sexually molesting a 6 year old "mulatto" girl, from his jail cell and hanged him from a courthouse window. Columbia Statesman, 19, 23 and 26 August 1889; ibid., 21 and 28 August 1889; Switzler, History of Boone County, 373; Columbia Herald, 22 and 29 August 1889; ibid., 12 September 1889.

⁸⁰ Columbia Evening Missourian, 30 April and 1 May 1923; Columbia Daily Tribune, 30 April 1923. For various accounts of the jail storming and lynching in white newspapers, see St. Louis Globe Democrat, 29 and 30 April 1923; St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 29 and 30 April 1923; Kansas City Star, 29 April 1923. For accounts from a black viewpoint, see St. Louis Argus, 4 May 1923; Kansas City Call, 4 May 1923; and Chicago Defender, 5 May 1923.

⁸¹ Columbia Evening Missourian, 30 April and 5 May 1923; Columbia Daily Tribune, 30 April 1923.

⁸² Columbia Evening Missourian, 30 April 1923; Columbia Daily Tribune, 30 April 1923. The 1923 winter term had just ended on April 25, and the summer term was to begin on June 18. Otherwise, it seems probable that more students would have been among the crowd. University of Missouri Catalog, 1922-1923, 152, 348.

blacks also gathered, on the fringes of the crowd, and nervously waited, hoping their worst fears would not be realized. Shaking his head in disbelief, one unidentified black remarked, "I never thought this could happen in Columbia."⁸³

Two uniformed policemen stood idly by, conversing with spectators. Although Sheriff Brown had ample warning of the mob's intentions to get Scott on Saturday night, he had taken no extra precautions to protect the prisoner, fortify security at the jail or to swear in any extra deputies. Nor had he moved Scott to a different county jail.⁸⁴

Realizing the local authorities had no intention of preventing the lynching, George L. Vaughn⁸⁵, a prominent black St. Louis attorney and NAACP representative, telephoned Governor Arthur M. Hyde in Jefferson City around midnight and urged him to assemble the national guard to disperse the mob. Vaughn had arrived in Columbia at 6:30 p.m. that evening at the request of Rev. Caston to assist Anderson in Scott's legal defense.⁸⁶ At approximately 12:15 a.m. the governor returned Vaughn's call and told him that he had contacted Colonel John F. Williams, commanding officer of Battery B, 128th Field Artillery, Missouri National Guard, headquartered in

⁸³ Quoted in "NAACP Lynching Report," 2, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Papers, box 361.

⁸⁴ Columbia Evening Missourian, 30 April 1923.

⁸⁵ Vaughn had been a long-time champion of black political and civil rights in St. Louis. He and several other prominent black city leaders formed the Citizens Liberty League, an organization aimed at promoting black political candidates, in 1910. In 1915, Vaughn served on a special NAACP committee which fought a city-wide initiative which sought to impose residential segregation in St. Louis, and later that year he and Homer G. Phillips argued the case before the Missouri State Supreme Court. On Vaughn, see Journal of Negro History vol. 34, no. 4 (October 1949), 490-491; Lawrence O. Christensen, "Black St. Louis: A Study in Race Relations, 1865-1916" (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Missouri-Columbia, 1972), 221-222, 250-251.

⁸⁶ "NAACP Lynching Report," 1, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Papers, box 361. Vaughn wrote an eight-page report of the lynching for the NAACP. For a reprint of his report, see St. Louis Argus, 4 May 1923; and for a shorter version, Columbia Evening Missourian, 5 May 1923.

Columbia, and ordered them to mobilize and disperse the mob.⁸⁷ Rev. Caston recalled that the governor "said that he had ordered the battery out and that they should appear in a few minutes. Vaughn and I then went to the corner of Seventh and Ash streets where we waited for about half-hour, expecting the battery to arrive."⁸⁸

But Battery B never arrived. By 12:30 a.m., only Colonel Williams, Captain Arthur L. Campbell and three sergeants had assembled in the armory across the street from courthouse.⁸⁹ More than fifty of the battery's members failed to report because they were among the crowd on the courthouse lawn.

Inside the jail, the mob continued, unhindered, hammering on the first steel door which separated them from their quarry. By now, nearly 500 men crowded the narrow passageway, shouting encouragements to those swinging the sledges. Unmasked and calling one another by name, the mob worked "quietly and determinedly." However, the steel door proved more stubborn than expected, and the mob sent for an acetylene torch.⁹⁰

By 12:30 a.m., the vigilantes had sheared off the first jail door's hinges with the torch. The mob poured into the other cell block, reserved for black prisoners, and men applied the acetylene torch to

⁸⁷ "NAACP Lynching Report," 3-4, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Papers; Columbia Evening Missourian, 30 April, 3 and 5 May 1923. Sheriff Brown claimed that he had telephoned the governor around 11:15 p.m., informing him he would be unable to disperse the mob without assistance. However, Governor Hyde claimed the first call he received about the lynching was from Vaughn. Columbia Missourian, 30 April 1923. Earlier in the week, on April 23, Adjutant General Raupp had ordered the 140th Infantry of the National Guard to Bernie, Missouri, when race riots threatened Southeastern Missouri after a local white killed a black migrant worker. For local accounts of the incident, see Bernie Newsboy, 26 April 1923; Cape Girardeau Southeast Missourian, 23 and 24 April 1923; and Bloomfield Stoddard Tribune, 26 April 1923.

⁸⁸ For Rev. Caston's account, see Columbia Evening Missourian, 3 May 1923.

⁸⁹ Report from Colonel John F. Williams to Adjutant General W.A. Raupp, n.d., 3 pages, Arthur M. Hyde Papers, collection no. 7, box 31, folder 796, Joint Collection, University of Missouri, Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Columbia and State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscripts.

⁹⁰ Columbia Evening Missourian, 30 April 1923.

the large steel lock on Scott's cell door, the last barrier between the self-appointed executioners and the doomed black.⁹¹

The lock on the door was quickly burned through with the torch and two vigilantes entered the cell, which confined both Ollie Watson and James T. Scott, and asked the occupants which was Scott. Lying calmly on his cot wrapped in a blanket, Scott, without hesitation, answered them. A mob member slipped a noose around Scott's neck and dragged him out of the cell. Men fought each other to get close enough to kick and punch the prisoner. Scott resisted as the mob violently pushed and jerked him through the corridor and out into the warm, moonlit night. A sea of spectators on the courthouse lawn, which had swelled to 1,500, greeted the triumphant vigilantes with enthusiastic cheers.⁹²

On the porch of the jailer's home, the mob paused briefly, and Scott regained his feet. Again asserting his dignity, he asked to be treated like a man. "Don't pull me. I will go," he told those holding him. He then told a Missourian reporter who was standing nearby, "I am not guilty, I swear it, but I have no chance."⁹³

Meanwhile, Sheriff Brown, prosecuting attorney Hulen and Judge Collier attempted to dissuade the mob. "Men, do not kill him now," the judge pleaded. "I will promise you a fair trial and swift justice if he is convicted." Finally, the sheriff cried, "Is there a man here who will aid me in preserving law and order?"⁹⁴ The crowd answered the officials's pleas with shouts, "Take him to Stewart Bridge. Hang him."⁹⁵

⁹¹ Ibid., 30 April 1923; St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 30 April 1923. In an effort to stop the mob, an unidentified officer, perhaps the sheriff, shut off the electricity to the jailhouse, forcing the mob to work by flashlight. At another point, an apprehensive mobster cut the rubber gas hose which led from the acetylene tank; however, the hose had been cut near the tank, and a ringleader quickly mended it.

⁹² Columbia Evening Missourian, 30 April 1923; Columbia Daily Tribune, 30 April 1923.

⁹³ Quoted in Columbia Evening Missourian, 30 April 1923.

⁹⁴ Quoted in ibid., 30 April 1923.

⁹⁵ Quoted in ibid., 30 April 1923.

With its victim in tow, the mob set off at a slow trot, snaking down Seventh to Cherry Street where it turned west a block to Sixth Street. The "death march" continued down Sixth past the university campus to Stewart Road. Twice along the route, mob members knocked Scott to the ground and dragged him several yards before he could regain his feet. A quarter of a mile from the campus, the crowd, which had swelled to almost 2,000, swarmed out onto Stewart Bridge, jockeying for positions along the railings. Most of the spectators drove automobiles to Stewart Bridge, arriving before the vigilantes and their battered victim. Most of the blacks, their worst fears answered, did not venture to Stewart Bridge. Only about a dozen skirted the crowd's fringe on the east side of the bridge.⁹⁶ "Well let's go," a shaken black youth told his family at the bridge, "We done seen all I wanna see."⁹⁷

The mob rushed Scott to the railing on the south side of the bridge, but in the confusion, the ringleaders discovered that the rope around Scott's neck was only about ten feet long, too short to successfully lynch anyone. In addition, it was less than a quarter-inch in diameter, hardly enough to support the weight of a body. Mob members dashed to get another rope.⁹⁸

While they waited nervously, Professor Almstedt, Regina's father, arrived from his home and attempted to reason with the mob. "I am the father of the girl . . .," he said, "As an American citizen I plead with you to let the law take its course with this man. I ask it of you in the name of law and order and the American flag."⁹⁹ The antagonized throng howled, "Shut up or we'll lynch you too."

⁹⁶ Ibid., 30 April 1923; Kansas City Star, 29 April 1923; St. Louis Globe Democrat, 29 April 1923.

⁹⁷ Interview with Eula Jackson by Wynna Faye Elbert, John W. "Blind" Boone Community Center, Columbia, Missouri, no date, "A Collection of Memories of Our Black Community," audiocassette.

⁹⁸ Columbia Evening Missourian, 30 April 1923.

⁹⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 30 April 1923. A traditional mob defense of lynching--shielding white women and their families from the humiliation of testifying against their attackers in court--would appear unfounded in this case since Professor. Almstedt had pleaded for a trial. Raper, The Tragedy of Lynching, 18.

Professor. Almstedt pressed through the crowd and returned home.¹⁰⁰

Dr. Almstedt had offended mob etiquette. Traditionally, the victim's kin played the role of revengers, leading the lynching mob to summarily execute the so-called guilty party and vindicate their wronged family members.¹⁰¹ However, Almstedt, a second generation German immigrant, was ignorant of, or rather shunned the traditional Southern extralegal role of family protector. The crowd's abusive treatment of him reflected the post World War I hostile attitude of native-born Americans towards immigrants of Germanic descent. In addition, it also dramatically illustrated the social fracture between the university community and the townspeople.

Battered and bleeding from his nose and ears, his shirt torn, Scott leaned weakly against the railing, pleading for his life. "I am an innocent man," he declared to those close enough to hear. "I have a fifteen-year-old daughter and it would be impossible for me to commit this crime. I have never touched a white woman in my life." The crowd jeered and cursed him. Interestingly, Scott waited until he had reached the bridge to accuse his cellmate: "Ollie Watson confessed to me in the cell this afternoon that he did it." He then told a young journalism student standing next to him, "I know I haven't a chance. They won't listen to me. Won't you say something?"¹⁰²

However, the anxious crowd had had enough of waiting. A large, husky man with a 25 foot, half-inch manila rope at hand pushed his way through the crowd, hurriedly tied a knot and slipped the noose over Scott's head. Realizing he had but a few minutes to live, Scott dropped to his knees, looked to the heavens and prayed in a calm

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Columbia Evening Missourian, 30 April 1923. Arthur Raper noted that, "The relatives and friends of those against whom crimes have been committed may, and sometimes do, greatly help in the prevention of lynchings by urging that the law be allowed to take its course." Raper, The Tragedy of Lynching, 52-53.

¹⁰¹ Raper, The Tragedy of Lynching, 18.

¹⁰² Quoted in Columbia Evening Missourian, 30 April 1923.

voice, "Lord, thou knowest the truth. Have pity on an innocent man's soul, O Lord. Thou knowest my innocence. Will thou allow an innocent man to suffer?" The impatient crowd, tired of the delays, demanded, "Over with him."¹⁰³

The large man picked Scott up, balanced him on the railing for a moment and pitched him headlong off the bridge. Scott's body plunged down, crashing through the limbs of a small tree. The crowd shrieked with approval. As the rope jerked taut, Scott's neck snapped audibly in a sickening crack. A convulsive twist or two and his lifeless body, naked to the waist and dangling twenty feet from the ground, twisted and swayed in the early Sunday morning breeze. It was approximately 1:40 a.m.¹⁰⁴

A hush fell over the crowd. Then a shout went up, "That'll teach 'em. Let him hang there now as an example." The man who threw Scott over the railing immediately disappeared into the crowd. The other ringleaders quickly left the scene. Half an hour later, the crowd had abandoned the scene. Only a few curious spectators remained gaping at the dangling corpse.¹⁰⁵

The sated mob did not return to the jail for the other two accused rapists. Sheriff Brown removed Ollie Watson and Jadie Scott to Jefferson City for their protection after the vigilantes took Scott.¹⁰⁶ At 3:00 a.m. Sunday, April 29, Coroner Ben F. Barker cut

¹⁰³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 30 April 1923.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 30 April 1923.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, 30 April 1923.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 18 May 1923. After Scott's murder, Boone County officials attempted to charge Ollie Watson, the man Scott accused, with attacking Regina Almstedt. On July 5, prosecuting attorney Hulen took Regina to identify Watson at a Mexico, Missouri jail, where he was being held while awaiting trial on a change of venue in the Audrain County Circuit Court. However, authorities never brought Watson to trial on charges of assaulting the white girl. On July 24, an Audrain County jury convicted Watson of forced assault on a black schoolgirl and sentenced him to 24 years in prison. The other defendant charged in the same incident, Jadie Scott was presumably acquitted, because three years later, Scott shot and killed "Buddie" Rankin, a black taxi cab owner, and seriously wounded his wife Dorothy Rankin, a Columbia school teacher, in Jefferson City, Missouri. On 20 October 1926, a Cooper County jury found Jadie Scott guilty of

down Scott's body and removed it to the Parker Funeral Home. Examining the body, Dr. Lloyd Simpson concluded death had been instantaneous, caused by a broken neck. The corpse's neck was swollen and burned from the rope, and the left temple had a small cut, but there were no other marks on the face.¹⁰⁷

Unlike untold numbers of lynch victims, Scott was not tortured nor was his corpse mutilated or cut up for gruesome souvenirs. The mob, led by elites, perhaps desiring a "civilized" lynching, did not tolerate such lowbrow savagery. Scott's murder correlates with Oliver C. Cox's theory of lynching in that it occurred in the presence of a public symbol: the mob hanged Scott within sight of Columbia's most prominent institution--Jesse Hall--the University of Missouri's majestic, domed administrative building.¹⁰⁸ It was also typical of many lynchings because the vigilantes returned Scott to hang from Stewart Bridge, near the scene of his alleged attack.

first degree murder and sentenced him to life imprisonment. Columbia Daily Tribune, 6 and 7 July 1923; Columbia Evening Missourian, 24 July 1923; Jefferson City Tribune, 10 May and 20 October 1926.

¹⁰⁷ Columbia Herald-Statesman, 30 April 1923. James T. Scott's funeral was held at 10:30 a.m. Wednesday, May 2. His brother, Akers Scott, from St. Louis, and his three children from Chicago were in attendance. Rev. Caston presided over the services held at the Second Baptist Church. Scott's body was interred in Columbia Cemetery. *Ibid*, 3 May 1923; Chicago Defender, 26 May 1923.

¹⁰⁸ For Cox's eight stage lynching cycle, see Cox, Caste, Class and Race, 551.

Chapter Three: "There Was No Failure"

In the immediate wake of the lynching, the Missouri press, especially the St. Louis and Kansas City papers, and nation's metropolitan dailies blasted the city and especially the University of Missouri in their coverage of the incident. The New York Times headlined its front-page story, "Missouri Students See Negro Lynched, Co-Eds Join Crowd Which Cheers the Storming of the Columbia Jail." The largest Midwestern daily, the Chicago Daily Tribune, captioned its account, "College Town Mob Kills Negro, Missouri 'U' Students Join In Lynching." But the militant African-American press supplied the most damaging articles and editorials, at least for the university. "College Students Lead Missouri Lynch Mob" splashed across the front page of the prominent black weekly, the Chicago Defender.¹⁰⁹ W. E. B. DuBois, in his characteristic sarcasm, published a scathing editorial, entitled "A University Course In Lynching," in The Crisis, the official organ of the NAACP:

"We are glad to note that the University of Missouri has opened a course in Applied Lynching. Many of our American Universities have long defended the institution, but they have not been frank or brave enough actually to arrange a mob murder so that students could see it in detail. . . . We are very much in favor of this method of teaching 100 per cent Americanism; as long as mob murder is an approved institution in the United States, students at the universities should have a first-hand chance to judge exactly what a lynching is. . . . We are glad that the future fathers and mothers of the

¹⁰⁹ New York Times, 30 April 1923; Chicago Daily Tribune, 30 April 1923; Chicago Defender, 5 May 1923. In addition to these three, various Associated Press and United Press accounts of the lynching also appeared in the following newspapers: Atlanta Constitution, Little Rock Arkansas Gazette, Baltimore Sun, Dallas Morning News, Denver Post, Detroit News, Louisville Courier-Journal, Montgomery Advertiser, New Orleans Times-Picayune, New York Sun, New York Tribune, New York World, Pittsburgh Gazette Times and Washington Post. An edited version of New York World's account appears in Ginzburg, 100 Years of Lynching, 169. Atlanta Constitution, Montgomery Advertiser, New York Sun and New York World clippings located in "Missouri--1923," Lynchings File, Tuskegee Archives, Tuskegee, Alabama.

West saw it, and we are expecting great results from this course of study at one of the most eminent of our State Universities.¹¹⁰

The university's presence at the site of the lynching appears to have intensified the press's coverage of the incident and its criticism of Columbia. The national and state-wide accounts reflect the media's unquestioning acceptance of the still current notion that universities and colleges impose a progressive, tolerant influence on the communities in which they are located. The St. Louis Globe Democrat observed that the Columbia lynching proved "a deeper stain upon the honor of Missouri" because its scene "was the center of education of the state, where its university is located, where its youth are instructed--in law as well as in other things--and where learning and enlightenment might be supposed to have a humane and steadying influence upon the whole community. . . ." "A lynching in a small town," the New York Times editorialized in a similar tone, "of which a State university is the most prominent feature--and should have been an effective influence for maintaining the theories and practices of civilized life--is rather worse than like affairs in other places."¹¹¹

In the face of such harsh criticism, the University of Missouri's Board of Curators chose not to publicly respond to such charges, and although most probably abhorred mob violence, they never officially condemned the lynching.¹¹² It appears likely that the school's officials divorced themselves and the university from the lynching, a topic which they must have regarded as a town issue which did not concern the institution.

However, some image-minded university officials, especially

¹¹⁰ W. E. B. DuBois, "A University Course in Lynching," The Crisis vol. 26, no. 2 (June 1923), 55.

¹¹¹ St. Louis Globe Democrat, 30 April 1923; New York Times, 3 May 1923.

¹¹² The Board of Curator's minutes for its May 7 meeting, the first meeting following the incident, contain no statement regarding the lynching, much less one on the university's position regarding the lynching. "University of Missouri Board of Curators Papers, 1839-1932," collection 920, reel 120, Joint Collection, University of Missouri, Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Columbia and State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscripts.

administrators, realized that the lynching had tarnished the university's esteemed reputation. They also realized that if the university did not respond to the allegations, its interests would be endangered. Following the charges published in the New York City and Chicago papers, University of Missouri acting president Isidor Loeb, in a statement issued to the New York World on April 30, called the allegations that students were active participants in the lynching "absolutely false" ¹¹³ "I have done everything possible," President Loeb responded to a concerned New York woman, "to counteract the false statements . . . regarding participation of students in this affair."¹¹⁴ Likewise, Missouri Attorney General Jesse Barrett denied any student involvement in the incident and demanded that a Chicago paper retract its article implicating students.¹¹⁵

Besides defending its interests, the university took a determined stand against the mob violence. The Columbia Evening Missourian, in its Monday, April 30 editorial, "Punish The Guilty," condemned the lynching and demanded that the vigilantes be prosecuted:

Violators of the law in Boone County must answer for their crimes. . . . Mob law is dangerous and cannot be tolerated. It is the duty of every law-abiding citizen in Columbia, in Boone County, and in Missouri to see that those guilty of mob action are punished. The lynching cannot be undone, but Columbia can, in part, clear its name if speedy action against those who committed the crime is taken.¹¹⁶

However, the Columbia Daily Tribune's editor, Edward Watson, chose to ignore the heinous crime and tackled a seemingly more pertinent

¹¹³ Telegram from Isidor Loeb to editor of the New York World, 30 April 1923, 1 page, University of Missouri President's Office Papers, collection 2582, box 46, folder 2114, Joint Collection, University of Missouri, Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Columbia and State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscripts. Loeb, professor of political science and public law, succeeded John Carleton Jones on 25 April 1923 as acting president of the university. Missouri Alumnus vol. 11, no. 8 (April 1923), 183-184.

¹¹⁴ Letter from Isidor Loeb to Mrs. Wayne N. Laidlaw, 9 May 1923, 1 page; *ibid.*, box 46, folder 2114.

¹¹⁵ Quoted in Columbia Evening Missourian, 5 May 1923. Presumably, the Chicago paper was the Defender.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 30 April 1923.

issue that day in his column, entitled "How To Assure A County Fair."¹¹⁷

These two newspapers's coverage of the lynching exemplified the opposing sentiments which the university and the larger Columbia community held. While the Missourian's April 30 edition devoted almost two of its 6 pages to articles on the lynching, the Tribune begrudged only two columns in its 8-page edition to the incident.¹¹⁸ In the following week, the university paper published two articles on the lynching from a black viewpoint, Rev. Caston's account and a shortened version of George L. Vaughn's lynching report for the NAACP.¹¹⁹ In contrast, the other daily allotted no space to the black viewpoint, nor did it mention Vaughn's name in its article on the lynching. The Missourian reprinted three to four editorials from assorted state and national newspapers condemning the lynching in a three week feature, entitled "What the World Thinks of Columbia's Lynching."¹²⁰ The university paper, it seems, offered a diverse array of opinions to his readers and respected the voices of many segments of the pluralistic society, while the other Columbia daily advanced only one voice, that of conservative, white Boone County elites. Such seemingly trivial journalistic styles and tones displayed by the two papers foreshadow the significant social fracture which would divide the university and larger community over the lynching in the next three months.

Although the overwhelming majority probably disapproved of the mob violence, Columbia's townspeople never collectively condemned the lynching. Few whites in the community, other than those affiliated with the university, dared to oppose the lynching and break racial solidarity for fear of an economic or political boycott. The pressure to conform loomed large for the white general public

¹¹⁷ Columbia Daily Tribune, 30 April 1923.

¹¹⁸ Columbia Evening Missourian, 30 April 1923; *ibid.*, 30 April 1923.

¹¹⁹ Columbia Evening Missourian, 3 and 5 May 1923.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, 1 to 18 May 1923. The feature began on May 1, and with the exception of two issues, appeared in every edition over the next three weeks, ending on May 18.

with the community consensus shielding the lynchers. On Sunday, April 29, a Boone County coroner's inquest investigating Scott's lynching had returned its verdict that he "came to his death by hanging at the hands of a man or men unknown to this jury."¹²¹

Although it is certain that the outraged African-American community discussed and condemned the lynching in church and lodge meetings, it appears they have left no record of collective protest. While the community's churches and fraternal societies provided an organized mass base, the city's African-American institutions lacked a strong infrastructure. The absence of a NAACP chapter in the city, or other politicized organizations, and the virtually nonexistent tradition of social protest among Columbia's blacks, left the community politically impotent. Public statements made by Scott's pastor, Rev. Caston, provide the only example of local indignation to the murder.¹²² Like any whites who might oppose the lynching, vocal Columbia blacks faced sanctions, though admittedly more violent and severe, for protesting Scott's murder. Rev. Caston, the only black community leader willing to publicly oppose the lynching, received a note warning him to leave town.¹²³ The looming threat of additional racial violence and reprisals against the local community may have extinguished any other indigenous black protest

Militant black protest and pressure to prosecute the lynchers came from outside Columbia, spearheaded by the NAACP national office in New York. "The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People," Executive Secretary James Weldon Johnson wired Governor Hyde an April 30 telegram, ". . . trusts that every individual who participated in the brutal lynching of James T. Scott whether or not a student of the University of Missouri will be tried for first degree murder and convicted if guilty[.] [T]he eyes of the nation," he reminded the governor, "are upon Missouri to be shown whether anarchy or law will prevail."¹²⁴

¹²¹ Ibid., 30 April 1923.

¹²² Ibid., 3 May 1923.

¹²³ Ibid., 5 May 1923.

¹²⁴ Telegram from James Weldon Johnson to Governor Hyde, 30 April 1923, Hyde

The Columbia lynching occurred during a period of one of the NAACP's most intensive anti-lynching campaigns. Missouri Congressman Leonidas C. Dyer, a Republican representing St. Louis's black 12th congressional district, was touring the Middle West and Western United States to promote his federal anti-lynching bill.¹²⁵ In 1920, Congressman Dyer had introduced his bill into the House of Representatives, and in January, 1922, the House passed the Dyer Bill by a vote of 230-119. But a well-organized filibuster by the Southern Senators prevented the bill from coming to a vote in the upper house.¹²⁶ "I . . . must continue my journey with a bowed head," Congressman Dyer explained, "shamed by the atrocity at Columbia."¹²⁷ James Weldon Johnson termed the lynching and the state's inaction "one of the best concrete arguments for the passage of a federal anti-lynching bill."¹²⁸

In a follow-up letter to Governor Hyde, dated May 7, Johnson inquired "Is any step being taken to fix the responsibility for the failure of the National Guard Unit which you ordered to take action to prevent that lynching?" He termed "the inaction" of the National Guard officers and county law enforcement officers "one of the grossest examples of neglect of duty and cowardice ever laid at the door of Americans."¹²⁹

Two days later, Governor Hyde responded to Johnson's charges in a brief letter. "There was no failure," the governor asserted, "of the Papers, box 32, folder 797.

¹²⁵ Joplin Globe, 1 May 1923. On Dyer, see Official Manual of the State, 1923-1924, 56.

¹²⁶ The full text of the bill may be found in House Representatives 71, 68th Congress, First Session, 16. The bill would have provided jurisdiction to the federal courts to try and punish county officers and lynchers, and a \$10,000 fine of any county in which a lynching occurred.

¹²⁷ Quoted in Columbia Evening Missourian, 1 May 1923.

¹²⁸ Letter from James Weldon Johnson to the editor of the New York Tribune, 2 May 1923, 1 page, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Papers, box 361..

¹²⁹ Letter from James Weldon Johnson to Governor Hyde, 7 May 1923, 1 page, Hyde Papers, box 31, folder 796.

National Guard Unit at Columbia." He maintained that less than 35 minutes passed between the time he was notified of the mob and the time the mob removed Scott from the jail. "You can readily see," the governor explained to Johnson, "that it was impossible for them to operate rapidly enough to prevent the lynching."¹³⁰

Although Governor Hyde had responded with direct steps to attempt to prevent Scott's murder, he felt the protest mount. Over the next two weeks, concerned citizens and various black and white fraternal orders, women's clubs, church organizations and political clubs across the state flooded Governor Hyde's office with telegrams and letters condemning the lynching. They demanded the guilty parties be brought to trial and encouraged the governor to send the attorney general to head the prosecution.¹³¹

In response to the public outrage, Governor Hyde moved to prevent Scott's murder from becoming a pogrom. He dispatched Adjutant General W. A. Raupp, head of the Missouri National Guard, and several members of the secretary of state's office to Columbia the morning of the lynching to investigate reports of additional possible racial violence. Governor Hyde condemned the "infamous outrage" and offered prosecuting attorney Hulen and Sheriff Brown state assistance, promising "to do anything and everything that the state could do, up to declaring martial law, if they desired."¹³²

¹³⁰ Letter from Governor Hyde to James Weldon Johnson, 9 May 1923, 1 page, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Papers, box 361.

¹³¹ Among the organizations were Benevolent Order of Peerless Knights of St. Louis; Twentieth Century Republican Club of Kansas City; Kansas City Athenaeum; Webster Groves League of Women Voters; Grand Knights of Pythias of Missouri; National Headquarters of NAACP; First Congregational Church of Sedalia; Church Federation of St. Louis; Kansas City Federation of Colored Women's Clubs; St. Louis Chapter of NAACP; Kate F. Newton Women's Christian Temperance Union of Kansas City; Associated Vestries of the Protestant Episcopal Church, Dioceses of Missouri; Kansas City Negro Women's Republican League; Baptist Ministers Twin City Alliance of Kansas City, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri; Ministerial Alliance of St. Louis; and A.M.E. Ministerial Alliance of Greater Kansas City. See Hyde Papers, boxes 31-32, folders 796-797.

¹³² Letter from Governor Hyde to Mrs. Russell Field, 8 May 1923, 2 pages, Hyde Papers, box 31, folder 796.

Several factors compelled Governor Hyde to respond to the incident of racial violence with state intervention. First, the Columbia incident was the second lynching in the state during his administration. On 29 April 1921, a mob seized Roy Hammonds, a 19 year old black man convicted of assaulting a 14 year old white girl, from the Pike County sheriff and lynched him in Bowling Green, Missouri.¹³³ Second, personal concerns and Republican party politics motivated him. In the 1910s and 1920s, a rising black Missouri electorate determined the outcomes of many state and local elections, and politicians, especially Republicans, became increasingly dependent on black voters to win elections.¹³⁴ Third, the national guard's failure to prevent the lynching drew the state into the affair and laid at least partial responsibility at the door of the governor's mansion in Jefferson City.

However, Governor Hyde denied any responsibility on the state or national guard's part in his effort to pass this political hot potato. In his response to outraged citizens, he reviewed the state's immediate efforts to prevent the lynching, and reiterated the powerlessness of the national guard to maintain law and order due to the late request for state troops:

The Battery was ordered out within five minutes after the first information reached here, but that altogether the Battery had less than 30 minutes to dress and come from their homes. This they were unable to do in time and in sufficient numbers to stop the lynching.

I want you to know these facts in order that you may know the state acted with great

¹³³ Bowling Green Times, 5 and 12 May 1921. Many Missourians felt the state had adequately failed to respond to the Bowling Green lynching. "We beg respectfully to remind you," a concerned Kansas City group wired the governor, "that this is the second lynching in the state during your administration and urge that the state employ greater diligence in investigating and prosecuting this shame of Columbia than was shown in the case in Bowling Green." Telegram from John L. Love to Governor Hyde, 29 April 1923, Hyde Papers, box 32, folder 797.

¹³⁴ Franklin Dean Mitchell, "Embattled Democracy: Missouri Democratic Politics, 1918-1932," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1964), ix-x, 98. African-Americans increasing political significance stemmed largely from interstate migration and urbanization. With elections riding on the black vote, many politicians courted and catered to the race they once had neglected.

promptness. . . . Had the information reached me earlier there is no question but that this lynching could have been stopped. . . .¹³⁵

In his report of the lynching, Colonel Williams, commander of Battery B, concurred with the governor "that if the battery had been called an hour sooner, it could easily have dispersed the mob and prevented the lynching." The large number of curious spectators, and the presence of women and children in the crowd, he asserted, "would have made it difficult to stop the work of the mob unless an early start was made." In addition, the colonel agreed with the governor's assertion that the troops had less than 30 minutes to mobilize before the mob removed Scott from the jail.¹³⁶

But St. Louis attorney Vaughn, who had telephoned the governor about the lynching, claimed the Battery's commanders had "a little more than an hour" to mobilize their troops. "Being a stranger I do not know personally any of the members of Battery B," Vaughn charged, "but I heard both colored and white people state that many of the members of Battery B were among the members of the mob, and assert that that is the reason it was not possible to get them out."¹³⁷

In addition to the national guard officers, the city and county officials, especially the sheriff, encountered harsh criticism from outraged citizens. C. A. Franklin, editor of the black weekly, the Kansas City Call, wrote Governor Hyde, "The sheriff is criminally liable for failure and neglect to exercise supervision over the county jail according to the law." Another black newspaper editor, Nick Chiles, of the Topeka Plaindealer, reminded the governor of his "sworn duty" to "see that the sheriff who had this man in custody at Columbia should be dismissed from office."¹³⁸ However, unlike many

¹³⁵ Letter from Governor Hyde to Mrs. Russell Field, 8 May 1923, 2 pages, Hyde Papers, box 31, folder 796.

¹³⁶ Report from Colonel John F. Williams to Adjutant General W.A. Raupp, n.d., 3 pages, *ibid.*, box 31, folder 796. The colonel specifically faulted Sheriff Brown, noting that he "could have asked for troops a full hour before any request was made."

¹³⁷ Letter from George L. Vaughn to Governor Hyde, 30 April 1923, 2 pages, *ibid.*, box 32, folder 797.

states, Missouri had no statute to suspend or discharge elected county law officers for failing to prevent a lynching.¹³⁹

While the evidence is not conclusive, it appears probable that image-minded state and county authorities felt compelled to prosecute the lynchers in the interests of the University of Missouri and because of the widespread negative publicity the lynching attracted. At least, an unidentified Columbia black man believed this was the case. "The authorities," he wrote to relatives in Chicago, "feel they've got to do something on account of the state university."¹⁴⁰ "Even without dragging the students into the affair," the St. Louis Star's editor observed, "the University has suffered serious harm from mere proximity to the disgraceful affair."¹⁴¹

After a conference on Monday morning, April 30, in Jefferson City, prosecutor attorney Hulen and attorney general Jesse W. Barrett announced that a special Boone County grand jury would be called on Wednesday to investigate the lynching. Characterizing the lynching as a "deplorable violation of our laws" which "strikes at the very foundation of all law and order," Hulen optimistically promised at least a dozen indictments within twenty-four hours of Wednesday if provided with a grand jury "composed of citizens with respect for the law." In addition, he was convinced the mob's ringleaders could be convicted of at least second degree murder charges, and he was reasonably sure authorities would have no trouble identifying them. "We know who the leaders of the mob were. . . ," he announced, "I know some of them, and my officers and deputies know them all and

¹³⁸ Letter from C. A. Franklin to Governor Hyde, 30 April 1923, 1 page, *ibid.*, box 32, folder 797; letter from Nick Chiles to Governor Hyde, 31 May 1923, *ibid.*, box 31, folder 796.

¹³⁹ By 1923, nine states--Alabama, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Minnesota, South Carolina, Tennessee and New Jersey--had enacted legislation which made provisions for the removal of law officers from office who failed to prevent lynchings. Two additional states, Georgia and Idaho, made such an officer guilty of a misdemeanor, while Pennsylvania imposed a felony charge. Chadbourn, Lynching and the Law, passim 58-76.

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Chicago Defender, 19 May 1923.

¹⁴¹ St. Louis Star, 3 May 1923.

can testify against them." Like many apologists for lynching, Hulen wrongly saddled the city's lower class whites and outsiders with the blame for the lynching: "The leaders were among the roughneck's of the town and . . . farmers from the county."¹⁴²

Attorney General Barrett provided state assistance in the prosecution of the vigilantes, furnishing the services of Assistant Attorney General Henry Davis. "I know the people of Boone County," Barrett declared at the press conference, "and I know that they are not the kind to let this assault upon law and order go unpunished."¹⁴³

Despite the attorney general's contention, many whites did not want to see the mob members go to trial. Prosecuting attorney Hulen received a letter postmarked in Arkansas and signed "K.K.K.," warning him "to let this negroe business goe or you will git some of the same [sic]." Written apparently by an ignorant, almost illiterate person (or written to appear so), the cheap, -tablet-paper note, was strewn with poor spelling and grammar. As reprinted in the Columbia Evening Missourian, it read:

Some where on the road. I left cansas City this morning on my road to Jonesboro. In the Commercial Appeal i saw the lynching of a negro. Look here Mr. Prosecuting Attorney jus as it happen i tell you something you had better let this negro business goe or you will git some of the same. take it on youself if it had been your daughter you can get meaning enough out of this to now take warning of negro. From K.K.K."¹⁴⁴ Interestingly, the Tribune published the anonymous letter, but their note's spelling, punctuation and grammar had been corrected. Perhaps, it desired a more articulate voice to express the opinions the newspaper itself advocated.¹⁴⁵

Others in Columbia wanted to forget the lynching. "I wish that the papers would let the matter rest now," Sheriff Brown told a reporter, "The Columbia Tribune, I think, said enough before this thing came off."¹⁴⁶ "We want to try and forget this trouble as soon as possible," Professor Almstedt commented in a statement to the

¹⁴² Quoted in Columbia Evening Missourian, 30 April 1923.

¹⁴³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 30 April 1923.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2 May 1923.

¹⁴⁵ Columbia Daily Tribune, 2 May 1923.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in Columbia Evening Missourian, 30 April 1923.

press, "and lift the cloud that has been hovering over my home for more than a week." In addition, he maintained that Scott had been "absolutely identified" by his daughter, and he was convinced the guilty man had been lynched.¹⁴⁷ While he had opposed the mob violence, his statement ironically echoed the dogmatic assertions of the victim's absolute guilt traditionally shared by lynchers and pro-lynchers.¹⁴⁸

However, the most militant apologist for the lynching, perhaps sensing its own complicity in the incident, proved to be the Columbia Daily Tribune. Its rabid defense of Columbia and apology for the lynching dramatically illustrate the tensions between the university and Columbia society. The Columbia Daily Tribune criticized a university sociology professor, Charles A. Ellwood,¹⁴⁹ who had commented in his criminology class lecture that a community in which a lynching has occurred "has lower moral ideals than communities which do not tolerate lynchings." A St. Louis Star reporter present at the time, later quoted the professor in an article. The Tribune attacked Professor Ellwood in an editorial, "A Sociological Beam":

Since Doctor or Professor (or whatever his degree may be) Ellwood has taken upon himself the gratuitous task of criticising [sic] and maladventing against Columbia, it will not be out of place, or taste either, to advert somewhat to the Doctor. . . . While descanting on the moral degradation of Columbia, this savant and sociologist sees clearly what he regards as the mote in Columbia's eye, but is totally blind to the beam in his own. . . . From his expressions one would judge that he lays the Pharasical [sic] unction to his soul that he is not like other Columbians. It might be said that Columbians, those who ever give the Doctor a thought, also like the Pharasees [sic] thank God fervently that they are not as he is.¹⁵⁰

The newspaper continued its mudslinging, elaborating on the professor's stock market gambling and branding him a liar. The editorial concluded:

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 30 April 1923.

¹⁴⁸ On the mental characteristics of vigilantes, see Raper, The Tragedy of Lynching, 8-9.

¹⁴⁹ Curiously, Professor Ellwood wrote the only letter to the governor from the site of the lynching. Letter from Charles A. Ellwood to Governor Hyde, undated, 1 page, Hyde Papers, box 32, folder 797.

¹⁵⁰ Columbia Daily Tribune, 1 May 1923.

In view of the foregoing facts, every one [sic] will admit that Dr. Ellwood's house is a structure of glass and that it ill becomes him to throw stones at the moral status of Columbia and its people. . . .It might also be said that Columbia's moral status was not elevated one jot or one tittle when this sociologist made his advent into the community and that it will not be effected when he leaves, neither are there strings attached to bind him to this burg which he considers so low brow and such a pauper in morals.

Columbia has this satisfaction: Dr. Ellwood has not yet qualified as an expert on fine drawn ethics and morals in the community in which he calls home. The Doctor has eminently qualified as one of that variety of birds that despoils its own nest.¹⁵¹

Professor Ellwood denied the Tribune's allegations, asserting the reporter had misquoted him. Subsequently, he demanded an apology from the Tribune; however, the paper refused, commenting in a second editorial, "for the reason that none is due him."¹⁵²

"I am constrained, in justice to myself," the professor wrote in a letter to the Columbia Evening Missourian, "to make a further statement of my position in the hope that the people of Columbia may understand that my motive in inveighing against lynching was not, as the editor of the Daily Tribune seems bound to infer, to defame the fair name of Columbia in any way, but rather, as a scientific man and criminologist, to point out in my classroom the evil of any toleration whatsoever of lynching. . . . Far from trying to defame the fair name of Columbia," he explained, "I may add that I endeavored to shield it by denying interviews to the many reporters who came to me after the lynching occurred."¹⁵³ Like so many others in the white community, Professor Ellwood defended Columbia.

151 Ibid., 1 May 1923.

152 Ibid., 2 May 1923.

153 Quoted in Columbia Evening Missourian, 3 May 1923.

Chapter Four: "A Travesty On Justice"

On Thursday, May 3, a special Boone County grand jury returned indictments against four Columbia men, including a prominent businessman and a city councilman's son, and one Harrisburg man.¹⁵⁴ George W. Barkwell, a local contractor and former city councilman, was arrested and charged with first degree murder in the death of James T. Scott.¹⁵⁵ H. H. "Hamp" Rowland, a Harrisburg farmer,¹⁵⁶ Marvin M. Jacobs, a harness maker and Estill B. Davis, a bricklayer, were arrested and charged with obstructing an officer. A member of Battery B, Sergeant Elmer Woods, a mechanic, was also charged with obstructing an officer.¹⁵⁷

It appears the secrecy a jury guarantees allowed some whites, who had opposed the lynching, but feared public boycott or ostracism, to follow their conscience. It is highly probable other jurors, responding to the negative publicity, acted in the interest of the university or the city..

While many whites opposed bringing the lynchers to justice, , the Columbia Evening Missourian published an editorial, "Without Fear Or Favor," on Saturday, May 5, in which the paper championed the due

¹⁵⁴ Harrisburg is a small town in northwestern Boone County

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 7 May 1923; interview with Hilda and Helen Demmer by George Mielke, Columbia, Missouri, 26 March, 2 and 9 April 1990; In addition to his contracting company, Barkwell owned a coal yard and almost all the houses in Paris Court. Earlier in the week Sheriff Brown had arrested Barkwell, charged with carrying sledge hammer and chisel into the jail the night Scott was lynched. He was released on \$7,500 bond, signed by 26 persons.

¹⁵⁶ Columbia Evening Missourian, 4 and 5 May 1923. Rowland was a relative of Columbia Police Chief Ernest Rowland. .

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 7 and 8 May 1923. Obstructing an officer carried a penalty, if found guilty, of three months in the county jail or \$100 fine up to a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

process of law:

The men indicted by the grand jury for complicity in the lynching should have the fair trial in the courts that those who lynched the negro denied him. . . .Those guilty of the first crime should receive the punishment that is justly due them. Only thereby can this town and county clear itself of the shameful blot put upon it by a few misguided individuals.¹⁵⁸

However, some members of Columbia's white elite sanctioned the lynching by posting bond for Barkwell, Woods and Davis. Seventeen business associates posted Barkwell's \$20,000 bond within 30 minutes of his arrest.¹⁵⁹ According to the Kansas City Post, the Columbians who signed his bond represented an aggregate worth of one million dollars.¹⁶⁰ Four men signed Woods's \$5,000 bond, including his employer, Emmett C. Clinkscales, owner of a Ford distributorship and service station. Presumably, Columbia city councilman Ira L. Davis, owner of Davis & Phillips Construction Company, posted his son's \$5,000 bond.¹⁶¹

By posting bond, upper class whites set an example for the other

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 5 May 1923.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 7 May 1923. Only five of the 17 signers had posted Barkwell's initial \$7,500 bond. The men who signed the \$20,000 bond were: three executive officers of Boone County Trust Company--William A. Bright, president; Alexander Bradford, vice president; Sanford F. Conley, secretary; William T. Conley, president of Conley-Meyers Bank; Ira L. Davis, a city councilman, and George B. Phillips, owners of Davis & Phillips Construction Company; James H. Jenkins, owner of Boone County Coal Company; the Proctor brothers--Leslie T. Proctor and Micajah G. Proctor, Jr., (county collector), owners of the Proctor Lumber Company; Lorey E. Renie, president of Renie Hardware Company; W. Emmett Smith, cashier of the Exchange National Bank (Columbia's public administrator); Charles C. Bowling, owner of Bowling Lumber Company; W.P. Cunningham, a real estate agent; James F. Whitesides, Columbia's weigh master; George W. Smarr, owner of Smarr & Algeo Feed and Fuel Company; and John Hoersch, a blacksmith, and T.A. Jennings, Jr. For the bondsmen's occupations, see the Columbia Directory, 1923.

¹⁶⁰ Kansas City Post, 7 May 1923.

¹⁶¹ Columbia Evening Missourian, 7 and 8 May 1923. Besides being a former Columbia mayor, Clinkscales had also served as city marshal, president of the Columbia Commercial Club and as a trustee of Christian College. On Clinkscales, see Columbia Kiwanis Club, 5. Davis's father had also posted bond for Barkwell .

classes. Ten carloads of Harrisburg farmers accompanied Rowland into Columbia, when he was arrested, to post his \$5,000 bond, and 22 friends had affixed their names to his bond ten minutes after it was prepared. The middle class entrepreneurs who owned businesses near Jacobs's harness shop posted his bond.¹⁶²

Not only did white men recognize the need for solidarity to defend their neighbors, white women also advocated that they too collectively come to the defense of the indicted men. Mrs. A.D. March, who signed Rowland's bond with her husband, remarked, "I think all women should be interested in this matter."¹⁶³ Mrs. March challenged other women to join her in supporting the men who had attempted to defend women's honor and status in the community.

The defendants's attorneys, former state senator Frank G. Harris, Lakenan Price, George Starrett and U.S. Congressman Samuel C. Major, provide another example white elites's collective support for the accused. Originally each defendant retained a his own attorney; however, the attorneys, in a collective agreement, united to form a team defense, and thus all four attorneys represented each defendant. These attorneys, all members of the elite community in Columbia or the surrounding area, illustrated their social class's stalwart support of the accused lynchers.¹⁶⁴

On Tuesday, May 8, Barkwell, Rowland, Woods, Jacobs and Davis all pled not guilty to their respective charges, Judge Ernest Gantt, ordered the five cases tried separately in the following term of the Boone County circuit court.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Ibid., 4, 5 and 8 May 1923. Except for real estate agent William H. Goldsberry, New York Life Insurance representative William G. Stephenson and former sheriff Fred T. Whitesides, most who signed Rowland's bond were Harrisburg farmers. The men who posted Jacobs's bond included: Willard Fenton, owner of Farmer's Restaraunt; Oliver C. Owen and George S. Owen, owners of the Owen Brothers Dry Goods Company; Orme McCammon, owner of Turley & McCammon Grocery; and five retired farmers. For the bondsmen's occupations, see Columbia Directory, 1923.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 4 May 1923.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 8 May 1923; Columbia Daily Tribune, 8 May 1923.

¹⁶⁵ Columbia Evening Missourian, 8 May 1923; Columbia Daily Tribune, 8 May 1923. The five defendants were to be tried individually. George Barkwell's trial for

Two months later, on Monday, July 9, Boone County Circuit Court opened at 9:00 a.m. with Barkwell's case for first degree murder. The selection of the jury graphically illustrated most Columbia and county residents's aversion to prosecuting any of the lynchers. According to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, one-quarter of the 83 veniremen questioned were disqualified from jury duty because they believed in mob law in certain situations.¹⁶⁶ Five others expressed their objections to trying a white man for "hanging a nigger." The capacity crowd applauded and cheered every prospective juror who declared he favored mob law, and at one point, became so loud and boisterous, the judge threatened close the trial to the public if they continued with the demonstrations. This circus-like atmosphere continued for over two days. Finally at 10:30 a.m. on Wednesday, the prosecution and the defense agreed on an acceptable, all-white male jury.¹⁶⁷

"We expect a conviction if a jury which will consider the case on the evidence submitted is obtained," Assistant Attorney General Davis optimistically declared. "I believe that such a jury has been obtained as it is my impression that most of the residents of Boone County are in favor of upholding the law in all cases." He added the prosecution had compiled enough evidence to prove Barkwell was "guilty beyond a doubt."¹⁶⁸

However, few others shared Davis's optimism. A black Topeka, Kansas newspaper editor wrote Governor Hyde, "We have little faith in what the court may do in this matter, as this being a Colored man, who belongs to a Race where the white people have imposed on them for the last three centuries. . . ."¹⁶⁹ In Missouri, juries returned a first degree murder was scheduled to begin July 9. The other four defendants' trials were scheduled: Rowland and Jacobs, July 11; Woods, July 13; and Davis, July 16.

¹⁶⁶ St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 12 July 1923.

¹⁶⁷ Columbia Evening Missourian, 9 and 10 July 1923; Columbia Daily Tribune 9 July 1923; quoted in St. Louis Argus, 13 July 1923.

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in Columbia Evening Missourian, 9 July 1923.

¹⁶⁹ Letter from Nick Chiles to Governor Hyde, 31 May 1923, Hyde Papers, box 31, folder 796.

conviction against lynchers only once previous to 1923. In 1903, a jury sentenced Samuel Mitchell to ten years' imprisonment for second degree murder in the lynching death of Thomas Gilyard, a black Joplin man. But a subsequent appeal overturned Mitchell's conviction.¹⁷⁰

On Wednesday, July 11, testimony in "State of Missouri versus George W. Barkwell" began. A capacity crowd of 600 packed the muggy courtroom, standing along the walls and in the back. After the jury--composed almost exclusively of farmers or retired farmers--had been instructed, 61 witnesses, including prominent Columbia merchants and bankers and practically all city and county law officers, were called before the bar and sworn.¹⁷¹

In the prosecution's opening address, Hulen laid out the state's case. "I believe testimony will trace the defendant from the courthouse columns until he tied a rope around the neck of the negro and pushed him backwards from Stewart Bridge." In the defense's opening remarks, Frank G. Harris admitted Barkwell, who he characterized as a "a law-abiding, respected citizen," was present at the lynching, just as hundreds of others were; however, instead of leading the lynch mob, he argued the defendant had tried to prevent the lynching. Harris also preyed on the residues of the racist hysteria which had recently gripped the community. "The deceased in this case is a negro," he asserted. "Just a few days prior to the alleged lynching, he was charged with the heinous crime of rape. I think the evidence will show that a heinous offense had been committed on a white girl," and he graphically recounted the lurid details of the attack.¹⁷²

As witness for the prosecution, Columbia and Boone County law officials were tentative in their testimony against Barkwell. Those

¹⁷⁰ Cutler, Lynch-Law, 255; Joplin Daily Globe, 19 April and 21 November 1903.

¹⁷¹ Columbia Evening Missourian, 11 July 1923. The jury consisted of: T. D. Mitchell, farmer; C. A. Burnham, farmer; Cliff Rodgers, farmer; Edward Thompson, farmer; W .W. Riggs, farmer; A. W. Selby, farmer; Charles Turner, farmer; J. M. Angel, farmer; T. J. Holloway, farmer; George Hall, former banker and farmer; Frank L. Gibbs, retired farmer; and A.J. Archer, carpenter. . .

¹⁷² Quoted in *ibid.*, 11 July 1923.

who were elected officials realized the danger of opposing the community's popular sentiment which supported the accused. Sheriff Brown testified that he saw Barkwell, Rowland, Jacobs and Woods outside Scott's cell, but he did not know who had burned the locks off the jail doors, and amazingly he could not identify any other mob member inside the jail except the five indicted. Policeman Ples T. King saw Rowland lead about fifty men to the jail. He also recognized Barkwell, Jacobs and Davis inside the jail corridor. Three feet from Scott's cell, Barkwell stood over a young man operating the acetylene torch, directing him. Probate Judge H. A. Collier recalled seeing Barkwell two or three feet from the victim's cell, peering inside while Davis operated the torch. When he tried to reason with the mob, Judge Collier said Barkwell quieted the mob by raising his hand.¹⁷³

The state's key witnesses were two university journalism students. Sophomore Foster B. Hailey from Barry Illinois, testified Barkwell was one of the first men into Scott's cell when opened. He also observed Barkwell "monkeying around with the gas tank" and conferring with the men operating the torch. Charles Nutter, a freshman from Sedalia, Missouri who covered the lynching for the Kansas City Star, testified he stood alongside Barkwell when the defendant put the rope around Scott's neck and pushed him off the bridge. Nutter declared he had seen Barkwell "in a bright light" and could not be mistaken; however, under cross-examination by the defense, he could not recall what the defendant wore that night, except to say Barkwell was "in his shirt sleeves."¹⁷⁴

The defense produced several prominent Columbia businessmen and merchants who created an alibi for Barkwell. W. E. Smith, cashier of the Exchange National Bank, testified he and Barkwell were talking on the north side of Stewart Bridge when Scott was

¹⁷³ Columbia Evening Missourian, 11 July 1923; Columbia Daily Tribune, 11 July 1923.

¹⁷⁴ Quoted in Columbia Evening Missourian, 11 and 12 July 1923; University of Missouri Catalog. 1922-1923, 289, 312. Originally, Nutter did not know Barkwell's name, but he recalled mob members calling the man with the rope "Barkwell."

thrown over the south side railing. The son of a prominent Columbia businessman, insurance salesman Pierce Niedermeyer, claimed Barkwell was standing next to him on the north side of the bridge when Scott was hanged. Lorey E. Renie, owner of Renie Hardware Store, testified he was standing approximately sixty-five feet from the spot of the lynching, but did not see Barkwell among the men gathered around Scott.¹⁷⁵

The prosecution started its closing argument at 11:00 a.m. on Thursday, July 12. Assistant Attorney General Davis charged the jurors's to "send the word across the state of Missouri that Boone County would not tolerate acts against organized government." He emphasized Nutter's testimony and questioned W. E. Smith's motives. "I am not saying Smith testified falsely, but I will say that he had such an intense interest in the case that he said Barkwell was on the north side of the bridge."¹⁷⁶

In his final argument, defense attorney George Starret asserted Columbia had lived "in peace and equanimity" for years until April 20, when a black man committed a "fiendish crime" and a "white girl was ravished and despoiled." Contrasting Nutter and Smith's testimony, he observed, "Now this man Nutter," said Starrett, "was one of these newspaper reporters who is always going around after news. All of them feed on publicity. I do not believe a word of what Nutter said. If you are to believe him, you have to call W.E. Smith, one of our best citizens, a liar!" Starrett declared he was more apt to believe Smith than a "whole basketful of Nutters."¹⁷⁷

The jury retired at 2:10 and returned 11 minutes later with a verdict. One ballot was taken. Despite Nutter's damning testimony,

¹⁷⁵ Columbia Evening Missourian, 12 July 1923; Columbia Daily Tribune, 12 July 1923. Smith had signed Barkwell's \$20,000 bond. Niedermeyer's father, Frederick W. Niedermeyer, was an aid-de-camp to Governor Hyde, president of the Columbia School Board since 1902, a former mayor of Columbia and a director of the Boone County Trust Company. Official Manual of the State, 1923-1924, 790; Floyd Calvin Shoemaker, Missouri and Missourians vol. 5 (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1943), 346-347. Renie had signed Barkwell's \$20,000 bond.

¹⁷⁶ Quoted in Columbia Evening Missourian, 12 July 1923.

¹⁷⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 12 July 1923; Tribune, 12 July 1923.

the jury found George Barkwell not guilty.¹⁷⁸ Dozens of men crowded the dense counsel's table, shaking Barkwell's hand and congratulating him and his attorneys. Friends celebrated Barkwell's acquittal in a banquet thrown in his honor that night.¹⁷⁹

In a statement made immediately following the trial, Assistant Attorney General Henry Davis and Prosecuting Attorney Ruby Hulen observed that even though Barkwell was acquitted, the trial would have a positive influence upon the preservation of law in Columbia. "Although the defendant in this case was acquitted," Hulen said, "I believe the fact that there was a vigorous prosecution should deter others from joining lynch mobs in the future."¹⁸⁰

Less than an hour after Barkwell's acquittal, Hulen dismissed the case against "Hamp" Rowland. In the next several days, a group of unidentified Columbia residents circulated a petition requesting Hulen drop the charges against the remaining three defendants.¹⁸¹ The other three cases were "continued indefinitely" in a confidential agreement between the state and the defense. Marvin Jacobs, Elmer Woods and Estill Davis were never prosecuted. Like most lynch mob members, the men who lynched James T. Scott went unpunished.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Columbia Evening Missourian, 12 July 1923; Columbia Daily Tribune, 12 July 1923.

¹⁷⁹ Columbia Evening Missourian, 12 July 1923; St. Louis Argus, 13 July 1923; Pittsburgh Courier, 21 July 1923, in Lynching File, Tuskegee Archives.

¹⁸⁰ Quoted in St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 13 July 1923.

¹⁸¹ St. Louis Globe Democrat, 13 July 1923; Columbia Daily Tribune, 14 July 1923. The petition alleged "the signers do not believe the defendants guilty; that the Barkwell case has demonstrated that it will be impossible to secure a conviction against any of these defendants; that the cost of these trials will be great and the benefits small and that the trial will keep alive bad feeling."

¹⁸² Chadbourn, Lynching and the Law, 13, 78. Chadbourn found that lynchers had been convicted in only eight-tenths of one percent of the lynchings in the United States between 1900 and 1930. For example, although mob members's identities were known in fifteen of the 21 lynchings in 1930, grand jury indictments were secured in only six cases.

Conclusion

In retrospect, James T. Scott, like untold numbers of blacks lynched in America, appears to have been innocent. At least several newspapers reported he was innocent.¹⁸³ His dignity which he displayed when the mob was breaking into the jail, and his steadfast proclamation of innocence, reinforces my belief that he was at work, as he stated, on the afternoon the white girl was attacked. Scott was guilty of nothing more than being economically self-secure and falling victim to the sweeping hype of consumerism.

Scott was a highly visible member of Columbia's African-American community, and his prosperity seems to have been a well-known subject in the white community. He was a newcomer to the community, an "outsider." He held a well-paying position as a university janitor--a position only a dozen or so blacks held. James and Gertrude Scott were members of the Second Baptist Church, and lived in a middle class neighborhood near Douglass School. He owned a relatively expensive automobile, a fact that the Columbia Evening Missourian mentioned following his murder.

It is highly probable that James T. Scott appeared to some whites in Columbia to be advancing too fast. He seems to have threatened whites by being too self-assertive and too prosperous. In 1938, an elderly Columbia black woman told a white interviewer, "The whites hate the colored, and the more money you get the worse they hate you."¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, Scott appears to have asserted himself as a man during a period when black men's acceptable roles among whites, especially Southerners, consisted of only "boys" or "Uncles." First, he was a decorated war veteran, a status long-associated with manliness in nearly all world cultures. Second, he was

¹⁸³ See for example, St. Louis Argus, 6 July 1923 and Chicago Defender, 14 July 1923.

¹⁸⁴ Quoted in Kittel, "The Negro Community of Columbia," 116.

employed in a steady, good paying job as a janitor earning wages equal to those of white janitors at the university. His role as a breadwinner asserted his manhood and challenged the white definition of his socio-economic place in community. And third, Scott owned a relatively expensive automobile, a commodity entrenched in notions of masculinity and sexuality in American mass culture.

The African-American community responded to Scott's lynching by protecting themselves in any way possible. In the wake of the racial violence and fearing additional reprisals, many black residents fled the area. An unidentified Columbia black man wrote a letter to relatives in Chicago:

I want to leave here right away, but have not got the money. We all fear something is going to happen because things are awful critical just at the present time. We can't tell just yet, but we've got a good many who have left, some gone to the country, some left town.¹⁸⁵

The 1930 census indicates a decrease in Boone County's black population, from 3,471 to 3,293, during the 1920s. At the same time, Columbia's black community increased, from 1,919 to 2,301 (See Table 3). It is plausible that both migrations resulted from a search for increasingly scarce jobs during the early stages of the Great Depression. But it is more probable the decrease in Boone County reflects the black exodus in the wake of the lynching.

It remains uncertain, at this point, how African-Americans fared politically in the wake of Scott's murder. The divided white response may have prevented the establishment of a more restrictive system of racial control. But, blacks were forced into a more accommodated position economically. On the eve of the lynching, the dozen or more black janitors employed at the university earned wages equal to whites janitors. But the 1927-1928 university employment records show blacks making a ceiling rate of \$72.50 a month while white janitors made, on average, approximately \$75 a month. The majority of janitors employed during that period, however, were almost entirely black. The university appears to have down-graded the job and it was no longer

¹⁸⁵ Quoted in Chicago Defender, 19 May 1923.

a desirable position for whites.¹⁸⁶

Ironically, the lynching of James T. Scott, a violent act of racial repression perpetrated to intimidate and control the blacks, appears to have strengthened bonds and collective conscienceness within Columbia's African-American community. Because of the lynching, the black community questioned their relationships to all whites, including racial moderates. Thus, instead of relying heavily on the white paternalistic network as before, blacks turned to their own community for support and strength. An elderly woman, who was fourteen at the time of the lynching, remembered her mother's white employer offering her and her family a haven from additional possible violence. The woman told her mother "if she was too scared, she could come to her house," but the family chose to remain within the community.¹⁸⁷ Her mother's decision reflects the insecurity she felt about relying on whites, even her own employer. Another elderly woman recalled that her family and her aunt's family left town two or three days after the lynching to stay with an uncle, who lived outside of the city, for several weeks, returning only after the immediate tensions eased.¹⁸⁸ The racially motivated crime, while sparking a chord of fear in the black community, also created a source for solidarity, reaffirming the need for an extended network of kin.

The lynching also galvanized Rev. J. Lyle Caston as a capable and courageous leader under duress. His intensive efforts on behalf of Scott and his solitary protests denouncing the lynching confirmed him as an emerging political leader among the black community. However, his links with Vaughn and other St. Louisians perhaps provided the most significant contribution to the local community's embryonic sense of collective conscienceness.

Scott's murder initiated and consolidated enduring ties between Columbia's African-Americans and one of the largest, most

¹⁸⁶ Official Manual of the State of Missouri, 1927-1928 (Jefferson City: Hugh Stephens Press, n.d.), 500-504.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with M. W. by Patrick Huber, Columbia, Missouri, 21 April 1990.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with O.T. by Patrick J. Huber, Columbia, Missouri, 21 April 1990.

politically active black communities in the Midwest. For Columbia's blacks, these St. Louis connections fostered a greater sense of racial unity with outside communities and spurred interaction with the city's militant civil rights organizations such as the NAACP and the Citizens Liberty League. In addition, these links provided local blacks with inspiring examples of the potential of organized collective protest.

Traditionally, lynchings have united whites in communities where they occurred. As Arthur F. Raper observed, "Lynchings tend to minimize social and class distinctions between plantation owners and white tenants, mill owners and textile workers, Methodists and Baptists, and so on."¹⁸⁹ However, as we have seen, Scott's murder splintered the local white community, exacerbating already-present tensions between the university and townspeople. Conversely, the lynching united the townspeople because elites fulfilled their community responsibility to middle and lower class whites by leading the lynch mob. In addition, their stalwart support of the accused vigilantes and their rabid defense of the racial violence signaled others in the community to follow their example.

Columbia provides an illustrative, yet problematic, glimpse at societal dynamics within a community in the wake of a lynching. Entrenched in the antebellum plantation economy, festering tensions between white townspeople and African-Americans exploded in violence, resulting in Scott's murder. The lynching, serving as a catalyst, exacerbated the tensions, entrenched in the city's late nineteenth-century social transformation, between the university and the larger Columbia community. Perhaps the Columbia Daily Tribune summarized this deep-seated conflict best, when mincing no words, it asserted, "The Missourian is conducted by aliens who have no interest in Columbia."¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Raper, The Tragedy of Lynching, 47.

¹⁹⁰ Columbia Daily Tribune, 14 July 1923.

Appendix

**Table 1. Columbia and Boone County Population, 1920:
Race and Nativity**

	Columbia		Boone County	
	Number	%	Number	%
Native-born Whites	8,337	80.2	25,960	87.5
Foreign-born Whites	133	1.3	238	.8
Blacks	<u>1,919</u>	18.5	<u>3,471</u>	11.7
Total Population	10,392*		29,672*	

* **Note:** These figures include three Asian-Americans who are not counted above. **Source:** : Fourteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1920: Population vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1921), 245; *ibid.*, Population vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), 552.

Table 2. Columbia's Population Growth, 1860-1920; Race

Year	Total	Whites	%	Blacks	%
1860	1,414	873	61.7	541	38.3
1870	2,236	1,438	64.3	798	35.7
1880	3,326	2,031	61.1	1,295	38.9
1890	3,999	2,406	60.2	1,593	39.8
1900	5,651	3,735	66.1	1,916	33.9
1910	9,662*	7,412	76.7	2,246	23.3
1920	10,392*	8,470	81.5	1,919	18.5
1930	14,967*	12,661	84.6	2,301	15.4

***Note:** The 1910, 1920 and 1930 total population figures include 4, 3 and 5 Asian-Americans or Indians who were not counted above. **Source:** For Columbia's figures from 1860 to 1900, see Elwang, The Negroes of Columbia, 9; and for 1910 and 1920, see Thirteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1910; Population vol. 2 (Washington,D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), 1125; Fourteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1920; Population vol. 1 (Washington,D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1921), 245; Fifteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1930; Population vol. 3, part 1 (Washington,D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932), 1337.

**Table 3. Columbia and Boone County Black Population,
1920-1930**

Year	Columbia		Boone County	
	Number	%	Number	%
1920	1,919	18.5	3,471	11.7
1930	2,301	15.4	3,293	10.6

Source: Fourteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1920: Population vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1921), 550, 552; Fifteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1930: Population vol. 3, part 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932), 1328, 1337.

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Interviews

Unless otherwise indicated the following interviews were conducted by the author. The following persons consented to interviews, with their anonymity respected in some cases:

Hilda and Helen Demmer interview with George C. Mielke, Columbia, Missouri, 26 March, 2 and 9 April 1990.

F. Garland Russell interview, Columbia, Missouri, 10 April 1990.

E. T. interview, Columbia, Missouri, 10 April 1990.

C. G. interview, Columbia, Missouri, 13 April 1990.

Wynna Faye Elbert interview, Columbia, Missouri, 17 April 1990.

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O.T. interview, Columbia, Missouri, 21 April 1990.

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