

STATESBORO BLUES

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It is a disgrace to our civilization that men can be put to death by painful methods, which our laws have discarded as never suitable, and without the proofs of guilt which our laws call for in any case whatsoever. It would be a disgrace to us if amongst us men should burn a rattlesnake or a mad dog. The badness of the victim is not an element in the case at all. Torture and burning are forbidden, not because the victim is not bad enough, but because we are too good. It is on account of what we owe to ourselves that these methods are shameful to us, if we descend to them. It is evident, however, that public opinion is not educated up to this level.

--William Graham Sumner
February, 1905*

Whatever may be said of their weakness when required to hold a white man or a rich man, the meshes of the law are certainly always strong enough to hold and punish a poor man or a negro. In this case there is neither color to blind, money to corrupt, nor powerful friends to influence court or jury against the claims of justice. All the presumptions of law and society are against the negro. In the days of slavery he was presumed to be a slave, even if free, and his word was never taken against that of a white man. To be accused was to be condemned, and the same spirit prevails to-day.

--Frederick Douglass
July 1882**

*Quoted from foreward to James E. Cutler, Lynch-Laws: An Investigation into the History of Lynching in the United States, (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1905); also quoted in Walter White, Rope and Faggot, (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), p. vii; Charlton Moseley, "A Lynching at Statesboro: The Story of Paul Reed and Will Cato," (unpublished, 1974), pp. 27-28.

**Quoted in George C. Wright, Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings." (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), p. 13.

On August 16, 1904, enraged whites in Statesboro, Georgia, lynched two black men in retaliation for the murder of a white farmer and his family two and a half weeks earlier. In the aftermath of the lynching, whites randomly attacked, beat, whipped, and killed blacks without provocation. The Statesboro lynchings represented a departure from other acts of mob violence of the time in three key respects. First, the drama of the lynching played itself out over the course of an entire month, not in the more typical one or two days. The duration of the event provides a glimpse of the tensions and divisions, as well as the bonds, which both separated and ultimately held together the white citizens of Bulloch County. Second, the lynching did not occur until after the two men had been indicted, tried, convicted, and sentenced to death in a court of law. In this respect, the Statesboro lynching can be seen as transitional, combining the traditional elements of mob violence with the precepts of legally sanctioned lynchings which became more popular as the twentieth century progressed.¹ Third, the brutality of the lynching reflected a growing need amongst lynch mobs to exact suffering, torture, and mutilation, rather than feeling satisfied with death by hanging or shooting.

In 1904, Statesboro, the seat of Bulloch County, was a growing and prospering community, driven by the success of the cotton and turpentine industries. Citizens of the town and county prided themselves on new churches, businesses, and schools. In addition to expressions of civic pride, the county's one newspaper, the Statesboro News, echoed the goals of the white citizenry: the need to maintain a stable, quiescent, primarily black, labor force, and the continued dominance of the Democratic party at the local level until similar gains could be achieved at the national level.

¹ For a full explanation of "legal lynchings," see George C. Wright, Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings" (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), pp. 215-305.

The murder of a well-respected white farmer and his family and the subsequent arrest of two black laborers, however, tore the county apart, obfuscating any sense of prosperity. For a month after the murder on July 28, 1904, white passions continuously flared and cooled, subsiding only when some whites perceived a threat to their own economic interests and when others had finally spent their hatred. Lawyers and ministers expressed a determination to allow the legal process to punish the culprits. Many other whites, among them friends and relatives of the murdered farmer and his family, felt that the law provided an insufficient punishment.

On several occasions, certain white leaders attempted to prevent a lynching, succeeding at first, but failing in the end. White reaction split over several issues: the initial threats of a lynching, the removal of the black prisoners to Savannah, the presence of the state militia, and senseless violence in the aftermath of the lynching. White opinion, however, ultimately closed rank and insisted on the protection of mob members and other whites who committed violent acts against blacks. Such protection depended upon two factors: a firm belief that the court system had judged the black criminals fairly and a rigid conception of Old Testament vengeance that demanded an "eye for an eye." Curiously enough, the longing for Biblical justice invalidated the sufficiency of the court verdict and sanctioned the brutal lynching that followed.

The events of August 1904 indicate that economic development and advancement did not produce a more civilized and humane society. White residents of Statesboro and Bulloch County considered themselves law-abiding and God-fearing, qualities underlying their new-found prosperity. Prevailing racial assumptions and animosities allowed whites to look upon their black neighbors as a dangerous threat to this prosperity. The legal system normally offered an adequate means of protection for whites for they completely controlled the Sheriff's office, judgeships, jury pools, and bar membership. When the law proved insufficient, however, a belief in Biblical

vengeance sanctioned more severe and brutal punishment of blacks, allowing whites to justify almost any action which served to punish blacks and preserve their position.

Growth and prosperity, therefore, did not lead to the eradication of extra-legal violence as an acceptable form of social control. As a result, white public opinion in Statesboro condoned the lynching of two black men, burned at the stake on August 16, 1904.²

Historians disagree over when lynching first became prevalent, but they agree that the late 1880s witnessed the beginning of a new trend in the nature and form of mob violence, as lynchings became more dramatic, often including torture and mutilation.³ From 1889 to 1918, 3,224 individuals were lynched in the United States. Of these, 2,522 (78 percent) were black, and 2,834 (88 percent) lived in the South. As each decade passed, lynching became increasingly associated with the South and mob victims proved more often to be black. From 1909 to 1918, over 91 percent of those lynched were black and more than 94 percent of all lynchings occurred in the South.⁴

By 1890, lynching lay at the heart of white efforts to maintain rigid control over blacks in their midst. Edward Ayers and Jacquelyn Hall both point to the tension created by the meeting of a new generation of blacks and whites, no longer constrained by the paternalistic expectations of planter society. Ayers emphasizes that members of

² In 1905, historian James Cutler defined lynching as "an illegal and summary execution at the hands of a mob, or a number of persons, who have in some degree the public opinion of the community behind them." See James E. Cutler, Lynch-Laws: An Investigation into the History of Lynching in the United States (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1905), p. 276.

³ See Edward L. Ayers, Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 223-265; Joel Williamson, The Crucible of Race (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 180-223; George C. Wright, Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940, pp. 1-18. Ayers and Williamson both point to the late 1880s as the period in which the number of lynchings accelerated. Wright argues that all forms of racial violence were well established by the mid-1870s, but concedes that the late 1880s did constitute the arrival of new forms of lynching.

⁴ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918 (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969), p. 8 & 31; Arthur F. Raper, The Tragedy of Lynching (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1933), p. 25.

this new generation "faced each other across an ever-widening chasm" of fear and ignorance. Hall suggests that because blacks appeared to have lost their docile, child-like nature, whites began to view them as dangerous. As this image of blacks evolved, whites increasingly turned to more violent forms of control. The threat of lynching reinforced the tenets of white supremacy, manifested daily through debt peonage, disfranchisement, and segregation. Jessie Daniel Ames, the leader of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching in the 1930s and early 1940s, referred to lynching as the "most vivid symbol of black oppression, shaping the consciousness of southerners both black and white."⁵

While the number of lynchings did not increase in the early twentieth century, the brutality often did. Lynchers ceased to accept death by hanging or shooting and began to demand suffering, torture, and mutilation.⁶ The significance of each one seemed ever greater, affording whites fewer opportunities to send a message to the blacks in their midst. In August 1904, many whites in Bulloch County shared a strong desire to send such a message. In addition, whites who supported the lynching of Paul Reed and Will Cato fervently believed that the death of their neighbor and friend, Henry Hodges, demanded the burning to death of his killers. They were determined that the suffering of the criminals would equal the brutality of the crime.

⁵ Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*, pp. 235-241; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 133-136. Whites commonly blamed lynchings on the prevalence of black crime, particularly the rape of white women. Other contemporaries, however, insisted that such claims distorted the truth. See Ida B. Wells-Barnett, "Lynching and the Excuse For It," *The Independent*, LIII (May 16, 1901), p. 1135; Walter White, *Rope and Faggot* (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969), pp. 82-113.

⁶ NAACP, *Thirty Years*, pp. 29-35; White, *Rope and Faggot*, pp. 19-39. White, the former Executive Director of the NAACP, argued that increased brutality "came as the inevitable result of many years of lynching--the search of the mob for new thrills when relatively painless hanging or shooting no longer sufficed to appease it."

In the fall of 1904, northern newspaperman Ray Stannard Baker visited Statesboro and proclaimed it "distinctly a town of the New South, developed almost exclusively by the energy of Southerners and with Southern money." Baker mentioned a new courthouse, new churches, telephones, electric lights, and even rural free delivery as "signs of improvement and progress."⁷ Throughout 1904, the Statesboro News made the same points, expressing great pride in a new \$40,000 oil mill, a \$7,000 ice factory, and a \$10,000 Methodist Church.⁸ The optimism of Statesboro's editors was not simply a case of blind self-congratulation. The Savannah Press proclaimed, "There is no more progressive county in the state than Bulloch."⁹

Statesboro's growth and good fortune, moreover, extended beyond the town limits and enveloped the surrounding rural county. Of Bulloch's 25,000 inhabitants in 1904, only 2,000 resided in Statesboro.¹⁰ The rural population depended primarily on the fortunes of the cotton economy. Observers expressed concern that the Bulloch farmers needed to diversify their crops, but with newspaper headlines in February proclaiming "Cotton Market Still In The Clouds," few farmers felt convinced that a change was in order.¹¹ Although February prices of sixteen cents per pound for short cotton and twenty-seven cents per pound for long cotton had fallen to 10 1/4 cents and

⁷ Ray Stannard Baker, "What Is a Lynching?: A Study of Mob Justice, South and North," McClure's, (Jan. 1905), p. 301; Charlton Moseley, "Burned at the Stake: The Lynching of Paul Reed and Will Cato in Statesboro, Georgia," (Unpublished), pp. 1-2. I am indebted to Dr. Charlton Moseley, Professor of History, Georgia Southern University, who has kindly shared with me two papers that he has delivered, and one that he has published, on this event. I have referred to many of the same sources that Dr. Moseley used, and have tried to credit his work in instances where we refer to the same source.

⁸ Statesboro News, January 8, 1904, p.1.

⁹ Statesboro News, October 21, 1904, p. 1.

¹⁰ Statesboro News, October 4, 1904, p.2; Moseley, "Burned at the Stake," p. 1.

¹¹ Statesboro News, February 2, 1904, p. 1.

191/2 cents respectively by the end of September, the farmers still considered the prices good. In fact, the News reported that November 1 was the "most productive business day ever" as farmers unloaded three hundred bales of cotton.¹²

The growth and optimism shared by leading businessmen and farmers overlooked fundamental tensions in the Bulloch community. Forty years after the abolition of slavery, Bulloch's black population remained impoverished. Despite comprising 43 percent of the 1900 population and more than one-third of the 1904 taxpayers, blacks owned a dismal 3 percent of the aggregate wealth in the county. The value of the land, buildings, and possessions of the 2,459 white taxpayers averaged \$1,394, while 1,241 blacks averaged a mere \$85. Furthermore, most black-owned property consisted of animals and household tools, not land or homes.¹³ Only 7 percent of the black population owned their farms or homes. Fifty-nine percent of the whites, by contrast, enjoyed such ownership, claiming title to 97 percent of the acreage in Bulloch County.¹⁴

The maldistribution of land and aggregate wealth reflected similar occupational disparity amongst Bulloch County's blacks and whites. Sixty-nine percent of the white population farmed the land, while 66 percent of the blacks worked as laborers. Some found jobs on farms or in the saw mills, but one-third of the entire black population

¹² Statesboro News, November 4, 1904, p.1.

¹³ United States, Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910: Volume II, Population 1910, Reports By States, With Statistics for Counties, Cities, and Other Civil Divisions (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), p. 374; Bulloch County, Tax Digests for Bulloch County, Georgia, 1904; Moseley, "Burned at the Stake," pp. 1-2.

¹⁴ Unless otherwise noted, population statistics are taken from a sample of 494 whites and 468 blacks drawn by J. Douglas Smith from United States, National Archives, Manuscript Schedules for the 1900 Population for Bulloch County, Georgia, Volume 6, Enumeration Districts 89-99. Acreage figures found in Tax Digests for Bulloch County, Georgia, 1904. Of those blacks who did farm, 19 percent owned their land, as opposed to over 70 percent of their white counterparts. For a comparison to black farmers in Georgia and the South, see C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), p. 206; Loren Schweninger, Black Property Owners in the South, 1790-1915 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), p. 164; Gavin Wright, Old South, New South (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1986), p. 119.

worked as turpentine hands in the pine forests.¹⁵ Turpentine work required a frequent change of venue, dictated by the limited return from a given forest. As a result, employers hired young, black males, willing to move from one area to another. This transitory work frightened white members of more settled communities. In addition, the steady, albeit low, wages drew many laborers away from the farms. Such competition often led whites and blacks to see timber and turpentine workers as violent and disruptive outsiders.¹⁶ In 1900, as a result, Bulloch County blacks were much more likely than whites to be young, single, and without roots in the local community. Over half of the males were under the age of thirty, while one quarter were unmarried. By contrast, three of every ten whites were under thirty and barely one in ten remained single. While 87 percent of Bulloch whites were born in Georgia, only 62 percent of the blacks were native-born.¹⁷

Considering the dichotomy between a young, transitory black population of renters and boarders and an older, established, property-owning white population, it is hardly surprising that the white community came to regard its black neighbors warily. After visiting Statesboro and the surrounding county, Baker concluded that the white population made strong distinctions between "the self-respecting, resident negro" and "large numbers of the so-called 'worthless negroes,' perhaps a growing class, who float from town to town, doing rough work, having no permanent place of abode, not known to the white population generally." Baker suggested that the turpentine industry had "brought many such negroes to the neighborhood of Statesboro."¹⁸

¹⁵ Sample drawn by JDS from 1900 Manuscript Census.

¹⁶ Thomas F. Armstrong, "Georgia Lumber Laborers, 1880-1917: The Social Implications of Work," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, LXVII (Winter 1983), 448-449. Armstrong credits this notion to Richard C. Edwards, "The Social Relations of Production at the Point of Production," *Insurgent Sociologist*, VIII (1978), 190-225.

¹⁷ Sample drawn by JDS from 1900 Manuscript Census.

¹⁸ Baker, "What Is A Lynching?", p. 301.

Baker's observation that "this floating, worthless negro caused most of the trouble" supported such comments in the white Georgia press as "the negroes in the turpentine camps of south Georgia are in the main a lot of irresponsible and half savage vagabonds."¹⁹ Almost daily, the newspapers reminded their readers that "it is the bad negro we want to move on. Let him go either to Africa, or up North among his pretended friends."²⁰

Members of the white community primarily focused on the presumed threats posed by the "worthless" blacks; nevertheless, they felt compelled to remind one another that "good" blacks did exist and ought to be distinguished from the "worthless" type. In fact, such distinctions were absolutely necessary for the maintenance of the community's racial hierarchy. In the minds of Bulloch's white citizenry, Moses H. Hall epitomized their conception of a "good" black. The newspaper extolled Hall because "he has never voted any ticket in his life except the democratic ticket, has never been a hundred miles from home, never been in jail or on the witness stand and has never donned a \$10 suit of clothes. He is an example for others of his race. If all the negroes were like Mose our courts would be shortened and the race question solved."²¹

Moses Hall was acceptable to Bulloch's whites because he stayed in his place. The editors of the News considered him a successful farmer, and yet he owned no more than an acre. Furthermore, Hall represented a small class of landowning farmers, too small to pose any sort of economic threat to the white community. Baker insisted that the "Southerner of the better class, indeed, takes a real interest in the welfare of the

¹⁹ Baker, "What Is A Lynching?", p. 302; Atlanta News, quoted in Statesboro News, August 5, 1904.

²⁰ Statesboro News, March 24, 1905.

²¹ Statesboro News, December 13, 1904.

home negro, and often has a real affection for him."²² But this affection was premised on blacks staying within their assigned boundaries. A Statesboro News editorial reminded the community that "this is a white man's country, and if the white people will be more careful to see that the negro is kept in his place, and is duly convicted in the courts when guilty, it will be better for all hands."²³

The Bulloch County political and legal machinery reflected this belief in white supremacy. Aside from cotton prices, nothing seemed as important to the citizens of Statesboro and Bulloch County as the fortunes of the Democratic Party. Throughout the first six months of 1904, the Statesboro News praised its favored candidates, Colonel J. A. Brannen, a candidate for Congress, and William Randolph Hearst, a Democratic nominee for President. Brannen's ownership of the News certainly influenced this support and contributed to the paper's difficulty in finding anything positive to say about either man's opponent. The News viewed Hearst as a staunch adversary of the coal trusts and as an unselfish man, imbued with "patriotic sentiment." When the incumbent, Colonel Lister of Savannah, defeated Brannen in the primary, the News proclaimed that the people of Savannah were guilty of "some of the boldest election robbery that was ever perpetrated on any community," but went on to say that the close result boded well for the future because Lister would soon retire.²⁴

Despite clear-cut preferences for Brannen and Hearst, the News proved quite capable of supporting all Democratic candidates in the general election. The editors of the News insisted that a vote for Theodore Roosevelt and the Republicans lent support to the Negro and threatened the maintenance of white supremacy. After Hearst lost the nomination to Alton Parker, a News editorial explained:

²² Baker, "What Is A Lynching?", p. 301.

²³ Statesboro News, August 30, 1904, p. 2.

²⁴ Statesboro News, Feb. 23, March 15, April 8, 15, 19, 22, 26, May 10, and June 14, 1904.

The News, while not a supporter of the men named as the standard bearers, or of the policies advocated by them, hopes to see the ticket elected. We, of course, will support the nominees. The people of the South are forced to do this in view of present conditions. The republican party as now constituted is led by the vicious element; men who hate the South are in the saddle in republican councils; our social status and political rights are assailed, and all good democrats will now line up for those named at St. Louis.²⁵

While expressing clear disdain for the Republican Party on the national level, the white citizens of Bulloch apparently felt quite secure, free from Republican intrusions in local politics. The newspaper noted that white primaries have "practically disfranchised" blacks. In addition, blacks and republicans presented such an insignificant threat that only twenty-five voters in Statesboro bothered to vote in the municipal elections held in December 1904.²⁶

In addition to a locally dominant Democratic party, the Bulloch County legal machinery effectively reinforced the tenets of white supremacy and punished blacks when they stepped out of place. In July 1900, the Statesboro jail held nineteen prisoners for various crimes; each was young, male, and black.²⁷ By 1904, the white community of Bulloch County enjoyed secure dominance of their black neighbors. All of the institutions and traditions in the community served to reinforce this dominance. And yet, such dominance would prove insufficient to punish Paul Reed and Will Cato, two black men held responsible for the death of Henry Hodges, his wife, and three small children.

²⁵ Statesboro News, July 12, 1904.

²⁶ Statesboro News, May 27 and December 6, 1904.

²⁷ United States, National Archives, Manuscript Schedules for the 1900 Population for Bulloch County, Georgia, Volume VI, Enumeration District 94.

Henry Ray Ford Hodges stood as the embodiment of all that Bulloch County whites considered virtuous. A native of the county, he was born in May 1858, the son of Asbury W. and Ruthy Hodges. His father served in the Confederate Army, was wounded, recovered, joined the First Georgia Regiment, and died in combat at the Battle of Peachtree Creek, near Atlanta, on July 22, 1864.²⁸ After her husband's death, Hodges's mother married Hardee H. Moore, and Hodges grew up with a host of brothers, sisters, half-brothers, and half-sisters.

Hodges attended school at least until he was twelve, and probably a while longer. By 1880, sometime before his twenty-second birthday, he went to live on his own, perhaps acquiring some land from the start. In July 1892, Hodges married his first wife, but she died soon after; eighteen months after his first wedding, he married again. In February 1896, his second wife Cassie gave birth to a daughter, Kittie Corinne, but Cassie soon died, most likely owing to complications from childbirth. Finally, on December 7, 1897, Hodges married his third wife, Claudia Jernigan, twenty years his junior. After giving birth to one child who died, Claudia had two sons: Harmon Asbury, presumably named for Henry's older brother and father, born on September 8, 1902, and Talmadge, born on February 4, 1904.²⁹

By 1900, Hodges farmed 303 acres, two miles from Hardee Moore's place. He was a farmer of modest means. Hodges ran three plows and had only one sharecropper, but was highly respected as a hardworking, industrious man. He owned

²⁸ Smith Callaway Banks, A Roster of Confederate Soldiers of Bulloch County, Georgia, 1861-1865 (Statesboro: Statesboro Regional Library, 1991), p. 55.

²⁹ Alvaretta K. Register, 1860 Census of Bulloch County, Georgia, 1870 Census of Bulloch County, Georgia, 1880 Census of Bulloch County, Georgia (Statesboro: No Date); Register, Bulloch County, Georgia: Genealogical Source Material (Swainesboro: Magnolia Press, 1985), pp. 233-34; Statesboro News, August 12, October 21, 1904; Manuscript Schedules for the 1900 Population for Bulloch County, Georgia, Volume VI, Enumeration District 95.

land and goods valued at \$1,562, about 12 percent more than the average white taxpayer in Bulloch County.³⁰

While Henry Hodges may have been only an average farmer, he was extraordinary in other ways. He served as a deacon and Sunday school teacher at the Friendship Baptist Church. One branch of contemporary folklore suggests that Hodges was also a teacher, sawmiller, cabinet maker, and even occasionally served as a country doctor, tending wounds and setting broken bones. In addition, Hodges is said to have had such a beautiful script that many families asked him to enter their children's names in the family Bible.³¹ Perhaps most importantly, Henry Hodges lived amongst numerous friends and relatives, all of whom seemed to have regarded him highly. After his death, the Savannah Morning News wrote that "Mr. Hodges was born and reared near his home, and it is said by his boyhood companions who had known him all his life, that he was never known to do anything to make an enemy. He was quiet, peaceable, and friendly and attended strictly to his own business. He was never known to say harsh things about others."³²

On the evening of Thursday, July 28, 1904, Henry Hodges picked up his daughter Kittie at the home of Isaac Akins, a neighbor who lived several miles away. Kittie had been playing with Akins's daughter, Sallie Pearl. Just before nightfall, an intense thunderstorm swept down upon Bulloch County and continued until 10:00 p.m. Shortly after the rain stopped, Boss Woodrum and Tom Woodcock noticed a fire, coming from the direction of the Hodges farm. When the two men reached the farm, the roof had fallen in and there was no sign of the family. Initially, witnesses thought a

³⁰ Savannah Morning News, July 30, 1904; Baker, "What Is Lynching?", p. 302; Tax Digests for Bulloch County, Georgia, 1900-1904.

³¹ Statesboro News, October 21, 1904; Interview, Rita Turner Wall, March 20, 1992.

³² Savannah Morning News, July 30, 1904.

bolt of lightning had started the fire but, by morning, it became obvious that Hodges and his entire family had been murdered.³³

As the sun rose, searchers found pools of blood in the yard and on the fence, and discovered Hodges's hat thirty yards from the house. A stone with traces of blood and fresh tracks seemed to indicate some sort of scuffle had taken place. Before long, the bodies of the entire family were discovered in the charred ruins of the home. The Savannah Morning News reported that "fumes arising from the burning house showed that the bodies were within, and every effort was made to get at them, but to little purpose. When they were got out they were charred beyond recognition. The legs and arms were burned off nearly to the body, and the skulls were charred." The Statesboro paper, in an apparent attempt to enflame the passions of the community, provided an even more graphic description of the scene, stating that "the skull of Mr. Hodges had been battered to pieces, Mrs. Hodges' skull, as well as the little girl's, had been crushed in one place The two small children were burned beyond recognition, only small lumps of burning flesh marked their remains. The bodies of Mr. Hodges and his wife could only be told apart by the suspenders that were still on his back Their arms were burned off at their shoulders and their legs were completely burned off to a point near their bodies." The bodies of the two youngest children revealed no sign of violence, suggesting that they had died in the fire. Initially, robbery was fixed as the motive.³⁴

As word of the crime spread throughout the community, friends, relatives, and curious onlookers rushed to the Hodges homestead. A self-appointed search team

³³ Savannah Morning News, July 30, 1904; Charlton Moseley and Frederick Brogdon, "A Lynching at Statesboro: The Story of Paul Reed and Will Cato," Georgia Historical Quarterly, LXV (Summer 1981), 104-105.

³⁴ Savannah Morning News, July 30, 1904; Atlanta Constitution, July 30, 1904; Statesboro News, August 2, 1904.

combed the woods around the house, desperate for clues. Sometime Friday afternoon or Saturday, two shoes, one an elastic Sunday shoe, the other a brogan, were found under a log. The shoes appeared stained with blood, and several strands of a woman's hair, identified by Claudia Hodges's father as that of his daughter, stuck to turpentine or blood on the shoes. Pleasant Brannen, a neighbor of the Hodges, identified the shoes as belonging to Paul Reed, a Negro farm laborer. Another member of the search party discovered a knife, also identified as belonging to Paul Reed. When searchers arrived at Reed's home, they discovered the missing mates to both shoes. In addition, the string on one of the shoes matched the fabric of a dress worn by Reed's wife Harriet. Reed was arrested and lodged in the Statesboro jail. The Statesboro News insisted that his crime exceeded in its barbarity any event in the criminal history of the state of Georgia. Authorities also arrested Will Cato and ten other black men, charging them with complicity in the crime. Meanwhile, Henry Hodges, his wife, and three children were buried together in one coffin at the Friendship Baptist Church.³⁵

Shortly after the arrest, Harriet Reed confessed to authorities that her husband and Cato, a twenty-five-year-old mulatto, had been responsible for the crime. Apparently, the two men believed that Hodges had a considerable sum of money buried in a kettle behind the chicken house. Reports later indicated that Hodges had deposited \$180 earlier that week in a Statesboro bank. On the Saturday before the murder, Reed, Cato, and a third man, Handy Bell, had gone to look for the money but, when discovered, they told Hodges they needed some turpentine for a snake bite. On July 28, Cato and Reed returned to search for the money. Hodges again surprised the two men, and Reed apparently killed him in the ensuing scuffle. Claudia Hodges must have heard the scuffle and gone to aid her husband. Tracks in the mud indicated that both

³⁵ Savannah Morning News, July 31, 1904; Statesboro News, August 2, 1904; Atlanta Constitution, July 31, 1904; Moseley and Brogdon, "A Lynching at Statesboro," 106-107.

men had chased her in the yard before she died. According to Harriet Reed, the two men panicked and fled, but later returned with matches, intent on covering up their deed. When they returned, they discovered Kittie hiding behind a trunk, killed her with the base of a lamp, and set the house ablaze. Presumably, the two infants died in the fire, although conflicting stories persisted.³⁶

As details of Harriet Reed's confession spread throughout the community, passions flared. The Savannah and Atlanta newspapers noted that "never before have the people been so excited, and there is no telling what will happen." Other accounts were more explicit, suggesting that numerous citizens "feared the negroes will be lynched if allowed to remain in the Statesboro jail." Governor Joseph M. Terrell ordered the Statesboro Regiment to guard the prisoners. A group of leading citizens, comprised of lawyers, ministers, and town officials, joined several blacks in a meeting at the court house and pledged themselves to discourage any attempts to lynch the prisoners. The Savannah newspaper reported that a "few hot-headed fellows . . . endeavored to get up a lynching, but received little encouragement." The Statesboro News, on the other hand, wrote that "there seemed to be little sympathy with the spirit of the meeting." On Saturday evening, fearing for the safety of the two primary suspects, Sheriff J. Z. Kendricks attempted to board a train for Savannah with Cato and Reed, but Hodges's younger brother and a few friends prevented him, promising the prisoners would not be lynched if they remained in Statesboro. The News claimed that, in fact, any of the one hundred men at the train station was quite prepared to lead a

³⁶ Savannah Morning News, July 31, 1904; Atlanta Constitution, July 31, 1904; Statesboro News, August 2, 1904; Moseley and Brogdon, "A Lynching at Statesboro," 107; Baker, "What Is a Lynching?", p. 303.

lynch mob and all were merely waiting to make certain that Cato and Reed alone were responsible.³⁷

These sentiments reflected a widespread fear among the Bulloch citizenry that Cato and Reed would somehow go unpunished if let out of their sight. The Statesboro press argued that only a swift trial and the absence of "oily tongued lawyers" would prevent the "people from taking the matter into their own hands." Sheriff Kendricks felt that Cato and Reed would undoubtedly be lynched if they remained in the Statesboro jail. At 2:00 a.m. Sunday, Kendricks slipped Cato and Reed out the back door of the jail, traveled ten miles to the town of Brooklet, and boarded a train for Savannah. Certainly, Kendricks's actions did not reflect any widespread concern for their safety, but rather a sense of his own obligation to the law. Once in Savannah, he stated, "I hated to have to protect the negroes, but the duties of my office required it. It was hard to do, but I did my duty. I hate to face my friends, though, when I get back to Statesboro." His concern proved well-founded, as numerous citizens felt outraged that Kendricks had broken his promise to keep the prisoners in Statesboro. After several days, however, the news reports indicated that the citizenry had begun to realize that the Sheriff's actions were appropriate. With Cato and Reed out of Statesboro, talk of lynching subsided and leading citizens urged adherence to the rule of law. One Savannah correspondent wrote, "The people are coming to realize now that Sheriff Kendricks did his duty While they are determined to have the men punished, they are happy over the prospects of an immediate trial and there will be no lynching.

³⁷ Savannah Morning News, July 31, 1904; Statesboro News, August 2, 1904. The name of the Bulloch County Sheriff, J. Z. Kendricks, also appeared as Kendrick in many reports and articles. In this instance, as well as others where similar discrepancies exist, I have attempted to use the form that I found most often. In instances where a name appears in official records, I have relied on that spelling.

The law will take its course and the people of Bulloch county will show to the world that they are vigilant, but law-abiding."³⁸

Lodged safely in separate cells in the Savannah jail, Paul Reed and Will Cato spoke for the first time about the crime. According to Ray Stannard Baker, Reed and Cato were both illiterate turpentine workers who had had little contact with the white people. Cato was known to have come to Bulloch County from Aiken, South Carolina, while Reed was reported as a native of the county. The 1900 manuscript census, however, lists only one Paul Reid, a native of South Carolina, who was not, in fact, illiterate. Cato apparently did not come to Bulloch until after 1900. Pictures of Reed reveal a strong man with prominent features, and Baker described him as a "black, stolid savage." Cato, on the other hand, was a mulatto, wore a mustache, and did not possess Reed's strength. In 1900, Reed was employed as a turpentine worker, but at the time of the Hodges murder, both men worked on the farm of Alex and John Brannen. Reed owned nothing of value, and Cato's household belongings totaled only \$10. Despite the fact that both men labored on the edge of subsistence, neither man had been in any trouble with the law before July 1904. In fact, Baker described Reed as "a good type of the worthless and densely ignorant negro."³⁹

Baker's description of Reed reflected his general attitude toward blacks. On the one hand, he felt that "the solution to the Negro problem lies in treating the Negro more and more as a human being like ourselves." Baker insisted that blacks be judged by their worth and that qualified blacks be allowed to vote. At the same time, however,

³⁸ Savannah Morning News, August 1,2,3, 1904; Atlanta Constitution, August 1, 1904; Statesboro News, August 2, 1904.

³⁹ Baker, "What Is a Lynching?", pp. 304-307; Tax Digests for Bulloch County, Georgia, 1904; Statesboro News, August 2, 1904; Savannah Morning News, August 19, 20, 1904; Manuscript Schedules for the 1900 Population for Bulloch County, Georgia, Volume VI, Enumeration District 94. Paul Reed's name was often spelled Reid in various newspapers and court records. Ophelia Cato's testimony before the coroner's jury confirms that Reed was from South Carolina. See Savannah Morning News, August 3, 1904.

Baker proclaimed that "the vast majority of Negroes . . . are still densely ignorant, and have little or no appreciation of the duties of citizenship." In Baker's mind, blacks ought to have followed the advice of Booker T. Washington, as they were most suited for physical and manual labor. Baker supported segregated schools and some Jim Crow laws in order to eliminate friction between the ignorant of both races.⁴⁰

In jail, the two prisoners spoke to their guards, as well as several men from Statesboro, about the crime. Reed initially asserted that he had gone to the Hodges home with two other black men, John Hall and Sank Tolbert. Cato, according to Reed, did not accompany them. Reed claimed that he had only served as a lookout, becoming frightened and running away when Hodges appeared. He insisted that Hall had killed Hodges and set the fire, but when Reed was asked how he knew this if he had run away, he quit speaking and refused to answer any further questions. Cato, meanwhile, admitted that he had gone to Reed's home earlier in the evening, but denied he had been to Hodges's home, despite Reed's attempts to get him to come along.⁴¹

By the end of the week, both men had changed their stories. Reed now claimed that he had gone along with two other men, had served only as a lookout, and that Cato had killed Hodges. Cato continued to maintain that he was not present. He said that he had seen Reed on the night in question and that Reed told him that the Hodges had been killed, and that he was going back to burn the house since it would not do "to leave this job that way." As the Savannah Morning News concluded, "this accords with the statement of Cato's wife, who says he came home and watched out the window for the fire and then remarked that he guessed Paul had done what he said he would." The

⁴⁰ Ray Stannard Baker, Following the Color Line (1908; reprint Williamstown, MA: Corner House Publishers, 1973), pp. 292-307.

⁴¹ Savannah Morning News, August 1, 1904; Statesboro News, August 2, 1904; Aiken Journal and Review, August 16, 1904; Moseley and Brogdon, "A Lynching at Statesboro," 108-109.

changing and contradictory statements led most observers to conclude that Reed was certainly guilty, and that Cato, at the very least, had been an accomplice.⁴²

Once the initial threats of lynching had abated, the attention of the community turned to the investigation of the actual facts of the crime. On Tuesday, August 2, a coroner's jury met to consider testimony from various witnesses. Before such testimony was heard, however, the Savannah Morning News proclaimed in bold letters, "Flames Concealed A Darker Crime When The Hodges Family Was Cremated," strongly insinuating that Cato and Reed had raped both Claudia and Little Kittie. Absolutely no proof existed to substantiate such claims, except the discovery of five silver dollars and some small coins in the remains of the fire. The newspaper's correspondent rationalized that if robbery had been the motive, Cato and Reed would certainly have found the money. Since they left the money, rape was the only possible explanation. Such logic reveals a great deal about the temper of Bulloch's white citizenry, who seemed bent on believing only the worst about "the fiendish deed of demons in black." As if robbery and murder were not enough, the newspaper reported a determination to prove that Cato and Reed had sunk to the absolute depths, committing "that nameless offense at which the white men tremble."⁴³

The coroner's jury, which officially charged Cato and Reed with the murder of the Hodges family, relied almost exclusively on circumstantial evidence and on the testimony of Ophelia Cato and their primary witness, seventeen-year-old Harriet Reed. As in her initial statement, much of Harriet's testimony was contradictory. She suggested that Cato and Reed actually succeeded in digging up the money from the kettle behind the chicken house, but that Hodges came out, took the money from them,

⁴² Savannah Morning News, August 1, 6, 1904.

⁴³ Savannah Morning News, August 1, 1904; Moseley and Brogdon, "A Lynching at Statesboro," 108.

and handed it to his wife. Harriet, however, could not explain what happened to the money, and it had already been established that Hodges had made a deposit in a Statesboro bank several days earlier. In addition, Harriet claimed that during the struggle, Hodges yelled at his wife to go inside and get his gun. Claudia did as her husband had asked, but panicked and threw it down. Contrary testimony, on the other hand, proved that Handy Bell, a sharecropper on Hodges's land, had borrowed the gun earlier that day and had not returned it. Such inconsistencies, however, mattered little, as Harriet provided ample details condemning her husband and Will Cato. She stated that her husband had killed Hodges, Cato had killed his wife, and that they both killed the two youngest children. They did not find Kitty until they returned with matches. Once again, Harriet Reed related the aspect of the crime that would be passed down for generations. As the Statesboro News reported, Cato and Reed remembered that Kitty was still around, "returned and made a search for her, and heard her scrambling behind a trunk. They dragged her out and, in fear, she asked what they wanted. They told her it was money, and she offered them a nickel, all she had in the world, and begged them to spare her life. They killed her by breaking a large lamp over her head."⁴⁴

Ophelia Cato, described in the newspapers as "a bright mulatto negro of about twenty years," offered somewhat less-damning testimony than Harriet Reed. She acknowledged that her husband had gone off with Paul Reed on the night of the crime, but soon returned and stated that Reed had had a fight with Hodges. Cato changed into a pair of shoes which were later fitted to a set of tracks outside Hodges's home, and then left. Several hours later, he returned, stared out the window until he saw the light of the burning building, and told his wife that Reed "must have done that which he said he was going to do." Cato then related to his wife that Reed had knocked Hodges

⁴⁴ Statesboro News, August 5, 1904; Savannah Morning News, August 3, 1904.

down, cut his throat, and killed the rest of the family. Several other neighbors testified about finding Reed's shoes and knife, but Harriet Reed and Ophelia Cato provided the bulk of the testimony.⁴⁵

Harriet Reed's testimony had a chilling effect. The removal of Cato and Reed to Savannah had momentarily quieted the calls for violent action, but the retelling of the story rekindled communal passions. Public opinion amongst many whites shifted course once again, led by those more concerned with Biblical vengeance than with the legal process. The Statesboro press reflected such opinion when it stated that "never before have the people of this county been worked up to the point they are at this time. It is certain that if the two negroes . . . had been here on Tuesday, they would have been lynched in short order, but Sheriff Kendricks had spirited them away and they were not 'come-atable.'"⁴⁶

After the coroner's jury formally indicted Cato and Reed, numerous individuals pleaded with Judge A. F. Daley to hold a speedy trial. Daley, who did not live in Statesboro, apparently expressed an initial desire to wait until the people cooled down, but as the Statesboro News noted, "if he is waiting for this, then he just as well [ought to] postpone the court indefinitely." Daley adhered to the public's wishes and called a special session of the court to convene on August 15, the earliest day allowed by law.⁴⁷

One might argue whether the Statesboro News reflected or shaped the opinion of the community. In either case, the newspaper contributed a great deal to the intensity of feelings that preceded the trial. Once Harriet Reed had told her story, there was absolutely no question of the guilt of the two men. The editors of the paper expressed a

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Statesboro News, August 5, 1904; Savannah Morning News, August 4, 1904.

⁴⁷ Statesboro News, August 5, 1904; Moseley and Brogdon, "A Lynching at Statesboro," 110.

shallow desire to allow the law to take its course, claiming "we hope that the people will give the law at least *the first opportunity* to administer as full a measure of justice as is possible to give them."⁴⁸ If worse came to worst, and the outraged citizenry failed to seize the second opportunity, the newspaper demanded that Cato and Reed be given a public hanging. In a blistering editorial, the paper stated:

We hope that when the bloody devils who did the terrible crime on Mr. Henry R. Hodges and family are swung, as they must and shall be done, that Judge Daley will take into consideration the great enormity of this diabolical crime, the blackest that the civilized world has ever seen, that he will sentence them to be executed in public.

The law which provides for private hangings is an unwise one to start with. Let the example be given in public that all men of a criminal leaning can witness the fate that awaits them, if they engage in the crime of taking the lives of their fellow men. We have a gallows already constructed in the county jail, one which is enclosed by a brick wall A dozen men we suppose is all that could witness it. The people not only are anxious to know that these murderers are hanged high and hanged until they kick out their bloody and criminal existence between heaven and earth, but they want to see the thing done. While all this will not restore one of the unfortunate victims again, yet it will be at least of some satisfaction to an outraged people, to see the thing happen. Private hangings should be done away with, let the example be taught in the open air, that all can come and look on the terrible fate that awaits all other criminals of their stamp.⁴⁹

Any observer must question whether the newspaper would have constructed such a passionate statement if Henry Hodges and his family had been black, or if Cato and Reed had been white. The Statesboro News constantly focused on black criminality. On an almost weekly basis, a reader could find accounts of blacks attacking or killing whites. Lynchings as far away as Texas received front-page coverage. White crimes, however, were buried in the back pages or given much smaller headlines. One particular issue led with the headline, "Bulloch County Farmer Suffers At Hands Of Two Worthless Negroes." The story related how two young, black males had stolen a bale of cotton from a white farmer, in the middle of the night,

⁴⁸ Statesboro News, August 5, 1904. Emphasis added.

⁴⁹ Statesboro News, August 5, 1904.

without any use of force whatsoever. Also on the front-page, but with a much smaller headline, ran a story about the slaying of a white man who had killed several men, white and black, stolen many animals, and caused a great deal of fear throughout southeastern Georgia.⁵⁰ This perpetual emphasis on the misdeeds of blacks reinforced the presumptions of white supremacy. A southern police officer reflected this inequitable treatment when he said, "If a nigger kills a white man, that's murder. If a white man kills a nigger, that's justifiable homicide. If a nigger kills a nigger, that's one less nigger."⁵¹

While the Statesboro News did its part to rile the populace, individual citizens took steps to make certain that Cato and Reed received a sufficient punishment. On the day before the trial began, rumors spread that Cato and Reed had already been lynched, and most assumed it was true, considering the intensity of the lynching sentiment throughout the county. The Savannah Morning News reported that "people who know the feelings of a large element in Bulloch county say that the chances of the murderers being legally hung are very slim, and that the avenging of the killing of the Hodges family will be at the hands of those in the community where the crime was committed. They look for something to happen as soon as the negroes have been tried and sentenced, if not before."⁵²

To make matters worse, word spread that Reed had blamed the murders on a black society known as the "Before Day Club," a presumed group allegedly dedicated to committing criminal acts against whites. As a result, racial tensions mounted, and two black girls were dragged out of a church and whipped for allegedly pushing two

⁵⁰ Statesboro News, October 3, 1905. See also May 17, July 8, 1904; April 14, July 4, August 15, September 29, 1905.

⁵¹ Ayers, Vengeance and Justice, p. 231.

⁵² Savannah Morning News, August 14, 15, 1904.

white girls off a sidewalk. When the father of the black girls went to Statesboro to press charges, he too was whipped by an angry mob.⁵³

The day before the trial, hundreds of people poured into Statesboro. Both railroad lines provided extra cars, bringing people from all of the neighboring counties. These visitors filled every hotel and boarding house in Statesboro. While the Statesboro newspaper continued to pay lip service to law and order, its editors made it clear that the "people have been promised a prompt trial and a conviction of the parties who are guilty, whoever they may be." No one contradicted those who suggested that Cato and Reed were the guilty parties. The paper warned that all would be well, as long as there was no "shyster work on the part of a lawyer." Others claimed that the populace would not tolerate the presence of state militia troops. One company stood by in Savannah, fifty miles away, waiting to be called if needed. The local Statesboro troops were withdrawn at the request of prominent citizens who believed such an action would pacify the crowd.⁵⁴

Amidst such tension, the trial of Will Cato and Paul Reed began on Monday, August 15. The prosecution first moved to try the two separately, so that Ophelia Cato and Harriet Reed could testify against each other's husband. Despite the clear prejudice of the packed courtroom, or perhaps because of it, no motion for a change of venue was even entertained.⁵⁵

A week before the trial commenced, John E. Myrick, a Savannah attorney, had indicated that he would represent Cato and Reed. It is unknown what prompted Myrick to offer his services, but he wasted little time in raising the wrath of the Statesboro

⁵³ Statesboro News, August 12, 1904; Savannah Morning News, August 15, 16, 1904; Moseley and Brogdon, "A Lynching At Statesboro," 109-110.

⁵⁴ Statesboro News, August 12, 19, 1904; Savannah Morning News, August 15, 16, 1904.

⁵⁵ Savannah Morning News, August 15, 16, 1904; Moseley and Brogdon, "A Lynching at Statesboro," 110.

News. As Reed started to confess certain aspects of his crime from his Savannah jail cell before the trial, Myrick entered, told Reed that he was his lawyer, that he could get Reed off, and that he ought not to reveal any further information. Myrick's arrival, most likely, prompted the News to issue its warning against oily-tongued, shyster lawyers who might try to get the two prisoners off.⁵⁶

Curiously enough, Myrick failed to appear in Statesboro on Sunday night. As the Savannah train arrived in Statesboro that night, one newspaper reported, a large man stepped forward and asked each passenger if John E. Myrick was on board. The paper questioned whether or not any "personal violence" would have been attempted had Myrick been on board, but he was not. In any event, the possibility of his arrival had certainly aroused the curiosity of the Bulloch citizenry. Two days later, the Atlanta Constitution reported that although Myrick had failed to appear for the defense, he had been in Statesboro during the trial and had been severely beaten in a street fight by two men after the trial had ended.⁵⁷

The night before the trial began, in Myrick's absence, Judge Daley appointed four men to handle the defense of Cato and Reed. J. J. Anderson, D. R. Groover, E. A. Coley, and A. N. Deal were all members of the Statesboro bar, each a resident of Bulloch County. No reports suggest that any of these men actually prepared for the case.⁵⁸

In addition to a hostile crowd and unfamiliar lawyers, Cato's and Reed's fate was decided by a jury infected by the passions and prejudices of the community. In every sense of the word, the twenty-four members of the two juries represented the white, farming community of Bulloch County. At least twenty, and perhaps as many

⁵⁶ Statesboro News, August 12, 1904.

⁵⁷ Savannah Morning News, August 14, 15, 1904; Atlanta Constitution, August 17, 1904.

⁵⁸ Savannah Morning News, August 16, 1904.

as twenty-three, of the jurors were farmers. Eighteen of them owned an average of 418 acres, and only three of the eighteen owned fewer than 150. They averaged \$1,816 of aggregate wealth, more than 30 percent higher than the county average. Two of the others were middle-aged farmers who owned their farms free of any mortgage. One of the jurors owned no land at all. Figures for the other three could not be located. One newspaper went so far as to proclaim that "the jury selected are all true, trustworthy men, who can be depended upon to do their full duty, and there is no doubt of the convictions of both negroes."⁵⁹

Despite the numerous assurances that Cato and Reed would not be lynched, Statesboro Mayor G. M. Johnston felt sufficient concern on the morning of the trial that he and two other leading citizens wired Governor Terrell: "One thousand armed men in the city. It is conceded the prisoners will be lynched as soon as convicted. We need four more companies here by 6 o'clock this afternoon." Only twenty-four hours earlier, Johnston and other prominent citizens considered the situation safe enough to request the removal of all troops.⁶⁰

In response to Johnston's telegram, Captain Robert Hitch and the Oglethorpe Light Infantry prepared to leave Savannah as the trial began. The Reverend Harmon Hodges, Henry's older brother, had travelled from Texas to attend the trial. He prayed and then spoke, urging the crowd to allow the majesty of the law to take its course, expressing his belief that violation of the law was no better than the crime committed by Cato and Reed. A Savannah reporter captured the solemn and dignified nature of Harmon Hodges's address:

⁵⁹ Savannah Morning News, August 16, 17, 1904; Tax Digests for Bulloch County, Georgia, 1904; Manuscript Schedules for the 1900 Population for Bulloch County, Georgia, Volume VI, Enumeration Districts 89-99; Atlanta Constitution, August 16, 1904. Occupational information, land, and aggregate wealth figures were derived from comparing jury lists to the manuscript census and tax digests.

⁶⁰ Savannah Morning News, August 15, 16, 1904

In the presence of a crowd that filled the Court House to overflowing until no more could get in, and with every lawn covered with citizens of the county and those from adjoining counties, the brother of the man who was so foully murdered together with his entire family raised his eyes to heaven, and while all stood in reverent attention, offered a prayer to God. He pleaded for the strength to avoid expression of the passions that might rage in the hearts of the excited public. He prayed that all might be given the strength to uphold the dignity of the law, and to recognize the higher laws of humanity.⁶¹

The prosecution tried Will Cato first because his name preceded Reed's on the indictment. The testimony of the witnesses differed little from that of the coroner's inquest, the one exception being that Harriet Reed apparently divulged more information. In the opinion of two historians, Harriet's testimony at the trial conflicted with her previous account.⁶²

Several sources conclude that the bulk of the testimony was directed against Paul Reed. Cato was connected to the crime only by the uncertain identification of a pair of shoes and underwear, and through Harriet Reed's testimony. After all the witnesses had been examined, Will Cato finally spoke. Throughout the afternoon he appeared solemn and dejected while Reed openly laughed and talked with his lawyers. In a broken, quavering voice, interjected by repeated pauses and one burst of tears, Cato whispered:

Well, gentlemen, the crime they have got me charged with here—I am not guilty of that crime. Nothing like it. Because when that thing was done, I wasn't there. I wasn't nowhere about Mr. Hodges's house at all. I was at my own house, I suppose, when that was done. Whilst I left my house that night, I never went to Mr. Hodges's house at all. I went to Paul Reed's house and back to my own and back to Paul's and from there to George Campbell's, and then back to my house, and when I got back there I stayed—and when I got back the house was not even set on fire, and it was not set on fire until after I lay down.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Savannah Morning News, August 16, 1904; Moseley and Brogdon, "A Lynching at Statesboro," 110-111.

Cato acknowledged that he had seen Paul Reed and that Reed had told him about the crime, but Cato never wavered from his insistence that he had not been to the Hodges home. When Cato finished, Colonel Deal rose to provide the closing argument for the defense. He simply noted that "if the accused was present and witnessed this conspiracy, and spoke of it to no one and was not a participant, he is not guilty of the charge in this bill of indictment." Whether constrained by public opinion, unmoved by Cato's statement, or resigned to the futility of the situation, the defense offered no further argument. By the time Judge Daley sent the case to the jury, only one hundred spectators remained in the courtroom, as it had been determined that Paul Reed would not be tried until Tuesday. In addition, a steady drizzle began to fall shortly after 6:00 p.m., and many out-of-town visitors left for home. At 7:18 p.m., only eight minutes after receiving the case, the jury returned a verdict of guilty against Will Cato for the death of Henry Hodges and his family.⁶³

During the course of the afternoon, Captain Hitch arrived from Savannah with a company, increasing the number of troops in Statesboro to 115. Despite the Mayor's assessment that morning that four more companies were needed, Judge Daley, impressed by the quiet crowd, concluded on Monday evening that the Savannah and Statesboro troops offered sufficient protection.⁶⁴

The next morning's headlines, however, carried an ominous threat, reporting the text of Mayor Johnston's telegram and intimating that Cato and Reed would be lynched as soon as their trials ended. Furthermore, Handy Bell, held in jail as a witness in the trial, awoke and told his fellow prisoners that he had envisioned "a cross of fire in the heavens," a portent that Cato and Reed would be burned to death.⁶⁵

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Savannah Morning News, August 16, 1904.

⁶⁵ Savannah Morning News, August 16, 1904; Moseley and Brogdon, "A Lynching at Statesboro," 112.

Despite such threats, the situation was not so tense as the day before. Fewer spectators crowded into the courtroom and only half as many individuals filled the surrounding streets. Absent the previous day's distractions, Reed's trial proceeded rapidly. The testimony corresponded with that of the day before, except for Reed's own statement. Reed claimed that the murder was the work of the "Before Day Club," and that the club had planned to rob several other houses that night. Reed insisted that he was only a watchman, and tried to assert that by leaving his watch, he had actually prevented other crimes from being committed that night, as the rest of the group spent the remainder of the night looking for him. Reed's testimony contained numerous contradictions, and he eventually admitted, just prior to his death, that he had invented the "Before Day Club." Many whites, nevertheless, anxiously believed that such an organization was not only possible, but probable. Rumors of such clubs appeared throughout Georgia and spread into other states as well. They continued to surface for several months after Cato and Reed died, despite a lack of tangible evidence.⁶⁶

Reed's statement had no impact on the jury and, according to one newspaper, the jury deliberation lasted only as long as it took to write out the verdict of guilty. Immediately following the decision of the jury, Judge Daley sentenced Cato and Reed to hang on September 9, the earliest date possible under the law. Eyewitness accounts differ about the force of Daley's statement, one spectator suggesting that "Daley made a speech that would make anybody feel like lynching them," others insisting that Daley's words were not exceptional in a case of this nature. Daley recited the facts of the case and, in sentencing the two men, he drew sharp distinctions between them. He said that Reed was "one of the most hardened criminals" he had ever seen, one who "showed a calmness to do any crime." He told Reed, "You do not seem to have shown any--to

⁶⁶ Savannah Morning News, August 16, 17, 20, 1904; Moseley and Brogdon, "A Lynching at Statesboro," 109-110.

have felt it at all, you have even laughed during the trial." Daley, on the other hand, expressed some sympathy for Cato because he seemed to show some regret and appeared sorry.⁶⁷

In a mere twenty-four hours, Paul Reed and Will Cato had been legally lynched. Historian George Wright argues that legal lynchings afforded whites an opportunity to deal harshly with blacks without suffering the repercussions and criticism that often accompanied lynchings. The constant threat that a lynching could occur normally sufficed to produce a verdict of guilt and a sentence of death. Despite a lack of solid evidence and a plethora of contradictory statements, Cato and Reed were convicted by a jury that apparently never considered the possibility that they were innocent. They received the speediest trial possible under state law, without the benefit of committed attorneys. As historian Dan Carter suggests, speedy trials were viewed as the surest means of avoiding extralegal mob violence. In addition, the local press and populace demanded the defendants' guilt, not to mention a public hanging. And yet, even the most prominent white citizens, including the Judge and Mayor, felt that Cato and Reed had received a fair trial. Few residents of Bulloch County would have supported the Baltimore Afro-American Ledger's assertion that the hasty nature of the Cato and Reed trial constituted a "mockery of justice."⁶⁸

After sentencing, bailiffs and troops removed Cato and Reed to the prisoners' room, located adjacent to the courtroom and right behind the Judge's bench on the second floor of the courtroom. As he had done the day before, Captain Hitch ordered

⁶⁷ Savannah Morning News, August 17, 1904; State of Georgia, Department of Defense, Charges and Specifications Prepared Against Capt. Robert M. Hitch, Company I, First Infantry, Georgia State Troops, Oct. 10-11, 1904, pp. 29, 43, 131, 150. Hereafter, referred to as Court-Martial Proceedings.

⁶⁸ George C. Wright, Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings" (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), pp. 215-305; Dan T. Carter, Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), p. 119; Baltimore Afro-American Ledger, August 20, 1904.

the prisoners held in the prisoners' room until the courthouse had been cleared. Hitch and Judge Daley had decided that following the trial, Cato and Reed would be returned to Savannah to await their hanging. Owing to Hitch's request, however, Daley had not made this known to the public for fear of inciting their anger. The spectators cleared the courtroom, but they did not disperse from the first-floor corridor, milling around the pair of narrow, winding stairways which afforded the only access to the courtroom and prisoners' room. They began to yell until Sheriff Kendricks and then Judge Daley attempted to quiet them. Kendricks begged the crowd to disperse, emphasizing his conviction that Cato and Reed were needed to bring other participants to justice. The mob sought assurance that the prisoners would remain in Statesboro. Others demanded a public execution, echoing the sentiments of the Statesboro News that aggrieved whites in the community would receive some measure of satisfaction if the citizenry could witness the death of Cato and Reed. Daley told the crowd that if they would disperse, he would see to it that Cato and Reed remained in Statesboro, but he stated that it was "not in his power" to grant a public execution. After Daley returned to the courtroom, Thomas J. Denmark and another man approached the Judge, and once again requested that the convicted killers not be sent to Savannah. The Judge replied that "if they would clear the hallway that it might be done." Denmark and his accomplice apparently made such arrangements with the mob, and a few minutes later, Judge Daley left the Court House, noting that the hallways were clear.⁶⁹

The crowd, however, discovered that Captain Hitch had made arrangements to take Cato and Reed directly to the train station. An agent of the Statesboro and Savannah Railroad, sharing the sentiment of the crowd, apparently provided this information. This news strengthened the resentment and resolve of Bulloch County

⁶⁹ Savannah Morning News, August 17, 1904; Aiken Journal and Review, August 19, 1904; Court-Martial Proceedings, pp. 157-158, 186-188.

whites who disdained the presence of state troops. Many residents saw the militia as an outside force interfering in local affairs and considered that black criminals such as Cato and Reed did not deserve the protection of the militia. Some outraged whites opposed the transfer of Cato and Reed to Savannah on principle, some feared the possibility of escape, and others no doubt understood that such a move would hinder plans to lynch the two criminals and exact an appropriate punishment.⁷⁰

The Savannah Morning News later reported that shortly before 1:00 p.m. "a tall man on the outside harangued the crowd for a few minutes and then called on those around him to follow him." Hitch posted guards on both stairways, but their rifles were unloaded, leaving them only with their bayonets to repel the mob. In addition, eighty-five of his troops remained either back in camp or at the jail. Twenty-five or thirty men crowded around the rear stairway, muscling their way towards the guard, testing their resolve to resist. The mob surged back and forth from the rear to the front stairway, looking for an opening. Finally, the mob disarmed two guards and discovered that their rifles were unloaded. One newspaper reported that the guards "were invited to go to dinner with their assailants and were treated with kindness but determination."⁷¹

Despite their unloaded rifles, a number of soldiers valiantly resisted the emboldened mob. Lieutenant James McIntire and a handful of men held the rear stairway, trading blows with their assailants. Meanwhile, in the prisoners' room, Bailiffs G. H. Mock and J. G. Mitchell, both residents of Bulloch County, attempted to persuade Sergeant A. J. Fulton and Sergeant R. C. Thompson to put Cato and Reed out the second-floor window so that the mob could have the prisoners without anyone

⁷⁰ Savannah Morning News, August 15, 1904; Court-Martial Proceedings, pp. 255-262.

⁷¹ Savannah Morning News, August 17, 1904; Atlanta Constitution, August 17, 1904; New York Times, August 17, 1904; Baker, "What Is A Lynching?", p. 306; Moseley and Brogdon, "A Lynching at Statesboro," 113.

else getting hurt. One of the two bailiffs suggested to Fulton that he had a wife and two children to support and that he "didn't want to get killed about two damn negroes." Mob members on the outside attempted to put a ladder up to the window of the prisoners' room. Fulton, however, was determined to thwart such a plan, and he quickly requested and received additional reinforcements.⁷²

Shortly after 1:20 p.m., Captain Hitch stood on the front stairway, shouting instructions to his troops. Ben T. "Cap" Mallard, one of the Sheriff's bailiffs, inched his way up the staircase. Hitch had no cause for suspicion, as the deputies and bailiffs had traversed up and down the stairs throughout the altercation. When Mallard pulled even with Hitch, however, he locked his arms around the Captain, shouted "This is the Captain," and threw Hitch down into the waiting mob, which gladly removed him from the courthouse altogether. Once the mob disarmed the Captain, the rest of the soldiers on the front stairs, mostly Statesboro men, provided insufficient resistance. A mass of "wildly cheering men" rushed up the front stairway, across the courtroom, and headed for the door of the prisoners' room.⁷³

Estimates of the size of the mob varied greatly. Colonel H. B. Strange, one of the prosecuting attorneys, suggested that seventy-five to one hundred men were actually involved while as many as 1,200 to 1,500 watched. Lieutenant Charles Cone estimated that active members of the mob numbered between fifty and seventy-five, but that roughly two hundred were present. Captain Hitch insisted that between fifty and one hundred men served as peacemakers during the riot and that only twelve or fifteen individuals fought the troops. He estimated that the rest of the crowd, however,

⁷² Savannah Morning News, August 17, 1904; Court-Martial Proceedings, pp. 39-42; Moseley and Brogdon, "A Lynching at Statesboro," 114.

⁷³ Savannah Morning News, August 17, 1904; Court-Martial Proceedings, pp. 212-215 & 271-272

numbering between 1,500 and 2,500 persons, expressed clear support for the rioters.⁷⁴

The soldiers inside the prisoners' room differed in their opinions about whether or not the door to the room was opened from the inside by a bailiff, or from the outside by Sheriff Kendricks. They unanimously agreed, however, that the Sheriff entered the room with the mob. Sheriff Kendricks later explained that when he realized the mob had broken past the guards, he had intended to take the prisoners to safety through an opening in the ceiling of the solicitor's office, which adjoined the prisoners' room. The Sheriff's conduct, however, suggests otherwise. At least four soldiers later testified that Sheriff Kendricks not only entered the room with the mob, but that he told the soldiers to "stand aside" and "let the mob take the prisoners." According to Sergeant Fulton, Kendricks said, "Sergeant, stand aside. I told Captain Hitch to give this up and let us have the prisoners. There is no use for you boys to fight." If Kendricks was not actually part of the mob, he must have remembered the outrage of the community when he took Cato and Reed to Savannah, as well as his own ambivalent feelings about having had to protect them.⁷⁵

Once in the prisoners' room, the mob worked to secure Cato and Reed. One newspaper reported that Cato offered no resistance and was "dragged from the room, pleading for his life." Reed, on the other hand, fought vigorously for three or four minutes before mob members placed a rope over his neck and dragged him from the room. The mob carried Cato and Reed down the stairs and out into the Court House square. One man climbed a telephone poll with the intent of hanging them right there, but the mob expressed its determination to exact more symbolic revenge and the crowd

⁷⁴ Court-Martial Proceedings, pp. 36, 49, 119, 214-215, & 253-54; Moseley and Brogdon, "A Lynching at Statesboro," 113-114.

⁷⁵ Court-Martial Proceedings, pp. 32-33 & 216-221; Atlanta Constitution, August 19, 1904; Savannah Morning News, August 27, 1904.

headed towards the Hodges farm, six miles from Statesboro. Although reports differ, the mob most likely carried or dragged Cato and Reed while several spectators followed in buggies. According to eyewitnesses, most of the mob was in shirt sleeves and unarmed.⁷⁶

The mob headed north on Main Street and passed within sight of the camp where many of the soldiers remained, uncertain what to do. When Hitch and McIntire reached the camp, McIntire begged Hitch, "as a Georgia boy," to let him pursue the mob. McIntire felt certain that he could easily disperse most of the mob, but Hitch refused, stating later that he was under the impression that the prisoners were in buggies, and that even if the troops were able to catch them, the mob would have shot Cato and Reed.⁷⁷

After two miles, the mob succumbed to the intense August heat and turned off into a strip of woods. The lynchers, eager to avoid the destruction of any property, decided to move the prisoners into another strip of woods, closer to water, and farther from a nearby residence. The realization that they were to be burned alive had profoundly different effects on Paul Reed and Will Cato. According to one Savannah newspaper, Reed remained relatively stoic and expressed little concern. Cato, on the other hand, "was shaking like an aspen and begged to be hanged, crying 'Gentlemen, for God's sake, have mercy on me. I might be guilty of being in this, but I did not kill nobody. Please don't burn me; hang me, shoot me.'" Some mob members apparently favored granting Cato his request, until one witness recited the crime, focusing on the plea of Little Kittie to spare her life for a nickel. According to an eyewitness, after Cato proclaimed his innocence one last time, Reed responded, "Let him die like I do."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Savannah Morning News, August 17, 27, 28; Atlanta Constitution, August 17, 1904; Baker, "What Is A Lynching?", p. 306; Court-Martial Proceedings, p. 35.

⁷⁷ Court-Martial Proceedings, pp. 53-76, 226, & 275.

⁷⁸ Savannah Morning News, August 17, 1904; Court-Martial Proceedings, p. 208.

The Statesboro mob placed the convicted murderers side by side, Reed to Cato's left, and chained them to an old stump, approximately twelve feet high and three feet wide. Reed's undershirt was ripped from the neck and pulled part way down, revealing the finely tuned muscles of a life-long laborer. Cato's clothes were left intact. A short delay ensued while the mob waited for the arrival of lightwood and kerosene. During the interlude, the two hundred spectators stood back so that a photographer could record the scene. When the wood and oil arrived, mob leaders piled faggots around the base of the stump and poured ten gallons of kerosene on each man. One witness later testified that certain members of the mob seemed to weaken as "they were slow about getting things ready." Just before he met his death, Reed confessed that he had killed Mr. and Mrs. Hodges and claimed that Handy Bell had killed the children. The Savannah Morning News captured the intensity of the moment when it wrote, "At exactly 3:14 o'clock the torch was applied. The scene which followed beggars description. Frenzied cheers rent the air as men, almost crazed with the hatred of the men being punished, saw the cruel flames drinking up their life blood."⁷⁹

Even in death, Cato and Reed continued to exhibit strong differences in their personalities, perhaps a reflection of personal strength, perhaps an expression of degree of complicity in the crime. According to several sources, "Cato screamed in agony and begged that he be shot. His heavy suit of hair, which was oil-soaked, was almost the first thing the flames fastened on, and, screaming with agony, while the hempen rope became a cell of fire around his neck, a thrill of horror ran through the frames of the more timid." As Cato writhed in pain, members of the mob threw knots of lightwood

⁷⁹ Savannah Morning News, August 17, 1904; Atlanta Constitution, August 17, 1904; New York Times, August 17, 1904; Court-Martial Proceedings, p. 208; Baker, "What Is A Lynching?", p. 307; Moseley and Brogdon, "A Lynching at Statesboro," 115-116. G. M. Guerrey, a Savannah reporter, estimated that two hundred persons actually witnessed the burning. See Court-Martial Proceedings, p. 207.

at his head. Reed, on the other hand, attempted to choke himself, but never screamed. His only, and final, words were "Lord, have mercy."⁸⁰

By late afternoon, nothing but ashes and a few small bones remained of Paul Reed and Will Cato. Throughout the evening, white residents of the county searched for souvenirs, grabbing sections of chain or fragments of bone. Two young men, walking down a Statesboro street, stopped Judge Daley and offered him several charred bones. He shuddered in disgust and declined. The Savannah Morning News noted that among the crowd of souvenir hunters were a "number of small boys in knee pants."⁸¹

In addition to the souvenir collectors, Statesboro photographer T. M. Bennett offered another memento of the event. Several weeks after the lynching, Bennett ran the following advertisement in the Statesboro News:

PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE STATESBORO HORROWS FOR SALE

Photos as follows at 25 cents each, or any one Hodges family group who were murdered and burned: Little Kittie, who offered Cato and Reid five cents for her life and was refused; Talmadge and Harmon, infants who were burned alive; Hodges home after burning; Cato and Reid in jail yard; Cato and Reid chained to stump just before burning; Cato and Reid during burning; Cato and Reid after burning.⁸²

Copies of these photographs have survived.

Some accounts suggest that the lynching was spontaneous, spurred on by the belief that Cato and Reed would be sent to Savannah. It is more likely that the decision to return Cato and Reed to Savannah simply added a new sense of urgency to the mob's actions. Charlton Moseley and Frederick Brogdon suggest that whether the

⁸⁰ Savannah Morning News, August 17, 1904; Atlanta Constitution, August 17, 1904; New York Times, August 17, 1904; Aiken Journal and Review, August 19, 1904; Baker, "What Is A Lynching?", p. 307; Moseley and Brogdon, "A Lynching at Statesboro," 115-116.

⁸¹ Savannah Morning News, August 17, 1904; Baker, "What Is A Lynching?", p. 307; Moseley and Brogdon, "A Lynching at Statesboro," 116.

⁸² Statesboro News, September 13, 1904. "Harrow" is the spelling of "horror" as it appeared in the Statesboro and Savannah newspapers on several occasions.

lynching was spontaneous or planned, the decision to burn the prisoners "was not finalized until they reached the lynching site." The Savannah Morning News, however, indicated that the lynching had been carefully planned, as "ropes had been purchased. Oil was stored away and committees appointed." In addition, Judge Daley later testified that he saw "well-known ladies" handing bottles of kerosene to the mob as they headed out of town. The storing of oil certainly suggests that a burning was intended all along, as does the decision of the mob to move the prisoners into another strip of woods to avoid any unintended property loss. Moseley and Brogdon, however, correctly assert that several lynchers on the scene advocated hanging, and that several mob members had to be sent back into town to get kerosene and trace chains.⁸³

Baker and others note that when cooler heads advocated hanging, a chorus of disagreement shouted them down. Mob members yelled, "Burn them! Burn them!" Hardee Moore announced that his wife Ruthy, Henry Hodges's mother, wished the men burned. After that, no one called for a more humane death.⁸⁴

The lynching of Paul Reed and Will Cato, unfortunately, was not simply an isolated event or a singular expression of rage. Despite the efforts of Mayor Johnston, the Reverend Langston, and others, most whites sanctioned the lynching, arguing that Cato and Reed got exactly what they deserved. Baker claimed that even members of the black community expressed such feelings, but one must wonder to what degree they responded out of fear. Baker noted that in the aftermath of the lynching, "All the stored-up racial animosity came seething to the surface; all the personal grudges and spite." White citizens assured certain blacks that they would not be harmed, that only the criminal and worthless blacks were in any danger, but such distinctions proved

⁸³ Savannah Morning News, August 17, 23, 1904; Baker, "What Is A Lynching?", pp. 306-307; Moseley and Brogdon, "A Lynching at Statesboro," 114-115.

⁸⁴ Baker, "What Is A Lynching?", p. 307; Savannah Morning News, August 17, 1904; Moseley and Brogdon, "A Lynching at Statesboro," 114-115.

impossible to maintain. Once the white citizens of Bulloch unleashed and sanctioned the use of extralegal violence in one instance, it was impossible to stop its use in others. Indiscriminate beatings, whippings, and killings followed, prompting the New York Times to state that "it is not a race war, for violence comes all from one side."⁸⁵

In a clear attempt to place the blame for violence on black lawlessness, a leading citizen of Statesboro commented that "we shall have trouble with the negroes here just as long as they can't behave." The actions of Bulloch's white citizenry, however, suggested that well-behaved blacks were not immune to acts of violence. As the town of Statesboro returned to normal, violence erupted throughout the countryside. Albert Roberts, a seventy-year-old black man and his seventeen-year-old son were riddled with bullets while sitting in their cabin in Register, several miles from Statesboro. Roberts was described by white neighbors as well-liked and peaceable, a black of the "better class." Despite reports that his murder incensed his white neighbors, no one was ever charged.⁸⁶

On Tuesday evening, an unidentified black man was found dead on Lott's Bridge, about nine miles from Statesboro. Initial reports pegged the man as Handy Bell, thought by many to have been an accomplice in the Hodges murder. Sheriff Kendricks had begged the mob not to lynch Cato and Reed precisely because he believed that they held information against Bell and others. After the lynching, Judge Daley ordered the Sheriff to release Bell, held in jail as a witness against Cato and Reed, due to a lack of evidence. According to the Savannah Morning News, a mob followed Bell out of Statesboro, captured him, placed a rope around his neck, strung the other end over a branch, and tried to force a confession out of him. Bell, however,

⁸⁵ Baker, "What Is A Lynching?", pp. 307-308; New York Times, August 18, 1904; Savannah Morning News, August 18, 1904.

⁸⁶ Savannah Morning News, August 18, 1904; Statesboro News, August 26, 1904; Baker, "What Is A Lynching?", p. 307.

maintained his innocence. Enough of his captors believed him and they set him free. The next day, after a long afternoon at a local still, Bell left Bulloch County.⁸⁷

Two weeks after the lynching, Sebastian McBride, a nineteen-year-old sharecropper, was taken from his home in the middle of the night, beaten, and shot numerous times. McBride dragged himself home and identified three of his attackers, all white men, before dying the next day. Ray Stannard Baker concluded that "the better class of citizens, the same men who would, perhaps, condone the burning of Reed and Cato, had no sympathy with this sort of thing." Several of these men witnessed McBride's dying statement and, as a result, three men were charged with the murder, but never convicted. This incident highlights the futility of attempting to draw distinctions between expressions of violence, condoning one and condemning another. The white citizens of Bulloch County, no matter what their social or economic standing, ultimately sanctioned mob violence by refusing to hold individuals responsible, whether it be for whippings, shootings, or lynchings, and refusing to punish them accordingly. In the final analysis, Bulloch's white citizens excused individual acts of violence to avenge the death of Henry Hodges and his family.⁸⁸

The indiscriminate whippings and beatings did not end because the white community felt sympathy for the blacks. In fact, several newspapers reported that groups of farmers had expressed a determination to "rid the community of a class of blacks that is said to have made life unsafe here." The press and white citizenry of Bulloch County saw attacks on responsible, well-respected blacks as unfortunate, but unavoidable if they were to cleanse the community. Instead, a determined effort to end the reign of lawlessness did not begin until the whites recognized that they were endangering their own economic interests. Farmers depended upon black labor to pick

⁸⁷ Savannah Morning News, August 18, 19, 1904; Statesboro News, August 26, 1904.

⁸⁸ Savannah Morning News, August 30, 1904; Baker, "What Is A Lynching?", p. 307.

their cotton in the early fall and the flight of black labor posed a serious dilemma. The county's farmers apparently succeeded in stemming the tide of black flight, as the fall crop was quite profitable. In December, the Statesboro News noted that most blacks had returned to Bulloch County.⁸⁹

Moreover, the reign of lawlessness that swept Bulloch County began to subside once the intense hatred of many whites had been allowed to run its course. The Statesboro News refused to blame the lynching on any particular group of white citizens, but rather spoke of a law-abiding "people" who simply "lost control of themselves" when confronted with the awful details of the Hodges murder. The News tried to explain the violent outbreak in terms similar to temporary insanity, asserting several weeks after the lynching that "madness has given away to reason, and violent passions are now subdued. . . . The enraged lion has been caged, and the man comes forth again. Human passion has spent its fury, and reason again enthroned." Unfortunately for Bulloch's black citizens, whites kept the keys to the lion's cage.⁹⁰

The lynching of Paul Reed and Will Cato did not come without some costs to the people of Statesboro and Bulloch County. The press, not only in the North, but throughout the South, condemned the lynching as a flagrant violation of the law. In response, the white citizenry of the county created an elaborate series of justifications, based upon their belief, as echoed in the Statesboro News, that "a desperate people are themselves the law." They asserted that the law was an instrument to keep blacks in their appropriate place, but that if blacks grossly violated the accepted boundaries, the people had a right to take the law into their own hands. Most whites in Bulloch

⁸⁹ Savannah Morning News, August 18, Sept. 8, 1904; New York Times, August 18, 1904; Baker, "What Is A Lynching?", p. 308; Statesboro News, September 30, December 6, 1904.

⁹⁰ Statesboro News, August 19, 23, 1904.

County, when driven by a sense of outrage, proved willing to substitute this more fundamental Biblical law for the law of courts and juries.⁹¹

Baker acknowledged that the "overwhelming majority of the people of Bulloch County undoubtedly condoned the lynching," but stressed that "there was a strong dissenting opposition among the really thoughtful better-class citizens." Baker especially singled out the Reverend Whitley Langston, the minister of the Statesboro Methodist Church, who expelled two members of his congregation for failing to confess and atone for their participation in the mob. His act was so unpopular that twenty-five parishioners left the church, a statement that perhaps reflected their belief that Biblical tenets sanctioned the mob's action.⁹²

Langston proved to be the only individual willing to hold mob members accountable for their actions, rejecting any construct which condoned the lynching. Even he, however, ultimately offered a certain level of justification. In a letter published in the Savannah Morning News a week after the lynching, Langston insisted that it was "incorrect and untrue" that the county's best citizens had taken part in the lynching. Such assertions, he claimed, did "hundreds of our people a gross injustice that must not pass unchallenged." Langston acknowledged that "a few of our property owners and ordinarily law-abiding citizens were in the mob" but that "a great many--a large majority, I think--of the men composing the mob were not our 'best citizens,' but were irresponsible boys and young men, many from other counties, who under the excitement, were drawn into the current and joined the crowd without taking time for

⁹¹ Philadelphia Press, Chicago Chronicle, New York Times, Memphis Commercial Appeal, Charleston News and Courier, Richmond Times Dispatch, quoted in Atlanta Independent, August 27, 1904; Statesboro News, August 19, 23, 1904.

⁹² Baker, "What Is A Lynching?", p. 308; Savannah Morning News, August 22, 1904.

deliberate thought." Langston saved his strongest criticism for the northern press, berating them for blaming the entire community for the shortcomings of a few.⁹³

Certain individuals such as Mayor Johnston, Harmon Hodges, and Langston did attempt to dissuade the mob and pleaded with them to allow the law to take its course. Langston's letter, however, downplayed the degree to which the lynching involved a cross section of the entire white community. A closer look at some of the known members of the mob may help to illuminate this point.⁹⁴

Evidence suggests that the lynching of Cato and Reed was very much the work of Bulloch County men, and not excitable, irresponsible men and boys from other counties. In front of the Court of Inquiry on August 30, Langston did identify three of the leaders as men who had only recently moved to Statesboro from Savannah. Nevertheless, these men, W. B. Moore, S. Landrum George, and Thomas J. Denmark, were residents, well-known by the local community. It is impossible to know whether Langston failed to mention long-time Bulloch residents out of fear, or a desire to protect the image of the county, but it is clear from other testimony that at least six other men who played significant roles in the events of August 16 were natives of the county. Leroy R. Blackburn, George Deal, and Joe Olliff were part of the mob that formed on the Court House lawn, while Ben T. "Cap" Mallard, G. H. "Henry" Mock, and J. G. Mitchell aided the mob from the inside, serving as bailiffs.

In addition to Whitley Langston, Sergeant Thompson, who was stationed in the prisoners' room at the time of the riot, identified Landrum George as one of the leaders of the mob. Thompson saw George urging the crowd to follow him into the Court

⁹³ Savannah Morning News, August 22, 1904.

⁹⁴ Because of the involvement of the state militia, Governor Terrell appointed a Court of Inquiry to investigate the affair. As a result of the Court's findings, five officers were tried in a court-martial. The names of mob members discussed here are taken from testimony presented in front of the Court of Inquiry and the court-martial. See Savannah Morning News, August 31, September 1, October 11-16, 1904; Court-Martial Proceedings.

House, stated that George was at the head of the mob that entered the prisoners' room, and that George placed a rope around Reed's neck. At the time of the lynching, Landrum George was thirty-four-years-old and married with four children. In 1900, he lived in Savannah, owned his own home, and worked as a cashier for the Savannah Brewing Company. He moved to Statesboro in early 1903 to take a job as the manager of the new Statesboro Ice Company, one of the new businesses of which the town boasted. George was by no means a wealthy man, but he did hold a white-collar job with a growing company.⁹⁵

W. B. Moore worked as an auditor for the Savannah and Statesboro Railway. Four years earlier, he had worked in Savannah as an accountant. Although only a resident of Statesboro for a year at the time of the lynching, the thirty-eight-year-old Moore was apparently relatively well-known, most likely as a result of the nature of his work. He may have been the agent that informed the mob of Hitch's plans to return Cato and Reed to Savannah after their trial. In addition to Moore and George, Thomas J. Denmark was one of Statesboro's growing number of urban, white-collar employees, working as a bookkeeper in Savannah before moving to Statesboro in 1901 to take an identical job with the Simmons Company. Denmark had owned his own home in Savannah, and apparently did the same in Statesboro. Several witnesses cited the thirty-nine-year-old Denmark as one of the primary agitators throughout the riot which led to the capture of Cato and Reed. Furthermore, he was appointed Clerk of the October Grand Jury which refused to indict any of the lynchers.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Savannah Morning News, August 31, 1904; Court-Martial Proceedings, p. 227; Manuscript Schedules for the 1900 Population for Chatham County, Georgia, Vol. XI, Enumeration District 49; Tax Digests for Bulloch County, Georgia, 1904.

⁹⁶ Savannah Morning News, August 31, 1904; Atlanta Constitution, October 25, 1904; Court-Martial Proceedings, pp. 187-88; Manuscript Schedules for the 1900 Population for Chatham County, Georgia, Vol. XI, Enumeration Districts 50 & 55; Tax Digests for Bulloch County, Georgia, 1904.

George, Moore, and Denmark were not the only Statesboro residents identified as mob leaders. Testimony revealed that Joe Olliff and Leroy R. Blackburn were both among those rioters who disarmed the members of the militia. Olliff, thirty-six in August 1904, was a member of one of Bulloch's oldest families. He owed no mortgage on a substantial home in town. As recently as 1900, Olliff had served as the Town Marshall of Statesboro. Leroy Blackburn was by no means a wealthy man, but he owned a modest home and regularly plied his trade as a brickmason.

John G. Mitchell was another skilled craftsman, a blacksmith, who figured prominently in the lynching of Cato and Reed. Mitchell had been sworn in as a bailiff for the trial and was stationed in the prisoners' room when the riot erupted. Either he or his partner, Henry Mock, suggested to Sergeant Fulton that they throw the prisoners out the window. Fulton's testimony suggested that both men knew of the mob's plans. In addition, Mitchell admitted that he unlocked the door to the prisoners' room upon the Sheriff's request. His actions allowed the mob into the room. The thirty-eight-year-old Mitchell, a life-long native of Bulloch County, owned his own home and business.⁹⁷

Like Henry Hodges, Henry Mock was a farmer. In August 1904, he was a month shy of his sixty-fourth birthday. Mock owned a 491-acre farm, well above the mean, and a modest home. In many respects, he was a typical Bulloch County farmer.

George Deal also fit this description, although he was more successful than most. Deal farmed over 850 acres and owned property valued at \$2,600. More significant than his farming success, however, was Deal's personal connection with Henry Hodges. The forty-four-year-old Deal had been married to Hodges's sister

⁹⁷ Savannah Morning News, August 31, October 15, 1904; Court-Martial Proceedings, pp. 39-42; Manuscript Schedules for the 1900 Population for Bulloch County, Georgia, Vol. VI, Enumeration District 94; Tax Digests for Bulloch County, Georgia, 1904.

Mary for nearly twenty years. Henry Hodges was an uncle to Deal's five children. A soldier swore under oath that Deal and Stanley Kittrell had disarmed him, although Mayor Johnston later asserted that Deal had at one time been among those attempting to pacify the crowd.⁹⁸

Ben T. "Cap" Mallard openly boasted to several of Statesboro's town leaders that he had disarmed Captain Hitch. J. E. Brannen and H. B. Strange testified to the court-martial that Mallard also told them that not only had he been a member of a committee that had worked out plans to capture Cato and Reed, but that arrangements had been made with Mock and Mitchell to throw the prisoners out the window if the mob could not get past the soldiers. In addition, the committee also had men stationed in strategic places to shoot the soldiers if necessary.

Of the nine men identified here as leaders and members of the mob, "Cap" Mallard is perhaps the only one that might fit Langston's description of irresponsible men and young boys. In 1904, Mallard was a twenty-four-year-old farmer, struggling to support five younger brothers and sisters. Presumably, his parents had both died since the birth of his youngest sister eight years earlier. Mallard did not own the land he farmed, nor the house he occupied. He worked his rented parcel of land with an eighteen-year-old brother, while the other four siblings attended school.

While Mallard may not have enjoyed the occupational or economic security of the other mob members, he did share ties to Henry Hodges. Mallard lived in the same, sparsely-settled district of Bulloch County as the Hodges, only several miles from their farm. More than likely, he knew Hodges well.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Savannah Morning News, August 31, 1904; Court-Martial Proceedings, pp. 39-42 & 78; Manuscript Schedules for the 1900 Population for Bulloch County, Georgia, Vol. VI, Enumeration Districts 92 & 99; Tax Digests for Bulloch County, Georgia, 1904.

⁹⁹ Savannah Morning News, August 31, 1904; Court-Martial Proceedings, pp. 212-215; Manuscript Schedules for the 1900 Population for Bulloch County, Georgia, Vol. VI, Enumeration District 95; Tax Digests for Bulloch County, Georgia, 1904.

Clearly then, the mob that lynched Paul Reed and Will Cato at the stake was not, as Langston suggested, a group of "irresponsible boys and young men" from other counties, drawn by the wild excitement of the crowd, devoid of deliberate thought. The actions of the mob, by contrast, reflected a community-wide effort of predetermined action to exact sufficient revenge for the brutal death of a well-respected citizen. Prosperous and struggling farmers, skilled craftsmen, and white-collar professionals joined together to lynch the two men.

Langston's protestations were not completely without merit. There were certainly prominent citizens, especially lawyers, clergy, and the Mayor, who did oppose the lynching, but Langston's emphasis diminishes the inclusiveness of those who did actively participate. In addition, Langston sought to excuse the town leaders a bit too soon. Soon after the lynching, the Atlanta Independent, a black newspaper, wrote that the "the 'best citizens' are on trial now. If they do not come forward and insist upon the punishment of the white lynchers in the name of humanity and civilization, if they remain silent in the face of such an attack upon a swift-handed justice, then they must be considered as either craven or criminal."¹⁰⁰

Initial news reports of the lynching emphasized the degree to which mob members were easily identifiable. The Atlanta Constitution wrote that "the leaders of the mob are well known to the officials and the prominent citizens of Bulloch County, and there will be no trouble in identifying them." The New York Times went even further, noting that "every effort will be made to bring to justice the leaders of the mob, despite the fact that it is said that the best people of Bulloch County, in which Statesboro is situated, composed the crowd that burned the negroes." The statement from the Times makes it abundantly clear that numerous well-respected, important

¹⁰⁰ Atlanta Independent, August 27, 1904.

members of the white community participated in the lynching. The Times, however, erred in suggesting that anyone would be punished.¹⁰¹

Contrary to the claims of the Times, most reports indicated that mob members did not at all fear punishment. They were said to speak openly of their actions. The Augusta Chronicle claimed to represent the sentiment of the entire state when it expressed a desire to avoid lynchings in the future, but not to place blame and responsibility for the current affair. Most citizens would have preferred to let the matter rest, but Governor Terrell, anxious to assess the culpability of the state militia, appointed a Court of Inquiry which interviewed numerous witnesses.¹⁰²

The revelation of the details of the lynching in front of the Court of Inquiry produced a steady barrage of criticism in various newspapers which forced the white citizenry of Statesboro, led by the editors of the News, into a defensive shell. Not only did community leaders refuse to blame anyone within their own ranks, they sought to justify the actions of the mob by placing blame elsewhere, primarily in the hands of Cato and Reed. Even those who condemned the actions of the mob expressed a belief that Cato and Reed got more or less what they deserved. Few individuals disagreed with those who argued that the militia had done exactly the right thing. The shedding of white blood would have been far worse than the lynching of Cato and Reed.

The testimony of several prominent witnesses indicates the degree to which the white community insisted upon closing ranks and excusing the lynchers. Sheriff Kendricks perhaps felt that pressure more than any other individual. One newspaper reported that Kendricks and Hodges had been the "closest of friends." In addition,

¹⁰¹ Atlanta Constitution, August 19, 1904; New York Times, August 17, 1904.

¹⁰² Savannah Morning News, August 17, 18, 1904; Augusta Chronicle, quoted in Statesboro News, September 2, 1904.

Kendricks's brother was married to Hodges's half-sister. Friends and neighbors had criticized Kendricks when he took Cato and Reed to the Savannah jail soon after their arrest. Hodges's younger brother James had directed a great deal of anger toward the Sheriff for breaking his promise to leave the prisoners in Statesboro. At the time, Kendricks had made clear his own ambivalence, stating that he hated to face his friends when he returned to Statesboro. Although Kendricks vehemently denied that he had aided the mob, he did not offer any significant resistance. It is quite likely that he knew of the mob's intentions and realized that he would be ostracized, if not seriously injured, if he attempted to stop it. Kendricks witnessed the entire riot and clearly stood in the prisoners' room as the mob captured Cato and Reed. Nevertheless, he later testified that he could not identify a single member of the mob. He said, "I could not see through the crowd well enough to know anybody; all strangers to me. I think, I am satisfied they were people from different counties. I did not know them, in fact. I know nearly everybody in my county."¹⁰³

In a similar manner, J. G. Mitchell, who let Kendricks and the mob into the prisoners' room, testified that despite living in the county for thirty-eight years, he did not recognize a single member of the mob. The Atlanta Independent sarcastically observed, "It is better to be a live man with a poor memory for faces than a dead one with a record for courage and duty done." Mitchell's refusal to identify mob members may have reflected a certain level of fear, but more than likely, he considered his primary duty to be the protection of Bulloch County's white community.¹⁰⁴

Whitley Langston was the one member of the Statesboro community who revealed the names of mob leaders not already mentioned by the militia. He received enough criticism that he felt the need to offer an explanation. Langston revealed to his

¹⁰³ Savannah Morning News, August 1, 1904; Court-Martial Proceedings, p. 178.

¹⁰⁴ Savannah Morning News, August 31, 1904; Atlanta Independent, September 10, 1904.

congregation that when called to testify before the Court of Inquiry, he had asked to be relieved of any such duty "because I naturally do not want to be instrumental in getting my friends into trouble." He said that he divulged the names only when told that his other options were to be held in contempt of court or to lie. Unlike Kendricks, Mitchell, and others, Langston chose not to lie.¹⁰⁵

The Statesboro News sought to lessen the impact of Langston's charges by suggesting that he had actually mentioned several men who were only with the "spirit" of the mob, a distinction clearly intended to absolve the individuals of wrongdoing and to discourage efforts to punish them. The unapologetic editors of the News embodied the defensive localism of the white Bulloch citizenry. They asserted that it was fine if the Court of Inquiry wished to punish the military, but that "so far as the conduct of the citizens are concerned in the affair, that is a matter that our own people will investigate, and take such steps as may be proper and right." The newspaper insisted that Bulloch's citizens were good and law-abiding and that they had only lost their heads for a brief moment, provoked by the actions of Cato and Reed. The News concluded, "The truth of the matter is: If there had been no murder of the Hodges family, there would have been no lynching, that is the whole thing in a nutshell."¹⁰⁶

The general consensus in Bulloch County suggests that many citizens believed they had nothing for which to apologize. In a letter to the Statesboro News, L. G. Lucas exclaimed that "hundreds of the best citizens of the county" had decided that "these demons shall reap what they have sown." Despite the fact that Cato and Reed had been sentenced to hang, many whites deemed their punishment inadequate. The News even concluded that since their guilt had been determined in court, the lynching

¹⁰⁵ Savannah Morning News, September 7, 1904.

¹⁰⁶ Statesboro News, September 2, 6, 1904.

simply served as an appropriate sentence and was, therefore, acceptable. A lynching without a trial, on the other hand, would have been wrong.¹⁰⁷

Most criticism aimed at Bulloch County offered no sympathy for Cato and Reed, but rather attacked the violation of the sanctity and majesty of the law. Even the Atlanta Independent admitted that they deserved death, albeit legally administered. A State House official in Atlanta embodied these feelings when he said that "of course no one has any sympathy for the negroes. They ought to have been killed, and they would have been killed by law. The troops were not there merely to protect these negroes; they were there to defend a principle of organic law."¹⁰⁸

The Statesboro News, however, effectively dismissed such criticism by asserting that the people themselves constituted the law. The court system had not failed, since the citizenry sat on the jury, delivered the verdict, and imposed the sentence. The "most atrocious and appalling crime in the annals of villainy had been perpetrated" in the midst of the citizens of Statesboro and Bulloch County. If ever a crime justified popular recourse to lynching, this was it. James Cutler, writing within a year of the Statesboro events, summed up these attitudes when he wrote, "Lynching as a crime against society is not yet distinguished from lynching as the justifiable inflection of a deserved punishment by private citizens."¹⁰⁹

Like the official in Atlanta, even the most law-abiding whites in Bulloch County expressed no sympathy for Cato and Reed. They, too, sought methods of justifying the lynching. Ultimately, they eased their collective conscience by asserting that the deaths of Cato and Reed could only have been prevented by resolute force on the part of the militia. The mob was so determined that such force, they felt, would have led to

¹⁰⁷ Statesboro News, August 19, 1904.

¹⁰⁸ Atlanta Independent, August 20, 1904; Savannah Morning News, August 19, 1904.

¹⁰⁹ Statesboro News, August 19, 23, 30, 1904; Cutler, Lynch-Laws, p. 266. See also Carter, Scottsboro, p. 193.

great bloodshed. In a letter to a Savannah newspaper, signed only by L, one Bulloch resident stated that law-abiding citizens would have preferred a legal hanging, but that they would never have sanctioned the shedding of innocent blood, as the protection of the "incarnate devils" was not worth such sacrifice. The lynchers were enraged and excited, perhaps wrong, but guilty of no crime. These sentiments support Captain Hitch's claim that if he had ordered his troops to fire, he would have been put on trial for harming innocent whites, a far greater crime than failing to prevent the lynching of two black killers. After he received word of his court-martial, Hitch wrote Gov. Terrell and said, "You know, I know, everybody knows, that had one shot been fired during those two hours while I was on that Court House stairway . . . the indiscriminate slaughter which would have ensued would have caused me to be branded as a murderer and a monster from one end of the land to the other. You know, as well as I, that I would have been indicted, tried, and convicted in the civil courts for murder."¹¹⁰

In failing to hold individuals responsible for the deaths of Will Cato and Paul Reed, law-abiding whites who condemned their lynching actually served to further justify such mob violence. Whites who supported and accepted the lynching exerted extreme pressure on other whites to excuse the passionate response of the lynch mob. Most whites convinced themselves that a failure to do so would send the wrong message to blacks and encourage further criminal acts. The desire of whites not to punish other whites for crimes against blacks proved far more important than divisions amongst whites. Once the white community excused and justified the lynching of "incarnate devils" such as Paul Reed and Will Cato, however, society lost its ability to prevent the deaths of innocent blacks such as Albert Roberts and Sebastian McBride.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Savannah Morning News, August 19, October 30, 1904; Statesboro News, September 9, 1904.

¹¹¹ Statesboro News, August 19, 23, 1904.

C. Vann Woodward argues that in the 1890s, the federal courts, northern liberals, and southern conservatives granted whites "permission to hate" blacks. In Statesboro, Georgia, in 1904, certain white leaders granted the community permission to commit acts of violence against black citizens. Many whites ostensibly intended such permission to apply to that class of blacks considered "worthless" or "bad." The maintenance of a cohesive white community, however, soon obviated such distinctions, and "good" blacks were harmed as well. The death of the Hodges family sparked a reaction that played itself out until aggrieved whites had spent their pent-up fury. At the same time, white leaders realized that random acts of violence no longer served their best interests.¹¹²

Perhaps most disturbing of all, the failure of even the most well-intentioned white citizens to hold individuals responsible ensured that these permissions would be handed down to the next generation. The potential for mob violence remained until white leaders reshaped white public opinion, expressed in part by juries of the people, and secured indictments against those responsible for all violent attacks. The need to close ranks and protect their fellow citizens forced numerous whites to perjure themselves. The effect on their children had far more profound implications. Whitley Langston expressed these implications when he related the following story to his congregation:

While sitting in my study, a number of little boys collected around the rear of the church door-step just before Sunday-school. They did not know I was near, but two of them acted the part of Cato and Reed, one Judge Daley, another Sheriff Kendricks and another Captain Hitch. Others impersonated the soldiers and the mob. They went through the performances of overpowering the officers and soldiers and lynching the culprits. I am told that other little boys have actually caught and tied

¹¹² C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3rd ed. rev. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 81-82.

little negro boys and piled wood around them in mimic lynching. How awful the example of the mob.¹¹³

Langston's story anticipated the findings of Walter White, who deplored the effects of lynching on children as the community exalted the lynchers as brave protectors of the white community, justified their actions, and refused to punish them. Arthur Raper argues that not only children, but the entire moral fabric of the community suffered when "barbarism and deception are translated into virtues."¹¹⁴

At the time of the Statesboro lynching, the Philadelphia Press wrote that "no more uncivilizing and debasing influence on a human being can be imagined than his voluntary presence, aiding, abetting, and enjoying the suffering of a man burned at the stake."¹¹⁵ Most white citizens of Bulloch County, however, did not agree. They considered neither Reed nor Cato a man, but rather a black devil guilty of a vile crime. Cato and Reed had committed perhaps the worst imaginable deed. They had violated all acceptable bounds and offended the entire white community. As a result, Bulloch County whites alone, and not the law, could exact appropriate punishment.

The Statesboro News led the community in ridiculing Governor Terrell's efforts to indict the lynchers. Under state law, Terrell could not prosecute any local officials, including the Sheriff, or any members of the mob. Only a local grand jury could attempt such action. Terrell, nevertheless, encouraged the indictment of known participants. He forwarded a copy of the minutes of the Court of Inquiry to officials of the Superior Court, a document which contained the names of several lynchers. The News suggested that Terrell might have felt differently if he had lived in the county and had known Henry Hodges.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Savannah Morning News, September 7, 1904.

¹¹⁴ White, Rope and Faggot, pp. 3-6; Raper, Tragedy of Lynching, pp. 40-41.

¹¹⁵ Philadelphia Press, quoted in Atlanta Independent, August 27, 1904.

¹¹⁶ Savannah Morning News, August 30, 1904; Statesboro News, September 27, October 28, 1904.

On October 24, Judge Daley addressed the grand jury of the October session of the Bulloch County Grand Jury. He told the assembled men that the Court of Inquiry and Court-Martial had "produced evidence that some of your citizens were leaders of the mob. If you find this to be true, you must indict them I trust you will do your duty in the matter." More than likely, however, another statement of Daley's resonated far more clearly with the jurors: Daley told them that "it is not a question of sympathy for the negroes. Nobody disputes that they did not deserve the punishment, but the law is to protect our liberty and our property." In the minds of the friends and neighbors of Henry Hodges, Cato and Reed's punishment was just, and therefore no further action was warranted.¹¹⁷

Despite the evidence, the grand jury refused to deliver any indictments. Such action should have surprised no one, considering the temper of the community and the composition of the jury. Thomas J. Denmark, one of the men accused of leading the mob, served as Clerk. Denmark asked to be excused from jury duty, but Daley considered that no legitimate legal excuse existed, and Denmark remained. Newspaper reports suggested that other mob members also served on the grand jury, prompting one observer to state that "the investigation by the Bulloch County grand jury was a veritable farce from beginning to end." Both Ray Stannard Baker and several newspaper accounts claim that Judge Daley and Mayor Johnston felt deeply disappointed and discouraged by the inaction. Johnston reportedly exclaimed, "If our grand jury won't indict these lynchers, if our petit juries won't convict, and if our soldiers won't shoot, what are we coming to?" Another reporter, however, noted that "the whole county appears to be in sympathy with the lynchers. Even those who were opposed to the actual lynching now appear disposed to shield those who took part in

¹¹⁷ Savannah Morning News, October 25, 1904; Atlanta Constitution, October 25, 1904.

it." The Savannah Tribune, a black newspaper, went a step farther and stated that the white community opposed indictments or any other action "that looks like protection of the dangerous negro element."¹¹⁸

The United States Court that met in Savannah offered the only remaining avenue of punishment for the lynchers. On Monday, November 28, the federal grand jury went so far as to issue subpoenas for members of the Statesboro mob, drawing indictments under an 1870 statute initially aimed at the Ku Klux Klan. The subpoenas, however, were never delivered. Assistant United States Attorney W. R. Leaken wired the Attorney General in Washington, seeking authorization to proceed with the indictments. Judge Emory Speer, a jurist eminently respected by the black press, also wired Washington, questioning the validity of federal jurisdiction in the case and suggesting that the matter be postponed until March. On Tuesday, November 29, Attorney General William H. Moody notified Leaken and Speer that the Statesboro case did not fall within the purview of the federal courts. Twenty-four hours later, Moody withdrew his initial telegram, essentially authorizing Leaken to proceed. Speer, however, had dismissed the jury less than an hour before receiving the second telegram. Leaken expressed his intent to pursue the case at the March term of the Court, but no such action was taken. Federal officials dropped the case and never again threatened the members of the lynch mob with punishment.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Atlanta Constitution, October 25, 29, 1904; Savannah Morning News, October 30, 1904; Baker, "What Is A Lynching?", p. 308; Savannah Tribune, November 5, 1904; Statesboro News, November 1, 4, 1904.

¹¹⁹ United States, National Archives, Department of Justice Records, Correspondence Between the Attorney General, United States Judge Emory Speer, and Assistant United States Attorney W. R. Leaken, November 28, 29, 30 & December 3, 1904; Savannah Morning News, November 29, 30, December 1, 1904; Savannah Tribune, December 3, 1904; Statesboro News, December 2, 1904; Charlton Moseley, "A Lynching At Statesboro: The Story of Paul Reed and Will Cato," (unpublished, 1974), p. 25.

The only indictment ever handed down in connection with the events of August 1904 was for the murder of Sebastian McBride. McBride, before he died, identified three of his assailants as Wesley Waters, Henry Barnes, and Perry Barnes. Despite the testimony of three well-respected white farmers, a mistrial was declared in January 1905, as only six jurors voted to convict. In April, Waters was acquitted. When Waters did not appear in October as a witness in the case against Perry and Henry Barnes, all charges were dropped. The Bulloch County legal system, designed to perpetuate the interests of the white community, even refused to punish Wesley Waters, a troublesome young man who would appear in the Bulloch County courts several times over the next few years. The protection afforded by the white community of Bulloch County remained intact.¹²⁰

Most white leaders sanctioned the lynching of Paul Reed and Will Cato because they considered it an appropriate punishment. Many of them even participated. They did not, however, approve of Sebastian McBride's death. McBride had committed no crime and posed no threat to the white status quo. By contrast, McBride's killers considered him enough of a threat that they resorted to violence. At least two of them represented the lower class of whites and they may have considered McBride an economic competitor. Such an assertion is mere speculation, but McBride's murder clearly resulted from different perceptions and experiences from those which led to the lynching of Cato and Reed.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Savannah Morning News, January 21, 1905; Statesboro News, January 20, April 21, 1905; Bulloch County, Bond Issues, October 1904; Bulloch County, Criminal Docket, 1904-1911.

¹²¹ See Barbara J. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 156. See also Roberta Senechal, The Sociogenesis of a Race Riot: Springfield, Illinois, in 1908, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), p. 194. Fields argues that white supremacy never constituted a mere static prejudice, but was determined by varying class positions.

Despite these differences, the white community responded in an identical way, refusing to punish white citizens for violent attacks on blacks. White leaders feared the dissension and disruption that indictments and punishment would create within the prospering white community. They deemed it best to close ranks and protect their own interests. Bulloch's white leaders hastened the natural dissolution of the passionate fury that fueled attacks on blacks, but only when such random acts of lawlessness threatened to disperse their much-needed black labor force. Moreover, they refused to punish members of the white community, and thereby continued to grant whites implicit permission to commit acts of violence against blacks.

On October 21, 1904, a court-martial in Savannah, called in response to the recommendations of the Court of Inquiry, found Captain Hitch guilty of "gross neglect of duty and errors of judgement." Two other officers were convicted of lesser charges. Hitch was dismissed from the state militia for life. In the opinion of the court-martial, Hitch had possessed adequate troops to prevent the capture of Cato and Reed. The most interesting, and illuminating, aspect of Hitch's case was not his punishment, but the swing in public opinion among the residents of Bulloch County.¹²²

Throughout the court-martial, as well as the investigations of the Court of Inquiry, Hitch had insisted that he had been betrayed by Sheriff Kendricks and his bailiffs, particularly "Cap" Mallard. Hitch insisted that Cato and Reed would not have been captured and lynched without the complicity of these men. Kendricks and his bailiffs quite expectedly denied all such charges and the people and press of Bulloch County supported them to the hilt.¹²³

¹²² Savannah Morning News, October 22, 23, 1904.

¹²³ Savannah Morning News, August 18, 19, 27, 31, October 11-16, 1904; Court-Martial Proceedings, pp. 153-184, 230-286

Once Hitch was convicted, however, he became a hero in Bulloch County.

Whether responding from a sense of guilt, knowing that Hitch's career had been ruined on their account, or from a belief that no one should have been punished for the deaths of Cato and Reed, the citizenry of Bulloch County embraced Hitch as a hero. Editorials condemned the severity of his punishment and voters wrote in his name in the fall gubernatorial and congressional elections. The News captured the spirit of the crowd when Hitch addressed a group of veterans in July 1905, writing, "Capt. Hitch arose amid a deafening round of applause, and his speech . . . was pronounced the ablest that has ever been delivered before the veterans of Bulloch County Capt. Hitch was hailed by a large percentage of the crowd as a returning hero. Men crowded up against each other to shake his hand he was among friends." Most likely, the residents of Bulloch County were amongst the happiest in the state when Governor Hoke Smith fully exonerated Hitch in July 1911.¹²⁴

As 1904 came to an end, Statesboro and Bulloch County returned to normal, concentrating on cotton, politics, and civic pride. In the November elections, 410 Statesboro residents cast their ballots, 312 voting for the Democratic candidate, and the rest scattered among the Populist, Republican, and Prohibitionist parties. Despite a clearly stated distrust of the Republican party by most whites in Bulloch County,

¹²⁴ Savannah Morning News, October 22, 23, 30, 1904; Statesboro News, October 18, 25, December 2, 1904, July 21, 1905; ; Moseley, "A Lynching at Statesboro," p. 24; State of Georgia, Executive Department, Executive Minutes, July 22, 1911, p. 20.

relatively high cotton prices tempered their reaction to Roosevelt's overwhelming victory in the presidential contest.¹²⁵

J. R. Miller, the editor of the Statesboro newspaper, organized the Bulloch County exhibit for the Georgia State Fair. The Savannah Press lauded the exhibit as an example of the hard work, "enterprise and ability" that had made Bulloch the most progressive county in the state. In addition to sea island cotton, rice, sugar cane, and an assortment of fruits and vegetables, Miller included several stalks of corn, each about fifteen feet high, that Paul Reed had grown. Miller claimed that he included Reed's crop out of "curiosity." The Bulloch exhibit won second prize at the regional fair before moving on to the state fair. One year later, Miller put together another exhibit that claimed second prize in the entire state, prompting the Atlanta Constitution to praise the prosperity and progressiveness of the editor and people of Bulloch County.¹²⁶

Racial tensions, however, continued to persist beneath the veil of prosperity. The News regularly carried reports of black criminality and issued warnings to blacks who violated their assigned place. One column in the News sought to solve the race problem by exchanging two million northern and western farmers for two million southern blacks. Other whites resorted to threats and intimidation, burning an animal in the home of a black in an apparent attempt to frighten the man into leaving the county.¹²⁷

In 1905, Ray Stannard Baker wrote, "We are accustomed to look upon a mob as an entity, the expression of a single concrete feeling; it is not; it is itself torn with dissensions and compunctions, swayed by conflicting emotions."¹²⁸ The murder of

¹²⁵ Statesboro News, November 8, 11, 1904; Savannah Morning News, November 9, 1904.

¹²⁶ Statesboro News, October 14, 21, 25, 1904, October 10, 17, 20, 1905.

¹²⁷ Statesboro News, December 6, 20, 1904, March 7, May 12, 23, 1905.

¹²⁸ Baker, "What Is A Lynching?", p. 306.

Henry Hodges, a white farmer, and his family on July 28, 1904, and the subsequent arrest of Paul Reed and Will Cato, two black laborers, precipitated a series of events which threatened to tear apart the white citizenry of Bulloch County. The brutal nature of the murder led many whites, especially friends and relatives of the Hodges family, to believe that only a lynching would provide a sufficient means of punishment. The determination of other whites, however, initially prevented such action.

The removal of Cato and Reed to Savannah forced lynch advocates to rethink their position. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the entire sequence of events is that no effort was made to lynch Cato and Reed once they were returned from Savannah, but before their trial began. For several days, they sat in the Statesboro jail, guarded only by a few troops. A determined mob would have met little resistance. More than likely, white leaders, eager to preserve the town's and county's new-found prosperity and positive image, succeeded in convincing lynching advocates to allow the legal process to go forward. After all, whites so thoroughly dominated the courts as to guarantee a verdict of guilty and a sentence of death by hanging.

Advocates of law and order allowed Cato and Reed to have their day in court, but they could not alter public opinion. Most whites in Bulloch County adhered to a rigid conception of Old Testament justice that demanded an eye for an eye. The court, therefore, could not provide a satisfactory punishment for two black men charged with the murder and incineration of a white farmer and his family. Once the legal process confirmed the guilt of the two prisoners, Bulloch County whites imposed the sentence of an outraged people and burned Will Cato and Paul Reed at the stake.

The lynching of Cato and Reed, however, did not satisfy the fury of the white citizenry. Indiscriminate beatings and whippings followed. Whites killed several black men, without any provocation whatsoever. The violence continued until white hatred

was spent and until white farmers and merchants realized that such violence threatened their self-interest.

Certain whites did oppose the lynching of Cato and Reed, as well as the violence which followed. Most, however, approved. Even among those who condemned the mob action, very few individuals favored the punishment of mob members. White public opinion coalesced, ultimately justifying the lynching on the grounds that it was deserved, and insisting on the protection of all involved. Public opinion refused to hold individual whites accountable for their actions, thereby sanctioning the deaths not only of Paul Reed and Will Cato, but also the murder of innocent blacks such as Sebastian McBride, Albert Rogers, and his seventeen-year-old son. Until such a change occurred, the haunting specter of the lynch mob remained alive.

According to legend, relatives of Henry Hodges found some money in the remains of his home. His killers apparently did not discover it, or else they panicked and left it behind. The family used this money to purchase an elegant, eighteen-inch-high wooden clock. To this day, the clock stands in the Statesboro Regional Library.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Interview, Isabel Sorrier, March 19, 1992.

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