The Greensburg Race Riot of 1907

Race and a Sundown Town

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ABSTRACT: In April 1907, John Green, a Black resident of Greensburg, Indiana, was accused of robbing and raping white widow Caroline Sefton. Unable to lynch Green, who had been removed from the town, white residents rioted, attacking and injuring several Black men and threatening at least one Black family. Some accounts claim that in response to the riot African Americans fled Greensburg, and it became a sundown town. Author Robert White examines the history of racism in Greensburg and Decatur County and demonstrates that the riot was a symptom of a broader racial intolerance. Racism, which existed prior to the riot and persisted after the riot, drove African Americans from Greensburg, Decatur County, and surrounding counties. Racism created an almost entirely

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white area of southeastern Indiana that persisted as a sundown region for decades.

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Greensburg, Indiana, is a quiet little city known as the home of a tree that grows out of the top of the Decatur County courthouse. Less well known is that Greensburg experienced a race riot in the early years of the twentieth century. The *Encyclopedia of American Race Riots* offers this version of events:

> In early April 1906, a black laborer named Green, who had been brought up from the South to work on the railroad and who was known to be mentally impaired, allegedly raped a well-liked and highly respected white widow for whom he had been performing odd jobs. After the rape, he was quickly apprehended, tried, and convicted. Several weeks later, whites in the town were still seething over the incident. On April 30, a crowd of white men and boys tried to take Green from the jail but were held off by law enforcement officials. They then went on a rampage in the black section of Greensburg, shooting and torching homes, destroying businesses, and beating blacks at random. Many blacks were driven out of town, never to return. The riot was quickly contained and although no one was killed, there were thousands of dollars in damages and a number of injuries. No one was ever arrested or tried for participating in the riots.

Unfortunately, this account begins with the wrong year and does not greatly improve in accuracy thereafter. The riot has never been fully described in any single account.[1]

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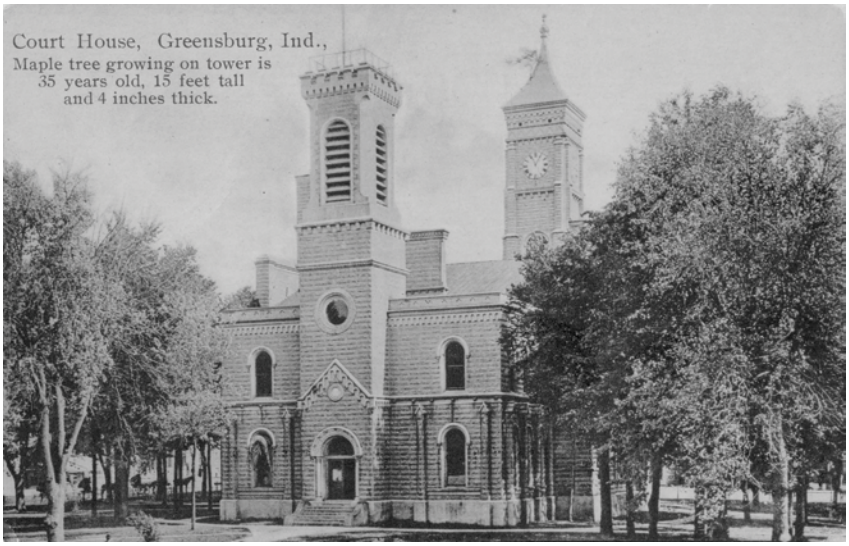
[1] Marilyn K. Howard, "Greensburg (Indiana) Riot of 1906," in Walter Rucker and James Nathaniel Upton, eds., *Encyclopedia of American Race Riots,* vol. 1 (Westport, Ct., 2007), 258–60. Sources that repeat the incorrect year include James Loewen, "Honda's All-American Sundown Town," History News Network (2006), accessed July 16, 2022, http://hnn.us/articles/27821.html; James Loewen, "Race Riots, Home Page," accessed July 29, 2022, https://sundown.tougaloo.edu/sundowntownsshow.php?id=865; Peter M. Bergman and Mort N. Bergman, *The Chronological History of the Negro in America* (New York, 1949), 347; Charles A. Gallagher and Cameron D. Lippard, eds., *Race and Racism in the United States: An Encyclopedia of the American Mosaic* (Santa Barbara, Calif.,



Postcard depiction of the Decatur County Courthouse, Greensburg, Indiana, c. 1907
Courtesy, Indiana Album

A thorough history of the Greensburg race riot is needed for two reasons. First, it is important to document the riot. A 2007 article in the *Greensburg Daily News*, for example, minimized the event and referred to it as a "so-called race riot."[2] Yet, detailed information is readily available: a search of newspaper databases and genealogical sources confirms that a riot occurred and provides information on the perpetrators and victims.[3] On the evening of Tuesday, April 30, 1907, a small group of white men, backed up by a crowd of 300 to 500 people, assaulted seven Black men in Greensburg's courthouse square. Early the next morning, a crowd stoned the home of a Black family. The term "riot" can be defined as "an outbreak of illegal violence against random or shifting targets committed by crowds expressing frustration or anger against people, property, or groups

2014). See also Pat Smith, "Re-examining the Greensburg Riot of 1907," *Greensburg Daily News*, January 24, 2014, accessed April 22, 2021, https://www.greensburgdailynews.com/opinion/columns/re-examining-the-greensburg-riot-of-1907/article_c73bbf67-5e45-5c39-943b-84351333e56b.html.

[2] Pat Smith, "A Hatchet and the Dream of Equality," *Greensburg Daily News*, April 25, 2007, accessed July 11, 2022, https://www.greensburgdailynews.com/opinion/editorials/pat-smith-a-hatchet-and-the-dream-of-equality/article_5a65fb49-3774-59ac-9511-412a36f1962f.html.

[3] Robert G. Barrows, "The Manuscript Federal Census: Source for a 'New' Local History," *Indiana Magazine of History* 69 (September 1973), 181–92; Robert W. White, "Hoosier Genealogy and Indiana History: Using each to inform the other," *The Hoosier Genealogist: Connections* 50 (Spring/Summer 2010), 14–21.

in power." In Greensburg, a crowd of white men "expressing frustration [and] anger" perpetrated "illegal violence" against African Americans.[4]

The lack of a detailed account of the Greensburg riot contributes to factual errors. Contrary to the account found in the *Encyclopedia of American Race Riots*, John Green was not in Greensburg when the riot occurred; homes were not torched; businesses were not destroyed; white men were arrested; and one white man was prosecuted. A jury of his peers found him not guilty. A careful study of the riot reveals that it was caused by interconnected issues of race, social class, and gender, of which race was the most important.[5]

Second, the riot is symptomatic of a broader racial intolerance in southeastern Indiana. James Loewen defines a "sundown town" as an "organized jurisdiction" that for decades kept African Americans or other groups from living in it and was "'all-white' on purpose." Loewen claimed that he was "able to confirm mini-riots that forced out the black populations" from more than thirty towns in the early 1900s, including Greensburg. With respect to Greensburg, this overstates the case. The 1910 census shows several Black people living in the city, including some victims of the riot. Loewen recognized that an effectively "all-white" community might "include nonblack minorities and even a tiny number of African Americans."[6] On the surface, this describes Greensburg. Embedded in this broader definition, however, is the questionable assumption that the white violence in these towns targeted and drove out only shiftless troublemakers while allowing upstanding Black citizens to remain.

This rhetoric, which helped to legitimate sundown towns, underemphasizes the centrality of racial prejudice in the creation of sundown towns and ignores the ongoing racism faced by "nonblack minorities" and

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[4] Jeanne H. Ballantine, Keith A. Roberts, and Kathleen Odell Korgen, *Our Social World: Introduction to Sociology* (Thousand Oaks, Calif., 2020), 510–11.

[5] Patricia Hill Collins provides a valuable framework for understanding the interconnections between race, social class, and gender that inform this examination. Patricia Hill Collins, "Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection," *Race, Sex and Class* 1, no. 1 (1993), 25–45. See also Gregory Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City* (Gainesville, Fl., 2005), 7–12, 73–81.

[6] James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York, 2005), 4, 96; Loewen, Historical Database of Sundown Towns: Indiana, accessed February 22, 2021, https://sundown.tougaloo.edu/sundowntownsshow.php?state=IN; James H. Madison, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Heartland* (Bloomington, Ind., 2020), 178–79; Brent M. S. Campney, *Hostile Heartland: Racism, Repression, and Resistance in the Midwest* (Urbana, Ill., 2019), 1–11.

African Americans who lived in sundown towns.[7] Contrary to statements by white elites at the time, the white mob in Greensburg did not distinguish between "good" and "bad negroes." The mob targeted Black men because of their race, not their social class. The Greensburg riot was part of and contributed to a hostile social climate that drove African Americans from southeast Indiana. In the decades following the riot, Decatur County became a "sundown county," as did the adjacent counties of Franklin and Ripley, even though they did not experience race riots in these years. Viewing the riot as a symptom and not a cause allows us to better understand this process of out-migration by Black citizens.

The Greensburg riot occurred in an environment within which white violence against Black people was common and frequently deadly. It is often assumed that the "lynching era" lasted from 1880 to 1930, and that the practice was largely confined to the southern states. In fact, lynching pre-dated the Civil War and occurred south and north of the Mason-Dixon line. In 1845, for example, white mobs lynched Black men in Columbus, Ohio, and Indianapolis, Indiana.[8] The "Equal Justice Initiative" (EJI) documents the lynching of 4,084 Black people in southern states between 1877 and 1950, *and* the lynching of another 307 Black people in eight states "Outside the South"—Oklahoma (76), Missouri (60), Illinois (56), West Virginia (35), Maryland (28), Kansas (19), Indiana (18), and Ohio (15).[9]

In Indiana, lynchings took place in the decades following the Civil War in Evansville (1865), Charlestown (1871), Lawrence County (1872), Greenfield (1875), Mount Vernon (1878), and Brazil (1880). On election day in 1876, a white mob killed a Black voter in Indianapolis. In 1886, a mob broke into the jail in Vincennes and left a prisoner's "worthless black carcass" swinging in the courthouse yard. With the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the Supreme Court's *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision in 1896, African

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[7] Guy Lancaster writes that "racial cleansing should be understood not as an absolute but as existing along a continuum." Lancaster, *Racial Cleansing in Arkansas, 1883–1924: Politics, Land, Labor and Criminality* (Lanham, Md., 2014), 140; Campney, *Hostile Heartland*, 106–112, 149–50, 192–98; Roberta Senechal de la Roche, *In Lincoln's Shadow: The 1908 Race Riot in Springfield Illinois* (Carbondale, Ill., 2008), 173–75.

[8] Campney, *Hostile Heartland*, 27.

[9] "Lynching in America: Racial Terror Lynching," accessed April 24, 2021, https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/explore; Jack S. Blocker Jr., "Race, Sex and Riot: The Springfield, Ohio Race Riots of 1904 and 1906 and the Sources of Anti-Black Violence in the Lower Midwest," *Ohio Valley History* 6 (Spring 2006), 27–44, esp. 29. James Madison reports more than sixty known lynchings in Indiana history; most occurred in the late nineteenth century. Madison, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Heartland*, 111.

Americans lost rights they had gained after the war, and, as historian Brent Campney notes, northern and southern whites "ensured that blacks would continue to occupy the bottom rung of the social ladder."[10]

Terms like "lynching" and "riot" do not fully capture the violence that Black citizens experienced at the hands of white citizens.[11] Consider the Midwest in the first half of the twentieth century. In August 1908, a Black man was accused of raping a white woman in Springfield, Illinois. In the mob violence that followed, the city's Black business district was destroyed, Black homes were burned out, and two innocent men were lynched. By the time the Illinois state militia restored order, four more people were dead.[12] In summer 1919, race riots took place in twenty-five U.S. cities, including Chicago, Knoxville, Omaha, and Washington, D.C.[13] The violence did not end with World War II. The first postwar race riot, in Columbia, Tennessee, almost resulted in the lynching of future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall.[14]

Indiana experienced several incidents of racial violence in these decades. In February 1901, a crowd of white people stormed the Vigo County jail and killed a Black man who had been arrested for the murder of a white woman. The mob placed a rope around the dead man's neck, dragged his body to the banks of the Wabash River, and hanged him from a bridge. The crowd set fire to his body on the river bank, "burned it to a cinder," and cut off his toes for souvenirs.[15] That summer, there were two race riots at Fairview Park in Indianapolis. The *Indianapolis Recorder* reported that a "gang of lawless white boys known as the bungaloos" attacked "all the

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[10] Campney, *Hostile Heartland*, 54–73; "Lynch's Lariat," *Indiana Daily Sentinel,* January 20, 1886, p. 1; A. James Fuller, *Oliver P. Morton and the Politics of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Kent, Ohio, 2017), 188–93; Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850–1880* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1965), 229–31, 238–45.

[11] Campney, *Hostile Heartland*, 1–11.

[12] Senechal de la Roche, *In Lincoln's Shadow*.

[13] "The Chicago Race Riot of 1919," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed June 18, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/event/Chicago-Race-Riot-of-1919.

[14] Chris Lamb, "America's First Post-World War II Race Riot Led to the Almost Lynching of Thurgood Marshall," *Washington Post*, February 25, 2021; Campney, *Hostile Heartland*, 161–85.

[15] "Negro Lynched and Burned," *Indianapolis News*, February 26, 1901, p. 1; "Another Lynching," *Indianapolis News*, February 27, 1901, pp. 1, 9; "Hanged and Burned," *Indianapolis Recorder*, March 2, 1901, p. 6; Paul R. Mullins, *Revolting Things: An Archaeology of Shameful Histories and Repulsive Realities* (Gainesville, Fl., 2021).

colored people they could find in the park."[16] In 1903, a major race riot occurred in Evansville, after a Black man killed a white police officer. The state militia was mobilized and at least a dozen people were killed before order was restored.[17] In 1906, a white man struck a "negro girl with a whip," and a race riot broke out at the fairgrounds in Princeton, Indiana. "Scores of whites and blacks participated," and five people were injured.[18] In 1916, after a confrontation between a white man and a Black man at the Delaware County fair, "a mob of 150 whites" attacked and injured "20 men and women, nearly all negroes."[19] In 1930, two Black men accused of killing a white man and raping his fiancé were lynched in Marion; a third man managed to escape.[20] In 1942, a posse of white Vigo County farmers shot a Black man and pursued him across the state line; he was found dead outside of Paris, Illinois.[21]

The Greensburg riot occurred in an era in which anti-Black violence was frequent. As the United States wrestles with racial issues today, including the Black Lives Matter movement and the teaching of critical race theory, a better understanding of our past will contribute to a more positive future.

Greensburg in the Early Years: 1816—1865

In the early nineteenth century, Native American members of the Delaware, Miami, and Potawatomi nations were the primary inhabitants of southeastern Indiana. Through a series of lost battles, treaties, and land purchases, the

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[16] "Riot at Fairview," *Indianapolis Journal*, July 22, 1901, p. 1; "Hoodlumism," *Indianapolis Recorder*, August 31, 1901, p. 1; Carolyn Brady, "Indianapolis and the Great Migration," *Black History News and Notes* 65 (August 1996), 3–8; Richard McDonagh, "Syndication News Column: Frederick Douglass Park," Two Cents News, accessed March 2, 2021, https://www.twocents.news/syndication-news-column-frederick-douglass-park.

[17] "Race War Breaks Out in the Streets of Evansville," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, July 6, 1903; "Victim of Evansville Riot," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, July 9, 1903; Brian S. Butler, "'An Undergrowth of Folly': Public Order, Race Anxiety, and the 1903 Evansville Riot," Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1998; "Evansville Officer Was Shot By A Negro" *Indianapolis News*, July 4, 1903; "Man Who Caused Riots Is Dead in Prison," *Indianapolis News*, July 31, 1903, p. 14.

[18] "Five Injured In Race Riot," *Plymouth Tribune*, September 20, 1906.

[19] "Race Riot Follows Attack at Muncie County Fair Grounds," *South Bend News-Times*, August 11, 1916, p. 1.

[20] "Marion, Indiana Lynching (1930)," BlackPast, accessed June 16, 2021, https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/marion-indiana-lynching-1930/; Madison, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Heartland*, 138.

[21] Campney, *Hostile Heartland*, 177–85; "Accuse Indiana Law Officials," *Indianapolis Times*, July 14, 1943, p. 2.

United States government acquired Native lands in the area, with the final purchase made in 1818.[22] Slavery had been forbidden under the Northwest Ordinance, but there were slaves in the Indiana Territory. When Indiana became a state, the new constitution limited the right to vote to white men, prohibited Black men from giving testimony in court cases involving white men, and forbade intermarriage. The state constitution also prohibited slavery, but the 1820 census still recorded 190 slaves. Indeed, the 1830 census for Decatur County recorded a young Black girl as a slave.[23]

White, predominantly Protestant, settlers arrived in southeastern Indiana from a variety of locations, including slave states like Kentucky and Virginia, and non-slave states such as New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.[24] Decatur County and Greensburg were founded in 1822. Table 1 presents the population growth of the county and the city beginning in 1830.[25] Kentuckian Joseph Snelling is recorded as the first free Black person to take up permanent residence in the county. In 1823, Snelling purchased fifty-six acres of land in Fugit Township, to the east of what became Clarksburg.[26] By 1852, about seventy-five Black settlers were living in the "Snelling Community." In his *History of Decatur County Indiana*, Lewis Harding notes that "some of them owned small farms, but the most of them depended for a livelihood on working on the farms of the white [antislavery] citizens." The county was home to the Decatur County Colonization Society (founded in 1830) and the Decatur County Anti-Slavery Society (founded in 1836).

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[22] David A. Nichols, "The View from Polypotamia: An Editorial Introduction," *Indiana Magazine of History* 117 (March 2021), 1–12; Nichols, "Potawatomi Resistance, Renewal, and Removal," *Indiana Magazine of History* 117 (June 2020), 65–81.

[23] The Northwest Ordinance's antislavery prohibitions could be, and were, circumvented through the use of indentures. John D. Barnhart and Dorothy L. Riker, *Indiana to 1816, the Colonial Period* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1994), 347–49; Lewis A. Harding, ed., *History of Decatur County Indiana: Its People, Industries and Institutions* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1915), 50 (on 1820 census) and 407 (on 1830 census); Emma Lou Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana before 1900: A Study of a Minority* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1957); Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era*, 13–15.

[24] Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana*, 33–52, 69–74, 464–69, quote at 70; Gregory Rose, "Hoosier Origins: The Nativity of Indiana's United States-Born Population in 1850," *Indiana Magazine of History* 81 (September 1985), 201–232.

[25] Table 1 is based primarily on information from successive U.S. federal censuses. The 1870 census did not provide a separate return for Greensburg; James L. Harrison, "A Brief History of the Growth and Development of Greensburg, Indiana, 1822–1968," M.A. thesis, Butler University, 1972, p. 18. The 1930 census did not report population characteristics for towns between 2,500 and 10,000 in population. Information for 1930 and 1960 is from http://www.stats.indiana.edu/population/poptotals/historic_counts_cities.asp, accessed December 7, 2022.

[26] John Pratt and William O. Smith, "A Guide to the Underground Railroad in Decatur County, Indiana" (Indiana Humanities Council, n.d.), author's personal copy.

Harding reports that both groups "hated slavery and differed only in their methods of dealing with it." The Underground Railroad passed through the Kingston–Clarksburg area, in Fugit Township. An Underground Railroad "junction" was located south of McCoy's Station, about four miles east of Greensburg.[27]

Table 1. Population of Decatur County and Greensburg, Indiana (1830–2010)

Year	Decatur County	Greensburg	Greensburg as a Percentage of the County
1830	5887		
1840	12171		
1850	15107	1202	8%
1860	17294	1283	7%
1870	19053	2600	14%
1880	19779	3138	16%
1890	19277	3596	19%
1900	19518	5034	26%
1910	18793	5420	29%
1920	17813	5345	30%
1930	17308	5702	33%
1940	17722	6065	34%
1950	18218	6619	36%
1960	20019	7492	37%
1970	22738	8620	38%
1980	23841	9254	39%
1990	23645	9286	39%
2000	24572	10260	42%
2010	25795	11492	45%

[27] Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana*, 124, 398–407; Diane Perrine Coon, *Southeastern Indiana's Underground Railroad Routes and Operations: The Freedom Trails Initiative*, http://npshistory.com/publications/ugrr/se-in.pdf, 6; Donald F. Carmony, *Indiana, 1816–1850: The Pioneer Era* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1998), 566.

From the beginning, the presence of Black people in Decatur County created controversy among white citizens. Abolitionists co-existed with slave hunters, some of whom lived in Greensburg. Under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, little evidence was required for an officer of the law to arrest an alleged escaped slave. Article XIII of the 1851 Indiana Constitution, which barred free Blacks from entering the state, codified the sentiments of many white people.[28] In response to threats like these, many members of the Snelling community fled for Canada. Between 1850 and 1860, the county's African American population fell from 156 to 24 people.[29]

Greensburg was formally incorporated in 1859; the county courthouse was completed the next year.[30] The attitudes of white citizens toward African Americans remained mixed. In 1860, Abraham Lincoln easily carried Decatur County; in December 1861, county Democrats adopted a resolution that included: "That we are opposed to the emancipation of the slaves in the Southern States, either by the action of Congress or that of the military power, *upon any pretext whatever*." The resolution warned that emancipation would fill "the Northern States with a debased negro population, corrupting the morals of our people, increasing our public burdens and cheapening and degrading labor." More than 2,000 soldiers from Decatur County served in the Union Army; 251 died from various causes. Amidst this sacrifice, an anti-war rally in Greensburg, on April 25, 1863, sparked a riot in which at least two people were shot.[31]

After the war, the city continued to grow. Greensburg's high school opened in fall 1869. Enough anti-Black sentiment persisted that for a brief

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[28] Madison, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Heartland*, 169; Campney, *Hostile Heartland*, 56, 69.

[29] Pratt and Smith, "A Guide to the Underground Railroad in Decatur County, Indiana"; J. Michael Raley, "The Underground Railroad in Jefferson County, Indiana: An Interracial Partnership Ahead of Its Time," *Indiana Magazine of History* 116 (December 2020), 293–42; Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana*, 124, 398–407; "Early Black Settlements by County—Decatur County," Indiana Historical Society, accessed February 17, 2022, https://indianahistory.org/research/research-materials/early-black-settlements/early-black-settlements-by-county/; Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana before 1900*, 48–54; James Madison, *The Indiana Way: A State History* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1986), 169–73; Xenia E. Cord, "Black Rural Settlements in Indiana Before 1860," in Wilma Gibbs, ed., *Indiana's African American Heritage: Essays From Black History News & Notes* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1993), 99–110; U.S., Eighth Census, 1860, Population Schedules for Decatur County, Indiana.

[30] Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana*, 158; Andrew R. L. Cayton, *Frontier Indiana* (Bloomington, Ind., 1996), 285–86; James L. Harrison, "A Brief History of the Growth and Development of Greensburg, Indiana, 1822–1968," M.A. thesis, Butler University, 1972, p. 15.

[31] Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana*, 191, 407, 431, 442–5, 478; Carmony, *Indiana, 1816–1850*, 112; "Democratic Convention of Decatur County," *Indiana State Sentinel*, December 30, 1861, p. 1.

period in the early 1870s the city's schools were segregated.[32] While there is no documented history of racial violence in Greensburg before the riot, there is evidence suggesting African Americans were second-class citizens.[33] In 1879, David Robert Lewis became the first Black student to graduate from Greensburg High School. In 1915, Harding reported there had been "753 graduates from the Greensburg high school in its forty-six years of existence." In those years, there had been only "five colored graduates from the Greensburg high school, but none of recent years."[34]

As the city grew, it became more diverse. St. Mary's Catholic Church was built in the 1850s, and many of its initial parishioners were Irish immigrants. By the 1870s, the parish was large enough to support the construction of a parish hall, a parochial school, and a larger church.[35] The African American community also prospered after the Civil War. By the late 1870s, they had established "a Methodist class" with services held in a room on the southwest corner of the courthouse square. In 1880, the African Methodist Church built a "frame house" place of worship at the corner of Lincoln and North Streets, with a parsonage to the west.[36]

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[32] Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana*, 188–94; *Greensburg Standard*, August 13, 1897, p. 1; Lorene E. Shirk, comp., *Schools in Decatur County, Indiana 1820–1978* (n.p., 1979); *Greensburg Daily News*, January 29, 2014.

[33] A search of Greensburg newspapers between 1890 and 1907, using the terms "race riot" and "colored violence," did not reveal any such incidents. A 1906 article reports on the town marshal of nearby Newpoint running out of town "three 'niggers,' two armed with 'big guns' and one with a razor." "Suppresses a Riot and Averts a Race War," *Greensburg News*, December 14, 1906, p. 7. For accounts of "bad negroes" coming into the community and of local police violence against Black residents see, for example, "A Bad 'Nigger," *Greensburg News*, August 7, 1903, p. 4; "Shooting Scrape at the Y. & B.," *Greensburg New Era*, August 13, 1903, p. 1; "Resisted," *Greensburg News*, November 30, 1906, p. 1.

[34] David Robert Lewis was also the first Black student to graduate from the Purdue School of Engineering. Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana*, 188, 193–95; *Greensburg Daily News*, January 29, 2014; "Purdue Celebrates First African American Civil Engineering Graduate," accessed April 22, 2021, https://engineering.purdue.edu/CE/AboutUs/News/Alumni_Features/purdue-celebrates-first-africanamerican-civil-engineering-graduate.

[35] Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana*, 272–73; "History of St. Mary's, Greensburg, In.," n.d., n.p., p. 3, author's personal copy.

[36] Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana*, 220; Pat Smith, "African Americans contributed much to Decatur County's history," *Greensburg Daily News*, February 12, 2014, accessed July 21, 2022, https://www.greensburgdailynews.com/opinion/columns/pat-smith-african-americans-contributed-much-to-decatur-countys-history/article_c5718cf8-c565-5d58-9036-112fe7db6011.html; "Early Black Settlements by County—Decatur County."

Greensburg on the Eve of the Riot (1900–1907)

At the turn of the century, Decatur County was home to 19,518 people, of whom 5,034 lived in Greensburg. The city's population had experienced a four-fold increase since 1860. The county's African American population had grown from 24 to 133 people (a five-fold increase), with 107 of those living in Greensburg. Urbanization was especially pronounced among African Americans. Although 26 percent of the county's overall population lived in Greensburg, approximately 80 percent of the county's Black population lived there.[37]

Between 1890 and 1900, Greensburg had added more than 1,400 new residents. This was the largest population increase for any decade in the city's history (see Table 1). This influx of people brought change, including railway upgrades and two large construction projects. Between 1905 and 1907, the Indianapolis & Cincinnati Traction Company built an interurban traction line connecting Greensburg with Indianapolis; between 1906 and 1907, the city built a new sewage disposal plant.[38] Accounts from the *Indianapolis Star* and the *Indianapolis News* suggest that the construction projects attracted a group of "undesirable citizens" who remained in town after the work was completed, including (according to the papers) a group of "bad negroes" who spent their time "gambling and pilfering from the white residents" and frequenting two "negro dives" on the west side of the city—the "Red Onion" and the "Garlic." The two bars had reputations for knife fights, "negro gamblers and negro women."[39]

With the influx of new Black citizens and the perpetuation of existing racist attitudes, African Americans in Greensburg suffered slights in various ways. In early April 1907, the local Eagles Hall hosted a minstrel show that included men wearing blackface. One of them, Andrew Muldoon, would be involved in the riot. The *Greensburg News* reported that a high point

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[37] *Greensburg Daily News*, January 29, February 12, 2014.

[38] Glenn Blackburn, "Interurban Railroads of Indiana (concluded)," *Indiana Magazine of History* 20 (December 1924), 400–464; Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana*, 161, 396.

[39] It is unclear if either the Red Onion or the Garlic was involved, but in January 1906, a dispute during a poker game at a boarding house for "colored laborers" on Railroad Street (run by Fannie Brackett, a "negress") resulted in Ed Williams shooting dead Edward Gateskill; Williams was subsequently convicted of manslaughter. "Colored Man Murdered," *Greensburg Standard*, January 19, 1906, p. 7; "Refused New Trial," *Greensburg News*, April 27, 1906, p. 1; "'Red Onion' Is Stoned," *Greensburg Standard*, March 22, 1907, p. 4; "Mob Leaders Now in Clutches of Law," *Indianapolis Star*, May 2, 1907, p. 1; Ray Stannard Baker, *Following the Color Line: An Account of Negro Citizenship in the American Democracy* (New York, 1908), 127; W. H. Blodgett, "Riot Due To Laxity in Enforcing Laws," *Indianapolis News*, May 2, 1907, p. 3.

Loyd's Minstrel Show, Greensburg, Indiana, with entertainers in blackface, c. 1905. In 1907, the local Eagles Hall hosted a minstrel show which also featured white men in blackface.
Jay Small Postcard Collection, Indiana Historical Society

of the evening was the rendition of a "natural coon ballad" in which the singer worked in verses that referred to local interests.[40]

Racial violence in this era often developed out of a confrontation (actual, alleged, or perceived) between a Black man and a white woman. Whites often assumed that the Black man was a sexual predator, and the mere suggestion that a Black man was sexually preying on a white woman could mobilize white violence. After the fact, the presumption of guilt was often used to retroactively legitimate white violence that had followed the confrontation. All these factors came into play in Greensburg.[41]

Table 2 offers detailed information on the key people involved in the Greensburg riot, beginning with Caroline (Smiley) Sefton. I present these

[40] "Made a Hit," *Greensburg News*, April 12, 1907, p. 7.

[41] Several of Indiana's minority communities suffered threats and violence in the first half of the twentieth century. Madison, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Heartland*, 84–111; Campney, *Hostile Heartland*; Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (New York, 1892), accessed June 6, 2022, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14975/14975-h/14975-h.htm; Wells, *A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States* (Chicago, 1895), accessed June 6, 2022, https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=14977; Baker, *Following the Color Line*; David Jones, "'An Unusual Case': Dan Shay, Clarence Euell, Gertrude Anderson, and the Limits of Hoosier Progressivism," *Indiana Magazine of History* 103 (December 2007), 349–78; Blocker, "Race, Sex and Riot."

Table 2. Key Persons Associated with Greensburg Race Riot of 1907.

Key Persons	Year Born	Age in 1907	Where Born	Arrived in Decatur County	Arrived in Greensburg	Race	Occupation	Year Died	Where Died
Caroline Sefton	1840	67	Ohio	1849	Circa 1895	White	Homemaker	1924	Greensburg, IN
John Green	1865	42	Kentucky		After 1905	Black	Showman/ Odd Jobs/ Hod Carrier		
Victims of the Riot									
George Edwards	1860	47	Boone Co., KY		By 1900	Black	Laborer,Grain Mill	1936	Bloomington, IN
Adolphus Frazier	1863	44	Boone Co., KY	By 1870	By 1900	Black	Plumber	1939	Connersville, IN
William Frazier	1874	33	Decatur Co., Indiana	1874	By 1900	Black	Coachman	1966	Connersville, IN
Earl C. Hood	1885	22	Greensburg, IN		1885	Black	Porter, Hotel	1962	Columbus, Ohio
Ray Laster	1881	26	Knightstown, IN		Circa 1903	Black	Porter, Barber Shop	1917	Knightstown, IN
Garfield Meadows	1879	38	Decatur Co., IN	1879	By 1900	Black	Barber	1934	Chicago, IL
Harry Scott			Indianapolis, IN		Circa 1904	Black	Laborer		
Frank Woods	1877	30	Chicago, IL		Circa 1905	Black	Laborer		

(*Continued*)

Table 2. Continued.

Persons Arrested for Involvement in the Riot									
Richard Lacy	1873	34	Franklin Co., IN		Circa 1905	White	Engineer/ Machinist	1943	Butler, Ohio
Thomas Morgan	1854	53	Kentucky		1854	White	Hostler	1935	Greensburg, IN
James Mowrer/ Mowrey/Mowry	1872	35	Greensburg, IN		By 1870	White	Plasterer/Gas Fitting	1945	Batesville, IN
Andrew Muldoon	1870	37	Greensburg, IN		1870	White	Railroad Industry/ Conductor	1935	Greensburg, IN
Charley Speer	1874	33	Greensburg, IN		1874	White	Painter		Probably California

details here and refer to them later because the people involved should not be reduced to passive, unknown victims and unidentified perpetrators. As well as being a part of Greensburg's past, their lives inform our understanding of the riot. Caroline Smiley's family arrived in Clay Township when she was a child, and her father and brother became prominent farmers. She married Ed Sefton in 1863, and they raised their family in Clinton Township. The Seftons moved into Greensburg in the 1890s, and when Ed Sefton passed away in 1904, he was buried in the city's primary cemetery, South Park Cemetery. A confrontation between Caroline Sefton, a white widow, and a Black man set the stage for the riot.[42]

"Preacher" John Green was born in 1865, in Kentucky, and may have been the child of slaves. He left home at the age of eight and never learned to read or write. In 1903, he was arrested in St. Louis for assault and battery but was not convicted. For a time, he performed stunts and was a glass eater in an "Uncle Tom's Cabin troupe." Depending upon the source, Green was drawn to Greensburg by work on the traction line or the new sewage treatment plant. John Green robbed and, it was alleged, sexually assaulted Caroline Sefton.[43]

The victims of the riot were Adolphus "Doc" Frazier, William Frazier, Earl Hood, Ray Laster, Garfield Meadows, Harry Scott, and Frank Woods, as well as George Edwards and his family.[44] Their backgrounds aid in

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[42] The U.S. Federal Census (via Ancestry.com) is the primary source for information on the Seftons and other persons noted in Table 2. Other information comes from https://www.findagrave.com. In Table 2, the information for James Mowrer/Mowrey/Mowry is for "James Mowrer." In the 1880 and 1900 censuses, the Seftons are listed in Clinton Township. Caroline's obituary states that they moved into Greensburg in 1893. *Greensburg Standard*, January 13, 1922, p. 2. See also Caroline Smiley, Indiana Marriage Registration, February 26, 1863, Ancestry.com. Ed Sefton died in 1904; his obituary states that they lived on West Washington Street in Greensburg, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/24363332/edward-w.-sefton, accessed February 17, 2022.

[43] John Green's Indiana State Prison record lists his father and mother's names with "(sl)" after each of them. John Green, Indiana State Prison North, Department of Corrections Records, Indiana State Archives, Indianapolis (hereafter John Green, Department of Corrections Records). Traveling shows based on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) were common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; performances were often racist and anti-Black. John Frick, *Uncle Tom's Cabin on the Stage and Screen* (London, 2012); Jane Ford, "The Story of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' Spread from Novel to Theatre and Screen," *UVA Today*, accessed July 22, 2022, https://news.virginia.edu/content/story-uncle-tom-s-cabin-spread-novel-theater-and-screen. "Fiendish Negro Admits Assault," *Greensburg News*, May 3, 1907, p. 5; Pat Smith, "Horrific Crime Leads to More Trouble," *Greensburg Daily News*, February 26, 2014; Rucker and Upton, eds., *Encyclopedia of American Race Riots*, 1:259.

[44] Individual census returns shift between characterizing these men, and members of their family, as Black ("B") and Mulatto ("M"), and summary tables often use "Negro." On occasion a Black person in one census is identified as Mulatto in another. I use "Black" and "African American" here.

understanding the riot and its aftermath. George Edwards (1860–1936) was born in Boone County, Kentucky, and it is unknown when he arrived in Greensburg. In 1900, he lived at 69 Monfort Street with his family, and he was employed as a mill hand.[45] Adolphus Frazier (1863–1939), also born in Boone County, Kentucky, was a child when his parents relocated to Adams Township, Decatur County. It is unknown when they moved into Greensburg. The 1900 census shows Adolphus Frazier and his family, and his brother William, living at 289 East North Street. Adolphus was a plumber and William was a coachman. In 1904, Adolphus Frazier was arrested for housebreaking, but there is no evidence that he was convicted.[46]

Earl Calvin Hood was the son of Orlando and Irene Hood. Irene was also born in Kentucky. Orlando was born in Jennings County, where his family was involved in the Underground Railroad. During the Civil War, he served in Company B of the 28th Regiment, United States Colored Infantry, and records indicate that he was "Present" for the famous Battle of the Crater. Orlando Hood arrived in Greensburg in 1875. The family was prominent—Irene Hood would serve as a steward in the African Methodist Church, and Orlando Hood was elected "officer of the guard" for the local Grand Army of the Republic post. In 1900, the family, including their fourteen-year-old son Earl, lived at 96 East North Street.[47]

Sherman Garfield Meadows (1879–1934) was born in Fugit Township, and the family was part of the Snelling Community. His father, Miles

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[45] George Washington Edwards, Certificate of Death, September 12, 1936, State of Indiana, Division of Public Health, Ancestry.com.

[46] "'Doc' Frazier," *Greensburg News*, January 29, 1904, p. 6; William Frazier's Social Security application states that he was born in Greensburg in 1874; the 1880 census shows the family living in St. Omer. William John Frazier, "Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936–2007," Ancestry.com.

[47] Orlando Hood's pension file indicates that he suffered a significant injury to his right elbow when he was struck by a pick in August 1864, while helping build fortifications around Petersburg, Virginia. Pvt. Orlando Hood Military Service Record, Co. B, 28 U.S. Col'd. Inf., M589 Roll 42, Film Number B-44, National Archives and Records Administration; Pvt. Orlando Hood Full Pension File–Civil War, file number wc-790663 (Cert. No. 357064), Pensioner Irene Hood, Veteran Orlando Hood, National Archives and Records Administration; Jennings County Preservation Association, Inc., *Historic Black American Sites and Structures in Jennings County* (North Vernon, Ind., 1998); Diane Perrine Coon, *Southeastern Indiana's Underground Railroad Routes and Operations*; "Anti-Slavery and African Americans in Jennings County," accessed January 31, 2022, http://ingenweb.org/injennings/pages/histories/africanamerhist.html; Pension notice, *Greensburg New Era*, May 8, 1889, p. 1; "Officer of the Guard" and "Minor Notes," *Indianapolis Journal*, April 6, 1891, p. 5; "Dropsy Causes Death," *Greensburg Weekly Democrat*, November 20, 1914, p. 1; "Orlando Hood Dead," *Greensburg Standard*, November 20, 1914, p. 2; *Greensburg Weekly Democrat*, May 21, 1915, p. 4; William A. Dobak, *Freedom by the Sword: The U.S. Colored Troops, 1862–1867* (Washington, D.C., 2011).

Meadows, was born in Mississippi and had relocated to Indiana by 1850. Miles Meadows (1822–1892) was a conductor on the Underground Railroad and is buried in Kingston Cemetery along with several other abolitionists. In 1900, Garfield Meadows, a twenty-year-old barber, lived at 254 West North Street with his widowed mother and other members of the family.[48]

Ray Laster, Harry Scott, and Frank Woods, in contrast to the others, were relatively new to Greensburg. None of them are found living there in the 1900 census or the 1900 city directory. Laster was from Knightstown, Scott was from Indianapolis, and Woods was from Chicago. All three were married in Greensburg: Scott in 1904, Woods in 1905, and Laster in 1906. The 1905 city directory shows that Scott and Woods were employed as laborers but does not indicate an occupation for Laster (listed as Ray "Lasker").[49] In December 1906, Ray Laster and Harry Scott were arrested, along with five white men, in a raid on a "gambling room" above Leimgruber's saloon on the south side of the courthouse square—all of them pleaded guilty.[50]

Richard Lacy, Thomas Morgan, Andrew Muldoon, Charles Speer and, depending upon the newspaper, James "Mowrer," "Mowrey," or "Mowry" were arrested for their involvement in the riot.[51] Richard ("Dick") Lacy

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[48] In the 1850 Census, Miles Meadows is listed as a 37-year-old farmer in Fugit Township; he is also found in the township in the 1860, 1870, and 1880 censuses; and see https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/24479946/miles-meadows, accessed June 4, 2021; Rev. E.A. Allen, "Address on Underground Railway," *Vevay Reveille Enterprise*, May 7, 1831; Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana Before 1900*, 43–44; "The Underground Railroad," https://www.in.gov/history/for-educators/all-resources-for-educators/resources/underground-railroad/bury-me-in-a-free-land-the-abolitionist-movement-in-indiana-by-gwen-crenshaw/the-underground-railroad/, accessed June 7, 2021.

[49] This assumes Frank "Woods" in the 1900 census, 1905 city directory, and 1905 marriage registration in Greensburg is the same Frank Woods or "Wood" described in accounts of the riot. For Laster, Scott, and Woods, their marriage registrations (found via Ancestry.com) indicate that they were Black; Laster and Woods were found in the 1900 census. A 1903 notice in the *Recorder* describes Laster "of Greensburg" visiting Indianapolis. *Indianapolis Recorder*, October 17, 1903, p. 3; *City Directory of Greensburg Indiana for 1905*; *The Inter-State Directory Company's Directory of Greensburg and Decatur County Gazetteer For The Year 1908* (Marion, Ind., 1908).

[50] "Poker Game Raided—'A Pair of Fours Drawn,'" *Greenburg Standard*, December 28, 1906.

[51] More than a century after the event, some important details are unclear. Common names, misspellings, etc., contribute to uncertainty. A key *Greensburg News* article ("A Stigma of Disgrace," *Greensburg News*, May 3, 1907, p. 6) does not name those arrested. The *Indianapolis Star* ("Six Negroes Beaten by Greensburg Mob," *Indianapolis Star*, May 1, 1907, p. 1) reported that "Will Lacey" was one of the rioters. Other accounts consistently identify him as "Richard" or "Dick" but have "Lacy" and "Lacey" as the surname. His tombstone uses the "Lacy" spelling. A *Greensburg New Era* article referred to Dick Lacey, Andy Muldoon, Charles Speer "and others as leaders of a mob of whites" ("Backed Up," *Greensburg New Era*, July 25, 1907, p. 6). Newspapers reported that James "Mowrer" was charged with rioting (*Indianapolis News*, May 2, 1907); that James "Mowrey" was a ringleader ("Jury Returns Quick Verdict," *Indianapolis Star*, June 1, 1907, p. 8); and that James "Mowry" was arrested ("The Greensburg Rioters," *Fort Wayne Daily News*, May 2,

(or "Lacey") (1873–1943) was born in Franklin County and served as an artillery sergeant during the Spanish-American War. The 1900 census shows him living in Brookville and his father living in Greensburg. The 1905 Greensburg city directory shows Richard Lacy and his wife living at 611 E. Central Avenue. The railway construction or the sewage project may have brought him to the city.[52]

Other than newspaper accounts, little information is available on James "Mowry." James "Mowrer" (1872–1945) was born in Greensburg in 1872 and was married there in 1897. He was the grandson of Phillip Mowrer, who served as Decatur County Sheriff from 1861 to 1865 and remained prominent in the community, and the great-grandson of John Fugit, one of the first white settlers of Decatur County for whom Fugit Township is named. In 1900, James Mowrer lived at 62 Railroad Street with his wife and infant son, Philip. He was employed as a plasterer. Mowrer's wife died of tuberculosis in 1902, leaving "a husband and two small children." She was buried in Lower Union Presbyterian Cemetery, about fourteen miles southwest of Greensburg. At some point after this, Mowrer and his children moved in with his parents and siblings.[53]

Thomas Morgan, Andrew Muldoon, and Charles Speer were long-term residents of Greensburg. Morgan (1854–1935) was born in Scott County, Kentucky, but had relocated to Greensburg by 1870. His wife died in 1898 and was buried in South Park Cemetery. In 1900, he was a 45-year-old widower, employed as a hostler, who lived with his children at 32 Forsyth

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1907, p. 3). Prominent Decatur County farmer Nelson "Mowrey" and his family (none of whom were named James) may have contributed to the uncertainty (Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana*, 732–34). In reporting the riot, most of the Indiana papers used the "Mowry" spelling, but it appears that Mowrer is correct. On May 9, 1913, the *Greensburg Weekly Democrat* reported that James "Mowrey" had resigned from the fire department, while the *Greensburg Standard* of the same date reported that James "Mowrer" had resigned.

[52] The following assumes that the Richard Lacy arrested for the riot is the same person found in the 1905 and 1908 Greensburg City Directories. The 1905 city directory has Richard married to "Blanche" Lacy and employed as a hostler, while subsequent censuses show him living with "Blanch" Lacy (e.g., 1910) and working as a machinist or mechanic. See "Application For Headstone Or Marker," signed by Blanche Lacy, Ancestry.com; *City Directory of Greensburg Indiana for 1905*; Richard E. Lacy and Blanche Crawford registered to marry on October 17, 1900, in Brookville, Indiana, "Indiana Marriages, 1810–2001," Ancestry.com.

[53] Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana*, 89; "Ora Whipple Mowrer," accessed September 5, 2022, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/54707914/ora-mowrer; *Greensburg Standard*, October 31, 1902, p. 3; "Mowrer Funeral Friday Afternoon," *Greensburg Daily News*, June 25, 1931, p. 1; "Mowrer Dead At Batesville," *Greensburg Times,* January 12, 1945, p. 1; Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana,* 121.

Street.[54] Andrew Muldoon (1870–1935), the son of Irish immigrants, was born in Greensburg. The family was a part of the Catholic community, and several family members are buried in St. Mary's Cemetery. In 1900, Andrew lived at 1716 West Washington Street with his widowed mother and his siblings. Andrew and several of his brothers worked for the railroads.[55]

Charles Speer was raised in a troubled family. He was born in Greensburg and baptized into the First Presbyterian Church. In 1894 he married a woman in Shelbyville; that same year, his younger brother Oscar was charged with petty larceny and committed to the Indiana Reform School for Boys. Nineteen hundred was a particularly busy year for the family. "Charley" and Oscar Speer were painters, and they lived with their widowed mother and sister at 221 North Franklin Street. Charley had been married for six years, but his wife did not live with him. Not long after the census was taken, Oscar Speer was accused of murder. The charge was subsequently dismissed, as was a charge that Charles had been involved in a robbery.[56]

The Assault of Caroline Sefton and the Arrest of John Green

As described in the *Greensburg News*, on the night of Thursday, April 25, 1907, the city was "Swept By Rain and Wind." Caroline Sefton, a 67-year-old

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[54] Thomas Morgan and Anna Dwyer registered to marry on December 6, 1876, "Indiana, U.S. Marriages, 1810–2001," Ancestry.com; Certificate of Death, Thomas Morgan, January 8, 1935, State of Indiana, Division of Public Health, Ancestry.com; Anna Dwyer Morgan, accessed July 18, 2022, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/48226917/anna-morgan.

[55] Sacramental records are available only to family members; I cannot confirm that the Muldoons were formal members of St. Mary's Church. The available evidence shows that Andrew Muldoon's parents were practicing Catholics: their marriage license was signed by Fr. John Gillig of St. Vincent de Paul parish, Shelbyville; Andrew's sister was married in St. Mary's; Andrew's funeral Mass was in St. Mary's Church; Andrew and several of his family members are buried in St. Mary's Cemetery. "History of St. Mary's, Greensburg, In." U.S., Ninth Census, 1870, population schedules for Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana, enumerate Thomas and Mary Muldoon and their three children, including two-month-old Andrew Jr. The death certificate for Andrew Muldoon Jr. indicates that he was born in Greensburg. Andrew Muldoon, Certificate of Death, State of Indiana, Division of Public Health, May 13, 1935. On Andrew Muldoon Sr., see https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/37667693/andrew-muldoon, accessed February 17, 2022.

[56] It is possible that more than one Charles Speer lived in Greensburg in these years. The *Indianapolis Star* reported that the Charles Speer arrested for involvement in the riot was a painter. *Indianapolis Star*, May 1, 1907, p. 1. Charles J. Speer, "U.S. Presbyterian Church Records, 1701–1970," Ancestry.com; "Shelbyville," *Indiana State Sentinel*, April 25, 1894, p. 8; Oscar Speer, Order of Commitment, State of Indiana (personal copy via the Indiana State Archives); "Sunday Night Saloon Row," *Indianapolis Journal*, June 26, 1900, p. 4; "Sunday Evening Tragedy," *Rushville Republican,* June 26, 1900, p. 1; "Released on Bond: Oscar Speer the Decatur Boy Charged With Murder Is Out On $2,500 Bond," *The Republic* (Columbus), October 4, 1900, p. 4; "Within Our Borders," *Waterloo Press*, November 29, 1900, p. 2; "Court Notes," *Greensburg Daily Review*, October 16, 1900, p. 1.

Ed and Caroline (Smiley) Sefton (right) and Ed Sefton's sisters, in front of a Greensburg house built by W.O. Sefton (Ed's father), c. 1895
Courtesy Indiana Album, Brenna Green Collection

widow, lived alone in a small house at 422 North East Street. Mrs. Sefton, described as "one of the best known and most highly respected citizens of the community," had gone to bed early. At some point after 9 p.m., she was allegedly raped by an unknown intruder. The *Greensburg News* reported that she was awakened by "the cold hand of the ravisher laid across her brow." She fought against her attacker but "was powerless in the hands of the black monster, who after the deed, compelled her to arise and give to him what money she possessed." The attacker then walked to the kitchen, unlocked the door, and disappeared into the night.[57]

After the intruder left, Mrs. Sefton climbed out of a window and went to the home of her nearest neighbor, George Lanham. From there, phone calls were made to a local physician, Dr. Clarence Kercheval, and the police. The police met at the office of Mayor Frank Thomson and raised "a general fire alarm which aroused the citizens enmasse (*sic*)." As a result, "a crowd of thoroughly aroused and desperate men . . . in possies of threes and fours, silent and determined, armed with improved weapons . . . scoured the city from one end to the other looking for the instigator of the deed." It was learned that John Green—"a colored man, a resident of this city"—had bought a ticket and boarded the 10 p.m. traction car for

[57] "Horrible Crime Enacted," *Greensburg News*, May 3, 1907, p. 8.

Shelbyville, about 22 miles to the northwest. The *Greensburg News* said that the forty-two-year-old Green "is a cocaine fiend, is of a degenerate character and not above committing such a crime."[58]

Jacob Biddinger, the Decatur County sheriff, secured a car and left for Shelbyville. In Shelbyville, Biddinger discovered that when John Green had arrived, he had immediately boarded another traction car heading back to Greensburg. A phone call to the mayor's office alerted the Greensburg police. When the traction car arrived at the railroad crossing on West Street, about 1:30 a.m. Friday morning, Green was arrested by Officer Elmer Robbins. The *Greensburg News* reported that "excitement ran so high amongst the aroused citizens who believed Green guilty of the charge that he would probably have been lynched on the spot" if the police had not immediately taken him to the Decatur County jail.

With a suspect in custody, Sheriff Biddinger began "sweat box proceedings," over the course of several hours "leading the prisoner to admit facts that point strongly to his guilt." A few weeks earlier, Green had worked on repairs at the Sefton home; he would have been familiar with the house and knew that Mrs. Sefton lived alone. The side of the house where the intruder had climbed in the window was scratched; Green's worn shoes had "protruding nails or tacks" and they matched footprints found there.

John Green's behavior prior to the assault was also deemed incriminating. He had "accosted" the county's deputy prosecutor, Frank Hamilton, and asked him for a dime. When this was refused, Green tried to purchase a dime's worth of cocaine at the Mills Henry drug store "on credit." This was refused. According to the *Greensburg News*, he then visited the home of a "Mrs. Harris, colored, on South Franklin street." She also refused to give him money and they quarreled.

Mrs. Sefton could not identify her attacker, but she knew that she had given him either seventy-one or seventy-six cents (around $22.50 in 2022 dollars). John Green, who did not have a dime earlier in the evening, paid for his ticket to Shelbyville with a half dollar. The total cost of the round trip was seventy cents. When he was searched, he had one penny on him. The cumulative evidence was damning, but circumstantial. Green denied that he had purchased any tickets and claimed that he had paid the conductor. And while it appeared that he had made the quick round

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[58] Ibid.; John Green, Department of Corrections Records, and an abbreviated version at Indiana State Digital Archives, accessed February 17, 2022, https://secure.in.gov/apps/iara/search/; Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana*, 562–64.

trip to establish an alibi, Green claimed "that he was sent to Shelbyville by Mrs. Harris to obtain medicine for her."[59]

The police brought in tracking dogs from Noblesville. Around noon on Friday, Sheriff Biddinger and Officer Robbins took Green from jail and drove him to the Styers farm, to the southwest in Sand Creek Township. No one told Green why he was taken from the jail. As the *Greensburg News* described the scene: "The negro firmly believed that his time had come and shook from fear when taken from the machine. In tremulous tones he asked 'Where is the mob?'" He was told that he was there "for a run" that would prepare the dogs to track his movements. The dogs were taken to the Sefton home and on their first attempt they picked up a scent that led to the traction barn. On two subsequent attempts, they lost the scent. The tracking dog evidence was considered inconclusive, but Green was not released. He was returned to jail and charged with stealing "a quantity of beer" from a local dealer, an offense that had occurred a few weeks earlier. That afternoon, "groups of men, silent yet serious" were scattered about the courthouse square "all discussing the tragedy of the night." The *Greensburg News* opined that this "bodes ill for the man who is guilty of this fiendish deed."[60]

Sheriff Biddinger, W. G. Smiley (probably Caroline Sefton's brother), Officer Robbins, Mayor Thomson, Charles Zoller Jr. (a prominent citizen), and prisoner John Green took the 6 p.m. traction car from Greensburg and arrived in Indianapolis shortly before 9 p.m.[61] The *Greensburg News* suggested that Green was sent there for "safekeeping," but Biddinger may have sought the advice of a more experienced interrogator. The same article reported that Green was "at once taken to the police station where he was subjected to the sweat box proceeding." Over the course of an hour Green "gave fanciful versions of his conduct" but when told that the half dollar used for his ticket to Shelbyville had been marked, he confessed. In his defense, he claimed that he had been drinking "with a colored man named 'Charley'" who put "'dope'" in his drinks. Because of this, he had "acted like an insane man and hardly knew what he did." The police wrote down Green's confession, photographed him, and subjected him to "the

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[59] *Greensburg News*, May 3, 1907, p. 8; Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana*, 86.

[60] *Greensburg News*, May 3, 1907, pp. 5, 8.

[61] On W. G. Smiley and Charlie Zoller, see Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana*, 583–84, 620–22.

Bertillon measurement"—a contemporary method for identifying criminals using their physical measurements.[62]

Early Saturday morning, with John Green back in Greensburg, there was an attempt to hold a preliminary hearing. He was charged with assault and burglary, but "the crowds that tried to get a view of the negro made all kinds of ugly threats." The hearing was waived, Green was "bundled into a heavy coat and his face covered," and he was placed in the rear seat of a car. Sheriff Biddinger and Mayor Thomson drove him to Columbus, Indiana, arriving around 10 a.m. When asked by a Columbus reporter if there was "mob talk" in Greensburg, Biddinger replied: "Well, I'd reckon . . . if you had heard the gossip going around and the threats made by the people up there you would have thought there was plenty of mob talk. I wasn't going to take any risks so I brought him here." It appears that the initial plan was to hold Green in the Bartholomew County jail until the circuit court's next term, but the threat of mob violence followed them. Judge Marshall Hacker arranged for Green to secretly spend the night under the supervision of Irvin Cox, Bartholomew County sheriff. The next day, at Judge Hacker's order and via the Jeffersonville, Madison, and Indianapolis Railroad, Biddinger took Green to the State Reformatory in Jeffersonville.[63]

The Greensburg Race Riot of 1907

With Green in the State Reformatory, the opportunity to lynch him had passed. The city was calm on Sunday and Monday, but the town's small African American community was still at risk. On Tuesday, April 30, Mayor Thomson held a "caucus" at his office with George Dickey, the town marshal; Frank Hamilton, the deputy prosecutor of Decatur County; police officers Elmer Robbins, Lon Robbins, and James Grimstead; and "several of the business men of the town and newspaper correspondents." It is

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[62] The "Bertillon measurement" involved five measures—the length and breadth of the head, length of the middle finger, length of the left foot, and length of the cubit (measured from the elbow to the end of the middle finger). Visible Proofs: Forensic Views of the Body, accessed October 27, 2022, https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/visibleproofs/galleries/technologies/bertillon.html; *Greensburg News*, May 3, 1907, p. 5.

[63] John Vanderbur reports that Green spent the night in the home of a Columbus police officer. John Vanderbur, "Greensburg 1907 Riot; Correcting a Possible Wrong," *Greensburg Daily News*, April 14, 2017, accessed November 18, 2022, https://www.greensburgdailynews.com/opinion/columns/greensburg-1907-riot-correcting-a-possible-wrong/article_f592a2c2-2119-5bb9-9302-a7c743befbb4.html; *Greensburg News*, May 3, 1907, p. 5; "John Green Spends Very Uneasy Night," *Columbus Republican*, May 2, 1907, p. 1; "Mob Feeling Was Cause of a Move," *Columbus Republican*, May 2, 1907, p. 3.

not clear who led the meeting and who endorsed the result. Newspapers reported that the "police were to serve notice on a number of disreputable characters" and that "a list had been made out as to what colored residents would be ordered from the city."[64] In the meantime, people upset by what had happened to Mrs. Sefton and by their inability to punish John Green were gathering in the courthouse square.

Although multiple accounts vary somewhat, it is generally agreed that as news of the mayor's meeting became public, some of the men in the square decided to take matters into their own hands. The *Waterloo Press*, in northeastern Indiana, reported that a mob "was formed by three white men and rapidly increased to 500. All saloons and other places frequented by negroes were visited and the furniture and fixtures demolished. Negroes found in the places were beaten and warned to leave town. The authorities finally induced the crowd to disperse." The *Indianapolis News* reported that "half a dozen fellows, most of whom, if not all, were inflamed with whisky, began knocking down negroes whenever they were found." A page one article in the *Chicago Daily Socialist*, with the headline, "Hoosier Town Has Bloody Race War," reported that "Negroes have been given forty-eight hours to leave town" and that "T. W. Fraser" had been fatally injured.[65]

The *Greensburg News* may offer the most valid account of the start of the riot. The plan to evict certain "colored residents" was probably to be kept a secret until it had been implemented, but an "afternoon daily" published information about the meeting and inflamed a tense situation: "the publication was hardly on the streets more than a half hour until a white man, loaded with booze and carrying an old grudge against Ray Laster, started the trouble that for days has been secretly brewing." According to this account, "the mob leaders started their work shortly after five o'clock when a white man accosted Ray Laster, the colored porter at the Strasburger tonsorial parlors, and in disgraceful language ordered him from the city." An *Indianapolis News* report that "a colored porter" at one of the barber shops heard what was coming and got away early may refer to this altercation. News of the assault on Ray Laster spread, and before

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[64] The *Indianapolis Star* estimated that there were approximately "thirty negro voters" in Greensburg, of whom "twelve or fifteen were classed as bad negroes and undesirable citizens." The *Star* reported that the meeting was in the mayor's home; the *Greensburg News* reported that it took place in his office. *Indianapolis Star*, May 2, 1907, p. 1; *Indianapolis News*, May 2, 1907, p. 3; *Greensburg News*, May 3, 1907, p. 6; *Indianapolis Star*, May 1, 1907, p. 1.

[65] "Indiana," *Waterloo Press*, May 23, 1907, p. 2; *Indianapolis News*, May 2, 1907, p. 3; "Hoosier Town Has Bloody Race War," *Chicago Daily Socialist*, May 2, 1907, p. 1.

long the white man "was joined by another and the two walked the streets for several hours assaulting and beating every colored man that they came across."[66] *The Columbus Republican* reported that "all colored men who passed were handled roughly."[67]

Various reports suggest that more than two white men assaulted Black citizens and that the second victim was Earl Hood. He worked as a porter at the Stagg Cigar Store, located on the square. According to the *Indianapolis Star*, Hood had an "unsavory" reputation. Men went into the store and "knocked him down. Then several of the other whites joined in and kicked him." There were five more victims: Adolphus Frazier, his brother William Frazier, Garfield Meadows, Harry Scott, and Frank Woods. Contrary to the *Chicago Daily Socialist*, no one was killed. Adolphus Frazier, who was knocked down by a brick and kicked, probably suffered the most serious injuries. Harry Scott was hit by a brick and badly bruised. The *Star* described Garfield Meadows as "the colored barber, who has been especially obnoxious to a good many of the whites in town." Meadows was kicked and hit but got away without being badly injured. The assaults attracted attention, and by 8 p.m. a crowd of 300 to 500 people had gathered in front of the De Armond Hotel, located on the southeast corner of the square.[68]

People in the crowd were "drinking freely" and looking for more trouble when the police intervened. They "issued an order to every saloon keeper in the city to close," and then, as "white desperados continued to make the rounds of the city looking for the blacks," they took direct action. The *Greensburg New Era* reported that "the crowd started for South Franklin street where are located a number of negro houses of prostitution from one of which came the fiend [John] Green." The *Indianapolis Star* reported that the crowd "decided to go to the southern end of the city and 'clean out' the entire negro quarters." According to the *Greensburg News*, police officers "literally ploughed their way" into the crowd and "obtained the leaders who, after some talk, listened to reason and left." *Indianapolis Star* reported that Officer Elmer Robbins "seized two of the ringleaders and held them." Robbins "pleaded" with the crowd "to allow the proper

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[66] *Greensburg News*, May 3, 1907, p. 6; "Mob Aroused," *Greensburg New Era*, May 2, 1907, p. 6; *Indianapolis News*, May 2, 1907, p. 3.

[67] "Race Riot Breaks Out at Greensburg," *Columbus Republican*, May 1, 1907, p. 1.

[68] *Indianapolis Star*, May 1, 1907, p. 1.

Postcard depiction of the De Armond Hotel, on the courthouse square, Greensburg, Indiana, c. 1905. On April 30, 1907, a crowd of white men attacked several Black residents and then converged in the square.
Indiana Historical Society

authorities to handle the 'tough' negroes.'"[69] According to the *Hammond Times*, the intervention stopped the attacks, but the crowd did not disperse until a compromise was reached. The compromise, as reported by the *Greensburg New Era*, was: "We'll give you three days to get rid of them, and then if you don't we will." Because of the quick action of Officer Robbins, the immediate threat to public order passed. By 11 p.m., the streets were "comparatively quiet."[70] According to the *Star*, Earl Hood boarded the "late train" for Indianapolis.[71]

The quiet did not last. Early Wednesday morning, May 1, a crowd gathered outside of the home of George Edwards, whom the *Greensburg News* described as "an industrious, upright and honest man, his family

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[69] *Greensburg News*, May 3, 1907, p. 2; *Indianapolis Star*, May 1, 1907, p. 1; *Greensburg New Era*, May 2, 1907, p. 6.

[70] *Greensburg New Era*, May 2, 1907, p. 6; "From Down the State," *Hammond Times*, May 2, 1907, p. 5.

[71] The *Greensburg New Era*, May 2, 1907, p. 6, reported that "Pinkie Hood" walked to Sandusky and then phoned from North Vernon. It may or may not have been a consequence of the riot, but Earl Hood was accused of theft and arrested in Connersville in July 1907. He was subsequently cleared when another person confessed to the crime. "Not Guilty," *Greensburg News*, July 30, 1907, p. 3; *Indianapolis Star*, May 2, 1907, p. 1.

respectable." The crowd of "rowdies" stoned the house, broke windows, and frightened the family. The paper also reported that "other places of peaceable colored residents were scenes of similar occurrences." Edwards considered leaving town until several "influential men" advised him to stay and promised that if they had a say in the matter, he and his family would be safe. The *Indianapolis Star* report added that the "best" citizens of the city "deplore the attack."[72] These statements of support suggested that Black citizens like Edwards—long term "industrious" residents—would be protected. As if to confirm this, later that morning Mayor Thomson and his police officers "made the rounds of the negro quarters" and told the "disreputable characters" that they had to leave.[73]

Earl Hood's brother, Dicky Hood, worked in Columbus as a porter at the Imes and Washington barber shop. He was interviewed for an article that was published in *The Columbus Republican* the day after the riot. Dicky Hood described the mob leaders at "worthless whites."[74] According to the *Indianapolis Star*, Greensburg's leading citizens agreed:

> When it became known that a mob had beaten six of the most objectionable negroes in the city Tuesday night the public appeared to sanction the act, but when it was found that several of the worst white characters in the city had taken the leading part in the mob violence there was an immediate feeling that the bad whites should be punished as well as the bad negroes. . . Greensburg hopes to come out of the ordeal with its moral atmosphere considerably purified.

On Wednesday afternoon, five white men were arrested and brought before the mayor.[75] The *Indianapolis Freeman*, "An Illustrated Colored Newspaper," referred to Mayor Thomson as weak-kneed but applauded the arrests: "We rejoice to note that the leaders of that mob have been summarily dealt with at least we are reliably informed that the mobbers were arrested and

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[72] Ray Stannard Baker was told by a white attorney that "There isn't a better citizen in town than Edwards." Baker, *Following the Color Line*, 127. *Indianapolis Star*, May 2, 1907, p. 1; *Greensburg News*, May 3, 1907, p. 6.

[73] *Greensburg News*, May 3, 1907, p. 6.

[74] "Race Riot Breaks Out at Greensburg," *Columbus Republican*, May 1, 1907, p. 1.

[75] *Indianapolis Star*, May 2, 1907, p. 1.

placed behind bars, where they deserved to be placed."[76] It appeared that the mayor, the police, and the city's leaders were serious when they claimed that they would not tolerate drunken and disorderly whites.[77]

Richard Lacy (or Lacey), Thomas Morgan, James "Mowry" (or Mowrer), Andrew Muldoon, and Charles Speer were charged with inciting the mob. Lacey, Muldoon, and Speer were also charged with assault and battery on Garfield Meadows. Muldoon faced a third charge of assault and battery on Earl Hood. Lacey faced a third charge of assault and battery on Adolphus Frazier. The men put up $100 bond each and were released.[78] The *Indianapolis Star* reported on May 1 that Richard Lacey worked at "the electric light plant," Muldoon was "a railroader," and Speer was "a painter." The next day, the *Star* offered comments on Mowry and Speer—"Neither works steadily and both have reputations around Greensburg that are not of the best"—and stated that they would be ordered out of the city after their trials. Lacey, Morgan, and Muldoon had "heretofore given the police no trouble." The *Indianapolis News* reported that Lacey was employed as an engineer at the Greensburg Gas and Electric Company. The plant was co-owned by a state representative, Web Woodfill, who quickly "discharged" him.[79]

By the time the second *Star* article went to press on May 2, Greensburg had already been "purified" to a significant extent. The paper reported that of "thirty negro voters in Greensburg . . . twelve or fifteen were classed as bad negroes and undesirable citizens. They refused to work and spent their time gambling and pilfering from the white residents of the town. It is believed that every one of this number is gone. The respectable negroes will be permitted to remain and will not be molested." Three men who had left were identified as Earl Hood, Ray Laster, and Frank Woods. The *Star* described Woods as "a gambler"; the *Greensburg News* referred to him as "Frank Wood, the colored man known as 'Lucky.'" The *Star* also reported that the Red Onion and the Garlic had been "completely wiped out."[80] W. H. Blodgett, in the *Indianapolis News*, offered the following: "Yesterday

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[76] *Indianapolis Freeman*, May 11, 1907, p. 4.

[77] Saturday afternoon (May 4), Prosecutor Hamilton and Marshal Dickey raided a gambling "Hell Hole" in the basement of the De Armond Hotel and arrested eight (presumably white) men. All eight pleaded guilty and paid fines. "Gambling," *Greensburg Standard*, May 10, 1907, p. 1.

[78] *Fort Wayne Daily News*, May 2, p. 3; *Indianapolis Star*, May 2, 1907, p. 1; *Indianapolis News*, May 2, 1907, p. 3.

[79] *Indianapolis News*, May 2, 1907, p. 3; *Indianapolis Star*, May 1, 1907, p. 1; *Indianapolis Star*, May 2, 1907, p. 1; Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana*, 601.

[80] *Indianapolis Star*, May 2, 1907, p. 1; *Greensburg News*, May 3, 1907, p. 6.

afternoon and last night the disreputable negroes, male and female, left Greensburg, and most of them went to Indianapolis, 'nigger heaven,' as they call it." Indianapolis, with approximately 16,000 African Americans, had a higher percentage (9 percent) of African Americans than any other city north of the Ohio River.[81]

Contemporary interpretations of the riot suggest that it had more to do with issues of social class than race. The *Indianapolis News* claimed that Greensburg did not experience a "race war" but instead had been disgraced by a few "drunken hoodlums." The *News* blamed the city administration and took the view that if Mayor Thomson, town marshal George Dickey, and the police had driven out the "disreputable whites and depraved negroes" when they should have, there would have been no trouble.[82]

Muckraking journalist Ray Stannard Baker visited Greensburg soon after the riot. In February 1908, in an article published in *American Magazine* that was later published as a chapter in *Following the Color Line: An Account of Negro Citizenship in the American Democracy* (1908), he offered a similar argument: "Progress brought an electric railroad to Greensburg. To work on this and on improvements made by the railroad hundreds of laborers were required. And they were Negroes of the ignorant, wandering, unlooked-after sort so common in similar occupations in the South." According to Baker, the mayor was a "good fellow" who catered to the "saloon interests" and let a "Negro dive" remain open. As a result, the "entire Negro population of Greensburg was blamed for the crime of a single ignorant and neglected man." Baker minimized the role of race: "I have several different newspaper reports of the affair from outside papers, and nearly all indicate in the headlines that all the Negroes in Greensburg were concerned in the riot and were driven out of town, which was not, of course, true. As a matter of fact the respectable Negroes are still living in Greensburg on friendly terms with the white people."[83]

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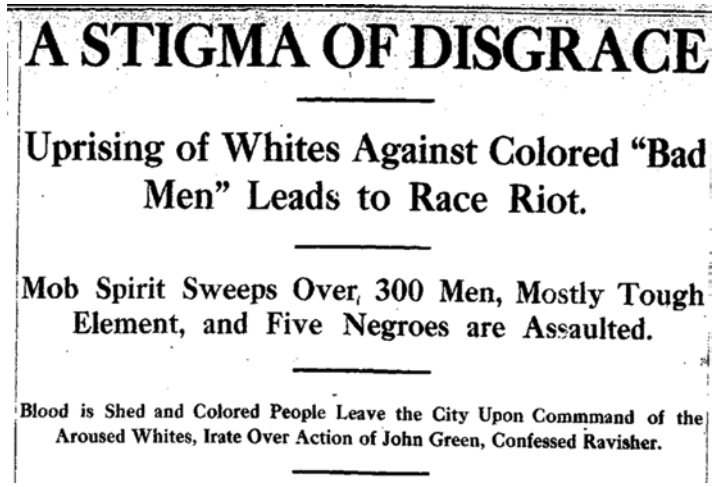
[81] In 1900, there were almost 16,000 African Americans (9.4% of the city's population) living in Indianapolis. *Indianapolis News*, May 2, 1907, p. 3; Richard B. Pierce, *Polite Protest: The Political Economy of Race in Indianapolis 1920–1970* (Bloomington, Ind., 2005). 2–3; A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam CJ Walker* (New York, 2001), 104.

[82] *Indianapolis News*, May 2, 1907, p. 3.

[83] Peter and Mort Bergman describe John Green as a "negro half-wit." See Loewen, "Race Riots, Home Page"; Bergman and Bergman, *The Chronological History of the Negro in America*, 347; Ray Stannard Baker, "The Color Line in the North," *American Magazine* (February 1908), 345–57; Baker, *Following the Color Line*, 127–28; *Indianapolis News*, May 2, 1907, p. 3. Baker's article in *American Magazine* was noted locally: "Prominent Magazine Writer," *Greensburg News*, January 31, 1908, p. 8.



A STIGMA OF DISGRACE

Uprising of Whites Against Colored "Bad Men" Leads to Race Riot.

Mob Spirit Sweeps Over, 300 Men, Mostly Tough Element, and Five Negroes are Assaulted.

Blood is Shed and Colored People Leave the City Upon Commmand of the Aroused Whites, Irate Over Action of John Green, Confessed Ravisher.

Greensburg News, May 3, 1907. Local accounts of the Greensburg race riot used language emphasizing bad vs. good Black residents, common rhetoric used to justify anti-Black violence.

Baker's account does not do justice to the complexity of the riot and its aftermath.

The distinction between "bad/depraved" and "good/respectable" people—Black and white—found in accounts of the riot is also found in contemporary accounts of racial violence in other cities, including Atlanta, Georgia (1906); Monroe City, Illinois (1907); and Springfield, Illinois (1908).[84] Leaving terms like "bad" and "undesirable" undefined worked to the advantage of whites. On the surface, the good/bad dichotomy separated amoral and shiftless people from law-abiding, industrious people. Leaving the distinction undefined allowed for flexible justifications of and distancing from racial violence. Hoke Smith, whose anti-Black commentary helped get him elected governor of Georgia in 1906, offered an all-purpose description of a "good negro" that fit the needs of white supremacists—someone who was "contented to occupy the natural status of his race, the position of inferiority." By default, a "bad" negro was any Black person who threatened or potentially threatened the status quo. For a politician like Smith, "bad negroes" were educated Black men who wanted to vote for change. For the

[84] Baker, *Following the Color Line*, 2–3, 60–63; Campney, *Hostile Heartland*, 106–107, 122, 149; Senechal de la Roche, *In Lincoln's Shadow*, 173–78; Gregory Mixon, "'Good Negro—Bad Negro': The Dynamics of Race and Class in Atlanta During the Era of the 1906 Riot," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 81 (Fall 1997), 593–621.

angry white mob in Greensburg on the evening of April 30, 1907, a "bad negro" was any Black man caught on the courthouse square. A flexible definition allowed white elites *and* the white working class to claim that Black people had crossed some undefined line and asked for trouble. White people determined where that line was. At the same time, acknowledging that there were disreputable white people conveniently allowed white elites to distance themselves from that segment of the population.[85]

After the Riot: The Individuals Involved

The legal system took swift action when it came to John Green. On Tuesday, June 11, Sheriff Biddinger picked him up at the Jeffersonville Reformatory and they returned by train to Greensburg. Around 5 a.m. the next morning, he was taken to the courthouse and appeared before Judge Hacker. In less than thirty minutes, Green pleaded guilty to "House Breaking" and was sentenced to ten to twenty years in the state penitentiary. The *Greensburg Standard*, after describing him as a "notorious nigger," reported that because the penalty for rape was fixed at two to fourteen years, Green was allowed to plead guilty to burglary which carried a longer sentence. The charge of rape remained on the criminal docket. If Green served out the sentence for burglary, he would then face the rape charge and possibly another two to fourteen years in the penitentiary. When court was concluded, Green was put in a car and driven to Indianapolis for the train ride to Michigan City.[86]

Green arrived at the Indiana State Prison North on June 12. In contrast to reports that he was "mentally impaired," prison officials described his mental condition as "Fair." His physical condition was good ("G"), his occupation was "Showman," and his associates were described as "Bad." Over the next ten years he worked in various jobs at the prison (including "cooper"), was punished six times (including three times for "Talking in Shop" and once for "Disorderly Conduct"), and was admitted to the

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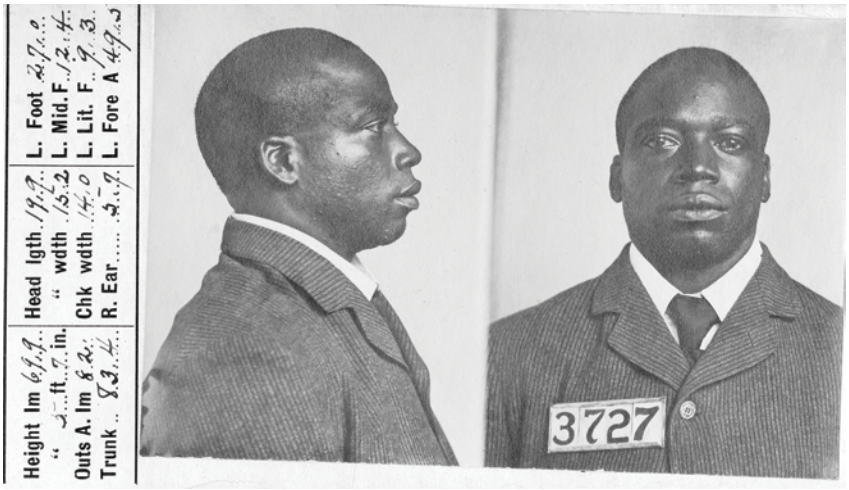
[85] Baker, *Following the Color Line*, 242; Mixon, "'Good Negro—Bad Negro,'" esp. 612–13; see also Senechal de la Roche, *In Lincoln's Shadow*, esp. 190–99.

[86] It is impossible to determine exactly what Caroline Sefton experienced. John Vanderbur suggests that Green did not rape her: "Alcohol is a depressant which encumbers sexual activity." He adds, "The newspaper accounts stated that Mrs. Sefton was 'assaulted,' but . . . the word 'rape' was never used . . . [Green] would have confessed to anything to get away from his inquisitor." *Greensburg Daily News*, April 14, 2017. The *Greensburg News* of 1907, in contrast, described the attacker as a "ravisher," and the *Greensburg Standard* used the word rape. On Everett Arbuckle, see Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana*, 161. *Greensburg News*, May 3, 1907, p. 8; "Saved A Negro's Life," *Richmond Palladium and Sun Telegram*, June 13, 1907, p. 5; "Black Fiend," *Greensburg Standard*, June 14, 1907, p. 1.



John Green, June 12, 1907, in a photo taken at the Indiana State Prison North, Michigan City
Courtesy, Indiana State Archives

prison hospital at least six times. John Green was released on parole on July 5, 1917.[87] What happened to him after that is unknown. There are no indications that he returned to Greensburg to face the outstanding charge of rape.

For Caroline Sefton, the assault and subsequent riot must have been traumatic, but she remained in the community. The 1910 census shows her living alone at 422 East Street. She still lived there in 1920, but with a private family housekeeper. When she passed away in 1922, an obituary in the *Greensburg News* noted her lengthy history with the community but did not mention the assault or riot. Like her late husband and several other family members, she was buried in South Park Cemetery.[88]

The attack on Mrs. Sefton and the riot were public events; accounts of both were published in a variety of newspapers and no doubt contributed to the hostile, anti-Black atmosphere that was already present in southeastern Indiana. African Americans who fled Greensburg were not welcomed in nearby communities. The day after the riot, the *Rushville Republican* reported that the city attorney had received a telephone call warning him that eighteen refugees from Greensburg were headed in his

[87] John Green, Department of Corrections Records. Some entries in these records are difficult to read.

[88] Caroline Sefton obituary, *Greensburg Standard*, January 13, 1922, p. 2; https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/24363331/caroline-sefton, accessed February 17, 2022.

direction. According to the report, "Numbered among this crowd of exiles are many keepers of low dives and loafers, and as they do not bear the right stamp of citizenship, they will find a cold—or rather warm—reception when they arrive here." A Rushville police officer had encountered two Black men from Greensburg in the "worst part" of town earlier that morning. The officer escorted them to the northern city limits and told them to "'kiss themselves goodbye.'"[89]

Two weeks after the riot, the *Greensburg Daily News* carried a report from the *New Castle Daily Courier*. William Hawkins, "one of the Greensburg negroes," had been arrested. Hawkins was charged with intoxication, but his "real offense" was insulting white women on New Castle's Broad and Main Streets. The *Daily Courier*'s headline read: "He Insulted White Women." At about 3 p.m., in front of a grocery store, Hawkins "approached a young lady from the country who shrank from him in fear" and called out for protection. The article included this message: "New colored men of the city should take warning from the arrest of Hawkins and conduct themselves in the proper manner. Nobody can molest white women in New Castle. It will not be tolerated for a moment." John Hawkins, William's brother, was not allowed into the jail for a visit. When he "got pretty flip" about it, he was told to be "pretty well on his way towards the state line by evening or go to jail."[90]

Consistent with Ray Stannard Baker's interpretation, it might be tempting to conclude that following the riot Greensburg accepted "respectable" Black citizens and rejected only "undesirable" Blacks. Ray Laster, Harry Scott, and Frank Woods, for example, had been identified as gamblers. What happened to Scott is unclear, but the evidence (or lack thereof) suggests that he, like Woods, left Greensburg and did not return.[91] Laster fled to Indianapolis and was there in October 1907 when Greensburg newspapers reported that he had been struck by an interurban car and suffered a broken leg. The *Greensburg Standard* noted that he "was asked to leave here last spring and has since been a resident of the capital city." Laster and his wife appear in Indianapolis in both the 1910 city directory and the federal census. As he had done in Greensburg, Laster was working as a porter in a barber shop. His wife died in a fire in 1913 and was buried in

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[89] "Exile Negroes Make For Here," *Rushville Republican*, May 1, 1907, p. 1.

[90] "From This City in Jail at New Castle for Insulting White Women," *Greensburg News*, May 17, 1907, p. 4; "He Insulted White Women," *New Castle Daily Courier*, May 7, 1907.

[91] *Indianapolis Star*, May 2, 1907, p. 1.

Indianapolis. Ray Laster (1881–1917) passed away in 1917 and was buried in his hometown of Knightstown. An obituary in that town's *Tri-County Banner* mentioned that he had recently been working in Danville, Illinois, but did not mention the city of Greensburg.[92]

Contrary to Baker's interpretation (and the reputed reputations of Ray Laster, Harry Scott, and Frank Woods), I have found no evidence that William Frazier, employed as a coachman, was an "undesirable" citizen. Frazier was married to a woman from Rushville. After the riot, he and his family moved there but remained connected to family and friends in Greensburg.[93] They are found in Indianapolis in the 1930 and 1940 censuses. Around 1950 they moved to Connersville, where John William Frazier (1874–1966) passed away in 1966.[94]

At least four of the victims of the riot still lived in Greensburg in 1910: George Edwards, Adolphus Frazier, Earl Hood, and Garfield Meadows. Edwards lived with his family at 614 West Washington Street and was employed as a laborer at Garland Mill. Frazier and his family lived at 390 South Franklin Street, and he was still employed as a plumber. Hood may have left for Indianapolis the night of the riot, but the 1910 census shows that he was back in Greensburg and lived at 606 South Broadway Street with his wife and family. He was a porter at a local hotel. Meadows lived at 634 West North Street, with his mother and aunt, and he was still employed as a barber.

As Baker noted, the riot did not drive the Black community out of Greensburg and turn it into a "sundown" town. The lives of most people are complicated, and they do not have the option of packing up and leaving immediately after they experience a negative event. Adolphus Frazier, for example, was employed, married, and had children to consider. He was

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[92] On May 15, 1908, the *Greensburg News* reported that Ray Laster "was formerly porter in Strausberger's (sic) barber shop, and it will be remembered left here on a 'short call' notice." "Seriously Injured," *Greensburg Standard*, October 4, 1907, p. 3; "Ray Laster," *Greensburg New Era*, October 10, 1907, p. 8; "Roll of the Dead" (for "Waymond Laster"), *Tri-County Banner* (Knightstown), May 4, 1917, p. 4; Bertha Laster, Certificate of Death, January 4, 1913, Indiana State Board of Health, Ancestry.com; Raymond Laster, Certificate of Death, April 29, 1917, Indiana State Board of Health, Ancestry.com; "Knightstown, IND.," *Indianapolis Recorder*, April 6, 1912, p. 6; *R. L. Polk & Company's Indianapolis City Directory for 1910* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1910); "Woman Burned To Death," *Muncie Star Press*, January 6, 1913, p. 7.

[93] "Rushville," *Indianapolis Recorder,* January 30, 1909, p. 3; "Rushville," *Indianapolis Recorder*, October 9, 1909, p. 3; "Rushville," *Indianapolis Recorder*, June 11, 1910, p. 3.

[94] "Mary M. Frazier, Age 72, Expires," *Rushville Evening Daily Republican*, May 17, 1958; "John William Frazier," https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/180327784/john-william-frazier, accessed February 17, 2022; "Virgil Frazier," *Indianapolis Recorder*, April 11, 1964, p. 7.

still in Greensburg in 1910, but by 1920 he had left for Connersville, where he died and was buried in 1939.[95]

Orlando and Irene Hood, the parents of Earl Hood, lived out their lives in Greensburg. When Orlando Hood died in 1914, his obituary in the *Greensburg Weekly Democrat* included the following: "Born in the days of negro bondage and living to see the time when his race was placed on equal footing with the members of the white race, Mr. Hood went through the gigantic conflict which gave him absolute freedom."[96] Orlando Hood may have found "freedom," but that did not keep his son from being attacked by a white mob. Earl Hood's World War I draft registration card for 1917–18 shows him working as a waiter in Connersville. The 1930 census shows his family living in Logansport, but he was divorced and living in Cincinnati. Hood's World War II draft registration card shows him in Columbus, Ohio, working for Don Ebright in the Ohio State Sales Tax Department. In October 1950, the *Ohio State News* carried a photograph of Ebright and several members of his staff, including Earl Hood. It appears that Hood (1885–1962) passed away in Columbus in 1962.[97]

The 1920 Greensburg city directory shows that George Edwards and his wife still lived at 614 W. Washington Street. Not long after this, he left the city. In 1930, he worked in Logansport as a janitor. George Washington Edwards spent more than half of his life in Greensburg, but he passed away in Bloomington, Indiana, in 1936 and was buried there. His death

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[95] Adolphus Frazier's wife, Priscilla, died in 1913 and was buried in South Park Cemetery; he subsequently remarried. *Greensburg Standard*, April 23, 1915, p. 4; "Priscilla Frazier," https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/24378660/priscilla-jessie-frazier, accessed April 25, 2021. The 1920 census shows Adolphus Frazier living in Connersville (U.S., Fourteenth Census, Population Schedules for Connersville, Fayette County, Indiana); he was buried in Connersville City Cemetery. Adolphus Frazier, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/193176506/adolphus-frazier, accessed April 25, 2021.

[96] *Greensburg Weekly Democrat*, November 20, 1914, p. 1.

[97] In 1923, the *Logansport Pharos Tribune* reported that Cora Pearl Hood charged Earl Hood with abandonment, having deserted her in 1915, and that she was granted a divorce. *Logansport Pharos Tribune*, April 5, 1923, p. 10; "Wife Given Notice," *Logansport Pharos Tribune*, June 21, 1923, p. 13. An Earl Hood died in Columbus, Ohio, on October 8, 1962. The deceased was African American and born in Indiana, but the birth date on the death certificate is not consistent with the date of birth on the war registration documents. Earl Calvin Hood, U.S. World War I Draft Registration Card, September 12, 1918, Connersville, Indiana, Ancestry.com; Earle Calvin Hood, U.S. World War II Draft Registration Card, April 25, 1942, Columbus, Ohio, Ancestry.com; "Don H. Ebright and Employees," *Ohio State News*, October 21, 1950, p. 14, accessed August 24, 2022, https://digital-collections.columbuslibrary.org/digital/collection/african/id/9864/; "Obituaries," *Ohio Sentinel*, October 25, 1962, p. 26, accessed February 17, 2022, https://digital-collections.columbuslibrary.org/digital/collection/african/id/21951/; Earl Hood, Certificate of Death, October 9, 1962, Division of Vital Statistics, Ohio Department of Health, Ancestry.com.

certificate states that he worked in a grain elevator in Greensburg for forty years; there is no information on why he left the city.[98]

Garfield Meadows lived a complicated life. In 1914, he was convicted of petty larceny (robbing the St. John and Guthrie drug store in Greensburg), sentenced to one to eight years in the state prison at Michigan City, and then transferred to the "Indiana State Farm." He was paroled in 1915, returned for violating parole in 1916, and then paroled again in 1917. The 1920 census records him living in Indianapolis with his mother. In 1921, a criminal court in Indianapolis found him guilty of second-degree burglary, and he was returned to Michigan City with a sentence of two to fourteen years. Meadows was paroled in 1923 and relocated to Chicago, where he passed away in 1934 and was buried.[99]

Adolphus Frazier, William Frazier, Earl Hood, Ray Laster, Garfield Meadows, Harry Scott, and Frank Woods were the direct victims of the Greensburg riot. George Edwards and his family were victimized after the fact. Not one of these men lived out their lives in Greensburg. They probably left for a variety of reasons. The available evidence suggests that some of them were solid, respectable citizens, while others were not, but all of them were Black men.

With respect to the white men arrested—Richard Lacy, Thomas Morgan, James Mowry/Mowrer, Andrew Muldoon, and Charles Speer—justice was swift and lenient. The riot occurred on Tuesday, April 30, and they were arrested the next day. On Thursday, the *Greensburg New Era* published an editorial expressing its "hearty approval" of Sheriff Biddinger for moving John Green out of town. The editorial stated that "there can be no excuse for a resort to unlawful violence," and called on citizens to protect the safety of white women: "There has but recently been a horrible outrage committed in one of the homes of the city by a negro brute . . . The safety

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[98] Neither George nor Jane Edwards, or their children, are found in the 1924, 1928, or 1929 Greensburg city directories. In 1930, George Edwards, a widower, remarried a woman in Logansport. George Washington Edwards, Certificate of Death, September 12, 1936, State of Indiana; George Edwards, https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/87231/memorial-search?firstname=George&middlename=&lastname=Edwards&cemeteryName=Valhalla+Memory+Gardens&birthyear=&birthyearfilter=&deathyear=&deathyearfilter=&memorialid=&mcid=&linkedToName=&datefilter=&orderby=r, accessed February 17, 2022.

[99] "Arrest Follows Repeated Visits," *Greensburg News*, August 14, 1914, p. 5; Garfield Meadows, Indiana State Prison North (Michigan City), October 31, 1914, Department of Corrections Records, Indiana State Archives; Garfield Meadows, Indiana State Prison North (Michigan City), April 27, 1921, Department of Corrections Records, Indiana State Archives; "Sentenced to State Prison For Theft," *Greensburg Daily News*, April 28, 1921, p. 1; Garfield Meadows, U.S. Deaths and Stillborn Index, 1916–1947, Ancestry.com.

of every white woman in town depends upon driving from the city the vampires who are corrupting the morals of the men and endangers the safety of the women."[100] On Friday, the *Greensburg News* defended Thomas Morgan and Andrew Muldoon:

> Andrew Muldoon and Tom Morgan have for months past resided with their families near the negro quarters and watched the disgusting actions of the blacks. Even on occasions have members of their families said to have been insulted by the rougher element of the negroes and it seems that forbearance at last ceased to be a virtue in such cases. None of the men against whom affidavits have been filed will leave the city, but instead with their attorneys fight the charges against them.[101]

Richard "Lacey," James "Mowrer," and Andrew Muldoon were formally charged with being the riot's "ringleaders." Separate trials were arranged.[102]

In the mayor's office on Friday, May 31, prosecutor Frank Hamilton presented the first case against Richard "Lacey." It went to the jury at 3 p.m. Five minutes later, Lacey was found not guilty. After this, the charges against Muldoon were dismissed; it is unclear what happened to the charge against Mowrer. As reported in the *Greensburg News*, the charge that "Lacey" had struck Garfield Meadows as he stood on the corner of the De Armond Hotel was held over indefinitely. Available information suggests that the assault and battery charge against Lacy, and other charges associated with the riot, were dropped. A search of contemporary newspapers has not revealed additional court appearances by any of those charged with participation in the riot. Greensburg's African American community would have understood that statements about respectable Blacks being protected and disreputable whites being punished were rhetorical.[103]

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[100] Brent Campney documents numerous instances in which local authorities tried to protect Black people from white violence. Campney, *Hostile Heartland*, 136–60; "Editorial," *Greensburg New Era*, May 2, 1907, p. 2.

[101] *Greensburg News*, May 3, 1907, p. 3.

[102] *Indianapolis Star*, June 1, 1907, p. 8.

[103] The authorities may have waited until John Green was convicted before quietly dropping the outstanding charges against Lacy et al. The *Greensburg Saturday Review* subsequently reported that Dick "Lacey," after threatening to "punch the editor's face," had received a retraction from the *Greensburg New Era/Graphic* for "certain slanderous publications." The *Star* reported that the acquittal of "Lacey" "practically annuls" the cases against Muldoon and "Mowrey." *Indianapolis*

Given that Richard Lacy was fired from his job, there is merit in the argument that some white citizens were genuinely upset with the "worst white characters in the city" and that the rioters paid a price for their actions. But how high that price was and how the riot influenced their lives is unclear. As noted, the *Indianapolis Star* reported just after the riot that James "Mowry" and Charles Speer would be ordered out of Greensburg, but a few days later the *Greensburg News* stated that none of those involved would leave town. What transpired was a mix of these two outcomes.

Other than newspaper reports, I have been unable to find a record of a "James Mowry" living or dying in Greensburg. A September 1908 report in the *Greensburg Standard* states that James "Mowry," George Dickey (town marshal from 1906 to 1910), and three other men had left for "a weeks outing" near Azalia, in Bartholomew County, on the White River. The 1908 Greensburg city directory shows James "Mowrer" living with his parents at 603 East North Street. He was employed in "gas fitting." The Mowrer family lived together for decades. In 1910, James Mowrer (a widower) and his children lived with his parents and siblings on East North Street; he was a laborer. In 1920, Mowrer and his son lived with his father (a widower) and several siblings; his occupation was listed as "none." In 1930, Mowrer lived with his sister and two brothers; his occupation was "driller" in the "gas well" industry. At some point he moved to the Versailles community where he worked as a cook at "Romweber's camp" and then as a janitor for the Versailles fire department. James Mowrer died in Batesville in 1945 and was buried in an unmarked grave in South Park Cemetery.[104]

Star, June 1, 1907, p. 8. See also "Riot Charge Dismissed," *Greensburg News*, June 7, 1907, p. 1; "Continued by Agreement," *Greensburg Standard*, May 10, 1907, p. 1; "Not Guilty," *Greensburg Standard*, June 7, 1907, p. 1; "Backed Up," *Greensburg New Era,* July 25, 1907, p. 6; *Greensburg Saturday Review*, November 5, 1908, p. 6.

[104] I thank Russell Wilhoit and members of the Ripley County Historical Society for information on the death and burial of James Mowrer. I have been unable to locate a death certificate for James Mowrer. The relationship between James "Mowry" and the town marshal is interesting, if impossible to explore fully, especially if "Mowry" was James "Mowrer," the grandson of Decatur County Sheriff Phillip Mowrer. James "Mowry" is not found in the 1908 Greensburg City Directory; James "Mowrer" is. The 1940 census shows James Mowrer living on "Fishing Camp Road" and working as a "caretaker" in a "Fishing camp" in Johnson Township, Ripley County (U.S., Sixteenth Census, 1940, Population Schedules for Johnson Township, Ripley County, Indiana). *Greensburg Standard*, September 18, 1908, p. 7; Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana*, 160; *The Inter-State Directory Company's Directory of Greensburg and Decatur County Gazetteer For The Year 1908*; *Greensburg Times,* January 12, 1945, p. 1; "James Mowrer Dies at Batesville Hospital," *Versailles Republican*, January 11, 1945, p. 8.

Thomas Morgan and Andrew Muldoon died in Greensburg. In 1910, Morgan lived at 321 South Franklin Street with one of his daughters and a son-in-law. He was still employed as a hostler. Morgan (1854–1935) passed away in the Independent Order of Odd Fellows Home (I.O.O.F.H.), at 80 years of age. In the 1920s, the local Ku Klux Klan met on Thursdays at the IOOF Hall. Thomas Morgan was buried in South Park Cemetery, in the IOOF plot.[105]

What became of Andrew Muldoon is more complicated. In 1910, his family lived at 233 South Franklin Street, just a few doors away from Thomas Morgan, but Andrew is not listed with them. The 1920 census records Andrew Muldoon living in Indianapolis with his brother and mother. When his mother passed away in 1925 at St. Francis Hospital in Beech Grove, the obituary described her as "one of the veteran residents of Greensburg." At the time of her death (according to the obituary), Andrew Muldoon lived in Indianapolis. The 1930 census shows Muldoon renting a home, with others, in Greensburg, at 132 South East Street. His death certificate indicates that he died in the "Decatur County Poor House" in 1935 and that his residence was the Decatur County Infirmary. His obituary described him as "a former conductor on the Big Four railroad." He was buried in St. Mary's Cemetery.[106]

Charles Speer's life was especially complicated. In October 1910, the *Greensburg News* reported that he had been charged with burglary. In December 1910, the *Greensburg Standard* reported that Mrs. Anna Speer had filed for divorce. Details in this article may explain her absence from the Speer household in 1900: the couple married in 1894, lived together in Greensburg for a few years, and then Anna moved back to Shelbyville. They had not lived together for "about eight years," although the 1900 census suggests that their marriage was troubled even earlier. In February 1919, the *Greensburg Daily News* reported that Charles Speer had been arrested with ten quarts of liquor and charged with intoxication. And in

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[105] "Exposing The Klan," *Muncie-Post Democrat*, November 14, 1924, p. 1; "Thomas Morgan," https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/86955/memorial-search?firstName=&lastName=Morgan&page=3#sr-48227155, accessed May 10, 2021.

[106] Andrew Muldoon lived in the infirmary only a few weeks; prior to that he resided at 132 South East Street. His sister, Anna (Muldoon) Link, is buried in Holy Cross Cemetery, Indianapolis. "Aged Lady Dies in Indianapolis," *Greensburg Daily News*, September 5, 1925, p. 1; "Railway Man Dies At Co. Infirmary," *Greensburg Daily News*, May 13, 1935; Andrew Muldoon, Certificate of Death, May 11, 1935, State of Indiana, Division of Public Health; Andrew Muldoon, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/24462880/andrew-j.-muldoon, accessed February 17, 2022.

August 1922, the *Greensburg Standard* reported that Speer was one of five men "arrested on a gaming charge last night." It is not clear if Charles Speer was ever convicted of the many offenses he was charged with. It appears that in 1924, in Alameda, California, he married the widow of his older brother, Harry Speer.[107]

What became of Richard Lacy was more straightforward. The *Greensburg New Era* reported in February1909 that "Dick Lacey" and his family were moving to New Castle where he would be employed in a factory. In 1910, Richard Lacy, his wife, and their children are found living in Brookville. He was employed as a machinist in a factory. In 1920, they are found in Connersville, where he worked as a machinist. The 1930 and 1940 censuses show them living in Hamilton County, Ohio. Richard Lacy (1873–1943) died in Butler, Ohio, and was buried in Brookville, Indiana.[108]

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[107] This assumes that the Charles Speer baptized in Greensburg in 1874; child of E. M. and V. Speer and sibling of H. L., O. W., and A. Speer in 1880; child of the widow Melvina Speer and sibling of Oscar W. and Mary A. Speer in 1900; divorced by Anna Speer in 1910; and found in various newspaper reports are the same person. As noted, the *Star* reported that the Charles Speer arrested for involvement in the riot was a painter (*Indianapolis Star*, May 1, 1907, p. 1), which was the occupation for "Charley" Speer in the 1900 census. The 1910 census has Melvina Speer living in Los Angeles (U.S., Thirteenth Census, 1910, population schedules for Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California); she passed away in 1917 and was buried in Los Angeles. Harry Speer died in 1921 and was buried in Los Angeles next to his mother Melvina, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/111166429/harry-louis-speer, accessed February 17, 2022. Charles Speer may have moved back and forth between California and Indiana. The 1910 Oakland, California, city directory shows "Speer Chas J," a painter, living there and boarding with "H L Speer." *Husted's Oakland Berkeley and Alameda Directory 1910* (Oakland, Calif., 1910), 818. Charles Jessie Speer married Frances Speer, in Hayward, California, on October 7, 1924. The marriage certificate states that he was a painter. Frances Speer was likely the widow of Charles's older brother, Harry. Their marriage certificate indicates it was the second marriage for each of them; he was divorced, she was a widow. Harry and Frances are found in Oakland, California, in the 1920 census (U.S., Fourteenth Census, 1920, population schedules for Oakland, Alameda County, California). "Five Homes Burglarized," *Greensburg News*, October 7, 1910, p. 6; "Man Is Arrested For Bootlegging," *Greensburg Daily News*, February 12, 1919, p. 1; "Five Men On Gaming Charge," *Greensburg Standard*, August 18, 1922, p. 1; California, U.S. Marriage Records from Select Counties, 1850–1941, Ancestry.com.

[108] The 1900 census shows Richard Lacy's father and what appears to be his father's second wife living in Greensburg (Edward and Delilah Lacey, U.S., Twelfth Census, 1900, population schedules for Greensburg, Decatur County, Indiana). The 1905 and 1908 Greensburg City Directories indicate that Richard Lacy, with his wife Blanche, lived in Greensburg, and he worked as a hostler. This may have been his job prior to and after being fired by Web Woodfill. In 1919, the *Greensburg Daily* News reported that Richard "Lacey," "a former resident here," had pleaded guilty to "importing intoxicants." If this is the same Richard Lacy, it is interesting that a "colored" man arrested with "Lacey" also pleaded guilty. "Former Resident Fined For Importing Booze," *Greensburg Daily News*, February 3, 1919, p. 1. See also "An Awakening," *Greensburg New Era*, February 18, 1909, pp. 1, 4; "Headstone Applications for Military Veterans," January 19, 1944, Ancestry.com; Richard Lacy, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/182468177/richard-e-lacy, accessed February 17, 2022.

The Causes of the Greensburg Riot of 1907

Contemporary descriptions suggested the riot was caused by issues related to social class. More than a century later, one might argue that a financial panic in spring 1907 exacerbated tension between whites and Blacks who competed for jobs. In response to John Green's attack on Caroline Sefton, an elderly white widow, working-class whites lashed out at underemployed and unemployed Blacks, especially those associated with the reputed dens of iniquity that were the Red Onion and the Garlic.[109]

The argument that the financial panic caused the riot is questionable. At the national level, the panic that began in March 1907 was largely confined to the stock market. The business cycle did not peak until May and overall factory employment was essentially unchanged from January through September 1907.[110] Locally, a search of the weekly *Greensburg Standard* suggests that the March panic did not affect the city's economy.[111] On April 19, 1907 (eleven days before the riot), the *Greensburg News* did report that the Indianapolis & Cincinnati traction line had been completed and a large force of men "will now be discharged."[112] This development may have raised tension in the community, but most (if not all) of the Black victims and most (if not all) of the white perpetrators were employed in occupations not associated with the traction line. Based on city directory and census information, the occupations of the eight African American victims

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[109] *Greensburg Daily News*, April 25, 2007; Dana M. Caldemeyer, "Conditional Conservatism: Evansville, Indiana's Embrace of the Ku Klux Klan, 1919–24," *Ohio Valley History* 11 (December 2011), 3–24, esp. 9, 21.

[110] *Historical Statistics of the United States* shows that the economy peaked in May (the second quarter of 1907) but adds that dates are "tentative and subject to revision." *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789–1945: A Supplement to the Statistical Abstract of the United States* (Washington, D. C., 1949), 320–21, 329. A recent analysis states that the economy "slipped into a recession in May," followed by a major financial panic in October 1907. Donald P. Morgan and James Narron, "The Final Crisis Chronicle: The Panic of 1907 and the Birth of the Fed," Liberty Street Economics, Federal Reserve Bank of New York, accessed November 12, 2021, https://libertystreeteconomics.newyorkfed.org/2016/11/the-final-crisis-chronicle-the-panic-of-1907-and-the-birth-of-the-fed/. See also O. M. W. Sprague, "The American Crisis of 1907," *The Economic Journal* 18, no. 71 (September 1908), 353–72.

[111] A local lumber dealer complained of being unable to meet rapidly increasing demand; a local farmer commented on rising wages for farm hands: "No longer are the wages of a farm hand to be scoffed at." "The Demand is Greater Than Supply, Which is Being Rapidly Depleted," *Greensburg Standard*, April 19, 1907, p. 8; "They're Well Paid," *Greensburg Standard*, April 26, 1907, p. 4. The April 26 issue of the *Greensburg Standard* carried a full-page advertisement for a "Great Bankruptcy Sale," but noted that the items were available because of the failure of "several eastern manufacturers," not local manufacturers. *Greensburg Standard*, April 26, 1907, p. 8.

[112] *Greensburg News*, April 19, 1907, p. 7.

were two porters, a plumber, a barber, a coachman, a grain mill laborer, and two laborers. The occupations of four of the five white men arrested were engineer/machinist, hostler, painter, and railway worker (see Table 2). James Mowrer, if he was the fifth person arrested, was a plasterer and gas fitter. These are not occupations that would have been prone to interracial competition and conflict.[113] Newspapers did not report that those arrested were out of work. Papers did report that Richard Lacy was fired *after* the riot and that neither James "Mowry" nor Charles Speer "works steadily."

The argument that economic competition among shiftless whites and Blacks caused the riot—which minimizes the importance of race as a motive—is consistent with the rhetoric of white elites not only in Greensburg but also in other cities, such as Springfield, Illinois, where elites claimed that a 1908 riot had less to do with race than it did "poor white trash" fighting with "undesirable" Black troublemakers.[114] However, a careful examination of the available information shows that there was no single cause of the Greensburg riot. The riot was fueled by interconnected issues of race, social class, and gender, with race the most important.[115]

When newspapers blamed the riot on white riffraff and recent Black arrivals who were unemployed and spent their time "gambling and pilfering from the white residents," they conveniently scapegoated the victims, minimized racism, and justified violence. Ray Laster, Harry Scott, and Frank Woods may have been relatively new to the city, and they may or may not have had dubious records, but the Frazier, Hood, and Meadows families had been in Decatur County for decades. George Edwards, Adolphus and William Frazier, and Garfield Meadows had lived in Greensburg since at least 1900 (see Table 2). Earl Hood was born and raised in Greensburg, was the son of a respected Civil War veteran, and was at work when he was assaulted. The decision by the city's leaders to have the police "serve notice on a number of disreputable [Black] characters" triggered the riot. It began when Ray Laster (who was employed) was "accosted" by a white man nursing an "old grudge" and ordered to leave the city. Following the Laster incident, other white men joined in and "walked the streets for several hours assaulting and beating *every colored man* that they came across" (emphasis added). The crowd was going to "'clean out' the *entire negro*

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[113] Senechal de la Roche, *In Lincoln's Shadow*, 110–15.

[114] Ibid., 104–119, 173–78; Campney, *Hostile Heartland*, 60–61, 106–108, 149–52.

[115] Patricia Hill Collins, "Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection"; Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot*, 7–12, 73–81.

quarters" (emphasis added). "Other places of *peaceable colored residents*" were attacked (emphasis added). The victims were not attacked because they were shiftless nor because they threatened the jobs of white men. They were attacked because they were Black.[116]

An account in the *Greensburg Standard*, which retroactively legitimated the riot, may have best captured the intersecting motives of the white mob: "Low, degraded, shameless white brutes called women, have been known to congregate at these negro dives and have for their associates and companions buck negroes and negro wenches . . . Is it any wonder that our people thought it high time to take a hand in law enforcement?"[117] It would appear that the privilege of white working-class men was threatened by three groups of people: Black working-class men ("buck negroes"), Black working-class women ("negro wenches"), and white working-class women ("brutes"). Black men and women enjoying themselves in a Black-owned bar would have been an affront to some white people. The open association of white women with Black men in a "negro dive" would have been especially threatening because it challenged the assumption that white women were not attracted to Black men; it challenged the assumption that white women had sex with Black men only when they were raped; and it threatened the practice of using alleged Black sexual predations to retroactively legitimate white violence. Rhetoric about desirables and undesirables, coupled with the arrest (but not conviction) of Lacey et al., allowed white elites to blame the riot on class issues and deny their own racism. Similar justifications of white violence are found across the Midwest.[118] All of this helps us understand the place of the Greensburg race riot in the history of race relations in southeast Indiana.

After the Riot: Greensburg, Decatur County, and Southeastern Indiana

In his *History of Decatur County*, Lewis Harding does not mention the riot. He does comment on the state of the African American community: "There have never been many colored people in Greensburg, and at the present time (1915) there are only ten families." He also notes that the African Methodist Church "now has about twenty active members." The

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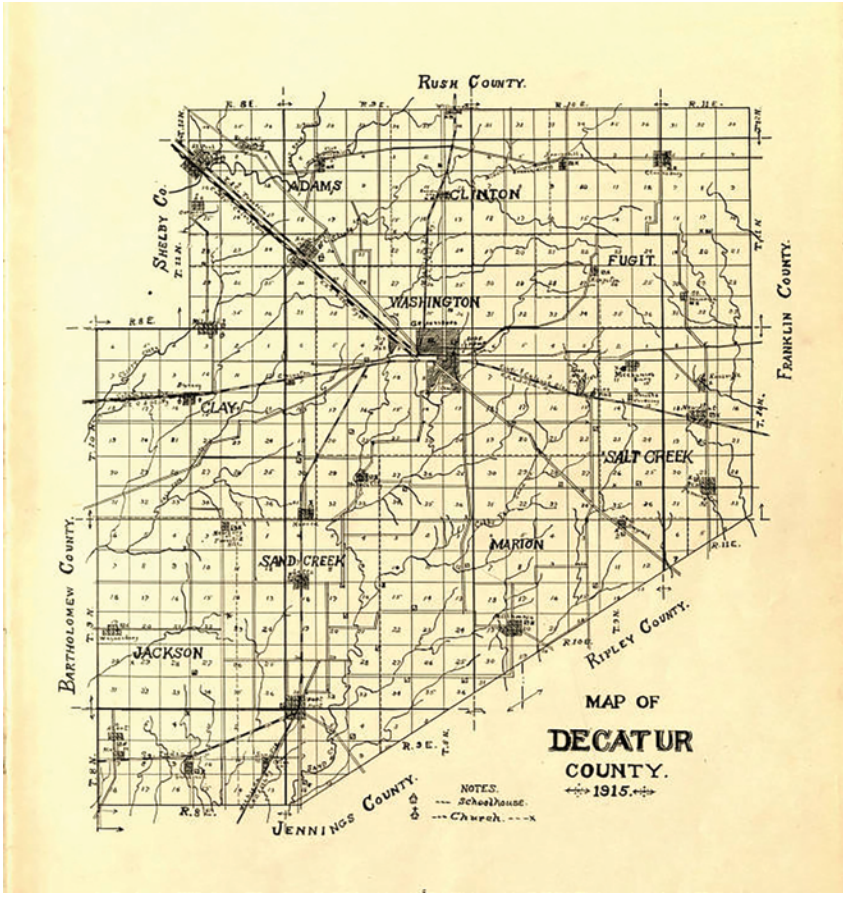
[116] *Greensburg News*, May 3, 1907.

[117] "Race Riot!" *Greensburg Standard*, May 3, 1907, p. 3.

[118] Campney, *Hostile Heartland*, 6, 108–112, 192–98; Blocker, "Race, Sex and Riot," 40; Wells, *Southern Horrors*; Wells, *A Red Record*; Senechal de la Roche, *In Lincoln's Shadow*, 173–78.



Decatur County and adjacent counties, 1915
Plat Book of Decatur County, Indiana (1915)

members included Adolphus Frazier, a trustee, and Irene Hood, a steward. By 1920, Adolphus Frazier lived in Connersville. In 1921, the Greensburg AME church held its last service; in 1929, Mrs. Hood died, and the church and land were sold. Harding commented on residents of the Snelling community in Fugit Township: "There is now only one left in the township, Margaret Wilson, of Kingston." Margaret Wilson moved into Greensburg and, as described by Pat Smith, "When she died in 1986 she was the last of the lifetime, or longtime, African American residents in Decatur County."[119]

[119] Pat Smith, "African American Church Was Important," *Greensburg Daily News*, February 6, 2014, accessed May 5, 2021, https://www.greensburgdailynews.com/opinion/columns/pat-smith-african-american-church-was-important/article_d2c8dd7f-f93a-5b60-b08c-d455b57eb7ec.html;

The Black community left Greensburg over time, some by natural causes and others by relocating.

It is beyond the scope of this analysis to examine definitively the many possible causes of the decline in the African American population in Greensburg in the first half of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, a broad comparison of the population trend in Decatur County and its adjacent counties is revealing.

Six counties are adjacent to Decatur County—(clockwise) Rush, Franklin, Ripley, Jennings, Bartholomew, and Shelby. The first recorded presence of African Americans by county was: Franklin (by 1811); Jennings (by 1820); Ripley (by 1820); Shelby (by 1821); Bartholomew (1821); Decatur (1823); and Rush (by 1830). Several of the counties were the home of an African American settlement or community prior to 1850.[120] The African American experience in these seven counties was not uniform.

Table 3 presents the total population and the African American population in Decatur County and its adjacent counties between 1820 and 2010.[121] Apart from Shelby County, the African American population in every county declined between 1850 and 1860. These decreases reflect the influence of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, the 1851 Indiana constitution, and other anti-Black initiatives. Table 3 also shows that Decatur County was not alone in experiencing a decrease in African American population between 1900 and 1910. Apart from Shelby County, every county

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Harding, *History of Decatur County Indiana*, 124, 220; Pat Smith, "Conditions were bad in Greensburg," *Greensburg Daily News*, February 19, 2014, accessed May 7, 2021, https://www.greensburgdailynews.com/opinion/columns/pat-smith-conditions-were-bad-in-greensburg/article_a88b61a0-f7c3-53cd-b94d-15b0c5b0fd2e.html; Harrison, "A Brief History of the Growth and Development of Greensburg, Indiana, 1822–1968," 31.

[120] Early Black Settlements: Early Black Settlements by County, accessed November 18, 2022, https://indianahistory.org/research/research-materials/early-black-settlements/; Wilma Moore, "A Treasure Hunt: Black Rural Settlements in Indiana by 1870," *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History*, 27, no. 1 (Winter 2015), 24–33; Cord, "Black Rural Settlements in Indiana Before 1960"; Pratt and Smith, "A Guide to the Underground Railroad in Decatur County, Indiana."

[121] Information in Table 3 is from successive censuses between 1820 and 2010, many of which are available through the web pages of the United States Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/en.html); STATSINDIANA: Indiana's Public Utility Data (for 2000 and 2010); and the IPUMS National Historical Geographic Information System (for 1980). In a few instances (and typically revealing only small differences), census compilation information differs from census report volumes and data. On occasion, pdf entries in online tables are difficult to read and/or contradict entries in other tables, STATSINDIANA data, and NHGIS data. STATSINDIANA, accessed July 15, 2022, http://www.stats.indiana.edu/index.asp; Steven Manson, Jonathan Schroeder, David Van Riper, Tracy Kugler, and Steven Ruggles, IPUMS National Historical Geographic Information System: Version 17.0 [dataset], 2022, accessed December 1, 2022, http://doi.org/10.18128/D050.V17.0.

Table 3. Decennial Census of Population for Decatur and Adjacent Counties, 1820–2010 (Source: US Federal Census and Related Reports)

Year	Decatur County Total	Decatur County African American	Franklin County Total	Franklin County African American	Ripley County Total	Ripley County African American	Bartholomew County Total	Bartholomew County African American	Rush County Total	Rush County African American	Jennings County Total	Jennings County African American	Shelby County Total	Shelby County African American
1820			10763	65	1822	2					2003	45		
1830	5887	9	10190	91	3989	8	5476	6	9707	107	3974	58	6295	8
1840	12171	63	13349	82	10392	43	10042	13	16456	481	8829	158	12005	20
1850	15107	156	17968	209	14820	96	12,428	82	16445	427	12096	323	15502	19
1860	17294	24	19549	103	19054	87	17865	7	16193	419	14749	151	19569	21
1870	19053	87	20223	24	20977	103	21133	11	17626	463	16218	422	21892	128
1880	19779	235	20092	12	21627	157	22777	138	19238	550	16453	408	25257	287
1890	19277	164	18366	6	19350	74	23867	314	19034	534	14608	294	25454	313
1900	19518	133	16388	7	19881	32	24594	335	20148	577	15757	374	26491	383
1910	18793	89	15336	6	19452	31	24813	319	19349	418	14203	295	26802	483
1920	17813	51	14806	4	18694	7	23887	229	19241	416	13280	247	25982	420
1930	17308	10	14498	0	18078	10	24864	191	19412	270	11800	257	26552	413
1940	17722	9	14412	1	18898	3	28276	181	18927	252	13680	220	25953	365
1950	18218	5	16034	7	18763	5	36108	245	19799	242	15250	251	28026	335
1960	20019	3	17015	3	20641	8	48198	315	20393	235	17267	286	34093	379
1970	22738	4	16943	4	21138	4	57022	513	20352	183	19454	230	37797	318
1980	23841	2	19612	2	24398	7	65088	974	19604	164	22854	197	39887	301
1990	23645	39	19580	10	24616	16	63657	1005	18129	142	23661	209	40307	330
2000	24572	12	22252	7	26654	13	71763	1342	18194	110	27747	205	43479	341
2010	25795	91	23058	40	28815	69	76823	1509	17383	146	28482	228	44295	480

considered experienced such a decrease. The decreases in Franklin and Ripley Counties, which already had very few African Americans, were quite small. The decrease in Decatur County is notable (133 to 89 African Americans). Decatur County lost one-third (44/133=.33) of its African American population between 1900 and 1910, a larger percentage than in any of the other counties. This large decrease reflects the impact of the Greensburg riot.

An alternative to the argument that racism drove African Americans from southeastern Indiana is the argument that people—white and Black—left because there were fewer and fewer jobs. Because of farm mechanization, for example, fewer laborers were needed.[122] This argument is problematic. Table 3 shows that between 1900 and 1940 (if not earlier), Decatur, Franklin, and Ripley Counties were, in effect, depopulated of African Americans. The other counties experienced decreases in Black population after 1910, but not to this degree. Shelby County is especially interesting. Starting with 1850, there was an increase in African American population every decade until 1910 when it peaked and then remained (relatively) high past 1950. Table 3 suggests that when it came to African Americans, Decatur, Franklin, and Ripley Counties were especially unwelcoming if not outright hostile.

Census data from Greensburg reinforces the findings with respect to Decatur County. The 1900 census reports that 5,034 people lived in the city, of whom 107 were African American (see Table 4). Between 1900 and 1910, the city's total population *increased* but its African American population *decreased*. Some of this decrease was caused by the riot. Over time and following the riot, the city's total population waxed and waned, but its African American population rapidly declined. By 1940, the city had 6,065 citizens, but only three of them were "Negro." By 1940, Ray Stannard Baker's statement that "the respectable negroes are still living in Greensburg on friendly terms with the white people" had lost its meaning.[123]

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[122] *Greensburg Daily News*, January 29, 2014.

[123] The 1930 census did not report characteristics for towns between 2,500 and 10,000 in population. As noted for Table 1, information for Greensburg's population in 1930 is from STATSINDIANA, accessed December 7, 2022, http://www.stats.indiana.edu/population/poptotals/historic_counts_cities.asp. The 1930 African American population is an estimate; the 1930 census records that eight persons identified as "negro" lived in Washington Township, within which Greensburg is located. Baker, *Following the Color Line*, 129.

Table 4. Population Trend in Greensburg (1900–1940)

	Greensburg Total	"Negro"
1900	5034	107
1910	5420	71
1920	5345	25
1930	5702	8 (est.)
1940	6065	3

Numerous indicators suggest the Greensburg community was unwelcoming to African Americans, Catholics, Jews, and immigrants in the decades following the riot. Minstrel shows with white performers in blackface were an "institution" in the community until at least 1939.[124] A few months after the riot, St. Mary's Catholic Church was robbed and set on fire. A 1916 speech from an "anti-Catholic demagogue," sponsored by the "Guardians of Liberty" and delivered at the local post of the Grand Army of the Republic, attracted around 200 people. Noteworthy events in 1924 included a fire of "unknown origin" that damaged St. Mary's school (May); an attempt to rob the votive stand in front of St. Mary's Church (July); and more than a thousand Klansmen and Klanswomen marching through town (September). After the Klan march, a crowd estimated at 5,000 people listened to "splendid patriotic addresses and a fine program of music was provided by the Klan band and drum corps from Indianapolis." A "national speaker from the Imperial branch" explained that "members must be native, white, Protestant, Gentile citizens." On the day before Christmas 1925, the *Greensburg Daily News* printed an invitation to a Ku Klux Klan cross burning as part of the season's celebrations.[125]

[124] "Minstrel Show An Institution In Community for Many Years," *Greensburg Daily News*, September 25, 1969, p. 12. On blackface, see Wesley Morris, "Music," in Nikole Hannah-Jones, et al., eds., *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* (New York, 2021), 359–79.

[125] The 1916 speech was condemned in the *Greensburg Weekly Democrat*. A history of St. Mary's notes that the parish had struggles with "community misunderstanding." "Anti-Catholic Demagogue Makes Incendiary Speech at Meeting of Secret Order," *Greensburg Weekly Democrat*, February 18, 1916; *Greensburg New Era*, September 5, 1907, p. 2; "History of St. Mary's, Greensburg, In."; "School Suffers $10,000 Damage in Fire," *Greensburg Daily News*, May 10, 1924, p. 1; "Attempt Made to Rob Church," *Greensburg Daily News*, July 19, 1924, p. 1; "Principles of Hooded Order are Explained," *Greensburg Daily News*, September 29, 1924, p. 1; "Rain Fails To Halt Greensburg

A July 1931 advertisement for fireworks available at the Fair Store, published in the *Greensburg Daily News*, listed "Nigger Chasers" at a cost of one cent.[126]

Even a cursory check of available sources shows that while the riot was unique to Greensburg, white supremacy was not. In 1907, the threat that John Green would be lynched in Columbus forced his removal to Jeffersonville. African Americans who frequented "low dives" and were deemed "loafers" were not welcome in Rushville. When John Hawkins complained that he could not visit his jailed brother in New Castle, he was told to leave the state or be arrested. James Madison notes Klan activities in the 1920s in cities as varied in size and geography as Columbus, Crown Point, Elwood, Evansville, Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, Kokomo, Lafayette, Mooresville, New Castle, Richmond, Shelbyville, South Bend and Vevay.[127] The 1924 Klan parade in Greensburg included units from Anderson, Indianapolis, Muncie, and New Castle. In 1927, a minstrel show performed in Vincennes and Greensburg before moving on to Columbus, Ohio.[128] The aforementioned 1931 Fair Store advertisement let readers know that "Nigger Chasers" were available at both locations—Greensburg and Batesville. In 1936, a Christmastime advertisement in *The Brookville Democrat* let readers know that "Nigger and Baby Dolls" were available for little girls at Fries & Geis Hardware Company.[129] A few months after the Greensburg riot, residents living on "Nigger Hill" road in Columbus agreed to change the name to McKinley Avenue. The local paper used the former name into the 1960s.[130] A culture of "native white supremacy" that was embraced by many Hoosiers spanned the first half of the twentieth century.[131]

The view that race riots in the early 1900s drove Black "riffraff" from small towns throughout the Midwest and left behind a small

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Parade," *Fiery Cross*, October 3, 1924, p. 1; Madison, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Heartland*, 138, 109–111.

[126] *Greensburg Daily News*, July 2, 1931.

[127] Madison, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Heartland*, 9, 13, 50, 57, 77, 128, 129, 141.

[128] "Good Old Time Minstrels Are Much Enjoyed," *Greensburg Daily News*, December 19, 1927, p. 2.

[129] *Brookville Democrat*, December 10, 1936, p. 7.

[130] "Name of Nigger Hill Road is Abandoned," *Evening Republican,* July 4, 1907, p. 1; "Betty Sewell Still Critical," *The Republic*, February 28, 1961, p. 2.

[131] Madison, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Heartland*; Dana Caldemeyer, "Conditional Conservatism."

but welcome minority community made up of good citizens helps to legitimate sundown towns, minimizes the white racism that created and sustained sundown towns, and ignores the threat of white violence that always lurked in the background.[132] Like many "organized jurisdictions" in the Midwest, Greensburg was an effectively all-white community for much of the twentieth century. This was not because the riot affected only lower-class, immoral troublemakers. Black people in general were victims of the riot, and Black people left Greensburg in the years following the riot. The race riot did not make Greensburg a sundown town, and it did not make Decatur, Franklin, and Ripley sundown counties. Racism drove African Americans from cities like Greensburg and sent them to other small cities that were more welcoming (Connersville) and larger cities with larger African American populations that provided some level of safety (Chicago; Columbus, Ohio; and Indianapolis).

The 1907 Greensburg race riot is a part of the city's history. The riot was a symptom of a broader racial intolerance that permeated much of southeastern Indiana and the United States. Between 1860 and 1870, the African American population in Indiana more than doubled. Over this decade, the number of African Americans in Decatur County more than tripled (from 24 to 87 people) and almost tripled again between 1870 and 1880 (from 87 to 235 people). Around 1880, the African American population peaked in Decatur County. After this, African Americans were effectively driven out of Greensburg, Decatur County, and much of southeastern Indiana. By 1940 and for decades thereafter, Greensburg and Decatur County were part of a "sundown region."[133]

Greensburg, Decatur County, and the United States have changed with time. A race riot in Greensburg more than a century ago does not overshadow the broader problem of racial intolerance that still exists in the United States. The political success of Donald Trump is a symptom

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[132] Loewen, *Sundown Towns*, 4; Loewen, Historical Database of Sundown Towns: Indiana; Madison, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Heartland*, 178–79; Campney, *Hostile Heartland*, 108–112, 192; Senechal de la Roche, *In Lincoln's Shadow*, 176–77; Lancaster, *Racial Cleansing in Arkansas, 1883–1924*.

[133] As shown in Table 3, the African American population also peaked in Ripley County in 1880; it peaked in Franklin County in 1850.

of ongoing racism.[134] So was the murder of George Floyd. The need for a Black Lives Matter movement and the controversy about teaching critical race theory demonstrate that the United States still has not come to terms with its racist history.

[134] Vanessa Williamson and Isabella Gelfland, "Trump and Racism: What do the data say?," August 14, 2019, *The Brookings Institution Blog*, accessed September 4, 2022, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2019/08/14/trump-and-racism-what-do-the-data-say/; Brian F. Schaffner, Matthew MacWilliams, and Tatishe Nteta, "Understanding White Polarization in the 2016 Vote for President: The Sobering Role of Racism and Sexism," *Political Science Quarterly* 133, no. 1 (2018), 9–34.