



Ralph Scott

## Lynching in America

“Lynching in America” (<https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/>) is a web site sponsored by Google through the Equal Justice Initiative. The Equal Justice Initiative was founded by Bryan Stevenson in 1989 and is dedicated “to ending mass incarceration and excessive punishment in the United States, to challenging racial and economic injustice, and to protecting basic human rights for the most vulnerable people in American society”<sup>1</sup> The site is based on an Equal Justice Initiative book entitled “Lynching in America: confronting the legacy of racial terror.”<sup>2</sup> A pdf download of the book can be found on the above web site. Also located on the web site are compelling audio oral histories (with accompanying videos) of eye-witness descendants of victims, a short seven minute video entitled “Uprooted,” interactive maps that show the number of individuals lynched in each state, information on the Equal Justice Initiative and a link to learn more about the initiative (basically an email signup web page).

The video “Uprooted” tells the story of a young California woman Shirah Myles and her family members who are searching for the story of her missing great grandfather Thomas William Mills. She is puzzled by the fact the no one talks about him. A trip to Shreveport, Louisiana in search of her family's history reveals that Mr. Mills had a business and that he had a house in town. They even found the current site of his undertaker J. S. Williams still in business in Shreveport. She

discovers these facts by visiting the local archive. Continuing their search they discover the police blotter where Tom was arrested for sending a note to a white girl. A newspaper article about the case, states that there was no evidence to convict Tom of his charge and he was released out the back door of the jail where a mob was waiting for him. Later his body was found hanged on a tree and he had been shot. Following Mr. Mills death, the family then moved to California. Later in their visit they go to the location where his house and store were only to find vacant lots. When they arrive at the tree where he was hung, the young woman scoops up some soil and places it in a memorial glass jar with “Thomas Mills and Caddo Parish, Louisiana April 9, 1912,” written on it. Later she hugs the tree hoping to feel his spirit. The young woman is in hope that her pilgrimage will encourage remind us of the over 4000 African-Americans who were lynched between 1877 and 1950.

The five audio oral histories (with video accompaniment) relate family stories that have been told over the years. The first by Tarabu Betseral Kirkland tells the impact the story of John Harland who was lynched in Ellerbe, Mississippi in 1919 had on her family. Next Anthony Ray Hinton gives us an account of his arrest, conviction and time on death row for a murder he did not commit. Doria Dee Johnson tells the story

of her uncle Anthony Crawford who was lynched in 1916 in Abbeville, South Carolina. Next Vanessa Croft tells her story of her uncle Fred Croft who fled the south after being accused of a crime he did not commit. Croft also relates the Goose Creek railroad bridge lynching of twenty-eight year old Bonk Richardson. James Johnson next tells the story of a relative Wes Johnson who was lynched in Abbeville, Alabama in 1937. The final video by the Miles/Myles family consists of excerpts from longer Tom Mills “Uprooted” video.

This web site tells a very moving and compelling story of a tragic period in American History. Viewers will be transported back in time through the narratives related in the stories and the video. Revisiting these scenes hopefully will help us not repeat the mistakes of the past.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.eji.org/about-eji](http://www.eji.org/about-eji) (accessed June 16, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Equal Justice Institute, *Lynching in America: confronting the legacy of racial terror*. Montgomery, AL, Equal Justice Initiative, 2015, 80pp.

“Uprooted,” <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/watch>, (accessed June 16, 2017)

Lynching in America audio stories (with video accompaniment), <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/listen>, (accessed June 16, 2017)