



Confronting Current Racial Issues through The Buncombe Community Remembrance Project

Formation Program at Trinity
Episcopal Church

Martin Luther King Jr.,
Association of Asheville and
Buncombe County

<http://mlkasheville.org>

Buncombe Community Remembrance Project

- ▶ Several groups in Asheville, including the Board of the MLK Association, Started Meeting Separately about Two Years Ago Related to the Equal Justice Initiative.
- ▶ The Buncombe Community Remembrance Project is a collaborative approach utilizing a diverse community coalition led by the Martin Luther King, Jr. Association of Asheville and Buncombe County.
- ▶ The Buncombe Community Remembrance Project is part of the Equal Justice Initiative's (EJI) National Memorial for Peace and Justice nationwide initiative.
- ▶ The Buncombe Community Remembrance Project aims to acknowledge and remember individuals lynched in Buncombe County.

Project Goals

- ▶ More Accurately Reflect History of Racial and Economic Injustice and Inequities
- ▶ Foster Healing from the Silent Trauma Surrounding Racial Violence (Jim Crow Trauma, Lynchings, Mass Incarceration, Violence in Communities, State Sanctioned Violence/Police Brutality)
- ▶ Foster Local Conversations and Reflections Concerning Community Healing
- ▶ Community Healing Through Truth Telling, Educational Programming, Reconciliation Events, Transforming Narratives
- ▶ According to the EJI, more than 4400 African American men, women, and children were hanged, burned alive, shot, drowned, and beaten to death by white mobs between 1877 and 1950. Millions more fled the South as refugees from racial terrorism, profoundly impacting the entire nation.
- ▶ (<https://museumandmemorial.eji.org>)

Buncombe County Reported Lynchings

- ▶ John Humphreys, 7/15/1888
- ▶ Hezekiah Rankin, 9/24/1891
- ▶ Bob Brackett, 8/11/1897

Buncombe Community Remembrance Project Operating Structure

- ▶ Community Stakeholders' Group (18+ Organizations, Groups, & Individuals)
- ▶ Steering Committee (17+ Organizations & Groups)
- ▶ Workgroups
 - ▶ Communications/PR Workgroup
 - ▶ Community Engagement Workgroup
 - ▶ Museums Tour Workgroup
 - ▶ Lynching Research Workgroup
 - ▶ Logistics/Historical Marker Site Location Workgroup
 - ▶ Essay Competition Workgroup
 - ▶ Educational Outreach Workgroup
 - ▶ Compliance Workgroup

Understanding the Roots of Violence Leading to the Black Lives Matter Movement

- ▶ In 1619, a Dutch ship dropped anchor at Jamestown, Virginia, with a cargo of twenty Africans ([1619 Project](#))
- ▶ When the first Constitutional Convention met in Philadelphia in 1787, the Northern delegates contended that slaves were property, therefore should not be counted in apportioning representation. (A Pictorial History of Black Americans, by Langston Hughes, Milton Meltzer, and Eric Lincoln)
- ▶ In 1803, less than ten years after the invention of the Cotton Gin, more than 20,000 Negroes, many of them supplied by New England slave traders, were brought into Georgia and South Carolina to work in the cotton fields.
- ▶ The Mississippi Supreme Court said that in the eyes of the law, "A Negro is prima facie a slave."
- ▶ Civil War Timeline: Began, April 12, 1861- Ended, May 9, 1865
- ▶ Jim Crow Laws, Violence, Police Brutality, and Massacres

Two-and-a-Half Years?

- ▶ Temperature of America
- ▶ **Under the Black Flag: Massacre at Fort Pillow**
 - ▶ An ugly fact of the Civil War is that the Confederate army on several occasions refused to accept the surrender of uniformed colored troops.
 - ▶ At least three such incidents occurred in 1864: Fort Pillow in April, the Crater in June, and Saltville in October.
 - ▶ In the spring of 1864, legendary cavalryman Nathan Bedford Forrest and 6000 troopers mount up to drive the Yankees from western Tennessee and Kentucky.
 - ▶ Forrest appears before Fort Pillow on April 12th. Inside are 557 men - two units of colored artillery with six guns, plus a detachment of turncoat Tennessee cavalry.
 - ▶ When the Yankee commander refuses surrender, a bugle sounds and the surrounding Confederates dash forward screaming "No quarter" and "Black Flag."
 - ▶ The report concludes that 300 - 400 of the garrison were killed at Fort Pillow and that of these 300 were murdered in cold blood after they had surrendered.
 - ▶ Forrest is investigated but never tried for war crimes. Following the war, he fights on as the first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan.

Source: <https://oldtowncrier.com/2014/04/01/under-the-black-flag-massacre-at-fort-pillow/>

Other Massacres

- ▶ [Colfax Massacre of 1873](#) (Louisiana)
- ▶ Historians aren't sure how many people died in the end, but while records show that the massacre resulted in the deaths of three white men, it's estimated that anywhere from 60 to 150 African Americans were killed.
- ▶ While the massacre made headlines across the country and 97 members of the white mob were indicted, in the end only nine men were charged with violating the Enforcement Acts of 1870 and 1871, sometimes known as the [Klu Klux Klan Acts](#), intended to guarantee the rights of freedmen under the 14th and 15th Amendments.
- ▶ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/1873-colfax-massacre-crippled-reconstruction-180958746/>

Other Massacres Continued

- ▶ Thibodaux Massacre of 1887
- ▶ In 1887, African-American cane workers in Louisiana attempted to organize—and many paid with their lives.
- ▶ On November 23, 1887, a mass shooting of African-American farm workers in Louisiana left some 60 dead.
- ▶ Bodies were dumped in unmarked graves, while the white press cheered a victory against a fledgling black union.
- ▶ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/thibodaux-massacre-left-60-african-americans-dead-and-spelled-end-unionized-farm-labor-south-decades-180967289/>

Other Massacres Continued

- ▶ East St. Louis Massacre of 1917
- ▶ East St. Louis Race War
- ▶ A smoldering labor dispute turned deadly as rampaging whites began brutally beating and killing African Americans.
- ▶ By the end of the three-day crisis, the official death toll was 39 black individuals and nine whites, but many believe that more than 100 African Americans were killed.
- ▶ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/east-st-louis-race-riot-left-dozens-dead-devastating-community-on-the-rise-180963885/>

Other Massacres Continued

▶ Arkansas Massacre of 1919

- ▶ The sharecroppers who gathered at a small church in Elaine, Arkansas, in the late hours of September 30, 1919, knew the risk they were taking.
- ▶ Upset about unfair low wages, they enlisted the help of a prominent white attorney from Little Rock, Ulysses Bratton, to come to Elaine to press for a fairer share in the profits of their labor.
- ▶ At around 11 p.m. that night, a group of local white men, some of whom may have been affiliated with local law enforcement, fired shots into the church.
- ▶ The shots were returned, and in the chaos, one white man was killed. Word spread rapidly about the death.
- ▶ Governor Charles Brough called for 500 soldiers from nearby Camp Pike to, as the *Arkansas Democrat* reported on Oct 2, "round up" the "heavily armed negroes." The troops were "under order to shoot to kill any negro who refused to surrender immediately."
- ▶ They went well beyond that, banding together with local vigilantes and killing at least 200 African Americans (estimates run much higher but there was never a full accounting).
- ▶ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/death-hundreds-elaine-massacre-led-supreme-court-take-major-step-toward-equal-justice-african-americans-180969863/>

Other Massacres Continued

- ▶ [Tulsa Massacre of 1921](#)
- ▶ The Oklahoma lawyer, father of famed African-American historian [John Hope Franklin](#) (1915-2009), was describing the attack by hundreds of whites on the thriving black neighborhood known as Greenwood in the booming oil town.
- ▶ It was a racial massacre that destroyed what was known as Tulsa, Oklahoma's ["Black Wall Street."](#)
- ▶ More than 35 blocks were destroyed, along with more than 1,200 homes, and some 300 people died, mostly blacks. The National Guard was called out after the governor declared martial law and imprisoned all blacks that were not already in jail. More than 6,000 people were held, according to the [Tulsa Historical Society and Museum](#), some for as long as eight days.
- ▶ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/long-lost-manuscript-contains-searing-eyewitness-account-tulsa-race-massacre-1921-180959251/>

More Localized Events

- ▶ *The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson*, by Rayford W. Logan
- ▶ On the very day that President Hayes delivered his acceptance speech, the town of Hamburg, SC, was the scene of a bloody riot. Another race riot occurred at nearby Ellenton, South Carolina, September 15 - 20, 1877 (p. 14).
- ▶ Wade Hampton “waved” a potential Southern “Bloody Shirt” before Hayes’s eyes (if Federal troops were not removed from South Carolina). Moreover, Hampton, strong-willed with the arrogance of the ex-slaveholders, had a single objective - the restoration of white supremacy (p. 21).
- ▶ Tillman’s victory over Wade Hampton was due in part to the fact that Wade Hampton had not eliminated the Negro as completely from politics as Tillman and his supporters demanded (p. 73).

More Localized Events Continued

- ▶ Tillman, in his inaugural address, December 4, 1890, boldly proclaimed the path that he would follow. For the first time in the history of the state, he declared, the people had demanded and obtained the right to elect their own governor. The triumph of Democracy and white supremacy over mongrelism and anarchy is most complete (p. 74).
- ▶ In Wilmington, NC, two days after the 1898 elections, a race riot resulted in the killing of a score or more of Negroes and a mass flight of the frightened Negroes from the city. The election resulted in a victory for the 'white supremacy' campaign. When North Carolina in 1900 adopted a constitutional amendment to disenfranchise Negroes, President McKinley again remained silent (p. 89).
- ▶ Ben Tillman, who had become senator, boldly declared that South Carolina had disenfranchised all the colored people it could. 'We have done our level best. We have scratched our heads to find out how we could eliminate the last one of them. We stuffed ballot boxes. We shot them. We are not ashamed of it' (p. 91).

Lasting Impact

- ▶ Culture
 - ▶ Institutions (Winn Dixie, Dixie Tires, Etc.)
 - ▶ Battle Flag
 - ▶ Dixie Song
- ▶ Implicit Biases
- ▶ Devaluing of Black Lives
- ▶ Fear and Distrust of Criminal Justice System
 - ▶ Birmingham Police Commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor
 - ▶ Freedom Riders
 - ▶ Sheriff Jim Clark, Selma, Alabama (Bloody Sunday)
 - ▶ George Wallace, University of Alabama
- ▶ Mass Incarceration

Correcting the Narrative: Buncombe Community Remembrance Project

- ▶ Moving from defensive/minimizations to recognition/acknowledgement/acceptance/adaptation
- ▶ Enhancing Multicultural Consciousness about “Black Lives Matter”
- ▶ Increased Cultural Competence
- ▶ Addressing Cultural Biases
- ▶ Creating a Non-Racist Environment
- ▶ Examining Perceptions Concerning Nonmajority People
- ▶ Demonstrating Respect for Others’ Rights and Dignity
- ▶ Decoding Cultural Biases
- ▶ Becoming Inclusive and not just Diverse

