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Sherman Massacre of 1930

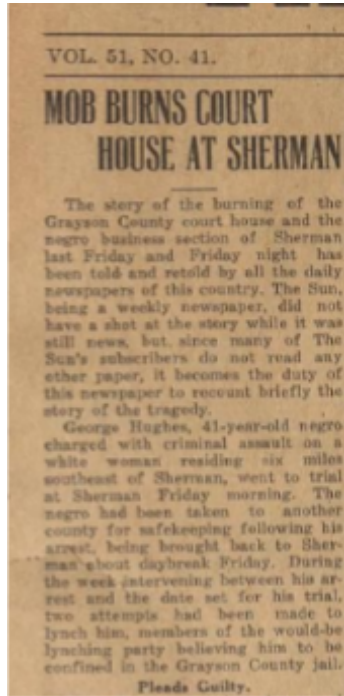
CW: Description of heavy racial violence

Introduction:

Texas has a fairly dark history when it comes to issues of racial equality. From the start of the history of Texas as we know it, from its foundation myth of the Texas War of Independence, to its admission into the Union, through today, Texas can be, in part, defined by how racism affects Texans lives. Being a slave state and then a member of the Confederate States during the Civil War, black Texans already started with major disadvantages compared to their white contemporaries. Add to this the fact that white Texans have managed to assert political and economic dominance over their black counterparts through the entire history of Texas, sans for a brief time during Reconstruction, and there are many instances of discrimination that can and should be covered. The instance that will be explored here will be one that impacted the city of Sherman in Grayson County, Texas and is an example that has had far lasting effects. Under the pretense of enacting justice and protecting the “sanctity of white womanhood”, whites in Grayson County caused the lynching of George Hughes and ensuing race massacre, which ended up destroying the black community in the city, thereby limiting opportunities for community growth, setting back the Black community in the city for years to come.

The Events:

According to a report from the newspaper *The Whitewright Sun*, a weekly newspaper from the nearby community of Whitewright published on May 15th, 1930, the events began when a black man named George Hughes was arrested and charged with the assault of a Grayson



Excerpt from an article in The Whitewright Sun about the event, from May 15, 1930

County white woman. Historian Nolan Thompson, with the Texas State Historical Association, in 1995 claimed that this interaction likely started as Hughes coming to confront the woman's husband over a wage dispute (Thompson.) Returning to the news article, Hughes pleaded guilty to the charges of assault against him, and he was taken to jail in another county, due to fears of a white mob attempting a lynching. These precautionary moves proved ineffective, as angry whites from across Grayson County convened in the city of Sherman, the largest city in the county, to try and lynch Hughes. On the day of his trial, on Friday May 9th, the mob stormed around the courthouse, as they began fighting state troopers to try and gain entry into the building. The actual trial was only able to

take place for a few minutes before the mob managed to battle their way into the building, and after tear gas was thrown to try and disperse the crowd, the judge of the case declared that the trial must be held at a different site due to the acute danger of violence. Once word got out about this decision, the white mob began to set fire to the courthouse, eventually burning it to the ground. After retrieving the corpse of Hughes, the mob moved to the black area of town, strung up the corpse from a tree, and then proceeded to burn the entire surrounding black community. The next day, Texas Governor Dan Moody declared martial law, and eventually, according to

Thompson, 14 men were indicted for the riot, but not a single was charged with the crime of lynching (Thompson.)

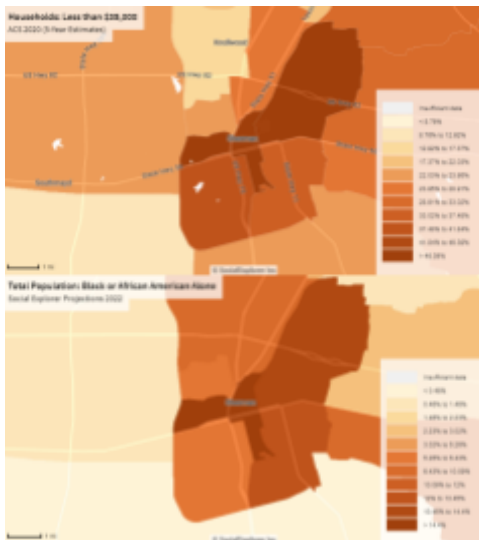
Contributing Factors:

Instances of racial violence and lynchings like the example in Sherman were all too common throughout America, and especially in the South, during this time period. Investigative journalist Ida B. Wells, in *The Red Record*, lays out 3 reasons why these acts of violence occurred. Out of the 3, the reason that fits the Sherman Massacre best is the third, which Wells describes as the belief that blacks “had to be killed to avenge their assaults upon women.” (Wells, 5.) Wells further describes how the sanctity of white womanhood was unassailable in this period, so any example of black men “attacking” this social institution, even if they’ve been clearly framed (which they often were), being often enough to spawn a mob. This phenomenon is what caused many similar race massacres, and the Sherman Massacre is no different. According again to Thompson, “In the days preceding the trial, rumors spread about the case, among them that Hughes had mutilated the woman's throat and breasts and that she was not expected to live.” This claim was proven to be completely false with medical examinations of both Hughes and the woman herself. Still, this imagined brutal attack on white womanhood was enough to gather whites across the county to enact revenge for this incident upon the entire black community.

Enduring Effects:

The effects of this incident have been felt in both the short-term after the incident, and in the long-term today. The first effect that was initially felt was a decline in the black population in the region. According to SocialExplorer, in the 1930 census, the black population of Grayson County was 7,009, a total of 10.65% of the total population. By 1940, that had fallen to 6,817,

just 9.81% of the total population. While this likely wasn't solely due to the massacre, as the black population in other counties in the state also fell, the frequency of events like the Sherman Massacre likely contributed to the migration of blacks out of the South.



2 maps, the one on top showing households that make less than \$35,000 a year in Grayson County and the bottom showing the percentage black population of different sections of Grayson County

The second effect is a more long term one stemming from the destruction of the many black businesses that took place when the white mob set fire to the black portion of town. Destroying the economy of the black portion of the city likely made it incredibly difficult for local black people to get any social mobility, since those who already had businesses had to start over, an expensive process that likely set back the community for decades. Today, many black populations in the city of Sherman face economic struggle compared to their white

contemporaries, with, according to SocialExplorer, shows that many sections of Sherman with a high percentage of households that make under \$35,000 a year are also sections that have the highest percentages of black residents in the city.

Coming up with ways to address this injustice is tricky because of how long ago the event was. The solution that is most sensible with events like these are reparations towards the victims of the incident. However, since this happened 93 years ago, there are likely little to no survivors of this incident who are still alive today. Tracking down the relatives of those impacted is also hard because it would be incredibly hard to track who was in the black section of Sherman during this period, and all of their living ancestors, which again, due to the amount of time passed, might be an incredibly large number. Still though, this incident has likely severely impacted the black community in the city, as argued previously, so reparations of some sort

should be given out, and giving them to the entire black population of Sherman is likely the best way to do it because it wouldn't require the intense ancestral investigation the previous two routes would, and as shown in the previous paragraph, the black community in Sherman still struggles economically, so reparations would provide a boost to their economy and might help them catch up with the white areas of the city.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the 1930 lynching and race massacre in Sherman, Texas was caused by a white desire to punish blacks in the community over the assault on "white womanhood", and it both contributed to a decline in black population in Grayson County, and also harmed the local black community's economy, with many black businesses being destroyed. These effects have all helped to contribute to the racial inequality in Sherman. The best solution to try and help reduce the inequality is giving reparations to the black community of Sherman.

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