

Full report: A Man Named John Thomas

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On April 25, 1909, Mr. Thoma, a man born in 1884 in Bessemer Alabama, was lynched. Mr. Thomas was around the young age of 24 when this lynching took place in Bessemer, Alabama. Thomas was accused of a crime against a woman named Ms. Patterson. Accounts exist in the *Lineville Headlight*, under a headline listed as “*Death by Lynching*,” and in the *Birmingham Republican*, and as part of “*Happenings of the week*” in the *Goodwater Enterprise*.

According to the article, written by Walter S. Scott, Mr. Thomas was caught on a Saturday in 1909 and was fully identified and confessed which resulted in his death by lynching. Mr. Thomas was described as a brute.. Using that term to describe Mr. Thomas, authorities said they didn’t want to submit the “victim,” Ms. Patterson, to any public humiliation and ask her to testify on the stand. Instead, they were willing to lynch Mr. Thomas and avoid due process for the accused. Mr. Scott also wrote that it was better for people to take the law into their own hands because the law did not act quickly enough in punishing “brutes.” Instead, he argued, the law should agree and quietly hang the accused in the jail yard. Scott felt this would be less shameful to their women and they had a duty to protect their women.

Research into Mr. Scott shows the ways in which white newspapers and local law enforcement collaborated to enforce racial violence. Mr. Scott was the editor and proprietor of the newspaper, the *Lineville Headlight*, and served as a solicitor or attorney. In Lineville, as in Jefferson County, Alabama, one person would serve as a deputy, bailiffs, transporter, and jailer as well as a patroller of roads all in the same day. It was common for people in powerful positions to have more than one hat to wear while working in their daily duties.

Is impossible to know if Mr. Thomas committed a crime against Ms. Patterson or to determine what the outcome would have been if he had received a fair trial. One month before this lynching, the NAACP was created, perhaps an indicator of how critical this time was for blacks in the South.

John Thomas is someone to remember. He was loved by someone and his death should not be in vain. When society views individuals as a problem because of the color of their skin, that society has major work to do. He can be remembered as a black man at the age of 24 from Bessemer, Alabama. Listed as laborer, he was accused of a crime, and the result of that accusation cost him his life. Learning more about what happened and imagining what we cannot know is one way to become stronger and create a better future.

By

http://www.hueytown.org/historical/Sheriffs_of_Jefferson_County_A.pdf ; <https://www.fbi.gov/history/field-office- histories/ birmingham>; <https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/links/misclink/moulton.htm>; <https://sites.rootsweb.com/~lewgriffin/g0/ p1.htm#i14>; https://www.newspapers.com/image/? clipping_id=18496155&fcfToken=eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiIsInR5cCI6IkpXVCJ9.eyJmcmVILXZpZXctaWQiOjI3M TUzMTMwMiwiaWF0IjoxNTc0MDU5NjQ5LjE1NzQxNDYwNDI9.QAij33wt1ztAQX7eI3q_i2GP2nX44JevzHlyQUwXIRc;
John Thomas <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:JD8R-3LN>; https://www.newspapers.com/clip/18496266/ lynched_near_bessemer_john_thomas/