

Submitted in person
July 10, 1918.

MEMORANDUM FOR GOVERNOR DORSEY FROM WALTER F. WHITE

Below are given some of the facts discovered during a recent visit to Brooks and Lowndes Counties, with reference to the recent lynchings in these two counties:

It was learned that the following Negroes are known to have been lynched, the first six of these having been reported in the daily press:

Will Head,
Will Thompson,
Hayes Turner,
Mary Turner,
Eugene Rice,
Sidney Johnson.

In addition to these, a Negro by the name of Chime Riley was lynched and turpentine cups (these being clay cups used to catch turpentine gum when the trees are cut to obtain gum) were tied to his body, and the body was then thrown into the Little River near Banney Georgia. My informant in regard to this case told me that he went down to the river hoping to find the body when the river was low; but assumed that the body had probably become entangled in the sand bars and therefore could not be discovered. He secured, however, one of the turpentine cups which had been tied to the body of Riley. The name of this man I could not learn, but I saw him on the spot where Mary Turner was lynched. Another Negro by the name of Simon Schuman was called out of his house near Berlin on the Moultrie Road between eight and nine o'clock at night and has not been seen since. The interior of his house as well as his furniture was completely demolished. The family of Schuman is now on what is known as the

Bryce Plantation. In addition to the eight mentioned above, bodies of three unidentified Negroes whose names I have been unable to learn but which I expect to receive at an early date, were taken from the Little River just below Quitman. I was informed by a minister that eighteen Negroes have been killed. I discovered only the eleven mentioned above.

The causes of the crime and lynchings I discovered were as follows:

Hampton Smith, the white farmer who was murdered, seems to have borne the reputation of grossly mistreating the hands employed on his plantation known as the Old Joyce Place on the Adel and Quitman Road. He seems to have had the habit of beating these hands and refusing to pay them wages due them. This reputation had become so wide-spread that it was practically impossible for him to secure labor. He, therefore, had been in the habit of paying the fines of Negroes convicted in the courts, and having them work out these fines on his plantation. Sidney Johnson, the Negro who admitted killing Smith, had been convicted of gaming and had been fined \$30.00, which was paid by Smith. A few days previous to the tragedy Johnson had complained of being sick and had been beaten by Smith when he refused to go to work. Johnson is said to have threatened Smith for having beaten him while he was sick. Smith was shot through the window while sitting in his home Thursday night, May 16th. He was shot twice, one

shot entering the back and coming out near the heart, the other shot entering the shoulder, breaking it, passing entirely through the body and coming out through the other shoulder. His wife was also shot, the bullet passing directly through the center of her breast and just missing her heart and lungs. Her wounds are not serious. In regard to the statements made to the Governor that she was subjected to severe brutality and was raped: My information is that this is not true, although a number of conflicting statements have been given in regard to this. This can be definitely ascertained by the fact that she was in her sixth or seventh month of pregnancy at the time of the crime, and I have been informed by several reliable physicians that had this been true she would be unable to give birth to the child, and a miscarriage would have resulted. I suggest that it be ascertained whether or not she has given birth to a child since that time. I have also been informed by the same physicians that the shot alone would not necessarily cause a miscarriage, but that raping or even rough handling would have caused such a condition. Later: Mrs Smith gave birth to her child.

Contrary to the press accounts of the affair, Sidney Johnson was not concealed in the swamps near Quitman, but was at his home in Valdosta from the time of the crime up to the time he was killed by the posse. He is said to have made the statement to several persons that he alone was implicated in the crime of murdering Smith, and that the other parties lynched knew nothing about it until after the crime was committed.

As stated above, Will Head and Will Thompson were lynched on Friday night, May 17th. Hayes Turner was taken from the jail at Quitman by Sheriff Wade and the Clerk of the County Court, Roland Knight by name, for the purpose of being carried to Moultrie for safe-keeping. Turner was taken from these officers about three and a half miles from Quitman near a bridge on the Okapiloo Creek. He was hanged with his hands hand-cuffed behind him. He hung on the tree between Saturday and Monday and was then cut down by the county convicts and buried about five feet from the tree on which he was lynched. Mary Turner, his wife, made the remark that the lynching of her husband was unjust, that he knew nothing of the crime, and that if she knew the parties who were in the mob she would have warrants sworn out against them. For this she was captured on Sunday and carried to a place a few yards from Folsom's Bridge on Little River and there lynched. The method of execution in this case, was most brutal. At the time she was lynched Mary Turner was in her eight month of pregnancy. Her ankles were tied together and she was hung to the tree head down. Gasoline was taken from the cars and poured on her clothing which was then fired. When her clothes had burned off, a sharp instrument was taken and she was cut open in the middle, her stomach being entirely opened. Her unborn child fell from her womb, gave two cries, and was then crushed by the heel of a member of the mob. Her body was then riddled with bullets from high-powered rifles until it was no longer

possible to recognize it as the body of a human being. The tree on which she was lynched bears the marks of several bullets from high-powered guns. Mary Turner and her child are buried about ten feet from the tree and at the head of her grave is a whiskey bottle with a cigar stump placed in the neck. It is my information that the leaders of the mob which on Friday night, May 17th, lynched Will Head and Will Thompson were S. E. McGowan, an undertaker of Quitman and W. A. Whipple, a cotton broker and merchandise dealer of the same place. The following names were given to me as being the names of men who were members of the mob, by a man who stated that he himself was a member:

Ordley Yates, Clerk in the Post Office,
Frank Purvis, Employed by Griffin Furniture Company,
Fulton DeVane, Stock Dealer and Auditor and
Agent for Standard Oil Company,

Chalmers, Farmer near Quitman,
Lee Sherrill, Farmer Near Quitman,
Brown Sherrill, Employed by W. A. Whipple,
Richard DeVane, Farmer,
Ross DeVane, Farmer, Quitman, Ga.

Van, Barker, Quitman, Ga.
Jim Dickson, Farmer, Quitman, Ga.
Dixon Smith, Brother of Hampton Smith
Will Smith, Brother of Hampton Smith,
and Two other Brothers of Hampton Smith.

These names were given to me in confidence by a man who admitted that he was a member of the mob, on the condition that I would not divulge his name, as to do so would cause him a great deal of embarrassment, and probably death. If I might, I would suggest that the men whose names are given above be required to prove an alibi for the night of Friday May 17th. It

is my information that S. E. McGowan has publicly boasted of his part in the lynching, and he is reputed to have made the following remark, "If the Germans were as thick as the grass in the courthouse yard the time they would be

done again".

A spirit of unrest exists in both Brooks and Lowndes Counties which will undoubtedly affect the labor situation in that community. It is my information that over five hundred Negroes have left the community since the lynching. Many more, because of property which they own and crops which they have now in process of cultivation, are unable to do so at the present time, but are planning to leave as soon as they can dispose of their land and gather their crops. At this time when the production of food means so much towards the success of the Government in the war such a condition is serious. The above facts were all verified from a number of sources.