

# The Ku Klux Klan and Vigilantism

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# The Ku Klux Klan and Vigilantism

*Essential question: What factors led to the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in Tennessee?*

The Ku Klux Klan was formed in Pulaski, Tennessee between December 1865 and May 1866. Its founding members were six well educated former members of the Confederate army. They claimed that they originally intended the organization to be nothing more than a social club modeled on a popular fraternity. However, the organization quickly became something much more sinister: a paramilitary group that used violence and intimidation tactics on anyone who opposed their vision of a country ruled by white men.<sup>1</sup>

The name Ku Klux was derived from the Greek word Kuklos meaning “circle” and “klan” was added for alliterative value. Following the fraternity tradition, the men developed secret signals and codes for passing messages. They created coded titles like Grand Cyclops (president) and NightHawks (messengers) and rituals including hazing of new members. The original six then donned some sheets with holes cut out for the eyes and began riding around the countryside crashing parties and playing practical jokes. As others became aware of the group, membership grew and new clubs or dens were created in surrounding counties.<sup>2</sup>

According to John Lester, one of the original Klansmen, the men only gradually realized that they could use their costumes and anonymity to frighten Blacks. However, some historians find this story doubtful. They believe that the group had intimidation of Black citizens as its main purpose from the beginning. The 1866 Civil Rights Act had

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Campbell Bartoletti. *They Called Themselves the K.K.K.: The Birth of An American Terrorist Group*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2010). 13-16.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

declared Blacks to have the same rights as whites. This likely horrified the former Confederates who had prospered under a legal system that denied equal rights to Blacks. On May 1, 1866 a confrontation between discharged USCT troops and policemen in Memphis was followed by two days of racial violence. Congress sent a special committee to Memphis to investigate the events. The Congressional Committee determined that

“the outbreak of the disturbance resulting from collision between some men and discharged colored soldiers was seized upon as a pretext for an organized and bloody massacre of the colored people of Memphis, regardless of age, sex, or condition, inspired by the teachings of the press, and led on by sworn officers of the law composing the city government and others.”<sup>3</sup>

Three days of violence left forty-six Blacks and two whites dead, five Black women raped and 75 people injured. Ninety-one homes, four churches and eight schools belonging to Black people were burned. The massacre also known as the Memphis Race Riots of May 1866 may have been the real motivation for founding the organization. <sup>4</sup>

The Ku Klux Klan began patrolling roads and whipping Blacks who travelled at night. They also began collecting information about white Republicans and Blacks who were politically active. As former Confederates, the men could not vote in Tennessee elections, but they could harass and intimidate anyone who dared to vote for policies they opposed. In 1867, Klan members from all around the state met in Nashville. They revised and refined their rules, wrote a constitution called the Prescript and devised an

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. *Memphis Riots and Massacres*. 39th Congr., 1st sess. 1866, Rep. 101. 5,

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llss&fileName=1200/1274/llss1274.db&recNum=10>

<sup>4</sup> Bartoletti, *They Called Themselves the K.K.K.*, 21-23.

organizational system for spreading new dens throughout the south. The “Invisible Empire,” as they now called themselves, selected Nathan Bedford Forrest as their new Grand Wizard or leader.<sup>5</sup>

Forrest had made his fortune in the Memphis slave trade before the Civil War. During the war, Forrest was known as the “Wizard of the Saddle.” It is likely that the title “Grand Wizard” was derived from this nickname. Forrest was in command at Fort Pillow in 1864 when Unionists and Black Federal Troops were slaughtered, though he was never formally charged for the massacre.<sup>6</sup> Forrest’s name drew even more former Confederates to the organization. While the organization claimed to be selective, many poor white men claimed to have been forced to join. They were threatened with fines and beatings if they did not participate.<sup>7</sup>

This “social club” quickly became an instrument of terror throughout the South. Blacks who defied social norms by looking white men in the eye, speaking to white women or doing anything that demonstrated pride were considered “uppity” and subject to abuse from the Klan. Blacks who enjoyed economic success were especially vulnerable to the vigilante justice handed out by the Klan. George Taylor had amassed 60 acres and 2 mules before the Klan broke into his home in the middle of the night. They dragged him outside where they whipped him until his backbone was visible through his wounds. Taylor and his family were forced to abandon their farm and possessions, a loss of about 500 dollars.<sup>8</sup>

In Tennessee, Klansmen increasingly targeted Radical Republicans as well as politically active Blacks. On August 12, 1868 a group of six masked men approached

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 41-46.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 81.

Lewis Powell's home in Hickman County. Powell was a member of the Black Union League. Powell hid in the woods as the men advanced. The men asked Powell's wife for food. When she told them that her family was poor and had none to spare, the men opened fire, killing her. They rode off as Powell ran back to find his wife dead. Governor Brownlow ordered the State Guard to catch the klansmen, but they did not succeed.<sup>9</sup>

Frustrated with the State Guard's lack of success, Brownlow hired a private detective named Seymour Barmore to infiltrate the Klan. Barmore managed to get admitted to a den, but was later heard bragging about breaking up the Klan. A message was relayed to Klansmen in Maury County who boarded the train Barmore was on and kidnapped him. Barmore's body was recovered six weeks later. The Klan had sent a message: anyone who crossed them would die.<sup>10</sup>

As the organization grew, its ties with the Democratic Party grew as well. In Tennessee, Conservative Republicans and former Confederate Democrats were able to reclaim control of the legislature. When a new state constitution was put to a vote in 1870, Klansmen made sure that both Black and white voters voted for it or were too scared to vote at all. The ratification of the 1870 Constitution and the election of John C. Brown, a former Confederate general and Klansmen, meant that the Ku Klux Klan would continue to terrorize the state for many years to come.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Hardy, "Fare well to all Radicals"

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

# Ku Klux Klan in Tennessee

*Using the text, answer the questions below.*

1. When was the Ku Klux Klan formed? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Where was the Ku Klux Klan formed? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Who formed the Ku Klux Klan? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What type of organization did the men base the Klan on? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Why do you think the klansmen wore robes and hoods? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. According to the klansmen, why was the organization formed? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. What law declared Blacks to have the same rights as whites? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Why do historians think the organization was formed? \_\_\_\_\_

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9. What actions did the Ku Klux Klan take towards Blacks? (2 examples) \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

10. What actions did the Ku Klux Klan take towards Republicans? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Ku Klux Klan in Tennessee Key

Using the text, answer the questions below. *Answers will vary.*

1. When was the Ku Klux Klan formed? *Between December 1865 and May 1866*
  2. Where was the Ku Klux Klan formed? *Pulaski, TN*
  3. Who formed the Ku Klux Klan? *Former Confederates; upper class*
  4. What type of organization did the men base the Klan on? *A fraternity*
  5. Why do you think the klansmen wore robes and hoods? *Answers will vary*
  6. According to the Klansmen, why was the organization formed? *As a social group to crash parties and play practical jokes*
  7. What law declared Blacks to have the same rights as whites? *1866 Civil Rights Act*
  8. Why do historians think the organization was formed? *To harass and intimidate African-Americans who had recently gained voting and other rights*
  9. What actions did the Ku Klux Klan take towards Blacks? (2 examples) *Answers will vary. Whip people out at night, shot people, destroyed or stole property*
  10. What actions did the Ku Klux Klan take towards Radical Republicans? *Kept Republicans from voting so that Democrats (former Confederates) could regain political power*
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## Ku Klux Klan Primary Source: Excerpts from Forrest's Letter of Advice

*The following excerpts are from a broadside written by Nathan Bedford Forrest, Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan regarding the 1872 presidential election. Note: The source appears in an unedited form and contains offensive language. Please read it carefully to gauge its appropriateness for your students.*

Source: "A Letter of Advice from N.B. Forrest." *Reconstruction and the African American Legacy*. Tennessee State Library and Archives. 2012. Web 8 July 2014.

<<http://cdm15138.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/reconaa/id/205/rec/3>>

FRIENDS AND COMPANIONS:—Four years ago, upon a similar occasion, I addressed you a campaign circular. And whatever its influence might have been upon the sentiment of the country, in its main object it was an inglorious failure ; that object being the defeat of that irrepressible humbug and impostor—U. Scalawag Grant, and the election of that model statesman and Christian—Horatio Seymour. I write you again at this time, for a similar purpose—namely, to defeat the same prince of damd scalawags and nuisances, and to elect a feller whom I acknowledge to be intrinsically, even more detestable than he ; but for our purpose, as splendid and delectable as the Morning Star.

Let me explain. Our one grand scheme of re-establishment, the restoration of the old constitution as it was, and the honored institutions of the past, must never, no never, be lost sight of. All means to forward this truly pious work are as pure as the Virgin Mary, and holier than the holy Moses. Appropriation is not stealing. Killing is not murder—fire is purifying and cleansing. Now in tones of thunder I say to you that Horace Greeley must be elected. He is the man providentially raised up for our work and for our salvation. As things have bobbed the last four years, under Grant's infernal dynasty, the work for us to do has greatly accumulated. But, Farmer Greeley once elected, as we have sworn by the ghost of the holy confederacy he shall be, and this work will be dispatched by the double rule of lightning.



Greeley has promised us universal amnesty, and at least two members of his cabinet. With these advantages many others will follow as a matter of course. Brush up your disguises, clean your revolvers, sharpen your bowies, reconstruct your lodges, secure fleet horses, and be ready, at a moment's warning, for efficient service. And you well understand the meaning of that.

The butcher, no doubt, has some peculiar advantages, which we must not ignore. The National Treasury is within his reach. Now suppose for a moment that such an opportunity was placed within *our* reach! Wouldn't it be an important advantage to us? Then all his countless myrmidons and toadies will move heaven and make a league with hell to beat us. They will also drag into their service all the cowardly, ignorant, ragamuffin, Yankee soldiery; which soldiery would have subdued the rebellion in one half the time it did, had it not been so stupidly brainless and cowardly. Then again, all the nigger persuasion, and all the psalm singing rabble, of Christian loafers, and shouting Methodists, must be counted on his side. With all this help, Grant himself must be written down an ass. In fact, his military successes were the result of ignorance, rather than true military skill. For if he had had only the gumption to perceive when his army was fairly and squarely licked, as was notoriously the case several times while on its murderous tramp to Richmond, he would have surrendered on the spot, as he ought to have done, by all the rules of civilized warfare. But his thick skull and indomitable mulishness saved him and his army, (though not worth the saving,) and have scourged the Nation

Some conceited upstarts may claim that Greeley is not safe—that the Democratic party cannot trust him—that his life-long labors have been on the side of the whining, disgusting, stingy black abolitionist, Yankee pick-pockets. Well I don't pretend to deny this. There would be no use denying it. But all this and lots of other things prove him to be a first-class coward; which we all know Grant is not. Well, a coward is just what we want for the emergency. Greeley can be intimidated easier than any chickadee. And once let him *dare* to refuse us anything we ask of him, when he gets into the big chair at Washington and Gratz Brown will take his place in double quick time, and Gratz can surely be managed, either with one thing or the other, and the *other* means whisky. We propose to try all fair means first, after that the two black D's, Desperation and Despatch. But Greeley is cunning. He wont put us to any trouble. His whole game, for the last few years, shows him in his true character—that of an artful, ambitious, limber-jointed, damnd hypocritic coward—just exactly what we need, and just exactly the opposite of Butcher Grant.

But enough of all this. The spell is now broken. Grant is doomed and will soon pass into obscurity. A new era is about to dawn. The people are no longer to be ruled by a tyrant, but by the Democratic party. And the Democratic party, as you know, is ruled and led by our order. Horace Greely, in this country, will sustain the same relation to the public service as Victoria does in England—that of a mere figure-head and automaton. While the selfsatisfied old philosopher, in his second puerility and early dotage, will flatter himself that he is the *de facto* president of this great nation, the power behind the throne will guide his hand by invisible machinery: precisely as in the case of Andy Johnson. And you know how that was done, yourselves.

But the iron clad Grant, the atrocious, the infamous, the blood-thirsty Grant, is more than a match for the devil. If in the inscrutable councils which control human destiny, his re-election is pre-determined, contrary to all present indications, we shall have but one desperate alternative. You of course understand me. But when we resort to this, you know it is apt to re-act upon ourselves, as in the case of Lincoln; and may set us back for years. It therefore must never be done except in the very last extremity. Smaller and less prominent obstacles may be removed without exciting much attention. The people are not very easily aroused. But when they do get mad they are mighty damd strong and unmanageable. So let us be wise as serpents, cautious as crows, and tenacious as the devil. If therefore, ill-fatedly for us, Grant should be re-elected, then before this great question is decided, I shall order a grand Ecumenical Council of the Klan, and bring all our chiefs face to face to discuss the mode and means of his removal.

Now a few words in regard to tactics. Four years ago we were too confident of success, and failed for want of this element. And the greasy-wooled, odoriferous African has been our master ever since. Now don't let us repeat this folly. In the language of Solomon of old, Make yourselves all things to all men, in order to gain your points. During this campaign, let by-gones be by-gones. In the Northern States out-herod Herod in all the sickening, idiotic radical nonsense that offends your nostrils wherever you go. Where tee-totalism is rampant go the whole hog on Temperance. Wherever niggerism is epidemic hug and kiss the nigger and the nigger's wife and daughter. Take the lead and git excited on women's rights, when you can make capital by so doing. Go it blind on high tariff or free trade, as the case may be according to the direction of wind and tide. It will be impossible for us to make ourselves useful until we get the reins of government out of the hands of the nigger leaders. And all things are lawful, as Shakspeare says, while we are striving to gain a position of usefulness. This necessity will last but a few weeks more. Then we will resume our character of restorationists, and without gloves.

# **Memphis Massacre**

## **Shelby County, Tennessee, May 1-3, 1866**

### **Background**

The Memphis Massacre began as an argument between white policemen and former Black Union soldiers. It escalated quickly as mobs of white civilians ravaged Black neighborhoods. Nearly fifty people died in the three-day riot: forty-six Blacks and two whites (one of the whites is believed to have died when his own firearm misfired). Seventy-five people were injured and 103 buildings were burned: 91 homes, 4 churches, and 8 schools. One hundred people were robbed, many civilians lost their life savings, and many of the soldiers lost the money they had just received upon ending their service with the Union Army. Five women were raped. Martial law was finally implemented to stop the riot, but not before much bloodshed and destruction had occurred. Despite the widespread violence and investigations by the Freedmen's Bureau and a Joint Congressional Committee, none of the instigators was ever brought to trial. The Memphis Massacre and a similar riot in New Orleans in July, lent power to the Republicans controlling Congress and led to the ratification of the 14th Amendment.

*Note: The source appears in an unedited form and contains offensive language. Please read it carefully to gauge its appropriateness for your students.*

## **6. Testimony of Dr. R. M. McGowan**

My name is Dr. R. M. McGowan, I live on South Street near Causey. On the 1st day of May 1866 while at my place I heard shots fired and upon going to the door saw several Policemen (one named Carroll) running up the street away from the mob and when they arrived at the bridge one of the policemen was shot - did not see who shot him - I went to dress the wound, while doing so the police returned with an increased force and immediately upon their arrival they commenced firing upon the colored people indiscriminately. There were women and children amidst the colored people. I saw one colored man killed by the police on the bridge, he was running away from them at the time. I saw another colored man endeavoring to conceal himself, when the police shot him and beat him over the head, he was left for dead. After night a colored soldier came to my house for protection, when a number of white men came along accompanied by police. One white man entered my place and asked me "what are you, you damn nigger doing here." I replied "let him alone, he is waiting for the ambulance to gather the murdered." He then said to me "you damn Yankee son of a bitch you can't come down here to live." I think he also said "we will burn you out." At this time the police came to the door when the man said "here is a damn abolitionist who says that the police are doing wrong," the mob cried "bring him out." I was forced out. The Captain of the Police then interfered and said "let him alone, I know him." The next morning they assaulted my store during my absence and I was forced to leave & close it and it remained closed for several days. I think the man who entered my store on the night of the 1st is named Wm. Porter, a butcher. I can identify him.

## **7. Albert Harris**

**State what you know about the riot that took place in this city, when it took place, and all you know about it.** The riot commenced on Monday night, a little before dark; it commenced at South Memphis. On Tuesday night they came to me and took a gun and all the money I had. I was sitting down just before supper, when somebody knocked at the door. I said, "Come in." In walks a man who had stood at the corner opposite nearly all day, and some people with him. Directly he came in he said he had orders to search my house for arms; that he was a detective; that he understood we had arms there; that the neighbors complained about it, and he wanted them. I told him I had a shot-gun, and, of course, if he had orders to take it, it was all right. He said I must get it immediately. When I brought it to him he said, "This is not all." I told him I hadn't any more. He said he would search the house, and if he found any he would hold me responsible. I was afraid he would find some pistols belonging to my boys who were away. They unlocked my trunks, and went searching all over the premises. They found a bowie-knife at the head of the bed, and they took that. They turned my bed all up and everything upside down. At length they opened the trunk where my money was, and I took it out. This man says, "What is that you have got?" I said it was money, and not to take that. He said he had orders to take every cent for having guns there. He took it, and then said, "Come on, boys. I don't believe they have got any pistols anyhow." They went into the next room, where there was a man very sick, and asked him if he had a pistol there. He was so sick he was hardly able to speak. They said, "Oh no; he hasn't any pistol." There was another gun there standing in plain view, but they did not seek to get it. One was mine, and the other Henry Johnson's. They took Henry Johnson's gun. I said, "Don't carry my money away; it is all I have got." There were two or three policemen there, and my wife said something to try and get them to interfere. She cried about it. They had a pistol all the time drawn and pointed right at the side of my head. When they started to go I said, "Don't let them carry my money away, it is all I have, and I have worked hard for it." They said, "Go to the Freedmen's Bureau in the morning, and you will get your money." The policemen didn't say anything, and they all went away.

**How much money did he take?** At least \$350 of my money, \$50 belonging to the sick man in my care, and \$10 belonging to another man who was away.

**Did the policemen see it?** I do not know. He knew they had it, for he heard me ask them to not carry it away.

**As soon as they got your money they seemed perfectly satisfied?** Yes; perfectly satisfied.

**Do you know anything that took place in the riot after this?** The same night a blacksmith's shop about fifty yards from me, on Alabama street, was set on fire.

**Do you know anything of your own personal knowledge with regard to the commencement of the fuss on Monday?** I do not know anything further than I have said. I stayed my shop working and trying to support my family. I had nothing to do with anybody. I have been as quiet as anybody could be. My former master and mistress will say so to-day. They have not a word against me. They are sorry for me, because I lost everything I had.

**Have you taken any measures to get back your money?** No, sir. I do not know any way in the world to get it back. It was all I had.

## **8. Ellen Ditts**

**Be good enough to state when it commenced and what you saw of it.** The first I saw of it was Monday afternoon, the last day of April. There were four policemen walking down the street and met three or four colored men. I do not know what was the matter of the policemen; they seemed to be angry. The negroes turned out for the policemen to pass, when one of the negroes fell down and a policemen fell over him. That appeared to make the policemen mad. I did not hear what they said.

**Did the colored men draw pistols and knives?** No; the policemen drew them. This colored man then started to go away. One of the policemen ran after him and hit him over the head with his pistol, breaking the pistol. The other colored men seemed very mad about it, and one of them hit the policemen over the head with a stick; then the policeman hit him on the head with a brick---

**Another policeman or the same one?** Another policeman. Then, I think, they separated; the colored men going back towards South street, and the policemen in the other direction.

**Did anyone seem badly hurt?** The colored man who was struck with a pistol appeared to be considerably hurt; the blood ran from the nostrils and from the side of his head. The blood ran from the back of the head of the one struck with the brick.

**What took place next so far as these riotous proceedings were concerned?** The next day, on Tuesday, I saw policemen going very fast down Main street towards South street. They had hardly the time to get to South street before I heard a great deal of firing.

**Did you see any persons running in that direction?** Hundreds of them. The policemen went up and down and gave the alarm, and I should think there were a hundred policemen congregated. There may not have been so many. There were a good many.

**How long after this did you see the crowd of people together?** I cannot remember how long. I know that two policemen went up and down the street, and that it was not long, I think not twenty minutes, before hundreds of people came together.

**What did they do?** They had just a battle on South street; they were firing all the time. Once a crowd came running down the street in which I live, and at one time my front room was full of men. They said, "Don't let us be such cowards; let us go back again." The colored men were trying to hide in every place. There was a colored man going along the sidewalk about noon, when a policeman struck him, knocked his head against a post, and swore at him. The negro said, "Don't hit me; I have not done anything; I am just going home from my work." Another colored man ran into a yard; a policeman pointed his pistol at him and told him to come out. I heard a policeman say, "Kill every nigger, no matter who, men or women."

**Who fired the pistols?** The policemen and citizens. The policemen were all armed with pistols. Many of the citizens were armed with pistols or clubs.

**Did you understand there was any firing on them by the colored men?** I do not think the colored men had anything to fire.

**Were the white people firing among themselves?** They were firing at the colored people.

**How many of them did you see?** I saw them one at a time; I do not know how many I did see. If they would go into any person's yard for protection, the policemen would wear at them and order them out.

**Did you see colored men at any time make any demonstrations of violence towards the police or toward white citizens?** No; I only saw that man on Monday hit the policeman with a stick. The colored men were almost frightened to death.

**How many colored people did you see beaten or shot out, should you judge?** I cannot remember, there was such a crowd.

**A crowd of colored or white people?** A crowd of white people; the white people were the ones who did the shooting. The colored people went by, some bleeding at their heads, some were all covered with dust and blood, as if they had been down in the dust.

**Did any of the crowd of white people you saw collected show any disposition to protect the negroes?** No; they were all against the negroes; a great many of them had been in the southern army. I could hear them make remarks that they had, and that they wanted to kill all the negroes.

**Do you know anything about the burning of any buildings afterwards?** Yes; I saw one man who said he had set a negro school-house on fire on South street.

**Who was this man who said he had set a negro school-house on fire?** I do not know; he was a man who looked like an Irishman, a kind of red-faced man.

**How came he to make this observation?** Someone said to him that he appeared warm. He said he had been at warm work. They asked him what he had been doing. He said he had been setting a nigger school-house on fire.

**Did you hear anything about who set the others on fire?** They said it was the firemen.

**Who said so?** The colored people; they said they knew the fireman—that they went around in hacks. I only know in reference to this one man who I heard say the first one on fire; all the rest is hearsay.

**Did you see any number of negroes together on Tuesday at any time?** I do not think I did.

**There was no crowd at any one time?** Not that I remember.

## **9. Lavinia Godell**

**Are you married?** Yes, sir; I was married. My husband got killed.

**State what you know in reference to his being killed.** He came home and said he wanted some supper. I was sick, and said to him that I had nothing in the house to cook him anything from only a little flour, and that if he would get some meal it would be less trouble. He went out of the house to get some meal. In a few minutes after a sister of the church, who lives next to me, came in and said, "Sister Lavinia, Jackson

is killed." When I went out he was lying and only groaning; I sat with his head in my hand, when some gentlemen came along and said, "You had better take him into the house," and that if I would go and get some of my friends, he would stay by Jackson until I came back. I went and tried to get somebody to take him in, but could not. Some other person then said to me, "You had better go in or they will kill you." I did not know what to do. They told me it would cost me my life if I stayed there, and I finally went in. I could not do anything. The next morning when I got up I went to look for him, but he was not there. I took up his hat and carried it in. I did not know where to look for him. Mrs. Hust, one of the sisters, came in and said, "Don't you know where Jackson is?" I said no. She said that four men came and took him off in a hack, and said they were taking him to a hospital, and that I had better go to the station-house and see what hospital, I went up there, and the old man there, who wears military clothes, stopped me. I asked him to let me go in and see if the dead man who was there was not my husband. He asked me what kind of a man my husband was. I told him her was a low man. He asked me if he had a little bunch of whiskers on his chin. I said yes. He asked me what kind of clothes he had on, and I told him. He said he thought it was my husband lying out yonder, dead, and that I had better not go away. He told me to ask another man he pointed to, to let me go in, which I did, but he would not let me go. I begged him three or four times, but he would not let me. Then another little low Irishman stepped up and said: "Aunty, you wait a little while, and I will see if you cannot go it." After a while he called to me, and I went and just peeped through the bars of the window, and saw my husband lying there, dead. They would not allow me to go inside. I went back and said: "That is my husband lying in there, dead." The man asked me how I knew. I told him of course I knew my husband, and asked him what they were going to do with him. He said they picked that man up out of the street. He asked me what my husband's name was. I told him Jackson Godell. He said there was no such man there. He asked me where my husband was killed. I told him on Beal street, almost right at Hollowell's grocery. He said he was there when he was killed; that he was shot dead.

**What was done with your husband's body?** I do not know. I cannot tell you now where he is.

**Have you asked for it?** I did. I said after you have killed him you ought to give me the body. They refused. I do not know where he is any more that you do. I did not see him after I saw him in the station-house.

**How long did you stay with him?** I stayed as long as I could, until they told me to go in or I would be killed. They were going to kill every negro they could find.

**Who told you that?** That is what they said on the streets. They said the policemen were going to kill every negro they could catch.

**About how far from where you live was he killed?** About two doors.

**Was there a policeman standing near his body?** No; there was no one there when I went out. While I sat there with his head in my hands, there were three who came from this way and went right down Beal street. One of them said: "Here is a damned nigger; if he is not dead we will finish him." Another gentleman then pushed him off, and said: "You have killed him once, what do you want to kill him again for?"

## 10. Anna George



My name is Anna George. I live in Memphis, Tenn.

On the next morning the 2nd I saw a number of white men shoot and kill two colored soldiers who were passing along quietly attending to their own business. I then saw the mob fire the col'd school house at the corner of South & Causey Sts. and also bring furniture out of the houses of colored people and throw it into the fire. The houses were owned by white people.

I saw the girl Frances Johnson who was shot and groaning, her mother was upbraiding the mob when they took the girl who was still alive and threw her into the fire and shot at her mother who ran away. The girl was burnt to death.

There was quite a number of police with the crowd, they were encouraging them to go on. The police had badges on at the time and did not arrest anyone.

Source: Freedman's Bureau Online < <http://freedmensbureau.com/>>

**Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Tennessee**  
**Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865 - 1869**  
**National Archives Microfilm Publication M999, Roll 34**  
**"Reports of Outrages, Riots and Murders, Jan. 15, 1866 - Aug. 12, 1868"**

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**Report of Outrages Committed by Whites on Freedmen in the Memphis Sub District, Bureau R. F. A. L. For the month of May 1867, as reported to Lieut. Col. Fred S. Palmer, Sub. Asst. Commissioner.**

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**County:** Haywood; **Name of Freedmen:** Nelson Helms and a Freedmen name unknown; **Nature of Outrage:** shot and slightly wounded at the disturbance or riot at Brownsville May 13; **Remarks:** case referred to the Grand Jury who found two bills against six whites and eleven colored persons.

**County:** Gibson; **Name of Freedmen:** name unknown; **Nature of Outrage:** lynched by a mob near Lynn Point, charged with attempt to commit a rape; **Remarks:** no action taken by civil authorities.

**County:** Gibson; **Name of Freedmen:** George Tatum; **Nature of Outrage:** Assault with intent to kill. Party of roughs went to Tatum's house and made a brutal assault upon him, breaking two of his fingers and collar bone; **Remarks:** no action taken by civil authorities.

**County:** Gibson; **Name of Freedmen:** name unknown; **Nature of Outrage:** assault with intent to kill. The same party who assaulted Tatum went to a Negroes quarters on Mrs. Singleton's plantation and upon being refused admittance, fired several shots into the door. The freedman returned the fire, killed one and wounded two others; **Remarks:** no action taken by civil authorities.

**County:** Madison; **Name of Freedmen:** Bill Tice; **Nature of Outrage:** shot and severely wounded while at work on a Mrs. Johnson's plantation in Madison County. John Dewberry, Tim Wade & Pone Womble went from McNairy County to Mrs. Johnson's plantation and after shooting Tice, took him back with them to McNairy Co.; **Remarks:** the civil authorities are powerless to make any arrest in this case.

**County:** Madison; **Name of Freedmen:** Silas Bills; **Nature of Outrage:** assault & cruelly beaten by Jonas Davis; **Remarks:** case referred to civil authorities & Davis indicted by the Grand Jury.

Thos. J. Palmer  
Lieut. Col. & VCR  
Sub. Asst. Commissioner