Ernest Green and Charles Lang
Shubuta, MS
October 1942

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Civil Rights and Restorative Justice
(Working Document)
On October 6, 1942, fourteen year old African American teenagers Ernest Green and Charles Lang crossed paths with thirteen year old white girl Dorothy Martin on the side of Highway 45, just south of Shubuta, a small town in Clarke County, Mississippi. Martin came upon Green and Lang at an overpass or bridge as she was walking home along the side of the road. There is considerable confusion as to what occurred between the three teenagers, but it is indisputable that a few hours after the encounter Charles Lang and Ernest Green were arrested for the attempted rape of Dorothy Martin. Less than a week later, Green and Lang were abducted from the Clarke County Jail and brutally lynched.
There are two different accounts of what occurred along the side of highway 45 on the afternoon of October 6, 1942. Authorities in Quitman and Shubuta alleged that Green and Lang had waylaid Dorothy Martin and that Martin had escaped and fled to her home. County Sheriff Lloyd McNeal claimed that Green and Lang were arrested after he received a complaint of attempted rape from Dorothy Martin.\(^1\) Northern newspapers ran stories reporting that Green and Lang had been accused of, or had confessed to, attempted rape.\(^2\) The *Chicago Defender* reported a slightly different story, one that placed in doubt the authenticity and veracity of the allegations against the boys.\(^3\) Follow up articles reported that Green and Lang had startled or frightened Dorothy Martin, who then fled home to vengeful parents.\(^4\)

In the weeks and months following the lynching, the NAACP, the New York City daily *PM*, and the *Chicago Defender* sent investigators to Clarke County. They uncovered a substantially different story from that of the sheriff. On the day in question, Ernest Green and Charles Lang were scrounging scrap rubber and scrap metal just south of town near a bridge on Highway 45.\(^5\) For two African American youths who were poorly educated and left largely to their own devices, collecting scrap was a way to

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\(^3\) The initial coverage in the *Chicago Defender* characterized the allegations as “unsupported.” “Mississippi On Another Rampage; Two 14 Year Old Boys Lynched!!.” *The Chicago Defender*, 17 Oct. 1942, National.


supplement the meager wages they earned performing various menial tasks for white Shubutans. Dorothy Martin had stopped to talk or perhaps to play with Green and Lang. The three youths were acquainted as they were neighbors and, by some accounts, they were friends. Trouble began when a passing motorist saw the three young people together. The motorist either drove into town and told the sheriff that he saw Green and Lang attempting to rape Dorothy Martin, or told Dorothy’s father that Green and Lang were harassing or chasing his daughter. Mr. Martin got word to Deputy Sheriff Ed McClendon, who arrested Green and Lang at their homes a few hours later.

It is well established that Green and Lang were arrested on Tuesday, October 6. It is less clear, however, what transpired between the time of arrest and when their

6 Waters, Enoc P. “Two Lynched Boys Were Ace Scrap Iron Collectors In Mississippi Town.” The Chicago Defender, 6 Mar. 1943, National. Enoc Waters travelled to Shubuta several months after the lynching and interviewed local residents. Waters was apparently told that Green and Lang were in the second grade and were not well supervised as each boy had a parent living in a city other than Shubuta.

7 Waters, Enoc P. “Two Lynched Boys Were Ace Scrap Iron Collectors In Mississippi Town.” The Chicago Defender, 6 Mar. 1943, National.

8 Shortly after the lynching, Odette Harper Hines, African American, travelled to Clarke County accompanied by a white woman by the name of Sally Crayton Canaday on behalf of the NAACP. Hines attempted to question local African Americans while Canaday (who hailed from Alabama) queried the local whites. Hines had little success getting information out of the frightened African Americans in the community, but Canaday was much more successful with whites. Canaday was told that the three children were playing together and that Martin stumbled and was helped to her feet by one of the boys. A passing truckload of drunken white men thought the boy was assaulting Martin, pulled over, and tortured and murdered the boys on the spot. Rollins, Judith. All Is Never Said: The Story of Odette Harper Hines. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995. 90-91.


bodies were found hanging from a railroad bridge outside of Shubuta on Monday, October 12. At some point between Tuesday when the boys were arrested and the following Saturday, Green and Lang were given over into the custody of County Sheriff Lloyd McNeal. At some point either before or after they were in McNeal’s custody, the boys found themselves before a justice of the peace, W.E. Eddins. Although Sheriff McNeal maintained that Green and Lang “got a fair-and-square hearing,” some sources describe the proceeding as an informal hearing, possibly at Judge Eddins’ home in Clarke County’s smallest municipality, Pachuta. At the hearing, Green and Lang allegedly confessed to the attempted rape of Dorothy Martin.

By Saturday October 10, Green and Lang were incarcerated at the Clarke County jail, in the rear of the courthouse in Quitman. They remained there apparently without incident until their abduction in the early morning hours of Monday October 12.

12 Waters, Enoc P. “Two Lynched Boys Were Ace Scrap Iron Collectors In Mississippi Town,” The Chicago Defender, 6 Mar. 1943, National. Enoc Waters reported that Dorothy Martin lobbied her father to set the record straight but was rebuffed.

13 One report says that there was a “preliminary arraignment” on Saturday. “Mississippi On Another Rampage; Two 14 Year Old Boys Lynched!!” The Chicago Defender, 17 Oct. 1942, National. In contrast, Sheriff McNeal told PM that he had driven to Shubuta on Tuesday, collected Green and Lang and returned them to Quitman for a hearing at an unspecified date. Bernstein, Victor H. “The Story of 3 Lynchings - And How Mississippi Does Nothing About Them.” PM, 28 Oct. 1942. It is difficult to ascertain whether there was a hearing before or after Green and Lang were handed over to Sheriff McNeal and it is similarly unclear when they were handed over to Sheriff McNeal. It would appear that at the time Judge Eddins was a justice of the peace. However, there is a W.E. Eddins or Eddings who was a state circuit justice for the circuit containing Clarke County.


15 Ward, Jason M. Interview by Samuel Kennedy-Smith and Margaret Burnham. Phone Interview. 27 Sept. 2011.


17 Waters, Enoc P. “Two Lynched Boys Were Ace Scrap Iron Collectors In Mississippi Town.” The Chicago Defender, 6 Mar. 1943, National.
Supposedly, the jailer, Quitman town Marshall G.F. Dabbs, was tricked into letting the abductors into the jail and found himself quickly overcome.\footnote{According to Sheriff McNeal, “Somebody called [Quitman] City Marshall [G.F.] Dabbs at his home and said he was a constable with a prisoner and could the jail be opened? So Dabbs dressed and drove around to the jail…. And when he got out two men grabbed him, pulled his coat over his head and one of them stole his keys. Someone held him for a while and the next thing he knew he heard a car starting up and going away real fast.” Bernstein, Victor H. “The Story of 3 Lynchings - And How Mississippi Does Nothing About Them.” \textit{PM}, 28 Oct. 1942. The Chicago Defender reported that Dabbs had received a phone call telling him to expect a constable coming to drop off a prisoner. When Dabbs heard a knock on the door, he opened it immediately and was overwhelmed by a mob of angry whites. “Mississippi On Another Rampage; Two 14 Year Old Boys Lynched!!.” \textit{The Chicago Defender}, 17 Oct. 1942, National. The Pittsburgh Post reported that Dabbs answered a knock on the door and was quickly overwhelmed, enveloped in a blanket, and locked in a cell. “Mob in Mississippi Lynches Two Boys.” \textit{Pittsburgh Post-Gazette}, 12 Oct. 1942.} James McRee, a local minister, reports that his nephew, now deceased, was incarcerated with Green and Lang and witnessed the jailer toss the keys to Green and Lang’s cell to the mob.\footnote{Jones, Jeneane. “Mississippians View Tragic Past, Hopeful Future.” Jan. 2009. \url{http://www.gcorr.org/site/apps/ninet/content2.aspx?c=m…} (1 Sept. 2011).} Some newspaper accounts reported that as many as 50 people travelled in a caravan from Shubuta to Quitman to abduct Green and Lang.\footnote{“Mississippi On Another Rampage; Two 14 Year Old Boys Lynched!!.” \textit{The Chicago Defender}, 17 Oct. 1942, National.} However, Sheriff McNeal speculated that there were perhaps three or four kidnappers, and another report asserts that an African American incarcerated with Green and Lang that night witnessed two men take the boys from their cells.\footnote{Bernstein, Victor H. “The Story of 3 Lynchings - And How Mississippi Does Nothing About Them.” \textit{PM}, 28 Oct. 1942.}

On October 12, the local authorities – likely Sheriff McNeal and/or Deputy Sheriff McClendon – found the bodies of Green and Lang hanging from the notorious “Hanging Bridge” in Shubuta. The Hanging Bridge, still extant, was a railroad bridge in Shubuta...
where at least four other African Americans had been lynched, two in 1918.\textsuperscript{22} The bodies of Green and Lang had been mutilated. “Their reproductive organs were cut off. Pieces of flesh had been jerked away from their bodies with pliers and one boy had a screw driver rammed down his throat so that it protruded from his neck.”\textsuperscript{23} The bodies were cut down, placed in the bed of a truck, and driven into town. After a large crowd of white Shubutans got a chance to view the bodies, local authorities conveyed the corpses to the boys’ families.\textsuperscript{24} The families refused to take their children’s bodies. Consequently, the boys’ bodies were prepared for burial by the white undertaker in town\textsuperscript{25} and buried just outside the white cemetery by a County Prison work gang.\textsuperscript{26}

\textbf{The Aftermath}

In the weeks following the lynching, the FBI arrived in Clarke County to investigate the lynching. It is unclear, however, whether their arrival was a product of


\textsuperscript{24} Waters, Enoc P. “Two Lynched Boys Were Ace Scrap Iron Collectors In Mississippi Town.” \textit{The Chicago Defender}, 6 Mar. 1943, National.

\textsuperscript{25} When Odette Harper Hines questioned the “black undertaker” about Green and Lang, she was told that they had died in a car crash. Rollins, Judith. \textit{All Is Never Said: The Story of Odette Harper Hines}. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995. 90-91. This may very well have been the African American assistant to the white undertaker whom was “charged by the community with having said that the boys were bad.” Waters, Enoc P. “Ignorance And War Hysteria Found Underlying Causes of 2 Lynchings.” \textit{The Chicago Defender}, 13 Mar. 1943, National.

\textsuperscript{26} Yates, Gail Graham. \textit{Life and Death in a Small Southern Town: Memories of Shubuta, Mississippi}. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2004. 37. The author also reports that the boys were tied to the back of a truck and dragged through town but does not specify whether this was before or after they were hung from the “Hanging Bridge.”
another lynching which occurred less than a week after the murders of Green and Lang.\textsuperscript{27} On October 17, thirty miles from Shubuta in Laurel, a mob abducted convicted murderer Howard Wash from the Jones County jail and lynched him. Wash had been convicted by a jury of murdering his employer, but the jury had spared his life. Disappointed because Wash had escaped the electric chair, the mob broke him out of jail and killed him. With two lynchings in a week, northern news media focused upon Mississippi, and the FBI travelled to Laurel to investigate the case.\textsuperscript{28} Ultimately, there was an extensive investigation of the Wash lynching, producing a voluminous FBI file, and culminating in the indictment of five men including a local jailer. Charges against two of the men were dropped for lack of evidence, and the remaining three were acquitted.\textsuperscript{29} The African American press covered the lynchings in Laurel and Shubuta, and the \textit{Chicago Defender} in particular published several editorials. Several months after the Shubuta lynching, a columnist for the \textit{Defender}, Enoc Waters, travelled to Clarke County.\textsuperscript{30}

The NAACP also looked into the Green and Lang killings. An anonymous Shubuta or Quitman resident sent a hand-written letter to the NAACP asking if it would

\textsuperscript{27} Efforts to obtain copies of the FBI and DOJ files have been, as of yet, unsuccessful.


“be possible for [the] association to bring about a federal investigation.”31 The NAACP apparently sent Odette Harper Hines and Sally Crayton Canaday to investigate. In addition, the NAACP Youth Secretary, Madison S. Jones, passed through Meridian and Jackson in late October or early November 1942 and conducted a brief investigation.32 Jones did not travel to Shubuta or Quitman but he did meet with a handful of acquaintances or cousins of Green and Lang.33 The Youth Secretary documented his findings in a report of the incident and in a letter to NAACP Secretary Walter White.

Within a few weeks of the lynching, Deputy Sheriff Ed McClendon died suddenly. There are rumors that the Sheriff made a death bed confession expressing great remorse for the death of the boys.34 Dorothy Martin, the girl who Green and Lang allegedly attempted to rape, appears to have lived in the area until her death in the early


33 From Jones’ report it appears he met with some ‘associates’ of Green and Lang at a high school in Meridian. The students attended school there but resided in Shubuta. Jones Report in NAACP Papers. After departing Mississippi, Jones wrote the President of Jackson College, Jacob Reddix requesting that Reddix obtain a signed affidavit from a Jackson College student whom Jones had met with by the name of Dennie Cole. Reddix, citing concerns for the safety of Cole, refused to cooperate. The Correspondence is available in the NAACP Records, Washington, D.C. Collection in the Manuscript Division at the Library of Congress. Available in “Part II: General Office File, 1940-1956” - Box II:A411 (Series A).

34 Ward, Jason M. Interview by Samuel Kennedy-Smith and Margaret Burnham. Phone Interview. 27 Sept. 2011; Waters, Enoch P. “Ignorance And War Hysteria Found Underlying Causes of 2 Lynchings.” The Chicago Defender, 13 Mar. 1943, National. On July 10, 1943, the Chicago Defender reported a rumor allegedly leaked by the Department of Justice that on a relative of Dorothy Martin had taken ill shortly after the lynching and admitted on his death bed that he was one of the lynchers. “Miss. Lyncher’s Conscience Talks On His Death Bed.” The Chicago Defender, 10 July 1943, National. It is unclear whether the rumor was referring perhaps to the late Sheriff McClendon.
2000s. Charles Lang was survived by his father Hilliard and his mother Vesta. Hilliard Lang was drafted into the army in December 1942. Ernest Green left behind his father Louis, mother Mintora, and at least one sister, Cora. It was reported that Cora and Mintora continued to live in Shubuta even after the lynching. Mintora Green apparently died in Shubuta on February 15, 1972.

The bodies of Green and Lang remain where they were buried by the prison work gang, just outside the white cemetery and in close proximity to the grave of Sheriff Ed McClendon who, on his deathbed, allegedly confessed remorse for his role in their murders.

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35 Ward, Jason M. Interview by Samuel Kennedy-Smith and Margaret Burnham. Phone Interview. 27 Sept. 2011.

36 Waters, Enoc P. “Two Lynched Boys Were Ace Scrap Iron Collectors In Mississippi Town.” The Chicago Defender, 6 Mar. 1943, National. Enoc Waters reported that Vesta lived in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

37 Hilliard Lang, born in 1905, Army serial number 34489641.

38 Waters, Enoc P. “Two Lynched Boys Were Ace Scrap Iron Collectors In Mississippi Town.” The Chicago Defender, 6 Mar. 1943, National.