REV. ISAAC SIMMONS
(April 1880 – March 26, 1944)

Danielle G ordet, NUSL ‘13
Civil Rights and Restorative Justice
(Working Document)

“What I’d like to find out, mister, is can’t something be done to those men for kidnapping me and murdering my father in cold blood?

Can’t somebody be made to pay for my crops in the fields, my property damage, and being deprived of my property and rights to make an honest living on the soil where I was born and reared?

Can’t some ends of justice be met to aid us in this case?”

-Eldridge Simmons, June 24, 19441

1 Jasper T. Duncan, Son Kidnapped, Beaten, jailed, Ordered from Town Over Property. New Orleans Informer and Sentinel, June 24, 1944, at 8; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
NAME INDEX

Victim
• Rev. Isaac Simmons (April 1880 – March 26, 1944)²

Men alleged to be involved in the murder:
• Noble Rider (or Noble Thompson), brother of Narville (1911 – 1973)³
• Narville Rider, brother of Noble (April 9, 1914 – June 18, 1993)⁴
• Harper Dawson, father of Roger and Mann (died on July 9, 1970)⁵
• Roger Dawson, son of Harper Dawson (unknown)
• Mann Dawson, son of Harper Dawson (December 18, 1915 – February 25, 1983)⁶
• John Brown (unknown)
• Harper Elliot (unknown)
• Rabbit Spillman (unknown)
• Vaughn Lee (unknown)

Attorney for Plaintiff
• District Attorney Joseph E. Brown (unknown)

Victim’s Family
• Parents, including:
  o Anthony Simmons (November 1856 – unknown)⁸
  o Laura Simmons (November 1857 – unknown)⁹
• Wife:
  o Florence Jackson (October 1880 – unknown)¹⁰
• Brothers and sisters, including:
  o Otis Robinson (unknown)
  o Mary Bates (unknown)
  o Francis Patterson (April 1883 – unknown)¹¹
  o Matthew Simmons (January 1896 – unknown)¹²
  o Ida Buckley
• Children, including:

² CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
³ CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
⁴ CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
⁵ CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
⁶ CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
⁷ Email from CRRJ Investigator, Aug. 4, 2011.
⁸ CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
⁹ CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
¹⁰ CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
¹¹ CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
¹² CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
• Annie Simmons (unknown)
• Eldridge Simmons (January 1897 – unknown)\textsuperscript{13}
• Everett Simmons (unknown)
• Evy (or Evie) Simmons (unknown)
• Bishop Rollins Robin Simmons (December 28, 1907 – April 13, 2001)\textsuperscript{14}
• Mamie Simmons (unknown)
• Emma Simmons (unknown)
• Laura Lee Simmons (November 12, 1917 – September 13, 2007)\textsuperscript{15}

• Grandchildren:
  • Dr. Laura Thompson (as of 2011, lives in Memphis, TN)\textsuperscript{16}
  • Hazel (last name unknown)
  • L.S. (last name unknown)
  • Donis McDowell\textsuperscript{17}

• Great-grandchildren:
  • John Flagg (as of 2011, lives in California)\textsuperscript{18}

Civil Rights Advocates

• Daniel E. Byrd, President of the New Orleans Branch of the NAACP (January 3, 1910 – 1984)\textsuperscript{19}
• Edward R. Dudley, Assistant Special Counsel for the NAACP (March 11, 1911 – February 10, 2005)\textsuperscript{20}
• Paul M. Kattenburg, Foreign Services Officer (1922 – 2004)\textsuperscript{21}
• Thurgood Marshall, Special Counsel for the NAACP (July 2, 1908 – January 24, 1993)\textsuperscript{22}
• John E. Rousseau, Jr., a civil rights activist and journalist for New Orleans Informer and Sentinel (April 22, 1908 or 1909 – unknown)\textsuperscript{23}
• A. P. Tureaud, Civil Rights attorney in New Orleans, Louisiana (February 26, 1899 – January 22, 1972)\textsuperscript{24}
• Walter White, Secretary for the NAACP (July 1, 1893 – March 21, 1955)\textsuperscript{25}
• Ernest J. Wright, People’s Defense League (unknown)\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{13} CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
\textsuperscript{14} CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
\textsuperscript{15} CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
\textsuperscript{16} CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
\textsuperscript{17} CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
\textsuperscript{18} CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
Deputy Sheriff, Amite County
  • Nick Travers (unknown)

Sheriff, Liberty
  • Wiley Smith (unknown)

Government
  • Thomas L. Bailey, *Governor of Mississippi* (January 6, 1988 – November 2, 1946)\(^{26}\)
  • Francis Biddle, *United States Attorney General* (May 9, 1886 – October 4, 1968)\(^{27}\)
  • Tom C. Clark, *United States Attorney General* (September 23, 1899 – June 13, 1977)\(^ {28}\)
  • J. D. Good, *FBI Assistant Special Agent in Charge* (unknown)

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Introduction

Rev. Isaac Simmons, a minister, was lynched on March 26, 1944, in Amite County, Mississippi. The Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project has investigated the circumstances surrounding his death and the ensuing legal proceedings. The FBI investigated the Simmons lynching and turned the results over to local authorities. A state grand jury returned indictments against six men. The case proceeded to trial against one of the defendants. He was acquitted. The prosecutor then obtained dismissals of the remaining cases.

The Land

In 1887, Rev. Isaac Simmons’ father, Anthony, purchased 141 acres of land in Amite County, Mississippi, for $302.08. In 1895, he acquired an additional 137 acres for $300 more. Anthony died intestate around 1931, leaving his estate to his widow, Laura Simmons, and their children.

On April 22, 1931, on the Petition of the Estate of Anthony Simmons, filed in Amite County Chancery Court, the court found that Anthony’s estate consisted of “some land” and a
Liberty Bank Account containing $412.64.\textsuperscript{38} Rev. Isaac Simmons, Anthony and Laura’s eldest son, along with one N.G. Mayhall, were named co-administrators of the estate.\textsuperscript{39} \textsuperscript{40} The petition stated that Anthony left “no debts except a balance of burial expenses in the sum of $15 and the taxes on his property for the year 1930…which amounted to the sum of $110.61.”\textsuperscript{41} After paying the taxes, the burial expenses, and the legal and administrative fees, the remainder of the estate was, pursuant to the order of the chancery court, to be distributed equally among Anthony’s seven heirs: Laura, his wife; and their children, Otis (Robinson), Isaac (Simmons), Mary (Bates), Francis (Patterson), Matthew (Simmons), and (Ida Buckley).\textsuperscript{42}

It appears that Rev. Isaac Simmons took full control of the 278 acres of land, with at least some of his siblings setting up residence and raising their families in various locations around the property.\textsuperscript{43}

\textbf{Rev. Simmons}

For over ten years, Rev. Simmons appears to have lived in relative peace on the 278-acre farm his father had left him.\textsuperscript{44} He was a preacher and local medicine man;\textsuperscript{45} he was husband of Florence Jackson and father of Annie, Eldridge, Everett, Evy, Bishop Rollins Robin, Mamie, Emma, and Laura Lee.\textsuperscript{46}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{38} Estate of Anthony Simmons, Deceased, No.910; Chancery Court of Amite County, MS, In Vacation 1931, on April 22, 1931.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Estate of Anthony Simmons, Deceased, No.910; Chancery Court of Amite County, MS, In Vacation 1931, on April 22, 1931.
\item \textsuperscript{40} CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011. Even though the petition named two court administrators for Anthony’s estate, N.G Mayhall’s name does not surface on any land transaction documents after Anthony’s death.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Estate of Anthony Simmons, Deceased, No.910; Chancery Court of Amite County, MS, In Vacation 1931, on April 22, 1931.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Estate of Anthony Simmons, Deceased, No.910; Chancery Court of Amite County, MS, In Vacation 1931, on April 22, 1931.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Interview with John A. Flagg, Great-grandson to Rev. Isaac Simmons (July 19, 2011).
\item \textsuperscript{44} CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Interview with John A. Flagg, Great-grandson to Rev. Isaac Simmons (July 19, 2011).
\item \textsuperscript{46} CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
\end{itemize}
According to Rev. Simmons’ son, Eldridge, the family’s peaceful existence was shattered in 1941 by a rumor that there might be oil on Rev. Simmons’ property. As the rumors began circulating, a white man, Noble Rider tried to take Rev. Simmons’ land. Eldridge recalled, “We refused to sell as we were getting along alright. But they kept on hounding us and even went so far…to burn my barn full of corn, destroying it and a fine span of mules I had.”

By this time, all of Rev. Simmons’ children—except Rollins, who was living in Chicago—were farming the family property. Concerned that his children might lose his father’s land, Simmons contacted Frank Mize, an attorney in Forrest County Mississippi. Eldridge would later recall that “my father, a few months ago, went to Jackson, Miss., and employed a lawyer to straighten out the property, and fix it up so that they couldn’t legally take it.”

A few weeks after hiring Mize, two white men, Vaughn Lee and Noble Rider, approached Rev. Simmons while he was cutting timber on the property and ordered him to

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49 Jasper T. Duncan, Son Kidnapped, Beaten, jailed, Ordered from Town Over Property, New Orleans Informer and Sentinel, June 24, 1944, at 8; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
50 Affidavit, “Statement of Eldridge Simmons made to John E. Rousseau, Jr.,” New Orleans, Aug. 1, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division. In the Affidavit, Eldridge Simmons asserted that Rev. Simmons’ attorney was from Franklin, MS, but in an article written by Jasper T. Duncan, Eldridge asserted that Frank Mize was from Jackson, MS.
51 John Dittmer, Local People 15 August Meier et al. eds., 1995).
53 Jasper T. Duncan, Son Kidnapped, Beaten, jailed, Ordered from Town Over Property, New Orleans Informer and Sentinel, June 24, 1944, at 8; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
Rev. Simmons reported the threat to Attorney Mize, who directed Rev. Simmons to do as the white men instructed—at least for the time being.

In subsequent interviews with the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Clinic, Dr. Laura Thompson, Rev. Simmons’ granddaughter, and John Flagg, Rev. Simmons’ great-grandson, recalled that, in addition to the land, the white men also wanted the formula for a special ointment that Rev. Simmons had created to cure a livestock disease. Rev. Simmons refused to give the men the formula.

The Lynching

On Sunday, March 26, 1944, sometime between 11 a.m. and noon, six white men drove to Eldridge’s home, demanding that he show them where the Simmons’ property ended. All six men carried guns. Eldridge later recounted the story: “After we went down the road a few yards we came to a car and stopped. They cursed me, kicked me, beat me, tore my shirt off me, called me a smart ‘nigger’ and told that they were going to kill me. I begged them not to kill

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56 Interview with Dr. Laura Thompson, Granddaughter to Rev. Isaac Simmons (June 30, 2011). Interview with John A. Flagg, Great-grandson to Rev. Isaac Simmons (July 19, 2011).
57 Interview with Dr. Laura Thompson, Granddaughter to Rev. Isaac Simmons (June 30, 2011). Interview with John A. Flagg, Great-grandson to Rev. Isaac Simmons (July 19, 2011).
59 Jasper T. Duncan, Son Kidnapped, Beaten, jailed, Ordered from Town Over Property, New Orleans Informer and Sentinel, June 24, 1944, at 8; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
me.” As they drove, they kept telling Eldridge that he and his father were “smart niggers” for having consulted a lawyer. An FBI investigative report states that the white men forced Eldridge to tell them where his father was. After the earlier threats, Rev. Simmons had gone into hiding for fear that he would be killed.

On the day of the killing, two of Rev. Simmons’ grandchildren, Hazel and L.S., had been playing on the porch of Rev. Simmons’ house when the white men came to abduct him. Laura Lee, one of Rev. Simmons’ daughters, was also at Rev. Simmons’ house, staying with her parents so that they could help her take care of her month-old daughter. When Laura Lee saw the white men approaching, she grabbed Hazel and L.S, and hid them. Rev. Simmons’ wife, who was at church, did not see the abduction.

Eldridge recounted that Noble Rider and another man flanked Rev. Simmons on both sides as they dragged his father from his home and into their car, while another man kicked and punched Rev. Simmons from behind. The men then drove Rev. Simmons and Eldridge down a deserted road, beating them incessantly. Eventually they stopped the car and told Rev.

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60 Jasper T. Duncan, *Son Kidnapped, Beaten, jailed, Ordered from Town Over Property*, New Orleans Informer and Sentinel, June 24, 1944, at 8; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
64 Interview with John A. Flagg, Great-grandson to Rev. Isaac Simmons (July 19, 2011).
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67 Interview with John A. Flagg, Great-grandson to Rev. Isaac Simmons (July 19, 2011).
Simmons to get out. Eldridge remained behind. Emma, who was Hazel and L.S.’s mother, lived near the place where the car stopped. From the distance, Emma saw her father try to run away from the white men and heard the gunshots that took his life. Eldridge heard the gunshots from the car as well: “I heard another shot, and blows evidently from sticks they were beating him with, between the times I was begging the three who had me to spare my life.” The men did spare Eldridge’s life, ordering him to leave town in ten days and to keep quiet what had transpired. He agreed.

Eldridge recalls that he was “bloody, ragged, and half-blind” when the men released him. News of the lynching spread quickly. A group of people accompanied Eldridge back to the murder scene to try to locate his father’s body. Eldridge recounted finding his father “lying half on his side, shot three times in the back of the head, all of his teeth knocked out with a nearby club, his arm broken, and his tongue cut out.”

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71 Interview with John A. Flagg, Great-grandson to Rev. Isaac Simmons (July 19, 2011).
72 Interview with John A. Flagg, Great-grandson to Rev. Isaac Simmons (July 19, 2011).
73 Jasper T. Duncan, Son Kidnapped, Beaten, jaled, Ordered from Town Over Property, New Orleans Informer and Sentinel, June 24, 1944, at 8; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
High Sheriff held an inquest at the scene of the crime and concluded that Rev. Simmons “met his death at the hands of ‘unknown parties.’”\textsuperscript{80} \textsuperscript{81}

After Rev. Simmons’ murder, Eldridge prepared to leave town. He told Willie Huff and A. B. Robinson, two tenants who worked for him, to leave the property.\textsuperscript{82} He also warned S.B. Moton, who had been staying there because he had nowhere else to go, to leave immediately.\textsuperscript{83}

On March 28, 1944, Rev. Simmons was buried.\textsuperscript{84} The next day, Nick Travers, the deputy sheriff, took Eldridge to Magnolia, Mississippi in nearby Pike County, and locked him in jail “for his own protection”.\textsuperscript{85} Eldridge explained his incarceration: “He [the Sheriff] said of course I hadn’t done anything but they [the white men who killed Rev. Simmons] might come and get me if I stayed around Amite.”\textsuperscript{86} Amite County Sheriff Wiley Smith released Eldridge on April 8, 1944, giving him a letter of introduction: “To whom it may concern, this man can do good car repair, will work handy around timber logging or auto repair. Whoever hires him, if it be in

\textsuperscript{80} Jasper T. Duncan, \textit{Son Kidnapped, Beaten, jailed, Ordered from Town Over Property}, New Orleans Informer and Sentinel, June 24, 1944, at 8; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.

\textsuperscript{81} On March 30, 1944, a headline in the Southern Herald declared: “Aged Amite Negro Slain Sunday Morning at His Home, Near Berwick.” The article went on to explain that “numbers of people have been asked for a statement on the killing and up to the time of our going to press Thursday noon, we have had practically no information.” \textit{Aged Amite Negro Slain Sunday Morning at his Home, Near Berwick}, The Southern Herald, March 30, 1944, Volume Seventy-Eight.

\textsuperscript{82} Affidavit, “Statement of Eldridge Simmons made to John E. Rousseau, Jr.,” New Orleans, Aug. 1, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.

\textsuperscript{83} Affidavit, “Statement of Eldridge Simmons made to John E. Rousseau, Jr.,” New Orleans, Aug. 1, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.

\textsuperscript{84} It is disputed whether the funeral was held on March 28, 1944 or March 29, 2004. The affidavit lists March 29\textsuperscript{th} and the Jasper T. Duncan article lists March 28, 1944 as the date of the funeral.

\textsuperscript{85} Affidavit, “Statement of Eldridge Simmons made to John E. Rousseau, Jr.,” New Orleans, Aug. 1, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.

\textsuperscript{86} Jasper T. Duncan, \textit{Son Kidnapped, Beaten, Jailed, Ordered from Town Over Property}, New Orleans Informer and Sentinel, June 24, 1944, at 8; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
Jackson, Miss., keep in touch with Sheriff Gordon Jackson. I would like to know his whereabouts. His name is [Eldridge] Simmons from Liberty, Miss."87

**Eldridge Simmons Seeks Justice**

After his release, Eldridge went to New Orleans. He later told a journalist, “I made it to New Orleans where I am trying to do odd jobs to keep eating, and see if I can’t get some help from some organization, organizations or people to see if we can’t get some kind of justice done.”88 He wanted to find out if something could be done “to those men for kidnapping me and murdering my father in cold blood? Can’t somebody be made to pay for my crops in the fields, my property damage, and being deprived of my property and rights to make an honest living on the soil where I was born and reared? Can’t some ends of justice be met to aid us in this case?”89

He contacted the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Ernest J. Wright of the People’s Defense League.90 Even though the murderers had warned him that “if this comes up again, you had better not know anything about it,”91 Eldridge wanted to make sure that charges were brought against the men who had taken his father’s life.92

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87 Jasper T. Duncan, *Son Kidnapped, Beaten, jailed, Ordered from Town Over Property*, New Orleans Informer and Sentinel, June 24, 1944, at 8; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
88 Jasper T. Duncan, *Son Kidnapped, Beaten, jailed, Ordered from Town Over Property*, New Orleans Informer and Sentinel, June 24, 1944, at 8; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
89 Jasper T. Duncan, *Son Kidnapped, Beaten, jailed, Ordered from Town Over Property*, New Orleans Informer and Sentinel, June 24, 1944, at 8; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
90 Jasper T. Duncan, *Son Kidnapped, Beaten, jailed, Ordered from Town Over Property*, New Orleans Informer and Sentinel, June 24, 1944, at 8; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
92 Jasper T. Duncan, *Son Kidnapped, Beaten, jailed, Ordered from Town Over Property*, New Orleans Informer and Sentinel, June 24, 1944, at 8; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
On August 1, 1944, Eldridge made a statement to John E. Rousseau, Jr., the well-known civil rights activist and journalist for *New Orleans Informer and Sentinel*, who was gathering eyewitness accounts for the NAACP. In his affidavit, Eldridge detailed the events he witnessed on the day of his father’s death.

On August 3, 1944, an FBI official observed that proceedings for Rev. Simmons’ case “should be taken under the 13th Amendment to the Constitution and under Section 42, (252) Title 18, United States Code.” This represented a shift from position reflected in an FBI memorandum of July 24, 1944, to the effect that “since no police officers appeared to be involved” in Rev. Simmons’ killing “no further investigation was desired.”

On August 4, 1944, Daniel E. Byrd, President of the New Orleans Branch of the NAACP, sent to Thurgood Marshall, Special Counsel for the NAACP, Eldridge Simmons’ affidavit. Byrd explained to Marshall that: “A Negro was shot down in cold blood in Jackson Mississippi without the local Authorities in Jackson taking any action.” Byrd further explained that the New Orleans NAACP had sent this information to the National NAACP Office, asking the National Office to tell the Department of Justice “to not be so complacent about the brutality being placed upon Negroes.”

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98 Daniel E. Byrd to Thurgood Marshall, Esq., Aug. 4, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
100 Daniel E. Byrd to Thurgood Marshall, Esq., Aug. 4, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
On August 9, 1944, Edward R. Dudley, Assistant Special Counsel for the NAACP, sent Eldridge’s affidavit to Thomas L. Bailey, the Governor of Mississippi. Dudley described the events and related to the Governor that Eldridge had been “forced to abandon his land in Amite County, Miss., following the brutal murder of his father, Rev. Isaac Simmons, for daring to seek the advice of legal counsel in an attempt to protect his property.” Dudley wrote: “This case clearly represents a conspiracy on the part of certain individuals (named in the affidavit) to injure, threaten, and intimidate these citizens in the free exercise or enjoyment of rights secured to them by the State Constitution and laws thereunder.” Dudley demanded that Governor Bailey “institute a vigorous investigation into this matter so that the guilty parties may be properly punished.”

On August 17, 1944, the National NAACP issued a press release describing the Simmons case. The statement related that Eldridge had already sent his affidavit to the NAACP in New York, which had in turn asked Mississippi Governor Bailey to investigate the matter. The NAACP also asked Attorney General Francis Biddle to look into “the possibility that Federal conspiracy statutes have been violated.” In a letter to both Governor Bailey and the U.S. Attorney General, the NAACP pointed out that “this case clearly represents a conspiracy on the
part of certain individuals (named in the affidavit) to injure, threaten, and intimidate these citizens in the free exercise or enjoyment of rights secured to them by the United States Constitution.”

On August 19, 1944, Attorney General Tom C. Clark sent a letter to Assistant Special Counsel for the NAACP, Edward R. Dudley, acknowledging receipt of Eldridge’s affidavit. The United States Attorney General had already reported the case to the Department of Justice and an investigation was commenced. Clark wrote that he was forwarding the affidavit to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, in the hopes that they would be able to assist with the investigation.

On September 5, 1944, Walter White, Secretary for the NAACP, sent a letter to Attorney General Francis Biddle, inquiring what action the Department of Justice had taken on the case of Rev. Isaac Simmons. The NAACP had not heard anything from the Department of Justice since it had alerted the department about the case on August 9, 1944.

On September 5, 1944, Walter White sent another letter to Daniel E. Byrd, President of the New Orleans Branch of the NAACP, and A. P. Tureaud, a prominent civil rights attorney in New Orleans, inquiring about the Simmons case.

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108 Press Service of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Aug. 17, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
109 Tom C. Clark to Edward R. Dudley, Aug. 21, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
110 Tom C. Clark to Edward R. Dudley, Aug. 21, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
111 Tom C. Clark to Edward R. Dudley, Aug. 21, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
112 Walter White to Francis Biddle, Sept. 5, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
113 Walter White to Francis Biddle, Sept. 5, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
114 Walter White to Daniel E. Byrd and A.P. Tureaud, Sept. 5, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
On September 5, 1944, FBI special agents went to a saw mill in Liberty, Mississippi, and spoke to a man believed to have been involved in the killing of Rev. Simmons. When the agents began to question the man about his interest in the Simmons’ property, he became very angry and called upon other nearby men to bring him an axe. The man did not calm down until one of the special agents took out his gun. This man agreed to go to the Sheriff’s Office at Liberty and “admitted he had misinterpreted what the Agents had said, stating that he thought the Agents were indicating that he was directly involved in the killing.” Assistant Special Agent in Charge J. D. Good reported that the United States Attorney was in favor of filing suit against this man for assaulting a Federal Officer. Good also reported that “the U.S. Attorney also believes it will have a very beneficial effect on the Civil Rights investigation as many of the people in the vicinity think it is ‘just another Negro killing.’” Good also stated that “the U.S. Attorney is in favor of placing [name omitted] under $5,000 bond,” in part because the man was found to have been “bragging in a barber shop in Liberty about ‘handling some FBI Agents.’” The special agents intended to go to the mill and simultaneously arrest the man and question the other six men who had been at the mill.

On September 8, 1944, A.P Tureaud wrote to Walter White’s letter and confirmed that the Department of Justice was investigating the matter. Tureaud explained that while Governor Bailey did not appear to have taken any action it seemed that a representative from an

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123 A.P. Tureaud to Walter White, Sept. 8, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
“Agriculture Bureau” had indeed visited “the scene.” Tureaud was not sure if anyone was currently working on Rev. Simmons’ property, but said that he believed that, as of that moment, no oil had been found there.  

**Legal Proceedings Against Alleged Perpetrators**

On October 13, 1944, the FBI renewed its investigation and sent a summary of the results of its investigation to the state’s attorney who “desired to proceed with murder charges.”

The case was then presented to an Amite County grand jury, which returned indictments on October 25, 1944.

On October 25, 1944, murder charges were brought against Noble Rider, Harper Dawson, Narville Rider, Roger Dawson, Mann Dawson, and John Brown for Rev. Simmons’ murder.

The six men were arraigned on October 26, 1944, before Judge R. E. Bennett. In his charge to the jury, District Attorney Joseph E. Brown stated that these men “did then and there willfully, unlawfully, feloniously, and of their malice aforethought kill and murder one Isaac Simmons, a human being.” Brown further urged the jury to disregard “all appeals to prejudice.”

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124 A.P. Tureaud to Walter White, Sept. 8, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
125 A.P. Tureaud to Walter White, Sept. 8, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
128 *6 Whites Indicted in Slaying of Mississippi Minister*, Oct. 26, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
129 *6 Whites Indicted in Slaying of Mississippi Minister*, Oct. 26, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
though several accounts of the murder seemed to indicate that others were also involved in Rev. Simmons’ death, no charges appear to have been brought against Rabbit Spillman and Vaughn Lee.\textsuperscript{132} Eldridge had stated in his affidavit to John E. Rousseau, Jr. that both Spillman and Lee were present and took part in his father’s lynching.\textsuperscript{133}

Many of the accused were related to each other.\textsuperscript{134} Roger and Mann were the sons of Harper Dawson.\textsuperscript{135} Noble and Narville Rider were brothers, working as lumber mill operators.\textsuperscript{136}

After the trial, Noble Rider was “exonerated on insufficient evidence; and since the case against him was said to be the strongest, the others were not brought to trial.”\textsuperscript{137} \textsuperscript{138} \textsuperscript{139}

On October 27, 1944, Walter White wrote to the New York newspaper, \textit{P.M.},\textsuperscript{140} and to one Elizabeth Wilson, thanking them for “the superb job done in getting indictments of the lynchers of the Reverend Isaac Simmons.”\textsuperscript{141}

On November 6, 1944, Paul M. Kattenburg, a Foreign Services Officer,\textsuperscript{142} sent a letter to the NAACP noting that “the crime committed in Amite County, Mississippi, against the person of a colored preacher and farmer has, if accurately reported in the newspaper \textit{PM}., revolted me

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{132} Affidavit, “Statement of Eldridge Simmons made to John E. Rousseau, Jr.,” New Orleans, Aug. 1, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Affidavit, “Statement of Eldridge Simmons made to John E. Rousseau, Jr.,” New Orleans, Aug. 1, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
\item \textsuperscript{134} CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
\item \textsuperscript{135} CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
\item \textsuperscript{136} CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
\item \textsuperscript{138} An article in the newspaper, The Gloster Record, reported that Sheriff Smith had arrested “four men [the three Rider men and Harper Dawson] and placed them in jail, but upon advice from the District Attorney, they were allowed bail in the sum of $4,000 each.” \textit{Four Held in Second District Killing}, The Gloster Record, April 7, 1944.
\item \textsuperscript{139} FBI FOIA documents stated that “subjects were tried in local courts and on 11/4/44, were acquitted. The results were furnished to the Department which desired no further investigation.” This date does not seem to exactly line up with the others. (Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts FBI Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons).
\item \textsuperscript{141} Walter White to P.M. and Elizabeth Wilson, Oct. 27, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
\item \textsuperscript{142} Kattenburg, Paul M., http://library.sc.edu/scpc/kattenburg.html (last visited Aug. 10, 2011).
\end{itemize}
enough to make me feel that I ought to do something about it.”

Kattenburg emphasized that he was “in no way connected with any newspaper, organization, or official agency of any sort dealing with this case.”

On November 10, 1944, Edward Dudley, Assistant Special Counsel for the NAACP, responded to Kattenburg’s letter. Dudley wrote that the FBI had conducted an “extensive investigation of the case and found that it was a revolting crime and that the federal government has no jurisdiction since the killing was not the result of state action and therefore not a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution.” Dudley went on to write that the FBI turned the information they had received over to state authorities “who did submit the matter to the Grand Jury where the men guilty of this crime were subsequently indicted.” Dudley explained that the all-white jury had acquitted one of the white men. He was unsure whether the other men had been tried.

In 1944, Congress held a Subcommittee Hearing on “Bills to Assure to Persons within the Jurisdiction of Every State Due Process of Law and Equal Protection of the Laws, and to

143 Paul M. Kattenburg to NAACP, Nov. 6, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
144 Paul M. Kattenburg to NAACP, Nov. 6, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
145 Edward R. Dudley to Paul M. Kattenburg, Nov. 10, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
146 Edward R. Dudley to Paul M. Kattenburg, Nov. 10, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
147 Edward R. Dudley to Paul M. Kattenburg, Nov. 10, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
148 Edward R. Dudley to Paul M. Kattenburg, Nov. 10, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
149 Edward R. Dudley to Paul M. Kattenburg, Nov. 10, 1944; NAACP Papers, Box II-A408, Folder 1, Lynching—Liberty, Mississippi, 1944; Library of Congress—Manuscript Division.
Prevent the Crime of Lynching, and for other Purposes.”150 “In the Eightieth Congress eighteen anti-lynching bills were introduced. Typically these bills provided for (1) punishment of individuals who participate in a lynching and (2) punishment of state officers who neglect their duty to protect to protect lynching victims.”151 One of the lynching cases discussed was that of Rev. Isaac Simmons. The report quoted part of the statement Eldridge had made to John E. Rousseau, Jr. on August 1, 1944.152 Congress did not adopt the anti-lynching measure.153

**What happened to Rev. Simmons’ Land?**

Rev. Isaac’s Simmons’ father bought his first parcel of land in 1887.154 As of 2011, it is not possible to ascertain what happened to that land after his son’s lynching in 1944.155

The county courthouse’s “partial, tattered tax records for the period” establish that at least part of Rev. Simmons’ property taxes were current at the time of his death.156 157 In Eldridge’s statement to John E. Rousseau, Jr., he asserted that he had a tax receipt showing that he had personally paid taxes on the property as late as February 1, 1944. Then the trail of ownership disappears.158

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154 CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
155 CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
157 CRRJ Report on Rev. Isaac Simmons, June 20, 2011.
According to journalists who investigated the case in connection with a series of articles on black land loss, the land is worth an estimated $33,660.159

Conclusion

The Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project is currently working with the family of Rev. Simmons to ascertain the full facts of the killing and the land loss.