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“Lynching in Sandusky: An American Story”

Podcast by Claire Stevenson, Emma Bredthauer, and Bethany Gen
Saturday, 18 May 2019

Recording 1.1

Before we launch into the podcast, we'd like to make a statement about our positionality as researchers as well as issue a broad content warning. We live in a country with a racial caste system that excludes a disproportionate number of black and brown people from higher education. The fact that we get to research this topic at all, as folks who are not targets of anti-black violence, is a function of racial privilege. We hope that by bringing this lynching to light, we can add our voices to the ongoing movement to prevent anti-black violence in this country.

It is our goal to approach this difficult topic with sensitivity, keeping in mind that talking about lynching can bring up feelings of anger, pain, and sadness, particularly for those who are targets of anti-black violence today. We are sensitive to the fact that the trauma of lynching and other forms of anti-black violence passes down through generations and continues to have an impact today. With that in mind, please be aware that this podcast will involve discussion of extreme anti-black violence.

Recording 1.2

Imagine your hometown. What comes to mind? Is it the park? The main street? The old courthouse? Or even the library? Every block calls to mind a childhood memory.

But what if that rosy image were to be called into question? Across America, towns like these were the setting not just of ball games and Fourth of July fireworks, but also immeasurably cruel racial violence. The history is well documented. When the promise of Reconstruction was broken, black Americans were targeted for daring to claim their equality. But what's not as well known is that racial violence was not limited to the South. The North had nearly 100 reported lynchings take place between 1877 and 1950. Lynching was a *nationwide* phenomenon.

We're Bethany Gen, Claire Stevenson, and Emma Bredthauer, student researchers from Oberlin College. Today we're bringing you a story from a city only 45 miles away from Oberlin—Sandusky, Ohio, which you may know as home to the popular amusement park, Cedar Point. But in 1878, Sandusky was the site of a racial terror lynching; one of fifteen to occur in the state of Ohio between 1877 and 1950. What makes this case so important to talk about is that Sandusky had, and still has, a reputation for taking up the mantle of racial justice. This reputation stems from Sandusky's key involvement in the Underground Railroad. Just fifteen years before the savage murder of William Taylor, Sandusky was a major, if not *the* major, location on the Underground Railroad. Today we try to understand how the people of Sandusky transformed from advocates of freedom to eager participants in an explosive act of anti-black violence.

Recording 1.3

The story we're about to tell is horrific, shameful, and disturbing. But it's also a uniquely American story, one that all citizens, particularly white citizens, need to understand if we're ever going to build a truly inclusive America. As the visionary Equal Justice Initiative founder Bryan Stevenson says, "Our nation's history of racial injustice casts a shadow across the American landscape. This shadow cannot be lifted until we shine the light of truth on the destructive violence that shaped our nation, traumatized people of color, and compromised our commitment to the rule of law and to equal justice."

Recording 2.1

Our story begins sixteen miles south of Sandusky, in the small farming community of Monroeville, on the morning of September 11, 1878. On this particular morning, an uncharacteristically disturbing headline regarding Monroeville's northern neighbor in the *Monroeville Spectator* rocked the community. It was titled "Lynch Law in Sandusky: A Woman Ravished, and her Murderer Hung by the Mob."

Now, it was fairly typical for local papers to publish salacious stories about neighboring towns. However, this story was particularly shocking.

News Announcer Voice: The Norwalk Reflector: September 11th, 1878: "The mysterious disappearance of a woman, the finding of her dead body, the murderer's confession, followed by a lynching scene which rivals the most sensational occurrence of the kind ever sent from the South, all this has taken place in our city within a few short hours, and now that it is over our citizens are contemplating the affair with horror and regret."

The Norwalk Reflector article continues in this sensational tone as its report of the previous week's events:

News Announcer Voice: "The Register of Wednesday morning published an account of the mysterious disappearance of a young woman named Mary"—

Actually, it's Alice—

News Announcer Voice: O'Donnell, a servant girl for some time in the employ of Mr. A. K. West, on Washington Street, in this city. The last time she was seen alive by friends and acquaintances was about 5 o'clock Monday afternoon. Mrs. West left the house in her charge about that time, and on returning an hour later found everything, even the supper table, just as she had left it, with the exception that the girl Alice was missing. Inquiries into every direction failed to give any clue to the girl, and Marshal Berrigan, assisted by Coroner Hughes, Police Captain Bowen and two policemen, proceeded to investigate the premises, which finally resulted in the arrest of ...

--Here the article uses an outdated term for black person—

News Announcer Voice: William Taylor, a hostler—

Stablehand—

News Announcer Voice: in Mr. Taylor's employ. Spots of blood were found on various parts of the barn door and floor, and also a club stained with blood, which was taken possession of by the police. Every effort was made to pump Taylor concerning the affair, but he stubbornly denied any connection with it until Wednesday morning—

more than a full day of questioning—

News Announcer Voice: when he suddenly broke down and made a partial confession. He stated that after returning from errands on which he had been sent by Miss Hattie West, he went to the stable, where he found the body of Alice O'Donnell lying on the floor, her throat cut, and her clothes stained with blood. The sight horrified him, and he became possessed with a fear that he would be held accountable for her death. Acting on this belief he secreted the body and about midnight took a horse and buggy from the stable of Mr. West, into which he placed the corpse and drove to McCartney's woods, where he buried it near the fence with some hay. He denied stoutly that he killed the girl, falling on his knees before the officers and asserting his innocence before God. The wretch was ironed, placed in a buggy, and with the officers was driven to the woods where the body was found, as he had described. The body was taken to an undertaker's, and meanwhile as the story spread the excitement became intense.

Recording 2.2

This is when things start getting really bad for William Taylor. Because as rumors are circulating about this murder, a mob reported to be anywhere from two thousand to seven thousand whites starts to gather around the county jail where he's in custody. At this point, Erie County Sheriff Merrill L. Starr, the man who brought Taylor to the jail in the first place, reportedly hatches a plan to secret Taylor to a nearby county. And he does manage to get Taylor out of the jail without detection. But they don't get very far.

News Announcer Voice: Scarcely was the infirmary reached when a portion of the mob drove up in a wagon and stated that they had been commissioned by five hundred men to bring Taylor back to Sandusky and they intended to do it. Upon promising that Taylor would not be injured, the Sheriff complied with their request, and started in the direction of the city. At the railroad crossing an immense mob had gathered, who demanded that the prisoner be given to their hands.

Listeners should be advised that the report gets graphic from this point on.

News Announcer Voice: They were partially pacified until the arrival of Pusch's saloon on Columbus Avenue, when a number of men grabbed the wagon, overturned it in the street, and threw the occupants out upon the ground. The prisoner was seized by as many men as could get a hold of him and was beaten and kicked almost insensible. The mob then dragged and pulled him along down Columbus Avenue to

Washington Park, and hurried him into the pagoda. By that time two or three thousand people had congregated in the park, and the wildest excitement prevailed. The men howled and yelled like a lot of demons, filling the air with their shouts and curses.

Someone is sent to get a rope. Gripped with terror, Taylor reportedly exclaims,

News Announcer Voice: “I did not kill that girl! I only took her away after she had been murdered. I know that they are about to kill me, and these are my last words, and before God I tell you I did not kill the girl. A colored man named John Scott killed her. Let them hang me now if they want to—I am innocent.”

Taylor’s words do nothing to stop the crowd. They shove a noose around his neck and yank him down the gazebo steps. They then drag his beaten body right through the commercial heart of Sandusky. When they get to the corner of Columbus Avenue and Market Street—probably the busiest corner in Sandusky at the time—they string the free end of the rope over the lamp post. They hoist Taylor up a few feet, but then rope breaks, and the crowd explodes in rage. Then Alice O’Donnell’s brothers burst onto the scene with a ladder in hand which they use to string up the noose once again, much to the crowd’s delight. Frank Graul hoists up Taylor’s now mangled body, himself lifted up by spectators. Graul drops Taylor who is then asphyxiated. Three cheers explode from the throng. Taylor is left hanging, dead, for fifteen minutes. Marshal Berrigan eventually cuts him down.

Recording 2.3

You’re probably sick to your stomach after that. We were too. But if you sit with the shock for a bit, just enough time so that you can face the story again, you start to notice things you didn’t the first time around. With this podcast, we’re going to mine this horrific story as a case study for what racial terror lynching looked like in Northeast Ohio. By doing so we hope to further the case for racial terror lynching as a nationwide, rather than regional, phenomenon. Our research underscores the fact that anti-blackness is an American problem, not a Southern problem, and we hope that the scholarship begins to adopt this stance.

Recording 2.4

But first, a note on how we became aware of this incident. As students of History 493: Readings in Historical Justice, we had the wonderful opportunity to see Alicia D’Addario, an attorney and representative of the Equal Justice Initiative as well as Oberlin alumna, give a presentation on campus. D’Addario discussed the history of racial terror, its legacy in America, and the EJI’s work on communities reconciling with their past racial violence.

As part of her presentation, D’Addario displayed the EJI map showing where racial terror lynchings occurred across the U.S. from 1877-1950. We immediately noticed that there were 15 reported racial terror lynchings in Ohio, and wanted to know more about the history of a state with a reputation for being on the ‘right’ side of history in terms of racial justice.

Recording 2.5

A preliminary Google search into the lynchings that occurred in Ohio counties near Oberlin College turned up the case of William Taylor. The case caught our attention as one particularly ripe for investigation. As we mentioned before, what makes this case so important to talk about is that Sandusky had, and still has, a reputation for taking up the mantle of racial justice, a reputation stemming from its key involvement in the Underground Railroad. In order to make sense of the violence that occurred in Sandusky 1878, we will first look at the history of lynching nationwide.

Recording 3.1

When we think of lynching, we often picture an angry mob of white men seizing blacks from inside a jail, or just on the street, and viciously killing them. Just like what happened to William Taylor. Although this image describes many lynchings, especially in the South, it does not accurately depict the roots of lynching in early America.

Lynching is an act of violence committed by a mob outside of the legal justice system. It was frequently utilized as a tool to maintain white supremacy. EJI, the Equal Justice Initiative, defines racially motivated lynching as racial terror, because the act and threat of lynching became primarily a technique to enforce racial exploitation. It did this in two ways: it enforced social conformity and punished individuals for perceived crimes, and it also created an atmosphere of terror that reinforced race-based power divides.

Recording 3.2

Lynching began as a way for white Southern planters to enforce the social status quo. Before the civil war, almost all mob violence was directed at poor whites accused of deviating from community standards of behavior. In fact, at that time there was an incentive NOT to lynch black enslaved people. Slaveholders did not want those whom they enslaved to be lynched because lynchings endangered their property, and threatened their autonomy and superior status over the poor whites. Instead, white planters would turn them in to the state governments for punishment. If the government executed an enslaved person it would provide compensation for the supposed lost property.

Recording 3.3

William Taylor was not even afforded a semblance of legal justice. The end of the civil war changed everything, because the white supremacy written in the law codes was REDUCED after the civil war, not eliminated. Many whites then turned to extralegal methods of maintaining the racial hierarchy.

Thus, during the antebellum period, mob violence became a national phenomenon.

Angry whites turned to lynching and mob violence to maintain the caste system so ingrained in Southern tradition. Between 1880 and 1930, mobs in the South killed 723 whites and 3,220 blacks. In the Midwest,

mobs killed 181 whites and 79 blacks. It is important to note that while white people were lynched during this time, lynchings of black victims were *markedly* more violent. They often featured extreme brutality including burning, torture, mutilation, and decapitation.

Recording 3.4 _____

But if racial hatred and bigotry provided the fuel for the lynchings, what was the spark?

Often lynchings were triggered by accusations of black men raping white women. The widespread stereotypes of black men as dangerous and uncontrollable sexual aggressors, coupled with the white community's hypervigilant enforcement of racial hierarchy and social separation, fed into the pervasive fear of black men raping white women.

Recording 3.5 _____

Articles at the time reported that Alice O'Donnell's body was "ravaged" which implied she had been sexually assaulted. Thus it is clear the mob arose out of fear for both white supremacy and white patriarchy. This is not to say white women were not complicit in the murder of William Taylor but to note the societal systems Taylor was threatening by simply being accused of the crime.

Of all of the racial terror lynchings that the EJI documented, 25% of victims were accused of sexual assault. Another 30% were accused of murder. This racist view of black men as sexual predators that pose a threat to white women was prevalent in local community members and national leaders alike.

Although racially-motivated lynching was most prevalent in the South, it occurred all over the United States, and its effects reverberated around the nation.

Recording 3.6 _____

And in the South, mob violence became intimately tied with the defense of slavery. After slavery was abolished, white people felt very threatened by the freed black population. Without slavery, the white elite turned to many other methods of continuing the regime of white supremacy. Lynching was one of the most prevalent and vicious ways that white communities enforced racial domination. To replace the terror and violence of slavery, white communities turned to lynching to impose a new regime of terror and violence.

Recording 3.7 _____

In contrast to Southern states, Northern states began to promote themselves not only as saviors of the Union but also as liberators. These narratives shaped how the North discussed and promoted their legacy, but also acted as a cover to the historical truth of racism in their own communities. The official narratives have only just begun to be questioned by society but still have a long way to go.

Northerners have developed an idea that slavery and segregation in the Jim Crow era were a Southern issue, and therefore overt racism stems from a Southern legacy. But the simple fact that William Taylor was lynched in Sandusky, OH proves otherwise.

Recording 3.8 _____

While all Northern states had abolished slavery by 1804, segregation and racism were still heavily present in the region. It is true many white Northerners aided and sympathized with the abolitionist movement and in many cases were threatened and even murdered for their beliefs. But simply believing slavery was an abhorrent immoral practice did not force white northerners to acknowledge black people as their equals. The subsequent failure of reconstruction is symbolic of Northern whites' failure to understand the racism that plagued their own societies.

Recording 3.9 _____

While the State of Ohio had forbidden slavery in its first constitution in 1802 state politics and institutionalized racism ensured black people remained second class citizens. To prevent freedom seekers from neighboring slave states--Kentucky and Virginia--Ohio passed strict Black Laws. One such law forced black migrants pay a \$500 bond to ensure "good behavior".

While Ohio strictly regulated the migration of free black citizens the state did little to ensure slavery was nonexistent in their territory. While slave trading was outlawed in the state it still persisted illegally. The law of Ohio did little to protect these citizens and was therefore complicit in the creation of a racial hierarchy. The ownership of previously bought enslaved people was legal until 1841, when Ohio passed legislation that ensured any enslaved person who set foot on Ohio soil was automatically free. Yet, state officials rarely took action against slave owners in the region and if they did the slave owners simply fled to the Kentucky border.

Recording 3.10 _____

Despite new legislation protecting freedom seekers slave catchers will still prevalent in the state of Ohio, particularly around the Kentucky border. There were several cases of Black citizens being taken by slave catchers despite being considered free men and women.

While Cincinnati was the main stomping ground for slave catchers, they were still present in Cleveland. Cleveland, however, also served as a hub for the abolitionist movement, an image which is heavily promoted by Cleveland historical society. Cleveland and the surrounding area on Lake Erie served as important locations for the underground railroad, since freedom seekers could be ferried away to Canada. This is true of Sandusky as well and many locals will speak of their history with pride.

Recording 3.11 _____

In the 1870s Sandusky, similar to the majority of Ohio, was made up of white immigrants from Ireland, Scotland, and Germany. The town was known as a democratic hub although there was a strong Republican party.

While our secondary research turned up several books and articles on Sandusky's loading docks and their lighthouse history, there was little to no information on the black community in Sandusky. So we decided to ask Jeremy Angstadt, Sandusky Archivist and local librarian, more about Sandusky's history.

(Jeremy)

Sandusky has always had an African American population prior to the Fugitive Slave Act up to 1850. Sandusky actually had a fairly large African American community ahead was on the outskirts of town, the settlement was called Africa was making mixture of free African Americans along with freedom seekers, people who had escaped slavery. With the passing of The Fugitive Slave Act, the settlement basically disappeared. So we know a large number of them went back to or went on to Canada because they knew there was freedom there and there was safety there. And we know there's examples throughout history. And because Sandusky was a port city, and it was a railroad junction. For we have plenty of examples of Slave Hunters coming to Sandusky looking for people. And as for the story, we hear that the citizens of Sandusky either were very helpful in the Underground Railroad or were relatively neutral. It doesn't sound like there's a lot of examples of people in town actively supporting these slave catchers and trying to return them slavery, it seems In fact, there's a large number of people who are known who did help. Few freedom seekers either get to Canada from here or go to Detroit or buffalo or they could easily go into Canada from there.

(End)

While Jeremy gave us insight into the history of Sandusky's black community we realized we needed to dive in deeper into our primary research in order to understand racism behind William Taylor's lynching.

Recording 4.1 _____

After we conducted secondary research we began our primary research first in Oberlin Ohio and then in Sandusky's archives. Our first step was conducting research both on our handy dandy computers and in the Oberlin College Library and the Oberlin College Archives. We found several informative sources, mostly from newspapers outside of Sandusky.

Recording 4.2 _____

One of the first articles about this event that we came upon was a New York Times article, published September 8th, 1878, titled: "A City Under Mob Rule." The NYT article begins with:

News voice: "Probably no city in the United States is so fully under the sway of mob rule to-day as this."

It goes on to report that the mob prevented a meeting, called by community leaders to “take action in the matter,” from doing anything substantive, or even passing a resolution to condemning the lynching. The article also says that

News voice: “the Coroner’s inquest was suspended to-day, as those knowing most of the affair fear to testify. They ... have received threats of violence if they say anything.”

Recording 4.3

We were very fascinated by this article for several reasons. First, it seemed like the New York Times was blaming the lynching on the lawlessness of the city. We thought that this insinuation placed all the blame on the city itself and made it easy for readers to not think critically about the reasons that this atrocity happened.

It painted Sandusky as a bad apple, not representative of the nation. Certainly not as part of a national effort to use terror to enforce the racial hierarchy. Although we thought that this case was unique, we knew from our research that lynching was a regular occurrence throughout America.

Recording 4.4

Like this article, most of the articles we found attributed Mr. Taylor’s lynching to the “mob rule” over Sandusky. Another article we found was from The Spectator, a newspaper based in Columbus OH. On November 9th, 1878, it reported on the lack of indictments against the people who lynched William Taylor:

News: “Much indignation was expressed by the law-abiding citizens, who feel now that the city is given over to mob rule.”

But is “mob rule” really the problem here? We think not.

Recording 4.5

In further research, we even found an article about Mr. Taylor’s lynching in the Oberlin Weekly News from September 13 1878.

This discovery did not surprise us due to Sandusky’s proximity to Oberlin as well as both towns being committed to the abolitionist movement. However, even Oberlin’s reporting on this event told the same story: a massive mob which lynched William Taylor, prevented any punitive response for this extralegal killing, and continues to hold the city in its grasp, much to the indignation of the rest of the “law-abiding” people.

Recording 5.1

After gaining a basic understanding of the events of that day and the forces at play, it was time to travel to Sandusky. We decided to pay a visit to the Sandusky Public Library, which houses the archives of the Sandusky Register. The Sandusky Register is a local newspaper that has been operating since the 1800s.

The public library is an impressive stone building, built with several turrets and a red roof. Walking up the steps of the library, we felt that we were going to discover something important. But we had no idea what that would be.

We began digging through the records of the Sandusky Register, when we immediately came upon a problem. *There were no newspaper records from the week that the lynching of William Taylor occurred.*

[Audio: reactions to that discovery]

Recording 5.2

Despite this suspicious lack of documentation during the week of this atrocity, we eventually found articles reporting on this incident. The first mention of the Lynching occurred on September 12th practically a full week after it was initially reported. Rather than providing a detailed account of what happened, reflected the public sentiment about the lynching and were published several days after it happened. We found these articles to be biased and incredibly vague on basic facts. And although William Taylor never went to court, every article we found presumed his guilt.

We further discovered the complicated role of Sheriff Starr in Taylor's lynching. According to the Register:

News Voice: "The Sheriff did not surrender to the mob. He practically surrendered to the two unarmed men who claimed to represent a mob some three miles distant. They told him they represented five hundred men, but they made up the five hundred by adding two ciphers to the actual number, and it is doubtful whether either of them could have named even five men who had deputized them to demand the return of the prisoner."

Finally, all mentions of the lynching deflected blame from internal racism existing in the town, and made the incident seem like an anomaly arising from nowhere.

Narrator Voice: September 12, 1878: "Our Coroner says there was no mob. A rope did it, and the rope is to be hung, drawn, and quartered."

Recording 5.3

Newspapers implied the mob was caused by rival political parties in an effort to deflect the true cause of violence away from the town. There were even calls for the Mayor to resign. He was an easy person to blame for failing to enforce legal procedures and letting the city fall to mob rule.

The most interesting articles that we found were the Sandusky Registers responses to other reportings of the Lynching. One article, published on September 13th, spoke to a claim that the Journal, another newspaper, had described the event as

News Voice: “ a shocking local affair to political advantage.”

The Register responded in kind with this message:

Narrator Voice: “As a matter of fact an effort has been made to make political capital out of the affair and made by Democrats... If we had cared to make political capital out of it, we could have stated with truth that nine-tenths of those who approve the lynching of Taylor are Democrats, and that nine-tenths of those who disapprove are Republicans.”

These varied reactions were likely reflective of the varied sentiment in Sandusky in the aftermath of the lynching.

Recording 7.1

To expand our investigation into primary research in Sandusky we contacted Erie County Sheriff's Department and Sandusky's Common Pleas Court at the recommendation of Jeremy Angstadt. Jeremy had previously mentioned that both the Jail and the Court may have records dating back to 1878. We thought it was a long shot, but still worth investigating.

Our initial Contact with Sheriff Paul Sigsworth revealed his willingness to aid our investigation. Over the phone Sheriff Sigsworth discussed what he knew of William Taylor's lynching and the likelihood of there being a police record. Since Taylor was killed before a trial could take place, there would be no court documents relating to his alleged crime. Furthermore, because none of Taylor's killers were indicted, there would be no court documents relating to their crime. But there was a slight possibility that the Erie County jail register contained a record of Taylor's arrest.

Sheriff Sigsworth said that he would ask Luvada Wilson, Erie County Common Pleas Clerk of Courts, to check if the court still had the old jail register. Fired up by the possibility of unearthing more documents, we decided to make an appointment to meet with the Sheriff in a few days' time.

Recording 7.2

At the meeting, Sheriff Sigsworth handed us an envelope which turned out to be treasure trove of valuable documents.

Recording 7.3

The envelope was stuffed with indispensable sources, procured from local historians Henry and Martha Timman. Most valuable were clippings from the *Norwalk Reflector* and *The Monroeville Spectator*. You

heard the Monroeville Spectator article read earlier in the podcast. These articles were major breakthroughs for our research because they go into vivid detail. The *Sandusky Register* articles we'd found earlier were very brief. Sheriff Sigsworth has a theory about why the *Register* reported very little about the incident:

Recording 7.4

(Sheriff Sigsworth audio)

“I think the local papers back in that day, they did everything they could to promote their own city. And I think someone wants this, you know, obviously, there were emotions. Were at a fever pitch when this happened. You know, you wonder if once it was done if people's conscience is starting to get the best of them.”

Recording 7.5

Something that's important to note about the *Monroeville Spectator* article is that it settles the question of what happened to William Taylor's body. An article written in the *Norwalk Reflector* in 2017 reported that the fate of his body was unknown. The *Spectator* article tells us that Marshal Berigan cut down the body and brought it to Krupp's funeral home. Alas, Krupp's is no longer in business, so there were no remaining records.

The *Norwalk Reflector* article tells us what the mayor said after the crowd began to grow tired of the fruitless search for John Scott, the man that Taylor insisted was the true murderer. After the lynching the Mayor stated:

News Voice: “Gentlemen and fellow citizens: As Mayor, I request that you disperse and go to your respective homes. We have done our duty. What you have done rests with yourselves. I request in all kindness that you disperse.”

Recording 7.6

That Sandusky's highest official saw mob violence against a black man as a just, dutiful action tells us that due process was a protection that could be arbitrarily revoked from black Sanduskians at this time.

In Sheriff Sigsworth's packet was another illuminating article, from a book written by Sandusky historian Charles E. Frohman. Frohman's article recounts the resolution that Erie County attorneys drew up September 5th, two days after the lynching. They state:

“The Bar of Erie County have learned with horror and dismay that within the last twenty-four hours citizens of Sandusky have taken a human being from the officers of the law, while in the discharge of their official duties, and without trial or giving him any opportunity to be heard in his defense, and accompanied with circumstances of greatest indignity and cruelty, put him to death. This transaction is a burning disgrace to our city, and ought never to be and will not be submitted to by a free people, . . . a mob shall not become the self-appointed triers and executioners of Ohio.”

Recording 7.7

Another article included in the packet—also from the *Monroeville Spectator*—tells us that despite the Bar’s resolution, a grand jury failed to bring any indictments against those who lynched Mr. William Taylor. Even the ringleaders of the mob, including Frank Graul, were spared. This outcome was orchestrated by Sandusky’s elites at a meeting held to strategize how they should go about evading legal consequences. They canceled the coroner’s inquest, and threatened black Sanduskians into silence by setting rioters upon a meeting of the black community.

Knowing all this, we were more desperate than ever to find any shred of legal documentation testifying to what happened to William Taylor. We didn’t want to believe that it had all been erased from the record.

Not even the jail where William Taylor spent his final days remains. It was demolished in the 1880s and a new jail was built, which today is part of the Public Library. Sheriff Sigsworth gave us a picture of the old jail, a shot that had been taken from the dome of the courthouse building. The jail is two stories tall, made of brick, with a slanted roof and a chimney. It looked almost quaint. Sheriff Sigsworth explained where the early jail stood:

Recording 7.8

(Sheriff Sigsworth audio)

“the building is long gone. It was a brick building. And it might have been a little farther down the block but right in this area.... So would have been in between on Jackson Street between West Jefferson and West Adams Street.”

Recording 7.9

After traveling to the old jail, Sheriff Sigsworth brought her to the courthouse to speak with Ms. Luvada Wilson, the Court of Clerks. None of the people working at the Common Pleas Court had heard that a lynching occurred in Sandusky, however they were happy to help us in our investigation. The Clerks office is where records of everything that comes through the court are stored.

Ms. Wilson and her assistant, Buffy Land, had spent some time looking through the court records from 1878, but had not turned up anything. The jail records were located in Book 8, which contained jail records from 1876 to 1879. After reviewing the logs, there was not a single mention of William Taylor.

Recording 7.10

However, on the day of Taylor’s death, the register logs three cases, all recorded in Sheriff Starr’s ornate script. It’s strange to think that hours after he had failed to prevent a mob from seizing and killing a man in his custody, Sheriff Starr was having just another day at the office.

Recording 6.1

After exiting the library, we decided to track the path of the lynch mob. Initially, we thought to start at what we thought was the county jail in 1878. We later learned the building was erected in 1890 and William Taylor was taken from a wagon on Columbus Ave.

Before we describe the path, let's give you the lay of the land. Our start point was the 1890 county jail, now part of the public library. Across the street from the current library is the county courthouse. Directly behind the courthouse is the start of Washington Park. Washington Park is thus the courthouse lawn where countless black citizens have been lynched throughout American history.

The park itself is divided by two main roads Columbus Ave. and East Washington Street, which split the park into four subsections. And if one walks one block north from the center of the park they arrive at the sight where William Taylor was hung from a lamp post.

Recording 6.2

Thus, the first thing we noticed on our walk was how central the area was to the town and it would have been impossible to miss. And so everyone was complicit.

The second thing we noticed was Washington Park is surrounded by churches.

Our research revealed in 1878 when William Taylor was forced toward Washington Park on Columbus Ave. he would have passed the St. Peter and Paul Catholic Church, the Emmanuel United Church of Christ, and Zion Lutheran Church. Upon entering the Park Taylor would have been surrounded by churches; in Washington Park alone there were an additional six churches.

Beatty Church. First Congressional Church. First Presbyterian Church. Masonic Temple. Trinity Methodist Church. Grace Episcopal Church.

On our walk, we noticed the three that were still standing in their original location.

We were disturbed that this crime occurred in the religious heart of Sandusky and yet none these religious institutions intervened.

Recording 6.3

Upon arriving in Washington Park, we headed toward the East end where the Pagoda supposedly stood. Remember the Pagoda is where the noose was put around Taylor's neck. We had been assuming Pagoda was a colloquial term for Gazebo and were on the lookout for a similar structure. We did not expect to find anything.

But to our surprise we did.

In the middle of the south-east side stands a large brown Gazebo directly in front of the Grace Episcopal Church. A plaque stated the Gazebo had been a memorial since 1915 in honor of a long since forgotten Sanduskian. There was no mention of William Taylor.

While it was clear the Gazebo before us had been installed after Taylor's death, we think it replaced the pagoda from 1878.

So, in William Taylors honor we spent a few moments contemplating the Gazebo and the surrounding landscape in silence.

Recording 6.4

We then crossed the street to investigate a monument located in the North-Eastern side of Washington Park.

That monument was Sandusky's Freedom Monument.

Now before we continue we should note we had read about the freedom monument on Sandusky's historical society website and local residents blogs. From these websites, it seemed a source of Sandusky's Pride in its heritage and was even promoted as a sign of Sandusky's commitment to civil rights.

Yet upon seeing this monument as outside viewers we were immediately confused and taken aback.

This is not to say the residents of Sandusky had any ill intentions when erecting this monument nor is it to say the monument should be removed. We understand this monument was only created with good intentions and is meant to honor the idea of freedom in America whatever that may mean.

Recording 6.5

The monument itself was a three-foot-high semi-circle brick wall covered in plaques of America's achievements in the pursuit of freedom. The main plaque states: "Sandusky Freedom Shrine" in big gold letters and just below it in equally as big letters "Exchange Club Sandusky Ohio" and then in smaller letters it was dedicated July 4, 1998.

The smaller plaques cover a range of historical markers including: the declaration of independence, a memorial to the revolutionary war, the Gettysburg address, the emancipation proclamation, the 19th amendment, the surrender of world war II, a quote from President Kennedy's inaugural address, a quote from MLK's I have a dream speech, Perry's monument an international peace monument found in Sandusky.

The point being, that while this monument commemorates a rough outline of America's pursuit of freedom, the way the monument discusses the black community's struggle for citizenship indirectly ensures Sandusky appears on the right side of history.

There is one final commemoration on the monument we have not yet mentioned. And that is the bust of Martin Luther King Junior's head.

We noticed the bust as soon as we walked up to the monument, for it was placed directly in front of the Freedom Shrine. We later learned the bust was a new addition and in some ways is still undergoing construction with a commemoration of names engraved in brick just below it.

Standing behind the Freedom Shrine noticed we Martin Luther King Junior's gaze was fixed on Gazebo.

Recording 6.6 _____

After observing the Freedom Shrine we travelled towards downtown Sandusky which was only a block away. We walked towards the corner of Columbus and Market and immediately noticed a lamppost on every of the corner of the intersection. And at the top of each lamppost was a banner depicting the American flag.

Standing near the corner where William Taylor proclaimed his innocence with his last words we couldn't help but reflect on what Sandusky could do to honor his legacy.

Recording 8.1 _____

The EJI says that: "lynching has profoundly impacted race relations and shaped the contemporary geographic, political, social, and economic conditions of African Americans. Most importantly, lynching reinforced a narrative of racial difference and a legacy of racial inequality that is readily apparent in our criminal justice system today."

Although the lynching was an isolated incident, and the victim was just one man, we believe the legacy of racial terror has long-standing effects that reach into the present. The effects of the lynching of William Taylor on Sandusky is one part of a larger American history. Most black Americans experienced mass violence and trauma at the hands of white Americans. It is clear that the mass violence and trauma in American history, *our history*, needs to be present in public conversations throughout the nation. Only by engaging in and thinking about our past can we better understand why we are the way we are.

Recording 8.2 _____

In an interview, Bryan Stevenson says: "You can't demand truth and reconciliation. You have to demand truth - people have to hear it, and then they have to want to reconcile themselves to that truth."

Thus, truth is necessary for reconciliation to happen, and a process of truth and reconciliation is necessary for healing, for moving towards a better and more equitable future. But how far is Sandusky in this long and arduous process?

Recording 8.3

From the ways that Sandusky memorializes its past and promotes tourism, it is clear that the city prides itself on being a place where black Americans could find refuge. Our research into modern day Sandusky indicates that, while the city directly engages with and promotes its abolitionist roots, it does not acknowledge William Taylor's lynching.

The Sandusky Historical Society promotes the city's role in the underground railroad, even advertising a walking tour on their website of key sites, including places where freedom-seekers hid. The tour consists of two historical sites the Lucas Beecher house and the Beatty Church. Both these sites memorialize not the courageous freedom seekers but instead the white abolitionists who aided them. While it is important to acknowledge their contribution to freedom efforts, focusing solely on white activism minimizes the important role of the black community in Sandusky's history.

Recording 8.4

However, we did find several recent articles in the Sandusky Register and other local newspapers that discussed the lynching of William Taylor. These articles, published in 2017 and onward, presented a more nuanced history of Sandusky all the way through the Civil Rights era. One article, published in the Toledo Blade in 2017, points out that the downtown swimming pool in Sandusky was segregated until the 1950s and the movie theater and parts of the Sandusky Bay were also segregated. The Sandusky community has recently begun a dialogue surrounding this issue.

Recording 8.5

The Sandusky Register responded to that specific Blade article with an article that reflected a willingness to open up conversation. The journalist, inspired by the Blade article, critically examined the lynching of William Taylor and Sandusky's segregation history. The journalist reported that the Vice President of the Erie County Historical Society, a previous Sandusky mayor, and the President of Sandusky's NAACP's chapter were unaware of Taylor's lynching. However, there was recognition that this event needed to be commemorated in some way.

A first step would be to claim the monument currently located in EJI's Peace and Justice Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama. By bringing this monument back home, the city could acknowledge the atrocity that occurred in its past, and concurrently propel itself forwards in instigating dialogue and action to address the implicit ways that white supremacy continues to operate in city structures. If Sandusky were to do so, it would join a movement that has the power to transform national understanding of how racial violence continues to shape our country. This is not just a Sandusky story. This is an American story.

And, just like it did during the civil war, Sandusky has the opportunity to lead the nation in seeking justice and equality for all.

Recording 8.6

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