

1630-10th St. N. W.

Wednesday 3 P.M.

Dear Mr. Dawes:-

I neglected, I fear, to make clear to you the special reason I wished the President to peruse the manuscript I left with you, is the hope that he will make recommendation to Congress similar to the cases cited. Mrs. Baker and her children lay from Monday night after the assault was made, (which killed her husband and baby and wounded her self and three remaining children) until the following Saturday morning without any medical attention whatever. They are now in the colored hospital in Charleston S. C. and when they recover sufficiently to be discharged, have not a dollar with which to buy food, shelter or raiment. Sincerely trusting that I have not

trespassed too largely on your time and patience in humanity's name, I am

Respectfully yours

Ida B. Wells-Barnett

LYNCHING

Ida B. Wells-Barnett and the Outrage over the Frazier Baker Murder

By TRICHITA M. CHESTNUT

Somebody must show that the Afro-American race is more sinned against than sinning, and it seems to have fallen upon me to do so. The awful death-toll that Judge Lynch is calling every week is appalling, not only because, of the lives it takes, [and] the rank cruelty and outrage to the victims, but because of the prejudice it fosters and the stain it places against the good name of the weak race. The Afro-American is not a bestial race. —*Ida B. Wells, preface to Southern Horror*

In 1898 the Department of Justice was bombarded with letters concerning a recent lynching in South Carolina. The postmaster of Lake City, Frazier Baker, and his nearly two-year-old daughter Julia had been killed by a mob in the early hours of February 22. Two of the letters were from Ida B. Wells-Barnett—journalist, author, public speaker, and civil rights activist—who received national and international attention for her efforts to expose, educate, and inform the public on the evils and truths of lynching.

Lynching remains one of the most disturbing and least understood atrocities in American history. Between 1880 and 1941, roughly 4,179 persons were victims of lynch mobs in the United States. African American men, women, and children accounted for 3,446 victims, or 82.5 percent of the total.

What constitutes a lynching? Although most people think only of hanging, lynching means much more. Lynching is the killing of African Americans who were tortured, mutilated, burned, shot, dragged, or hung; accused of an alleged crime by a white mob; and deprived of their life without due process and equal protection of the law.

This type of mob violence in America earned its nickname in the 1770s from Virginia Quaker Charles Lynch, who authorized extralegal whippings against Tories who harassed patriots and committed crimes during the American Revolution. The practice quickly expanded across the western frontier in the decades before the Civil War, where many of the victims were mostly white, along with a number of Native Americans, Mexicans, Asians, and African Americans. In the antebellum south, whites constituted the majority of victims of mob violence. By the late 19th century, however, lynching had become an almost exclusively southern phenomenon. During the postbellum and Reconstruction periods, mob violence in the south became a tool for maintaining the racial order. African American men, women, and children now composed the majority of victims of lynch violence, and the lynchings assumed an increasingly sadistic nature. African American men, however, were the most targeted.

In southern law, politics, and the economy, the racial hierarchy placed African Americans at the bottom and whites at the top. Many whites believed African Americans had a dual nature—“docile and amiable when enslaved, ferocious and murderous when free[d].” Senator Benjamin (Ben) R. Tillman of South Carolina proclaimed that the African American man was “a fiend, a wild beast, seeking whom he may devour.” Many southern whites had an acute anxiety over racial purity, and they feared the amalgamation of the two races. The “cry of rape” was used as an excuse to lynch the alleged African American rapists for the protection of southern white women. Accusations of rape, however, accounted for only one-third of the lynchings.

In the 1890s, the number of African American men lynched escalated dramatically, as did the brutal torture of the victims’ bodies. White mob violence often occurred in areas experiencing economic changes, and lynchings tended to occur where another lynching had already taken place. These acts of violence were directed against the entire African American community and not just a single alleged miscreant. An African American man never knew if he would be the next victim.

Postmaster Frazier Baker, like many other African American lynched victims, was not accused of or guilty of rape but had become a target solely on the basis of his race and for serving in a prominent position reserved in past decades for whites.

Baker was a former farmer and treasurer of the Colored Farmer’s Alliance in Florence County, South Carolina, and became a postmaster of the Effingham post office in that county on March 15, 1892. He held this position at least until November 1894. Records show that he became postmaster at Lake City in Williamsburg County, South Carolina, on July 30, 1897, upon the recommendation of Edmund H. Deas, a Republican African American deputy collector of internal revenue also known as the “Duke of Darlington.” On February 23, 1898, the *Charleston News and Courier* described Lake City as “a white man’s town, not over a dozen negroes living in the place, and not one

Opposite: Ida B. Wells-Barnett (left) had campaigned for federal help to fight racial violence since the early 1890s. Enraged by the lynching of Frazier Baker in February 1898, she wrote a letter to former Republican Senator Henry Dawes of Massachusetts (right) concerning a manuscript she had left for the President in which she urged medical and financial aid for Mrs. Baker and her surviving children.

owning a foot of land in the corporate limits of the town.” Consequently, the white residents were perplexed when an African American was appointed postmaster. Lake City residents, like those in many other southern white communities at the time, resented African Americans who sought equality through political arenas, organizations, and jobs.

As a result, Baker encountered opposition immediately from the “good people” of Lake City. One night when he left the post office with some friends, Baker was shot at from an ambush; on another day, someone fired shots into the post office. When Baker assumed his position as postmaster, he made some major changes that angered the white residents. First, he moved the post office from its location of the last six years to a log house about a mile away from town. Next, he changed the three mail deliveries to one a day. Then, after a mysterious fire burned the post office down, Baker did not receive or deliver mail for about a week. The residents accused Baker of administrative ignorance and incompetence, and they protested in a letter to the *Lake City Times* that was reprinted in the *Charleston News and Courier* on February 12, 1898: “We have little courtesy shown us and the service is as poor as can be. The negro is uncivil, ignorant and lazy.” A petition for Baker’s immediate removal, signed by 200 of Lake City’s “best people,” was sent to the assistant postmaster general in Washington, D.C.:

We, the undersigned citizens of Lake City, S.C., do hereby respectfully request that you have Frazier B. Baker, our postmaster, removed, for the following reasons, to wit: First. He is impolite to ladies. Second. He is incompetent from the fact that he has delivered registered mail without taking receipt for same. Has issued money orders without charging any fee, and he had also given out the advise instead of the money order. Third. He has time and again allowed letters of importance to remain in the office for a week and sometimes a month, notwithstanding the fact that they were being called daily. Fourth.

Lake City, S.C. Appointment as Postmaster July 30 1897

An 1889 Post Office map shows the South Carolina towns (highlighted here) in which Frazier Baker lived and worked: Effingham and Lake City, Williamsburg County, where he was killed on February 22, 1898, and Cartersville, to which his wife, Lavinia, returned in 1942. Above: A Post Office Department entry shows his appointment as postmaster in Lake City on July 30, 1897.





He frequently gives out mail to persons that is addressed to persons other than themselves, thereby causing the mail thus given out to be considerably delayed. Fifth. He has sold fifty 2-cent stamps for fifty cents. Sixth. He was not a resident of this county when he applied for this office and had resided here only a few days when he received his commissions.”

Two separate investigations by federal post office inspectors produced no evidence to substantiate the residents’ claims. Regrettably, though, some 300 or more white residents took the matter into their own hands.

Around 1 a.m. on February 22, the Baker family awoke to discover that a fire had been deliberately set to the back of their home, where the local post office was located. Baker and his daughter Julia were shot to death, and their bodies were left to cremate. Baker’s wife, Lavinia, and daughters Rosa and Cora were each shot through the arm, and his son, Lincoln, was shot in the arm and in the stomach. As the family tried to flee from their burning home, a white mob fired upon them. Lavinia described the horrible scene in the *Charleston News and Courier* interview the following day:

Last night we retired between 10 and 11 o’clock. About 1 o’clock I awoke and found that the building was on fire and that the fire was making rapid progress. Then I aroused my husband. He jumped up and by the time several shots were fired into the building, I took my baby [Julia] into my arms, called the other children and followed Baker, who was making for the door. He reached the door, stuck his head out and was instantly shot several times in the body and through the head. He groaned, reeled and fell back in the building, near the door. Almost at the same time I myself was

shot in the left arm, on which my baby was resting, and not being able to support the child any longer, I dropped it. I noticed, however that it had already been killed. After remaining there a few minutes . . . the other children and myself fled to the house of my neighbor for protection. We got there alive, but three of my [remaining] five children and myself are wounded.”

When news of the atrocity spread, outraged citizens wrote to the President, members of Congress, and the Department of Justice demanding federal help to fight racial violence. Ida B. Wells-Barnett was one of them. She was known as the mother of the antilynching movement and had begun a lifelong crusade against lynching after three of her friends were killed in 1892 in Memphis, Tennessee. Up to that point, as she later reflected in her autobiography, *Crusade for Justice*, she, like many others who read in newspapers about lynchings in the south, “accepted the idea . . . that although lynching was irregular and contrary to law and order, unreasoning anger over the terrible crime of rape led to the lynching.” She further accepted the reasoning that “perhaps the brute deserved death anyhow and the mob was justified in taking his life.” After the lynching of her friends, Wells-Barnett devoted herself to investigating white racial violence and disproving the rape arguments that were used to justify lynching. No one had accused her friends of any sexual crime. Their only real crime, she concluded, was that the economic success of their grocery store rivaled a white grocer in the same district.

After the Frazier murders, Wells-Barnett immediately expressed her frustrations to government officials. In a undated two-page letter to former Republican Senator Henry Dawes of Massachusetts, she urged President William McKinley to make a recommendation to Congress regarding a manuscript (most likely referencing the

lynching of the postmaster and his daughter) she had left with the former senator. She asked for support for the injured widow and her children, who required medical and financial aid as well as food, shelter, and clothing.

A second undated letter written to the President, which was later forwarded to the Department of Justice for further investigation, still petitioned in behalf of Mrs. Baker and her children. This time she also addressed the issue of the federal government’s involvement in fighting Spanish oppression in Cuba while ignoring the oppression of Americans, especially African American victims of lynching mobs. An African American editor for the *Lexington (Kentucky) Standard* wrote that if to “Remember the *Maine* [was] the white man’s watch-word, [then] remembering the murder of postmaster Baker . . . should be the Negro’s.” Wells-Barnett agreed and wrote:

For nearly two years the overwhelming sentiment of the American people has demanded that even at the risk of provoking war, this nation interfere with the political policy of a friendly nation. We defend ourselves by declaring against barbarism of Spanish oppression. Strange that this sentiment so exercised over barbarism in Cuba should rest so complaisant over barbarism at home. During the past fifteen years more than 2500 men, women, and children have been put to death through lynchings, hangings, shooting, drowning and burning alive. All this in our own land under our own flag and yet our government has not taken the first step to stop the slaughter. Your Memorialists therefore respectfully suggest Justice like Charity should begin at home.

Wells-Barnett appealed on behalf of the Ida B. Wells Woman’s Club of Chicago, Illinois, for the President to apprehend and punish those responsible for the shooting and “recommend a national enactment to protect, men, women and children from the awful epidemic of mob law.” They

final tragedy, the purpose of the meetings being to devise means to remove postmaster Baker, and at which speeches were made by residents of the village advising extreme measures. Some of the persons who were present at these meetings have intimated that they are willing to give information, not only upon condition that they shall be protected, not only from prosecution but also from the other parties interested. I have not hesitated to offer immunity from prosecution, but in the matter of protection I have not felt authorized to make any expenditures for that purpose, and it seems clear from the statements of the Inspectors, and from my own observations, that some provision will have to be made in that behalf before we shall be able to get this testimony. The whole community is absolutely terrorized to such an extent that it is difficult to get anyone there to speak to a person supposed to be interested in the investigation; it being generally understood that to do so will place their lives in jeopardy.

News of the atrocity against Frazier Baker and his family was widely reported. An artist's depiction appeared in the *Boston Post* on August 10, 1899, soon after his widow relocated there.



During the investigation in April 1898, U.S. attorney Abial Lathrop reported to the Attorney General that the "whole community is absolutely terrorized," and that in spite of his offers of immunity from prosecution, it would be essential to offer protection to witnesses.

RESOLUTIONS BY I. B. W. WOMAN'S CLUB,
CHICAGO, MARCH 3RD, 1898.

WHEREAS, Frazier B. Baker, Postmaster at Lake City, S. C. and his infant daughter were shot and burned to death, and at the same time his wife and three daughters were shot and maimed for life, all because he would not desert his post of duty; and

WHEREAS, The National Government has officially acknowledged its responsibility for the lynching of foreigners by mobs in the United States; therefore be it

RESOLVED: That this act of murder and treason committed by citizens of South Carolina be brought to the attention of the President of the United States and Congress, to the end that the same measure of protection and responsibility guaranteed by the General Government to the foreigner shall be secured by National legislation to the humblest citizen of the United States.

RESOLVED: That these resolutions, properly engrossed, be sent to President McKinley, and a copy sent to the Senators and Representatives of Illinois in the National Congress.

Mrs. E. F. Wells-Barnett.
Mrs. J. Gray.
Mrs. T. Mason.

2939 Princeton Ave.
Chicago.

55TH CONGRESS, } HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. } REPORT
2d Session. } { No. 1379.

MRS. BAKER AND FAMILY.

MAY 19, 1898.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House and ordered to be printed.

MR. BINGHAM, from the Committee on the Post-Office and Post-Roads, submitted the following

REPORT.

[To accompany H. Res. 171.]

The Committee on the Post-Office and Post-Roads, to whom was referred joint resolution (H. Res. 171) for the relief of Mrs. Baker and family, of Lake City, S. C., submit herewith a letter from the Postmaster-General, Hon. Charles Emory Smith, relating to the matter (the same being in response to a request from your committee for information), and would report the resolution to the House with the recommendation that it do pass.

POST-OFFICE DEPARTMENT,
OFFICE OF THE POSTMASTER-GENERAL,
Washington, D. C., May 12, 1898.

Sir: In response to your request for information concerning the murder of the postmaster of Lake City, S. C., I beg to say that on the night of February 21, 1898, a mob surrounded the post-office of Lake City, set the building on fire, and when the postmaster and his wife and children succeeded in escape from the burning building they were shot. The postmaster and one child were instantly killed, and the wife and two other children were seriously wounded. I am advised that a charitable institution at Charleston took care of the survivors during the serious illness resulting from their wounds; that they have now been discharged from this institution, and are without any means of support, and are dependent upon public charity for subsistence. The evidence before the Department shows that the postmaster and his family were innocent of any crime to the community other than that of holding the office of postmaster by appointment of the Government.

Very respectfully,
Wm. E. F. LOHR,
Chairman Committee on the Post-Office and Post-Roads, House of Representatives.

Ch. EMORY SMITH, Postmaster-General.

Left: Wells and her Woman's Club formally petitioned Congress in behalf of Baker's widow and surviving children on March 3, 1898, urging federal action and protection. Right: Report No. 1379 to the 55th Congress, 2nd session, dated May 19, 1898, contains the Postmaster General's report recommending that H. Res. 171 be passed to provide compensation to Baker's widow.

sought support for the widow and children stating that:

You cannot bring back the husband and father, nor can you restore to the broken hearted mother the babe that was shot to death in her arms, but the nation owes that family the support and maintenance of which they were deprived by that brutal mob, in so far as money can requite their loss, these helpless ones should be indemnified.

She noted that the President had already set a precedent when the United States paid considerable sums of money to Mexico and Italy after the lynchings of one Mexican and three Italian citizens months before the Baker lynching. Furthermore, the heirs of the three lynched Italians in New Orleans had been paid \$25,000.

Wells-Barnett went even further. In March, she and a delegation that included some of Chicago's leading citizens and eight congressmen from the Chicago area traveled to Washington, D.C., on behalf of the citizens of Chicago. On March 22, she met with President McKinley, he received her and her companions "very courteously." She later wrote in her autobiography that he "listened to my plea [and] accepted the resolutions which had been sent by the citizens of Chicago." He then reassured her that she could "report back home that they had already placed some of the finest of their secret service agents in the effort to discover and prosecute the lynchers of the black postmaster."

She remained in Washington for another five weeks in an effort to have the only African American in Congress, Representative George Henry White of North Carolina, withdraw a bill that provided a \$1,000 indemnity for Baker's widow, Lavinia, and their five surviving children. Wells-Barnett thought the bill was too weak, so she worked with Illinois Representative William E. Lorimer on a bill that granted a larger amount of money to the family.

White had introduced the joint resolution (H. Res. 171) on March 3, 1898, and the next day, he referred the resolution to the Committee on the Post-Office and

Post-Roads. Immediately, the committee began receiving petitions and resolutions from organizations and clubs from across the country protesting the lynching, asking for compensation for the surviving Baker family, and requesting the apprehension and conviction of the responsible persons. Among the resolutions sent were one from the Ida B. Wells Woman's Club and one from the Colored Citizens of Chicago, on which her husband, Ferdinand, affixed his name.

Although the committee submitted Report No. 1379, recommending that the joint resolution be passed, the Bakers never received any money. Because the lynching had occurred in the midst of another national crisis—the explosion of the USS *Maine* in Havana harbor on February 15—Congress was preoccupied with imminent war with Spain.

Wells-Barnett was advised by Lorimer to go back home to Chicago and return later in December, as "it would be hopeless to expect any action now that all this excitement was up." She returned home only to find that national attention surrounding the lynching had diminished among her people, and the matter of her plan to return to Washington was not discussed again. This lack of national awareness frustrated her, as she wrote in her autobiography:

Here again was an illustration of how our own people seem to stand in the way of any accomplishment of federal intervention against lynching. They failed to take up the subject of organizing their forces and raising money for the purpose of sending me back to lobby for the desired results.

National attention was brought to the case when the state of South Carolina failed to prosecute any of the guilty persons, and the U.S. District of South Carolina stepped in, with the aid of the Office of Post Office Inspector. Unlike previous lynching murder cases, the Baker case attracted federal attention because it involved a federal employee. From the beginning of the 14 months of extensive investigation, the U.S. attorney for the

Charleston district, Abial Lathrop, realized the challenge the Department of Justice and post office inspectors would be facing in prosecuting the guilty parties, despite public sentiment to have them punished. The general consensus in Lake City was one that none of their residents had anything to do with the lynching, and business went on as if nothing had happened. The only thing that concerned them was how they were going to get their mail. District Attorney Lathrop wrote to Attorney General John William Griggs on March 5:

There is, as you have no doubt seen, a satisfactory public expression of feeling throughout this State in regard to this case, and a general desire on the part of the people to have the guilty parties properly punished. But while this is true in a general way, we have already found that we can not expect to receive any substantial assistance from the people of that immediately vicinity. Those who are not implicated themselves know that relatives and friends are likely to be, and this will deter them from acting in the premises, so that the only real advantage which we shall obtain from the public sentiment above referred to, will be in the probability of securing a jury that will be willing to render a proper verdict, but we shall have to depend upon our own efforts to procure the necessary evidence.

It became evident early on in the case that witnesses were unwilling to give testimony unless they were given protection. These eyewitnesses were living in the area at the time of the lynching and had either witnessed the burning of the home, heard gunshots, or attended meetings where discussions were made to murder the postmaster. As a result, they were too frightened to identify any of the guilty persons involved. Charleston post office inspectors John W. Bulla and H.T.B. Moyer wrote to Lathrop that no witnesses would testify against any lynchers unless they received help to get out of the community and were provided with financial assistance. Without these witnesses, the prosecution could not

justify issuing any arrest warrants. Lathrop could offer these witnesses immunity and sought the attorney general's approval to provide them with financial provisions. He also asked that Baker's widow, their surviving children, and their friends "be treated in the same manner" as the witnesses and relocated from the area and given financial assistance. This was the first and only time financial restitution for the surviving Baker family was mentioned in the attorney general's correspondence.

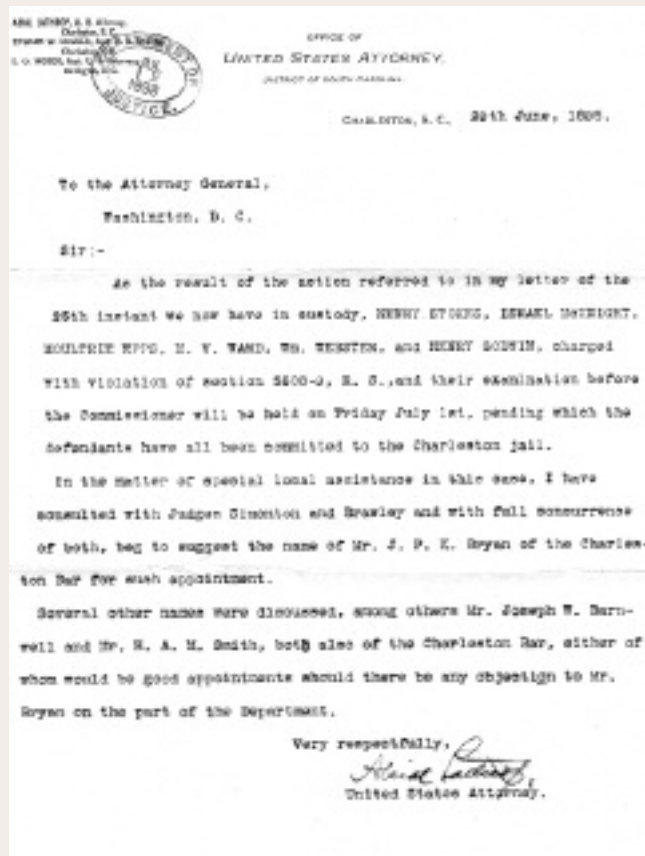
By early July 1898, Lathrop had arrested 10 white men and charged them with conspiracy to injure or intimidate citizens in the free exercise of their civil rights. Three more would later be arrested and charged with the lynching of the postmaster. Two of the conspirators confessed and expressed their willingness to testify for the prosecution against the others. During the preliminary examination held before the U.S. commissioner on July 1, one of the accused, Joseph Newham, told of the late-night meeting at Henry Stokes's store, where it was decided that Baker would be killed. At the preliminary examination, he gave the following account:

I went to Lake City Monday to be ready for the work fixed for that night . . . and at midnight I went to Stokes's store. Stokes, [Moultrie] Epps, [Early] Lee, Godard and [Dunham] Singletary were there at the time and [Ezra] McKnight came in later. . . . We talked there for a short time, and then started out to do the work. We went by Henry Godwin's store, where we stopped, and got a bucket of kerosene oil and a big bag of dry shavings. We then went on to the postoffice. All the men had arms. Some had shotguns and others had rifles. . . . [Lee and I] took the shavings and placed them near the chimney, and then poured a quantity of oil on the pile. . . . I held the guns and Lee set fire to the shavings. After the pile blazed up I ran away to the woods, and a little later I heard screams from the house. Then I heard the crowd shooting. Alonzo Rogers, Epps, Godard, Stokes, [Martin] Ward, [William] Webster, McKnight, Charley Joiner, Lee

Below, left: U.S. Attorney Lathrop informed the attorney general in his letter of June 29, 1898, of the arrest of six individuals in the case of the lynching of Frazier Baker.

Below, right: The preliminary testimony of Joseph P. Newham of Lake City was reported in the *Charleston News and Courier* on July 2, 1898. Newham, who escaped prosecution by turning state's evidence against the 11 other defendants, recounted the events of the lynching in great detail.

Opposite: In an April 19, 1899, telegram to the attorney general, Special Officer B. W. Bell expressed full confidence in the strength of the evidence, stating that "If jury does not convict it will be utterly useless hereafter [sic] to attempt convictions in this state for similar offences."



and myself were the only ones I saw that night at the postoffice. The men disappeared after the shooting. I left with Rogers, Webster and Ward.

How damaging was Newham's testimony? It was convincing enough for the Charleston federal district attorney general's office to take the case to a federal grand jury. There was now sufficient evidence to charge the 13 men with conspiracy to deprive Frazier and Julia Baker of their civil rights. Lathrop observed that it would be critical to the government's case to corroborate the testimony of the accomplices with other witnesses before the case went to the grand jury because it was "evident that there

will be no lack of testimony in behalf of the defendants to prove their good character and to impeach every Government witness." A couple of days later, the defendants submitted a petition for a writ of *habeas corpus*, which included many affidavits declaring that some of them were not present in the mob the night Baker and his daughter were murdered. After hearing their case, the judge granted bail for the defendants at \$2,000 each.

In preparing the case to go to trial in April 1899, the Department of Justice hired a special officer, B. W. Bell, to conduct investigations. In one of his early reports, Bell wrote to Lathrop that "from results obtained so far in my investigation

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THOS. T. BICKERT, President and General Manager.

RECEIVED at Wyatt Building, Cor. 14th & F. Streets, Washington, D. C. Apr 19 1899

Dated Charleston S.C. Apr 19 1899

To Atty Genl Wash D.C.

Government made exceptionally strong case by any effort before jury most powerful, superb, logical & convincing. Defendants alibi completely riddled & destroyed. If jury does not convict will be

witnesses were called on behalf of the government, including four members of the Baker family—Lavinia, Rosa, Cora, and Lincoln—who testified about the murder of their father and sister as well as the injuries they suffered.

As a result of turning state’s evidence against the other 11 defendants, Newham and Early Lee escaped prosecution by the government. The district attorneys set out to prove a well-constructed open-and-shut murder case. The 11 defendants were indicted for the original civil rights charges and, additionally, for conspiracy to intimidate to prevent an individual from accepting or holding office in the United States and willfully destroying mail-matter.

The defense questioned the credibility, reputation, and testimony of the government’s witnesses, especially Newham and Lee, while also presenting seemingly solid alibis for their defendants. The prosecution could not use Lee’s testimony when it was discovered that he had served 30 days on a chain gang for stealing a cross-cut saw. Witnesses for the defense testified that Newham had been a witness in court in Kingstree, South Carolina, on the day he claimed to be in Lake City conspiring to murder Baker, even though the records seemed to have been tampered with and possibly changed. On cross-examination, the defense made the witnesses admit they had received money from the government. Witnesses for the defense also testified that the government’s witnesses knew nothing of the lynching but were testifying only for monetary reasons.

When the prosecution and defense finished their closing arguments and submitted all their evidence on April 19, Bell was still confident. In a telegram to the attorney general, he wrote, “If jury does not convict it will be utterly useless hereafter [sic] to attempt convictions in this State for similar offenses.”

After two strong opposing arguments, the jury deliberated for 24 hours. On April 22, “not guilty” verdicts were returned for three men. The jury was deadlocked five to seven for a guilty verdict on the other eight defendants, and the judge ordered a mistrial. Lathrop wrote to the attorney general, “The evidence on part of the prosecution

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THOS. T. BICKERT, President and General Manager.

RECEIVED at Wyatt Building, Cor. 14th & F. Streets, Washington, D. C. Apr 19 1899

Dated 2/10/99

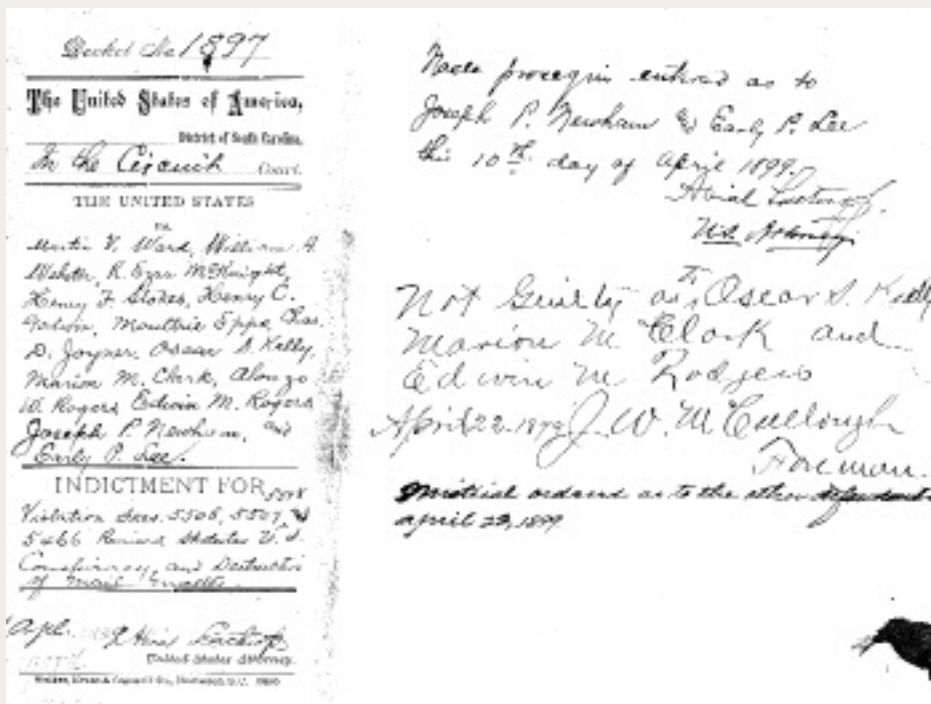
To Utterly useless hereafter to attempt convictions in this State for similar offenses
 Bell Special Officer

of the Lake City matter, I feel greatly encouraged in believing that I will, without doubt, be able to furnish an abundance of unimpeachable testimony to convict all the parities implicated.” He was certain that if the five or six witnesses could be moved away from the influence of the defendants and their friends, he would be able to build a strong case without having to depend on any more of the conspirators confessing their guilt.

Bell’s investigation took him from Charleston to Washington, D.C., and as far away as Havana, Cuba, where he interviewed three defendants who had enlisted in the Army the morning of the Baker lynching. Before the case went to the fed-

eral grand jury, the U.S. marshal asked the attorney general for extra deputy marshals because friends of the defendants were making threats against witnesses. Such threats did nothing to discourage the grand jury from returning a 47-page indictment against the 13 defendants in less than an hour. The government’s prosecution of *United States v. Martin V. Ward, et al.* began on Monday, April 10, 1899.

Once the jurors were selected, Lathrop considered the all-white male jury to be “composed of representative business men from nearly every section of the State, and it was generally conceded to be one of the best juries ever empanelled for the trial of any case in this State.” Many

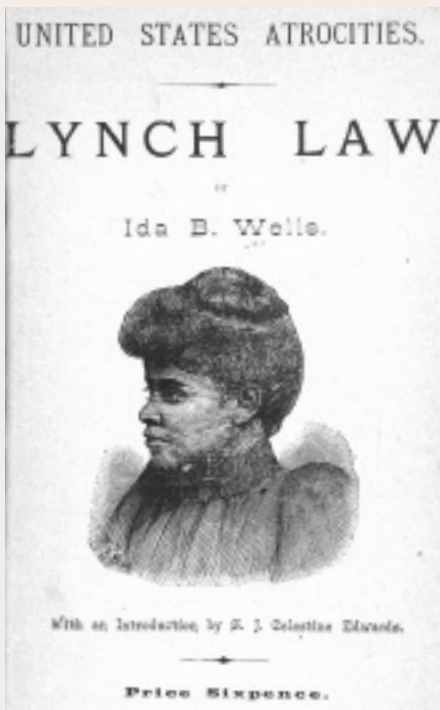


Above: The U.S. Circuit Court, District of South Carolina, declared a mistrial on April 22, 1899, after the jury was deadlocked on a guilty verdict for eight defendants. Three others were found “not guilty.”



Left: Lavinia Baker and her family accepted an offer of assistance after the trial by relocating to Boston, where this July 19, 1899, image of the family appeared in the *Boston Herald*. She returned to Cartersville, South Carolina, in 1942 and died in 1947.

Below: Ida B. Wells-Barnett was one of the most active crusaders against racial violence. Her writings on southern atrocities were widely distributed, as evidenced by this British version of her 1892 work on “Lynch Law.”



was in my opinion clear and should have been satisfactory as to the guilt of eight of the defendants.” He stated that he did not want to pursue the case any longer, “I would gladly be relieved of the terrible strain and responsibility of another trial of this case, if it could be avoided,” and the Department of Justice did not seek further prosecution. The federal government apparently still hoped to retry the lynchers as of April 2, 1901, when it transferred the case to the contingent docket, keeping the case file open until 1908.

After the trial, Lavinia Baker was quite aware of her family’s dire conditions in South Carolina. When a young white woman named Lillian Clayton Jewett from Boston, Massachusetts, came to Charleston to meet with her and promised a better life in the north and economic support, Mrs.

Baker agreed. However, when a tuberculosis epidemic plagued the poor African American population in Boston, she lost her youngest child in 1908 to the disease; by 1920, three more would die. Then in 1942, the last surviving child, Cora, died from a heart attack. With all her children gone, Lavinia returned to Florence County, South Carolina, and lived the remainder of her life in Cartersville, where she died in 1947.

Ida B. Wells-Barnett’s efforts to bring justice to the Baker family by urging government officials to investigate the lynching of a federal officeholder and providing for the surviving family needs were not in vain. Throughout her lynching crusade in the early 20th century, she continued to reference the lynching of Postmaster Baker when she lectured across the country, bringing more attention to the violent instance of white mob violence in America as a reason for federal antilynching legislation. Baker’s effort to fearlessly and courageously keep his postmaster’s position made him a martyr for many Africans Americas not only in Lake City, but for African Americans everywhere in the United States. The lynching of Postmaster Frazier B. Baker and his daughter Julia has not been forgotten. In South Carolina a short time ago, there had been some public interest in erecting a historical marker at or near the site of the lynching to describe and commemorate the event; however, no definite plans have been made to date. The Baker story will be forever remembered in the history of lynching and mob violence in the state of South Carolina and in the United States. **P**



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NOTE ON SOURCES

This article is dedicated to the memory of my colleague, friend, and mentor, Dr. Walter B. Hill, Jr. (May 22, 1949–July 29, 2008), who always unselfishly supported and believed in me and my research. Without his patience, guidance, and most of all his love, this article would not have been possible. I will miss you dearly.

The author is grateful to her supervisor, Neil Carmichael for allowing her time to research and write this article. For their help in locating records used in this article, she also thanks colleagues William Davis, Randall Fortson, Bernice McGuire, Rodney Ross, and Aloha South.

The author's description of lynching is loosely based on the lynching definition agreed upon at the December 11, 1940, meeting at Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama, that included the leading crusaders against lynching: the Tuskegee Institute, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, and the International Labor Defense.

Archival sources include the 1880 census and the Ida B. Wells Papers and Orator F. Cook Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library. In addition, in Records of District Courts of the United States, Record Group (RG) 21, United States Circuit Court District of South Carolina, Criminal Cases, 1867–1911, National Archives–Southeast Region (Atlanta), is found case file 1897, which includes the 47-page indictment, opinion, order granting bail, petition and order for arrests, and the verdict of the Lake City trial. Records of the Post Office Department, RG 28, *Record of Appointment of Postmasters, 1832–1971* (National Archives Microfilm Publication M841, roll 114), records Baker's appointment. Baker's name was erroneously recorded as Benjamin F. Baker instead of Frazier B. Baker. When the mistake became known, it was corrected to Frazier B. Baker on April 2, 1892. This correction is acknowledged in the Postmaster Journals, vol. 105, p. 105, in Orders, 1835–1953, RG 28, National Archives Building, Washington, DC (NAB). Letters from Wells-Barnett and correspondence Attorney General John W. Griggs received from District Attorney of South Carolina Abial Lathrop and other federal attorneys, marshals, and the general public regarding the Lake City lynching and trial may be found in File #1898-

3463, Year Files, 1884–1903, General Records of the Department of Justice, RG 60, National Archives at College Park, MD (NACP). The folder "Assassination of the Postmaster of Lake City, South Carolina, March 9, 1898–Jan. 6, 1899," in records of the Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads (55th Congress), Records of Early Select Committee, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, RG 233, NAB, contains petitions and resolutions received after the Baker lynching.

Published government sources include the *Journal of the House of Representatives* (55th Congress, 2nd sess.); *The Official Register of the United States, 1816–1959; Revised Statutes of the United States*; and the *Congressional Record of Proceedings and Debates*. Representative William Lorimer presented two resolutions (the first on February 23, and the second on February 24) to members in the House of Representatives to investigate the lynching of the postmaster and his daughter and the shooting of his wife and children (*Congressional Record* [55th Congress, 2nd sess.]). The resolution was referred to the Committee on Post-Offices and Post-Roads. On three separate occasions—February 28, March 2, and March 3—Illinois Senator William E. Mason introduced his own resolution in the Senate to create a joint committee of Congress to investigate the murders, which was also referred to the committee. See also Report No. 649 found in *Congressional Serial Set* (55th Congress, 2nd sess.). Also on March 3, Representative George Henry White presented H. Res. 171 in an effort to provide relief to Mrs. Baker and her children. See Report No. 1379, which accompanied H. Res. 171, found in the *Congressional Serial Set*; no further references were made regarding the relief for Mrs. Baker and her family after May 19, 1898. It is evident from the silence of some of the South Carolina congressmen and their lack of participation during the debates that they were not the least bit interested in supporting any of the resolutions presented by the congressmen from Illinois and North Carolina. Only South Carolina Senator John McLaurin made any comment, and that was to state that he believed the Senate had no reason to involve itself in the lynching and that state authorities should handle the murder investigation. Also in the *Congressional Record* (Senate's Special Session, 55th Congress, 1st

sess.) is more information regarding the lynching of the three Italians. For more information on the lynched Mexican citizen, see Report No. 237, Indemnity to Relatives of Luis Moreno, in the *Congressional Serial Set* (55th Congress, 2nd sess.).

There are many sources on the history of lynchings in the United States and the history of African Americans in South Carolina. Among those used for this article are James E. Cutler, *Lynch-Law: An Investigation Into the History of Lynching in the United States* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1969); Alfreda M. Duster, ed., *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Terence Finnegan, "Lynching and Political Power in Mississippi and South Carolina," in *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); George M. Fredrickson, *The Image in the White Mind: the Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971); Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 1898–1903* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975); Paula Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions: Ida B. Wells and the Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Amistad, 2008); Roger K. Hux, "Lillian Clayton Jewett and the Rescue of the Baker Family, 1899–1900 in *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* (Winter, 1991); I.A. Newby, *Black Carolinas: A History of Blacks in South Carolina from 1895 to 1968* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1973); Frank Shay, *Judge Lynch: His First Hundred Years* (New Jersey: Patterson Smith Publishing, 1969); Francis B. Simkins, "Ben Tillman's View of the Negro," in *Journal of Southern History* (May 1937); George B. Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes, 1877–1900* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1952); Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *On Lynchings: Southern Horrors, A Red Record, and Mob Rule in New Orleans* (Manchester, NH: Ayer Company Publishers, reprint 1991); and Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984). Newspapers include the *Charleston News and Courier*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Washington Post*.