



Statue of Liberty unveiled, 1886 – Painting by Edward Moran, public domain, Wikimedia

***No man can put a chain about the ankle of his fellow man without
at last finding the other end fastened about his own neck.***

— Frederick Douglass



Sacré-Coeur Basilica – Cropped Photograph by Aarya0141, Shutterstock

***I could, as a free man, look across the bay toward the
Eastern Shore where I was born a slave.***

— Frederick Douglass

Giovanni

*Is it possible for white America to really understand black's distrust of the legal system,
their fears of racial profiling and the police, without understanding how cheap
a black life was for so long a time in our nation's history?*

— Philip Dray - *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America*

We took rue Orsel over to the grand staircase winding up the butte Montmartre to the Byzantine Sacré-Coeur Basilica. I may be a Catholic who never goes to confessional, but I adore the churches of Paris, Notre Dame and St-Eustache, Saint Sulpice and St-Severin, medieval St-Julien-le-Pauvre and Renaissance St-Etienne du Mont with its splendid rood screen and shrine of Sainte Geneviève, the patron saint of Paris. But Sacré-Coeur is preposterous in Paris, more appropriate for Constantinople. After scores of design submissions from talented architects, what were they thinking when they chose this bizarre design? Was it the domes? Or was it a reaction against Garnier's florid neo-Baroque fantasies of the Paris Opera house, Palais Garnier? Or because it appealed to French patriotism with its heroic sculptures of Saint Louis IX and Jeanne d'Arc? Or maybe the designer discovered the drawings for a rocket ship conceived by a Babylonian two thousand years before Christ in Hammurabi's Empire. I must admit though, being the highest point in the city, from Sacré Coeur you have one hell of a view over Paris. Sacré-Coeur has its origins in part because the insurrection of the Commune originated in Montmartre. The anti-clerical Communards executed the Archbishop of Paris, making him a martyr of the Church. After 20,000 Parisians were slaughtered by the army during the brutal repression, including the final holdouts in Père Lachaise, the government decreed that the cause of the uprising was because of the Parisians' failure to believe in God. The new Archbishop of Paris called for a moral revival. He envisioned a new basilica to atone for the Commune's killing of the archbishop. *Et Voilà, Sacré-Cœur!*

On rue des Saules, Street of the Willows at the intersection of rue Saint-Vincent, we found Au Lapin Agile cabaret artistique, poems et chansons that Les said looked the same as it did a century ago with a

forlorn tree, green shutters, ivy winding across the eaves, a painting of a rabbit leaping from a frying pan, a red sash tied around his waist while balancing a wine bottle on an outstretched paw.



Sign by André Gill, 1875



Cabaret Au Lapin Agile – Painting by Raphael Toussaint, Wikimedia

Arriving an hour before the performance we sat in wooden chairs in a nearly empty room smoking Cuban cigars listening to an accordionist and guitarist rehearsing in the back room, not playing the same tune, the dissonance intriguing my ears. The waitress, Jeanette, a dark-skinned girl wearing form fitting pants, gold hooped earrings, bold mascara, fiercely red lipstick and braided hennaed hair, said they were out of Courvoisier VSOP and brought me a Rémy Martin XO instead. The dark wood paneling of the small room was covered with scores of paintings, portraits of artists and patrons, an upright piano in the corner, no stage for performers and tables like library desks from another century giving a warm atmosphere but not a place where you'd want to be with a full house in a fire.

"I don't know if it's true," Les said, blowing symmetrical smoke rings hovering like ghosts in the dark, "I understand the anarchists favored Au Lapin Agile."

"Yvonne has told me lots of anarchist stories."

"These aren't the bomb throwing kind," Les said, chuckling. "They're dedicated to bringing about a more just world. Only they were less effective than the Catholics, fascists, socialists, and communists."

"Why aren't the anarchists effective?"

"Because they're anarchists," Les laughed. "I've not followed the anarchist movement, because it's alien to my beliefs. But I do know that the Fédération anarchiste, FA was a messy coalition of pacifists, anarchistic communists — a contradiction if I ever heard one — and everyone who wants to do away with a government of any sort. The FA thought that the insurgent Algerian FLN was bourgeois; once the FLN took power, they would help the working class. The moral purity of the Fédération anarchiste makes all action impossible. The Federation Communiste Libertaire, FLC, headed by Guerin is more pragmatic. They argue that the Algerian liberation is a transitory stage to the ultimate egalitarian society. The anarchist journal *Le Libertaire* supports the Algerian revolt but its editors and writers have suffered the consequences of supporting the Algerian insurgents by being thrown into prison. The emphasis on individual freedom prevents the anarchists from creating a cohesive force. Anarchism fails as a political force simply because they are anarchists. The obsession with individual freedom leads to a bunch of cats who can't agree on anything.

"To go back to what you were telling me about the Ku Klux Klan. You said that Tulsa was Mississippi on the Arkansas river. What's that story?"

"Well, I'll tell you," Les replied, "Tulsa was settled by the Lochapoka and Creek tribes in 1836, right

after the government forcibly removed the civilized tribes from Georgia, Mississippi, and Florida. Tulsa got its name from *Tallasi*, meaning ‘old town’ in the Creek language. For many years, Tulsa was just a small Creek and Cherokee village and trading post on the Arkansas River in Indian Territory. As I mentioned earlier at dinner, even before Oklahoma Territory became a state, the unexpected happened, wildcatters brought in a big gusher just south of Tulsa. The discovery of the Glenpool and Osage County oilfield in the ‘20s was the beginning of the massive Mid-Continent Oil Field, the largest source of American oil in that day. Black gold gushing up from the earth transformed the village of Tulsa into a metropolis, the Oil Capitol of the World. John Paul Getty made his first million and Phillips got his strikes in Eastern Oklahoma. Looking for work in the oil boom, black people came up from the South and founded Greenwood in Tulsa on the north side of the Frisco tracks. They named it after Greenwood, Mississippi for many had come from there. Early in his career, B.B. King played on the radio in Greenwood, Mississippi. Have you played at the Rose Room in Greenwood?”

“I’ve never played any further West than Kansas City.”

“I’ve played in Greenwood a number of times,” Les said. I remember one night when I sat in with Yusef Lateef at the Rose Room. On another trip to Tulsa, I played with Bill Evans at the Rubyiot. When it comes to music, it’s a happening town. After we closed at the Rose Room, we’d go over to the Duke of Earls and later move on to the illegal late-night music joints to devour baked chicken and French fries ‘til dawn. One night we went over to a giant warehouse on the North side and caught Bo Diddley with his thumping axe and Chubby Checker who was playing the girls.” Les chuckled his raspy chuckle, “That was one crazy night.

“Black people are a social tribe. We like our late nights on the town. Yes sir, Greenwood had the action. They took a page out of the Harlem Renaissance right there in boom town Tulsa, Oil Capitol of the World. There was a lot of dancing in those late-night clubs. It was jumping with life. Music was a way of escaping our hardships, dancing a way of lifting up our soul.

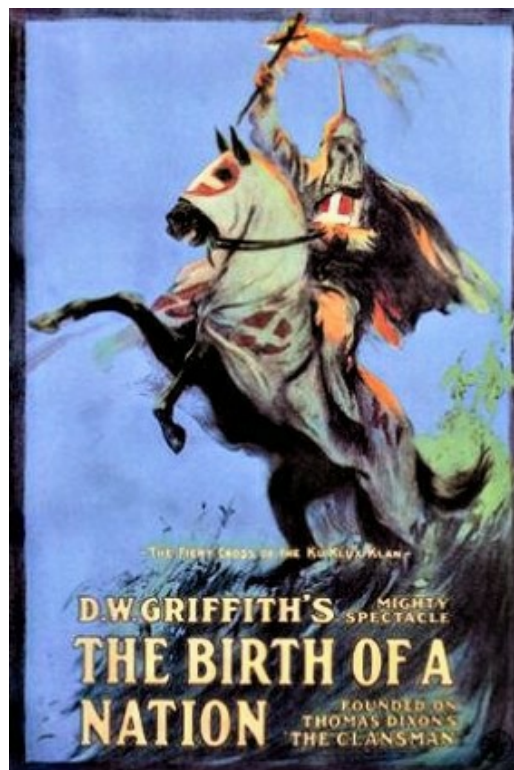
“In the early days of the Tulsa oil rush, the African American community of Greenwood became prosperous. The gentry employed maids and workers and drivers, creating wealth for the black middle class. They opened barbershops, cleaners, grocery, and clothing stores, lawyer offices, restaurants, and churches built out of their own manufactured brown brick. Greenwood became so prosperous that it was called the Negro Wall Street, the most prosperous black community in America. Tulsa had black millionaires who loaned money to white people. That caused some envy. Whites don’t like to see the Negro people rising up in the world.”



Panorama of Tulsa, 1909 – Author, Jack, Clarence, public domain, Wikimedia

“You’ve talked about the black immigration to Oklahoma, but you didn’t say where all the white people came from?”

“White immigration to Oklahoma was from the same place as the black immigration — the South. It was for the same reason — to start a new life. After losing everything in the Civil War, many former slave holders immigrated to Oklahoma, carrying with them the core beliefs of their slave-owning lives. The immigration of whites from the reconstruction states meant that the old South was transplanted to Oklahoma. Along with their mule teams they brought the Klu Klux Klan. If you were going to run for public office, better belong to the Klan. You might say the Klan ran many towns in Oklahoma. D. W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* came out during the war, portraying the KKK as a heroic force. The KKK used the film to recruit new members.



Movie poster for D. W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* starring Lillian Gish, 1915 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia. A 3-hour epic production, screened in the White House by President Woodrow Wilson, the film inspired a 20th century revival of the Ku Klux Klan.



Frontispiece to the first edition of Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman*, 1905 – Illustration by Arthur I. Keller, public domain, Wikimedia. Dixon's book, which was adapted by D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, was written to support racial segregation, showing blacks as murderers and rapists and portraying the Radical Republican Speaker of the House, Austin Stoneman as a "rapacious, vindictive, negro-loving legislator, mad with power and eaten up with hate."

“When seeking admission as a state of the union, Oklahoma legislators didn’t mention segregation when they wrote the State Constitution in 1907. As soon as Oklahoma got Theodore Roosevelt’s approval and Oklahoma was officially a state, the legislature wrote their first bill to define all people with any degree of African ancestry as Negro. Interracial schools were made illegal, interracial marriages were banned, and miscegenation was made a felony. You can imagine how all the blacks felt who had immigrated to Oklahoma believing it was the Promised Land.

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Klux Klans

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SEATS ON SALE AT RYAN'S

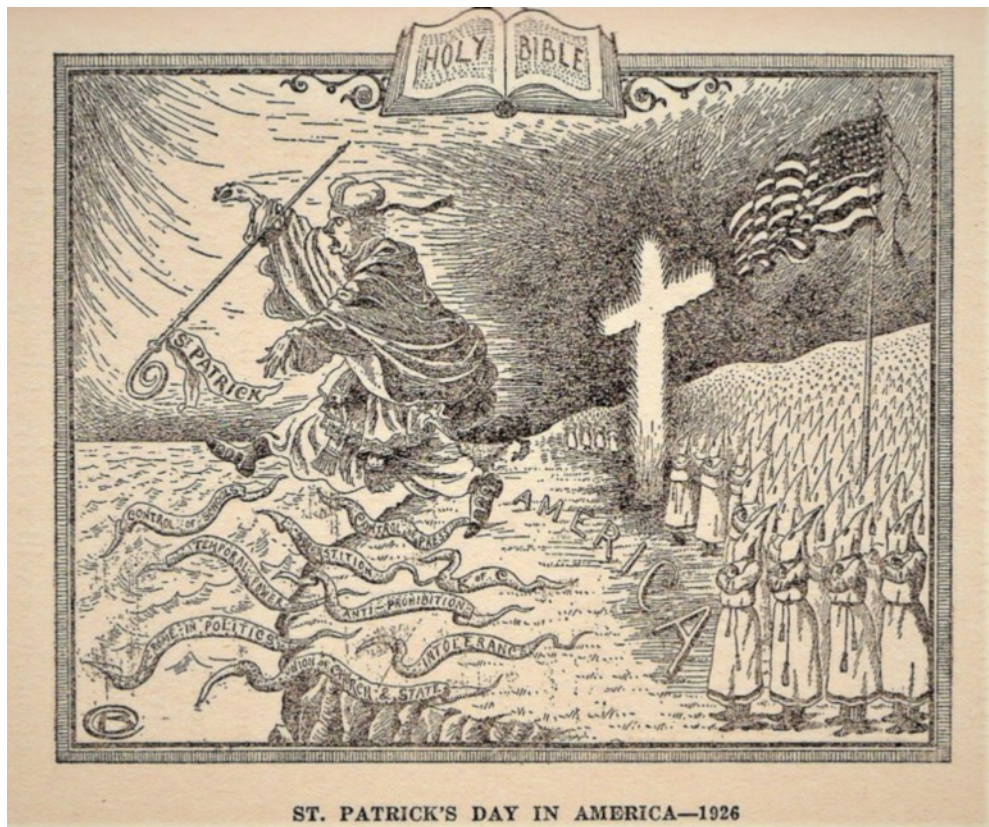
A newspaper advertisement announcing the screening of *The Birth of a Nation* at the Texas Grand Theatre in El Paso, Texas, 1916 – Unknown author, *El Paso Herald*, public domain,



Ku Klux Klan at Stone Mountain, Georgia, July 24, 1948. Dr. Samuel Green, Grand Dragon of the KKK and children – Author, Image Editor, Wikimedia. The second Ku Klux Klan, founded by William Joseph Simmons in 1915 at Stone Mountain, Georgia, appealed to people in the Southern, Midwestern, and Western states who viewed Roman Catholics, Jews, and foreign-born minorities to be anti-American. Most Klansmen were lower and middle-class whites trying to protect their jobs from foreign immigrants and African Americans migrating to northern cities, Detroit and Chicago, and the new cities of the Oklahoma-Texas Oil Boom, Tulsa, Dallas, and Houston.



Rally of 30,000 Ku Klux Klan from Illinois, Chicago, 1920s – Unknown author, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia



St. Patrick, the personification of the Roman Catholic Church, driven from America, 1926 cartoon – Author, Branford Clarke, *Klansmen: Guardians of Liberty* by Alma White, Public domain, Wikimedia. With the Holy Bible hovering above, snakes being driven into the sea represent the union of church and state, control of public schools, control of expression, and intolerance.



The Assassination of The Hon. G.W. Ashburn, in Columbus, Georgia. Ashburn was assassinated by the Ku Klux Klan for expressing his pro-black views – Unknown author, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated*, 1868. Public domain, Wikimedia



Ku Klux Klan parade, Washington, D.C., September 1926 – Author, National Photo Company Collection, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia



Cross burning was introduced by William J. Simmons, founder of the second Klan in 1915 – Author, *Denver News*, public domain, Wikimedia

“In the next few years, the betrayal of the Negro’s dream was steadily reinforced in Oklahoma. Segregation was enforced in housing, hospitals, restaurants, and cemeteries. Oklahoma was the first to mandate separate pay telephone booths for the races. The South had been transported to Oklahoma along with its brooding anger. Inflamed by Klan propaganda, a wall of innuendo and rumor rose up between whites and blacks. 1921 Tulsa was a dam ready to burst.

“Before she died, my auntie Rashida in Tulsa told me that right before the riot, the pastor of the Methodist Church led a group of men on a tour of the Greenwood clubs to investigate illicit nightlife and mixing of the races. Miscegenation was their greatest fear. One Christian pastor reported, ‘Young, white girls were dancing while a Negro played the piano.’

“In 1903, William Lee Howard, a doctor in Baltimore published *The Negro as a Distinct Ethnic Factor in Civilization*, a pseudo-scientific document declaring that the Negro was reverting to a state of savagery, sexual madness, religious emotionalism, and superstition. Dr. Howard said something to the effect that the sexual instinct of the African is animalistic. When his instinct intensifies, he longs to rape white girls. Lynching, Howard declared, would continue in the United States as long as there’s a Negro left alive, and there’s a white woman for him to rape. The African can’t help his instincts any more than he can control the color of his skin.

“That’s the crux of the issue, miscegenation — blacks having sexual intercourse with white women, the forbidden fruit. That was the fear behind the hatred. Many of the Negro leaders of the 19th century had white blood in their veins, Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Du Bois, included. Clandestine miscegenation by the white man had been going on since the first slave arrived in America, including Thomas Jefferson to the present. W.E.B. Du Bois cried out against the white man’s sexual desecration of helpless, unwilling slaves while simultaneously crying out, ‘You shall not marry our daughters.’ Du Bois shouted out his reply, ‘Who in Hell asked to marry your daughters?’

“Yeah, the sexual angle always plays a big role in race relations. I’ve seen it in club after club. Miscegenation is the deep-rooted fear.”

“That’s what came down in Tulsa,” Les said. On Memorial Day, 1921, the fear of miscegenation destroyed a whole community of blacks. A nineteen-year-old shoeshine boy by the name of Dick Rowland was said to have raped a white elevator operator. There wasn’t a bit of truth in it. The white attorneys at the Tulsa court house where Rowland shined shoes said it wasn’t in him to do a thing like that. Rumors spread like wild fire. The bootblack was arrested and taken to the court house jail. Greenwood was in turmoil. Everybody believed a lynching was brewing.

“Two years before, twenty-five mass racial killings occurred in cities across America. Dr. George Hayes, executive director of the National Urban League and the first African American to earn a doctorate from Columbia University, reported that in the first nine months of the Red Summer of 1919, white mobs lynched more than forty black men, hanging or shooting most, and burning eight men at the stake.

“After the Great War, 200,000 American Negro soldiers returned home. There was increased pride in the returning soldiers who’d risked their life for democracy. W.E.B Du Bois said, “We are cowards and

jackasses if now that the war is over, we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land.’ There was competition for jobs with white people. When the black soldiers came home, the whites were led to believe that blacks asking for racial equality would overthrow the U.S. government in a violent uprising like the Soviet Revolution of 1917. President Woodrow Wilson said that the returning American Negroes were the greatest threat to bring Bolshevism to America.”

“The fear of communism,” I said, provided a rationalization for hating blacks.”

“W.E.B. Du Bois ran a photo in the NAACP’s magazine, taken by a Chicago Tribune reporter — the naked body of Will Brown, burning on a steaming pyre, surrounded by a grinning white mob in Omaha, Nebraska.”



The charred corpse of Will Brown after being lynched, mutilated, and burned by a white mob in Omaha, Nebraska, Red Summer, 1919 – U.S. Library of Congress, public domain, Wikimedia. From early 1919 through autumn, white supremacist rage burned across America in nearly every state and in three dozen cities with the worst massacre taking place in rural Elaine, Arkansas. Following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the fear that socialist and communist ideas would dominate the civil rights movement, the influenza pandemic, and an economic recession fueled the ferocity of white rage. In response to the terrorism, in many northern cities blacks formed the African Blood Brotherhood as an armed resistance to white violence.

“Jesus God, they burned him to death.”

I signaled to Jeanette for another Rémy Martin XO. I felt like getting drunk.

“After Will was accused,” Les continued, “of raping a nineteen-year-old white woman, the *Omaha Bee* newspaper ran a rabble-rousing story about blacks attacking white women which inflamed a mob of thousands to attack the courthouse, set it on fire and seize Will who was screaming, ‘I never did it; my God, I am innocent,’ and hung him from a telephone pole. Their rage still not satisfied, the mob shot his hanging corpse hundreds of times then cut him down and drug him through the streets tied behind an automobile. Before the screaming rabble, Will’s mangled body was covered with oil and burned to a crisp.”

“Jesus Christ.”

“By the time of World War One, race relations were still as bitter as in the day of Abraham Lincoln. I remember reading Lincoln’s words about a burning in St. Louis seventy years before Omaha. Lincoln said, ‘A mulatto man by the name of McIntosh was seized in the street, dragged to the suburbs of the city, chained to a tree and actually burned to death; and all within a single hour from the time he had been a freeman attending to his own business and at peace with the world.’”

“A few months after the Tulsa burning, black sharecroppers were meeting in Elaine, Arkansas to form a union to get a fair shake from the planters who often withheld payment for crops for a full year. Sharecropping was slavery by another name. When gunfire broke out, the whites formed a militia and went after every black they could find, killing over 200.



Newspaper headline during the Elaine race massacre, 3 October 1919 – Author, William A. Wilson, *The Gazette*, Arkansas newspaper, public domain, Wikimedia

“The Governor of Arkansas appointed a panel of leading white businessmen to investigate. The verdict was that the sharecropper’s union was a socialist enterprise established by Negroes for the purpose of massacring white people. The branding of labor movements as socialist is a hammer that the capital class uses against labor unions, not only blacks but against all immigrants. If you were a person of color, you were locked out of the American dream.”

“You had a lot of family in Tulsa?”

“On both sides of the family, many with Indian blood. Several of them died on that day. My folks told me the newspaper boys were crying on the street, ‘Negro assaults a white girl!’ In those days, assault was the word they used for rape. The *Tulsa Tribune* newspaper ran a front-page story, ‘Nab Negro for Attacking Girl in Elevator.’ On the editorial page was another story, ‘To Lynch Negro Tonight.’ It was a white-hot moment. Both white and black sides of town expected a lynching that night.

Nab Negro for Attacking Girl In an Elevator

A negro delivery boy who gave his name to the police as “Diamond Dick” but who has been identified as Dick Rowland, was arrested on South Greenwood avenue this morning by Officers Carmichael and Pack, charged with attempting to assault the 17-year-old white elevator girl in the Drexel building early yesterday.

He will be tried in municipal court this afternoon on a state charge.

The girl said she noticed the negro a few minutes before the attempted assault looking up and down the hallway on the third floor of the Drexel building as if to see if there was anyone in sight but thought nothing of it at the time.

A few minutes later he entered the elevator she claimed, and attacked her, scratching her hands and face and tearing her clothes. Her screams brought a clerk from Renberg’s store to her assistance and the negro fled. He was captured and identified this morning both by the girl and clerk, police say.

Rowland denied that he tried to harm the girl, but admitted he put his hand on her arm in the elevator when she was alone.

Tenants of the Drexel building said the girl is an orphan who works as an elevator operator to pay her way through business college.

Newspaper article from 1 June 1921 edition of *Tulsa Tribune* – Author, *Tulsa Tribune*, public domain, Wikimedia

“The World War One black veterans got together in Greenwood. They had put their life on the line on the bloody battlefields of France. During the First World War, over 200,000 Negro soldiers served in France. Most did the heavy lifting jobs, loading the trucks, cleaning out the latrines, but 40,000 served in combat. The Harlem brothers joined up with the 15th New York National Guard Regiment, but when they shipped out to France, it was renamed the 369th Infantry Regiment. General Pershing wanted to use the 369th, but powerful senators in the states put pressure on the army and he was refused permission to use them. Pershing knew black men were good fighters. As a young first lieutenant, he’d commanded the 10th Cavalry Regiment of black soldiers called the Buffalo Soldiers who fought in the Indian Wars in New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. When he was teaching at West Point, cadets resenting Pershing’s strict discipline started calling him ‘Black Jack’ because he’d commanded the Black Buffalo soldiers. In the Spanish-American war, the Buffalo soldiers fought under Black Jack on San Juan Hill in Cuba.”

“I’ve heard of the Buffalo soldiers. One night at the Jazz Workshop, Max Roach told me that Charlie Mingus’s papa had fought with the Buffalo Soldiers.”

“That could be true,” Les said. “I know Mingus was born in Nogales, Arizona, one of the places the Buffalo regiment was based. Mingus is the best damn bassist in the business and a genius bebop composer, but man. . . what a temper. When Pershing was banned from using the 369th black regiment, he handed them over to the French command that had lost so many men they were damn happy to get those black fighters. The 369th was assigned to the 16th in the French Fourth Army, which called them, *Les Enfants Perdus* — The Lost Children.’ Issued French helmets, French weapons, and a couple of French words, just off the boat with barely any training, they were thrown into combat.”

“If they didn’t have any French, how could they understand commands?”

“A lot of sign language, I guess,” Les said with a big laugh. “I’ll bet it was pretty hairy at times not understanding a damn word of an officer speaking French like a machine gun. But it didn’t matter, those brothers fought like mad men in the Second Battle of the Marne at the village of Chateau-Thierry. That battle was the beginning of the end for the German army. After a few battles, they started calling the 369th, the Harlem Hellfighters.

“Yvonne told me about their heroics fighting alongside the French. Weren’t several awarded the Croix de Guerre?”



African American 369th Infantry Regiment in WWI. – Photograph by the War Department, public domain, Wikimedia. Two of the men, Privates Johnson and Roberts routed a German raiding party for which they were decorated with the French Croix de Guerre



American Expeditionary Forces, 369th Infantry Regiment, Harlem Hellfighters – War Department, public domain, Wikimedia



The 369th Infantry Regiment band plays jazz for American wounded in the courtyard of a Paris hospital – Photograph by U.S. Army Signal Corps, public domain, Wikimedia

“France awarded the entire regiment the Croix de Guerre for helping a French Division drive Germans from their trenches during the Aisne-Marne counter offensive. The best story of the 369th is about Corporal Henry Johnson and Private Roberts. On sentry duty one night, they heard the snipping and cutting of barb wire on the perimeter. Johnson sent his partner back for help and started lobbing grenades toward the barb wire cutters. The Germans opened fire and threw a mess of grenades hitting Roberts who’d come back to help his buddy. Johnson ran out of grenades and took a bullet in the head, then in his side and his hand, firing his French rifle until it jammed, the Germans charging over the top of the trench with Johnson swinging his rifle left and right, clubbing them down until the butt broke off and he was slammed to the ground. The Germans took Roberts prisoner and Johnson leaped up and went after them with his Filipino bolo knife, stabbing one in the stomach, throwing another off his back, stabbing one between the ribs, while suffering another shot in the arm as French troops came running to help. The Germans turned and fled, and Johnson passed out from loss of blood. When daylight came, they found four dead Germans and a whole lot of guns abandoned on the ground and blood everywhere. Johnson had fought off a whole German squad and survived.”

“Astonishing.”

“Miracle is the word. Johnson saved the life of his partner while suffering multiple wounds. The amazing thing is that Johnson was only 5 feet, 4 inches tall, and weighed 125 pounds wet. The astounded French promoted Johnson to sergeant and awarded him the Croix de Guerre, including the Palm d’Or, for extraordinary valor.”

“The French gave Johnson a Croix de Guerre. What did the U.S. army give him?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“Johnson suffered a dozen wounds and killed four krauts and they gave him absolutely nothing.”

“Yvonne told me that black soldiers in World War One couldn’t fight alongside white soldiers. But how could the army refuse to honor that kind of fighting spirit?”

“Well,” Les said, “the people in Harlem recognized him. When the 369th came back in 1919 to march in a Victory Parade down Fifth Avenue, thousands hysterically cheered the Harlem Hellfighters and the little man they called, ‘Black Death.’ Theodore Roosevelt called Johnson one of the ‘bravest Americans to serve in the war, but by the time he died ten years later, he was a forgotten man.”



369th Infantry parade through New York City, 1919 – Photograph by Underwood & Underwood, U.S. War Dept., U.S. National Archives, Wikimedia

“And after all the blood they shed,” I said, “they were still sitting in the back of the bus.”

“The Harlem Hellfighters were fighting for respect. In every fight, they went hell for leather to show they were first class citizens. The 369th was the first Allied unit to reach the Rhine and over one hundred Hellfighters in the 369th were awarded the Legion of Honor by the French. James Reese’s 369th Regimental band introduced jazz to Europe. The Brits and French loved our Negro jazz. That’s why thirty years later, we’re playing jazz in Paris. Negro soldiers not only fought for their freedom in the Civil War and World War One, they fought in the Revolutionary War too. Alexander Hamilton believed that Negroes were damn good soldiers. Hamilton said the intention was to give them their freedom with their muskets. Hamilton saw slavery as a betrayal of the principles of the American Revolution. Along with John Jay, he founded a New York society to encourage slave owners to free their slaves. Eventually the society succeeded in passing a New York law ending slavery. Hamilton is the founding fathers that I respect the most for he was a rare man who recognized that the intelligence of black people was as good as the whites.

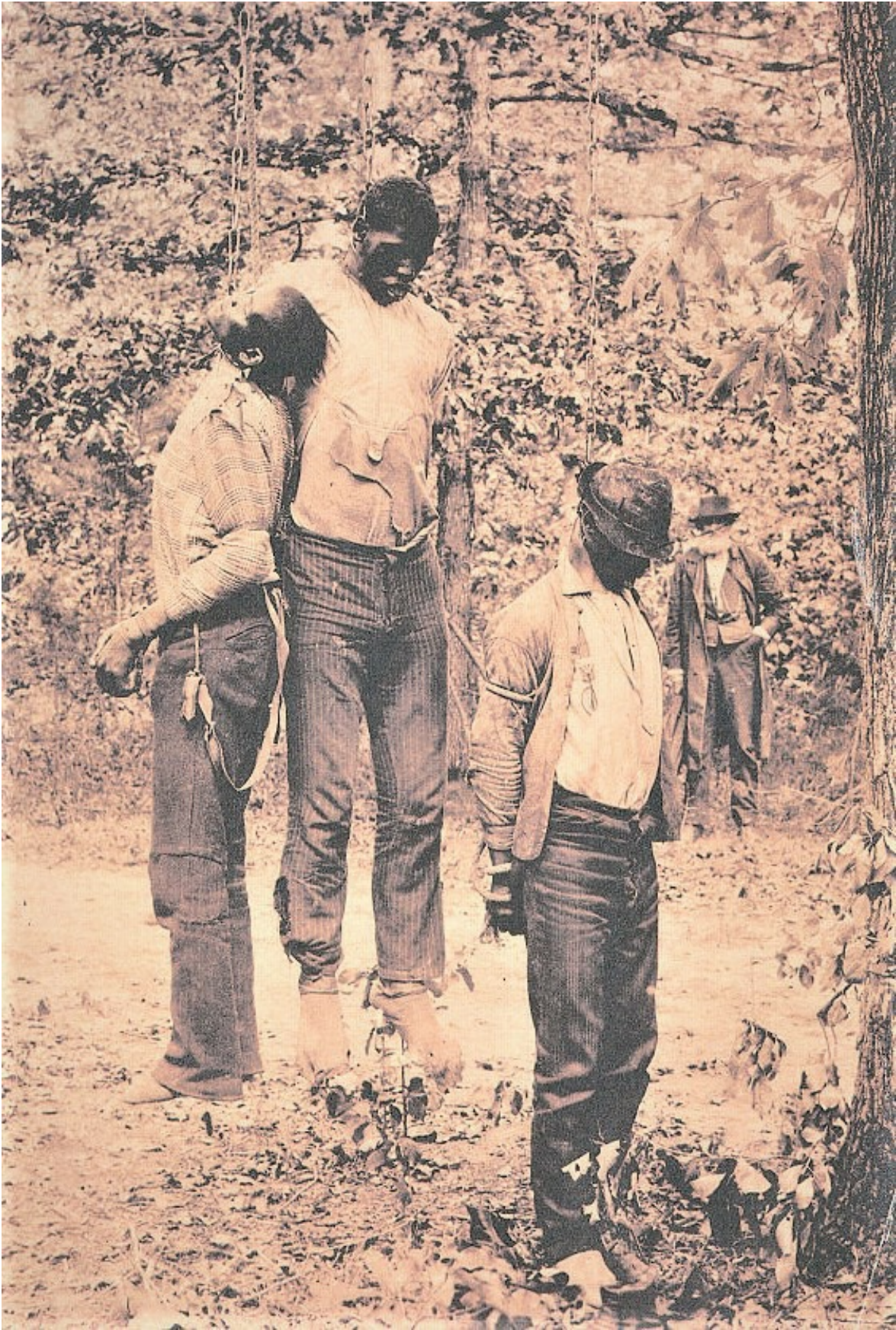
“Hamilton was a man who could see beyond his time. He even supported Toussaint L’Ouverture’s revolution against the French in Saint-Domingue while his adversary Thomas Jefferson, fearing that the

Haitian revolution would set off a slave rebellion in America, refused to give diplomatic recognition to the first black led republic in the Western Hemisphere. Hamilton championed the black soldier during the revolutionary war and they fought and died, but damn few were freed. In World War One, Negroes fought like wildcats, but when they came home, they discovered white people didn't recognize them as heroes."

"When it looked like the shoeshine kid was going to be lynched, what did the veterans do?"



The lynching of Laura Nelson in Okemah, Oklahoma, 25 May 1911
– Photo postcard by G.H. Farnum, Public domain, Wikimedia



The lynching of Jim Redmond, Gus Roberson, and Bob Addison, Habersham County, Georgia, May 1892
– Unknown author, *Without Sanctuary*, Lynching Photography in America, public domain, Wikimedia

“They weren’t going to forget the lynching of Red Summer 1919. White people tend to forget things like that. But black people never forget. The veterans had fought for America, but coming home, they were betrayed by white America. Those Oklahoma veterans said it was a time to put a stop to it. They picked up their guns and crossed the train tracks on Archer which divides the whites from the blacks. They weren’t going to take no more shit from those lynching crackers. Like the men in poet Claude McKay’s “If We Must Die,” the black veterans marched on the courthouse to save Rowland from certain death. If I can remember McKay’s words, he said something like ‘If we must die, let’s not die like hogs hunted in an inglorious sport, while round us bark the maddened dogs. Before us lies the open grave. Like men we’ll face the cowardly pack, pressed to the wall and dying, but fighting back. If we must die, then let us nobly die.’

“In the years before, twenty-seven of my people in Oklahoma were strung up from lamp posts and bridges. Yes sir, twenty-seven lynchings in Oklahoma. The World War One veterans said it was time to put an end to lynching in Oklahoma. The sheriff refused their help and told them to go back to Greenwood. After they went home, a mob of whites came down and told the sheriff to turn the kid over. To his credit, he didn’t do it. You know damn well what would’ve happened if he had. The veterans heard the white mob had surrounded the courthouse. Once again, they took up their guns and went down to the courthouse, dead set on saving the kid’s life. Somebody fired a gun. That’s when the killing began.”

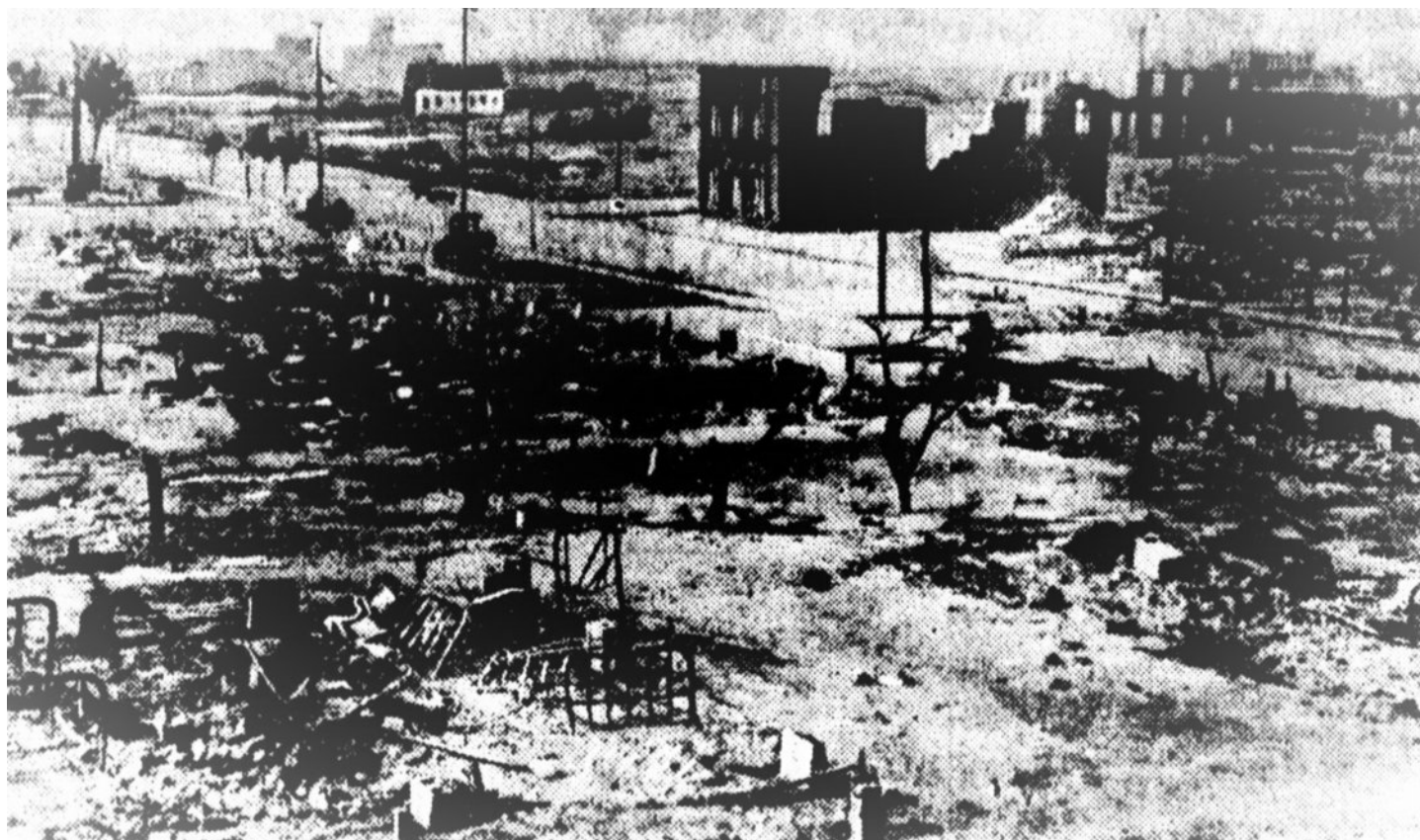
“Twenty-four hours later, two to three hundred citizens had been murdered, nearly all of them my people. Some policemen told the mob to ‘Go out and kill a nigger.’ Some called it ‘Nigger Day, a day for hunting niggers.’ The bastards even mounted a machine gun on top of the grain elevator by the Frisco train tracks and mowed down people in the street. There was another machine gun on Standpipe Hill.

“When the white National Guard arrived, instead of stopping the killing, they joined in killing Negroes. To put down ‘The Negro Uprising,’ planes were flying overhead dropping nitroglycerine, firebombing the houses. More than a thousand vigilantes went block to block setting fire to the stores, churches, houses, even the hospital until they’d burned down the whole town. Flames everywhere, you couldn’t see for the smoke. No church in Tulsa gave shelter to these stricken people except for the First Presbyterian, Baptist Church, and the Holy Trinity Catholic Church.”

“Holy Mary,” I said, crossing myself.



Smoldering ruins of African American's homes during the Tulsa Race Massacre – Author, Alvin C. Krupnick Co. public domain, Wikimedia



Aftermath of the race massacre in Greenwood, Tulsa, a hundred stores, a thousand homes, several square miles of utter devastation, 6 June 1921 – Author, Evening Public Ledger, Public domain, Wikimedia



The burning of African American homes and businesses in Greenwood during the Tulsa Race Massacre, 1 June 1921 – Photograph by U.S. Government, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia

“After twenty-four hours of hell on earth,” Les went on, “a hundred stores, a thousand houses were burned, two square miles of utter devastation, nothing but a few brick walls, charred timbers, and cast-iron beds left standing in the ashes. 10,000 blacks were homeless. Nobody had a roof over their head. My auntie Mae was bedridden. When they set fire to Mae’s house, she couldn’t get out. She burned alive.”

“My God. . .”



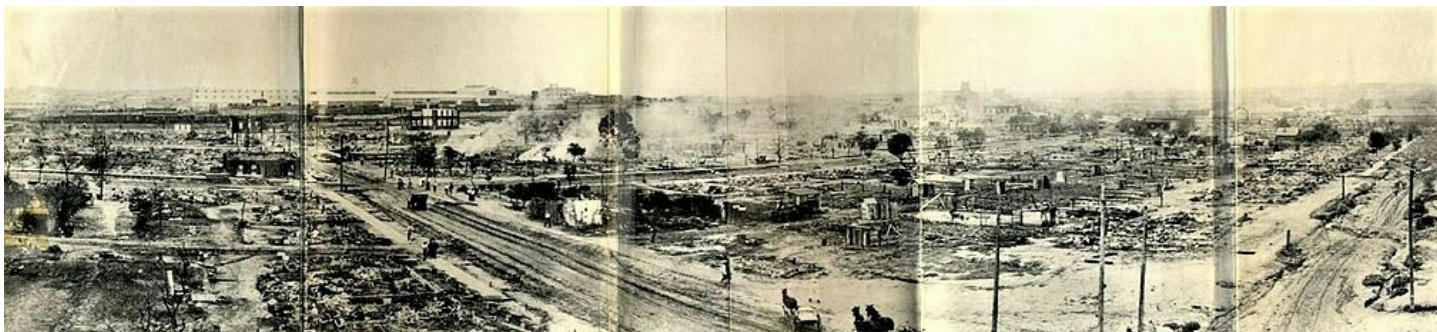
All That Was Left of His Home after the Tulsa Race Riot, 21 June 1921 – Unknown author, SMU.edu digital collection, Public domain Wikimedia



Black homes were looted by a mob of white Tulsans during the burning of Greenwood, 1 June 1921 – Unknown author, public domain, U.S. Library of Congress. Before the Oklahoma National Guard arrived in Tulsa and General Barrett obtained permission from Governor Robertson in Oklahoma City to proclaim martial law in Tulsa County, the African American homes of the most prominent black citizens on North Detroit Avenue, including A.J. Smitherman, editor of the *Tulsa Star* and Ellis W. Woods, Booker T. Washington High School principal, had been looted of furniture, light fixtures, clothing, silverware, and money. While the Oklahoma National Guard was still eating breakfast, white civilians wearing khaki World War I uniforms and Tulsa policemen wearing civilian clothes joined in the burning, destroying the finest houses of successful black businessmen at the base of Standpipe Hill, Tulsa's first water tower constructed in 1904. All the main businesses were burned, the fifty-four room Stradford Hotel, the Gurley, Red Wing, and Midway Hotels, drugs stores, barber shops, restaurants, cafes, grocery stores, cleaners, the Osborne Monroe's Roller Skating Rink and the Dreamland Theater had gone up in flames, destroying the livelihoods and life savings of the Greenwood community. Standpipe Hill was a center of the assault where a mounted machine gun fired indiscriminately down on blacks trying to flee while WWI era biplanes circled overhead dropping turpentine balls and gasoline bombs on the houses including the Mount Zion Baptist Church that the black community had so proudly dedicated just a few weeks before, burning it to the ground along with a half-dozen other African American churches, leaving forty-square-blocks destroyed and nine-thousand black Americans homeless. *Tulsa Race Riot, Report by the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*, February 28, 2001.



Survivors of the 1921 race massacre incarcerated on the Tulsa Fair Grounds – Unknown author, public domain, U.S. Library of Congress



Panorama after white Tulsans burned to the ground the African American community of Greenwood, Tulsa Oklahoma, 1 June 1921 – Photograph from Mary E. Jones Parrish's *Events of the Tulsa Disaster, 1921*, Public domain, Wikimedia

“Gio, it’s hard to not be bitter when I think how those heathens killed helpless people. There was an eighty-year-old couple living next door to Mae. The old man was crippled. When thugs came to burn his house, he wasn’t able to walk out on his own power. They shot him in the back of the head, splattered his brains on the wall.

His voice cracked. He lowered his head, his hand clenched in a fist. I said nothing and for a time, Les said nothing. Finally, he lifted his head, his eyes glistening, his voice just a whisper. “There’s always a commanding voice in a massacre — a voice that says what the mob is waiting to hear.”



Tulsa Race Massacre, 1 June 1921, Oklahoma National Guard with wounded – Photograph by *Tulsa World* newspaper, public domain, Wikimedia. Many of the mob were deputized by the police and carried off pianos, Victrolas, and musical instruments, loading them into trucks before setting the houses afire. The police and the Oklahoma National Guard did a lot of the killing, the police changing their uniforms for civilian clothes and joining the killing and looting.

“Who was the voice?”

“Jenkin Lloyd Jones, the publisher of the *Tulsa Tribune*. Unlike the *Tulsa World*, instead of objective journalism, his paper dealt in sensationalism and exaggeration, a tabloid of the worst kind, and that sensationalism made him money. Jones believed deeply in white supremacy. The *Tribune* referred to the African American community as ‘Nigger town’ or ‘Little Africa,’ a cesspool that must be sanitized. Jones wrote, ‘A bad nigger is about the lowest thing that walks on two feet. Give a bad nigger his booze and his dope and a gun and thinks he can shoot up the world. And all these four things are found in Niggertown, booze, dope, bad niggers and guns.’

“Jones knew the Ku Klux Klan was popular in Tulsa. He praised the Klan for its primary goal — ‘the supremacy of the white race in social, political, and governmental affairs of the nation.’”

“The commanding voice,” I said, “was the *Tulsa Tribune*’s editorial — ‘To lynch Negro tonight.’”

“That headline printed in thousands of newspapers on the street was a loud and clear call to those who hated to see black people getting ahead in the world, the immigrants from Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, drawn to the lure of the black gold that was making Tulsa rich — southerners transporting their smoldering hatred from the ruins of the South.’

“It takes only an official endorsement,” I said, “to sanction a mob’s rage. Mussolini had an evil genius for that.”

“Jones, a white supremacist, was the son of a Unitarian missionary — the church of John and Abigail Adams, Louisa May Alcott, Susan B. Anthony, Herman Melville, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Jenkin Lloyd Jones, a sympathizer with the Klan, was recently inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. That honor tells you a lot about Oklahoma.”

“If the black veterans had allowed the whites to lynch the boy, then the massacre wouldn’t have happened.”

“That’s the way it has been throughout history. When you stand up for justice, it’s a good way to get killed. But after the Great War, there was a firestorm of lynching. The black veterans had risked their life fighting for their country, and they were still being lynched. They couldn’t take it anymore.

“On Main Street, there was a black veteran who was blind, both his legs amputated in the war.

Everybody knew him. He scooted his torso along the pavement pushing with his hands in baseball catcher mitt, earning his living with a tin cup, selling pencils, and singing for a few coins. On that day, a bootlegger with a gang of guys tied a rope to the man's stump of a leg, tied him to the bumper of a convertible and drug him down the railroad tracks. The blind man's head bounced up and down the railroad ties until he was dead."

"Jesus God." I signaled Jeanette for another Rémy Martin.

"Sometimes I wake up in the night, and I see those hoodlums burning Auntie Mae alive. When one of my family went back to her house, she found only ashes."

"After the massacre of June first, the Klan was recruiting new members left and right. Downtown Tulsa, they built the biggest Klavern in the nation. It seated over 3,000 Klansmen. The Klan easily exploited the white's fears of the blacks because hardly a one of them crackers had ever set foot in Greenwood. One man said the reason for the catastrophe was 'niggers with money.' A Klansman organizer from Atlanta said, 'The riot was the best thing that ever happened to Tulsa.'



Cover of sheet music to "We Are Loyal Klansmen," 1923 – Public domain, Wikimedia

"The French writer Jean Genet said when he was visiting the U.S., 'What I did not yet know, so intense was the hatred of the white American for the black, a hatred so deep that I wonder if every white man in this country when he plants a tree, doesn't see Negroes hanging from its branches.'"

"When," I asked, "did the lynching stop?"



Klansmen visiting the United States Capitol Building, Washington DC. 1925 – Unknown author, U.S. Library of Congress. After the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921, the Klan created the Tulsa Benevolent Society and raised \$200,000 (1.5 million in today's currency) to build a Klavern on the site of the Centenary Methodist Church at Main and Easton Street. Two months after Greenwood was burned to the ground, a Baptist minister and national Klan official lectured at the Tulsa Convention Hall, calling the burning an outstanding success, "the best thing to ever happen to Tulsa and that judging the way that strange Negroes were coming to Tulsa, we might have to do it all over again."

Built at the base of Standpipe Hill overlooking the destroyed Greenwood community, then a city of tents where the African American survivors struggled to live, the three-story Klavern's auditorium had a capacity of 3,000 Klan members, a meeting place for white people of all social levels from policemen to judges, attorneys to businessmen, bankers to oil field workers, immediately initiating 300 Tulsans into the first class of the Tulsa Klan while the Junior Ku Klux Klan recruited boys aged 12 to 18. The following year, north of Owasso, a nighttime ceremony initiated 1,000 Tulsa Klavern members before a burning 70-foot high cross. The Klavern known as "Beno Hall," was often called "Be No Hall, Be No Nigger, Be No Jew, Be No Catholic, Be No Immigrant." Many years later, a radio evangelist turned Beno Hall into the Evangelistic Temple of the first Pentecostal Church where in the first revival meeting, an Enid preacher, Oral Roberts, exercised his faith-healing powers and fire and brimstone oratory.



Ku Klux Klan parade on Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D.C., 1928 – Unknown Author, U.S. National Archive, Wikimedia



Ku Klux Klan initiation ceremony, 1920s – Unknown author, Everett Historical, Shutterstock

“It was still going on even after thousands of black soldiers served in World War II. When they came back from the war, black veterans were attacked because white supremacists couldn’t stand to see black men in uniform. It challenged their ideas of black inferiority. Newspapers fanned the fear of black men returning from overseas to start a race war. Black soldiers were dangerous, potential leaders in uprisings against white rule. During the 19th century, Maryland, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina, North Carolina, Florida, Louisiana, and Texas passed race-based laws prohibiting slaves and free persons of color to own or carry firearms of any description. White citizen patrols were given the right to search the homes of slaves and free blacks and confiscate their arms.

“George Dorsey, a black veteran who’d fought the Japanese in the Pacific Theatre, his pregnant wife Mae, and his friends, Roger and Dorothy Malcom, were stopped in Walton County, Georgia by a mob of white vigilantes near Moore’s Ford Bridge on the Apalachee River east of Atlanta. The mob tied them up and executed them by shooting volley after volley into their bodies. Dorsey had risked his life for five years fighting for his county, only to come home to be lynched a few months after his return. Dorothy Malcom was only twenty years old. While Mae Dorsey lay in the road, the mob cut her fetus from her body.”

“It’s hard to imagine that kind of hate.”

“There was a great outcry against the mass killing,” Les said. “The Truman administration introduced anti-lynching legislation in Congress, but it was defeated by the Southern Democratic legislators. Lynching was still legal in the South.”

“Did they find the killers?”

“The FBI interviewed thousands of people, but no one cooperated, no one confessed, no evidence was ever found. Although the killers were known, no one turned them in. No one was tried for the crime. Absolute silence was maintained.

”White people can be gracious. They can be charming and hospitable. But those very same nice people, because of engrained beliefs, the myths and false information with which they’ve believed since a child, those very nice people end up supporting policies with evil results. A lot of very nice people voted for Hitler. They adored Hitler. They supported the killing of Jews, gypsies, artists, and intellectuals. It’s a contradiction in our humanity, a tragic flaw in people. The hard truth of it, Gio. So called nice people do evil things.”

“I remember Yvonne quoting Exodus 23:2, ‘Thou shall not follow a multitude to do evil.’ That’s what I

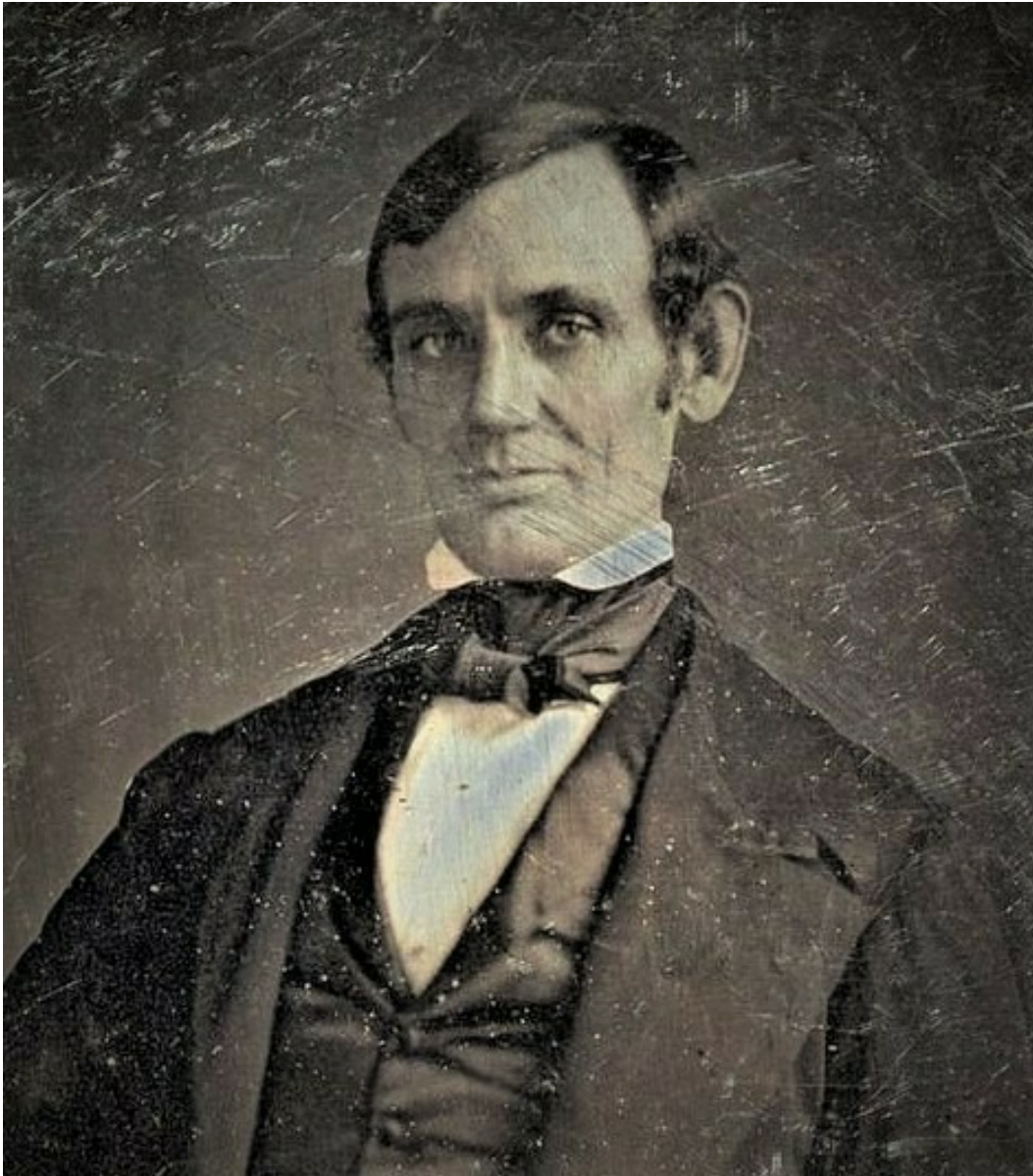
admired about Yvonne — her concern with injustice — how to deal with the hatred of man against man. That was Jesus’ concern too. How can we love all of mankind?”

“America has a long history of mob justice,” Les said. “The genocide in Tulsa, Oklahoma was only one case among many. Time and time again, self-appointed vigilantes driven by self-righteous hatred have murdered black folk. Not only was lynching a frequent event in the South but was a common event on the western frontier where whites strung up Mexican and Chinese miners. At the beginning of the Gold Rush in 1848, California belonged to Mexico. At the time that Mexico was forced to cede California to the U.S. after losing the Mexican-American war, 25,000 Mexicans were living in California.



Fall of Mexico City during the Mexican-American War. The American flag flies over the Mexican National Palace, 1848 – Lithograph by Adolphe Jean-baptiste Bavot after a drawing by Car Nebel, public domain, Wikimedia. Abolitionists opposed the war as an attempt by slave-owners to perpetuate slavery. Transcendentalist writers Ralph Waldo Emerson protested the popular war and Henry David Thoreau served time in jail for his opposition and composed the essay, *Civil Disobedience*. The conflict over the expansion of slavery into the conquered territories fueled the seismic drift toward civil war a decade later.

“The Mexicans were good miners producing a lot of gold. The Mexican’s success pissed off the white prospectors. A quick way to take over a rich mine was to lynch a Mexican miner. It’s figured that from the beginning of the gold rush to 1870, 200 Mexicans were strung up by whites. They even hanged Mexican women who had killed men attempting to rape them.”



Abraham Lincoln, member of the House of Representatives when he opposed the Mexican-American War, 1846 – Daguerrotype attributed to Nicholas H. Shepherd, one of Lincoln's law students, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia

“When it comes to women killing a rapist,” I said, “things haven’t improved that much in the last Hundred years.”

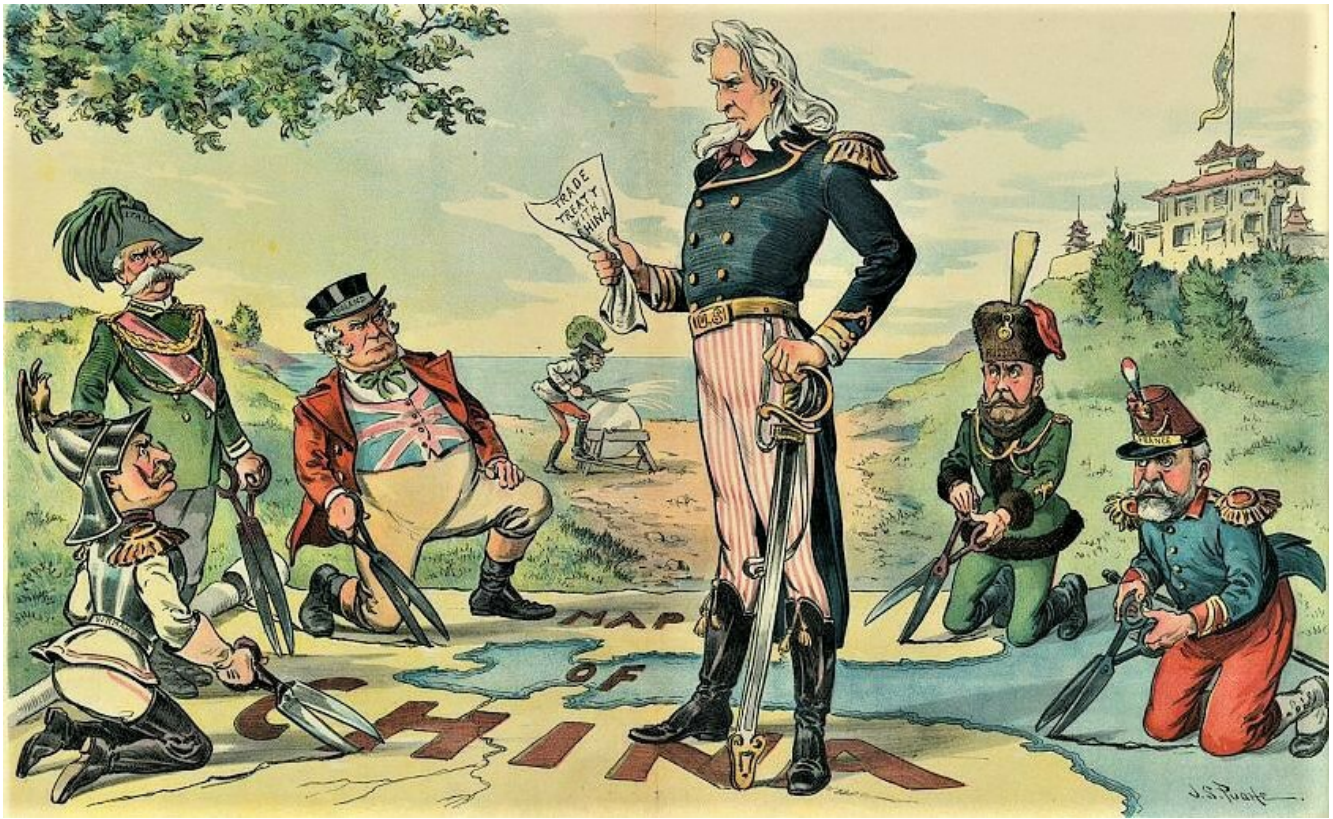
“The Chinese,” Les said, “endured the same racism as the Mexicans. Thousands of impoverished Chinese were recruited at slave wages to build the first transcontinental Union Pacific Railroad. Repelled by the strangeness of Chinese language, clothing, and religion, whites were outraged by the ability of the Chinese to work for little money. Popular books claimed that the Chinese immigrants were going to elect a Mandarin dressed in silk as governor and take over control of California. The Chinese were called by Californians, the Yellow Peril — a horde of abnormal people invading the purity of nativist America.”



The Yellow Terror in All His Glory, an editorial cartoon caricature of a Chinese worker, 1899, Unknown author, Public domain, Wikimedia



Boxer rebels, 1900 – Photograph from Tōgō Shrine and Tōgō Association, public domain, Wikimedia. The Boxer Revolt, the Society of the Righteous and Harmonious Fists, to drive European colonialists from China, 1899 - 1901, triggered a Yellow Peril xenophobia in America.



Major powers, United States, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom, France, Russia, and Austria plan to carve up China, 1899 – Illustration by J. S. Pughe, Punch, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia



Boxer Rebellion, British troops burn a Chinese Temple Shanhaikuan – Photograph by Amédée Forestier, The Illustrated London News, public domain, Wikimedia



French political cartoon. *China – The Cake of Kings and . . . of Emperors*. A Chinese Mandarin is horrified as Queen Victoria, British Empire, Kaiser Wilhelm II, German Empire, Tsar Nicholas II, Russian Empire, Marianne, Third French Republic, and a Samurai, Empire of Japan, carve up China into colonies, 1898 – Illustration by Henri Meyer *Le Petit Journal*, Bibliotheque nationale de France, Wikimedia

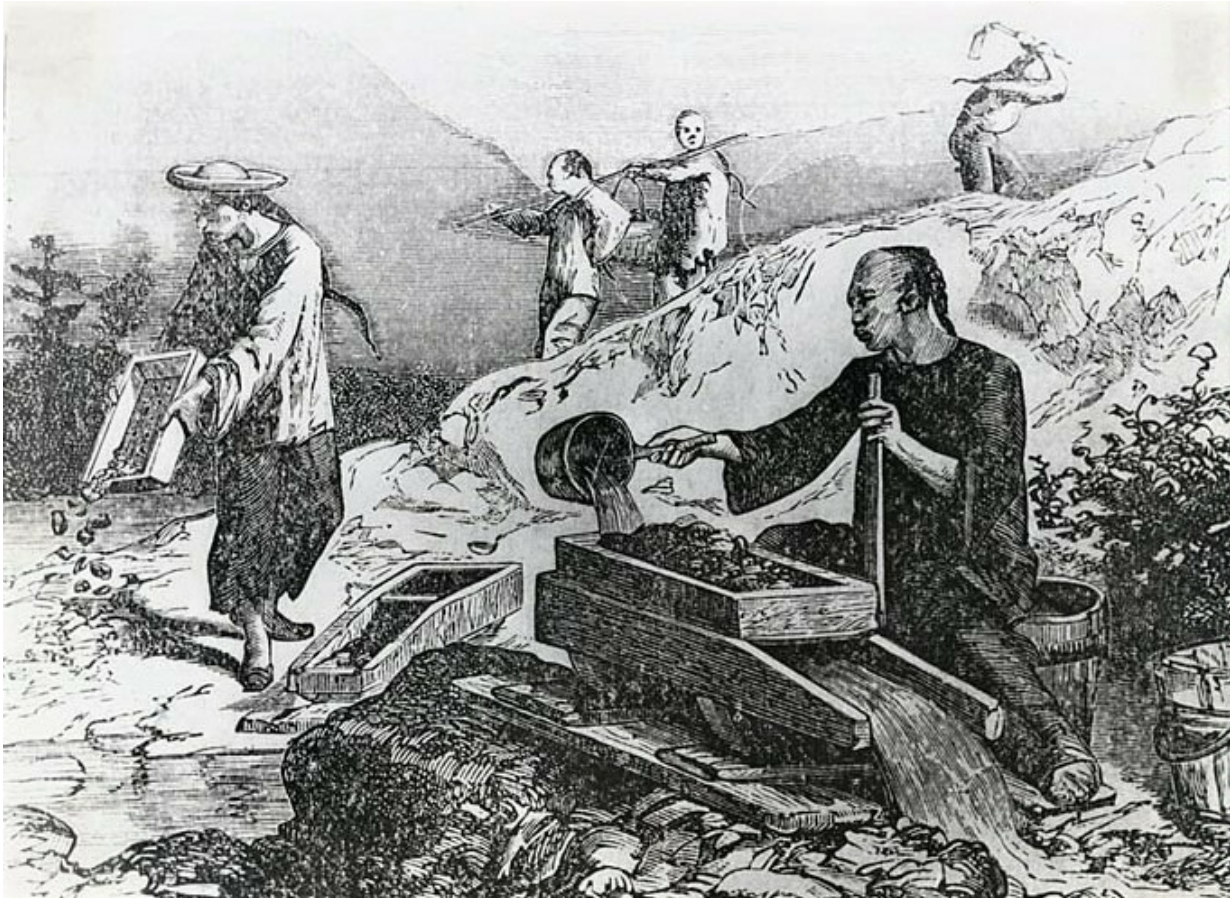
“Yellow was a metaphor for race,” Les said. Later in the century after the Boxer Rebellion in China, racial hatred of the Chinese flared up even stronger. During the nationalist revolt against the eight Western Powers who’d colonized China, the atrocities committed by the Boxer insurgents against Chinese and European Christians led to a terrible retaliation by the colonial powers. Russian Cossacks, German, French, Italian, British, American, and Japanese troops looted and killed without mercy. The Russian Christian anarchist Leo Tolstoy defended the Boxer rebels and accused the foreign troops of senseless slaughter. Tolstoy reserved his greatest condemnation for Nicholas II of Russia and Wilhelm II of Germany. But it was not only the western powers slaughtering the Chinese, the Japanese troops were skilled in beheading any Chinese suspected of being a Boxer.



European officials observe while two Boxer soldiers are beheaded – Unknown author, welcomeimages.org, public domain, Wikimedia

“To avoid rape and mutilation, thousands of Chinese women committed suicide. It led to the perception in America that it was a race war. The anti-Chinese faction used the Boxer massacre of missionaries, women and children to prove that the Chinese harbored a murderous hatred of all Christians.”

“The loathing of the Chinese,” Les said, “was so thick during the gold rush you could cut it with a knife. In the winter of 1858, a race war broke out in the gold fields. When the Chinese miners refused to be run off their claims in the Sierras, white miners armed with rifles and shotguns in Shasta and El Dorado Counties and in the Siskiyou mountains forced Chinese to quit their claims, declaring, ‘No white men can ever employ a Chink again.’”



Chinese gold miners in California – Roy D. Graves pictorial collection, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, Wikimedia

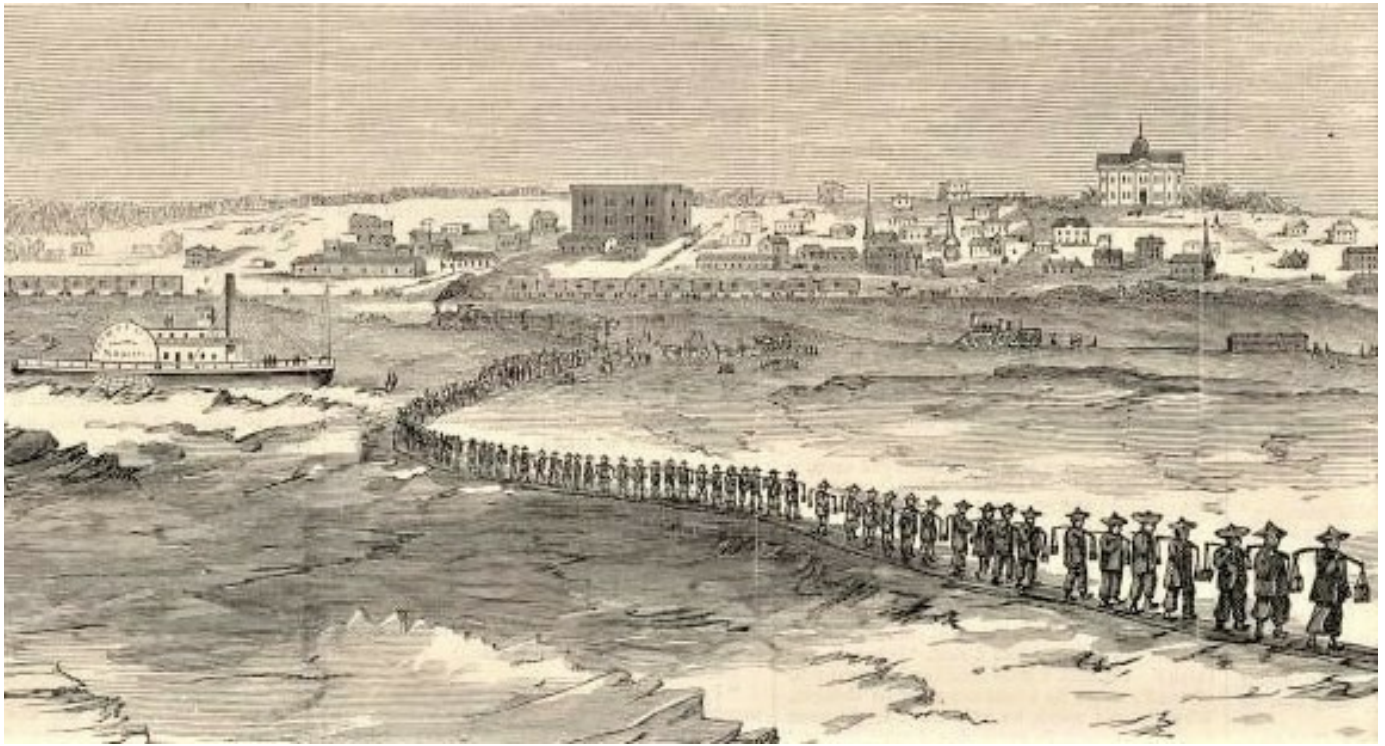
“White vigilantes set fire to the tents of the Chinese and burned their camps to the ground. A vigilante suppression of one Chinese camp expressed their American patriotism by being led by a brass band playing John Philip Sousa, a Portuguese American. In Nevada City, a hundred white men tore through Chinatown dragging shrieking prostitutes from the whore houses, pitching their belongings into the dirt, driving the Chinese off the mountain and stealing their claims throughout the rivers of the Sierras. Anti-miscegenation laws were passed banning Chinese men from marrying white women — the fear of amalgamated races. California passed a Foreign Miner’s Tax of three dollars a month when the entire salary of a Chinese miner was only six dollars a month. The Chinese-Americans were denied citizenship and forbidden to own land.”



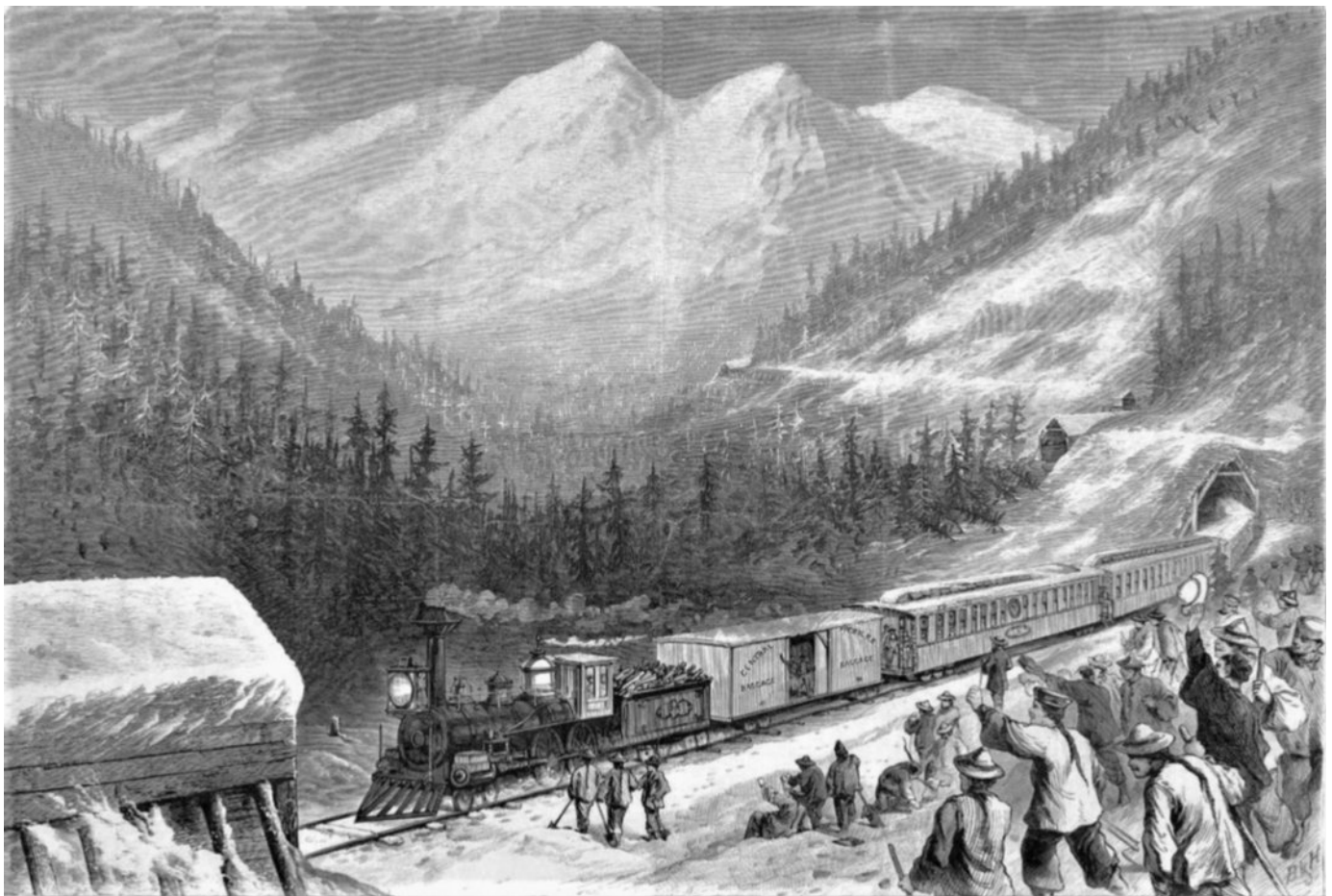
Chinese immigrants to America on board the steam-ship *Alaska*, bound for San Francisco – Sketch published in *Harper's Weekly*, 1876 – Unknown author, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, Wikimedia



Chinese Cigar Factory on Merchant Street, San Francisco, 1869 - *Illustrated San Francisco News*, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, Wikimedia



Chinese Coolies Crossing the Missouri River, 1870 – Sketch by Leavitt Burnham, *Harper's Weekly*, Public domain, Wikimedia



Chinese workers constructing snow sheds for the first transcontinental railroad in the Sierra Nevada Mountains – Sketch by Joseph Becker, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, Wikimedia



Central Pacific Railroad train rounding Cape Horn, Placer County, California, 1876 – Photograph by Carleton Watkins, National Library of Wales, public domain, Wikimedia



Chinese workers built this snow gallery for the Central Pacific Railroad at Crested Peak – Photograph by Carleton Watkins, public domain, Wikimedia



The Street of the Gamblers – Photograph by Arnold Genthe, 1898, U.S. Library of Congress, public domain, Wikimedia



Chinese American miners in the Colorado School of Mines' Edgar Experimental Mine near Idaho Springs, Colorado, circa 1920 - Dr. James Underhill, Denver Public Library, public domain, Wikimedia

“Very few Chinese women had come over. Most of the immigrants left their wives in China to take care of their parents. It was said that in 1850 there were 7 women and 4,000 men in California. Even ten years later, Chinese women were less than two percent of the population. You can imagine the demand for women.”

“How could the men do without women?”

“The age-old solution, prostitution. Another factor — with few white women available and Chinese men everywhere in the mining towns, men’s conventional fear of homosexuality clashed with his sexual desire creating a lethal mix of psychological aberrations. Tong Gangs held women as sexual slaves, ran the whorehouses and opium dens. Opium use became rampant. Beautiful women were priceless. Purchased from impoverished families or abducted in Canton, women were shipped to America to serve as sexual slaves, often forced into drug use to keep them dependent on gangs operating like the Italian Mafia. In the California 1870 census, 60% of the Chinese women were listed as prostitutes. Many were beaten, sexually abused, and died of venereal diseases. Like the abduction of Helen of Troy which set off the Trojan War, the kidnapping of prize Chinese slave-girls in San Francisco set off wars between rival Tong gangs. While whites were customers of the whore houses, they were the same ones who proclaimed the Chinese to be debauched and perverse, condemning the Chinese for corrupting the morals of American society. Since the days of the gold rush, the image of Chinese women as sex objects has resulted in a sexualized image of Asian women which has lasted until today.”

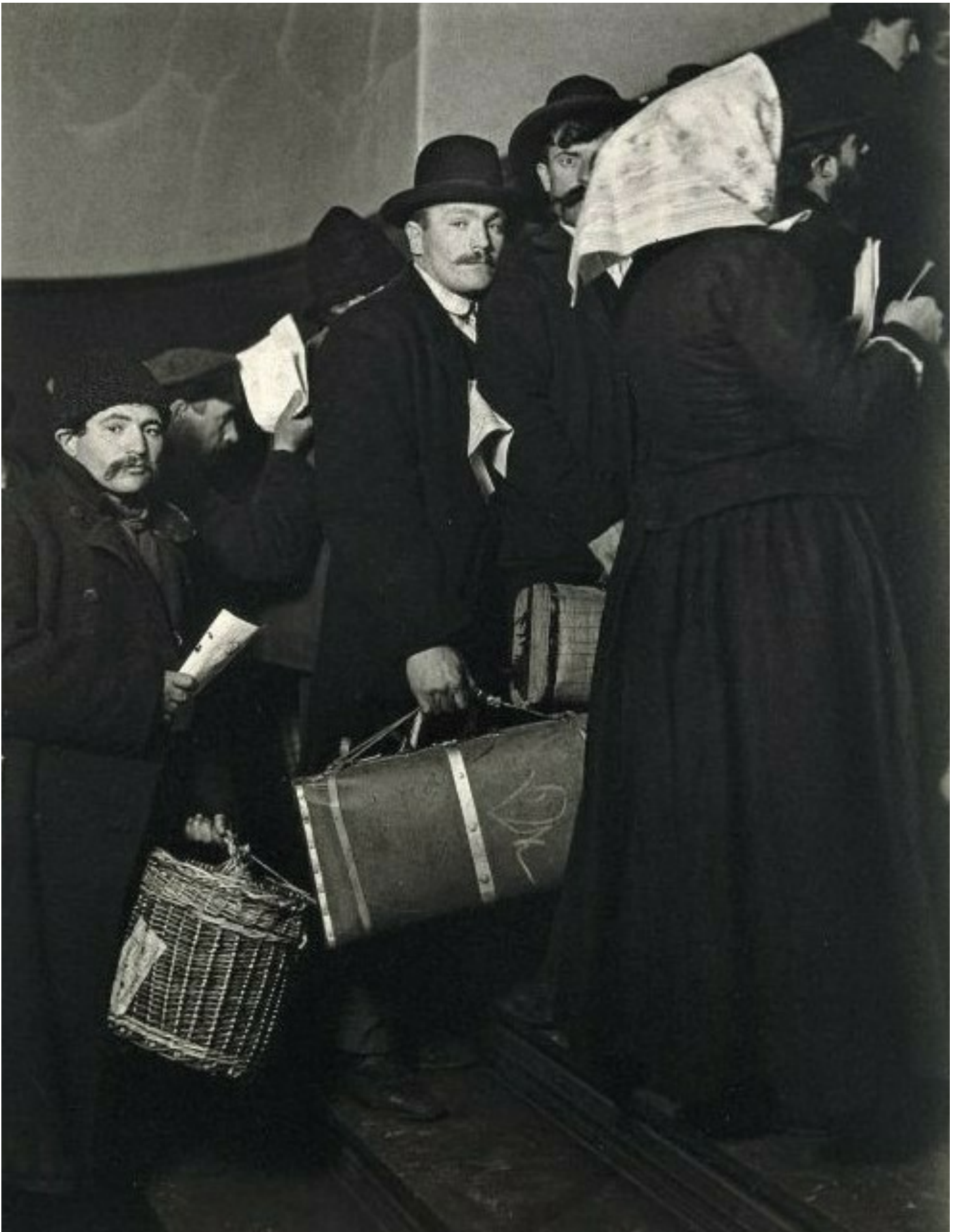
“The fate of the Chinese reminds me of Papa’s stories about the treatment of the *Mezzogiorno* Italians and Sicilians when they arrived in America in the 1870’s and 90’s. They came to America because of over population, class rigidity, absentee northern landowners, sharecropper wages with no schooling and healthcare. Italians, especially in the south, had no chance to rise into the middle class. Then there was the disaster of the phylloxera disease which destroyed the root stock of Italy’s vineyards. Like the Italians who came over for 30 dollars in the holds of hell hole steamers arriving on Ellis Island — *Isola del Lacrime*, the Island of Tears, where thousands of immigrants took their medical exams, Papa and I came to make a better life. Like the Chinese laborers who built the railroads, the Italians and Sicilians were reviled as dirty, devious descendants of bandits and assassins. Accused by organized labor for stealing American jobs and despised by the Protestants, Italian Catholics were called ‘a herd of steerage slime ‘and cursed as wops and dagoes.”



Second Ellis Island Immigrant Station, February 24, 1905 – Photograph by A. Coeffler, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia



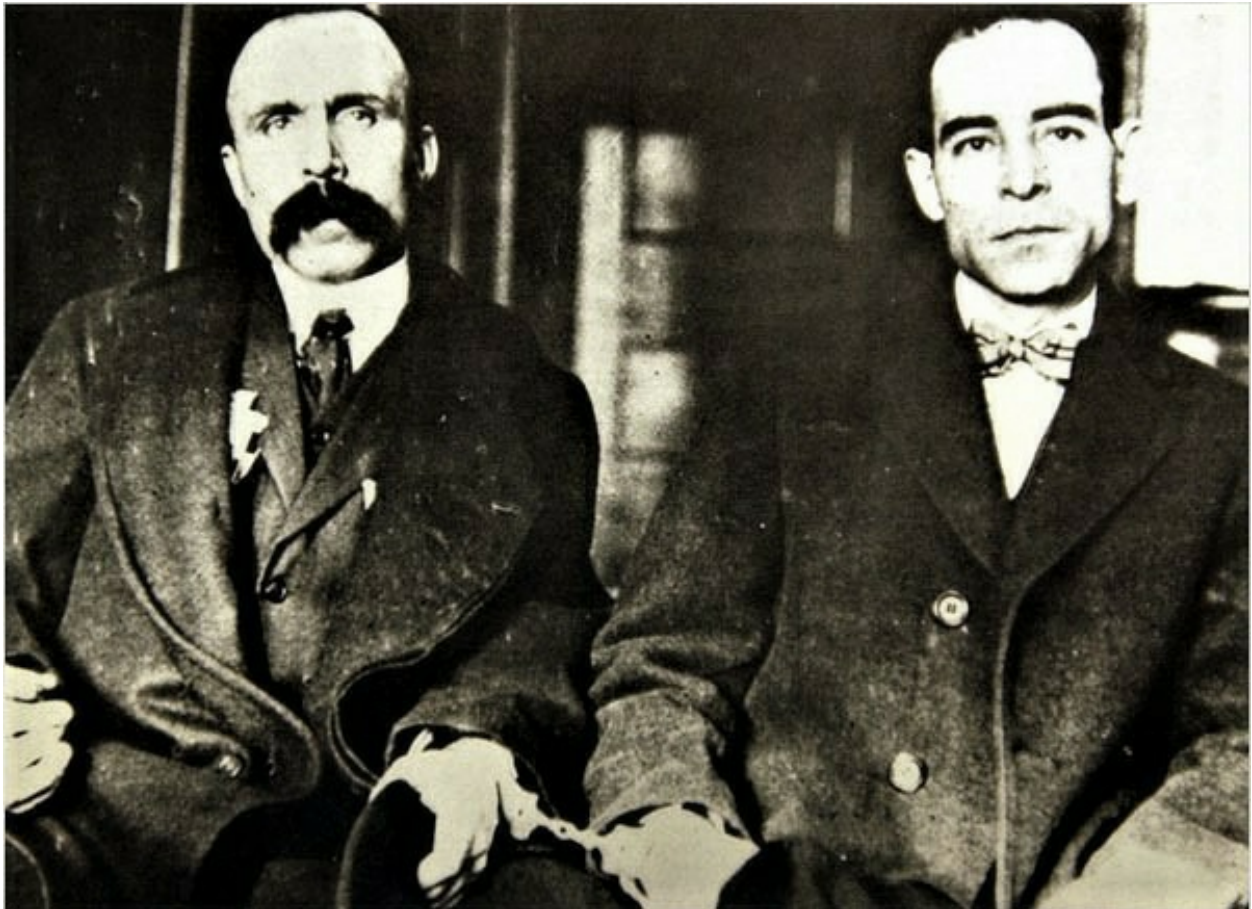
Arriving at Ellis Island – Author, Bain News Service, U.S. Library of Congress, public domain, Wikimedia



Climbing into the Promised Land, Ellis Island, 1908 – Photography by Lewis Hine, Brooklyn Museum, public domain. Wikimedia

“There was a political aspect too,” Les said. “Anarchism and socialism were popular with poor Italians. Italian laborers joined with other immigrants to demand better working conditions, shorter hours in the grueling mining, garment, and construction industries. The owners and wealthy stockholders of the corporations branded the Italian-Americans as labor agitators and dangerous radicals. It’s always the most recent and poorest immigrants who are demonized, like the Okies who immigrated to California after the great drought which devastated their land. They were reviled. Ask the whops, dagoes, spics, polaks, chinks, japs, and kikes how things were when they got off the boat.”

“In the last year of his life, Papa told me many stories about Italians in America. The most powerful story was about two Italian anarchists, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, a fish seller and a shoemaker who were charged for murder during a robbery. Papa believed that Sacco and Vanzetti’s only crime was that they were anarchists. Witnesses at Vanzetti’s trial swore that he was delivering eels on the day of the robbery and yet both were sentenced to death. As evidence of their innocence became known, writers, artists, and intellectuals spoke out for justice appealing to the courts for their pardon.



Bartolomeo Vanzetti, left, handcuffed to Nicola Sacco, right, Dedham, Massachusetts Superior Court, 1923 – Unknown author, Boston Public Library, public domain, Wikimedia. At the time of the photo, Sacco was on the 23rd day of a hunger strike.

“Felix Frankfurter, professor of law at Harvard and a future Supreme Court justice, argued passionately for Sacco and Vanzetti’s innocence. Mass protests around the globe called for their release. Yvonne said the French government unleashed massive police violence against those who protested the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. The passionate outcry against the execution of the two anarchists was ignored. Papa said that because they hated the Italians and feared their political beliefs, the two anarchists were condemned to die. Sacco and Vanzetti were executed in the electric chair.”



Protest in London to save the lives of Sacco and Vanzetti, 1921 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia. At the time of Vanzetti and Sacco’s scheduled execution in 1927, protests to save their lives were held in every major city in North America, Europe, Japan, Australia, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and South Africa. Seven years after their 1920 trial, Sacco and Vanzetti were executed in the electric chair just after midnight on August 23, 1927. Scholars today believe they were wrongfully convicted.

“They were executed because they were Italians. Did your papa tell you about the mass lynching of Italians in New Orleans?”

“Several times. Papa never made much money, but he was a born storyteller. Each time he told the story, it got more interesting. He said that when the police chief of New Orleans was shot, a bunch of Italians were rounded up and charged with murder. Because of lack of evidence, the jury acquitted them. New Orleans exploded in a fit of fury, the newspapers howling, ‘Who bribed the Jury?’ The tabloids encouraged citizens to execute justice with their own hands. A crowd assembled outside the jail, hundreds shouting ‘Kill the Dagoes.’

“An execution squad of a hundred white vigilantes broke into the prison and lynched eleven Italian prisoners while hundreds of people cheered the execution. After the lynching, the chief organizer of the mob said, Italians are little worse than the Negro, even more filthy and treacherous. He was later elected governor of Louisiana.”



The lynching of eleven Italians in the New Orleans jail in 1891 after the murder of police chief David Hennessy, 1891 – Illustration by E. Benjamin Andrews, 1912, public domain, Wikimedia.



William S. Parkerson inciting the mob – Unknown author, *Harper's Weekly*, March 28, 1891, public domain, Wikimedia. After the shooting of the chief of police, the mayor of New Orleans, Joseph A. Shakspeare ordered the police to arrest every Italian in sight. Shakspeare said that the southern Italians and Sicilians who had immigrated to the South to fill the shortage of cheap labor created by the end of slavery were the most idle, vicious, and worthless people among us. . . without courage, honor, truth, pride, or religion.” Attorney William Parkerson gave a fiery speech to the mob calling the jury who had failed to convict the Italians, “perjurers and scoundrels who had been bribed.” Barbara Botein, in “The Hennessy Case: An Episode in Anti-Italian Nativism” said that after the attorney’s speech, “The mob marched to the prison, chanting, ‘We want the Dagoes.’” Botein writes, “The mentally ill Polizzi was hauled outside, hanged from a lamppost, and shot. Antonio Bagnetto, a fruit peddler, was hanged from a tree and shot.” Joseph Maselli and and Dominic Candeloro reported in “New Orleans's 1891 Nightmare: Eleven Italians Lynched,” Nine other Italians were shot or clubbed to death inside the prison by some of the most prominent New Orleans leaders. The bullet-riddled bodies of Polizzi and Bagnetto were left hanging for hours.

“It’s the very same story, Les said, “as the mob lynching of the Chinese in Los Angeles. When the California Legislature passed a law prohibiting a Chinese from testifying against a white man, it gave immunity to any white man who killed a Chinese immigrant. A white man was killed during a shootout in Los Angeles between two rival Tong gangs and the seething hatred of the Chinese burst into the streets. 500 whites attacked the Chinese ghetto, wrecked the shops, beat every Chinaman in sight and strung up seventeen Chinese in Calle de los Negroes.”

“And where were the police in all of this killing?”

“Like the police in the South, the LA cops watched while the mob hung the Chinese from lamp poles and the whites cheered the killers on.

“City councilmen and prominent citizens were among the killers, but after the massacre, witnesses including the cops, failed to recognize any of the killers. The grand jury accused a score of street riff raff of murder, but a top lawyer filed a brief with the Supreme Court stating that the D.A. had committed errors. The court agreed and the convictions were set aside. No one has spoken of it since.”



Seventeen immigrants murdered in the Chinese massacre of 1871 in Los Angeles – Los Angeles Public Library, public domain, Wikimedia

“Murder is hard to prove when the guilty are the leading citizens.”

“The hatred of the Chinese,” Les said, “only grew stronger in California. An economic crisis hit the country in 1873 and lasted for several years. The transcontinental railroad had been completed and the economy had collapsed on the East Coast. Thousands of men moved from the East to look for jobs that weren’t there. With no government social programs or unemployment aid, men were left destitute in the streets, churches struggling to feed starving men, a crisis which California had never experienced before.

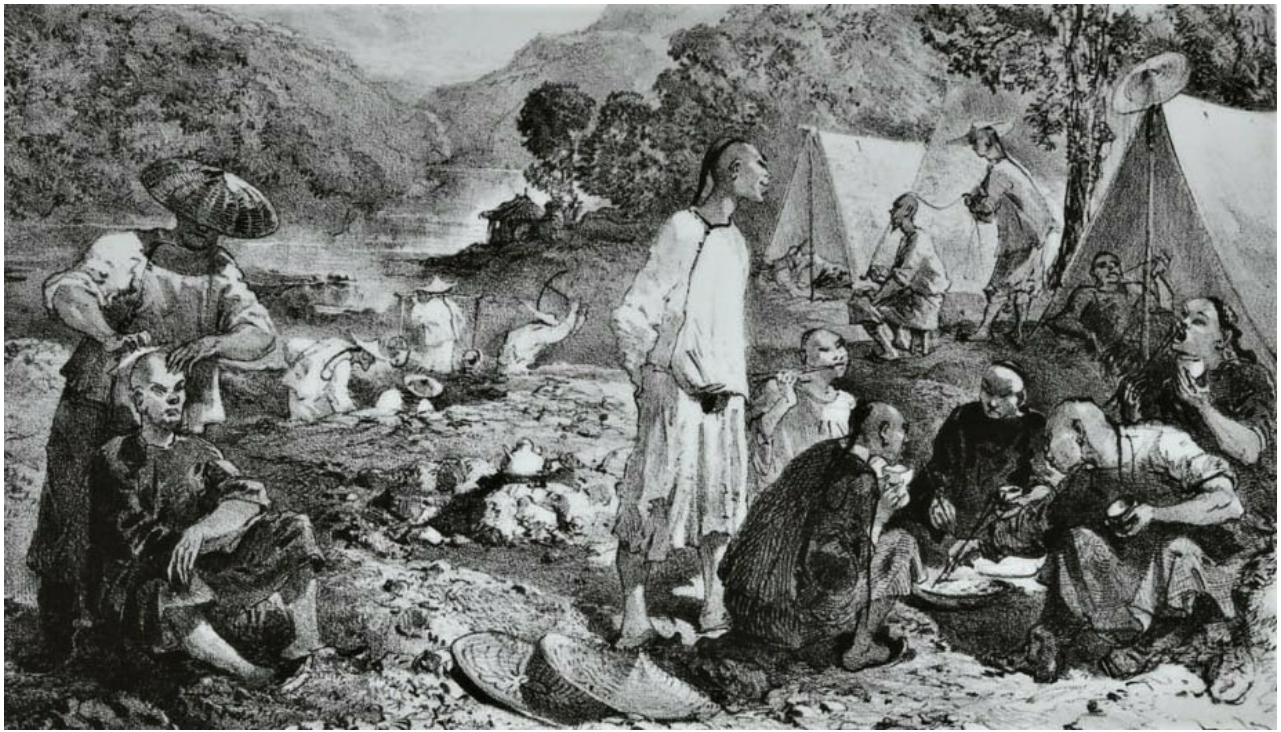
“Denis Kearney, a freight hauler and immigrant from Ireland, laid the blame on the coolies for stealing the jobs of whites. A powerful demagogue, Kearney organized a new party, the Workingmen’s Party of California and staged a mass rally on top of Nob Hill where the railroad barons, Leland Stanford, C. P. Huntington, Charles Crocker, and Mark Hopkins had built lavish mansions. In the light of enormous bonfires lighting up the castles of the millionaires, the orator Kearney yelled, ‘The Chinese must go!’



Denis Kearney's portrait on the cover of *Speeches of Dennis Kearney*, 1878 – Steel engraving, unknown author, Public domain, Wikimedia. During the depression of 1873-78, Denis Kearney's Workingmen's Party of California won seats in the California legislature and rewrote the state's constitution to deny Chinese citizens the right to vote. A wildly successful populist, Kearney said, if the ballot fails to run the Chinese into the sea, "we are ready to use the bullet." Kearney's slogan, *The Chinese Must Go*, caught fire with the masses and led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

“Bathed in thunderous ovations from the crowd and the flickering light, the hell fire orator preached to the unemployed urging them to arm themselves with rifles, lynch the railroad barons. and drive the Chinese out. In 1877, the Workingmen’s Party called for a rally of several thousand on the sand lot next to San Francisco City Hall. An anti-coolie faction stirred up the crowd of unemployed men with the cry of ‘On to Chinatown. The mob roared into the Chinatown ghetto, looting, burning, and killing for two days.

“The riot was just the beginning of the rage against the Chinese. The Workingmen’s Party will win, Kearney proclaimed, even if it had to wade knee deep in blood. Forty thousand in San Francisco voted to end Chinese immigration with only 200 in favor. Kearney’s party passed laws limiting the Chinese from living and working in the United States.



19th-century Chinese–American mining camp – Drawing by J. D. Borthwick, Public domain, Wikimedia



Massacre of the Chinese at Rock Springs, Wyoming – Drawing by Thure de Thulstrup, *Harper's Weekly*, 1885, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, Wikimedia. In 1874–75, after tension with the white miners, the Union Pacific Coal Department hired Chinese laborers who were willing to work for less money in the company's coal mines in southern Wyoming. Seeking revenge against the Chinese, 150 white men armed with Winchester rifles attacked Chinatown in Rock Springs, As the immigrants fled, the white miners opened fire, beating their victims with the butt of a gun, robbing them of their money, shooting them and flinging their bodies into the flaming houses while a group of women cheered them on. The ones who hid in their houses, were burned alive. The hatred was deep and abiding. The Chinese miners were scalped, mutilated, dismembered, decapitated, sexual organs severed, and their bodies hung from their burning homes.

“Groups like the Supreme Order of Caucasians blamed Chinese coolies for depressed wages, fueling a ferocious hatred of aliens and eventually resulting in the U.S. Congress passing the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 which banned the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years, renewed it ten years later and made the ban on Chinese permanent in 1902. The Exclusion Act prohibited the Chinese from becoming U.S. citizens which made them aliens forever, an especially cruel fate for they had little chance of reuniting with wives left behind in China. To preserve American racial homogeneity, an even greater ban was placed on immigration when President Coolidge signed the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 and Asian Exclusion Act which not only limited European immigration, but totally banned immigration of Arabs and Asians.”

“Surely,” I said, “the total exclusion of Asians and Arabs was unconstitutional.”

“Remember, slavery was once constitutional too. Unless the Supreme Court says so, nothing is unconstitutional. The Southern Democrats filibustered a law in the Senate to ban lynching. You could say that lynching was constitutional too. In the South, no jury would convict a lynch mob. Four years ago, a fourteen-year-old boy, Emmett Till was murdered by two white men in Mississippi.



At left: Emmett Till, 13-years-old, at his last Christmas, 1954 – Photograph taken by his mother, Mamie Till Bradley, Wikimedia. At right: Emmett Till's mutilated corpse on display at his funeral. Photograph printed in *The Chicago Defender* and *Jet* magazine, Wikimedia. Emmett's mother Mamie Till Bradley insisted on an open-casket funeral so people could see what had been done to her beautiful son Bobo – Three months later, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to sit in the colored section at the back of the bus, December 1, 1955. The Civil Rights War was on.

“A black man, Moses Wright risked his life to identify the killer in court, something that no one could remember a black man ever doing in Mississippi... but despite that courageous man’s testimony, the all-white, all male jury let the killers go free.”

“They accused Emmett of rape?”

“It was actually a charge of flirting,” Les said, his voice barely a whisper. “That’s all it takes to get killed in Mississippi — flirting. The husband of the woman and his half-brother heard of a boy who’d come down from Chicago to visit his cousins. Believing that the Chicago kid called Bobo was the one who’d whistled at his wife, they kidnapped Emmett, beat him nearly to death, gouged out his eye, and made him carry a 70 pound cotton gin fan to the banks of the Tallahatchie River, then shot him in the head, tied him with barbed wire to the fan, and shoved him into the river. When his body was discovered by two boys fishing, Emmett’s face was so mutilated he could only be identified by the ring on his finger. Bobo was the pride and joy of his mama Mamie Till who’d largely raised him herself. When Bobo first had the idea to go to the Mississippi Delta to see his cousins, she tried to stop him from going. She knew her child was a natural cut up, always joking around, capable of coming up with some silliness that could get him in trouble with white folk. She warned Bobo not to pull off any pranks down there. She told him there’s a big difference between South Side Chicago and the Mississippi Delta. But a headstrong child doesn’t listen to his mama, so off the willful child goes to his death in Mississippi. When his disfigured body was shipped back to Chicago and Mamie saw his face, she knew what she had to do. Mamie planned a big funeral and displayed Bobo in an open casket. She wanted the whole world to see Bobo’s crushed face. She wanted them to see how he’d died. I saw the photo of Bobo’s face in his coffin. He was no longer recognizable as a human. *The Chicago Defender* and *Jet* magazine published the photo that went around the world — Emmett’s eye wrenched out, the face of a child smashed into an unrecognizable pulp.

“Wait a minute Les, I can’t listen to this. I can’t believe what you’re telling me.”

“Every word is true. My uncle, Elijah went to Emmett’s funeral in Chicago. Tens of thousands came to pay their respects to this young boy. The black press spread the story of Emmett Till’s death, whipping the Black Nation into a fury. That was the moment when it all came together. Mamie Till’s decision to show what those hoodlums had done to her boy was the symbolic beginning of the Civil Rights Movement.

“Three months later, December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to sit in the colored section at the back of the bus. The Women’s Political Conference mimeographed 35,000 handbills, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott was on, a young minister, Martin Luther King put in charge, the boycott lasting several hundred days nearly bankrupting the bus company until the city of Montgomery was forced to stop segregating buses.



Rosa Parks with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, 1955 – Unknown Author, Ebony Magazine, U.S. National Archives, Wikimedia

“A century ago, Frederick Douglass said, ‘Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have the exact measure of the injustice and wrong which will be imposed on them.’ Douglass, who had Native American heritage on his mother’s side, was one of the great orators of his day. His autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, proved that the slave holders were dead wrong when they claimed that a man born a slave couldn’t attain high intellectual attainment. By the beginning of the Civil War, Douglass had become one of the most renowned blacks in America not only due to his speeches on race but on the suffrage of women. He said that to deny women the right to vote was not only a degradation of women but an ignorant refusal to use one half of the moral and intellectual assets of humanity.”



Harriet Ross Tubman – Albumen photograph, unknown author, Tabby Studios, Public domain, Wikimedia. Born into slavery, Tubman escaped and rescued 70 from slavery through her network of safe houses in the Underground Railroad. A strong force for women’s suffrage, Tubman helped abolitionist John Brown recruit men for his raid on Harpers Ferry and served as an armed scout for the Union Army during the Civil War.



Frederick Douglass, 1847-1852 – Daguerreotype by Samuel J. Miller, Art Institute of Chicago. public domain, Wikimedia. Douglass was the only African American to attend the first women’s rights convention at the Seneca Falls Convention. Douglass spoke in favor of women’s suffrage, saying that he could not accept the right to vote as a black man if women could not also claim that right.

**THREE HUNDRED DOLLARS
REWARD.**

RANAWAY from the subscriber on Monday the 17th ult., three negroes, named as follows: **HARRY**, aged about 19 years, has on one side of his neck a wen, just under the ear, he is of a dark chestnut color, about 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high; **BEN**, aged about 25 years, is very quick to speak when spoken to, he is of a chestnut color, about six feet high; **MINTY**, aged about 27 years, is of a chestnut color, fine looking, and about 5 feet high. One hundred dollars reward will be given for each of the above named negroes, if taken out of the State, and \$50 each if taken in the State. They must be lodged in Baltimore, Easton or Cambridge Jail, in Maryland.

ELIZA ANN BRODESS.

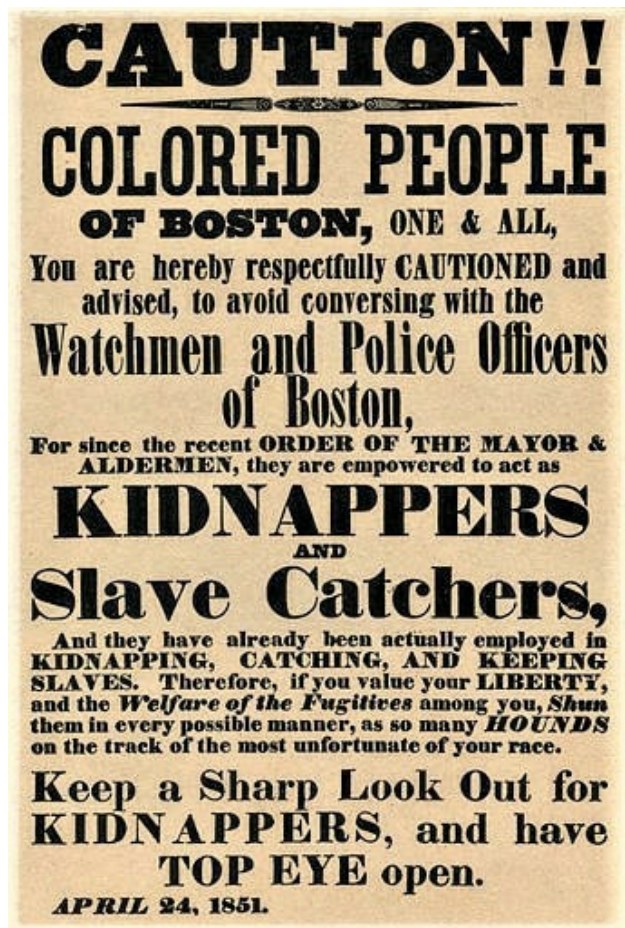
Near Bucktown, Dorchester county, Md.

Oct. 3d, 1849.

Cambridge Democrat newspaper notice offering \$100 reward, equivalent of \$3,000 today, for capture of each of the escaped slaves "Minty", Harriet Tubman, and her brothers Henry and Ben, 1849 – Unknown photographer, author, Eliza Ann Brodess, Cambridge Democrat newspaper, public domain, Wikimedia



Conceptual prototype of a United States \$20 featuring a portrait of Harriet Tubman to replace existing portrait of slave owning President Andrew Jackson – U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing, 2016, published in New York Times 24 June 2019, public domain, Wikimedia

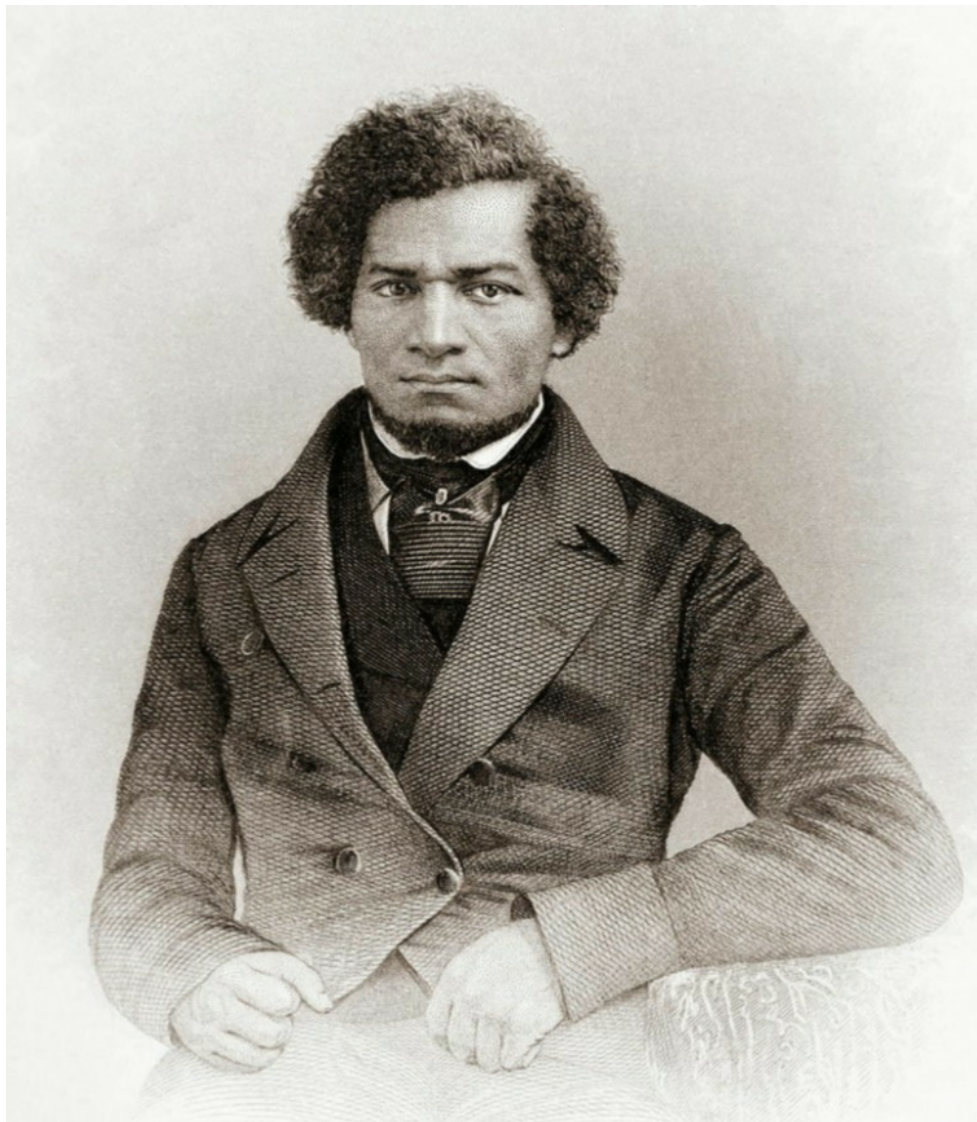


Poster warning the *Colored people of Boston* about policemen acting as slave catchers, 24 April, 1851, public domain, Wikimedia

“Polishing his eyeglasses once again, Les said, “Douglass was an admirer of Harriet Tubman’s success in using the abolitionist’s Underground Railway. When Tubman’s owner died and his widow was planning to sell the slaves, realizing that it would split up her family, Harriet refused to accept the heartbreak. Like Patrick Henry, she decided there were two things she had a right to — liberty or death. If she couldn’t have one, she would have the other and escaped with her two brothers, running for her life after a large reward had been posted for her capture. With her slave experience of driving oxen carts hauling logs and an intimate knowledge of the woods, marshes, and rivers of Maryland, Tubman began leading escaping slaves by night, spiriting hundreds of slaves to freedom guided by the stars through Delaware into Pennsylvania where Quakers offered a haven. ‘Quakers,’ Tubman said ‘are almost good as colored. They call themselves friends and you can trust them every time.’ Tubman’s mission was made even more difficult after the Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 mandating harsh penalties for assisting escaped slaves, decreeing that law enforcement make every effort to capture them even in states where slavery was outlawed.”

“That’s incredible. How could Congress justify capturing slaves in a state which has passed laws outlawing slavery?”

“It was due to the power of the lawmakers in Congress representing the South. The passage of the Fugitive Slave Law forced Tubman to lead her fugitives into the Canadian province of Ontario. Her advice to the fleeing slaves, ‘If you hear the dogs, keep going. If you see the torches in the woods, keep going. If there's shouting after you, keep going. Don't ever stop. Keep going. If you want a taste of freedom, keep going.’ The abolitionists compared Tubman to Moses who led the people of Israel out of Egypt. ‘I freed a thousand slaves,’ she said. “I could have freed a thousand more if only they knew they were slaves.’ Writing an homage for Harriet Tubman’s biography, Frederick Douglass said ‘I know of no one who has encountered more perils and hardships to serve our enslaved people than you.’



Frontispiece - Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom - Part I - Life as a Slave, Part II - Life as a Freeman*, 1855 – Engraved from a daguerreotype by J.C. Buttre, Public domain, Wikimedia

“After President Lincoln declared the freedom of all slaves in the Confederate states in the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, Douglass served as a recruiter for the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, encouraging black men to join the Union Army by telling them the story of Denmark Vesey’s slave revolt in Charleston.”

“Yvonne told me the story of Vesey’s revolt.”

“It’s one hell of a story,” Les said, “slipping his eyeglasses back on. “Frederick Douglass was furious with white ministers who preached that slavery was ordained by religion. The pro-slavery clergy was an ‘abomination in the sight of God.’ To avoid being recaptured after escaping from slavery, Douglass traveled and spoke in Ireland against slavery. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, he wrote about his experience in Ireland, “When I go to church, I’m met by no upturned nose and scornful lip to tell me, ‘We don’t allow niggers in here!’ Ireland was different than the United States. Douglass said, ‘I prayed for twenty years but received no answer until I prayed with my legs.’ And Gio, that’s where my legs have taken me — to France. Wherever I play my music all over the globe, I’m treated like a king. The only place I’m not treated with respect is in the United States. It is because I’m black and I don’t compromise with white people. There are some people who think that colored people should be building bridges between us and the white man. That’s horseshit. The white man doesn’t want any bridges. If the white man wants to earn my respect, he’s got to reach out to me. If he wants to live in peace with the black man, he’s got to be able to express some love. But he’s not been able to do that yet.”

Les stopped talking for a long while. I didn’t say a word for I could feel his anger.

After a time, Les began again. “Gio, you’ve been like a son to me and I hope you understand the concern I have for you. I hate to see you mess up your life. An Oklahoma Cherokee who was good with rope tricks said, ‘There are three kinds of men. The one who learns by reading. The few who learn by observation. The rest of them have to pee on the electric fence for themselves.’

“I once suffered a great loss too, so I can feel what you are going through. I know you want to do the right thing for Céline. She’s only eighteen. She needs her space. Céline needs freedom. Right now, you need your freedom from your memories. You’ve got to be honest with yourself, Giovanni, neither one of you are going to rise out of your grief over night. Give yourself some time to heal. Go back to New York for a spell. Céline needs time. Let her go Gio. Let her go.”

I knew Les was right. Yvonne's death and Céline's age. . . everything was against us. During the last hour, the cabaret had filled up, shoulder to shoulder, heat and humidity rising from sweating bodies packed into a small space. The accordionist came out to strike up a Mazurka to the crowd's delight. Wearing rimless eyeglasses, sparkling gold teeth, and a handkerchief tied around his neck, I wondered where I'd seen him before. A lithe woman in her twenties with pale eyes and pale hair, wearing a translucent 20's dress, came on to sing Piaf's *Je Ne Regrette Rien* in a rich and tremulous voice.

*Non, Rien de rien
Non, Je ne regrette rien
Car ma vie, car mes joies
Aujourd'hui, ça commence avec toi*

After the stanza, the accordionist began a vibrato, shaking the bellows of his blue and gold accordion. Listening to his vibrato, I realized where I'd seen him before. He was the accordionist with the gypsy band at Les' birthday party in Buttes Chaumont, the one who'd had his eye fixed on Céline. . . the night I danced with the Gypsy girl and nearly lost Yvonne.

"Go back to New York," Les had said. "Let her go."

After four cognacs, the stifling room was beginning to turn.

"Let's go."

Jeanette saw us leave and brushed my arm gently, "Come back soon," she whispered.