

Congressional Testimony – By Speaker or Topic of Quote

Free Black Women

“I saw a colored soldier, names Charlie, walking quietly along, when a policeman walked up and hit him on the head with his revolver, breaking the weapon” (Mathilda Hawley)

“I went and just peeped through the bars of the window, and saw my husband lying there, dead. They would not allow me to go inside.” (Lavinia Godell)

“I saw Ida Green attempting to leave the house, but they drover her back into it; she begged and prayed them to let her out of the burning house, but they would not let her. She then attempted to come out anyhow, and they shot her. She fell partly in the house; they kicked her and rolled her over like a log into the fire, where she was burned up. Her baby was in bed, and was burned up at the same time.” (Emeline Wilson)

They burned my house...broke up the chairs and put them on the fire. They poured turpentine on the bed and it flamed up to the ceiling....My husband was a soldier in the 55th regiment. (Mary Black)

The first I saw was some colored soldiers and police quarreling. They were cursing each other. I did not pay very much attention at the time. After that I heard shooting. After a while, fifty or sixty of the police and citizens came from uptown... running and firing. I saw two men shot. My husband was in my house sick. I was afraid they would kill him, and I stayed out on the street. I saw a colored soldier, name's Charlie, walking quietly along, when a policeman walked up and hit him on the head with his revolver, breaking the weapon. They came to the house of an old man they call Uncle Dick, and shot somebody there. I heard the man groan....[The next day] I saw colored soldiers lying dead as I was going to the fort. (Matilda Hawley)

It was in the night about 12 o'clock. They clopped down the front door with hatchets. They asked if he had been a soldier. He said no. He was in his bed. They told him to get up and come

out of his room. He told them he was not able to come out. They dragged him out, stood him up against a post, and shot him. (Maria Marshall)

Some men came to our house. We were in bed. They told us to get up and get some supper for them. We... made a fire and got them supper. We had two trunks. They did not unlock them, just jerked them open. They took all [our] money and clothes... They tried to take advantage of me, and did. I told them I do not do such things, and would not. One of them said he would make me, and choked me by the neck. My neck was swollen up the next day and for two weeks I could not talk to anyone. After the first man had connexion with me, another got hold of me and tried to violate me, but ... said I was so damn near dead he would not have anything to do with me. We had some quilts in the room, ... red, white, and blue. They asked us if we had made them before or after the Yankees came. We said after. They said, "You niggers have a mighty liking for the damned Yankees, but we will kill you, and you will have no liking for anyone then." (Lucy Smith – 16 years old)

Tuesday night, seven men, two of whom were policemen, came to my house. I knew they were policemen by their stars. They were all Irishmen. They said they must have supper and asked me what I had, and said they must have some eggs and ham and biscuit. I made them some biscuit and strong coffee, and they all sat down and ate. A girl lives with me, her name is Lucy Smith.; she is about 16 years old. When they had eaten supper, they said they wanted some women to sleep with. I said we were not that sort of women, and they must go. They said that "didn't make a damned bit of difference." One of them laid hold of me and hit me on the side of my face, and holding my throat, choked me. Lucy tried to get out the window when one of them knocked her down. They drew their pistols and said they would shoot us and fire the house if we did not let them have their way with us. All seven of the men violated us two. (Frances Thompson)

About 10 o'clock some men came and knocked at my door. They came in, looked into my trunk and searched everywhere. One of them put his hands into my bosom. I tried to stop him, and he knocked down my hands with his pistol and did it again. (Elvira Walker)

Free Black Men

I had nothing against them. There were three men that tried to kill me with an axe; they said they would “ kill every one of you damned niggers.” (John Handy)

I went round...and it was nothing but ...shooting right against my house all the while. ...I saw a man put fire to my house and kindle it a second time. He said, “Old man, pull off your hat and lie down or they will kill you.” Said I, “Massa George, what is the reason you burn my house down? I want to live where I am living as well as anybody else.” It was George McGinn. Said he, “I am ordered to do it, and I must or they will shoot me.” I told him he was one of the men doing it for himself, and that I had some valuable things for a colored man, and wanted to go in there and get them. “No,” said he. [and]...they broke open my trunk and took [my] things. (Adam Lock)

There has been a good deal of trouble between the Irish police and the colored people. Sometimes the colored people would ...cut up, and do things they ought not to do. Then sometimes the police would arrest a colored soldier when he had no right to. One thing I noticed I did not like. Whenever a policeman arrested a colored man, the first thing he did was strike him. It was that that made me careful to keep out of scrapes. (James Donahue)

A party of men during the riot set fire to the Colwell Hall, which belongs to me, and burned and destroyed [all the] furniture. (Joseph Colwell)

“We keep a shoe shop at number eight Beal street. On the night of the 4th of May, 1866, a party of white men, police and soldiers, came to our shop and stole boots, money and other articles to the amount of \$100; said if we spoke a word they would kill us.” (Peter Jones and Gabriel Cummins)

Did you see the sheriff at any time during those days? I saw him on Tuesday afternoon or evening. I saw him at first in Beale Street market getting a posse to go down to help the police. What were the police doing? They were fighting negroes. (J. S. Chapin)

“They beat him till he fell, and afterwards when he was on the ground; I then heard some one in the crowd say, “Shoot him;” one of the police then drew his pistol and shot the negro.” (William Craig)

I saw away on a bridge from me near twenty beating a black man. He lay there the whole night... They were all police they shot the loads out of their pistols, and then took their pistols, and beat him over the head. (Daniel Dawkins)

“some three or four policemen came to my house and broke open my trunk, taking there from my discharge and fifty dollars in silver, and fifteen dollars in greenbacks; after which they set fire to my house and burned it up” (Burton Davis – Colored)

Black Soldiers

On Wednesday about sunset, 6 white men stopped me in front of Gayoso House , and one of them asked me if I had been a soldier. I told him I had been on a gunboat. He then called me a “damned smoked Yankee,” and struck me on the left arm with a club and broke my arm between the wrist and elbow. One of the other men struck me on the head with a club and knocked me down. The men then took my pocketbook containing fifty dollars. I laid where I was knocked down till the next morning. (Louis Bennett)

Near my home I was stopped by the police, who demanded my carpet sack containing my clothes and fifty dollars in money. One of them struck me over the head with his club. They asked me if I had ever been a soldier. (Taylor)

“before they struck me they asked if I was a soldier.” (George Robinson)

“when near my house I was stopped by the police, who demanded my carpet sack, containing my clothes and fifty dollars in money. One of them struck me over the head with his club. They asked me if I had ever been a soldier. I got away as soon as I could” (Joseph Smith)

White Men Witnesses (Old Citizens)

“The negro struck was killed. He was shot several times after he was down. The negro was dressed in a soldier’s uniform.” (M.R. Cook)

“The crowd appeared to be a low class of community’ (M.C Galloway – chief editor of the Memphis Avalance)

“I saw several policemen beating a negro, and ordered them to desist, which they did...there were policemen among the crowd who did not attempt to restrain them, but seemed to countenance the proceedings” (William H. Smith – Major of 16th US Infantry)

The negroes never had any intention to harm the white man – never. And these watchmen here are nothing more than a set of lawless thieves. (John E. Moller)

What has been the conduct of the people towards colored persons? I have not mixed much with the citizens, and know very little except what I have seen in the streets. When the police arrested a colored man they were generally very brutal towards him. I have seen one or two arrested for the slightest offence, and instead of taking the man quietly to the lock-up, as officers should, I have seen them beat him senseless and throw him into a cart. (Dr. J.N. Sharp)

“Old Citizens are generally disposed to treat the colored people fairly” (Dr. Allen Sterling)

“I have not talked to a prominent citizen or a southern citizen that does not regret it.” (Dr. Allen Sterling)

I find a great majority of those who have been slaveholders and southern men have a spirit of almost desperate hate towards the colored man, and towards any man who has anything to do with him for his good. (Rev Ewing O. Tade)

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“Question: what class of community did the parties running after the negro appear to belong to? Answer: the most of them were policemen, and the rest of them appeared to be roughs” (E.C. Hastings)

After the burning of Wednesday night, the next move was to be made on the teachers and negro preachers. (Rev Ewing Tade)

Police as part of the Mob

“The man who struck the negro with the gun was a policeman. I have seen the man since with a start on his breast.” (Orville Yerger)

“I saw police firing in the direction the crowd was running when the man fell” (Alex McQuarters)

“I saw a policeman step out of the crowd with a gun and strike the negro on the head, breaking his gun at the stock” (E.O. Fuller)

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“I saw some policemen set fire to four houses on South Street, near the bayou bridge” (Lucina Less- colored)

“when near my house I was stopped by the police, who demanded my carpet sack, containing my clothes and fifty dollars in money. One of them struck me over the head with his club. They asked me if I had ever been a soldier. I got away as soon as I could” (Joseph Smith- Colored)

“a party of nine or ten policemen took me prisoner, and were going to kill me had it not been for sheriff Winters, he prevailed upon them not to do so” (Asbury Gibbons – Colored)

“I saw a colored soldier, names Charlie, walking quietly along, when a policeman walked up and hit him on the head with his revolver, breaking the weapon” (Mathilda Hawley – Colored)

“some three or four policemen came to my house and broke open my trunk, taking therefrom my discharge and fifty dollars in silver, and fifteen dollars in greenbacks; after which they set fire to my house and burned it up” (Burton Davis – Colored)

“one policeman and four men came to his house that night on a plea of searching for fire arms” (Clary Johnson – Colored)

Black Soldiers especially targeted for violence

“The negro struck was killed. He was shot several times after he was down. The negro was dressed in a soldier’s uniform.” (M.R. Cook)

“I saw a colored man shot and killed near the Memphis Tennessee railroad depot. Sa the dead body afterwards. The negro had on blue pants.” (J.H. Johnson)

“I saw a colored soldier, names Charlie, walking quietly along, when a policeman walked up and hit him on the head with his revolver, breaking the weapon” (Mathilda Hawley – Colored)

“I was going to the fort to keep out of the way of the rioters. On my way I met four white men. they halted me and asked me if I had ever been a soldier. I told them I ad. They then asked me if I had any money. I told them I had my pocketbook. They commenced searching me the, took from me seventy dollars, and a watch for which I gave fifty dollars” (George Willis – Colored)

“I was standing at my door and saw John Pentergrass pass with a pistol in his hand; I followed him, and saw him go up to a colored soldier and shoot him, killing him” (Penny Le Muir – Colored”

African Americans losing money, ability to work, jobs

“The bullet is still in my arm. I was making eight dollars a day, clear of expenses, at the time I was wounded” (Amos Bowles – Colored)

“before they struck me they asked if I was a soldier. I have not been able to work since that time. I had been working for two dollars per day previous to this occurrence” (George Robinson – Colored)

Issues of class during the massacre

“there were about twenty men and boys besides the police present when the negro was shot, but none of them looked like the better class of citizens” (William Craig)

“The crowd appeared to be a low class of community’ (M.C Galloway – chief editor of the Memphis Avalance)

“they were not the better class of citizen; I did not know a single person in the crowd” (M.W. Clusky)

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