
CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

- SEPTEMBER 30, 1919.** Approximately 11:00 P.M. Firefight outside Hoop Spur church between members of the Progressive Farmers and Household Union and Phillips County law enforcement officers. Will Adkins is killed.
- OCTOBER 1, 1919.** 2:00 A.M. Phillips County law enforcement sends nine individuals from Helena in two cars to Hoop Spur church to investigate shooting.
- OCTOBER 1, 1919.** Morning. Helena American Legion Post sends volunteers, including World War I veterans, to Hoop Spur area. Calls go out all over the Delta on both sides of the Mississippi River reporting that African Americans are fighting back. Throughout the day, six hundred to one thousand armed men from outside Phillips County arrive to hunt down black people.
- OCTOBER 1, 1919.** Morning. Governor Charles Hillman Brough, who is at the state capitol in Little Rock, receives the first of three telegrams asking that troops be sent to Phillips County. He begins the process of asking the War Department in Washington for troops to be sent from Camp Pike, which is composed of World War I veterans, some of whom had fought in the Second Battle of the Marne.
- OCTOBER 1, 1919.** Though a sheriff's deputy sends a report that the town of Elaine, three miles south of Hoop Spur, is under attack by a force of black rioters, no white casualties in the town are reported. The *Arkansas Gazette* reports the next day that bodies of "at least fifteen negroes were lying in the streets and outskirts of the town and that more would probably be found in the woods." A *Memphis Press* reporter notes black corpses on the road outside of Helena: "Enraged citizens fired at the dead bodies of the negroes, as they rode out of Helena toward Elaine."
- OCTOBER 1, 1919.** From a master's thesis by Bessie Ferguson from neighboring Lee County, published in 1927: "Barberism [*sic*] such as cutting off the ears or toes of dead negroes for souvenirs and the dragging of their bodies through the streets of Elaine are told by witnesses."

- OCTOBER 1, 1919.** Whites ransack the homes of black union members in the Hoop Spur area and steal their personal possessions. African Americans flee into the dense canebrakes and woods in the area.
- OCTOBER 1, 1919.** Morning. Ocier Bratton, eldest son of Little Rock lawyer Ulysses Bratton, arrives by train at Ratio, five miles south of Elaine. Unaware of the shoot-out at Hoop Spur, he and Robert Hill, founder of the union, meet with members of the Ratio lodge. Black sharecroppers pay fees and sign retainer agreements in order for the Bratton law firm to represent them in their dispute with planters. Bratton is taken into custody by a group of whites, driven to Elaine, and placed in a store where whites are expecting an attack by black rioters. Robert Hill escapes before he can be arrested.
- OCTOBER 1, 1919.** A group of African Americans from the Hoop Spur lodge, some of whom have military experience, decide to defend themselves and march in formation until they see whites. A shot is fired, killing Clinton Lee, a member of the Helena American Legion Post posse. James Tappan, also part of the same posse, is killed while searching for black people in the dense canebrakes.
- OCTOBER 1, 1919.** D. A. E. Johnston and his three brothers, members of a prominent black family in Helena, are shot to death while they are being transported to Helena by local posses and law enforcement. Their bodies are thrown out into the road. O. R. Lilly, a member of the white posse and a Helena resident who was in the same vehicle, is killed, allegedly by D. A. E. Johnston. Other stories say that Lilly was killed by the posse.
- OCTOBER 1, 1919.** Probably alerted by black couriers, a group of armed African Americans rides from the Lambrook plantation west of Elaine toward Hoop Spur. They inflict no casualties.
- OCTOBER 1, 1919.** Panicked by fears of a black uprising, whites in the Hoop Spur area seek safety in Elaine. Women and children are taken by train into Helena. Fearing that Ocier Bratton is about to be lynched, Phillips County circuit judge J. M. Jackson arranges for him to be taken to Helena and put in jail. No white farmers and their families report attacks by African Americans. Ocier Bratton observes no attack on the town of Elaine.
- October 2, 1919.** Because of bureaucratic delays, the Camp Pike troop train, which carries over five hundred men and twelve machine guns, does not leave Little Rock until shortly after midnight on October 1. Governor Brough is permitted to accompany the troops,

who are under the command of Col. Isaac Jenks, a West Point graduate. Brough tells reporters he is going to Elaine so that he can make an accurate assessment of what is occurring.

OCTOBER 2, 1919. Morning. The troop train arrives in Elaine. Colonel Jenks secures the town and orders that everyone, black and white, be disarmed. A detachment is sent in to Helena to guard the jail to prevent lynchings. Accompanied by Governor Brough, Jenks sets out with a company of men that includes two machine guns for Hoop Spur, where there is fighting reported. In his official report of the encounter, Jenks fails to mention that his troops fired even a single shot. He reports the death of one of his men and the wounding of another. The newspapers report that three shots were fired over the governor's head. The troops return to Elaine. No other whites, civilian or soldier, will be reported killed by black people, though Jenks accepts the whites' explanation that African Americans were attempting an "insurrection."

OCTOBER 2, 1919. The white mobs depart. The soldiers assist whites in interrogating black detainees, some of whom are tortured. Hundreds of black people are confined in makeshift stockades until their employers vouch for their innocence. Military intelligence reports claim that African Americans have confessed to planning an insurrection, though no names of individuals are given. African Americans are taken to the jail in Helena, where the torture continues.

OCTOBER 2, 1919. Afternoon. Governor Brough travels to Helena and marches at the head of the troops. He meets with the "Committee of Seven," a group composed of city and county officials and planters who propose to Brough that this group lead an investigation of the disturbances. Though the group has no legal authority, Brough gives them his blessing and returns to Little Rock the next day. Brough receives the promise that there will be "no lynchings" in Phillips County.

OCTOBER 3, 1919. The *Helena World* headlines announce that the Committee of Seven is now in charge. Brough holds a press conference in Little Rock and praises the valor of the five whites who have been killed. He does not mention the activities of the white mobs.

OCTOBER 2–9, 1919. Troops from Camp Pike remain in the Elaine area. In 1925, a book appears in Little Rock entitled, *What a Preacher Saw Through a Keyhole in Arkansas*, which alleges that 856 African

Americans were killed in Phillips County, mostly by troops from Camp Pike. Written by a white reporter for the *Arkansas Gazette*, Louis Sharpe Dunaway, the book contains little documentation. Jenks's official report mentions that only two black people were killed. Military intelligence reports place the total of black deaths, at most, at twenty.

OCTOBER 7, 1919. The Committee of Seven announces its findings: the fight at the Hoop Spur church prematurely set off a black insurrection planned for October 6. Planters were marked for death; Robert Hill, still at large, was the union's mastermind and had organized the union for purely personal gain. Told to expect support by the federal government, African Americans had expected to take over the planters' lands.

OCTOBER 7, 1919. A circular is passed out to African Americans advising them to get back to work and to act as if nothing has happened.

OCTOBER 7–19, 1919. Editorials in Arkansas, Tennessee, and Mississippi warn black people against further agitation, pointing out that it will only result in more deaths.

OCTOBER 8, 1919. Walter White, a black assistant field secretary for the NAACP in New York whose skin is white, deceives Governor Brough into thinking he is an open-minded journalist from the North and gains an interview with him. White also meets with Scipio Jones, the leading black attorney in Little Rock, who introduces him to Ulysses Bratton, who gives him information on peonage in Arkansas. White then travels to Helena but only remains for a few hours before he is nearly lynched.

OCTOBER 2–30, 1919. Attempts by Ulysses Bratton to get his son Ocier released from jail fail. Edgar McHaney, a well-connected attorney with the Little Rock firm of Murphy, McHaney and Dunaway, travels to Helena but is told that Ocier would not be guaranteed safe passage out of Phillips County even if he were released.

OCTOBER 11, 1919. The NAACP holds a press conference in New York, decrying the events in Phillips County. The first of several articles by Walter White about conditions in Arkansas appears in the Northern press. Governor Brough is furious and tries to prevent the *Crisis*, an NAACP magazine, and the *Chicago Defender*, a black-owned newspaper, from being distributed in Arkansas.

OCTOBER 19, 1919. A letter signed by Scipio Jones and other members of the black elite—including Philander Smith College president

James Monroe Cox; Arkansas Baptist College president Joseph A. Booker; and Bishop J. M. Conner of the African Methodist Episcopal Church—appears in the *Arkansas Gazette*, praising the actions of Governor Brough and expressing support for him.

OCTOBER 27–31, 1919. The Phillips County grand jury meets and charges 122 African Americans with crimes ranging from murder to nightriding. The prosecuting attorney, John E. Miller, dismisses charges against twenty-one African Americans for lack of evidence. Ocier Bratton is released by Judge Jackson, who personally sees to it that he gets out of Phillips County alive.

NOVEMBER 3, 1919. Judge Jackson begins the first trials against African Americans charged by the grand jury. Outside the courthouse, troops stand guard to ensure that no lynchings occur. Jackson appoints local white attorneys, who go through the motions of acting as defense counsel. They neither interview nor call witnesses, they strike no jury members for bias, and in general they put on no defense. In the first case, Frank Hicks is convicted of the murder of Clinton Lee. The jury is out eight minutes. The penalty is death.

NOVEMBER 3, 1919. Jackson empanels a new jury and begins the trial of Frank Moore, Ed Hicks (brother of Frank Hicks), Joe Knox, Ed “Sweat” Coleman, and Paul Hall for aiding and abetting in the murder of Clinton Lee. Though there is no evidence that Coleman or Hall had anything to do with Lee’s death, all are convicted. The penalty is death. Executions are set for late December and early January.

NOVEMBER 4, 1919. Alf Banks Jr. and John Martin, two of the guards outside the church at Hoop Spur, are convicted for the murder of Will Adkins. The jury is out for nine minutes and returns a verdict of guilty.

NOVEMBER 4, 1919. Albert Giles and Joe Fox are tried for the murder of James Tappan. These two defendants fled into the dense canebrakes near Hoop Spur and were hunted by the posse from Phillips County. They are convicted and sentenced to death.

NOVEMBER 4, 1919. William Wordlaw, a guard outside the Hoop Spur church, is convicted for the crime of aiding and abetting in the death of Adkins. The jury is out two minutes. The penalty is death.

NOVEMBER 5, 1919. Ulysses Bratton arrives in New York and begins meeting with the staff of the NAACP and its supporters. He describes the peonage system in Arkansas and helps the NAACP raise funds to

defend the men in Arkansas. He suggests the law firm of Murphy, McHaney and Dunaway to represent them.

NOVEMBER 5–6, 1919. Dozens of the defendants enter into hurried plea bargains to escape the electric chair. The *Helena World* reports that sixty-five men have been convicted of crimes ranging from second-degree murder (twenty-one years) to nightriding (one year). Other cases are continued; some are dismissed for lack of evidence.

NOVEMBER 17, 1919. Ed Ware, the secretary of the Hoop Spur lodge, is captured and put on trial for the murder of Will Adkins. Suggs Bondsman, who says he has lived in Elaine for three years, testifies that he was at a meeting of the Elaine lodge and overheard Ware and others naming planters who were to be killed. This is the only evidence the prosecution introduces in any of these trials of a plot to kill planters. There is no cross-examination. Ware is the last of Elaine Twelve to be convicted and sentenced to die.

NOVEMBER 24, 1919. Murphy and his firm are hired by the NAACP to represent the Elaine Twelve for three thousand dollars and incidental expenses. The deal does not include representation if the cases go to the United States Supreme Court. During this same time, African Americans in Little Rock begin to raise money for the Elaine Twelve and hire Scipio Jones, who begins to work with the Murphy firm on the cases. Other black attorneys, including Thomas Price, John Hibbler, and J. R. Booker, will assist Jones. Thomas Price, partner of Scipio Jones, appears to have previously represented the Progressive Farmers and Household Union of America.

NOVEMBER 24, 1919. Brough convenes a statewide biracial panel in Little Rock. He names a number of the black elite of Arkansas to the panel. The black members once again endorse the actions of the governor, who calls the events in Phillips County a “damnable insurrection.”

LATE NOVEMBER 1919. Bratton informs the NAACP that Scipio Jones has met with Governor Brough, who has told him that he will commute all the sentences except one.

DECEMBER 20, 1919. Murphy and Jones file motions for new trials that are denied by Judge Jackson the same day. Brough issues a stay of the executions to allow the cases to be appealed.

JANUARY 20, 1920. Robert Hill, the leader of the union, is arrested in

Kansas, setting off a protracted battle to have him extradited to Arkansas to stand trial.

FEBRUARY 2, 1920. Black elite of Arkansas, including Cox, Conner, and Booker, write a public letter to the governor of Kansas saying that Hill will get a fair trial if he is returned. They are denounced by the Northern black press and praised by Brough. Ulysses Bratton, who feels he has been run out of Arkansas and eventually moves his entire family, including his adult sons, to Detroit, meets with Governor Allen of Kansas to persuade him not to extradite Hill. Bratton, too, is highly critical of the black elite's position.

MARCH 23, 1920. After a hearing in which Arkansas is represented by its own attorney general, Governor Allen of Kansas announces he will not extradite Robert Hill, incensing Brough and embarrassing the state.

MARCH 29, 1920. The Arkansas Supreme Court announces its decisions and affirms six of the convictions and reverses and remands the other six for new trials on a technicality. From this day forward, the cases are severed into two distinct groups. The group that will receive new trials will be known as the Ware defendants and will include Ed Ware, William Wordlaw, Albert Giles, Joe Fox, John Martin, and Alf Banks Jr. The group whose convictions are affirmed will be known as the Moore defendants and will include Frank Moore, Joe Knox, Frank Hall, Ed "Sweat" Coleman, Frank Hicks, and Ed Hicks.

MAY 3-11, 1920. The Ware defendants are retried in Helena and again receive death sentences. However, Murphy and Jones are able to raise the issue that no African Americans are on the petit or grand jury. Scipio Jones cross-examines Suggs Bondsman during the Ed Ware trial. Bondsman can't remember other persons at the meeting the night a plot was allegedly hatched to kill planters and testifies falsely that he wasn't arrested. Jones puts on rebuttal testimony that others were at the meeting but did not hear Ware name planters to be executed. The six defendants are to be executed on July 23. Though Brough contends that "absolute justice" has prevailed, he grants another stay to allow appeals.

OCTOBER 11, 1920. Murphy, seventy-nine, dies. The same day Scipio Jones and Edgar McHaney, Murphy's partner, receive the news that their petition for a writ of certiorari, which had been filed on behalf of the Moore defendants, has been denied by the US Supreme Court.

Also on the same day they find out that Robert Hill, who had been kept in jail in Kansas on federal charges of impersonating a federal officer, has finally been released.

OCTOBER 11, 1920. Debate continues over who will take Murphy's place. Ulysses Bratton argues that Edgar McHaney is only interested in the money he can make on the cases. The NAACP, however, decides that McHaney, who has already been paid, and Scipio Jones will continue to represent the defendants.

NOVEMBER 15, 1920. Brough, under pressure from both sides, decides not to commute the sentence of a single one of the Moore defendants. However, about to go out of office, he does not reset the execution dates, leaving that to his successor, Democrat Thomas McRae.

NOVEMBER 17, 1920. In the first sign that statewide opinion is no longer unified, the *Arkansas Democrat* advises that there is no hurry to execute the Moore defendants.

NOVEMBER 29, 1920. The mandate denying review by the US Supreme Court in the Moore cases arrives in Arkansas, clearing the way for the executions.

DECEMBER 6, 1920. The second Ware cases are decided by the Arkansas Supreme Court, which reverses Judge Jackson once again. The grounds for the reversal are discrimination against African Americans because there were none on the grand or petit jury.

JANUARY 1921. Thomas McRae becomes governor and sets the Moore executions for June 10.

JUNE 8, 1921. McRae announces that he will not interfere with the legal process and thus will not halt the executions of the Moore defendants.

JUNE 8, 1921. Jones and McHaney, who planned to file a petition for a writ of habeas corpus in federal court, find out that no judge is available to hear it and in desperation file a writ of habeas corpus in state court in Little Rock. Judge John Martineau, who has been reversed on the same issue, signs the writ and sets a hearing on the petition.

JUNE 9, 1921. The Arkansas attorney general files a writ of prohibition with the state supreme court, seeking to carry out the executions as scheduled. The court refuses to summarily overturn the writ of habeas corpus and schedules oral arguments on June 12, thus gaining the Moore defendants valuable time.

JUNE 20, 1921. The Arkansas Supreme Court rules against the Moore defendants, and Jones and McHaney file a writ of error in the United States Supreme Court.

- JUNE 21, 1921.** Judge Jackson grants a change of venue in the second Ware trial. The defendants are to be tried in neighboring Lee County in October.
- AUGUST 4, 1921.** As expected, the US Supreme Court denies the writ of error, and McRae resets the executions of the Moore defendants for September 23.
- AUGUST 30, 1921.** McHaney writes the NAACP that he has found two new witnesses. They are H. F. Smiddy and T. K. Jones, who are now living in Memphis but who both testified for the prosecution in Helena. The sworn affidavits of these two individuals, which will be attached to the Moore defendants' petition in federal court for a writ of habeas corpus, will forever change the landscape in both the Moore and Ware cases. Both Smiddy and Jones admit to torturing African Americans in the Helena jail to make them testify favorably for the prosecution. They also identify others by name who tortured black detainees in the jail. The affidavits also contain other allegations that, if true, will make the prosecution of the cases more difficult. The affidavit of Smiddy verifies that a massacre took place on October 1, 1919.
- AUGUST 30, 1921.** McHaney requests permission to hire local white counsel in Marianna and in a neighboring town to represent the Ware defendants.
- SEPTEMBER 21, 1921.** McRae again denies clemency and refuses to halt the executions of the Moore defendants. Jones and McHaney file a writ of habeas corpus in federal court. Judge Jacob Trieber, a Republican and the first Jewish federal district judge in the United States, grants a hearing that stays the executions but then recuses from the cases because he lived in Helena for many years before moving to Little Rock.
- SEPTEMBER 26, 1921.** Trieber's replacement, J. H. Cotteral, from Oklahoma, holds a hearing and rules for the state of Arkansas on the law without holding an evidentiary hearing.
- SEPTEMBER 27, 1921.** Judge Cotteral certifies that there is "probable cause" for an appeal to the US Supreme Court.
- OCTOBER 1921.** The prosecution in the Ware cases announces it is not ready for trial, and the cases are postponed until the spring of 1922.
- NOVEMBER 1921.** William Turner, a black man, is lynched in Helena.
- FEBRUARY 10, 1922.** Six hundred and fifty men gather outside of Little Rock for a Ku Klux Klan initiation.

- APRIL 1922.** Again, the prosecution in the Ware cases asks for a continuance, which is granted.
- OCTOBER 1922.** For the third time, the prosecution in the Ware cases gets permission to postpone the trials.
- DECEMBER 1922.** Final preparations are made on the brief to go to the US Supreme Court in the Moore cases. The NAACP has hired Moorfield Storey, a former NAACP board president and prominent Boston lawyer.
- JANUARY 11, 1923.** The case of *Moore v. Dempsey* is argued orally to the US Supreme Court. Storey has selected Ulysses Bratton to help argue the case against the Arkansas attorney general. Scipio Jones, who was hired to prepare the papers in the case for the appeal, has been led to believe he would participate in the arguments. At the last moment Storey wires the NAACP that Jones is not needed.
- FEBRUARY 19, 1923.** The Supreme Court rules in favor of the Moore defendants. It is a great constitutional victory on due process grounds, reversing the decision in the Leo Frank case. The decision calls the Helena trial court proceeding in the Moore cases a sham that has gone uncorrected by the Arkansas appellate court. Though it is a great victory for the NAACP, the only relief afforded to the Moore defendants is that their cases are remanded back to the federal district court for an evidentiary hearing.
- MARCH 1923.** Apparently without running his idea by the NAACP, Scipio Jones contacts John E. Miller, whose partner C. E. Yingling is now prosecutor, and asks if a deal is possible for the release of the men.
- MARCH 24, 1923.** Miller responds that he thinks a deal is possible if the Moore defendants plead guilty to second-degree murder and accept sentences of five years from the date of their initial incarceration.
- APRIL 1923.** Edgar McHaney argues before the Lee County Circuit Court on behalf of the Ware defendants that two terms of court have passed without a trial and that the Ware defendants must be released. Local counsel R. D. Smith and Burke Mann testify that the former judge Jackson is mistaken in his testimony that they asked for a continuance. The “good ole boy” system in eastern Arkansas is no longer in effect. Though Judge Robertson rules against the Ware defendants, the case is appealed to the Arkansas Supreme Court.
- JUNE 25, 1923.** The Arkansas Supreme Court rules in favor of the Ware defendants, finding that two terms of court have passed without a trial, and orders the men freed. To avoid the possibility of a lynch-

ing in Marianna, Judge Robertson complies immediately with the order. At Robertson's direction, the sheriff of Marianna puts the men on a train to Little Rock and takes them to "the Walls," the penitentiary in Little Rock. The warden refuses to accept the men, and they are released in the middle of the night into the custody of Scipio Jones. The Ware defendants are free at last.

JULY 2, 1923. At the suggestion of Scipio Jones and with the blessing of the NAACP, Moorfield Storey contacts George B. Rose, perhaps the most prestigious lawyer in the state of Arkansas, to see if he will use his influence to free the Moore defendants. He writes John E. Miller, who responds positively to his letter.

NOVEMBER 3, 1923. Scipio Jones telegraphs the NAACP that he has received a concrete offer to settle the cases of the Moore defendants. Without waiting for further direction from the NAACP, Jones makes the following deal: the sentences of the Moore defendants will be commuted to twelve years in prison with the private assurance that within a year the men will be pardoned by the governor.

NOVEMBER 1924. Governor McRae has declined to run for a third term as governor, and a member of the Ku Klux Klan is elected governor, to take office in January. The month of November passes, and the Moore defendants are not released.

DECEMBER 19, 1924. Scipio Jones secures the release of the last of the remaining Elaine prisoners with the exception of the Moore defendants.

DECEMBER 20, 1924. The *Arkansas Gazette* runs an article that says the Moore defendants will not have their sentences commuted.

JANUARY 13, 1925. The day before McRae leaves office, Scipio Jones visits him. Afterward, Jones telegraphs the NAACP that the men will be released.

JANUARY 14, 1925. McRae signs indefinite furloughs for the Moore defendants, which although not pardons, free the six men.

MAY 4, 1927. Little Rock experiences its last lynching after the murder of a young white girl and a physical assault against a young woman and her daughter. Scipio Jones and other black leaders work to keep African Americans off the streets and indoors while whites riot. John Martineau, now governor, calls out the National Guard to restore order.

MARCH 28, 1943. Scipio Jones, his circumstances much reduced, dies at the age of eighty.