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HER and HIS Story in Black: Lessons from the Past

Her Stories Unforgotten: The Lives of
Laura Nelson and Mary Turner

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Dedication

I dedicate this eBook to Laura Nelson and Mary Turner, whose lives were tragically taken by the cruelty and hatred of others. Their stories, though horrifying and unjust, remain powerful reminders of the deep wounds inflicted by racial violence in America.

For too long, their voices have been silenced, and their suffering overlooked. What happened to them was unimaginable, yet their stories must not fade into obscurity. Instead, they deserve to be remembered, honored, and discussed.

This eBook is a small step toward ensuring that their legacies endure. Their pain and courage compel us to confront the injustices of the past and work toward a future where such atrocities never happen again. May their names be spoken, their stories be shared, and their lives never be forgotten.



Introduction

I chose to begin this eBook with the stories of Laura Nelson and Mary Turner because their names and experiences deserve to be remembered. These women suffered unimaginable injustices, and the horrific events that ended their lives stand as a shameful reminder of the systemic racism and hatred that has plagued our history. Laura Nelson and Mary Turner did not deserve the treatment they endured, nor did they deserve to be lynched while people stood by and watched. Their stories, like so many others, must not be forgotten.

The mission of HERandHIStoryinBlack is to preserve and highlight Black history, especially the stories that have been overlooked or erased. At a time when efforts are being made to suppress and erase Black history from public discourse, I refuse to stay silent. Instead of letting anger consume me, I've decided to take action by sharing these lessons in Black history myself.

By telling these stories, I hope to shed light on the systemic injustices that shaped the past and the resilience of Black communities in the face of such hatred. Laura Nelson and Mary Turner's stories are a testament to the strength and dignity that endured despite the violence they faced. Through this eBook, I aim to honor their lives and ensure their legacy continues to inspire and educate future generations.

Historical Background

Laura Nelson was an African American woman living in Okemah, Oklahoma, at the beginning of the 20th century. Little is known about her early life, a stark reminder of how the lives of Black women have often been erased from historical records. What is known about Laura Nelson centers around one of the darkest moments in American history—her lynching in 1911. At the time, racial tensions were high across the United States, and lynching was a tool of racial terror used to enforce white supremacy and intimidate Black communities.

The Story of Injustice

The events leading to Laura Nelson's death began with an incident involving her family. Her husband, Austin Nelson, had been accused of stealing a cow—an offense often exaggerated or fabricated to justify violence against Black families. When a sheriff's posse came to arrest Austin, a struggle ensued, and a deputy sheriff was killed. Laura and her teenage son, L.D. Nelson, were later arrested and charged with involvement in the shooting.

While imprisoned, Laura Nelson was held in a county jail with inadequate security. On the night of May 24, 1911, a mob of white men broke into the jail and forcibly removed her and her son. The mob took them to a bridge over the North Canadian River, where they were lynched. Laura Nelson, who was reportedly sexually assaulted before her death, was hung alongside her son. A photograph of the lynching, later turned into a postcard, further illustrated the brutal indifference to Black lives in that era.

Legacy and Lessons

Laura Nelson's death, like so many other lynchings, was a violent spectacle intended to send a message of fear to the Black community. However, her story has also become a symbol of resilience and a call to remember the humanity of those whose lives were stolen by racial terror.

Chapter 1

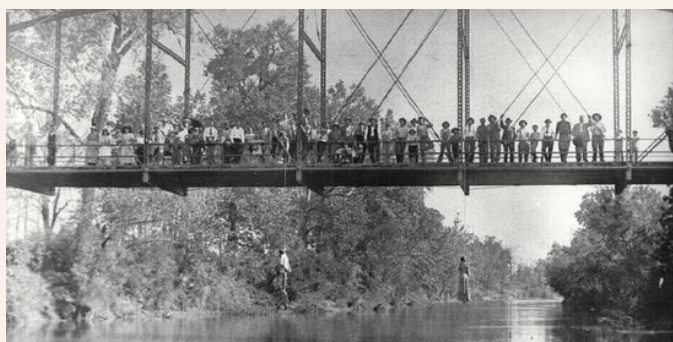
LAURA NELSON

Although her name is often left out of textbooks, her story has been preserved by scholars and activists committed to uncovering the truth about America's history of racial violence. Her lynching is a harrowing reminder of the intersection of racism, gender violence, and systemic injustice that Black women faced—and continue to face. By remembering Laura Nelson, we honor her life and amplify the stories of those who were silenced.

Reflection

- How can we ensure stories like Laura Nelson's are never forgotten?
- What lessons can we learn from this chapter of history to confront systemic injustice today?

This Picture was used a
Postcard



This is the sole known
image of Laura Nelson and
her son, a stark reminder of
the injustices they
endured.

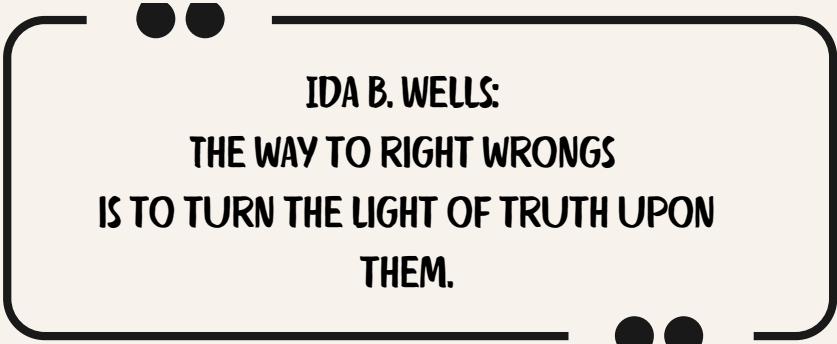
Sidebar: The Image of Injustice

The lynching of Laura Nelson and her son in 1911 is one of the few lynching photographs that have been preserved, serving as a grim reminder of the violence and hatred that permeated American history. This haunting image depicts Laura Nelson and her teenage son, L.D., hanging from a bridge in Okemah, Oklahoma, their bodies lifeless and dehumanized.

The photograph was not merely taken—it was distributed as a postcard, a chilling example of how lynchings were treated as public spectacles and tools of terror. These images were meant to intimidate Black communities and reinforce white supremacy, while also showcasing the indifference of society toward such brutality.

Deciding whether to show this image requires deep consideration. On one hand, it forces us to confront the horrific realities of racial violence and the systemic injustices that allowed it to persist. On the other hand, it risks retraumatizing viewers and reducing Laura Nelson and her son to symbols rather than individuals with lives and dignity.

If you choose to seek this image, it can be found online by searching "Laura Nelson Oklahoma." However, approach it with care and reflection, understanding the weight of what it represents and the humanity of those depicted.



**IDA B. WELLS:
THE WAY TO RIGHT WRONGS
IS TO TURN THE LIGHT OF TRUTH UPON
THEM.**

Historical Background

Mary Turner was a young African American woman living in Lowndes County, Georgia, in the early 20th century. She was married to Hayes Turner, a fellow laborer, and together they were part of a tight-knit community struggling to survive amid the systemic racism and violence of the Jim Crow South. Mary was pregnant at the time of her death, a poignant and tragic detail that underscores the brutality she faced.

The region was fraught with racial tension, as white landowners and laborers sought to maintain economic control and racial dominance. Black residents, often subjected to severe oppression, had little recourse in a legal system that favored white supremacy. In this volatile environment, Mary Turner's life and the events leading to her death became a devastating chapter in the history of racial violence in America.

The Story of Injustice

The tragedy began in May 1918, when a white plantation owner, Hampton Smith, was killed. Smith was known for his harsh treatment of Black workers, including forcing people to work off fabricated debts in conditions akin to slavery. Hayes Turner, Mary's husband, was accused—without evidence—of involvement in Smith's death.

Hayes was arrested and lynched by a mob in Brooks County, Georgia, as part of a wave of violence that would claim at least 13 Black lives over several days. Mary Turner, distraught over her husband's murder, publicly denounced the mob and vowed to hold them accountable. Her bold resistance was an extraordinary act of courage, especially at a time when speaking out against white violence often resulted in retaliation.

There are no known photographs of Mary Turner, leaving her story to be told through the words and memories passed down.



the mob cut open her abdomen, killing her unborn child.



Chapter 2

MARY TURNER

Her words enraged the mob, who decided to silence her. On May 19, 1918, Mary Turner was captured by the mob, taken to Folsom Bridge near Valdosta, Georgia, and subjected to one of the most horrific lynchings on record. She was hung upside down from a tree, doused in gasoline, and set on fire. In a final act of cruelty, the mob cut open her abdomen, killing her unborn child. Her body was riddled with bullets, and the mob left her remains as a warning to others who might dare to resist.

Legacy and Lessons

Mary Turner's courage in the face of unimaginable danger is a testament to the resilience of Black women throughout history. She refused to stay silent, even when the cost was her life. Her story is not only a reminder of the extreme violence faced by Black Americans but also a symbol of defiance against systemic oppression.

The brutality of Mary Turner's lynching shocked many and became a rallying point for anti-lynching campaigns. Activists like Ida B. Wells and organizations such as the NAACP amplified her story to expose the horrors of racial violence. Her death highlighted the urgency of federal anti-lynching legislation, though such laws would not be enacted for over a century.

In modern times, Mary Turner's story has been revisited in discussions about racial violence and gendered oppression. Her experience underscores the intersectionality of racism and misogyny, illustrating how Black women were often targeted in uniquely cruel ways. Memorials and educational initiatives, such as the Mary Turner Project, aim to honor her legacy and educate future generations about the ongoing fight for racial justice.

Sidebar: Remembering Mary Turner

There are no known photographs of Mary Turner, but her story remains a powerful testament to her courage and the brutal injustice she endured. In 1918, Mary was murdered because she refused to stay silent after her husband's lynching.

Her legacy is honored at the Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama, where her name is inscribed among countless others who lost their lives to the injustices of racial violence. Additionally, a historical marker commemorates her memory and the violent rampage that claimed her life. You can view the marker and learn more about her story [here](#).

We must remember Mary Turner's story and that of her unborn child, who never had the chance to take a breath or see the world. Their lives compel us to confront history and ensure these injustices are never forgotten.



**IDA B. WELLS:
LYNCHING IS OUR NATION'S NATIONAL CRIME.**

Chapter 3

THE CONNECTION



Connecting the Stories

Laura Nelson and Mary Turner both endured horrifying deaths that underscore the deep injustices faced by Black women in the early 20th century. Both were victims of lynching, a brutal tool of racial violence used to terrorize Black communities and maintain white supremacy. Their lives were stolen in acts of unimaginable cruelty, leaving behind legacies that demand acknowledgment, reflection, and justice.

Common Threads

The stories of Laura Nelson and Mary Turner are tragically similar in how they reveal the intersections of race, gender, and systemic oppression. Both women:

- **Faced Injustice:** Laura Nelson was falsely accused of a crime, and Mary Turner was targeted for speaking out against her husband's lynching. In both cases, they were denied their basic rights, reflecting how the legal system worked against Black people rather than protecting them.
- **Suffered Public Violence:** Their lynchings were not hidden acts but public spectacles, intended to instill fear and assert control over Black communities. Crowds watched, and in some cases, documented these events, showcasing the dehumanization of their victims.
- **Were Targeted as Women:** Both Laura and Mary endured gendered violence as part of their lynchings. Laura Nelson was reportedly sexually assaulted before her death, and Mary Turner's pregnant body was subjected to unimaginable brutality. These acts highlight how Black women were especially vulnerable to violence, often facing a unique blend of racism and misogyny.



Chapter 3

THE CONNECTION



Broader Themes

Their stories illuminate broader themes that are critical to understanding the history of racial violence in America:

- **Racial Violence:** Lynchings were used to enforce white supremacy and terrorize Black communities, often for fabricated or trivial reasons. The murders of Laura Nelson and Mary Turner demonstrate how this violence was normalized and accepted by society.
- **Systemic Oppression:** These lynchings were not random acts but part of a larger system designed to oppress Black Americans economically, socially, and politically. The lack of accountability for their murders further underscores the systemic failure to protect Black lives.
- **Erasure of Black Women's Stories:** The stories of Laura Nelson and Mary Turner were not widely known or taught for decades, reflecting the erasure of Black women's experiences from mainstream historical narratives. This silence further marginalizes their lives and the injustices they endured.

Honoring Their Resilience

Remembering the names of Laura Nelson and Mary Turner is an act of resistance against this erasure. It is a way to honor their courage, their humanity, and their resilience in the face of unimaginable cruelty. By keeping their stories alive, we refuse to let their lives be reduced to footnotes in history. Instead, we recognize their significance and draw lessons from their experiences to continue the fight for justice and equality.

Through this eBook, we bring their stories to light, ensuring that they are no longer forgotten. Laura Nelson and Mary Turner deserve more than silence; they deserve to be remembered, discussed, and honored. Their resilience inspires us to confront the past and work toward a future where such atrocities never happen again.

Chapter 3

THE CONNECTION

Reflection

- What does it mean to honor the resilience of women like Laura Nelson and Mary Turner?
- How can we ensure that their stories inspire meaningful change in the present and future?

Remember Their Names



Her Story

IN BLACK

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us remember the lives of Laura Nelson and Mary Turner and the stories that reveal the deep injustices they endured. Their names and experiences should not fade into obscurity but instead serve as powerful reminders of the courage and resilience of those who faced unimaginable cruelty.


By preserving and sharing their stories, we ensure that their legacies continue to inspire conversations about justice, equality, and the ongoing fight against systemic oppression. Their names—Laura Nelson and Mary Turner—deserve to be spoken, their histories discussed, and their courage honored.


As we reflect on their lives, let us commit to being advocates for historical education and truth. These stories are not just about the past; they are lessons for the present and the future. By confronting the darkest parts of our history, we can pave the way for a brighter and more equitable tomorrow.


Let their names be remembered. Let their stories be shared. And let their legacies guide us in the ongoing fight for justice and equality.


Call to Action: Let's Stay Connected

Stay connected with HERandHISTORYinBlack! Follow us on social media for more stories, resources, and conversations about Black history:

 Instagram: [@HERandHISTORYinBlack](https://www.instagram.com/HERandHISTORYinBlack)

 Facebook: [HERandHISTORYinBlack](https://www.facebook.com/HERandHISTORYinBlack)

 Pinterest: [HERandHISTORYinBlack](https://www.pinterest.com/HERandHISTORYinBlack)

 Visit us at <https://www.kasualcloset.net//HERandHISTORYinBlack>

We're also planning to launch a YouTube channel soon! Stay tuned for more engaging video content that will bring Black history to life.

Her Story

SUGGESTED READING AND RESOURCES

Suggested Reading

Expand your understanding of the history and legacy of lynching, racial violence, and systemic injustice with these thought-provoking books:

- "At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America" by Philip Dray
- A deeply researched account of America's history of lynching, examining its roots, impact, and the resistance efforts led by activists like Ida B. Wells.
- "Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America" by James Allen and Hilton Als
- This harrowing collection of lynching photographs captures the horrifying reality of racial violence, with critical commentary on its role as a public spectacle.
- "Blood at the Root: A Racial Cleansing in America" by Patrick Phillips
- A powerful examination of Forsyth County, Georgia, and the racial cleansing that left it an all-white community for nearly a century.
- "Lynching in America: A History in Documents" by Kerry Segrave
- This book provides a comprehensive look at lynching through primary source documents, offering invaluable insights into the motivations, justifications, and horrors of this practice.

References and Further Reading

The Lynching of Laura and L.D. Nelson (1911)

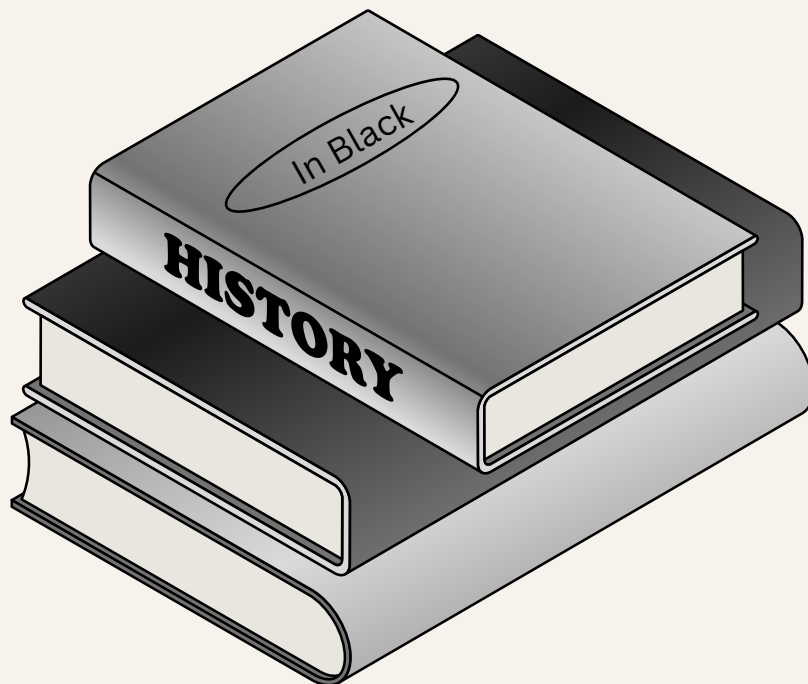
<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/lynching-of-laura-and-l-d-nelson-1911/>

The Equal Justice Initiative Calendar

- May 24: Explore the events surrounding the lynching of Laura Nelson and her son:
<https://calendar.eji.org/racial-injustice/may/24>
- May 19: Learn about the lynching of Mary Turner and the violence of the 1918 rampage:
<https://calendar.eji.org/racial-injustice/may/19>

Mary Turner and the Lynching Rampage of 1918

<https://www.georgiahistory.com/georgia-historical-society-rededicates-civil-rights-trail-marker-for-mary-turner-and-the-lynching-rampage-of-1918/>



*Reflections on History: Honoring
the Lives of Laura Nelson and Mary
Turner*

**HOW DO STORIES LIKE LAURA NELSON'S AND
MARY TURNER'S CHANGE YOUR UNDERSTANDING
OF AMERICAN HISTORY?**

**WHAT EMOTIONS ARISE WHEN YOU LEARN
ABOUT THESE INJUSTICES?**

*Reflections on History: Honoring
the Lives of Laura Nelson and Mary
Turner*

**HOW CAN WE CARRY THEIR STORIES FORWARD
IN OUR OWN LIVES?**

**WHAT ACTIONS CAN WE TAKE TODAY TO ENSURE
THAT THE STORIES OF THOSE WHO FACED RACIAL
VIOLENCE ARE NOT FORGOTTEN AND THAT THEIR
LEGACIES CONTRIBUTE TO MEANINGFUL
CHANGE?**

THANK *You*

Thank you for downloading this eBook. I truly hope you find it meaningful and inspiring. These stories hold lessons that deserve to be remembered and shared. If this eBook resonates with you, I encourage you to pass it along and share it with others. Together, we can ensure these stories reach more people and continue the conversation about injustice, history, and resilience. Your support means so much. Thank you for being a part of this journey to preserve and honor Black history. Stay connected with HERandHISStoryinBlack for more stories and updates!

 Instagram |  Facebook |  Pinterest

Sincerely,

Sophia