

GROWING TENSION IN CHATTANOOGA



CHATTANOOGA TRAIN TOWN



Chattanooga-Hamilton Bicentennial Library

Due to its extensive railroad network, Chattanooga was nicknamed the “Train Town.” Chattanooga also became a Union stronghold during the Civil War and attracted Black citizens seeking freedom. After the end of the Civil War in 1865, Black American communities suffered mass lynchings and mob violence. Chattanooga was more progressive than other towns, with a growing Black middle class and industrial job opportunities, but there was still significant racial tension. Chattanooga was segregated by race and the Tennessee River served as one of the dividers within the city. The Supreme Court decided *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) during this period, making segregation legal through the logic of “separate but equal.” There was also a rise of racial stereotypes that dehumanized the Black population.

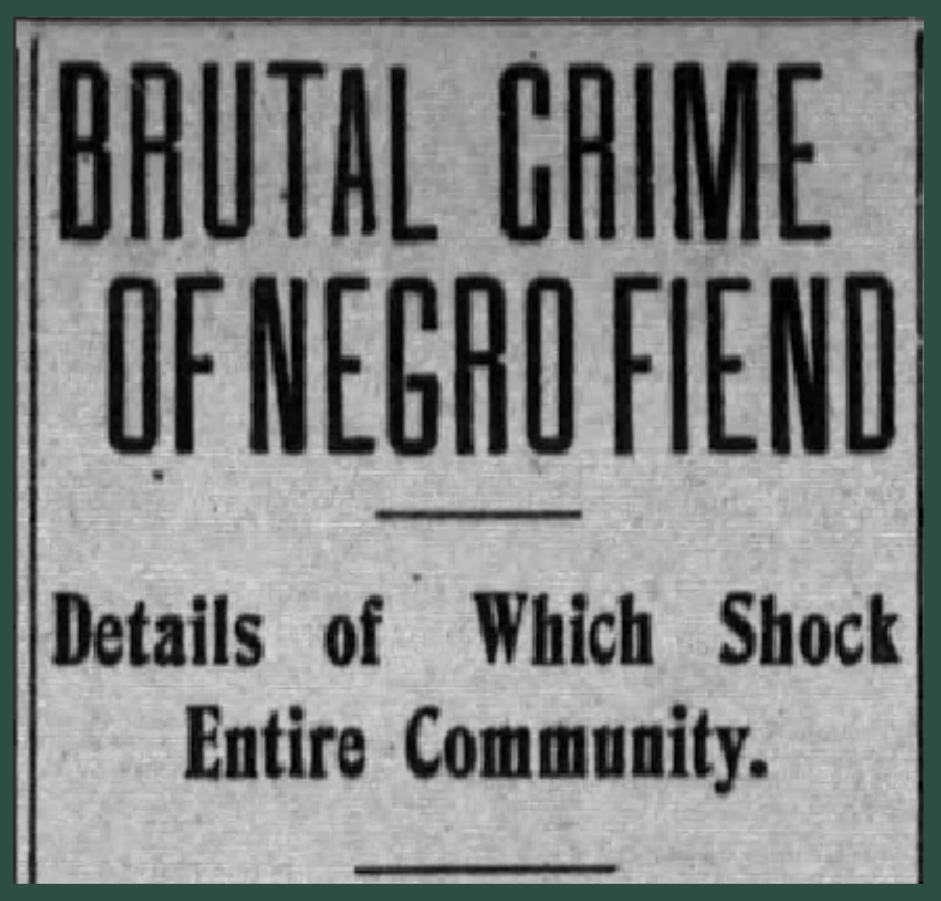
RACIAL ISSUES IN CHATTANOOGA

- Black Codes (restricted rights of Black individuals)
- Reduction in Black representatives in local government
- 3 Black Chattanoogaans lynched between 1890 & 1906

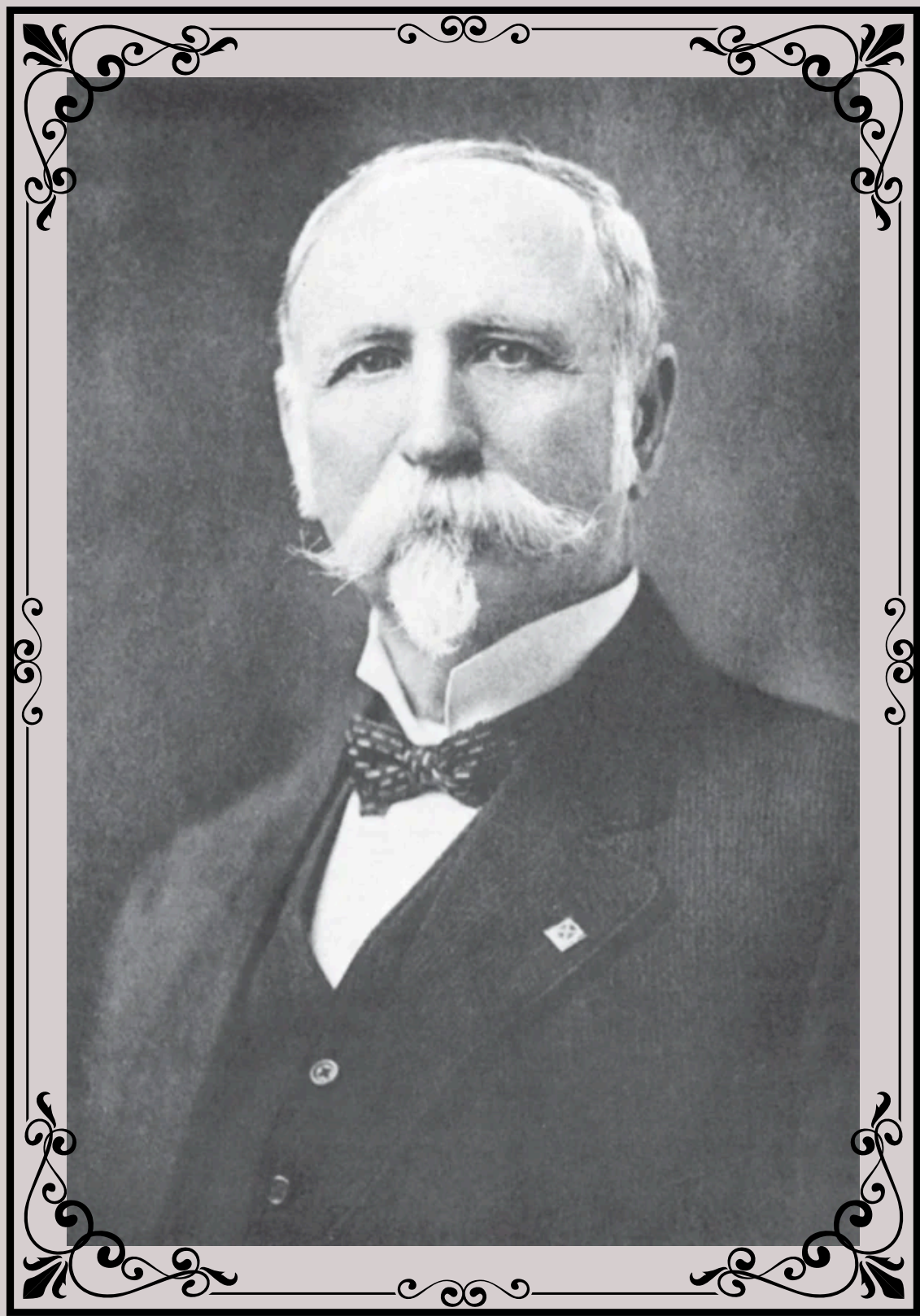
All of these factors, in addition to the rise of racial stereotypes, helped to create the hostile racial environment that led to the wrongful arrest of Ed Johnson.



The Chattanooga Daily Times, January 24, 1906



The Chattanooga News, January 24, 1906



Sheriff Joseph Shipp
Chattanooga Public Library

Election time was approaching and Sheriff Shipp, an ex-Confederate officer hoping to be re-elected, was desperate to find someone to blame.

WHAT HAPPENED?

On January 23, 1906, a little after 6:30pm, 21-year-old Nevada Taylor was walking home from the trolley station after work. An unknown assailant approached Miss Taylor and wrapped a leather strap around her neck, causing her to fall unconscious, and then raped her. After Miss Taylor regained consciousness, she rushed home through the cemetery where her family lived, only 100 yards from where she was attacked. She told her family what happened to her, and her father immediately called Sheriff Joseph Shipp. Sheriff Shipp investigated the scene of the crime, using bloodhounds to sniff out the assailant’s scent, but the trail kept going cold at the trolley tracks. Miss Taylor could not identify the assailant and could only say he had a “soft, kind voice.” After a reward that grew to \$375* was offered, Will Hixson stepped forward and identified Ed Johnson as the criminal. Ed Johnson was arrested for the rape of Nevada Taylor.

*\$12,000 in 2024

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