

# SANKOFA

*@Home*

*Clayton Jackson McGhie  
Memorial*



Transform Minnesota

# CLAYTON JACKSON McGHIE MEMORIAL

This month, Sankofa at Home heads north to the Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial in Duluth. The memorial marks the site where three Black men were lynched on June 15, 1920.

After a circus on June 14, nineteen-year-old Irene Tusken and eighteen-year-old James Sullivan accused six Black circus workers of robbing them at gunpoint and raping Tusken. The men were identified by the two teens and brought into custody despite a physical examination that yielded no physical evidence of assault.

Throughout the day of June 15, a mob formed as the story spread around Duluth. The crowd was instigated in part by Louis Dondino, who drove through Duluth in a red pickup truck telling people to join the “necktie party.” As the mob surrounded the jail, the commissioner of public safety ordered police not to use their guns to defend the men.

That night, the crowd broke into jail, pulled three of the six men - Elias Clayton, Elmer Jackson, and Isaac McGhie - from their cells. The men were brought up the street and hung from a lamppost in front of an estimated crowd of 10,000 (the largest ever on-hand for lynching). Photos taken after the deaths were sold as postcards.



**Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial**  
E 1st St & N 2nd Ave E  
Duluth, MN 55802  
[claytonjacksonmcghie.org](http://claytonjacksonmcghie.org)



The day after the lynchings, the National Guard mobilized to secure the city and protect the remaining three men. In the following weeks, a grand jury issued 25 indictments for rioting and 12 for murder to members of the lynch mob. Only eight individuals were tried, and only three - including Dondino - were convicted for rioting. No one was convicted of murder.

Two of the surviving circus workers were tried for rape. One - **Max Mason** - was convicted and sentenced to serve up to 30 years in prison. After four years, Mason was released on the condition he leave Minnesota. Mason, who served more time than any of the white members of the lynch mob, did not receive a pardon until 2020.

At the time of the lynchings, Duluth's population of 100,000 included approximately 490 Black residents. An NAACP chapter opened in Duluth following the lynchings, and NAACP lawyers defended the men charged with rape. In addition, St. Paul-based activist and suffragist **Nelli Francis** spearheaded efforts to create an anti-lynching law, which passed in April 1921.

The lynchings were largely forgotten from public memory until Michael Fedo published a book about the event in the late 1970s. Awareness was raised again in 1991 when Clayton, Jackson, and McGhie's unmarked graves received new grave markers reading "Deterred but not defeated." After several years of planning, the Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial opened 2003 across the street from the lynching site.



*Nelli Francis, who successfully spearheaded efforts for a state-level anti-lynching bill*

# HISTORY OF LYNCHING

Racial terror violence doesn't exist to harm just one victim; it exists to scare entire populations into submission.

- Jordon Moses, Duluth  
Lynchings Centennial  
organizer

“Lynchings were violent and public acts of torture that traumatized Black people throughout the country and were largely tolerated by state and federal officials.”

More than 4,400 Black people were killed during the height of the lynching period - an average of more than one killing per week over a 74-year period from 1877-1950. The practice increased dramatically in the South

after reconstruction as whites attempted to maintain power and promote a society built on white supremacy.

Lynchings were not only extremely public but highly publicized. Hangings would almost always occur in front of white crowds and were occasionally announced before they occurred to ensure a crowd. After, people would sometimes take items or body parts from the victims as souvenirs, and photos from lynchings were distributed as postcards.

Contributing to the terror was the fact that a Black person could be lynched for seemingly any reason. More than half of the lynching victims EJI documented were killed under accusation of committing murder or rape, but others were killed for being a business rival, for demonstrating a perceived slight to a white person, or for being present when a lynch mob was unable to find their intended target.



*Ida B. Wells-Barnett fled Memphis in 1892 following a series of anti-lynching commentaries in her newspaper. She continued to document lynchings through the rest of her life.*

Anti-lynching advocates decried and fought against the practice of lynching for well over 100 years. Many Black Americans, including prominent figures like Ida B. Wells, did so at great personal risk.

Despite the decades of advocacy, Congress did not pass a bill making lynching a federal hate crime until the **Emmett Till Antilynching Act** of 2022.

## THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

The Equal Justice Initiative has made a priority of helping Americans remember the history of racial violence in our country. As part of this work, EJI has documented more than 4,000 lynchings in the United States.

To honor these victims, EJI created **The National Memorial for Peace and Justice**. The names of these individuals are engraved on more than 800 steel monuments representing each county where a person was lynched.

In addition to the memorial, EJI displays soil from each lynching site at their **Legacy Museum**. Both locations display the names of Clayton, Jackson, and McGhie.



*Top: The National Memorial for Peace and Justice  
Bottom: Jars of dirt from lynching sites are displayed at EJI's Legacy Museum*

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## **The Lynchings in Duluth**

**Michael Fedo**

“Using newspaper accounts, court records, state files, and interviews with aging and often reluctant witnesses, **Michael Fedo** writes of ordinary people caught up in an extraordinary moment of violence and hatred.”

## **The Lyncher in Me: A Search for Redemption in the Face of History**

**Warren Read**

“In his poignant memoir, **Read** explores the perspectives of both the victims and the perpetrators of this heinous crime. He investigates the impact the denial and anger that the long-held secrets had on his family. Through this examination of the generations affected by one horrific night, he discovers we must each take responsibility for ‘our deep-seated fears that lead us to emotional, social, or physical violence.’”

## **The Duluth Lynchings** **Duluth News Tribune**

“In this podcast series, the **Duluth News Tribune** looks back at one of Duluth, Minnesota’s dark moments in history, a time when an estimated 10,000 people participated in or were witness to a hate crime — then basically didn’t talk about it again publicly for more than 60 years.”

## **North Star: Minnesota’s**

## **Black Pioneers**

**Twin Cities PBS**

“**The North Star** is a documentary of the Black pioneers who fought for freedom when Minnesota’s rights and equality was found lacking. These pioneers worked to make it a better place for all people. In this documentary, meet the Black men and women who created history, in Minnesota and across the United States by fighting for the freedom of all.”

*A video containing the portion of this documentary dedicated to the lynchings in Duluth can be found [here](#).*

## **Clayton Jackson McGhie**

## **Memorial Discussion Guide**

**Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial**

The **Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial Discussion Guide** offers a chance to learn more about and further reflect on the memorial, the events that led to its creation, and action steps individuals can take in their communities.

## Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror

EJI

“The lynching of African Americans was terrorism, a widely supported campaign to enforce racial subordination and segregation. **Lynching in America** documents more than 4400 racial terror lynchings in the United States during the period between Reconstruction and World War II.”

## On Lynchings Ida B. Wells-Barnett

In 1892, 161 African American men and women were lynched in the U.S. That year, the twenty-three-year-old **Ida B. Wells** charged in her newspaper that white businessmen had instigated three local lynchings against their black competitors, she was forced to flee Memphis for New York City as a goon-squad of angry whites destroyed her editorial office and print shop. These events led to a lifelong battle against lynching. This book contains three of her works against lynching: **Southern Horrors** (1892); **Red Record** (1895); and **Mob Rule in New Orleans** (1900).

## The Tragedy of Lynching Arthur F. Raper

Originally published in 1933, “this book deals with the quest for a preventive to lynching which can be undertaken only after one has an understanding of what it is that is to be prevented. This necessary analysis of lynching--its background, circumstances, and meaning--introduces many baffling elements. The author has made a detailed study of the lynchings of 1930 in an effort to find an answer to the complexities of the problem.”



*Marker at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice  
telling the story of the lynchings in Duluth*

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**Terror Lynching in America**

EJI

**Duluth Lynchings Centennial:**

**Week of Remembrance**

**Videos**

Minnesota Historical Society

**The Legacy of the Duluth**

**Lynchings**

Minnesota Historical Society

**Duluth Lynchings**

Minnesota Historical Society

**Duluth Lynchings**

MNOpedia

**One Hundred Years Ago, a**

**Lynch Mob Killed Three**

**Men in Minnesota**

Smithsonian Magazine

**The Duluth lynching, 100**

**years later**

MPR News

**Three Black Men Falsely**

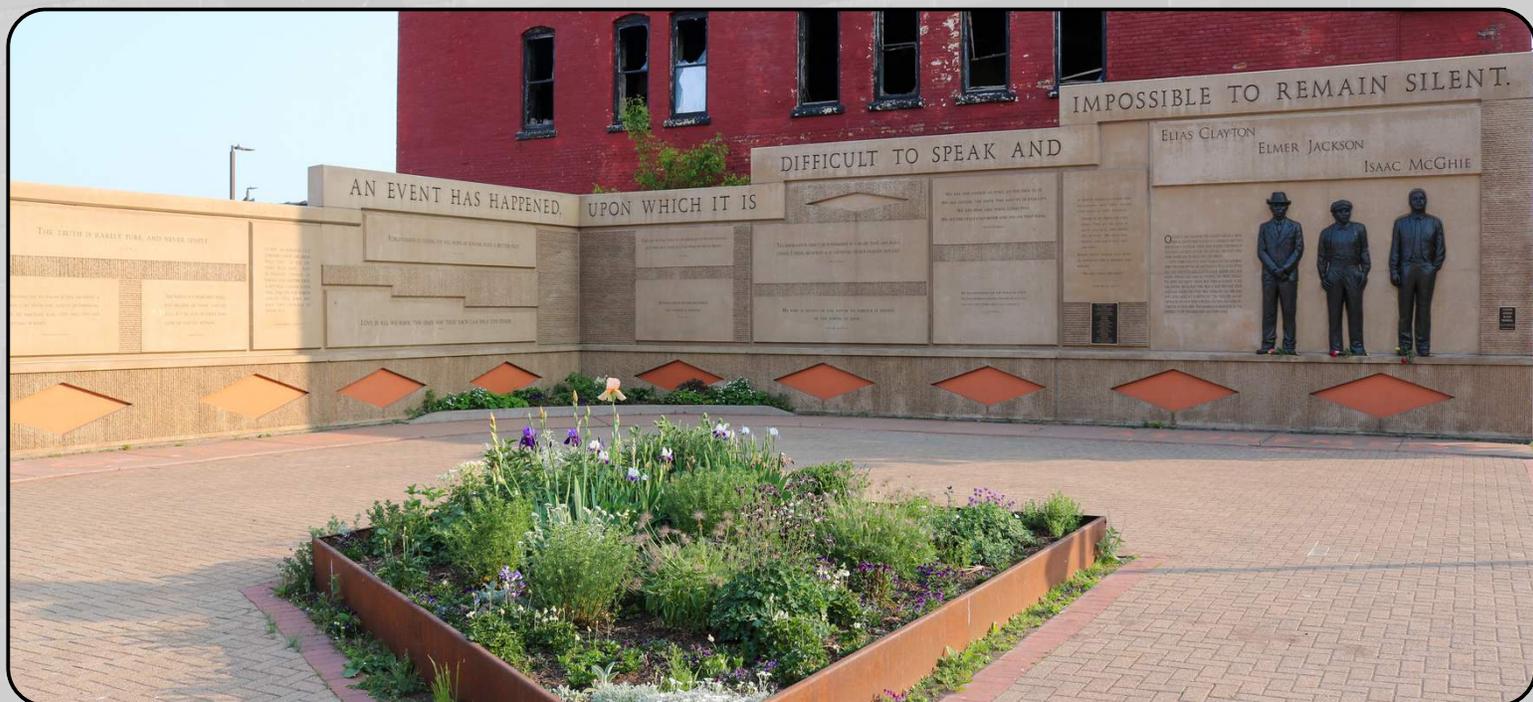
**Accused and Lynched in**

**Duluth, Minnesota**

EJI

**Francis, Nellie (1874-1969)**

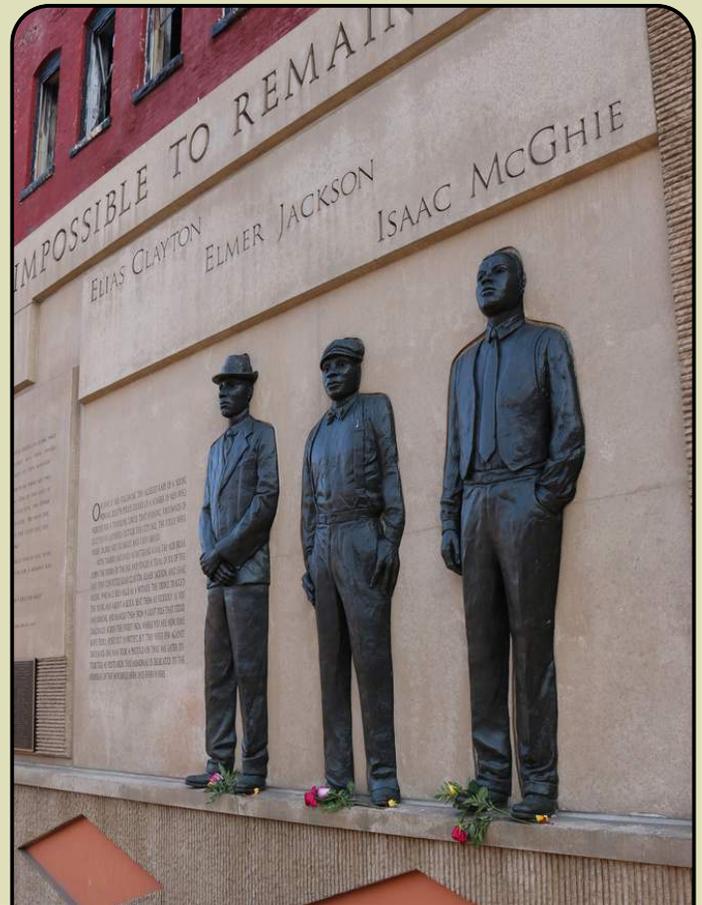
MNOpedia



# REFLECTION QUESTIONS

## As you visit the Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial:

- What's new to you?
- What do you feel?
- How do the quotes contribute to the memorial?
- Stand at the corner of the intersection. What would it be like to be surrounded by a crowd of 10,000 people here?
- This story was largely out of public consciousness for over 50 years:
  - What are the difficulties with publicly acknowledging and remembering these stories?
  - Why does it take so long to acknowledge these stories?
  - How does understanding these stories help us understand the past and present?
  - How does telling the truth about events like this help us move toward justice?
- How has the history of race in the U.S. been shaped by racial violence?
- How has racial violence changed throughout history? How have these changes informed the present?



ON JUNE 15, 1920, FOLLOWING THE ALLEGED RAPE OF A YOUNG WOMAN, DULUTH POLICE LOCKED UP A NUMBER OF MEN WHO WORKED FOR A TRAVELING CIRCUS. THAT EVENING, THOUSANDS OF DULUTHIANS GATHERED OUTSIDE THE CITY JAIL. THE POLICE WERE UNDER ORDERS NOT TO SHOOT, AND THEY OBEYED.

WITH TIMBERS AND RAILS AS BATTERING RAMS, THE MOB BROKE DOWN THE DOORS OF THE JAIL AND STAGED A TRIAL OF SIX OF THE MEN. THEY CONVICTED ELIAS CLAYTON, ELMER JACKSON, AND ISAAC MCGHIE, WHO HAD BEEN HELD AS A WITNESS. THE CROWD DRAGGED THE YOUNG MEN ABOUT A BLOCK, BEAT THEM AS VICIOUSLY AS YOU MAY IMAGINE, AND HANGED THEM FROM A LIGHT POLE THAT STOOD DIAGONALLY ACROSS THE STREET FROM WHERE YOU ARE NOW. SOME BRAVE PEOPLE SPOKE OUT IN PROTEST, BUT THEY WERE FEW AGAINST THOUSANDS. ONE MAN TOOK A PHOTOGRAPH THAT WAS LATER DISTRIBUTED AS POSTCARDS. THIS MEMORIAL IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORIES OF THE MURDERED HERE AND EVERYWHERE.



# **Transform** Minnesota

COMPLEX ISSUES. BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE.

This resource list is part of Transform  
Minnesota's Sankofa @ Home series

Inclusion of a resource on the list does  
not represent a full endorsement of  
stated beliefs