

Charles Greene Miller

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Men, women, Black, or white, we are all entitled to a second chance. We all deserve the right to due process and fair treatment through the normal judicial system. But above all else we deserve our story to be told. This is the story of Charles Greene Miller.

In his early childhood, Miller lived with his grandmother likely as sharecroppers. He didn't have an extensive education, but through the years, he learned to read and write. In his older years, Miller lived a simple life in his Opelika home with his wife Rosa Lee and a boarder. He held steady work at the railroads working long hours and days. The work was dangerous and required heavy labor. The Great Depression took a toll on his work, lowering wages and increasing unemployment rates. Not only did it impact Miller, it also affected other railroad industrial workers in Alabama. According to Lee County Sheriff William Samuel "Buck" Jones, he saw Miller as a "good fellow."

Charles Miller's life took a turn for the worse in Summer of 1932. According to news reports at the time, Charles Miller allegedly destroyed his entire house and killed his wife on June 29th, 1932. The next morning, he traveled to his brother in laws with a shot gun. Miller then attempted to shoot his brother in law and his wife. We do not know why here, but we do know he wanted to scare them. They only suffered minor injuries because he fired into a nearby tub where their hands were, not at them directly. A few hours later, Sheriff "Buck" received a call detailing where Miller would be found and offered to go and speak to Miller. As he left, he reportedly said, "He's a good fellow. He won't give me any trouble." The relationship between the Sheriff and Miller remains unknown, but they clearly knew each other. When the Sheriff opened the

door to Miller's home, he was shot in the chest and died shortly after. It is at this time, according to the Sheriff's granddaughter, Miller reportedly said, "Oh, Mr. Buck. I didn't know it was you." He then fled the scene. Shortly after the news of the death of the Sheriff, a mob formed to kill Miller. They shot him between 50-150 times, and "tore him to pieces." His body was then left in front of the courthouse. This is important because the mob wanted everyone to see what they had done to Miller. Similar to most lynching and hate crimes, it was not only a form of "punishment" to the victim but a message of terror to other people to not step out of line. In addition, by leaving Miller in front of the courthouse, it solidified their ideology that they were serving justice for the death of the Sheriff. It is also important to add that because Miller was killed before he received the right to due process, we will never know why or if he killed his wife and threatened body harm to his brother and sister in law.

The Legacy Charles Miller left in the Opelika community has been controversial since the incident 88 years ago. Sheriff Jones died embraced as a hero, protecting the town he loved. Miller on the other hand, died seen as a murderer, however, we can't be sure of what really transpired. Technically, he was never found guilty, and therefore died an innocent man, but the mob that shot him roughly 100 times got to go home, see their families, and go to work the next day, when no one thought anything of it. It's easy to deem the lynching of an innocent man as an act of terror and intimidation to the Black community, but in Miller's case we face a unique dilemma. Opposed to the belief that he deserved his fate; Miller never received the opportunity as an American citizen of due process. Without his day in court, we will never know the Miller case to its full extent. We will never know Miller's relationship with his wife, his brother-in-law, his sister-in-law, and Sheriff Jones. Miller's fate was instead decided out of the oppressive tyranny enforced by the white mob. This tragedy is important to not only Opelika, but to all of

America, because it compels you to critically think about what it means to die without justice; to die without your story being heard. If you take nothing else from this story, walk away knowing that true justice does not discriminate.