

JIM CROW AND THE NEW SOUTH GRANITE INDUSTRY
IN DEKALB COUNTY, GEORGIA

by

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Stone Mountain's famous monument to the Lost Cause of the Confederacy and its association with the revitalized Ku Klux Klan from its rebirth on the mountain's summit in 1915 connected the granite mountain to a twentieth-century culture of white supremacy. Stone Mountain's material history of work and social change that characterized the end of the nineteenth century reveals a forgotten foundation beneath the emergence of Confederate memory as the dominant interpretation of the mountain's past and illustrates how anti-Black racism in the United States has never been limited to cultural or linguistic expressions. Specifically, processes that unfolded in DeKalb County, Georgia in the decades that followed Reconstruction connected the history of the region's nascent granite industry with the development of Jim Crow. First, the quarrying of granite encouraged industrial and urban development, attracted workers to the region, and precipitated new ways of living and working in this landscape. Then in their efforts to build an empire of granite at the end of the nineteenth century, white capitalists embraced the burgeoning Jim Crow racial order to segregate workers and weaken the local labor movement. Ultimately, even as unions fought to organize and both white and Black workers honed their skills, the geology of granite itself provided a metaphor of the supposed permanence of the Jim Crow order and helped transform DeKalb County's granite from a New South natural resource into a symbol of white supremacy.

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INTRODUCTION

On the cold night of November 25, 1915, the flames of the burning cross lit up the weathered summit of Stone Mountain in DeKalb County, Georgia. Fifteen men stood close to the fire, grateful for what little warmth it provided as they listened to the former preacher William J. Simmons give his most recent sermon over the wind, resurrecting the Ku Klux Klan. The hike up the mountain had been difficult, and some of the men struggled to find the trail even with their flashlights. But Sam Venable knew the way well enough without a light. The mountain was his property, after all.¹ When he stood on the summit of his mountain that night, his face shrouded in a white hood, Sam Venable bore witness to a ceremony that would serve as the first point of connection between the mountain of granite and the foremost white supremacist movement in the twentieth-century U.S.²

This is how the history of Stone Mountain usually begins. Three decades earlier, however, it was Sam's elder brother William Venable who stood in the firelight on another November night. The exuberant streets of Atlanta, though just twenty miles to the east, felt a world away from his granite quarries the day after Grover Cleveland won the election of 1884. Venable had not seen a Democrat elected to the White House since James Buchanan in 1856, but he could scarcely recall such early childhood memories from before the war.³ To celebrate the Democratic victory, *Atlanta Constitution* editor Henry Grady organized a parade of thousands of

¹ William G. Shepherd, "How I Put Over the Klan," *Collier's* 82, no. 2 (July 14, 1928): 34; David B. Freeman, *Carved in Stone: The History of Stone Mountain* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 52.

² Shepherd, 34; Freeman, 52.

³ William Hoyt Venable (1852-1905) and Samuel Hoyt Venable (1856-1939) were the two oldest of their parents' eight children. After their father's death in 1874, the two brothers assumed financial responsibility for their mother and siblings, trying several business ventures unsuccessfully before settling on granite. For a brief biography of the Venable brothers' earlier endeavors, see Freeman, 46.

jubilant Atlantans. William Venable volunteered to take charge of “a brigade of bloody-shirt bearers” to march with “red shirts stretched on cross poles” through the streets of the city.⁴ The parade ended at the capitol. There, with the crowd packed around him, Venable gave the signal to set the shirts on fire in a symbolic dismissal of Republican criticisms of political and racial violence committed in the South during Reconstruction. The bands played “Dixie” and the “bloody shirts, saturated with oil ... burned, amid the wildest demonstrations of joy and approval.”⁵ Smoke rose from the blood-red cloth as it turned to ash. Amid these celebrations, Venable understood something. While he and his brother Sam had spent the preceding five years acquiring property and opening granite quarries at Lithonia, Pine Mountain, and Arabia Mountain in DeKalb County, their dreams of rebuilding the South in granite would come to nothing without power: social influence, financial prosperity, and—above all—uncontested control over their workers.

Stone Mountain’s monument to the Lost Cause of the Confederacy and its association with the revitalized Ku Klux Klan marked the mountain as a symbol of white supremacy in the twentieth century. But this was neither inevitable, as the United Daughters of the Confederacy argued as they raised funds for their Confederate memorial at the mountain, nor coincidental. Rather, the choice to claim Stone Mountain as a symbol of white dominance in 1915 responded to processes that had unfolded in DeKalb County in the decades following Reconstruction. These dynamics had tangled the fates of industrial development and the Jim Crow racial order with that of the mountain, the land, and the people who called it home. Even as the long geologic history of rock formation and erosion dictated aspects of the granite industry, the expansion of railroad networks and the movement of capital freed the granite companies from some of the physical

⁴ “All Ablaze!” *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 8, 1884.

⁵ “All Ablaze!” *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 8, 1884.

limitations of quarrying. But the tension between rootedness and mobility—between constraint and freedom—that shaped the history of the granite companies also created opportunities and struggles for the human communities who lived in the quarries’ orbit.

As the explosive growth of the granite industry began to replace plantations and family farms as DeKalb County’s economic foundation in the 1880s, new geographies of life and labor emerged. Distinct white and Black communities developed. Although railroad tracks and granite quarries often marked the boundaries between them, they simultaneously served as conduits that connected people and communities in new ways. The racial segregation of different jobs within the quarries kept white and Black workers apart, making cooperation and labor organizing even more difficult. These spatial aspects of the granite industry provided a foundation for the burgeoning Jim Crow social order, while acts of racial terrorism in the decades that followed paved the way for the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan in 1915.

Despite the hardening lines between white and Black workers and their communities in DeKalb County, instances of mobilization and resistance during this period revealed the fundamental instability of Jim Crow. While white capitalists sought to build a racially ordered empire on the rock-solid foundation of granite, Black quarrymen knew how to break granite at its weakest points. At times, white granite workers—some of them, at least—joined as co-conspirators on strikes, further fracturing the hard lines that would divide them. By responding to racial violence with resistance and attempting to redress exploitative working conditions with interracial labor organizing and legal action, this community of granite workers revealed the weakest points in the racist and capitalist status quo.⁶

⁶ This history of the Georgia granite industry necessarily brings together the literature on race and labor in the South after Reconstruction as well as a subset of environmental history that focuses on nature and work. For more on race and labor in the New South, see: Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the*

The historical literature has not reflected the significance of these interactions between granite quarrying and the racial re-ordering of society in the New South from the end of Reconstruction through 1915.⁷ Historians have largely limited any studies about Stone Mountain to the period after the Ku Klux Klan reemerged on its summit in 1915, as the mountain quickly became a representation of Confederate historical narratives carved in stone and a tourist site that symbolized “the modern white South’s triumphant coming of age.”⁸ Works by Grace Elizabeth Hale’s and J. Vincent Lowery have explored the history of Stone Mountain in the context of its significance as a tourist attraction and the largest, and perhaps best known, monument to the Lost Cause of the Confederacy.⁹ The mountain itself, however, appears in these studies as something

Black Worker, 1619-1981 (New York: International Publishers, 1981); Matthew Hild, “Organizing Across the Color Line: The Knights of Labor and Black Recruitment Efforts in Small-Town Georgia,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (1997): 287-310; Robin Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (1993): 75-112; Brian Kelly, “Sentinels for New South Industry: Booker T. Washington, Industrial Accommodation and Black Workers in the Jim Crow South,” *Labor History* 44, no. 3 (2003): 337-357; Ernest Obadele-Starks, *Black Unionism in the Industrial South* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000). For more on the historiographical overlap between environmental and labor history, see Gunther Peck, “The Nature of Labor: Fault Lines and Common Ground in Environmental and Labor History,” *Environmental History* 11, no. 2 (2006): 212-238; Thomas Andrews, “Work, Nature, and History: A Single Question, that Once Moved Like Light,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental History*, ed. Andrew C. Isenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁷ David Freeman’s *Carved in Stone* is presently the only book from an academic press about the history of Stone Mountain. While Freeman tells the story of Stone Mountain’s history beginning with the earliest available sources about the Creek Indians who lived in the area before the nineteenth century, *Carved in Stone* is essentially an assemblage of trivia and stories about the area’s history rather than an argumentative work of historical scholarship. In the forward to his book, Freeman describes his intended audience as “the ordinary, intelligent reader who may not know much about Stone Mountain, but would like to learn” (ix). Still, Freeman’s book is a useful starting point for historians looking to understand how the history of Stone Mountain and DeKalb County has been characterized so far.

⁸ Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 242.

⁹ Grace Elizabeth Hale, “Granite Stopped Time: The Stone Mountain Memorial and the Representation of Southern White Identity,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 82, no. 1 (1998): 22-44; J. Vincent Lowery, “A Monument to Many Souths: Tourists Experience Southern Distinctiveness at Stone Mountain,” in *Destination Dixie*, ed. Karen Cox (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2012). Other articles that illustrate the historiographical focus on Stone Mountain’s history after 1915 include Jamey Essex, “‘The Real South Starts Here’: Whiteness, the Confederacy, and Commodification at Stone Mountain,” *Southern Geographer* 42, no. 2 (2002): 211-227; Katharine P. Zakos, “Truth is Marching On:

of a blank slate for Confederate memory and white supremacy, with the implication being that its historical significance emerged after Atlanta lawyer William Terrell first suggested establishing a Confederate memorial at the mountain in 1914.¹⁰

This choice in periodization reflects an archival bias towards documents that preserve insights into the workings of organizations like the Daughters of the Confederacy and the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial Association as they sought to build an eternal monument to the Lost Cause.¹¹ Furthermore, such historiographical blinders show the lasting impacts of a white supremacist revision of Stone Mountain's history that meant to erase resistance to the racist regime of Jim Crow from the historical record. Displacing the traditional narrative moment of departure for histories of Stone Mountain and turning instead to the granite industry's entanglement with labor control and white supremacy reveals how a local history marked by struggle and dissent in the face of racial violence and repression transforms the story of a place we might think we already know.

A FOUNDATION IN GRANITE

The geological history of the Piedmont created granite, but it took a combination of geography, history, and ideology to make the Georgia granite industry. Between the mountains of the Blue Ridge and the southern Coastal Plains, the Piedmont region is characterized by its rolling hills and rocky outcrops. These features were less than ideal for the plantation agriculture

The Lasershow Spectacular at the Stone Mountain Park Confederate Memorial and the Changing Narratives of History," *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 10, no. 3 (2015): 280-295.

¹⁰ "Stone Mountain, Eternal Temple to Confederacy is Terrell's Suggestion," *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 26, 1914.

¹¹ For examples of this trend, see the Stone Mountain finding aids for the Emory University Library and the DeKalb History Center archives.

that dominated Georgia's economy before the Civil War, but the Piedmont was also home to most of the state's granite deposits.¹²

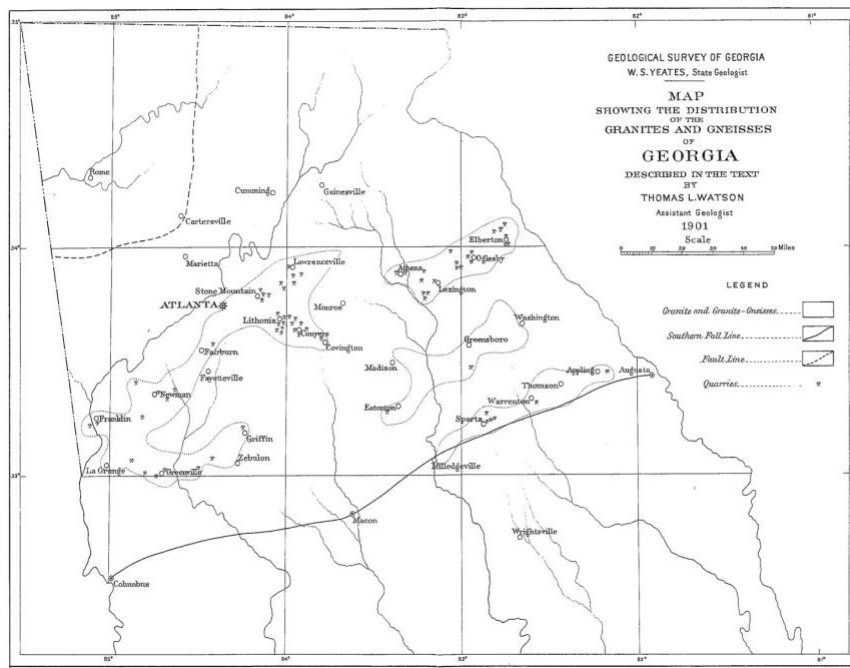


Figure 1: Geological Survey of Georgia, “A Preliminary Report on a Part of the Granites and Gneisses of Georgia,” by Thomas L. Watson, *Geological Survey of Georgia Bulletin*, no. 9-A (Atlanta: Geo. W. Harrison, State Printer, 1902): Plate 1.

DeKalb County in 1860 did not resemble the sprawling plantations that characterized life south of the Piedmont, but slavery nevertheless permeated the social and economic makeup of the county's towns and surroundings. The white inhabitants of the area were fully invested in the system, and this broad participation, from small subsistence farmers to widowed white women, illustrates historian Stephanie Jones-Rogers's argument that the regime of slavery could not have been sustained if it was elite white men alone who exerted power, violence, and control.¹³

¹² United States Geological Survey, “Granites of the Southeastern Atlantic States,” by Thomas L. Watson, *United States Geological Survey Bulletin*, no. 426 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910), 206.

¹³ Stephanie Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 70.

DeKalb County's embrace of racial chattel slavery in the decades before the Civil War established a foundation of racial labor regimes that would continue long after emancipation.

Before the Civil War, DeKalb County was primarily rural and agricultural. Corn was the primary crop, and a small number of DeKalb County farmers grew a few bales of cotton to sell for extra cash. They kept chickens, cows, sheep, and pigs, and produced eggs, milk and butter, wool, and meat. Many families kept vegetable gardens, and some grew peach trees or scuppernon vines. The area was among the largest dairy producers in the region, and the larger farming operations grew vegetables to sell throughout the southeast.¹⁴ About sixty percent of farmers in DeKalb County were slaveholders, the majority of whom kept three or four enslaved people, although some farmers kept up to thirty.¹⁵

Slaveholding in DeKalb County was not limited to farmers and planters, and the 1860 census lists numerous attorneys, mechanics, court officials, carpenters, railroad agents, and merchants who owned slaves.¹⁶ S.P. Alexander was a "hotel keeper" in the town of Stone Mountain who enslaved twenty-nine people, presumably to work at the hotel. Apart from farming, tourism was DeKalb County's biggest industry before the Civil War, and entrepreneurs built several hotels near the modest town center of Stone Mountain in the twenty years before the war to accommodate visitors.¹⁷ Women were also among these slaveholders. Seamstress Mary

¹⁴ DeKalb History Center, "DeKalb County History," <https://dekalbhistory.org/exhibits-dekalb-history-center-museum/dekalb-county-history/>

¹⁵ Examples of these relatively wealthier farmers and the number of people they enslaved included: Samuel House, 25; Watson Kittridge, 25; John McColouch, 28. U.S. Census Bureau, "United States Census (Slave Schedule), 1860, Georgia: DeKalb," *FamilySearch*, citing NARA microfilm publication M653 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/3161105>)

¹⁶ "United States Census (Slave Schedule), 1860, Georgia: DeKalb"; U. S. Census Bureau, "1860 Federal Census De Kalb County, Georgia," trans. Ross Jones, Georgia USGenWeb Archives, 2002, <http://usgwarchives.net/ga/dekalb/census.html>

¹⁷ Freeman, 35.

Stokes enslaved eight people, Sintha Stone ran a boarding house with six people enslaved, and women like Sarah Rainey and Rebecca Rainey are both described in the census as “widow and farmer” with five and seven slaves in their respective households.¹⁸

The 1860 Federal Census listed 5,854 “free inhabitants” of DeKalb County, with only two free Black men living alone in the Decatur and Stone Mountain districts and one free Black woman who lived in the Panthersville district with her three children.¹⁹ The vast majority of the African American residents of DeKalb County in 1860 were held in bondage, and the year’s census “slave schedule” enumerated some 1,440 individuals only by their age, sex, and slaveholder, although additional details emerge from the census’s mortality schedule.²⁰ Of the sixty-eight total deaths in the county throughout the year of the census, a disproportionate twenty-six of the individuals who died were enslaved.²¹ Most were infants and young children who succumbed to illness, such as four-month-old Lety Hardman, who had typhoid fever, or sudden accidents, like four-year-old Dicy Tilley, whose cause of death was described only as “burnt.”²² Of the adults listed, some had chronic ailments like the rheumatism that afflicted Catharine Johnson, a sixty-five year old field hand. But many deaths were attributed to diseases like “consumption” or “bilious fever,” sicknesses that carried away younger people like twenty-year-old Mahaly Farris.²³

¹⁸ “United States Census (Slave Schedule), 1860, Georgia: DeKalb”; U. S. Census Bureau, “1860 Federal Census De Kalb County, Georgia,” Georgia USGenWeb Archives, trans. Ross Jones, 2002, <http://usgwarchives.net/ga/dekalb/census.html>

¹⁹ “1860 Federal Census De Kalb County, Georgia.”

²⁰ “United States Census (Slave Schedule), 1860, Georgia: DeKalb.”

²¹ “United States Census (Mortality Schedule), 1860, Georgia: DeKalb,” trans. Lorraine H. Robinson, Georgia USGenWeb Archives, 2010, <http://files.usgwarchives.net/ga/dekalb/census/1860/mortality/1860dekalb.txt>

²² “United States Census (Mortality Schedule), 1860, Georgia: DeKalb.”

²³ “United States Census (Mortality Schedule), 1860, Georgia: DeKalb.”

Although the railroad first came to DeKalb County in 1845, locals later complained that General Sherman and his men left them nothing but smoldering wood and twisted iron on his way to Atlanta in the summer of 1864.²⁴ But the state rebuilt the Georgia Railroad, and soon the line from Decatur curved northwest to Stone Mountain again before heading southwest, through Redan to reach Lithonia at the county's edge. The ridges and hills that had once made travel from Atlanta to Stone Mountain a taxing, multi-day journey by stagecoach melted away outside a railcar's window in a pleasant afternoon ride for many well-heeled Atlantans' fleeing the steamy city for a weekend of picnicking, hiking to expansive mountain views, and relaxing at favored summer resorts.²⁵ By 1871, visitors to Stone Mountain could watch wrestling exhibitions, enjoy watermelon cuttings, and pay to ride a velocipede by the train depot, as the town re-emerged after the Civil War as a popular regional tourist destination.²⁶

Developments during the last decades of the nineteenth century, though, transformed Stone Mountain from a peripheral vacation destination surrounded by small farms and undeveloped land into the center of one of Georgia's most important new industries—the quarrying and finishing of granite. State support for the scientific field of geology precipitated the embrace of Georgia's rocks as potential sources of economic prosperity following the Civil War and Reconstruction. State lawmakers first created the office of State Geologist in 1836 to “disclos[e] the character and capacity of the soil,” but the office was abolished in 1840 after it

²⁴ Freeman, 32, 38. Stone Mountain was along the Georgia Railroad, which was the first railroad company in the state and only the third in the nation at the time of its charter in 1833. In 1845, workers completed the stretch of the Georgia Railroad between Covington and Marthasville (later Atlanta) to connect with the Western & Atlantic Railroad. Freeman notes that this stretch curved 20 miles off the straightest course to make the lines connect, bringing it right past the settlement that would become Stone Mountain town.

²⁵ Freeman, 43.

²⁶ Freeman, 43.

had already spent its \$10,000 appropriation “without benefit to the citizens of the State.”²⁷

Governor James N. Smith revived the state geological survey in 1874, appointing Dr. George Little, formerly a professor at the University of Mississippi, to the position.²⁸

Little’s first task in his new role was to begin a “careful and complete geological, mineralogical and physical survey of the State,” and although his work was only half finished four years later, the impact of the geological survey on capital investment in Georgia’s extractive industries was already clear. “The survey has developed the fact that Georgia is not only rich in agricultural resources but unsurpassed in mineral wealth and manufacturing facilities,” Georgia Secretary of Agriculture Thomas Janes wrote in his 1878 report, *A Manual for the Use of Immigrants and Capitalists*.²⁹ Including some of the findings from the as-yet-unfinished geological survey in his report, Janes outlined the valuable mineral resources that Little and his team found throughout the state, listing them by county for the benefit of anyone looking for investment opportunities.³⁰ For DeKalb County, these resources included gold, asbestos, iron, tourmaline, soapstone, and granite. Janes noted that while “granite is found in a number of counties not named in this list,” in DeKalb County particularly, “it can be quarried and used for

²⁷ Geological Survey of Georgia, “Historical Sketch of the Geological Survey of Georgia,” by H. S. Cave (Atlanta: Foote & Davies Company, 1922): 8, 12.

²⁸ Georgia Department of Agriculture, *Hand-book of the State of Georgia accompanied by a Geological Map of the State*, by Thomas P. Janes (New York: Russel Brothers, 1876), 215-216;

Cave, “Historical Sketch of the Geological Survey of Georgia,” 9. Dr. George Little had also served as the State Geologist of Mississippi, where he succeeded his mentor, Dr. Eugene Hilgard in 1866. Hilgard and Little both worked at the School of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts at the University of Mississippi from its founding in 1871 until Hilgard’s departure for the University of Michigan in 1872 and Little’s move to Georgia in 1874. See Mississippi Geological Survey, “Bulletin 100: The Mississippi Geological Survey, A Centennial,” by Frederic F. Mellon (Jackson: Mississippi Geological, Economic, and Topographical Survey, 1963): 46-48. <https://www.mdeq.ms.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Bulletin-100.pdf>

²⁹ Georgia Department of Agriculture, *A Manual for the Use of Immigrants and Capitalists*, by Thomas P. Janes (Atlanta: Jas. P. Harrison & Co. Printers, 1878), 52.

³⁰ Janes, *A Manual for the Use of Immigrants and Capitalists*, 100.

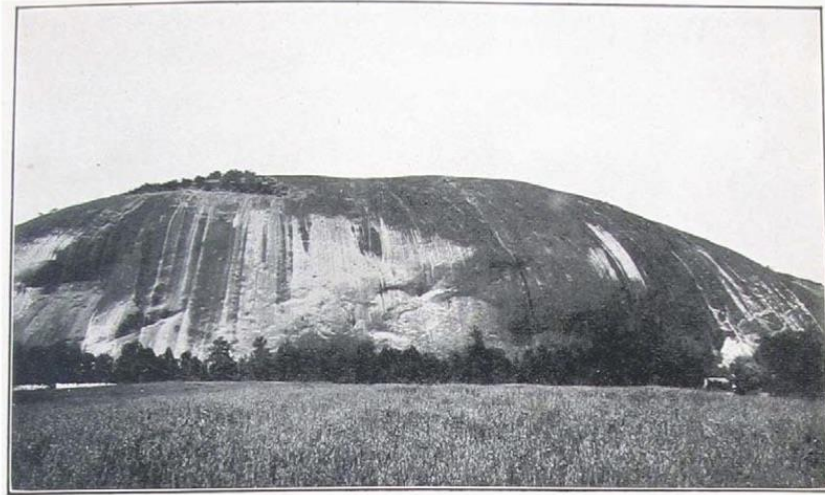
building purposes.”³¹ After Janes translated Little’s geological survey into information for potential investors, Stone Mountain stood high above the surrounding landscape of DeKalb County in promising boundless wealth for anyone with just a deed to the land and a reliable workforce.

Commercial quarrying began at Stone Mountain in 1870 when John Meador, William Richardson, and W. B. Belknap formed the Stone Mountain Granite and Railway Company, but the large-scale development of the DeKalb County granite industry awaited the state’s investment in geological knowledge to transform the mountain from a “wonderful natural curiosity” into an “exhaustless” supply of granite.³² With its 560 acre footprint and a summit nearly 800 feet above the surrounding countryside, Stone Mountain was the most prominent exposure of granite in the region and the site of the county’s first commercial quarries. The bulk of DeKalb County’s quarries, however, lay several miles south of this “geological monstrosity,” as one nineteenth-century scientist described Stone Mountain, near the town of Lithonia, where “flat-rock outcrops” of granite stretched for miles.³³

³¹ Janes, *A Manual for the Use of Immigrants and Capitalists*, 102.

³² “An Act to incorporate the Stone Mountain Granite & Railway Company,” Acts and Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of Georgia, Law No. 235, 1870 (Georgia Legislative Documents); Janes, *A Manual for the Use of Immigrants and Capitalists*, 70; “The New South: Results of Chief Statistician Switzler’s Explorations,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 13, 1887.

³³ Dr. Alexander Means, as quoted in Georgia Department of Agriculture, *Georgia: Historical and Industrial*, by O. B. Stevens and R. F. Wright (Atlanta: Geo. W. Harrison, State Printer, 1901), 42; Geological Survey of Georgia, “The Natural Environments of Georgia,” by Charles H. Wharton. *Georgia Geologic Survey Bulletin*, no. B-114 (1977): 161.



A. STONE MOUNTAIN, A GRANITE DOME, DEKALB COUNTY, GA.

Figure 2: United States Geological Survey, “Granites of the Southeastern United States, by Thomas L. Watson, *United States Geological Survey Bulletin*, no. 426 (Washington, D.,C.: Government Printing Office, 1910), Plate XXV.

In 1879, two brothers from Atlanta took note of the burgeoning granite industry and formed a new business venture: Venable Brothers Granite Company.³⁴ The oldest males of their parents’ seven surviving children, William and Samuel Venable began with a ledge of granite near Lithonia and continued to purchase land over the next decade until, with their final purchase of around 100 acres from the Southern Granite Company in 1894, they owned most of the quarries in DeKalb County.³⁵ To facilitate the shipment of granite blocks and gravel, the Venables paid for two spur lines off the Georgia Railroad, establishing seven miles of privately-

³⁴ Leila Venable Mason Eldridge, *Stone Mountain* (Decatur: DeKalb Historical Society, 1951), 17. Leila Eldridge was William and Sam Venable’s niece. As one of the mountain’s owners in 1951, the DeKalb Historical Society asked Eldridge to write a history of the mountain, and she included a list of previous owners and land transactions since 1846, “quoted verbatim” from an “Abstract of Title in possession of the present owners” (13-14).

³⁵ Eldridge, *Stone Mountain*, 17; “Big Granite Deal: The Venable Brothers Secure a Monopoly of the Stone Mountain Quarries,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, March 14, 1894.

owned road that by 1888 had integrated Stone Mountain and Lithonia into a larger regional network designed to transport granite on its way to becoming capital.³⁶



Figure 3: “Topographic Map of a Part of the Piedmont Plateau of Georgia,” Geological Survey of Georgia, surveyed in 1887-8 (Printed in Watson, 1901). This cropped portion of the map shows Stone Mountain and Lithonia, as well as the railroad lines connecting the granite quarries to Atlanta.

An observer in 1893 described the “immense” operations at the Venable Brothers’ quarries. Even more impressive than the hundreds of workers “engaged in mining and shipping the product throughout the country” was the vastness of the mountain itself:

The mind really is lost in wonder at the magnitude of the mountain. Centuries upon centuries yet to come will see but slight impression made upon the inexhaustible supply of stone imbedded in its sides. Figures cannot calculate the cubic yards of granite that constitute this wonderful freak of nature. Neither can there be calculated the immense

³⁶ Geological Survey of Georgia, “Topographic Map of a Part of the Piedmont Plateau of Georgia: Georgia Atlanta Sheet,” in “A Preliminary Report on a Part of the Granites and Gneisses of Georgia,” by Thomas L. Watson, *Geological Survey of Georgia Bulletin*, no. 9-A (1902): map.

weight which the earth here supports in this mountain. Fortune after fortune will be dug from it, and yet its possessor can always claim abundant resources.³⁷

Even as notions of the hyperbolic “inexhaustible supply of stone” began to obscure the mountain’s more constrained physical reality, the Venable Brothers believed that they had at their fingertips an infinite supply of the granite they needed to extract “fortune after fortune” from the mountain.³⁸ For over twenty years, the Venables leased out portions of their land to other granite companies while maintaining direct control over the largest, most lucrative operations at Stone Mountain and Lithonia.³⁹

From the early 1880s, DeKalb County exemplified the rapid growth of towns and villages characteristic of the New South.⁴⁰ The *Atlanta Constitution*, which had already solidified its reputation as the most ambitious of the many publications boosting the industrial possibilities of the reconstructed region, frequently reported on exciting developments in the granite towns. Headlines hailed “A Big Blast” of thirty-five pounds of powder to open an impressive new quarry and a “Building Boom” as Lithonia’s businessmen invested in new residences and storefronts with the gleaming locally quarried stone.⁴¹ Visitors even flocked to Stone Mountain to witness large explosions at the quarries, merging the town’s tourist roots with the new granite

³⁷ “Col. Waddell Was Re-elected: Secretary Instructed to Cast the Unanimous Vote of the Agricultural Society,” *The Macon Telegraph*, August 10, 1893.

³⁸ “Col. Waddell Was Re-elected: Secretary Instructed to Cast the Unanimous Vote of the Agricultural Society,” *The Macon Telegraph*, August 10, 1893.

³⁹ “Georgia’s Progress: Industries Developed Within the Last Few Years,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 1, 1888; Geological Survey of Georgia, “A Preliminary Report on a Part of the Granites and Gneisses of Georgia,” by Thomas L. Watson, *Geological Survey of Georgia Bulletin*, no. 9-A (1902): 113. A 1901 map of the railroad lines in DeKalb County shows that these spur lines at the Stone Mountain and Lithonia quarries were the only lines off the Georgia Railroad in the county, illustrating the significance of the Venable Brothers’ influence.

⁴⁰ Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South, Life After Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 55.

⁴¹ “Lithonia, Georgia: A Big Blast,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 19, 1883; “Lithonia, Georgia: The Building Boom,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 29, 1883.

business.⁴² But even as boosters of the fledgling industry lauded the Stone Mountain granite as “exceedingly rich in color,” “sparkl[ing] almost like gold,” and “the finest granite the world has ever seen,” the nature of the stone itself sometimes confounded such expectations.⁴³

The geologic processes that produced the Stone Mountain and Lithonia granites were governed by their own laws of nature, which at times undermined the Granite Men’s visions of abundance and uniformity. The particularities of the environment set fundamental limitations on where the quarries could be located and the purposes for which the stone could be used. When exposed to the surface, granite was subject to weathering and discoloration, changing the surface granite from resource to waste.⁴⁴ The texture and structure of the stone also directly impacted the purpose and potential profitability of any given quarry. When the Venable Brothers opened the Floyd Quarry near Redan in 1885, they soon discovered the granite there had a rough, irregular grain, making the stone unsuitable for building blocks or “dimension stone” for monuments.⁴⁵ Such granite could only be used to make crushed stone or gravel, which were far less profitable products.⁴⁶

Boosters’ rhetoric about the unsurpassed quality of Georgia granite was also less convincing to developers in cities outside the South. One engineer based in Cincinnati raised

⁴² “Four Tons of Powder to be Set Off in Stone Mountain Tomorrow,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 1, 1886.

⁴³ “Stone Mountain Granite: Beautiful Specimens of This Georgia Granite Taken From 25 Feet Below the Surface,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 22, 1883; “Searching for Granite,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, March 30, 1889; For other examples of boosterism regarding Georgia granite from the early years of the industry, see “Georgia’s Progress: Industries Developed Within the Last Few Years,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 1, 1888; “Atlanta Sits on a Solid Foundation of Granite,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 17, 1904. Publications from the State Geologist’s office also engaged in similar booster rhetoric about the Georgia granite (see Watson, “Preliminary Report”).

⁴⁴ Geological Survey of Georgia, “Geology of the Stone Mountain-Lithonia District, Georgia,” by Leo Anthony Herrmann, *Georgia Geological Survey Bulletin* no. 61 (Atlanta, 1954): 5.

⁴⁵ Watson, “A Preliminary Report,” 123.

⁴⁶ U. S. Department of the Interior, “Census Bulletin: Mines and Mining.—Granite,” by William Day (Washington, D. C.: Census Office, 1891), 11-12.

questions about whether the Georgia stone would hold up under heavy use, citing a “chemical and microscopic analysis of the Georgia stone” that revealed “a peculiar abundance of mica” compared to granite from the hinterlands of Richmond, Virginia. Explaining that the uneven distribution of mica in Georgia’s quarries made “portions of the granite...much stronger than others” and that such granite was “friable” and might not hold up under pressure, he advised building contractors “not to use Georgia blocks” for paving streets until the granite could be tested to hold up under regular use. He proposed that “two or three squares” of the Georgia paving stones “and a year’s service on some heavily traveled street” would be enough to prove its strength.⁴⁷ This skepticism among developers from other regions illustrates how New South boosters worked to promote the *idea* of Georgia granite rather than market a product based on its actual characteristics. In this way, Stone Mountain granite was beginning a transition from material to symbol. Granite started to mean something as extracting the stone became a new industry with the potential to provide the building blocks of the New South, although its meanings continued to shift and evolve over the decades that followed.

Geological realities, then, established the underlying conditions for the granite industry’s development and set limits on its potential profitability. The work of quarrying created another set of challenges. It required a close understanding of the physical properties of granite for workers to remove blocks of stone neatly from the quarry, thus minimizing waste and maximizing profit. As a doctoral student at Johns Hopkins University in the 1950s, Leo A. Herrmann studied the geology of the Stone Mountain and Lithonia granite and described the

⁴⁷ “The Granite Report: Engineer Stanley on the Result of the Tests,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, August 4, 1886.

methods that workers developed to extract the stone from the earth.⁴⁸ “Raising a ledge” was the first step in opening a quarry: workers drilled a hole deep in the rock and set off progressively larger charges of blasting powder into the hole before forcing compressed air into the hole. The desired result of this process was a rift over a large expanse of the rock, ideally along a joint in the granite for the smoothest, most efficient outcome.⁴⁹ The use of this method early in the DeKalb County industry’s history allowed for the efficient quarrying of sufficiently large volumes of granite each day to enable national competition with the longer-established granite regions of New England and the Upper South.⁵⁰ However, the quarrying of granite in larger and more profitable forms, such as building blocks or dimensional stone, remained limited to the bigger granite companies like the Venable Brothers, who had the capital to invest in the expensive equipment and skilled labor required to move and finish the massive, heavy stones.⁵¹

TRANSFORMATIONS

The environment shaped baseline conditions in the quarries, but the development of the DeKalb County granite industry also depended on a reliable workforce. In 1887, William F. Switzler of the U.S. Bureau of Statistics completed a survey of the new industries in the South. His portrayal of the potential wealth in the region’s extractive industries highlighted the apparent

⁴⁸The earliest attempts at quarrying granite in DeKalb County relied on preindustrial techniques: drillers would use hand drills to bore holes in the stone, then insert wooden wedges into the holes, and finally pour water into the holes to saturate the wood and make it expand, splitting the stone in the process. By the 1880s, compressed air technology powered pneumatic drills, enabling drillers to pour black powder into holes up to twelve feet deep, repeating the blasts as needed until it cracked the stone along a joint. Herrmann, “Stone Mountain-Lithonia District,” 88; “Granite Blocks: How They Are Made by Seventeen Scotchmen at Stone Mountain,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 17, 1883; Freeman, 48.

⁴⁹ Herrmann, “Stone Mountain-Lithonia District,” 88.

⁵⁰ Watson, “A Preliminary Report,” 114. Watson notes that by 1893, the Stone Mountain quarries could yield at least 25,000 paving blocks per day using these modern quarrying techniques.

⁵¹ Herrmann, “Stone Mountain-Lithonia District,” 89.

permanence of the supply of granite at Stone Mountain, but it also suggested that the Southern Granite Company's success could be seen in its employment of "between 300 and 400 men in their quarries, about two-thirds of whom are negroes."⁵² Indeed, it was the "abundance and cheapness of labor" that enabled granite companies in DeKalb County to extract "unlimited quantities of excellent stone" and compete with other granite producing regions, like New England.⁵³

Drawing on the antebellum tradition of commodifying Black workers, some industrialists of the New South believed that the region's most valuable assets were intertwined: "unsurpassed" natural resources and the abundance of Black labor to extract it.⁵⁴ An 1893 editorial in the *Manufacturer's Record* proclaimed that the South's "vast mineral wealth is to be uncovered, millions of feet of timber are to be cut, thousands of miles of railroad are to be constructed, great drainage projects are to be carried through," and "the negroes are a vital factor in Southern advancement... [T]he South could not do without them for a week."⁵⁵ Industrialists who shared this view conceptualized Black labor as akin to a natural resource—an indigent workforce that was, even after the end of slavery, still Southern property.

Even as Black labor was evidently central to the industry's success, the DeKalb County granite companies categorized workers as either "skilled" or "unskilled," and their emphasis on "skilled" white workers hid the significance of Black workers and the industry's dependence on

⁵² "The New South: Results of Chief Statistician Switzler's Explorations," *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 13, 1887.

⁵³ Thomas L. Watson, "A Preliminary Report," 127. Between 1880 and 1890, Georgia's rank among granite producing states rose from twelfth to sixth, "largely due to the extensive operations at Stone Mountain, near Atlanta, which were begun only a few years ago." Day, "Census Bulletin Mines and Mining," 6.

⁵⁴ Janes, *A Manual for the Use of Immigrants and Capitalists*, 52.

⁵⁵ "The Negro as Mill Hand," *Manufacturer's Record*, September 22, 1893, as quoted in Brian Kelly, "Sentinels for New South Industry," 340.

them. White workers most often were stone pavers and cutters who transformed rough blocks of granite into finished, marketable products. The secretary of the Granite Cutters' International Association of America would explain to Booker T. Washington in 1913 that granite-cutting in the South was customarily considered a "white man's trade," and this custom was in place by the 1880s as the Stone Mountain and Lithonia granite quarries quickly attracted white pavers and stone cutters who brought experience from their work in granite regions on both sides of the Atlantic.⁵⁶ Quarry owners like Sam Venable were quick to highlight the skill and industriousness of their pavers and cutters from Scotland. Yet breathless accounts describing how "they are wonderfully expert at breaking the stone"—"the artist in granite [who] chips it away easier than a grocer cuts off cheese"—also resulted in obscuring the industry's reliance on a much larger workforce of unskilled workers, most of whom were African American.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Booker T. Washington, "The Negro and the Labor Unions," *Atlantic Monthly* (June 1913), in *Booker T. Washington Papers, Volume 12, 1912-1914*, eds. Louis R. Harlan and Raymond W. Smock (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 215.

⁵⁷ "Georgia's Progress," *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 1, 1888; "Granite Blocks: How They are Made by Seventeen Scotchmen at Stone Mountain," *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 17, 1883.

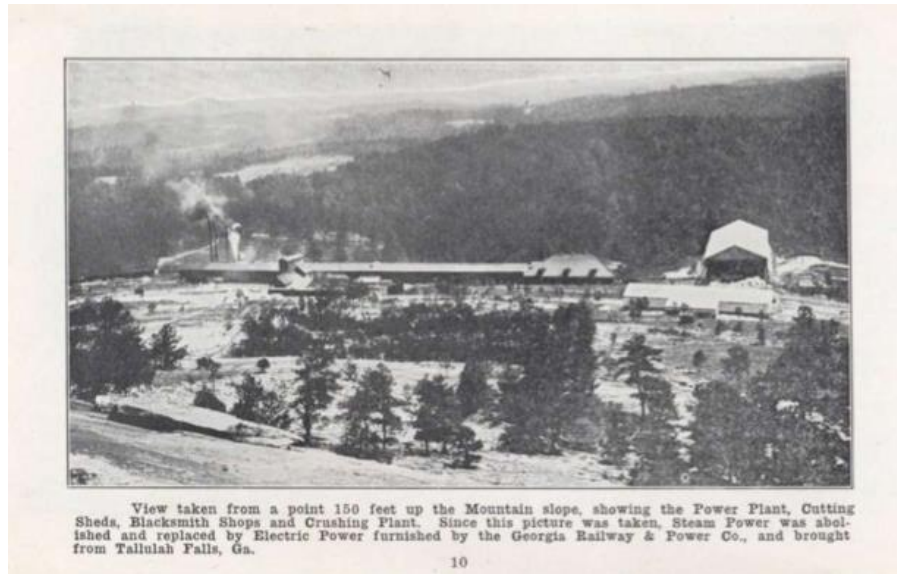


Figure 4: The sprawling Stone Mountain Granite Corporation complex shows how spread out these quarrying operations were. Workers in different departments were separated from each other by race as well as space.⁵⁸

There was difficult and dangerous work to be done before the pavers and cutters could finish the granite blocks in their workshops and send them off to fulfill a contract. The “unskilled” quarrymen—the drillers and general laborers—spent their days drilling into hard rock, setting explosives, hauling granite blocks, clearing away rubble, and driving, caring for, and picking up after mules.⁵⁹ For the granite companies, this was Black men’s work. It was not worth discussing with newspaper correspondents but remained a key component in making the DeKalb County granite industry an exemplar of the New South ideal.

That vision of the New South brought together, as historian Edward Ayers has put it, “the heritage of slavery and the allure of industrial capitalism,” but working out the relationship

⁵⁸ Stone Mountain Granite Corporation, booklet and price list (Atlanta: Foote and Davies Company, c. 1914), 10.

⁵⁹ The kinds of work these quarrymen did is evident in court cases regarding worker injuries in the granite quarries, including *Houston v. Culver, Reynolds & Company*, 88 Ga. 34, Supreme Court of Georgia, 1891; *Crusselle v. Pugh*, 67 Ga. 430, Supreme Court of Georgia, 1881; and *Strodger v. Southern Granite Company*, 99 Ga. 595, Supreme Court of Georgia, 1896. For the long-lasting distinction between white granite workers and Black quarry workers in the 1930s/40s, see Joseph Jacobs, interviewed by Clifford Kuhn, August 16, 1991, Georgia Government Documentation Project.

between notions like “heritage” and “progress” was a messy process. The creation of a new industrial economy drew on elements of the antebellum plantation society that preceded it, with planters and industrialists both working towards goals that included a continuation of a racialized labor regime.⁶⁰ The Georgia legislature’s decision in 1866 to “farm out the Penitentiary” shows how a coalition of plantation owners, antebellum industrialists, and white Republican politicians ultimately embraced a particular new framework for obtaining and controlling labor in Georgia during and after Reconstruction.⁶¹ The 1866 Act established the convict leasing system, in which private companies could purchase a lease for a number of the state’s convicts to work in their industries for a specified period of time.⁶²

Convict leasing was characterized by the state’s acquiescence to capitalists’ desire for labor as well as racial domination over the majority Black population of convicts. After the Civil War, southern states rushed to pass laws that took advantage of the Thirteenth Amendment’s allowance for the continuation of slavery or involuntary servitude as “a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.”⁶³ Under the cover of enforcing new crimes like “vagrancy”—the criminal offence of not being able to produce proof on demand of current employment—white law enforcement officers frequently arrested Black men and some women

⁶⁰ The question of who held political and economic power in the postbellum southern states has been a prominent feature of historians’ debates about this period, but James Cobb pushes back against arguments that either planters or industrialists achieved the power to assert their own goals at the expense of the other. Instead, he argues that the new southern industrial society had much in common with the plantation society that preceded it. James Cobb, “Beyond Planters and Industrialists: A New Perspective on the New South,” *Journal of Southern History* 54, no. 1 (1988): 68.

⁶¹ Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 192, as quoted in Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (London: Verso, 1995), 19.

⁶² “An Act to regulate the manner in which the Penitentiary shall be managed, and to provide for farming out the same,” Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Georgia, Law No. 221, 1866; “Convicts at Stone Mountain,” *Rockdale Register*, February 10, 1876, Digital Library of Georgia: Georgia Historic Newspapers.

⁶³ U.S. Constitution, amend. XIII.

to supply this new form of unfree labor.⁶⁴ The system also illustrates the integration of antebellum social organization with postbellum economic development, as it was easily compatible with the legacy of slavery and white supremacy while also remaining forward-facing and modern, designed to meet the needs of a quickly industrializing and urbanizing society. During the program's early years, the granite quarries of Stone Mountain seemed to provide a perfect venue for establishing the supposed benefits of a penal system that could harness Black labor while supplying materials for infrastructure and urban expansion through profitable public-private partnerships.⁶⁵

A Georgia State Assembly committee in 1866 also anticipated the New South boosters' rhetoric about an infinite supply of granite when it argued for the construction of a new state penitentiary at Stone Mountain. The committee was comprised of members who exemplified Georgia's new ruling class and included plantation owner Howell Cobb along with mill owner and railroad developer Mark Cooper, and they suggested that the vast natural resources of the granite quarries at Stone Mountain would "furnish work for the convicts for all time to come."⁶⁶ They imagined control over Black labor as an eternal project, akin to the belief in a boundless supply of Georgia granite, and the Stone Mountain quarries' proximity to the Western and Atlantic Railroad, which was owned by the state of Georgia, made the idea of transporting convicts to the quarries particularly attractive.⁶⁷ John Darnell, the principal keeper of the state

⁶⁴ Douglas Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: First Anchor Books, 2008), 53.

⁶⁵ Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (London: Verso, 1996), 2-5.

⁶⁶ Howell Cobb, Mark A. Cooper, and John A. Fitten to Charles J. Jenkins, "Report of the Committee on the Location of the Penitentiary," 2 November 1866, Box 53, Governor's Incoming Correspondence, Executive Department Papers, GDAH, pp. 8-10, as quoted in Lichtenstein, 31. For a detailed account of the Georgia State Assembly committee's report on the location of the state penitentiary, see Lichtenstein, 29-34.

⁶⁷ Lichtenstein, 32.

penitentiary, revived the idea of a new prison at Stone Mountain in 1870, arguing that convicts would be able to perform labor for the state by quarrying as well as by working to expand railroad lines.⁶⁸ The interests of the state and of capitalists came together here, as the development of infrastructure was of key concern to both parties.

Stone Mountain never became the site of a penitentiary, but granite company executives like John T. Meador of the Stone Mountain Granite Company eagerly purchased leases to work convicts in the quarries.⁶⁹ But Meador's decision to employ carceral labor led to local controversy in 1876, as the white stone cutters feared the reduction of their wages and the merchants of Stone Mountain worried about a decline in patronage of their businesses due to the presence of potentially dangerous convict laborers lurking about the surrounding area.⁷⁰

When the Stone Mountain Granite Company sold its property to the newly incorporated Southern Granite Company in 1886, the question of convict labor emerged again.⁷¹ *The Atlanta Constitution* reported on a meeting in the town of Stone Mountain that March, at which white citizens adopted a resolution stating that "the employing of convict labor at the exclusion of free labor, by any class of citizens, is clearly wrong in principle, unjust to honest citizens, mechanics and laborers, who rely on honest toil for a living."⁷² Several days later, the *Atlanta Constitution* fanned the flames of public outrage when it published a description of the convict camps at Stone

⁶⁸ Lichtenstein, 56.

⁶⁹ "An Act to incorporate the Stone Mountain Granite & Railway Company, and to confer upon the same certain rights, powers and privileges, and for other purposes therein," *Acts and Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of Georgia, passed in Atlanta, Georgia, at the Session of 1870*, Law No. 235, Georgia Legislative Documents.

⁷⁰ "Convicts at Stone Mountain," *Rockdale Register*, February 10, 1876, Digital Library of Georgia: Georgia Historic Newspapers.

⁷¹ "Southern Granite Company," *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 30, 1886, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁷² "Condemning Convict Labor," *The Atlanta Constitution*, March 16, 1886, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Mountain, describing the “fifty miserable souls wearing the stripes and balls and chains,” most of whom were “negro boys less than twenty years of age.” The reporter also described two convicts who had recently escaped, “a bad, mean looking negro” who had been sentenced to life for murder and escaped the penitentiary by striking his leg chain with his pick, and “another negro [who] escaped in a shrewd and clever manner,” by stealing a guard’s clothes while he slept, “picking up the shotgun[, and] deliberately walking away.”⁷³ Stories of escapees with histories of violent crime were unlikely to improve public opinion of convict leasing in the area, but they also contributed to negative white perceptions of Black quarrymen more generally.

In response to this public outcry, President C. D. Horn of the Southern Granite Company visited the quarries and met with the stonecutters’ foreman to discuss the company’s expectations of the quarrymen. Horn also announced that after the current convict lease expired in April of that year, the company would only hire free laborers.⁷⁴ The residents of Stone Mountain town and the white quarry workers were pleased at the announcement that convict laborers would no longer be employed by the quarries, but the continuation of racialized conflicts in the communities around the granite quarries reveals how the question of convict labor probably had less to do with the idealized dignity of wage work than the white citizens of Stone Mountain had claimed.⁷⁵

While the leasing of convicts at the granite quarries constituted a relatively short chapter in DeKalb County’s labor history, it was nevertheless part of a coercive labor regime that had its

⁷³ “Convict Chat: Something About the Convicts at Stone Mountain,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, March 22, 1886.

⁷⁴ “A Mountain of Granite: The New Management Take Charge of Stone Mountain,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, March 21, 1886.

⁷⁵ “Free Labor at Stone Mountain: The Citizens and Workmen Well Pleased at the New Order,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, March 26, 1886.

roots in the system of slavery but persists in various forms into the twenty-first century.⁷⁶ Even after the granite companies stopped purchasing leases for convict laborers, prison labor continued in DeKalb County. The county had its own convict-operated granite quarry at Stone Mountain, and the chain-gang continued to exist and work to build public works like roads long after convict leasing ended in Georgia in 1908.

When Stone Mountain was acquired by the State of Georgia in 1958, the task of building facilities for the new Stone Mountain Park fell to prisoners of the state.⁷⁷ A prison camp was one of the first structures in the new park, and the prisoners who were housed there built segregated picnic areas, roads and parking lots, and a dam on Stone Mountain Creek to create a stocked fishing lake. They may have also built Confederate Hall and Memorial Hall, central buildings of the Stone Mountain Confederate monument that were also constructed during this period.⁷⁸ The prison camp at Stone Mountain was reportedly demolished in 2002, but the Stone Mountain Memorial Association has contracted with the Georgia Department of Corrections into the twenty-first century to have prisons send inmates to the park for “mandatory work details”⁷⁹ The

⁷⁶ Although histories of Stone Mountain Park state that the prison camp was shut down in 2002, the camp’s address is currently listed as the location of “Stone Mountain Boot Camp,” a “military-style setting” for “young, nonviolent first offenders” on a website about prison ministries. Stone Mountain Boot Camp is not listed as a Georgia Department of Corrections facility today, but the contemporary status of Stone Mountain Park as a publicly owned, privately operated enterprise could be obscuring whatever is going on here. See Freeman, 146-148; Hudson and Mirza, *Atlanta’s Stone Mountain: A Multicultural History*, chapter 5; Stone Mountain Memorial Association, “Georgia’s Stone Mountain Park: Master Plan Amendment Report,” August 15, 2005, <https://stonemountainpark.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/SMMA-Master-Plan-2015.pdf>; Georgia Department of Corrections, FY 1989 Annual Report, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/141118NCJRS.pdf>; “Stone Mountain Boot Camp,” *PrisonMinistry.net*, accessed November 13, 2021, <http://prisonministry.net/SMBC>; “The Bust in Boot Camps,” *Newsweek*, February 20, 1994, <https://www.newsweek.com/bust-boot-camps-190144>; 5500 Venable Street, Stone Mountain, Georgia, Google Maps Street View.

⁷⁷ Paul Hudson and Lora Pond Mirza, *Atlanta’s Stone Mountain: A Multicultural History* (Charleston: The History Press, 2011), chapter 5.

⁷⁸ “Georgia’s Stone Mountain Park: Master Plan Amendment Report.”

⁷⁹ Georgia state prisoner Ralph Gay sued the Georgia Department of Corrections and the Stone Mountain Memorial Association in 2007 for “failing to provide a safe workplace for inmate work details

relationship that began in the early years of the granite industry between the penal system and Stone Mountain appears to have endured.

Following the pushback against the use of convict labor in the Stone Mountain and Lithonia quarries in 1886, granite companies shifted to hiring free Black men to work the granite deposits. While there were already established communities of African Americans in DeKalb County such as the Shermantown neighborhood at Stone Mountain or the Flat Rock community near Lithonia, the opportunity for consistent wage work in the granite quarries drew in greater numbers of Black workers from the county's farms and beyond. Settling at the fringes of the existing towns or in cabins along the Georgia Railroad line, the newcomers commuted by train to jobs at the quarries.⁸⁰ Residents of DeKalb County were more likely than ever to encounter strange faces on the streets, from the numerous Black migrants to immigrant granite cutters from England, Scotland, Wales, Italy, Sweden, and Norway.⁸¹

Even as racial hierarchy structured the nature of work in the granite, the sudden newness of life in DeKalb County in the late 1880s, particularly for white folks, made the Stone Mountain area a breeding ground for racial anxiety and fear. Historian Edward Ayers has detailed the general conditions that were most common in areas that witnessed lynchings during this era: “many black newcomers and strangers,” “few towns,” “weak law enforcement,” and “high levels

in accordance with State law” while on a “mandatory work detail” and he was instructed to climb an unsecured ladder to cut a limb from a tree, then fell 25 feet, sustaining multiple injuries. “Injured Georgia Prisoner’s Negligence Claim Survives, Others Fail,” *Prison Legal News*, May 15, 2007, <https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/2007/may/15/injured-georgia-prisoners-negligence-claim-survives-others-fail/>; *Gay v. Georgia Department of Corrections*, 270 Ga. App. 17, 606 S.E.2d 53 (Ga. App. 2004)

⁸⁰ A strike of the granite cutters at Stone Mountain and Lithonia in early 1888, ostensibly over “the employment of non-union men – negroes – in the quarries,” speaks to the increasing numbers of Black workers following the end of convict leasing in the DeKalb County quarries as well as the beginnings of issues regarding race and union membership during this period; “At Stone Mountain: Strike of Cutters in Quarries There and at Lithonia,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 8, 1888. For more on the demographics of the quarry workers, see Freeman, 43, 47.

⁸¹ Freeman, 45.

of transiency among both races.” All of these characteristics applied to DeKalb County in the 1880s.⁸² As Black workers traveled to and from the quarries each day, they passed scattered farms that were miles away from the county’s towns and sheriffs but whose residents were nevertheless part of the geography of the granite quarries.

At the end of July 1887, at the peak of the quarrying season, simmering white insecurity erupted into violence. This is what we know: Reuben Hudson got on the train at the Conyers station. When it arrived in Covington, the town’s sheriff and marshal boarded the train and arrested Hudson. They said he resembled a Black man who stood accused of attempting to rape a white farmer’s wife named Sarah Bush. Hudson spent the night in the Covington town jail, and the next morning, he woke to a mob gathered outside.⁸³ A reporter from the *Atlanta Constitution* was likely among the crowd, as the newspaper ran a full-page, detailed account of the lynching the following day. Sarah Bush arrived and when asked if Hudson was her attacker, she said, “Before God that is him.”⁸⁴ The mob, reportedly led by Dr. George Goldsmith of Stone Mountain, took Hudson from the sheriff’s custody, and carried him into the nearby woods.⁸⁵ Goldsmith placed a rope around Hudson’s neck and asked if he had anything to say. Hudson allegedly prayed, then said: “Lord, I am not guilty of this crime, and if they will give me time I will find the man who did.”⁸⁶

The crowd jeered, shouting that he had said enough. The *Constitution* reporter described how several men pulled the rope, suspending Hudson in the air for about ten minutes before

⁸² Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 156-157.

⁸³ “Lynching Too Good,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 27, 1887; “Hung With a Cord,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 28, 1887; “She Wanted Him Hanged,” *Augusta Chronicle*, July 28, 1887.

⁸⁴ “Hung With a Cord,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 28, 1887.

⁸⁵ “Hung With a Cord,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 28, 1887; “Admires Goldsmith’s Pluck,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 30, 1887.

⁸⁶ “Hung With a Cord,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 28, 1887.

lowering him to the ground again. Someone asked, “Now, tell us, did you do it?” Another said, “Say it all and say it fast.” Sweat pouring from his face, Hudson asked Goldsmith if he would write down a letter for his wife. He dictated, saying that “he was about to be lynched and that he wanted her to meet him [sic] in heaven.” When Goldsmith had finished writing, the mob once more demanded to hear Hudson confess. The reporter wrote that Hudson again refused, “all the time looking towards the depot as if expecting help.” If help was ever on the way, it never arrived.⁸⁷

The crowd lost its patience with Hudson’s denials. Several men pulled the rope again, tying it off on the tree. The crowd lingered for another ten minutes, watching Hudson die. Some members of the crowd dispersed, heading back to town, while other citizens who had not been part of the lynch mob – “men, women and children” – came and went throughout the day to see the body. The coroner finally arrived in the afternoon, formed a jury, and held an inquest. While the reporter notes that “on the jury were men who were present at the hanging,” the inquest nevertheless determined that Hudson “hung himself, or words to that effect.”⁸⁸

Newspapers from Louisville to Washington D. C. published accounts of the lynching of Reuben Hudson, and while some of the details varied from article to article, reports were consistent that he maintained his innocence until the end.⁸⁹ As news spread of Hudson’s death, it carried with it different meanings for the white and Black people of DeKalb County. While historian Amy Louise Wood has argued that the spectacle of lynching served to shore up a white community’s sense of “superiority and solidarity,” even if its members witnessed the lynching

⁸⁷ “Hung With a Cord,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 28, 1887.

⁸⁸ “Hung With a Cord,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 28, 1887.

⁸⁹ “Hung With a Cord,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 28, 1887; “Short Work,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, July 28, 1887; “A Black Fiend Lynched in Georgia,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, July 28, 1887; “A Brute Lynched,” *The Washington Post*, July 28, 1887; “She Wanted Him Hanged,” *Augusta Chronicle*, July 28, 1887.

only in a newspaper, Ida B. Wells-Barnett was among the first to write about what lynching meant to Black Americans. She argued that white southerners would use any method to subjugate African American men. “They have cheated him out of his ballot,” she wrote in 1892, “robbed him of the fruits of his labor, and are still murdering, burning and lynching him.”⁹⁰

INSTABILITY

The growth of the DeKalb County granite industry had produced new conditions of life and labor that paved the way for the violence of Jim Crow, and the history of the granite quarries in the 1890s shows how this work came to connect granite itself with white supremacist ideology. This process was messy. On the one hand, distinct cracks in the system began to appear in the wake of Reuben Hudson’s death. Through tactics including direct action, litigation, and cultural adaptation, DeKalb County’s African American community mobilized in response to the extralegal violence and exploitative working conditions that put their lives at risk. But there was also backlash to moments of protest, as the white community relished punishments like arrest and imprisonment for Black individuals they saw as instigators of unrest. The uncertain and unstable conditions on the ground in DeKalb County throughout the 1890s turned the granite quarries themselves into explicit sites of racial struggle.

One month after the mob killed Hudson, “the ill feeling which was created by the lynching of the negro at Redan” came to a head at a Black Sunday school picnic in Decatur.⁹¹ Newspapers reported “a race war between negroes and whites in Georgia,” a “riot” of “lawless,

⁹⁰ Ida B. Wells-Barnett, “Southern Horrors,” in *On Lynchings* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2014), 36; Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 8-10.

⁹¹ “A Riot Caused by Rum,” *New York Times*, August 28, 1887.

whisky-soaked negroes” that left at least two men dead and one “mortally wounded.”⁹² Among the dead was the popular young marshal of Decatur, Tobe Hurst, who arrested several “disorderly” picnic attendees before the violence broke out.⁹³ One newspaper cited the recent lynching as the catalyst for the violence:

The negroes have been reported as being restive. This lynching seems to have been freely discussed yesterday, and a black tough whose name is given as Hubbard, and who was quite drunk, pulled a pistol and said he could whip any s— of a b— of a white man in the country.⁹⁴

In the following month, reports that the Black citizens of DeKalb County “have grown more insolent since the Decatur riot” escalated into rumors of gathering crowds that intended to burn down the towns and lynch those who had been involved in Hudson’s killing.⁹⁵ Tensions were high as the papers reported that “rumors are thick of a negro uprising.”⁹⁶

Hudson’s death and the violence of “the Decatur riot” shook the Black community of DeKalb County, and they gathered at prayer meetings going late into the night in the days that followed.⁹⁷ Perhaps it was these gatherings which prompted the rumors that had been spreading in the paper; if there were indeed plans to take revenge on those who had participated in the lynching of Reuben Hudson, these may have been a response to the failure of law enforcement to arrest the perpetrators or hold anyone accountable.

⁹² “A Riot Caused by Rum,” *New York Times*, August 28, 1887; “Decatur’s Riot,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, August 28, 1887; “Fatal Riot at a Colored Church Gathering,” August 28, 1887.

⁹³ “Funeral of the Dead Marshal,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 29, 1887.

⁹⁴ “Blood in Georgia,” *Daily American*, August 29, 1887.

⁹⁵ “They Are Mad,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 31, 1887; “Watching the Negroes,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 2, 1887; “Rampant Negroes,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 16, 1887.

⁹⁶ “The Decatur Riot,” *New York Times*, August 29, 1887. Other episodes also illustrate the palpable racial tension in DeKalb County at this moment. For example, one Black man named Frank Castleberry wielded an ax and knife at the marshal of Stone Mountain while resisting arrest for drunkenness. The marshal shot Castleberry in the leg.

⁹⁷ “In the Atlanta Jail,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 30, 1887.

For the men held responsible for the violence of the “Decatur riot,” however, the criminal justice system took a different route. Local newspapers followed the stories of the accused from their capture in 1887 through their trials in early 1888, when the courthouse at Decatur was reportedly “densely packed with colored people” as one of the defendants’ lawyers argued that the late Marshal Hurst and others had “followed” and “assault[ed]... the colored people as they were going home, peaceably.”⁹⁸ Nevertheless, brothers Jack and Henry Goldsmith were found guilty of “aiding and assisting a prisoner to escape” and sentenced respectively to five and three years in the Georgia penitentiary. Alexander Lovejoy was convicted of murder and sentenced to “imprisonment in the penitentiary for life.”⁹⁹ When sentencing Lovejoy, Judge Richard H. Clark “urged upon the colored people a stricter regard for law as their own safeguard, and the cultivation by themselves of a more kindly feeling towards the whites.”¹⁰⁰

By 1888, it was clear that African American responses to the recent violence had spilled over into efforts among both Black and white workers to achieve their goals for improved working conditions at the quarries, which had by then become the county’s largest employers. While attempts to push back against the racial and capitalist order carried risks and were

⁹⁸ “The Decatur Riot: The Trial of the Alleged Murderer Concluded,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 22, 1888.

⁹⁹ “Bringing Them In: To Answer for the Riot at Decatur Saturday Last,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 1, 1887; “They Were Bound Over: The Goldsmith Negroes are Taken to Decatur for a Preliminary Trial,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 7, 1887; “The Decatur Riot: The Trial of the Alleged Murderer Concluded,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 22, 1888; “Lovejoy is Guilty,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 23, 1888; “Jack Goldsmith on Trial for Felony in DeKalb Superior Court,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 24, 1888; “Verdict Guilty: Jack Goldsmith Goes to the Georgia Penitentiary,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 25, 1888; “Another Rioter on Trial: Henry Goldsmith Arraigned for Aiding a Prisoner to Escape,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 25, 1888; “Another Rioter Convicted: Henry Goldsmith Found Guilty of a Felony,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 26, 1888; “About the Courthouse,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 22, 1888; “For Life: Alexander Lovejoy Goes to the Penitentiary,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 24, 1888; “End of the Riot Cases,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 29, 1888

¹⁰⁰ “For Life: Alexander Lovejoy Goes to the Penitentiary,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 24, 1888

frequently unsuccessful, each such instance of labor activism left granite executives like the Venable Brothers searching for new methods of control.

A different episode in the summer of 1887 sheds light on tensions between the businessmen and granite company executives who sought personal enrichment and power in DeKalb County. One year after Charles D. Horn left the Stone Mountain Granite and Railway Company and sold its assets to William and Sam Venable's company in 1886, he lay dead on the floor of the Kimball House Hotel in Atlanta.¹⁰¹ The feud that led to his death represents a clash between the new granite interests and the former slaveholding class, while also showing how men like Sam Venable interpreted challenges to authority over the granite quarries as unbearable "humiliation."¹⁰²

On a morning in June 1887, Sam Venable and "a young lady friend" took the train up to Stone Mountain to spend the day touring his company's granite quarries and the surrounding countryside.¹⁰³ They encountered Bud Veal soon after their train's arrival. Veal owned property in town at Stone Mountain, including multiple stores, and he was a member of a family of former slaveholders.¹⁰⁴ The Venables leased one store, where they ran a business selling supplies to their company's employees. Veal operated the shop next door.¹⁰⁵

Sam Venable complained that Veal "was creating a great deal of dissatisfaction by stopping purchasers from our store and taking them into his store where he would re-weigh the

¹⁰¹ "Stone Mountain Sold for \$75,000," *The Weekly Telegraph*, Macon, GA, June 1, 1886.

¹⁰² "An Eye Witness Narrative," *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 8, 1887.

¹⁰³ "An Eye Witness Narrative," *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 8, 1887.

¹⁰⁴ "United States Census (Slave Schedule), 1860, Georgia: DeKalb"; U. S. Census Bureau, "1860 Federal Census De Kalb County, Georgia"; "The Former Difficulty: The Circumstances Which Led to the Affair of Yesterday," *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 8, 1887.

¹⁰⁵ "The Former Difficulty: The Circumstances Which Led to the Affair of Yesterday," *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 8, 1887.

goods and make them dissatisfied with their purchases.”¹⁰⁶ Venable was also frustrated that he was having trouble keeping men employed at the granite quarries because Veal would meet workers who came to Stone Mountain by train and demand that they pay him a “\$2 street tax” for the privilege of entering the town.¹⁰⁷ Since many men could not pay in order to go to work in the first place, they would just leave. Venable said that Veal had therefore “driven off all our hands.”¹⁰⁸

When the two men met on the street the morning of Venable’s potentially romantic outing, they argued. Venable said that his company had “done more to build up this town than anything ever did,” and he told Veal that he seemed “bent upon crippling and injuring us in every way you can, driving off our hands by collecting a tax from them for which they are certainly not liable.”¹⁰⁹ Venable later recounted the rest of their conversation for the newspaper:

I said: ‘Mr. Veal it is clear that you are either damned ignorant, or else are bent upon injuring and oppressing our company.’

At this he turned and went into his store. A moment later he came out, and with his right hand behind him as if on a weapon, said: ‘Sam Venable, you are a bulldozer, you’ve got the reputation of bulldozing your way, but you can’t bulldoze me!’

I looked him square in the eyes and replied, ‘You are a damned coward and you are a liar, and I say this knowing you have your hand on your pistol while I am wholly unarmed.’¹¹⁰

This exchange attracted some attention, but Venable and his lady friend eventually departed for their tour of the quarries. While they were gone, Veal went to W. G. Langford, the marshal of Stone Mountain, requesting that he “deputize men and detain [Venable] at the mountain.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ “The Former Difficulty: The Circumstances Which Led to the Affair of Yesterday,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 8, 1887.

¹⁰⁷ “The Former Difficulty: The Circumstances Which Led to the Affair of Yesterday,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 8, 1887.

¹⁰⁸ “The Former Difficulty: The Circumstances Which Led to the Affair of Yesterday,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 8, 1887.

¹⁰⁹ “An Eye Witness Narrative,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 8, 1887.

¹¹⁰ “An Eye Witness Narrative,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 8, 1887.

¹¹¹ Letter from W. G. Langford to Sam Venable, as printed in “He Talks at Last: Mr. Sam Venable Tells of the C.D. Horn Killing,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 23, 1887.

Langford apparently thought that was overkill, but he arrested Venable and took him before the mayor, who then fined him \$25 for disorderly conduct. “Incensed at the indignity put upon him,” Venable swore he would whip Veal on sight if they ever crossed paths again.¹¹²

Two months later, Sam Venable and his company’s assistant manager, V. J. Fagan, met at the Kimball House in Atlanta. They went up to one of the hotel’s rooms, where a Mr. Lewis of the New York-based Rand Drill Company had invited a group of men for an evening of “discussing business matters pleasantly and entertaining each other socially.”¹¹³ There, they joined Charles Horn, who was at that time the contractor for the new Georgia state capitol building, as well as several investors from Cincinnati.¹¹⁴ “All being in the granite quarrying business,” a *New York Times* reporter noted, “they formed a congenial party.”¹¹⁵

Just before nine o’clock, a knock at the door interrupted the party, and Bud Veal came through the door. As “he and Venable scowled at each other,” Fagan quickly jumped up and attempted to get Veal to leave, but before he was able to do so, Venable stood and addressed the room.¹¹⁶ He reminded everyone present of the “nasty, cowardly trick” Veal had done when he had attempted to have him arrested and humiliated two months earlier.¹¹⁷ Such behavior “places him beyond the pale of gentlemen,” Venable said, and he “denounce[d] him as a cowardly cur.”¹¹⁸

¹¹² “An Old Grudge Settled,” *The New York Times*, August 8, 1887.

¹¹³ “An Eye Witness Narrative,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 8, 1887.

¹¹⁴ “The Bystander Killed: An Old Quarrel Between Sam Venable and Bud Veal Renewed at Atlanta,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, August 8, 1887.

¹¹⁵ “An Old Grudge Settled: Prominent Atlanta Man Shot Dead in a Hotel,” *The New York Times*, August 8, 1887.

¹¹⁶ “An Old Grudge Settled: Prominent Atlanta Man Shot Dead in a Hotel,” *The New York Times*, August 8, 1887.

¹¹⁷ “An Old Grudge Settled: Prominent Atlanta Man Shot Dead in a Hotel,” *The New York Times*, August 8, 1887.

¹¹⁸ “An Old Grudge Settled: Prominent Atlanta Man Shot Dead in a Hotel,” *The New York Times*, August 8, 1887.

Venable apparently asked Veal to step outside to “settle the matter,” but when Veal reached behind him – seemingly for a gun – Venable “slapped him in the face” As *The New York Times* described it:

The two clinched, striking at each other’s faces. They fell to the floor, locked in a close embrace. Veal had managed to get his revolver from his hip pocket, and he held it in his right hand as he struck the floor. Venable was on top. Fagan ran to where the combatants were lying and attempted to separate them, but then two pistol shots were fired in quick succession. Horn fell to the floor. A bullet had struck him under the eye and penetrated the brain. Death was immediate.¹¹⁹

Charles Horn died as he attempted to break up a conflict between two men whose disagreement centered on the quotidian arrangements of running the Stone Mountain granite industry. These men were prominent figures in the granite business, and they experienced a surge of celebrity as local and regional newspapers covered the details of Horn’s death, the testimonies of those who witnessed it, and Veal’s suffering from shooting himself in the foot during the fight, as well as his subsequent trial for the killing.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ “An Old Grudge Settled,” *The New York Times*, August 8, 1887.

¹²⁰ “An Old Grudge Settled,” *The New York Times*, August 8, 1887; “An Eye Witness Narrative,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 8, 1887; “C. D. Horn Killed,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 8, 1887; “The Bystander Killed,” *Louisville Courier Journal*, August 8, 1887; “The Former Difficulty,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 8, 1887; “Mr. Venable’s Story: The Circumstances of the Shooting and the Quarrel Which Led to It,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 8, 1887; “C. D. Horn: Shot and Instantly Killed at the Kimball House,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, August 9, 1887; “Day After the Deed: The Sorrow Caused in the Community by Mr. Horn’s Death,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 9, 1887; “The Verdict in the Horn Killing,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 9, 1887; “The Kimball House Homicide,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 10, 1887; “Two Shots or More? The Friends of Mr. Veal Assert There Were More,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 10, 1887; “Mr. Horn’s Funeral,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 11, 1887 (according to this article, workers who were building the new, granite state capitol building left their jobs en masse to attend Horn’s funeral, as he was a contractor on the project); “Mr. Veal Improving But Not Well Enough Yet for a Preliminary Trial,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 11, 1887; “The Stone Mountain Difficulty,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 13, 1887; “At Police Headquarters: Mr. Veal has an Easier Day,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 15, 1887 (this article notes that while Bud Veal was detained, “quite a number of his Stone Mountain friends came down to see him,” as well as “quite a number of ladies” who called); “Veal Has Moved Away From the City Prison to the Markham House,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 17, 1887; “He Talks at Last: Mr. Sam Venable Tells of the C. D. Horn Killing,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 23, 1887; “Seventeen Pieces of Bone Taken Out of Bud Veal’s Foot at Stone Mountain Yesterday,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 27, 1887;

This episode illustrates the role that violence played in shoring up authority, honor, and masculinity. These men prized gentility, but they could also be petty, quick to anger, and violent. However, it also helps contextualize men like Sam Venable, who played an important role in the development of the Georgia granite industry and would go on to be a central figure in Stone Mountain's transition from a natural resource to a symbol of Confederate memory. Conflicts like the one between Venable and Bud Veal set the stage for disagreements decades later amongst those who sought to shape Stone Mountain's future, including Sam Venable. Historian Elizabeth Hale has argued that infighting within the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial Association undermined the project's purpose of "naturalizing" the culture of segregation, and the "halting progress of the carving of Stone Mountain into a memorial, then, provided a paradoxical measure of white regional insecurity, nationalism, and ambition."¹²¹ This earlier history illustrates how conflict between Stone Mountain's elites has confounded the possibility that the mountain could provide a rock-solid foundation, whether for capitalist solidarity in the 1880s or for sectional reconciliation in the twentieth century.

The feud between Sam Venable and Bud Veal also reveals aspects of tension within the white community as Stone Mountain transitioned from a small town surrounded by farmland into the center of a major New South industry. Veal was a child during the Civil War, but he would have witnessed his family lose a large portion of its wealth after the end of slavery. His grandfather had been a major landowner in DeKalb County, and before the war, the men of the Veal family were farmers and slaveowners.¹²² However, emancipation brought about the loss of much of their net worth. For example, Bud's uncle Benjamin Franklin Veal owned a \$20,000

¹²¹ Hale, "Granite Stopped Time," 25.

¹²² "United States Census (Slave Schedule), 1860, Georgia: DeKalb."

estate before the war, but it decreased to \$8,200 by 1870.¹²³ Without a secure future as a gentleman farmer, Bud Veal attempted several different careers over the years, working as an “associate” of Sam Venable, who happened to be his brother-in-law’s first cousin, once removed, and even opening a ledge to quarry granite on his family’s land.¹²⁴ His quarrying operations did not take off though, and his fortunes shed light on the bitter rivalries that could develop between white men of means as the community convulsed with change.

These power struggles within the granite industry also extended far beyond personal vendettas. William Venable’s efforts to increase his influence demonstrate how the DeKalb County granite industry was inseparable from the broader political world of the Atlanta region and the state of Georgia as a whole. Beginning his political career as a member of Atlanta’s board of “commissioners of streets and sewers,” an ideal position for a man in the business of producing granite paving stones, Venable became an active member of the Democratic Party throughout the 1880s.¹²⁵ He went on to become a police commissioner of Atlanta in 1893 as well as a Georgia state senator in 1894, eventually serving as that body’s president.¹²⁶ In these roles, he did not hesitate to use his influence to advance his own goals.

In 1893, during his tenure as police commissioner, Venable received word that George Woodward, the former editor of *The Working World*, an Atlanta weekly, had allegedly called him a “thief.” Venable and Woodward had a history of bad blood, as the newspaperman had opposed Venable’s run for state senate several years earlier, disparagingly referring to Venable as a member of the “forty thieves” in one of the paper’s issues. When Venable heard that

¹²³ U.S. Census Bureau, “1860 Federal Census De Kalb County, Georgia.”

¹²⁴ Geological Survey of Georgia, “Preliminary Report on a Part of the Granites and Gneisses of Georgia,” by Thomas L. Watson, no. 9-A (1902): 120.

¹²⁵ “Why Mr. Venable Resigned,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 6, 1884.

¹²⁶ “The Police Commissioners,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 12, 1893.

Woodward had been “shooting off his mouth again,” he wasted no time acquiring a buggy whip and finding Woodward at his office on Atlanta’s Alabama Street. Woodward later recounted what happened to the police:

“I was sitting here at my desk and was just folding a letter which I had written when the door opened and Mr. Will Venable walked in. He came up to the desk, and asked: ‘Is this Mr. Woodward? Mr. G. K. Woodward?’
“I looked up and recognized him and, turning my chair around so as to face him, told him that it was. Then he said to me:
‘You called me a thief did you, you—’ (and here Mr. Woodward repeated an ugly and offensive epithet, saying Mr. Venable had used it.)
“And as he spoke, and long before I had time to either speak or rise from my chair, he hit me over the head with a loaded cane. The lick was a terrible one, and it staggered me. It dazed me and knocked me back in my chair. Then before I had time to recover from my dazed condition he drew a whip from under his coat and began slashing me with it. Gradually I recovered my senses and trying to defend myself, said:
‘Mr. Venable, I did not call you a thief.’
He continued to ply the whip and called me a lying puppy. I tried to get up but was too weak and could not. I tried to assure him that I had not said anything of the kind, but he would not listen and quit only when he got tired.”¹²⁷

A month following the “horse whipping,” as the local press referred to this incident, William Venable was charged with assault and battery. When delivering the verdict following Venable’s trial, foreman of the jury Burgess Smith reportedly said that “the sympathy of the jury was with Mr. Venable and that he was morally justifiable in his attack, but that according to the law and evidence in the case they had been obliged to find him guilty.”¹²⁸ Judge Westmoreland ultimately fined Venable for his actions, but noted that Woodward’s insults had been sufficient provocation for Venable to have resented him for it. The judge “knock[ed] off \$500 from the fine,” resulting in a fine of \$100, which Venable paid on the spot.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ “With a Buggy Whip: Hon. William H. Venable Assaults Mr. G. K. Woodward, the Ex-Editor,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 3, 1893.

¹²⁸ “The Woodward-Venable Case,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, December 7, 1893.

¹²⁹ “W. H. Venable Was Fined \$100 and Costs for Horsewhipping G. K. Woodward,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, December 9, 1893.

By that point though, Venable had already filed a complaint against Woodward for “criminal libel,” and the next month, the same judge who had begrudgingly fined Venable for his act of violence charged Woodward after he was found guilty. Westmoreland offered some commentary on the whole affair, saying that “the libel perpetrated against Mr. Venable was a great outrage,” and that as “Mr. Venable was one of the most prominent citizens and one of the most representative men in the community...that Mr. Woodward had no excuse and no reason for publishing the libel.”¹³⁰ He charged Woodward \$150, which the editor was not able to pay. He was then arrested and sent to the county jail, where he remained several weeks later, still unable to pay the fine.¹³¹

These incidents reveal a tangle of issues, from abuse of power to neglect of the rule of law. Venable’s disparagement and violence against a workers’ news editor, and the mainstream newspaper’s bald support of him in every instance, provides context for understanding the Venable Brothers’ conflicts with organized labor. Their hostility to the labor movement would grow over time, just as whiteness increasingly subsumed class identity for white workers in the granite industry. This process would culminate in the Stone Mountain Confederate memorial, as a project carved in granite was meant to be the definitive representation of white identity.

Venable worked to consolidate his power, combining his investment in the granite industry with city politics. Like his younger brother, he also responded ruthlessly to those who challenged him, even to the point of physical violence. His social status and connections also helped smooth over potential problems that could arise from being a police commissioner who took the law into his own hands. But as economic conditions including the Panic of 1893 led to

¹³⁰ “G. K. Woodward Found Guilty,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 3, 1894.

¹³¹ “G. K. Woodward Jailed: He is Unable to Pay the Fine Imposed Upon Him by Judge Westmoreland,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 26, 1894.

an overall decline in the Georgia granite industry's profitability, likely contributing to heightened tensions and frayed nerves, power and respect were more than abstract concerns for the Venable brothers.¹³² The New South boosters' exaggerated promise of granite's eternal profitability was not going as smoothly as anticipated, and by the turn of the twentieth century, the Venable brothers' efforts to ensure their power within the existing social and economic contexts increasingly came into conflict with granite industry workers' resistance in the form of strikes throughout the 1890s against the granite companies in the face of dangerous and exploitative working conditions.

Work and life in and around the quarries was rife with dangers, and white and Black workers both developed methods of resistance to labor exploitation and unsafe conditions. News reports of injury and death in the quarries became commonplace, as headlines announced: "His Head Blown Off: A Granite Miner at Lithonia Meets a Horrible Death," "Blown to Pieces by a Blast," and "A Dynamite Explosion... One of the Injured Men Thought to Be Dying—Three Negroes Seriously Hurt."¹³³ But despite the shared dangers white and Black workers faced in Georgia's granite quarries, the geography of segregation meant that these burdens did not fall equally.

¹³² Census reports from 1880, 1890, and 1900 help shed light on economic trends within the Georgia granite industry. In 1880, the value of granite produced in Georgia was \$64,480; in 1890, it had grown to \$732,481. In 1900 though, the value of the Georgia granite industry was down to \$380,434. For data drawn from the 10th and 11th censuses (1880 and 1890), see William Day, *Census Bulletin* (1891): 5. For the 1900 values, see US Department of the Interior, *Mineral Resources of the United States, Calendar Year 1900*, by David T. Day (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), 667. David Day also notes in his report that there was a shift in the Georgia granite industry by 1900 towards greater amounts of stone that was being used for "curbing, riprap work, and road making," while the "value of stone used for building" decreased overall (Day, 667).

¹³³ "His Head Blown Off," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 14, 1888; "Blown to Pieces by a Blast," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 15, 1888; "A Dynamite Explosion," *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 14, 1889.

As the granite industry grew and the larger quarrying operations were able to adopt machinery such as rock crushers to make gravel, slag, or grit, dust pollution extended beyond the boundaries of the quarries themselves. Due to the expansion of DeKalb County's towns coinciding with Jim Crow, Black communities such as Stone Mountain's Shermantown and Lithonia's Bruce Street neighborhoods were located closer to the quarries and the railroads that fed the granite industry's growth.¹³⁴ The impact of environmental pollution outside the quarries combined with Jim Crow to affect the health and well-being of Black communities. As recently as 2015, residents of Lithonia complained that the railroad "has been both a physical and cultural barrier in dividing the town" between the historically Black neighborhood on Bruce Street and downtown.¹³⁵

Following the replacement of hand tools with pneumatic drills and hammers by the 1890s, quarrymen were also at higher risk for developing silicosis or other respiratory illnesses. Workers and others who directly suffered from occupational health risks had long recognized the dangers of breathing in dust at work in mines and quarries, and around the turn of the twentieth century, they referred to the illness that caused symptoms including shortness of breath and coughing up blood as "consumption" or "phthisis."¹³⁶ This condition threatened the pavers and stone cutters who worked with granite inside finishing sheds, but after it became clear by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century that the use of power tools inside these poorly ventilated structures was causing an increase in "stone cutters' consumption," granite companies

¹³⁴ City of Lithonia, "Comprehensive Plan," 2015: 25
https://dca.ga.gov/sites/default/files/lithonia_city_of_comp_plan_update_2015.pdf

¹³⁵ City of Lithonia, "Comprehensive Plan," 23

¹³⁶ David Rosner and Gerald Markowitz, *Deadly Dust: Silicosis and the Politics of Occupational Disease in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 15

invested in systems to improve ventilation and spray water to knock the dust down to the floor.¹³⁷

The mostly Black drillers and other quarrymen who labored outside had no such systems to mitigate their exposure to dust. In a 1919 report for the U.S. Department of Labor on the health of granite workers in Vermont, statistician Frederick Hoffman described how “the greatest amount of dust comes from the surfacing [i.e., drilling] machines which are operated with compressed air,” while “the risk is less in polishing, grinding, sawing, and lathe work” that could be conducted while water constantly spraying on the work surface.¹³⁸ In the Georgia quarries’ segregated workforce, however, the men who worked with these pneumatic drills were more likely to be Black. The extent of occupational and environmental risks among DeKalb County’s granite workers and their communities remains an open question, but as David Rosner and Gerald Markowitz note in *Deadly Dust*, “for Black workers employed in the most hazardous jobs and provided with little protection, silicosis was an acute and life-threatening disease, not a long-term chronic disablement.”¹³⁹

In addition to shaping the spatial organization of communities in DeKalb County, a tangle of race and class interests also shaped white and Black workers’ relationships with each

¹³⁷ Rosner and Markowitz, 39.

¹³⁸ U.S. Department of Labor, Working Conditions Service, *Preliminary Report of Committee on Mortality from Tuberculosis in Dusty Trades* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), 13-14, as quoted in Rosner and Markowitz, 41.

¹³⁹ Rosner and Markowitz, 71. For additional sources about the spread of dust pollution and associated health problems, see J. J. Bloomfield and Waldemar C. Dreessen, “Silicosis Among Granite Quarriers,” *Public Health Reports* 49, no. 23 (1934): 679-684; “The Health of Workers in Dusty Trades,” *Public Health Reports* 48, no. 46 (1933): 1398-1400; U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, “Emissions from the Crushed Granite Industry: State of the Art,” by P. K. Chalekode et al., EPA-600/2-78-02, Cincinnati: Industrial Environmental Research Laboratory Office of Research and Development, 1978. This last source is a report sponsored by the EPA but performed by Monsanto, so there may be something more complicated at work there too, per Ellen Spears’ book on Monsanto and environmental injustice in Anniston, AL: *Baptized in PCBs: Race, Pollution, and Justice in an All-American Town* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

other. In February 1888, just months after the racial tensions of the previous summer, the *Atlanta Constitution* reported a strike of one hundred white granite cutters in response to the Venable Brothers' "employment of non-union men – negroes – in the quarries."¹⁴⁰ When asked for a statement on the affair, Sam Venable explained that the cutters' union had gone on strike before, but that the close profit margins on his company's current contract made it impossible for him to provide the wages the union men demanded. So, he decided to bring in Black strikebreakers from Virginia, and when they arrived and started to work, the cutters "threw down their implements and refused to work."¹⁴¹

The *Constitution* emphasized the role of race in this dispute, and Venable encouraged that divisive interpretation. "It is not our intention to ask the white men to work at the same quarries as the negroes," he said, "but we certainly do not propose to let our employees or anybody else run our business." The notion of racial division between his quarry workers served Venable more than any alternative explanation for the strike. John Campbell, secretary of the local branch of the Paving Cutters' Union of America, explained in a letter that was printed locally before the *Atlanta Constitution* picked it up:

Messrs. Venable Bros. & Foster, probably your memory is somewhat forgetful. If so, I shall remind you of what was said about workmanship... In August last the men were offered a year's engagement at \$20 per 1,000 blocks... In October they reduced them to \$18 per 1,000, and again in December they attempted to take them down another two dollars, which would have brought the figure to \$16 per 1,000, but fortunately, or unfortunately, the last move did not win. From the above points, which defy contradiction, any rational being can see at a glance what sort of men we have to deal with. Seemingly they know more about the union than any one else when they say it is 'almost without exception all Scotchmen.' Allow me to correct that prejudiced opinion. It

¹⁴⁰ "At Stone Mountain: Strike of Cutters in Quarries There and at Lithonia," *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 8, 1888.

¹⁴¹ "At Stone Mountain: Strike of Cutters in Quarries There and at Lithonia," *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 8, 1888.

is composed of Americans, English, Scotch, Irish, Welsh, Danes, Finlanders, Germans, colored, etc., etc.¹⁴²

According to Campbell, the problem was that the Venable Brothers were cutting wages, refusing to meet officially with representatives of the union, and then bringing in strikebreakers. And perhaps for members of the union leadership like Campbell, the strike was truly about these labor issues rather than underlying racial animosity.

Campbell's characterization of the local union as ethnically and racially diverse served to discredit Venable's account of the strike. Union leaders, particularly those on the national level, often took care to emphasize that their organizations were not officially segregated by race, so Campbell may have intended for his description of the Lithonia branch to be in line with this technicality. James Duncan, the international secretary for the Granite Cutters' International Association of America in 1913, elaborated on this situation when he said that there was no rule that excluded Black workers from the union while acknowledging that there were places in the United States where "circumstances make it advisable for white people and Negroes [to be] in separate organizations."¹⁴³ DeKalb County was one such place, and the different trades that made up the granite industry remained segregated, with this 1888 strike illustrating the overlap of questions of wages and contracts, union membership, and racial hierarchy. One striker hinted at the ways in which the racial stratification of the quarries was inextricably connected to other reasons for the strike when he said, "We do not propose to work side by side with niggers, especially when those niggers are trying to injure our business by working at less than union rates."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² "The Strikers' Side: A Communication from the Paving Cutters' Union on the Lithonia Troubles," *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 11, 1888.

¹⁴³ Booker T. Washington, "The Negro and the Labor Unions," *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 1913.

¹⁴⁴ "At Stone Mountain: Strike of Cutters in Quarries There and at Lithonia," *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 8, 1888.

Still, union organizers in DeKalb County did not give up on the hope that Black and white workers could both organize and support each other to achieve better working conditions together. Charles Blasingame, a member of the Quarrymen's National Union who went on to serve as the only Black organizer for the American Federation of Labor in Georgia, helped the African American drillers at the DeKalb County quarries organize into local branches of the national union. In March 1891, the drillers at Lithonia went on strike.¹⁴⁵

The drillers of Lithonia wanted a wage increase, but rather than grant their request the quarry companies "prepar[ed] to put in steam drills as a substitute for negro drillers."¹⁴⁶ In spite of fears that their work was becoming technologically obsolete and company threats to send "north and west for white labor to supply their places," the drillers nevertheless stood their ground. The *Atlanta Constitution* predicted that if the strike continued, "there will doubtless be plenty of cheap farm labor to be had about Lithonia this year, and many a hungry negro hereabouts."¹⁴⁷ The Venable Brothers and the editors of the *Atlanta Constitution* saw the drillers' strike in racial terms. "Rowdy, insolent negroes," as they put it, were acting out of place. But the white workers once again failed to meet the granite company men's expectations that racial difference would divide the house of labor when the Paving Cutters' Union joined the drillers on strike to support their mutual class interests by the end of April 1891.¹⁴⁸ In the early 1890s, white quarry workers, many of whom were immigrants, were not yet fully absorbed into the culture of

¹⁴⁵ "C. H. Blasingame to Samuel Gompers, January 1, 1901," *The Black Worker: Volume 5: The Black Worker from 1900 to 1919*, eds. Philip S. Foner and Ronald L. Lewis (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 122; "The Federation of Trades," *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 11, 1896; "Thriving Towns," *The Atlanta Constitution*, March 16, 1891.

¹⁴⁶ "Thriving Towns," *The Atlanta Constitution*, March 16, 1891.

¹⁴⁷ "Thriving Towns," *The Atlanta Constitution*, March 16, 1891; "The Granite Works Shut Down," *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 11, 1891.

¹⁴⁸ "They Are at Outs: The Blockmakers and the Granite Bed Owner," *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 30, 1891.

whiteness that would result from Jim Crow. To native-born white folks, this moment of solidarity would have been alarming, a suspicious alliance between outsiders and Black men.

Rather than acknowledging the strike and reaching a settlement with the union workers, the quarry companies sought alternative solutions. *The Atlanta Constitution* described how they hired non-union men to do the drilling and the cutting, but “this did not please the members of the Drillers’ Union,... and the non-union drillers were threatened with death if they continued to work.”¹⁴⁹ Blasingame, the leader of the drillers’ union, was arrested alongside three other men. Their arrest for allegedly intimidating the strikebreakers “aroused the negroes to a fever heat,” bringing crowds of protesters to Lithonia’s streets and calling back memories of the tensions that followed Reuben Hudson’s lynching in 1887.¹⁵⁰

Despite the separation of white and Black workers in the quarries, their work remained interdependent. While trades that had unionized separately did not tend to coordinate their activities, the symbiotic relationship of drilling granite from the quarries and then cutting the stone into finished products led the drillers to develop close bonds with the pavers and cutters. *The Constitution* described how “the quarrymen do not belong to the same union that the stonecutters do, but the trades are so similar that the unions are more closely akin than other unions. It is almost as if they were in the same union.”¹⁵¹

Biracial union solidarity in the DeKalb County granite quarries offered a bright moment of possibility, yet it was ultimately short lived. The high point of union activity among the drillers’ union came between 1891 and 1896, and a strike in 1898 largely failed to gain support

¹⁴⁹ “They Are At Outs: The Blockmakers and the Granite Bed Owner,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 30, 1891.

¹⁵⁰ “They Are At Outs: The Blockmakers and the Granite Bed Owner,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 30, 1891.

¹⁵¹ “Strike Still Unsettled: Stonecutters and Contractors Have Not Yet Agreed,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 18, 1896.

from either white or Black workers.¹⁵² By the end of the 1890s, support for the drillers' union had weakened, and racial division undermined cooperation between the white and Black workers.¹⁵³

Between the strikes of the 1890s, the Jim Crow system convulsed in response to such challenges. DeKalb County again became the site of racial violence. On April 2, 1892, two young white girls from Lithonia “went out into the country just above Lithonia to gather wild flowers.” On their way home, the girls cut through a swamp, and when they emerged, they were startled to run into two Black men. The girls accused the men of dragging one of them into a thicket and assaulting her. This allegation fit neatly into racist caricatures of Black men as sexually violent especially towards white women, and it sent Lithonia into an uproar.¹⁵⁴ The *Atlanta Constitution* reported that the white granite workers were the first to join in the “vigorous search” for the accused, establishing one of the first connections between DeKalb County’s granite and white supremacy.¹⁵⁵ Not only were workers segregated in the granite industry, but white workers in this moment acted collectively to stoke racial terror and further embrace a racial identity, rather than “immigrant” or “worker.”

These granite workers “were quickly joined by other gentlemen, and soon pursuers and pursued were lost in the labyrinth of a neighboring forest.”¹⁵⁶ By the time the sheriff of Decatur arrived in Lithonia with a pack of bloodhounds, the mob had returned, reporting that the dogs

¹⁵² “Results are Exaggerated: Contractors at Lithonia Have No Trouble Whatever,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 29, 1898.

¹⁵³ “Results are Exaggerated: Contractors at Lithonia Have No Trouble Whatever,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 29, 1898.

¹⁵⁴ One of the most famous examples of this trope is in Thomas Dixon’s book *The Clansman* (1905), and its film adaptation, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915).

¹⁵⁵ “The Trail Was Cold,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 4, 1892.

¹⁵⁶ “The Trail Was Cold,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 4, 1892.

would not be needed after all since the “negroes is [sic] lost.”¹⁵⁷ No bodies were ever reported to have been found, and when newspapers around the nation picked up the story, the *Los Angeles Times* pointed out, somewhat obviously, that “‘Lost’ Means Lynched in Georgia.”¹⁵⁸

Black quarry workers in the 1890s lived each day with the tensions between their union and their employers and the very real possibility of racial terrorism in the form of lynching. But some workers at Stone Mountain and Lithonia persisted in seeking relief from unbearable conditions, including bringing the granite companies to court. On January 10, 1893, a driller named William Strodger was ordered to leave his post where he was drilling granite to go assist a man named Morton, who was blasting stone. Despite Strodger’s lack of experience in the dangerous business of using dynamite to blast away chunks of granite, he went to help Morton as instructed. The following day, Strodger was again tasked with assisting Morton, who was attempting to remove an undetonated charge from a drill hole. Morton instructed Strodger to pour water into the hole while he used a metal tool to try to pick the charge out of the hole, but while Strodger poured the water, the charge exploded.¹⁵⁹

According to the court reporter of *Stodder v. Stone Mountain Granite Company*, when the charge detonated, it “entirely destroy[ed] the sight in both eyes of petitioner, and [threw] him down with great force upon the rock, rendering him unconscious, and otherwise seriously and permanently injuring him, whereby he has suffered great pain, both of body and mind, from then until now.” Strodger was 25 years old and in good health at the time of the accident, but “by

¹⁵⁷ “A Fiend Lynched,” *Reno Evening Gazette*, April 4, 1892.

¹⁵⁸ “‘Lost’ Means Lynched in Georgia,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 5, 1892.

¹⁵⁹ *The Southeastern Reporter*, 19 (1894): 1022. Cases like this one suggest the possibility of expanding Tomiko Brown-Nagin’s argument in *Courage to Dissent* about litigation and direct action as forces of change in Atlanta in the 1940s. Her book makes a distinction between legal action as a civil rights tool of choice for middle-class, educated African Americans and direct action as being more characteristic of working-class folks, but the evidence in DeKalb County decades earlier shows that the Black working class was using every tool at its disposal to gain some security in their lives.

reason of the injury, he is wholly and permanently incapacitated for earning a support for himself or family.”¹⁶⁰ In spite of the lifelong nature of Strodder’s injuries, a representative of the Stone Mountain Granite Company named Schafer visited the injured driller on February 9 with an offer of settlement for three months’ wages at \$1.25 per day plus an additional \$20. Schafer left the money by Strodder’s bed after propping him up to “touch a pen and make his mark to some paper,--he did not know what, and could not understand for what, owing to his disordered and distressed and disabled mental and physical condition.”¹⁶¹

Strodder later filed a petition against the Stone Mountain Granite Company for fraud, with his lawyers Matthew E. Lofton and George S. Thomas claiming that the company took advantage of Strodder’s incapacitation to impel him to sign the settlement.¹⁶² Judge Richard Clark of the DeKalb County Superior Court ruled that “where an accord and satisfaction is fully executed, the party receiving money from the other cannot rescind on the ground of fraud...without refunding or offering to refund the money.” Since Strodder had kept the \$20 settlement, Clark dismissed his petition.¹⁶³

William Strodder’s case is just one that illustrates how the law was not set up to protect workers, but instead to benefit the granite companies or the state. Strodder’s case was dismissed on the basis of contract law, and other cases from this period show how other legal approaches made workers essentially helpless if they were injured in a quarry. *Houston v. Culver* (1891), in

¹⁶⁰ *The Southeastern Reporter*, 19 (1894): 1022.

¹⁶¹ *The Southeastern Reporter*, 19 (1894): 1023.

¹⁶² Matthew E. Lofton of Decatur was a senior at Atlanta University in 1877-8 before becoming an attorney, and George S. Thomas was listed as one of five trustees of Clark University in 1886. This suggests that both Lofton and Thomas were part of Atlanta’s growing Black middle class, and their support of Strodder may be a counterpoint to the respectability politics of Booker T. Washington during this period. See “Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Atlanta University,” 1877-8” (Atlanta: Atlanta Constitution Power Book and Job Press, 1878); “Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Clark University, Atlanta, Ga., 1884-1885,” (Atlanta: University Press, 1885).

¹⁶³ *Strodder v. Stone Mountain Granite Co.*, 94 Ga. 626, Supreme Court of Georgia, 1894.

which a driller named Houston was injured after his superintendent instructed him to drill in a hole where there was already a charge set, was dismissed because of higher court findings holding that corporations were not liable for the negligence of their officials.

DeKalb County in the 1890s was a place of hope in the power of resistance but also of tension, uncertainty, and death. Union periodicals uniformly listed the Venable Brothers' company on their publications' "Unfair Lists," and the *Atlanta Constitution* reported in September 1893 how "a dozen negro boys" handed out pamphlets addressed to the "Workingmen" of Atlanta, telling them to avoid laboring for William Venable as well as his fellow quarry owners James Collins, Harry Stockdell, and Frank Rice. The pamphlet called the industrialists "our enemies," and said that "any man that ever signs another contract for street work helps Venable... Let's kill the Venables that killed us."¹⁶⁴

The bombing of a boarding house in Lithonia in 1896 reveals further entanglements between race and labor organizing. The newspaper report of the event described how a "feud...between the labor unions and the non-union or scab laborers" had for several years been the cause of "the most intense bitterness...between these two elements employed here in the granite quarries," and that "at times it has been almost impossible to suppress rioting."¹⁶⁵ In April 1896, the trouble started up again when granite companies were slow to sign the price list that would guarantee the Black Quarrymen's Union workers' wages for the year. The union workers went on strike, but "quite a large number of scab quarrymen" took their places. Then late on the night of April 11, "a terrible explosion" shook Lithonia. "A dynamite bomb had been sent off under a negro shack" near the Georgia railroad line, leaving the house with the

¹⁶⁴ "In Big Black Type: Some One Who is Unknown Attacks Venable, Collins, Stockdell and Rice," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 7, 1893.

¹⁶⁵ "With Dynamite," *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 12, 1896.

“appearance of having been splintered by lightning.”¹⁶⁶ About fifteen men had been living in the house at the time, all of whom were apparently “scab quarrymen.” Charles Blasingame, who was by 1896 a member of the executive committee of the Quarrymen’s National Union, was accused of executing “the diabolical plot,” and he was arrested along with three other men: Burrel Posey, Jack Johnson, and Tom Hunter.¹⁶⁷

But by early September 1896, Blasingame was reportedly in Atlanta to arrange for Lithonia’s “union of colored quarrymen” to participate in the city’s Labor Day celebration at Piedmont Park, so he was evidently not incarcerated after the boarding house bombing.¹⁶⁸ Blasingame would lead a group of 300 quarrymen in a parade, apparently all dressed in “pretty uniforms.” The stone cutters’ union from Lithonia, “composed of white men” and one of the “most conspicuous of the visiting unions,” also planned to attend with 150 members. While the *Atlanta Constitution* made much of the “many unions from other cities in the state” who would attend the event, the two Lithonia unions were the only two organizations from outside Atlanta that the paper mentioned by name. Charles Blasingame was also the only Black labor organizer mentioned, highlighting the significance of his work with the Lithonia quarrymen.

There was also a brief flash of unity between DeKalb County’s Black voters and the Populist Party leading up to the election of 1896, and Populist candidate for Vice-President Thomas Watson even came to Stone Mountain just before the election.¹⁶⁹ Arguing for the abolition of the chaingang and protecting the right to vote for Black citizens, Watson attempted

¹⁶⁶ “With Dynamite,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 12, 1896.

¹⁶⁷ “With Dynamite,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 12, 1896; *American Federationist* 3, no. 8 (October 1896), 167.

¹⁶⁸ “Monday Their Day: Labor Unions Will Celebrate Their Holiday in Grand Style,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 2, 1896.

¹⁶⁹ “Watson Was at M’Donough...Speech Delivered at Stone Mountain is Repeated to a Number Without Effect,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 3, 1896.

to entice Stone Mountain's Black Republicans into an alliance with the Populists. But whatever support there was for the "fusion ticket" in DeKalb County, when the votes were counted, the Democrats came out ahead.¹⁷⁰

As the nineteenth century ended, the limited moment of biracial labor solidarity in DeKalb County had largely dissolved into Jim Crow violence and division. The granite company men had had enough of the unions' challenges to their authority. William Venable and his counterparts consequently began to think more creatively about how to end their union troubles while also establishing a workforce rooted more clearly in racial exploitation than ever before. The history of segregation amongst trades in the granite industry meant that by the twentieth century, stone pavers and cutters, and the members of their corresponding unions, were exclusively white men. Combined with a racial system that devalued Black lives and labor, this meant that when men like the Venable brothers went looking for scabs who they could pay less than the unionized stone cutters, they turned to Black workers first. In May of 1900, William Venable had a plan, and he sat down to pen a request to an old acquaintance.

Venable had first met Booker T. Washington five years earlier at the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, where Washington delivered his famous "Atlanta Compromise" address. Venable had served on the exposition's Board of Directors as well as on the "Committee on Colored Exhibit," and his involvement in this event illustrates Venable's ability to leverage his influence in the granite industry and in local politics into positions of cultural significance as well.¹⁷¹ The Cotton States and International Exposition, coming just one year before the U.S. Supreme Court established the constitutionality of segregation in *Plessy v.*

¹⁷⁰ "The Election by County," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 8, 1896.

¹⁷¹ *Official Catalogue of the Cotton States and International Exhibition, Atlanta, Georgia, U. S. A., September 18 to December 31, 1895* (Atlanta: Claflin & Mellichamp, 1895), 12-13.

Ferguson, contributed to the creation of Jim Crow norms. Questions about where and how to include the contributions and achievements of Black Americans in the exposition in addition to logistical decisions to segregate facilities and transportation to the exposition grounds all served to help create a roadmap for segregation laws that targeted public spaces in the years that followed.¹⁷²

In his role in the Atlanta exposition's leadership, William Venable would have also seen firsthand how issues of race and labor shaped the planning and construction of the exposition, as well as its reception by both white and Black Atlantans. Congress had appropriated funds for the exposition's "Negro Building" after Black activists had pushed back against prior expositions' exclusion of Black Americans' accomplishments in the years since emancipation. A pair of Black contractors, J. T. King and J. W. Smith, won the contract to construct the building, employing exclusively Black workers for the project.¹⁷³ This was in sharp contrast to the construction of the rest of the exposition, for which the exposition company largely used convict labor to clear ground and build facilities.¹⁷⁴ Fulton County even provided convicts for free for the exposition's use.¹⁷⁵

Many Black workers as well as the Georgia Republican Party protested the exposition's use of convict leasing, and debates centering on race troubled the exposition throughout its run.¹⁷⁶ These struggles over race and labor were perhaps most visible in Booker T. Washington's famous speech at the exposition's opening. Addressing a segregated audience, Washington

¹⁷² For an account of the role that race played in the planning and reception of the exposition, see Theda Perdue, "Beyond the 'Atlanta Compromise,'" in *Race and the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition of 1895* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 7-52.

¹⁷³ Perdue, 23.

¹⁷⁴ Perdue, 23.

¹⁷⁵ Perdue, 23.

¹⁷⁶ Perdue, 24.

argued that Black southerners should embrace industrial and agricultural labor and learn trades instead of pursuing political power or social equality. “It is at the bottom of life we must begin,” he said, “and not at the top.”¹⁷⁷ Perhaps in Washington’s speech, William Venable saw a vision of a future that he could believe in, too.

Five years after the exposition, Venable attempted to reconnect with Washington. In his letter, he reminded Washington of their acquaintance while boasting that he had “been so very much interested in the progress of the colored race for years.”¹⁷⁸ As the letter went on, though, Venable made it abundantly clear what kind of racial progress he envisioned. Given the extent of the “trouble with the stone cutters,” Venable wrote, he and his brother “have made up our minds to attempt to teach the negroes to cut stone,” allowing them to be “independent of the labor organizations” once and for all.¹⁷⁹ This was a notable shift from earlier rhetoric that cutting stone was “white man’s work,” and it highlights the fact that the racialization of jobs in the granite industry was not based on any intrinsic suitability of one race or another to do a particular job, an impossibility that many at the time claimed to be true. Rather, it was an artificial division that served the interests of industrialists like Venable by decreasing opportunities for interracial class solidarity.

Replacing all unionized stone cutters with non-union Black workers, however, would come at a steep cost for Venable. “When we break away from these unions,” he predicted to Washington, “we will be condemned by every labor organization in the U.S... so you will

¹⁷⁷ Booker T. Washington, “‘Atlanta Compromise’ Speech,” delivered September 18, 1895 at the Atlanta Exposition, *Library of Congress*, accessed May 3, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/multimedia/booker-t-washington.html>.

¹⁷⁸ “Letter from William H. Venable to Booker T. Washington,” May 11, 1900, in *Booker T. Washington Papers: Volume 5: 1899-1900*, eds. Louis R. Harlan and Raymond W. Smock (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 508.

¹⁷⁹ “Letter from William H. Venable to Booker T. Washington,” 508.

appreciate the gravity of our position and its consequences if we take this step.” In addition to this announcement, Venable conveyed a proposal to Washington:

We want to erect on our property at Stone Mt. Ga. (we have 4000 acres) a large cotton factory & run it entirely by colored labor. To do this however we will have to seek the aid of people of the east Fall River or Boston to buy the equipment. We believe we could in a few years have a happy, prosperous [sic] and progressive village of your race at Stone Mt. & demonstrate your theory that they are capable of achieving success & independence in any kind of industrial pursuits. We want therefore to enlist your good offices 1st in giving us your candid opinion as to whether you think the plan is feasible [sic] for (securing good talent for stone cutters — boys with some good idea of angles, squares & figures &c). 2d In securing the necessary aid in the East to establish the cotton factory (we putting up lands, buildings &c) & others contributing machinery. 3d What you will be willing to spend some of your valuable time for, in the east to raise enough to buy the machin[er]y &c. This letter is in confidence—as the labor unions here would give us trouble in our present contracts if they knew we contemplated such a step. Let me hear from you. Very Truly

Wm H. Venable¹⁸⁰

Tired of their struggles with the labor unions, William Venable and his brother Sam imagined not only a granite company free from the constraints of collective bargaining but also a textile factory, with both enterprises utilizing an entirely non-union Black labor force. Perhaps Venable believed he was offering to cast his bucket “among those people who have,” as Washington put it, “without strikes and labor wars tilled your fields, cleared your forests, [built] your railroads and cities, and brought forth treasures from the bowels of the earth.”¹⁸¹ To Venable’s disappointment, Washington apparently did not respond.

William and Sam Venable never built their cotton factory, nor did they switch their granite quarries to an all-Black workforce. William died of a heart attack at the age of 51 in September 1905; following a “slight attack of indigestion” and while talking with his brother-and-law, Dr. J. M. Ellis, “Mr. Venable suddenly lurched forward headforemost to the floor, and

¹⁸⁰ “Letter from William H. Venable to Booker T. Washington,” 509.

¹⁸¹ Booker T. Washington, “‘Atlanta Compromise’ Speech.”

died before the doctor could even stoop to pick him up or raise his head.”¹⁸² Sam Venable then found himself the sole proprietor of the Venable Brothers’ company as well as the properties at Stone Mountain and Lithonia.¹⁸³

Even before his brother’s death, Sam Venable had begun looking for ways to wield his authority in the community in ways that would serve the Venables’ granite interests. As a commissioner for the Atlanta police in July 1905, Venable “took a very decided stand” at a police board meeting to discuss “the negro labor question,” or the question of how to respond to Black “unemployment.”¹⁸⁴ While Atlanta Mayor James Woodward stated at the meeting that “he was glad that the number of arrests had been reduced,” Venable saw this reduction in policing as a travesty. The *Atlanta Constitution* quoted Venable’s response:

There are from 500 to 1,000 negroes in the city...who will not work. ...I think the police should double their efforts to keep these vagrants off the street... I say make them work or get out of town. These vagrant negroes are living off of us. They either get their wives or daughters to steal from us, or they steal.¹⁸⁵

But by describing “Commissioner Venable” as a man who “employs a great deal of labor,” the *Constitution* implied that Venable’s “urgent reasons why the police should prosecute negroes who were idling in the city” were less about the safety and security of Atlanta’s citizens than about controlling Black workers, ideally in ways that would benefit his own granite business. While the shock of his brother’s death dealt a blow to both the Venable granite interests and the family hierarchy, Sam Venable looked to mobilize his position in the racial system of power as he scrambled for control over his company, his property, and the workers he employed.

¹⁸² “Wm. H. Venable Died Last Night,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 2, 1905.

¹⁸³ “Wm. H. Venable Died Last Night,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 2, 1905.

¹⁸⁴ “No Vagrants Wanted Here: The Police Board Discusses Problem of Making Negroes Work,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 11, 1905.

¹⁸⁵ “No Vagrants Wanted Here: The Police Board Discusses Problem of Making Negroes Work,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 11, 1905.

SOLIDIFICATION

As company executives and both Black and white workers struggled over the terms and conditions of the granite industry, the granite quarries themselves took on new meaning. These spaces of labor and resource extraction fit neatly into earlier narratives that granite would form the foundation of a New South. But by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, through the segregation of granite workers into separate trades, the anger of white union members over the occasional appearance of Black scabs, and the enthusiastic participation of white granite workers in lynch mobs and posses, the granite quarries had also assumed symbolic meaning as spatial representations of Jim Crow violence and racial hierarchy. Before Stone Mountain could be inscribed with its infamous Confederate memorial, DeKalb County's granite itself became symbolically connected with white supremacy.

A violent episode in 1908 sheds light on this transformation from granite as a New South resource to granite as a recognizable emblem of Jim Crow. On an October weekend, George Brooks, a white foreman at one of the Lithonia quarries, accused a Black quarry worker named Charlie Mitchell of assaulting him following "a trivial dispute."¹⁸⁶ Brooks took out a warrant against Mitchell, and accompanied Deputy Sheriff Charles Elliott, Bailiff Thomas Peek, and Charles Argo, a young white man who had been deputized for the occasion, to Mitchell's house the following morning to arrest him. What happened next is unclear. Mitchell may have been home with only his wife, or there may have also been a man there named Ike Everhart, who was

¹⁸⁶ "Lithonia Negro Killed by Posse," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 24, 1908.

also Black. Newspapers reported that Mitchell murdered both Peek and Argo, beat Elliott over the head with a pistol, then fled, but Everhart was also later arrested for killing Argo.¹⁸⁷

News of the incident spread “like wildfire” throughout DeKalb County, and newspaper reports described “the stone quarries, woods and cotton fields” as “alive with posses” who trailed after their bloodhounds in the hunt for Mitchell.¹⁸⁸ The posses believed Mitchell to be “heavily armed” and “utterly desperate”; one reporter declared that it was “hardly likely that he will be taken alive.”¹⁸⁹ Mitchell’s wife was also said to have left town, “spirited away by train to Decatur” to avoid a would-be lynch mob.¹⁹⁰

Four days later, Mitchell was hiding in a cotton house when a tenant of that property, a Black man called Rice, found him there.¹⁹¹ Rice reportedly locked Mitchell inside and went to Lithonia, where he told “another negro, George Broadnax,” where Mitchell was hiding. Broadnax then informed J. D. Argo, whose son Charles had been killed several days earlier in the attempt to arrest Mitchell. A posse that included Argo, “Bud Wheeler, a farmer,” “Doc. Rogers, a fearless, cool-headed stone cutter,” and John Farmer, another stone cutter, made its way to the cotton house to capture Mitchell. After “a volley of shots from the posse,” Mitchell lay wounded and dying. The posse reported that they had asked him to confess before he died, and that “he admitted having killed Argo and Peek, thus practically exonerating Ike Everhart

¹⁸⁷ “Lithonia Negro Killed by Posse,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 24, 1908; “Negro Slayer is Shot Down,” *Atlanta Georgian and News*, October 23, 1908.

¹⁸⁸ J. D. Gortatowsky, “Negro Slayer Shot Down; Dies at Door of the Jail,” *Atlanta Georgian and News*, October 23, 1908, Digital Library of Georgia: Georgia Historic Newspapers;

“Negro Murders Two Officers and Escapes,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 19, 1908.

¹⁸⁹ “Negro Murders Two Officers and Escapes,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 19, 1908. Another report contributed to a sensationalized depiction of Charlie Mitchell as a brutish “slayer,” describing how “his arms, knotted with muscle, and his great strong, bulging chest, told of the great physical strength which had enabled him to fight off three determined men and make his escape.” (J.D. Gortatowsky, “Negro Slayer Shot Down; Dies at Door of the Jail,” *Atlanta Georgian and News*, October 23, 1908, Digital Library of Georgia: Georgia Historic Newspapers).

¹⁹⁰ “Negro Murders Two Officers and Escapes,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 19, 1908.

¹⁹¹ “Negro Slayer is Shot Down,” *Atlanta Georgian and News*, October 23, 1908.

[sic], a negro who had been held at the county jail in Decatur and who, some thought, had fired the shot which really killed the former.”¹⁹² Nevertheless, Everhart would later be charged with murdering Charles Argo, and was sentenced to life imprisonment for this crime early the next year.¹⁹³

Following Mitchell’s death, two area newspapers covered the events in depth, echoing the giddy spectatorship that white audiences had engaged in following the lynching of Reuben Hudson in 1887. By 1908 though, advances in camera and printing technology allowed editors to include photographs alongside their reporters’ copy. The photographer at Lithonia captured an image of the posse that found and killed Mitchell.¹⁹⁴ The group stood proudly for the camera. They knew they would be seen as the heroes of the hour.

¹⁹² “Negro Slayer is Shot Down,” *Atlanta Georgian and News*, October 23, 1908.

¹⁹³ “Negro Guilty of Murdering Constable,” *The Atlanta Semi-Weekly Journal*, March 12, 1909; “Negro is Convicted: Slayer of Argo to Get Life Sentence,” *Atlanta Georgian and News*, March 11, 1909.

¹⁹⁴ “Charlie Mitchell’s Captors,” *Atlanta Georgian and News*, October 24, 1908.



Figure 5. “Charlie Mitchell’s Captors,” *The Atlanta Georgian and News*, October 24, 1908.

After their confrontation in the cotton house, the posse had loaded Mitchell into a wagon and brought him back to Lithonia, where a crowd had gathered to make sure he was dead. The *Atlanta Georgian* also ran a photograph of the crowd on the front page.¹⁹⁵ In the front row, Deputy Sheriff Elliott stood with a white bandage wrapped around his head and covering the left side where he claimed that Mitchell bit off his ear in their initial fight five days earlier. On either side of Elliott, the photographer captured the faces of two young boys. They were nearly cut out of the image, as they hardly came up to Elliott’s shoulder. The photo illustrates the broad support throughout the local white community for extralegal violence against transgressors of the racial order. The deputy sheriff’s presence as a law enforcement officer lent a veneer of legitimacy to

¹⁹⁵ “Citizens Aroused at Mitchell’s Capture,” *The Atlanta Georgian and News*, October 24, 1908.

the crowd's gathering, but white men in a range of clothing reflecting their disparate class backgrounds gathered to take revenge on a Black man for killing two of their own.



Figure 6. "Citizens Aroused at Mitchell's Capture," *The Atlanta Georgian and News*, October 24, 1908.

The caption described the crowd as "aroused" but "perfectly orderly," highlighting the group's good behavior and respectability. But at the same time, the papers described the crowd as a "great indignant throng [that] grew in fury as it grew in numbers," waiting for a chance to take Mitchell out of police custody.¹⁹⁶ Finally Mitchell died that night "without a lynching having been attempted."¹⁹⁷ Still, only the public display of his "bullet-ridden body" to the crowd quieted the mob's calls for blood.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ J. D. Gortatowsky, "Negro Slayer Shot Down; Dies at Door of the Jail," *Atlanta Georgian and News*, October 23, 1908, Digital Library of Georgia: Georgia Historic Newspapers; "Lithonia Negro Killed by Posse," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 24, 1908.

¹⁹⁷ J. D. Gortatowsky, "Negro Slayer Shot Down; Dies at Door of the Jail," *Atlanta Georgian and News*, October 23, 1908, Digital Library of Georgia: Georgia Historic Newspapers.

¹⁹⁸ "Lithonia Negro Killed by Posse," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 24, 1908.

Newspaper accounts differentiated between a posse administering justice and a lynching, but Charlie Mitchell died without being tried for his alleged crimes. As one historian has pointed out: “For blacks in Georgia and Virginia, or anywhere else in the South, it no doubt would have been an exercise in academic hairsplitting to suggest that it made any difference whether they were lynched by a posse or a mass mob.”¹⁹⁹ And while law enforcement officers formed posses to assist them in the capture—rather than the killing—of accused criminals, the newspaper reports revealed that the posse had no intention of bringing Charlie Mitchell back to Lithonia to stand trial:

Should the negro be captured there is no doubt but that summary vengeance will be wreaked for his slaughter. It is known that the desperado is armed with two revolvers and has a supply of cartridges, and he declared to his wife as he fled from the scene of the crime that he would never be taken alive. With this knowledge, the posses of man hunters will take no chances, and it is expected that the fugitive will be shot to death on sight. He will never be given the opportunity to take another human life.²⁰⁰

The visible presence of white stonecutters at the head of the posse that shot and captured Mitchell marks a firm end point to an earlier moment when there was some degree of cooperation and solidarity between white and Black granite workers. Twenty years earlier, the granite quarries represented an experiment in New South resource extraction and labor arrangements. But by 1908, segregation and violence had turned Lithonia and Stone Mountain into places where whiteness mattered more than working status. And almost three decades after immigrant stone cutters started arriving in DeKalb County, they were finally “white” under the racial logic of Jim Crow, setting the stage for the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan and the Confederate monument to white supremacy and that followed.

¹⁹⁹ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 45.

²⁰⁰ “Negro Kills 2 Officers, Wounds 1, and Escapes,” *The Atlanta Georgian and News*, October 19, 1908. See also “Negro Murders Two Officers and Escapes,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 19, 1908, which reports that “it is hardly likely that [Mitchell] will be taken alive.”

The newspaper accounts of Mitchell's death mention other Black men and women who also experienced this violent event firsthand. The *Atlanta Constitution* published an article about "John Broadnax, the DeKalb county negro who directed the officers of the law to the hiding place of a murderer of his own race," who provided "an example of obedience to law which should inspire every negro in the south with a desire for emulation."²⁰¹ The article framed the events surrounding the posse's hunt for Charlie Mitchell in terms of a color-blind commitment to law and order even as it also articulated racist ideas about a need for racial uplift to overcome Black criminality:

Whether intimidated by fear, or through devotion to a perverted sense of racial loyalty, negroes too often harbor their criminals... The violator of the law, be he black or white, should be given up to justice... The laws made to punish him are also for the protection of the life and property of innocent, law-abiding people of every race and color... The example of John Broadnax, who hastened from his home to notify the officials of DeKalb that a black desperado had sought its shelter, is worthy of all praise... In the schools and from the pulpits of negro churches the lesson should be continually taught that to defend a criminal is to share in his crime; to deliver him up to punishment is the duty of all who have it in their power to do so. By this means the black race will escape the stigma which has too long rested upon them.²⁰²

White observers held Broadnax up as an example of Black respect for the authority of the posse in its pursuit of justice, but there is another explanation for Broadnax's actions.

In his study of lynching in Georgia and Virginia, W. Fitzhugh Brundage described how African Americans saw posses "as nothing more than masquerades for lawless whites who relished the opportunity to flourish firearms and assume an air of responsibility." They knew that members of posses were rarely punished for extralegal violence, and that "manhunts often degenerated into indiscriminate violence against innocent blacks who found themselves in the paths of posses," at times intimidating and torturing Black bystanders for information to aid in

²⁰¹ "A Negro's Praiseworthy Act," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 24, 1908.

²⁰² "A Negro's Praiseworthy Act," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 24, 1908.

their pursuit.²⁰³ Broadnax likely knew what was at stake if he said nothing and the posse later found out that he had known Mitchell's location.

Genie Mitchell, Charlie's wife, had also known the risk she was taking when she brought ammunition and other supplies to her husband when he went into hiding. She was arrested and charged with being an accessory to murder.²⁰⁴ As she stood trial just months after her husband's death, she would have known that just outside the Decatur courthouse —built in 1898 from Lithonia granite—stood a brand-new, 30-foot-tall obelisk.²⁰⁵ It was one of the United Daughters of the Confederacy's monuments to the Lost Cause, silently undermining the court's promise of impartial justice and equality before the law and setting the stage for Confederate memory to shift the scales even further in DeKalb County's struggle over race, labor, and power.²⁰⁶

SET IN STONE

By the second decade of the twentieth century, Stone Mountain was beginning to take on new meanings as an epitome of soiled natural beauty and mismanaged resources rather than as a symbol of New South prosperity. Whereas newspaper articles in the late nineteenth century discussed the mountain in terms of the spectacular quality of its granite as a building material and how the mass of granite at Stone Mountain would supply wealth to Georgia for eternity,

²⁰³ Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 34-35.

²⁰⁴ "Four Negro Suspects Are Lodged in the Tower," *Atlanta Georgian and News*, October 23, 1908; "Preliminary Trial Was Held at Decatur," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 5, 1908.

²⁰⁵ DeKalb History Center, "Historic DeKalb Courthouse," accessed November 13, 2021, <https://dekalbhistory.org/exhibits-dekalb-history-center-museum/historic-courthouse-history/>; "Monument Unveiled on April 25, 1908," *Atlanta Georgian and News*, April 25, 1908.

²⁰⁶ "Preliminary Trial Was Held at Decatur," *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 5, 1908. "Georgia judge orders Decatur Confederate monument relocated," *Associated Press*, June 12, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/police-brutality-police-andrea-arnold-race-and-ethnicity-ga-state-wire-f6dd7b874f186cc4e7231ba115ed8541>

some observers were shifting their interpretation: “There is enough granite in DeKalb county, outside of touching Stone mountain, to build a wall around the world,” one writer commented in 1911. “Stone mountain should have been preserved as the wonder that it is, but it has not been preserved, and will eventually be so disfigured as to lose many of its natural attractions, then future generations will look upon its scars and say, ‘what fools the old-time Georgians were.’²⁰⁷ And if anyone looked for who was responsible for managing Stone Mountain—and failing to preserve it—they would find Sam Venable.

Following a particularly contentious strike of the white Granite Cutters’ Union at Stone Mountain and Lithonia in the summer of 1911 in which law enforcement authorities arrested union men for the alleged intimidation of non-union workers and arson at a granite finishing plant, Venable decided to relinquish direct control of operations at Stone Mountain by leasing the quarry to Albert Weiblen, a stone contractor from New Orleans.²⁰⁸ After decades of standing as a symbol of DeKalb County’s New South prospects, Stone Mountain’s granite quarries were in someone else’s hands.

But Venable retained ownership of the land, including the towering monadnock and its steep rock faces and summit that had never been practical for quarrying, despite boosters’ calculations of the vast volume of stone it contained. As his control over the granite quarries faded in the 1910s, Venable found a different way to secure his future as a man of influence

²⁰⁷ Sarge Plunkett, “Sarge Plunkett on the Opportunities in DeKalb,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 5, 1911. “Sarge Plunkett” was A. M. Weir’s nom de plume, and he contributed weekly essays of “rustic philosophy and humor” in the *Atlanta Constitution* at the turn of the twentieth century. See *Library of Southern Literature: Bibliographical Dictionary of Authors*, eds. Edwin A. Alderman, Joel C. Harris, and Charles W. Kent (New Orleans: Martin & Hoyt Company, 1910), 470.

²⁰⁸ “Stone Cutters to Ask New Terms in Contract,” *Atlanta Georgian and News*, April 28, 1911; “Masked Men Seek to Stop Workers in the Quarries,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 22, 1911; “Union Eager to End Granite Row,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 24, 1911; “Leasing of the Stone Mountain,” *Stone* 32, no. 10 (October 1, 1911): 538.

while also redefining his legacy. In a 1914 editorial in the *Atlanta Constitution*, attorney William H. Terrell first publicly proposed that Stone Mountain become the site of a “permanent memorial to the confederacy.”²⁰⁹ Using the same rhetoric of permanence that the boosters used in the 1870s and 1880s, Terrell’s proposal also reflected the recent reorientation of the mountain’s significance as a place that should be preserved, since “there is nothing like it on the earth.”²¹⁰ Terrell also wrote that he would not have made such a presumptuous scheme for the privately-owned mountain had he not “been assured, in a recent conversation, by one of the owners of Stone Mountain, that they would be entirely friendly to any movement of the sort, rather than otherwise.”²¹¹

Sam Venable does not feature prominently in the historiography of the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial, but this monument could not have been conceived of or executed without his input and acquiescence. He fully embraced the project, perhaps in hopes that his difficulties with the labor unions or his failure to establish an indisputable regime of racial domination could be washed away via a Confederate retelling of Stone Mountain’s history. The United Daughters of the Confederacy helped him with the personal side of this project. In her 1924 publication of “Miss Rutherford’s Scrap Book,” Mildred Rutherford, official U.D.C. “historian,” included a glowing biography of Venable by Eleanor Raymond Sykes.²¹² In that version of history, Sam Venable invented the process of “raising a ledge” at the granite quarries, and he showed his workers how to perform this essential task. When the drillers struggled to raise a ledge, the

²⁰⁹ William H. Terrell, “Stone Mountain, Eternal Temple to Confederacy, Is Terrell’s Suggestion,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 26, 1914.

²¹⁰ William H. Terrell, “Stone Mountain, Eternal Temple to Confederacy, Is Terrell’s Suggestion,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 26, 1914.

²¹¹ William H. Terrell, “Stone Mountain, Eternal Temple to Confederacy, Is Terrell’s Suggestion,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 26, 1914.

²¹² Eleanor Raymond Sykes, “Samuel Hoyt Venable: An Appreciation,” *Miss Rutherford’s Scrap Book: Valuable Information About the South*, no. 11 (October, 1924): 4-13.

immigrant stone cutters demanded that they receive their full wages while waiting for the stone to cut. Allegedly, Venable “invited the men to come over to a spring located on the property” where “he would have some beer for them, and they could talk over the matter.”²¹³ When they could not come to an agreement, Venable had a solution.

He would wrestle all of them. Anyone who could beat him would receive their full wages while they waited for the drillers to raise the ledge. What followed was apparently an “incident which is without parallel in the annals of dramatic story”:

This tall youth, seemingly made of steel, threw down *nine* of the brawny Scots without resting, then he rested ten minutes and threw down *ten* more. The others refused to wrestle with him, and the battle was won.²¹⁴

In this sporting tale, Venable appeared as a heroic figure, determining a masculine and fair solution to his workers’ problems. He and the immigrant stone cutters were cut from the same cloth, as the story goes. Any antagonism between them could be forgotten, their white identities forging a bond that erased a history of labor disputes.

Venable was also present at the reincarnation of the Ku Klux Klan in 1915, and he continued to be involved with the Klan in the years that followed. He supported annual Klan rallies on Stone Mountain’s summit, and he went on to serve as President of the Empire Mutual Life Insurance Company of the United States, which boasted that it was “owned and controlled by the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan” and headed by “Officers and Directors” who were

²¹³ Sykes, 8.

²¹⁴ Sykes, 8.

“Klansmen of National reputation.”²¹⁵ He even served for a time as the Imperial Klabebe, or treasurer, for the “Invisible Empire.”²¹⁶

His brother’s dream of an acquiescent Black labor force to replace the unions in the granite quarries never came to fruition, but Sam Venable found a solution to his troubles that had the potential to be even more powerful—and more permanent. His ongoing commitment to the Ku Klux Klan beyond his brief cameo in Stone Mountain’s white supremacist origin story suggests that the Klan’s association with the mountain was more than coincidental. Following shortly after the lynching of Jewish factory superintendent Leo Frank in Atlanta, the Klan’s rebirth at Stone Mountain was part of a broader pattern of bigotry even as it remained personal for Sam Venable. As he fought for respect and to assert his white masculinity, Venable turned to the Klan and Confederate memorialization to transform his troublesome granite quarries into something that would provide an easier path to power and authority.

²¹⁵ The Empire Mutual Life Insurance Company of the United States, “Where Does Your Insurance Dollar Work?” Washington D.C., c. 1920s, MO75 Bayfield, CO Ku Klux Klan records, Fort Lewis College, Center of Southwest Studies, https://swcenter.fortlewis.edu/finding_aids/KKK.htm

²¹⁶ Charles C. Alexander, “Kleagles and Cash: The Ku Klux Klan as a Business Organization, 1915-1930,” *Business History Review* 39, no. 3 (1965): 362.



Figure 7: The Ku Klux Klan continued to burn crosses on Stone Mountain for much of the twentieth century.²¹⁷

CONCLUSION

Georgia State Geologist George Little contended in 1876 that “the slow, long process of race development or retrogression covers long periods, almost like the Geological Ages. The constitution of a race, with its corresponding elevation or depression, is the inheritance of successive generations.”²¹⁸ For Little and others who saw parallels between geology and racial difference, such metaphors seemed to affirm their belief in a timeless racial hierarchy. White supremacy was their inheritance, and this argument seemed to support the belief that racial uplift

²¹⁷ “Cross burns as KKK clansmen watch, Stone Mountain, Georgia, August 1980,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* Photographs, <http://digitalcollections.library.gsu.edu/cdm/printview/collection/ajc/id/819/type/singleitem>

²¹⁸ Georgia Department of Agriculture, *Hand-book of the State of Georgia accompanied by a Geological Map of the State*, by Thomas P. Janes (New York: Russell Brothers, 1876), 144.

was possible for African Americans, but only within limits. The New South boosters applied this logic to granite in DeKalb County when they saw in the stone a promise of eternal economic prosperity as well as a source of infinite labor for a Black workforce. The field of geology seemed to assure them that neither granite nor whiteness could ever fail, even as geology itself functioned as a metaphor that helped hide messiness and violence of the recent white supremacist re-ordering of society.

However, both the environmental conditions at the quarries and the physical properties of the rock itself set the terms of the industry's development. And ongoing resistance from both white and Black workers and their communities through the end of the nineteenth century stymied efforts to assemble a tractable labor force that would meet the granite company men's expectations about class and racial hierarchy. Workplace conditions, tensions between workers and their employers, and racial violence fused experiences in and around the granite quarries with the solidification of the Jim Crow regime of racial violence in DeKalb County. That system remained tenuous as the African American community mobilized in response to episodes of racial violence, and both Black and white workers' developed tactics of resistance to exploitative and dangerous conditions in the granite quarries. But the increase in racial violence and antagonism around the granite quarries that accompanied Jim Crow's development ultimately reveals the transformation of DeKalb County's granite from a New South resource to a symbol of white supremacy.

The emergence of the Ku Klux Klan at Stone Mountain and the beginning of the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial project in 1915 should therefore be understood within the context of this longer history. Stone Mountain is one of the most recognizable sites of Confederate memory, and has rightly become the focus of contemporary debates over how to

reckon with the symbols of racism that remain inscribed on our society, our culture, and the landscapes we live in. As the largest Confederate monument of them all, and the centerpiece of one of Georgia's most popular tourist attractions, the Stone Mountain carving presents a different set of questions about its legacy and its future than a statue in a courthouse square.

When historians focus solely on Stone Mountain as a symbol of Lost Cause mythology, they detach it from its full historical context, casting the mountain as a purely cultural product.

Historian David Blight wrote that "by 1913 racism in America had become a cultural industry, and twisted history a commodity."²¹⁹ This "twisted history" replaced paving blocks or monument stones as Stone Mountain's main product. Through the establishment of a Confederate memorial, the mountain became a foundation of granite for a culture of racism. However, the mountain's longer history as part of the DeKalb County granite industry provides a critical case study in how expressions of anti-Black racism in the United States have never been confined strictly to culture or commemoration. The history of the quarries shows how the Stone Mountain Confederate monument and the re-founding of the Ku Klux Klan at Stone Mountain did not happen randomly. These cultural expressions of racism were instead merely the top layer of a white supremacist system that had taken shape over the preceding decades through a constellation of struggles: conflicts over the control and organization of human labor, the imposition of a framework of commodification and segregation in the mountain's quarries, and the undermining of class solidarity through racial violence.

²¹⁹ David Blight, *Race and Reunion*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 391.

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