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Clare V. McKanna Jr.
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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BLACK ENCLAVES OF VIOLENCE

RACE AND HOMICIDE IN GREAT PLAINS CITIES, 1890-1920

CLARE V. MCKANNA JR.

Badly Shot in a Drunken Row.
White Man and Colored Man "Mix" at Coffeyville.
Three Shots Struck Home.
Montgomery Daily Reporter, 14 January 1904

Killed by a Negro: Another Murder in Coffeyville's Tenderloin
Montgomery Daily Reporter, 5 February 1907

KEY WORDS: Coffeyville, enclaves of violence, handgun, homicide, lynching, Omaha, Topeka

Clare V. McKanna Jr. received a Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1993. He is the author of Race and Homicide in Nineteenth Century California (2002) and The Trial of "Indian Joe": Race and Justice in the Nineteenth-Century West (forthcoming November 2003).

[GPQ 23 (Summer 2003): 147-59]

These killings, occurring three years apart in Coffeyville, Kansas, offer bookend images of interracial homicides in the Great Plains. In the first shooting, Charles Vann, a black man and the victim, had been drinking at Walnut and Eleventh Streets in the "tenderloin" district, a black neighborhood in Coffeyville. This region, near the railroad yards, provided entertainment for black customers and occasionally whites in saloons, brothels, and gambling parlors. William Rodecker, a white male horse trader, had just arrived from Missouri and started drinking heavily in this area. About 8 P.M. Rodecker accosted Vann at the corner of Twelfth and Walnut Streets and began to "rag" him. Apparently, Vann took offense and allegedly put his hand on his hip pocket. Rodecker quickly pulled a .38 revolver and

fired four shots in quick succession, mortally wounding Vann.¹ In the second example, on 5 February 1907 Rodecker, just released from prison, became involved in an argument in the exact same area. Al Jesse (one of Vann's friends) pulled a revolver and shot Rodecker three times.² Not surprisingly, the killing of Rodecker occurred less than one block from the previous shooting.

These shootings typified violent behavior in Coffeyville at the beginning of the twentieth century. Since many men carried handguns, it is not surprising that violent confrontations often ended in death. Both homicides are especially significant because of the interracial factor. In the first case Rodecker, the white defendant, appeared before a justice of the peace and was quickly released on a five-hundred-dollar bond, and at a preliminary hearing the Montgomery County district attorney charged Rodecker with murder. Months later a jury found him guilty of manslaughter and a judge sentenced Rodecker from one to five years in prison.³ In the second killing, despite the defendant pleading self-defense (both men had drawn their handguns), an all-white jury found Al Jesse guilty of second-degree murder; he received a twenty-year sentence.⁴ These dramatic shootings provide historians with a window of opportunity to ask the question: how common were black homicides in Coffeyville, Topeka, and other eastern Kansas cities?

MEASURING BLACK VIOLENCE LEVELS

There is considerable literature on the black experience in Kansas. For example, Nell Painter and others have examined the black migration of the "Exodusters" who arrived to make a new life in rural Kansas after the Civil War. However, most of these studies deal with rural agricultural communities such as Nicodemus, Hodgeman, Morton City, and Parsons, which developed when blacks fled the South to escape mob violence, lynching, and discrimination.⁵ Arriving in large numbers, blacks soon discovered that discrimination also existed in Kansas and Nebraska.

Thomas C. Cox and others have graphically described the black experience in cities such as Topeka, Wichita, and Parsons.⁶ Nevertheless, there is a dearth of information on violent crime involving blacks in Kansas.

In the past few decades, social scientists and historians have collected data on violence among blacks in Miami, Philadelphia, Houston, and other urban centers.⁷ Data reveal black homicide rates in 1980 reached 55 per 100,000 in Dallas, 77 in Cleveland, and 98 in Miami and were ten times higher than white rates.⁸ The disparity between these two ethnic groups is remarkable. It is the thesis of this essay that such high rates for blacks is not of recent origin; the data will demonstrate that black homicide rates have been high for more than a century and can be traced to "enclaves of violence" that developed in Coffeyville and Topeka, Kansas, and Omaha, Nebraska.⁹

A variety of factors illuminate the development of black violence in Kansas and Nebraska cities. For example, the railroads that developed in these cities attracted hundreds of young blacks searching for steady employment. While Coffeyville and Topeka may have seemed to be tranquil to some observers, certain regions became "killing zones" for blacks who lived and worked in these cities. Alcohol also played an important role in violence levels. Railroad workers, meatpackers, and common laborers often spent their leisure hours in saloons, gambling parlors, and restaurants located near the railroad yards. Guns offer another part of the violence equation: cheap handguns, selling for less than three dollars, made their appearance during the 1880s and continued to flood the market well into the twentieth century. Finally, place provided the nexus where a variety of factors, such as the rapid, critical convergence of young men, guns, alcohol, and minor grievances, came together to create deadly "enclaves of violence."

This study focuses mainly on black homicides in four eastern Kansas counties during the period 1890 to 1920 but includes a comparison with Omaha, Nebraska. Labette, Leavenworth, Montgomery, and Shawnee Counties were

selected because of the presence of a significant black population. Leavenworth and Shawnee Counties, in northeastern Kansas, provide urban areas that offer a natural comparison with two rural counties. Although not large cities, Leavenworth and Topeka, Kansas (population between 20,000 and 50,000), offer an opportunity to examine the treatment of black defendants accused of homicide in an urban setting. These cities displayed a stable black population during the study period. Leavenworth County, with 4,465 blacks in 1890, declined to 3,780 by 1920 (10 percent of the total population), while Shawnee County's black population averaged 5,700 over the three decades (9.7 percent of the population).

Labette and Montgomery Counties, located in southeastern Kansas (bordering Oklahoma), provide a rural setting in which to assess the impact of black migration. Although the black population is smaller than in the urban counties, Montgomery County experienced significant growth, with the black population jumping from 947 in 1890 to 2,954 by 1920. This included in-migration of blacks who worked on three railroads that passed through Coffeyville. Neighboring Labette County's black population was 2,045 in 1890 and declined slightly over three decades to 1,980, suggesting a more stable environment in towns like Oswego and Parsons than in Coffeyville.

BLACK POPULATION MIGRATION

A series of push-pull factors explain the black in-migration to Kansas cities. Many blacks viewed southern police power as repressive and unjust and left to escape oppression. Police brutality was common in Richmond, Atlanta, and other cities, and this created unrest among southern urban blacks. Sometimes blacks resisted this form of violence, especially in Atlanta.¹⁰ Lynchings also served as a push factor. For example, two historians discovered "a very striking relationship between migration and lynching in Georgia and South Carolina."¹¹ Pull factors such as job opportunities, better living conditions, and the absence of

blatant racial persecution contributed to the black migration to Kansas and Nebraska. Railroads especially offered job opportunities for blacks moving into Great Plains cities.

Coffeyville experienced social change that created problems during the early part of the twentieth century. Blacks began to migrate into Coffeyville slowly, numbering 803 in 1900, or about 16 percent of the total population. By 1910 the black population had jumped to 1,309 (10 percent) and finally to 1,480 by 1920 (9 percent). The 1900 census reveals that 84 percent of the black males in the black district that developed along the railroad yards had migrated from the South, with an additional 12 percent from western states. By 1910, 75 percent of the black males claimed the South as their birthplace.¹² The black neighborhood in Coffeyville became concentrated near the Missouri Pacific Railroad yards that extended along a corridor north to south for several blocks, paralleling Walnut Street. The pool halls, gambling parlors, saloons, and houses of prostitution were frequented not only by black patrons but also by whites.

Topeka also proved to be a popular destination for blacks, with 77 percent migrating from the South. The black population peaked in Topeka in 1890 with 5,037 persons (16 percent) and then declined to a low of 4,272 (8.5 percent) by 1920. By 1895, 42 percent of the blacks migrating into Topeka lived in the second ward, near the Missouri Pacific and Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad yards.¹³ Historian Thomas Cox noted that blacks employed by the Topeka Railway Company "were relegated to the most menial tasks"; however, black workers were more successful in finding jobs with the Kansas Pacific Railroad.¹⁴ Despite discrimination in Topeka, blacks found employment in service-related businesses or operated their own barbershops, restaurants, and saloons. Cox found that "service businesses were most numerous, with barbers and caterers heading the list." Blacks usually had to settle for jobs as common laborers and they experienced blatant racism, such as signs stating "Negroes Need Not Apply" in Topeka factories.¹⁵

During their leisure hours some black workers leaving the railroad yards visited the saloons, gambling parlors, houses of prostitution, and pool halls nearby. Alcohol abuse created problems, and newspaper editors criticized excesses that brought crime to Topeka, especially prostitution. One editor suggested that such "women should be driven to the suburbs" and regulated "by a competent physician."¹⁶ This enticing region, just west of the railroad yards, became a prominent gathering place for young blacks.

Omaha experienced similar pull factors. The Union Pacific Railroad, Union Stock Yards, and Cudahy, Armour, and Swift meat-packing companies offered job opportunities in Omaha. Blacks moved into the region west of the Union Pacific Railroad yards and some became involved in service-related businesses such as saloons, gambling parlors, pool halls, and brothels. By 1910 Omaha's red-light district became concentrated in a core of city blocks that extended from Davenport Street south three blocks to Douglas, and from Ninth Street west three blocks to Twelfth. Many saloons served as social gathering places for railroad and stockyard workers in this highly concentrated district. Local officials attributed any crime that occurred in this region to blacks who lived in and around it. Black newspaper editor H. J. Pinkett protested that disreputable saloons created problems for neighboring black residents. He ran several editorials calling for cleaning up of the "bootlegging and gambling joints" that seemed to be everywhere.¹⁷

ENCLAVES OF VIOLENCE

Coffeyville's "enclave of violence" developed in the Tenderloin district that ran north to south for four blocks along Walnut Street and extended eastward from the railroad yards four blocks. The Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad crossed Walnut Street at about the 1300 block and continued northeast on a parallel course. Virtually all of the homicides that were committed by blacks and that could be identi-

fied with a specific street location (eight cases) occurred along Walnut Street from the 1000 to 1300 blocks. This black neighborhood proved to be a killing zone for blacks in Coffeyville¹⁸ (See Fig. 1).

For example, around 4 A.M. on 28 October 1902, Jess Brown and Frank Lee were sitting and playing poker in a gambling house at 1014 South Walnut Street. Apparently, Lee accused Brown of cheating, jumped up from the table, and threw the cards in Brown's face. Brown pulled a .44 Colt revolver and shot Lee through the heart. Police found a cocked .41 Colt revolver lying next to Lee; apparently he was too slow on the draw. Jess Brown was a well-respected black; Lee, however, appeared to be an unsavory character who had recently assaulted a police officer. A jury found Jess Brown not guilty.¹⁹ In a similar case, on 7 June 1907, Thomas Clark and Frank Emerson became involved in a dispute about an obscene note that had been sent to Emerson's wife. Known locally as "Society Red," Emerson confronted Clark at about midnight at Maple and Thirteenth Streets near the railroad yards. After a heated argument, Emerson pulled a revolver and fired one fatal shot into his victim.²⁰

White males sometimes became the victims of black assailants. In January 1917 Ed Brown, a white male, had been living with Lucille Jones, a black woman, at 1208 Beech Street. Brown became jealous of Simon Raines, Jones's seventeen-year-old nephew who also lived in the house. Apparently Brown had been abusing Lucille and threatened Raines with a butcher knife. Raines pulled a revolver and fired four shots, with three hitting their mark. Raines claimed self-defense; a jury agreed and found him not guilty.²¹ Recent homicide studies reveal that assailants usually kill their victims in their own neighborhoods. Virtually all of the killings involving blacks in Coffeyville occurred in this black neighborhood along Walnut Street.

Topeka's "enclave of violence," commonly called "Smoky Row," was located in the second ward, south of the Kansas River and west of the railroad yards. Most of the killings took

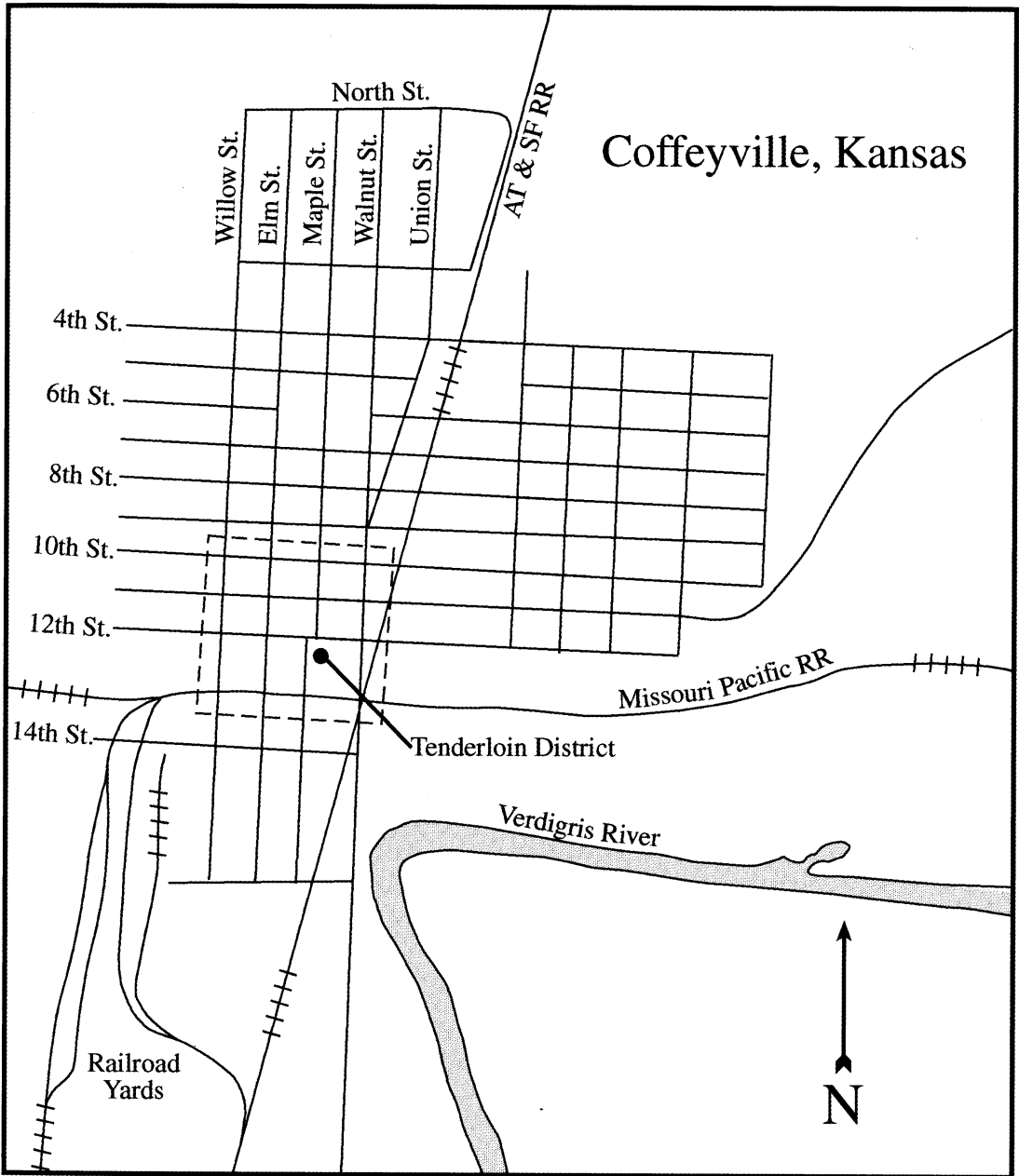


FIG. 1. Coffeyville, Kansas. Map by Melodie Tune.

place within a zone stretching from Crane Street south three blocks to Second Street and extending east from Van Buren four blocks to Monroe. Twelve homicides occurred within this small area, two others east of the railroad

yard, and six more a few blocks south in Tennesstown, in the third ward²² (See Fig. 2). Women rarely committed homicides, but there were exceptions. On 5 November 1899 Joanna Dupree became involved in an argument with

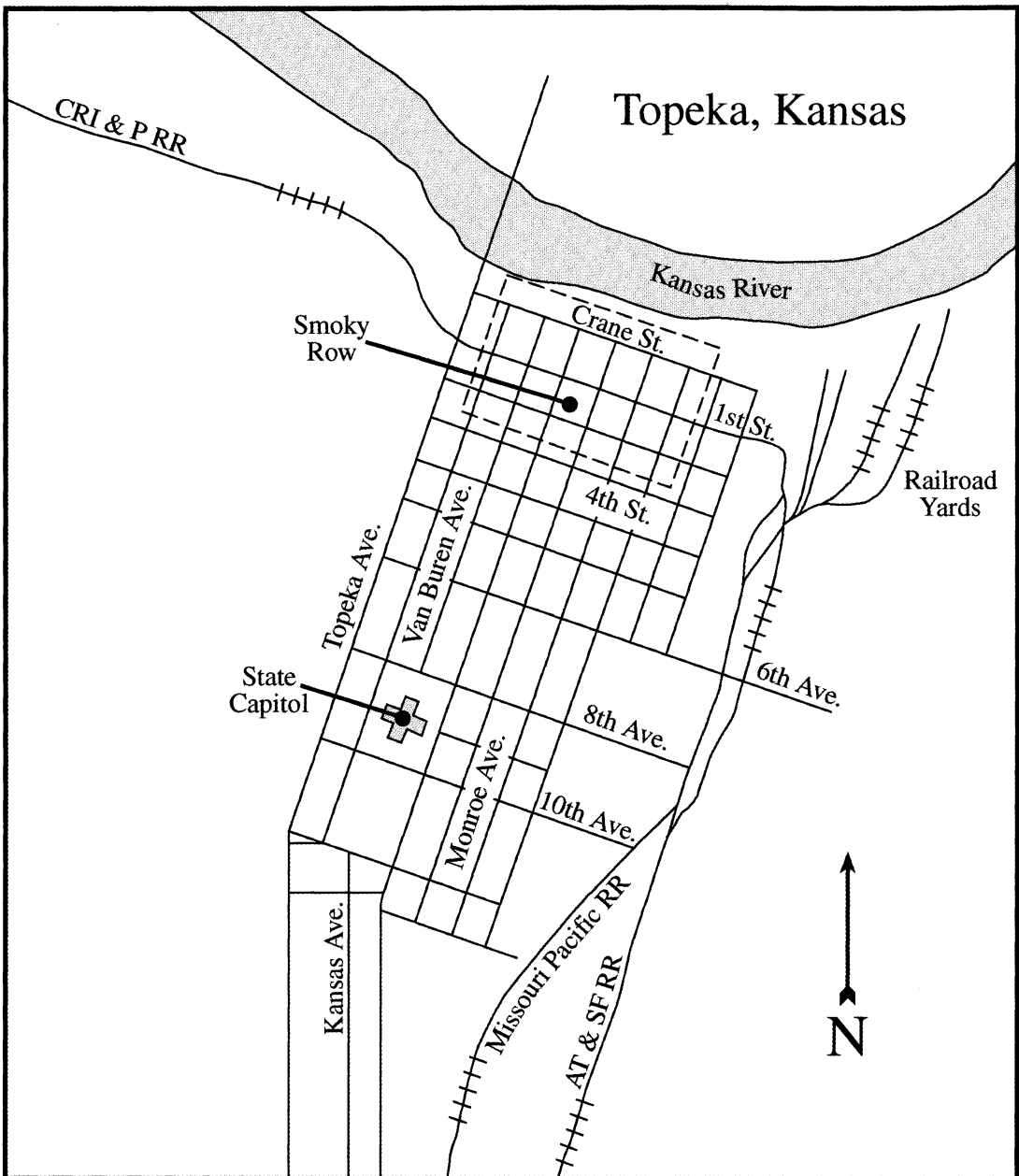


FIG. 2. Topeka, Kansas. Map by Melodie Tune.

Thomas “Red” Erwin on Smoky Row. Erwin, a tough talker, challenged Dupree: “If you can shoot any faster than I can, get your gun.”²³ Dupree went back into her house, picked up a .41 Colt revolver, returned to the street, and

shot Erwin dead on the spot. Although she was indicted for murder, a jury found her not guilty.²⁴

Young black males carried concealed weapons that proved to be an invitation to vio-

lence. For example, on 21 March 1900 Robert Smith, age eighteen, became involved in a dispute over a baseball that a group of boys had been playing with. William Richardson, age sixteen, took the ball and tried to leave. Smith pulled a revolver and shot Richardson in the face, killing him instantly.²⁵ Arguments over such trivial issues as a baseball or some other item of property and small bets often became deadly. In August 1904 Harvey Enochs stabbed Shadrack Simms to death in a crap game dispute in "Will Guy's Dive" on First Avenue and Monroe.²⁶ Nine years later James McCoy shot Clarence Sydnor in an argument in Sydnor's Pool Hall at 404 Kansas Street.²⁷ In 1915, in a fight over personal honor in an alley behind 218 Kansas Street, James Williamson shot Harry White three times because "he insulted my sister." A jury found Williamson guilty of second-degree murder and sentenced him to six to ten years in prison.²⁸ Finally, in 1915 Ada DuPree killed John Bronsema in a dispute over twenty-five cents on the corner of Monroe and Crane Streets. DuPree plea-bargained guilty to manslaughter.²⁹ Petty disputes, personal honor, concealed weapons, and alcohol proved to be deadly.

Omaha's "enclave of violence" developed in the region west of the Union Pacific Railroad center where most of the shootings involving blacks occurred. Omaha's unsegregated black neighborhood was the focal point of various racial groups; this accounts for the high interracial killings, with whites accounting for 32 percent of the victims of black assailants³⁰ (See Fig. 3). With killers and victims alike under the influence of liquor and well armed, minor disagreements often ended in violence.

Interracial homicides involving black assailants usually occurred in or around pool halls, gambling parlors, or saloons. Two interracial killings involving women suggest prostitution-related issues or the possibility of an insult. On the night of 27 July 1905, William Miles, a black male, stood talking to Florence Flick, a white woman, who had been living with him for two years. Recently, Harry McGechin, a

white man, had taken up with Flick. Miles and McGechin met in front of the Cambridge Hotel on the corner of Thirteenth and Capitol Streets and began to argue. Miles pulled a knife and quickly cut McGechin's throat; he died within minutes.³¹ In a similar case, a black male known as Lucky Brown took offense to remarks made by three inebriated white men at Twenty-sixth and N Streets about a woman he was escorting. Brown pulled a pistol and fired several rounds that left one man dead. Police were unable to apprehend the killer.³² These two cases display aspects of southern culture such as a heightened degree of personal honor. A careless comment, an unintended jostle on the street, or a gesture could bring a quick and deadly response from blacks conditioned by living in the South. Many black southerners had a strong sense of honor that dared not be sullied.

Sometime in 1908, Henry Brown, a black dining-car waiter for the Union Pacific Railroad, fought with Carrie Carter, a black woman who lived with him. After a bitter quarrel, she left him and moved into separate living quarters. Henry discovered her new residence and tried to convince her to return and live with him. She refused. On 8 February 1909, exasperated by her refusal, Brown visited a neighborhood pawnshop where he hocked his overcoat in exchange for a cheap handgun and a box of shells. He loaded the weapon and walked to Carrie's new residence at 1223 Capitol Avenue. After a brief argument in front of her house, Henry fired two shots, one of which struck her under the right arm, proving fatal. This scenario displays the ease with which individuals could obtain handguns in Omaha. It also indicates the single-mindedness and the premeditation of this killer; he pawned his overcoat in the dead of winter in exchange for a handgun.³³

DISCUSSION OF DATA

Research uncovered 381 homicide indictments within the four Kansas counties. Despite population differences, rural Montgomery

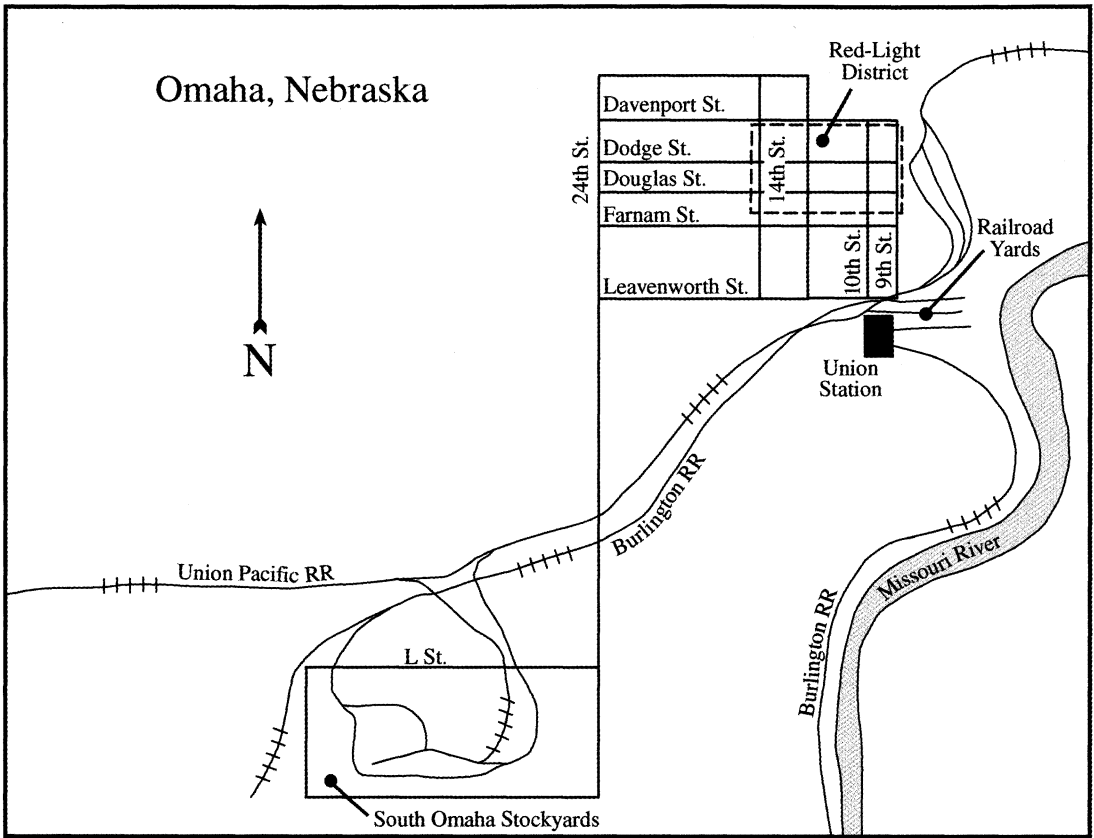


FIG. 3. Omaha, Nebraska. Map by Melodie Tune.

County had virtually the same number of homicide indictments as Shawnee County, which is dominated by urban Topeka (Table 1). This suggests that rural county homicide indictment rates sometimes mirror those of urban counties. Since indictment data were unavailable, the 162 cases in Leavenworth County reflect actual homicides taken from coroner's records.³⁴

Coffeyville, with a modest black population, had a higher black homicide indictment rate than Topeka; however, both exhibited higher rates for blacks compared to whites. Coffeyville and Topeka proved to be the most dangerous homicide hot spots in these four Kansas counties. Coffeyville, with a population of 13,452 in 1920, recorded forty-four homicide indictments (sixteen blacks and twenty-eight whites). Topeka, with 50,022,

TABLE 1
HOMICIDES/INDICTMENTS
KANSAS AND NEBRASKA COUNTIES,
1890-1920

County	1890-1920
Shawnee	91
Montgomery	90
Labette	38
Leavenworth	162
Douglas	237
Totals	618

Source: Criminal Appearance Dockets, Shawnee, Montgomery, and Labette counties and Coroner's Inquests, Leavenworth County and Douglas County, Nebraska, 1890-1920.

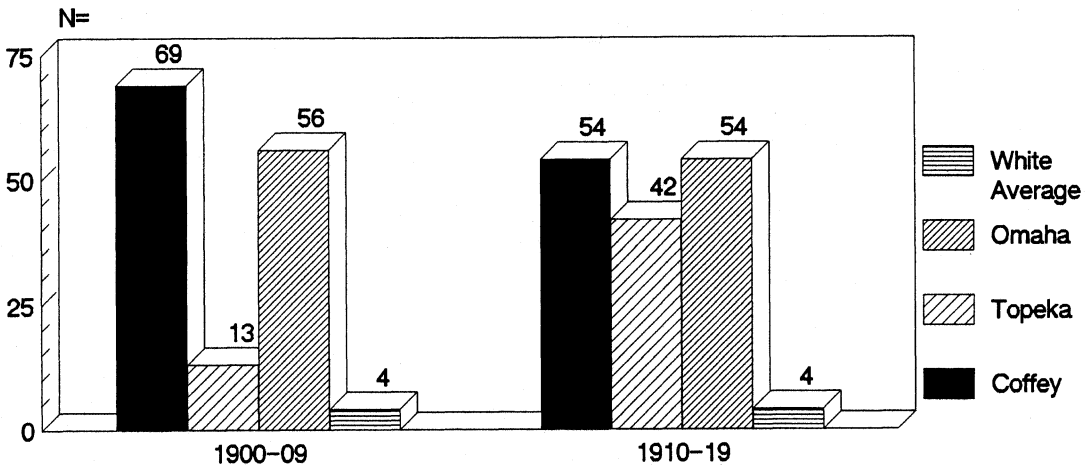


FIG. 4. Indictment rates per 100,000 black defendants in Coffeyville, Topeka, and Omaha, 1900-1919.

had fifty-six homicide indictments (thirty-one blacks and twenty-five whites). In Coffeyville and Topeka, with just 13 and 11 percent of the population, respectively, blacks contributed 36 and 55 percent of all homicide indictments. In Omaha, blacks received 37.5 percent of the homicide indictments but represented 7.6 percent of the total population. The transient nature of Coffeyville's black population and three railroads that enticed black workers into the region help to explain high violence levels. Coffeyville, Topeka, and Omaha had railroads, rapid population growth, and racial discrimination.³⁵ Equally important, high indictment rates for blacks may indicate a bias in the criminal justice systems. This was probably caused by a skewed accused/indicted ratio, meaning that blacks would more likely be indicted if accused of a crime, especially if they killed white victims. The accused/indicted ratio is the percentage of those individuals actually indicted selected from those who were identified and accused of murder.³⁶ Finally, lower black homicide indictment rates within Topeka may suggest a more stable society.

Black homicide indictment rates for 1900-1909 were 69 per 100,000 population for Coffeyville, 13 per 100,000 for Topeka, and 56 per 100,000 for Omaha (Fig. 4). The rates

for 1910-1919 remain high, with 54, 42, and 54 per 100,000, respectively, for Coffeyville, Topeka, and Omaha. White homicide indictment rates during this period averaged 4 per 100,000 in all three cities. Black homicide indictment rates exceeded white rates by a factor of ten or more. These Great Plains cities, however, were not the only ones that displayed such disparate figures; Roger Lane discovered similar high rates among blacks in Philadelphia.³⁷

The black homicide indictment rates for Coffeyville, Topeka, and Omaha have seldom been equaled except in some modern cities during the 1980s and 1990s.³⁸ Critics might complain that Coffeyville, with sixteen cases, is too small a sample to be reliable compared with the much larger population in Omaha, with sixty-five cases. However, statistics reveal that if you were a black male living in Coffeyville, your chances of being killed would be higher than if you lived in Omaha. Sixteen of 1,309 blacks were killed in Coffeyville compared to thirty-one out of 4,538 in Topeka, and sixty-five victims out of 5,143 blacks in Omaha. Blacks were also at risk in Leavenworth and Independence.

Following trends discovered in earlier studies, handguns played an important role; blacks

selected handguns to commit their homicides 65 percent of the time, while whites chose them 53 percent of the time. Blacks usually selected handguns patterned on the Webley British Bulldog double-action revolver (patented in 1883), probably because they were cheap. This model, with a two- or three-inch barrel, allowed for easy concealment in a coat pocket. American arms manufacturers copied this design and produced large quantities of the five-shot revolvers in several sizes, including .38 and .32 calibers. In the 1880s, the Iver Johnson Arms Company named its versions the American Bull Dog and Boston Bull Dog. The Harrington and Richardson Company, noted for making "Suicide Specials," switched to a similar design. Forehand and Wadsworth, Remington, Stevens, and other American gun manufacturers also produced similar guns. These cheap handguns sold for less than three dollars.³⁹

The combined population of the four Kansas counties reached 191,253 in 1920, compared to a population of 204,524 in Douglas County, Nebraska. Three of these Kansas counties had a combined total of 219 homicide indictments, and Leavenworth County had 162 homicides, compared to 237 indictments and 391 actual homicides in Douglas County, Nebraska between 1880-1920. Previous research suggests that if coroners' inquest records had been available, the actual homicides would have been approximately 25 percent higher, or about 436 homicides for the four counties.

Conviction rates in the four Kansas counties offer a similar pattern to those discovered earlier in Omaha, where 84 percent of black defendants were found guilty. Black defendant conviction rates reached 86 percent in Shawnee County and averaged 77 percent in Labette and Montgomery Counties.⁴⁰ White defendant conviction rates were 52 percent in Labette and Shawnee Counties and 43 percent in Montgomery County, compared to 37 percent in Omaha. Black defendant plea bargain rates were 41, 31, and 12 percent, respectively, in Shawnee, Labette, and Montgomery Counties, while Omaha had a plea bargain rate

of 32 percent. Whites rarely plea bargained in either state.⁴¹ The data reveal that blacks were especially at risk in these Great Plains cities.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

In his discussion of a "regional culture of violence," Raymond Gastil used the term "southernness" to help identify the persistence of southern culture in transplanted members of black society who moved to other regions such as the Great Plains cities of Coffeyville, Topeka, and Omaha. They carried with them their cultural tradition that included a propensity to settle problems, especially those involving "honor," with force that often could be lethal. Gastil established high correlations of southernness with blacks and high homicide rates.⁴² This supports an earlier study on black crime in Philadelphia by W.E.B. DuBois.⁴³ Many years later, Roger Lane, in his discussion of blacks in Philadelphia, suggested that "a different social psychology resulting from blacks' exclusion from the dominant experience with factory, bureaucracy, and schooling; a heritage of economic and other insecurities; and a long and complex experience with criminal activity" best explain black crime.⁴⁴ One is left with the conclusion that blacks brought their proclivity for violence with them when they left the South and moved into Kansas and Nebraska.

As noted earlier, in 1904 William Rodecker killed Charles Vann, a black patron in front of a saloon in Coffeyville. Three years later, just released from prison, Rodecker returned to Coffeyville's black neighborhood and was shot by Al Jesse, one of Vann's friends. Not surprisingly, both shootings occurred within this "enclave of violence." Authorities had sentenced Rodecker, a white man with a history of violence, to five years in prison, while Jesse received a harsher sentence. Black defendants paid a higher price in the criminal justice system, especially if they killed white victims.⁴⁵ These killings reveal the problems that many blacks faced in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Kansas and Nebraska.

Whether in Montgomery, Labette, Shawnee, Leavenworth, or Douglas County, young black males were at risk.

There are a series of factors that tie the homicides of Vann and Rodecker and many of the other killings together: gender, race, alcohol, guns, and place. First, most of the victims were men: 86 percent of all homicide victims in Kansas and 90 percent in Nebraska. These killings usually involved two young males arguing over a grievance such as a fifty-cent pool hall bet, an affront of honor, or a woman. These affairs often escalated into deadly violence. Although ranging in age from eighteen to sixty, the majority were men in their twenties and thirties.

People usually kill within their own ethnic group, but there were exceptions; race played an important role in interracial killings such as the Walker, Vann, Rodecker, and Jesse cases. In fact, 32 percent of the black killings in Omaha involved white victims. In the Kansas counties, blacks killed white victims 19 percent of the time. Kansas and Nebraska were the recipients of an ethnically diverse population that included blacks, Hispanics, and other whites. And, of course, ethnic minorities were treated differently by a criminal justice system that favored the white majority who controlled it; sheriffs, jury members, attorneys, and judges came mainly from white society.

Alcohol provides another strong connection among these homicide cases, as many of the young men, both victims and killers, had been drinking. Railroad workers, merchants, and common laborers gathered in saloons, gambling parlors, and brothels in Coffeyville, Topeka, and Omaha for entertainment, especially at night and on weekends. In Omaha, 75 percent of the killers had been drinking, while in the four Kansas counties an average of 71 percent had been.⁴⁶ Consequently, alcohol became a catalyst for violence. Although not a causal factor, alcohol consumption tended to reduce inhibitions and sometimes made young men reckless.

Guns bind these murders together as well, with most killers selecting cheap handguns to

commit their crimes. Kansas and Nebraska, like much of the American West, developed a strong gun culture. Anyone could carry a small revolver, enter a saloon, have a few drinks, and if challenged, draw and use it to settle any real or imagined grievance. Black assailants in these Kansas counties used handguns 65 percent of the time to kill their victims, while 75 percent of the black killers in Omaha used them. The carrying of handguns ensured that physical confrontations would often be deadly. Victims of assaults with knives, blunt instruments, and fists had a better chance of surviving than those shot with firearms. By their very nature, guns were more lethal. If the victim survived the initial shock of being shot, infection remained a great danger due to the nature of the wound. Doctors were ill equipped to deal with the effects of shock and trauma associated with gunshot wounds, especially the massive trauma caused by abdominal gunshot wounds, which often led to peritonitis. Consequently, most shootings were fatal.⁴⁷

Place also played an important role. Because of labor shortages, railroad companies enticed black workers to move to Coffeyville, Topeka, and Omaha. This new, fluid, transient black population was essential to the economic success of railroads and other industries in these cities. Blacks migrating from the South established their own neighborhoods, including saloons, pool halls, and gambling houses near the railroad yards and factories. Virtually all of the black homicides occurred within these enclaves where young male patrons, black and white, intermingled.

Finally, in evaluating the data, one can distinguish a well-defined pattern of interaction among minor disputes, alcohol, and heavily armed men. This *modus operandi*, coupled with the critical convergence of a young, ethnically diverse, and transient male population into these cities, explains high homicide levels. It is also possible that other Kansas counties would reveal similar violent patterns to those shown in this study.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, the factors of gender, race, alcohol, guns, and place assured that these cities would develop

"enclaves of violence" that would be deadly for young blacks who were, ironically, fleeing the South to escape injustice in the courts and white violence.⁴⁹

NOTES

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2. *Ibid.*, 5 February 1907.
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4. *People v. Al Jesse*, 22 May 1907, *ibid.*
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7. See Harold M. Rose and Paula D. McClain, *Race, Place, and Risk: Black Homicide in Urban America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); Margaret A. Zahn, "Homicide in the Twentieth Century United States," in *History and Crime: Implications for Criminal Justice Policy*, ed. James A. Inciardi and Charles E. Faupel (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1980), pp. 111-32; William Wilbanks, *Murder in Miami: An Analysis of Homicide Patterns and Trends in Dade County (Miami) Florida, 1917-1988* (New York: University Press of America, 1984); Darnell F. Hawkins, *Homicide among Black Americans* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1986); Marvin E. Wolfgang, *Patterns in Criminal Homicide* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1958); Lawrence E. Gary, "Drinking, Homicide, and the Black Male," *Journal of Black Studies* 17 (September 1986): 15-31; and Anthony E. O. King, "Understanding Violence among Young African Males: An Afrocentric Perspective," *Journal of Black Studies* 28 (September 1997): 79-96.
8. Rose and McClain, *Race, Place, and Risk* (note 7 above), p. 26; and Wilbanks, *Murder in Miami* (note 7 above), p. 142.
9. H. C. Brearley, *Homicide in the United States* (Montclair, N.J.: Patterson Smith, 1932), pp. 218-19. During the period 1920-1925, Brearley discovered that black homicide rates had reached 87, 99, and 101 per 100,000, respectively, for Kansas City (Kans.), Dallas, and Cleveland. Also see Clare V. McKanna Jr., "Seeds of Destruction: Homicide, Race, and Justice in Omaha, 1880-1920," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 14 (fall 1994): 65-90.
10. See Howard N. Rabinowitz, "The Conflict between Blacks and the Police in the Urban South, 1865-1900," *The Historian* 39 (November 1976): 62-76. Rabinowitz found examples of "the effective use of intimidation by blacks against white policemen."
11. Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, "Black Flight: Lethal Violence and the Great Migration, 1900-1930," *Social Science History* 14 (fall 1990): 360-61.
12. A 20 percent random sample of heads of black household was collected for this study. See US Bureau of Census, 1900 and 1910, *Twelfth Census: Population, Thirteenth Census: Population* (Washington, D.C., 1901, 1911). Kansas, Montgomery County, Coffeyville.
13. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka* (note 6 above), pp. 203-8.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 115-16.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 87 and 90-93.
16. *Daily Capital* undated, as quoted in *ibid.*, p. 107.
17. *Omaha Monitor*, 19 April and 17 August 1919.
18. *Criminal Appearance Dockets*, 1890-1920, Montgomery County, County Clerk, Independence, Kans.
19. *Coffeyville Daily Journal*, 29 October 1902, and *People v. Brown*, 21 November 1902, *ibid.*

20. *Coffeyville Daily Journal*, 11 June 1907. A jury found Emerson guilty of manslaughter, see *People v. Emerson*, 24 October 1907, *Criminal Appearance Dockets*, Montgomery County.

21. *Coffeyville Daily Journal*, 12 January 1917, and *People v. Raines*, 13 February 1917, *ibid.*

22. The location of an additional eleven homicides remains undetermined. See *Criminal Appearance Dockets*, 1890-1920, Shawnee County, County Clerk, Topeka, Kans.

23. *Topeka Daily Capital*, 9 November 1899.

24. *People v. DuPree*, 25 November 1899, *Criminal Appearance Dockets*, Shawnee County.

25. *Topeka Daily Capital*, 22 March 1900, and *People v. Smith*, 4 April 1900, *ibid.* Smith plea bargained guilty to second-degree murder.

26. *People v. Enochs*, 20 September 1904, *Criminal Appearance Dockets*, Shawnee County. Enochs plea bargained to manslaughter and received a sentence of five years in prison.

27. *People v. McCoy*, 5 May 1913, *ibid.* McCoy plea bargained to second-degree murder and received a ten-year sentence.

28. *People v. Williamson*, 19 February 1916, *ibid.*

29. *People v. DuPree*, 29 September 1915, *ibid.*

30. McKanna, "Seeds of Destruction" (note 9 above), p. 71.

31. *Omaha World-Herald*, 28 July 1905, and *People v. Miles*, 2 August 1905, *Criminal Appearance Dockets*, Douglas County, County Clerk, Omaha, Nebr. Convicted of manslaughter, Miles received a five-ten-year sentence.

32. *Omaha World-Herald*, 16 August 1913.

33. *Ibid.*, 9 February 1909. *People v. Brown*, 26 April 1909, *Criminal Appearance Dockets*, Douglas County, Nebr. Convicted of first-degree murder, Brown received a life sentence and was paroled in 1929.

34. Coroner's records were unavailable for Shawnee, Montgomery, and Labette Counties.

35. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka* (note 6 above), pp. 92-93; and McKanna, "Seeds of Destruction" (note 9 above), pp. 68-69.

36. The accused/indicted ratio could not be calculated because of the unavailability of coroner's records in Labette, Montgomery, and Shawnee Counties and indictment records in Leavenworth County. Similar research in California has revealed a significant disparity, with authorities indicting accused Indians 82 percent compared to whites with 46 percent. See Clare V. McKanna Jr., *Race and Homicide in Nineteenth-Century California* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2002), p. 100.

37. Roger Lane, *Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia, 1860-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 142-43. Another earlier study indicates that homicide rates for blacks in urban ar-

eas continued to be high during the 1920s, with Nebraska's urban black homicide rates (mainly Omaha) reaching 69 in 1920 and 1925, while Kansas black rates in Kansas City and Leavenworth, respectively, were 87 and 31 per 100,000. See H. C. Brearley, *Homicide in the United States* (1932; reprint, Montclair, N.J.: Patterson Smith, 1969), pp. 99 and 218. Brearley used actual homicides, rather than indictments, collected from federal government statistics.

38. For other comparisons see Rose and McClain, *Race, Place, and Risk* (note 7 above); Zahn, "Homicide" (note 7 above), pp. 111-32; Wilbanks, *Murder in Miami* (note 7 above); and Wolfgang, *Patterns in Criminal Homicide* (note 7 above), pp. 361-83.

39. A. W. F. Taylerson, *Revolving Arms* (New York: Walker and Company, 1967), pp. 32-44; Geoffrey Boothroyd, *The Handgun* (London: Cassell, 1970), pp. 221-24, 345-57. One could purchase handguns through Sears, Roebuck for less than two dollars. See *The Sears, Roebuck Catalog* (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck and Company, 1902), pp. 316-21.

40. Without indictment data conviction rates in Leavenworth were unavailable.

41. See McKanna, "Seeds of Destruction" (note 9 above), pp. 77-78; and *Criminal Appearance Dockets*, 1890-1920, Montgomery, Labette, and Shawnee Counties, County Clerk.

42. Raymond D. Gastil, "Homicide and the Regional Culture of Violence," *American Sociological Review* 36 (June 1971): 421.

43. W. E. B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899), pp. 238-68.

44. Lane, *Roots of Violence* (note 37 above), p. 173. For an earlier study on homicide and aggressive behavior, see Martin Gold, "Suicide, Homicide, and the Socialization of Aggression," *American Journal of Sociology* 58 (May 1958): 651-61.

45. *People v. William Rodecker*, 30 January 1904, and *People v. Al Jesse*, 22 May 1907, *Criminal Appearance Dockets*, Montgomery County, Kans.

46. Clare V. McKanna Jr., *Homicide, Race, and Justice in the American West, 1880-1920* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), p. 27; "Coroner's Inquest, 1890-1920," Leavenworth County, Kans. Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society Center for Historical Research; *Criminal Appearance Dockets*, 1890-1920, Labette, Montgomery, and Shawnee Counties; and *Coffeyville Daily Journal*, *Montgomery Daily Reporter*, *Topeka Daily Capital*, *Leavenworth Advocate*, *Leavenworth Herald*, *Labette County Times*, and *Oswego Independent*.

47. David McDowall, "Firearm Availability and Homicide Rates in Detroit, 1951-1986," *Social Forces* 69 (June 1991): 1085-1101; and Gary Kleck

and Karen McElrath, "The Effects of Weaponry on Human Violence," *Social Forces* 69 (March 1991): 669-92.

48. During my 1997 research trip to Kansas, I collected partial data in Cherokee County that revealed 94 homicide indictments; 27 percent were black defendants. Conviction rates for blacks

reached 95 percent and 21 percent plea bargained. See also Wyandotte (Kansas City), Atchison (Atchison), Douglas (Lawrence), Sedgwick (Wichita), and Crawford (Pittsburg) Counties; they also had significant pockets of black population.

49. Tolnay and Beck, "Black Flight" (note 11 above), p. 354.