“What they did is hurting my family,” Patrick W. Tanner testified to members of Congress on the Joint Select Committee Inquiring into the Affairs of the Late Insurrectionary States on July 7, 1871. A gang of armed and masked white men had attacked the Tanner family several weeks earlier and Patrick was there to report what transpired. Congressional investigators at the Ku Klux Klan hearings interviewing Tanner used the past tense to describe the violence done to him as an individual. In so doing, they indicated a belief that nightriding was a discrete event with no further consequences for victims which invalidated Patrick’s ongoing and potential long-term suffering. In using both the present tense and collective language, Tanner wanted to communicate the full nature of the horrors his family endured.

Interpersonal violence had been a part of daily life for blacks and whites during slavery. It continued throughout the war and the first years of emancipation. Outside of state executions of enslaved people and efforts to quell slave rebellions, most of this involved individual whites attacking individual blacks and vice versa and the targets fighting back. What happened to Patrick Tanner’s family was different.

A wave of terror swept across many former slaveholding states after Congress passed the 1867 Second Reconstruction Act, requiring the former rebel states to write new constitutions recognizing African American men’s right to vote. Armed white supremacists organized themselves into posses bent on curbing the possibilities of black liberation. Rather than reigniting the war and fighting the politicians or soldiers who made legal freedom and resulting civil and political rights for blacks possible, these men operated as racial vigilantes, waging organized assaults on civilians. Contemporaries often described this violence colloquially as “visits,” suggesting harmless social calls that masked the atrocities nightriders typically committed. Nightriders attacked families in their homes in the middle of the night and often without warning. Some men simply fired inside

---

1Testimony of Patrick W. Tanner, July 7, 1871, Joint Select Committee Inquiring into the Condition of Affairs of the Late Insurrectionary States, South Carolina, 408. Hereafter SCKH. The emphasis here is mine but even with only the transcript of Tanner’s testimony, the moment of this utterance in the larger arc of his testimony I don’t think that I’m making too much of a stretch by assuming he might have stated this point emphatically.
their targets’ homes but others invaded homes and held families hostage. Most targets were not prepared for raids, even if they had learned of them happening to someone else or were threatened with a visit.

In 1870 and 1871, Republican members of Congress responded to nightriding’s threat to the democratic process by passing three bills making interfering with voting a federal offense, requiring federal oversight for voter registration and elections, and authorizing the president to use the army when terrorist groups interfered with elections. Despite this action, violence continued, largely because the commitment to enforcing state laws on murder, assault, and even the Fourteenth Amendment’s due process and equal protection clauses remained low, as did the resources for combating it. The Enforcement Acts brought the weight of the federal government down on paramilitary violence and eventually helped to diminish it but only after perpetrators inflicted considerable harm on their targets.

The Forty-second Congress authorized an investigation into the raids, sending Secret Service agents into numerous communities where they collected intelligence and arrested suspects. In the spring of 1871, a bi-partisan committee of legislators from the House and the Senate went to the former slaveholding states to hear from the people themselves. They started in Washington, D.C. in May. The next month, subcommittees fanned out, heading west and south to conduct hearings before returning to compose and publish their report. The witnesses Congress heard were black and white, military and civilian, female but mostly male, victims and perpetrators. Some were summoned and others showed up of their own accord when they learned of the hearings. Combined, the testimonies and reports constitute thirteen volumes that document, among other things, the pillaging of African American freedom.²

Historians of Reconstruction have used transcripts and reports from the Klan hearings to great effect, illuminating different dimensions of postwar atrocities. Many focused on the nature of the violence or perpetrators’ objectives.³ Political historians have examined conservative Democrats’ rejection of radical

---

²For a brief history of the hearings and to see some of the supporting documents, see Shawn L. Alexander, *Reconstruction Violence and the Ku Klux Klan Hearings* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2015).

Republican policies, coalitions built by moderates, or the ways this violence undermined American democracy. Others have used the testimonies to expose the ways in which the former slaveholding class extracted compensation for emancipation via violence and underpaid work. African Americanists have highlighted the culling of black power brokers and the testimonies’ roles in revealing black people’s self-determination and capacity for armed self-defense.4 Some scholars have analyzed the legal factors of the hearings, the nature of the investigators’ questions, and the value of victims’ ability and willingness to publicly proclaim what happened to them. A few have studied the sexual and gender dimensions of the violence, bringing to light the ways in which rape—both public and private as well as individual and collective and of women and girls—and threats of it were critical features, despite the seemingly asexual factors of voting, holding office, or labor disputes that were often the catalyst to strikes.5

Despite several decades of examining these records, Reconstruction historians have yet to fully excavate the wounds survivors like Patrick articulated experiencing. The partisan politics of the Joint Select Committee as well as investigators’ personal beliefs about African Americans created a filter over the hearings, shaping what we can and cannot know about what happened during and as a result of strikes. Witnesses’ accounts would probably not hold up in most legal or judicial settings. Survivors withheld information because they forgot, they didn’t think it was important to share, or to protect themselves and their families from harm. Like all sources, the testimonies are imperfect and we may never know everything we want to know about night riding strikes. And yet, numerous witnesses were more forthcoming about the wide-ranging injuries they endured than one might surmise reading some of the scholarship using the hearings as a source base. These survivors’ efforts to provide a full accounting of their victimization give historians critical insight to nightriding’s significance.

To date, there hasn’t been as much room for a sustained analysis of the horrors endured by individuals or families and not just during or immediately after strikes but also for the long term. This isn’t to say that historians have ignored the effects of violence or are indifferent to it but that we tend to address it in perfunctory ways. We know who attacked whom, why, when, where, and how.6

4Franklin, Black Self-Determination.
6Historians are not alone. Journalists face this issue too and some of their efforts to develop a praxis for facing the challenges of witnessing violence, for moving beyond the “brutal surface reality” in their reporting are useful for thinking about this work, even it’s not always reflecting in
Graphic but often clinical descriptions of white terror raids that expose only a surface level understanding of what happened fill books on Reconstruction. Historical writing on these dimensions of attacks may or may not be buttressed by a fleeting representation of a survivor’s articulation of how awful they thought some feature of a strike was. This type of treatment is indicative of the ways historians examining these accounts rarely give victims the same amount of attention—in terms of time and space—as we do perpetrators, cultures of violence, the state, or means of archival production. Even when we appear to give victims equal time, extensive consideration of how violence included assaults on people’s personhoods, livelihoods, and social structures and of how families fared in the aftermath is uncommon. I know because I’ve been there and done it myself.

Evidence of our perhaps not thinking as deeply as we might about the effects of this violence on African Americans lies in the ways we have documented many injuries witnesses reported. Like the congressional investigators, we tend to treat the hurt victims endured as a one-time event whose capacity to harm ceased when the white men left black families alone. We don’t always think past the attack itself or the last trace in the archives we consult. Our limited understanding of the effects of violence is also reflected in what the larger public seems to know and understand about it—it happened and the worse was over when the perpetrators left. Patrick Tanner’s use of the present tense to describe his family’s suffering suggests he and his fellow survivors knew better.

Our inability to comprehend the interiority and complexity of nightriding violence is sometimes due to a lack of evidence pointing directly to traumatic injury or longterm suffering. Other times, it is because we have a hard time looking at and witnessing the suffering of others. This is hard emotional work; and archival silences can leave us rooting around in the dark. But to truly understand and convey the wave of devastation a strike unleashed on its African

---

7Understand, I think the exploration of these subjects is important. I could not ask, much less attempt to answer, the questions I have without this critical work. But, this research does not leave, or at least it has not left, much room or time for thinking deeply about the effects of this violence on something other than why perpetrators behaved the way they did, representations of their behavior in popular culture, electoral politics, citizenship, or the archive.

8Hannah Rosen discusses the ways sexual violence engendered emotional distress in African American families. Rosen, Terror in the Heart, 77-80.

American victims, we need to account for their suffering.¹⁰ To do this, we need to become better witnesses to and translators of survivors’ stories.

My belief in historians’ responsibility for witnessing and translating African American victims’ representations of their suffering from nightriding informs the work I do here. Instead of simply documenting violence or attempting to make sense of why perpetrators attacked, how the state responded, or white terror’s implications for Reconstruction politics—work that has already received comprehensive treatment—I use the attack on the Tanners to illuminate what happened during and as a result of strikes. I start by assembling a portrait of the Tanners’ family life before they were attacked. I do this by mining the transcripts of Patrick Tanner’s and his son-in-law William Moss’s testimonies for the quotidiana of witnesses’ accounts that permeate most testimonies and census enumerators’ data on the family but were likely deemed irrelevant by investigators.¹¹ Then I zoom in on the home invasions before zooming out again to discuss the aftershocks. I focus on the before, during, and after because witnesses like Patrick were very clear in appreciating—and trying to communicate to members of Congress—the cataclysmic nature of strikes.

Nightriding survivors’ testimonies abound with representations of aftermaths—detailed and fleeting descriptions of the ways visits constituted transformative events, dividing victims’ lives in two, before and after.¹² Lingering

---


¹¹Although I had been mining witnesses’ accounts for the precious details of how they built and lived their lives, I take “quotidiana” from David Kazanjian, who discusses all of the archival minutiae scholars typically discard when conducting their research. In the case of witnesses at the hearings, they revealed details of their lives that don’t necessarily help us to understand the things that matter to so many historians examining these records—electoral politics, armed self-defense, the political sparing between legislators and testifying witnesses—but was important enough to them that they discussed it in their testimonies. David Kazanjian, “Scenes of Speculation,” Social Text 33, no. 4 125 (2015): 78.

¹²I am aware of the ways the legal and judicial proceedings informed the nature of the questioning and African Americans’ decisions about what they chose to reveal or conceal. In essence, I read these records critically, like good historians do. But my training as an African Americanist means I bring a different vision to the records. Reading all the testimonies and noting the similarities and differences in their accounts of strikes and their aftermaths, I take the victims at their word in their descriptions of what happened to them or people they knew. Stanley Elkins wrote of debates over using first person accounts like testimonies and interviews with ex-slaves, that it was best that different kinds of sources be “given equal weight, as evidence in the judicial sense must always be, and the best presumption probably is that none of these observers was lying about the facts as he saw them…[M]uch is gained and not much is lost on the provisional operating principles that they are all telling the truth.” Stanley Elkins, Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 3-4. The number of ex-slaves who discussed nightriding when they were interviewed in the 1930s reflects the salience of this violence in the vernacular history and black people’s collective memory. I also read with and against the grain, decentering white voices and perspectives to get to the heart of what black victims understood about this violence. For a discussion of the WPA narratives and vernacular
on survivors’ representations of both the tragic character of strikes and their concerns about the aftereffects enables us to develop a more comprehensive understanding of what it meant to experience white terror during Reconstruction. This is important because we cannot fully apprehend the horrors of this violence until we can account for the suffering targets described enduring. My efforts to conduct such an accounting reveals that evidence of strikes’ toll lies not simply in the witnesses’ explanations of the moments of attack but also, and perhaps more significantly, in their efforts to communicate what they faced or might have faced in the months and years that followed.

My research reveals the matrix of African Americans’ suffering from nightriding was complex. Some consequences were physical—the result of whippings or beatings. Others were economic—linked to the loss of precious land or livelihood after sustaining disabling injuries. Still others were psychological—tied to having a very close encounter with annihilation, losing a loved one, or living in fear of being attacked again. The most unfortunate accounts had evidence of all of these. Whatever victims endured, there are clear indications the damage did not stop even stop there. Seeing their disposability in the eyes of others altered African Americans’ understandings of the world in which they lived.

Writing about large numbers of postwar atrocities can demonstrate its representativeness while making it harder to apprehend the devastation this violence wrought. This is a critical problem in efforts to achieve clear understandings of victimization and perhaps a degree of restorative justice. We have the names of thousands of people attacked or killed and we might have superficial understanding of the things done to them. However, too many cases analyzed at once can turn these horrors into the kind of spectacles that leave captives reduced to unidimensional beings whose victimization can only be seen or understood in the abstract. We can also lose sight of victims’ individual or familial subjectivities. To address these issues and make African Americans’ understandings of nightriding’s effects more visible, I focus on a single family.


14In doing this work, I’m inspired by Nell Painter’s call to embrace the complexity of history by focusing on individual subjectivities and placing them in historical context. Nell Painter, Future of African American Past, Session 8 “African American History as American History,” May 21, 2016.

Although I am using one family’s story to illuminate nightriding’s devastating blows, I examined 217 African American witnesses’ accounts, looking for similarities and differences
Patrick and Missouri Tanner lived in Glenn Springs Township, South Carolina, just outside of Spartanburg in the spring of 1871. The family had been living in their home and on their land for about four years, plenty of time for them to get settled in to make a real go at achieving their freedom dreams. Their household included children ranging from twenty-three year old Adrianna and one year old Vitoria and a young boy they hired. Missouri was in the final days of her pregnancy with the next addition to their family.\textsuperscript{15}

Patrick attended to his forty-three acres of land, which he rented for about $115 each year and was in the process of buying. He described his land as being “bottom land and the balance upland” and supporting a “good crop.” To subsidize their earnings and practice his trade, Patrick traveled twelve miles to Spartanburg to work as a rock mason. Like many freedwomen fortunate enough to find a good provider as a mate, Missouri kept house and tended to the children. This was hard work but she was spared the toil of domestic service for whites common to many freedwomen.

Patrick and Missouri were both native South Carolinians. Sixty-two-year-old Patrick could read and write but forty-two-year-old Missouri could not. Census records suggest Patrick had visually pronounced mixed racial ancestry and Missouri did not. Patrick’s earnings and probably Missouri and the children’s contributions resulted in $125 in savings, which would amount to roughly $2,340 today.\textsuperscript{16} The archive doesn’t provide insight into whether or not the Tanners were a happy or healthy family but it does suggest they were managing the transition from slavery to freedom.

By the time spring peaked, this started changing. On May 1, a gang of ten to twelve masked white men snatched Patrick’s son-in-law William Moss from his Spartanburg Township home. The attack on William was one of a series of deadly raids that resulted in the killing of an elderly black man named Wallace Fowler.\textsuperscript{17} The men blindfolded William and escorted him from his home but before they could punish him for an unspecified transgression, he got free and ran, drawing three blasts of gunfire. Moss reported the attack to authorities, which only antagonized his attackers. Rather than stay home and risk reprisal, William, his wife Adrianna, and their two children sought sanctuary, moving in with


\textsuperscript{16}I used the purchasing power tool MeasuringWorth.com to calculate the data. May 14, 2014.

\textsuperscript{17}William Moss, July 7, 1871, SCKH, 401.
Adrianna’s parents, Patrick and Missouri. In the meantime, Missouri’s pregnancy had come to term and she was confined to the home while she healed.

Sometime after the attack on William, masked white men visited the Tanners and demanded Patrick’s Enfield rifle and the pistol carried by a young man the Tanners hired. Insisting that bans on enslaved and free blacks owning guns or having ammunition that dated back to the colonial period stay in place—despite the war and emancipation—white men routinely swept communities, stealing or robbing African Americans of means to hunt for large game or defend their homes from intruders. Records do not indicate the family protested the confiscation of their weapons.

Having disarmed the Tanners, white men in the community probably felt it was easier to strike them again in June. Armed men painted with black and red faces and wearing gowns and hoods with horns approached the house while Missouri and newly wed Adrianna were up talking, sitting by the fire, and Patrick and other family members were asleep. Adrianna answered the door, assuming the visitors were people the family knew but when she saw who they were, Adrianna cried out to Patrick. Before she could fully awaken her father the men barged in and made their way to his bed. They threw a pillow case over Patrick’s head and took him outside, demanding to know his son-in-law’s whereabouts. The men promised not to hurt Patrick if he told them where William was. Patrick informed the men that William was sleeping in bed and they pushed him aside to pursue his son-in-law, enabling Patrick to “slip away.” When the men discovered Patrick’s escape, they told Missouri and Adrianna they would kill them all if they didn’t reveal his location, which they claimed they didn’t know. William likely heard the fracas and fled, prompting the men to fire on the running man, who escaped unharmed.

In his testimony, Patrick did not report to the committee what persuaded the men to finally depart or what, if anything, they did to Missouri, Adrianna, or anyone else before they left. But the strike left them all shaken. Missouri, and maybe other family members, took to sleeping outside to avoid being trapped inside their home by white men again.

When Patrick Tanner testified at the hearings, he attempted to convey the many layers of his family’s victimization. Investigators had other agendas. Examiners wanted to know the details of the attack—who attacked the family, when, and why—especially information relating to Patrick’s political activity. Patrick provided answers to most of their questions without protest, except when it came to revealing the perpetrators’ identities. Even though the attackers were masked, Patrick could see their clothes and body shapes and hear their voices. William had probably also informed Patrick about the attack on him, details that could have been corroborated by their neighbors, all of which provided insight
into their attackers’ identities. Part of Patrick’s reluctance to name his attackers came from his suspicions of who the men were. He did not see them clearly and amid the chaos of the raid he could have been mistaken. Having lived in a society where legal forums were largely public, Patrick would have understood the responsibilities of swearing an oath and testifying before Congress.\(^{18}\) But he was more troubled by his understanding of his family’s continued vulnerability to reprisal. “I am afraid,” Patrick explained, “somebody will know, and, perhaps, him or his friends will injure me for this again.”

Patrick and the examiners volleyed back and forth over this issue. U.S. Congressman Philadelph Van Trump, pressed, indicating his belief that if the men didn’t hurt Tanner’s family before, they wouldn’t hurt them in the future, even if Tanner disclosed their identities. This is when Patrick insisted, “What they did is hurting my family.”\(^{19}\) The investigators used the past tense, reflecting a common believe that because the men did not whip or kill anyone, as had happened in other attacks, that the visit upon the Tanners was a harmless, one-time event. Tanner’s use of the present tense underscores his appreciation for and efforts to convey the strike’s many aftershocks. Although many of the physical dimensions of the violence had ended when the men left, Patrick’s testimony suggests that he and his family were all still wrestling with the aftermaths of the raid.

Patrick had reason to be anxious. His fear was driven in part by the belief that they had done nothing to induce a visit. “We had done nothing to cause this,” Patrick insisted.\(^{20}\) White men had just started killing innocent men, he explained, which “made us all dubious to stay on the place where they had abused these men that hadn’t done any harm.”\(^{21}\) If the family could be attacked after having done nothing to provoke white men then they could be struck any time and for no reason.

When William was questioned about precipitating causes for the strike, he conceded that he had voted in recent elections but said that he did not know the men who first attacked him or why. Searching for possible causes, Moss reported knowing that just before Christmas his landlord, a Dr. Jones, had evicted white families from his land before leasing to William and others. The manner in which he reported this information suggests he did not believe before the men came for him that voting or renting land were the kinds of activities triggering visits.

In responding to questions about his potential culpability for the visit, Patrick insisted, “all the neighbors will give it in that I had been a peaceable man


\(^{19}\)Patrick Tanner, 408.

\(^{20}\)Patrick Tanner, 408.

\(^{21}\)Ibid.
and have attended to my own business and worked hard.” In making this statement, Tanner reveals his misunderstanding of his social position within the context of the white supremacist fight against black freedom.\textsuperscript{22} People living in communities initially beset by conflict tend to think that victims were at fault—that they had done something to draw the men down on them, like attacking white people or their property or organizing a black militia.\textsuperscript{23} Like Patrick, they think that if they “attend to their own business” that they will be spared. Patrick was working and participating in the democratic process. William did not evict the white family; Dr. Jones did. And if William’s suspicions were correct that the former tenants were part of what Elaine Parsons calls the “disembodied Klan,” men who donned the cloak of Ku Klux to work out their issues with black folks, all he had done was sign a binding contract with a respectable white man.\textsuperscript{24}

What people in nightriding zones did not know, often until it was too late, is that seemingly harmless things like black people working for their own families instead of someone else’s, buying their own land, voting or serving in political office, and moving into a place where displaced whites had lived threatened white power and required a reckoning. Patrick explained, “It surprised them all (his neighbors) that they should come to my house and take me out.”\textsuperscript{25} Visits to unoffending men like Tanner and William Moss would have illuminated everyone’s vulnerability to visits, which embodied the feeling of terror.

Another concern for Patrick was the identity of his attackers. Having lived in the area for forty of his sixty odd years, he knew at least one of his attackers and probably suspected he knew others given local social networks. That people who knew him would attack his family and might attack them again and that no one would do anything to help them added to Patrick’s suffering. Sometime during the raid the men told Patrick “if I didn’t leave there pretty shortly they would kill the last one of us; that we should not stay there.”\textsuperscript{26} The family was already “lying out” and living with the fear of being visited again. Patrick’s decision to name one of his attackers would put his family at additional risk if they remained in Glenn Springs. If they fled, they would do so sparing their lives but at great financial cost. Leaving would mean abandoning the family home as well as land and the good crop it supported, erasing the progress he and his family had made since slavery ended. He would be walking away from all the things that had given his family material security and might have enabled him to live out his

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid.\textsuperscript{23}Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco, “Speaking of the Unspeakable: Toward a Psychosocial Understanding of Responses to Terror,” \textit{Ethos} 18, no. 1 (1990).\textsuperscript{24}For more on the role of contracts and freedom, see Amy Dru Stanley, \textit{From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation} (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).\textsuperscript{25}Ibid.\textsuperscript{26}Patrick Tanner, 407.
remaining years in comfort—and forced to start anew without any certainty of success.

As pressing as Patrick’s concerns about being attacked or displaced were, he agonized over Missouri’s suffering. He testified, “They have injured my wife so that I believe she will never get over it.” Missouri had been confined after delivery (the records do not indicate the outcome of the birth or the sex of the child) when the men struck. Afterwards, she started sleeping outside after dark to avoid being trapped inside again. “She catched cold and can’t help herself now,” Patrick explained. “She is farther back now than she was before.” Patrick’s concern suggests his wife’s suffering went beyond the common cold, indicating other problems or conditions. The outcome of the birth could have left Missouri especially vulnerable during the strike. A difficult birth would have required bed rest so she could heal, which would have left her in little position to run away or to fight back especially if she had an infant to protect. A stillbirth could have left her beset by grief. Being afraid of sleeping in their home, in case the men returned, “lying out” would have exposed Missouri to the elements and set her back physically or emotionally, as Patrick’s discussion of his wife’s inability to help herself suggests.

Patrick’s concern for Missouri and their family offers insight into nightriding’s impact on his family after the men left. Historians are not equipped to make medical diagnoses of survivors using the sparse transcripts of the congressional testimonies. But understanding the ways experiencing a strike could result in both physical and emotional injuries can make us sensitive to indications of possible trauma in archival sources.

Humans are hardwired to experience a range of horrific events without sustaining significant psychological harm. But some, due to previous histories of violence or mental conditions, are more vulnerable to traumatic injury than others who might experience the same event and leave it largely unscathed. As former

27Patrick Tanner, 407.
28Patrick Tanner, 407.
29Today, we know from the new field of epigenetics that humans can inherit problems that make it difficult for them to withstand the normal forces of human life from their parents and grandparents. Biologist Michael Skinner calls this a transgenerational inheritance of “ancestral ghosts.” This inheritance, which emerges because people’s genetic codes change over the course of their lives, is not multigenerational, passed only from parent to child but transgenerational, passed from the person who experienced a traumatic event to the third or fourth generation. In essence, someone like Missouri might have been more vulnerable to suffering traumatic injury not simply because of what she herself experienced during the raid but also what she had experienced in life (possibly as a result of her enslavement) and what she inherited from her enslaved grandparents or great-grandparents like the experience of the Middle Passage or another catastrophic event. Michael Skinner, “Ancestral Ghosts in your Genome,” presented at the Soul Wounds: Trauma and Healing Across the Generations conference, June 4, 2015, Stanford University, which I attended. See the TEDx version https://youtu.be/f1Pf5S8Nbfk, accessed June 8, 2016. Skinner discusses environmental factors that are expressed genetically by subsequent
slaves who had lived through a devastating war, the Tanners might have seen their share of violence and even endured physical or emotional injuries before the white men came for them in June. My reconstruction of their life from archival sources indicates the family was managing the challenges life had thrown at them.

Patrick did not elaborate on the symptoms he observed in Missouri, which is not surprising, as Americans did not yet possess the language of trauma or gender available to us today. But, Missouri could have been experiencing flashbacks to the attack; nightmares; bouts of unexplained rage; feelings of insecurity; suicidal thoughts, attempts, and successes; depression, anxiety, or psychological breaks. Mrs. Tanner could have been acting out on her doubts about Patrick’s capacity to defend them generally or because he fled the raid particularly. She might have retreated from the world and Patrick could not reach her. Whatever Patrick saw, the visit left Missouri troubled, which distressed him.

Trauma is complex, ranging from the initial distress caused by the shock of death or deadly injury, that might last for hours or a day or two or what psychiatrists call acute stress disorder, which lasts from days to a few weeks, to what we call post-traumatic stress disorder, which today’s medical professionals can diagnose after a month or more. About a week had transpired between the generations. Psychiatrist and neuroscientist Rachel Yehuda also explores transference and the ways different histories, genetic profiles and biologic responses, particularly individuals’ cortisol levels, shape the way we experience and respond to life-altering events. See Rachel Yehuda, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," New England Journal of Medicine 346, no. 2 (2002): 108-14; Rachel Yehuda, Sarah L. Halligan, and Linda M. Bierer, "Cortisol Levels in Adult Offspring of Holocaust Survivors: Relation to Ptsd Symptom Severity in the Parent and Child," Psychoneuroendocrinology 27, no. 1 (2002).

Whereas biologists and psychiatrists focus on the molecular features of inherited trauma, others, like feminist theorist and memory studies scholar Marianne Hirsch, unpacks the cultural transfer of trauma. In her work on "post-memory," Hirsch, found that the generation at the epicenter of a trauma inducing event can transmit experiences and understandings of the traumatic injury to their children that are so intense that they develop a living connection to the event and manifest some of the emotional and psychological suffering caused by it. See Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," Poetics Today 29, no. 1 (2008); Marianne Hirsch, Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). Hirsch researched the Holocaust but noted that other vehicles of trauma include chattel slavery. My examination of the congressional testimonies and WPA narratives leads me to believe that nightriding strikes represent a similar kind of watershed event where that could make people break under the strain on their own, or when added to earlier traumatic injuries.

I draw this list of possible symptoms from an adaptation of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th edition, in Yehuda, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," 109. Survivors of traumatic events are also at risk for depression, somatic disorders, and acute physical pain. I also discuss the earth-shattering nature of violence in Williams, "The Wounds That Cried Out: Reckoning with African Americans’ Testimonies of Trauma and Suffering," in The World the Civil War Made.

Simpson and Coté discuss the challenges of armchair diagnoses for journalism that I find applicable for historians, Simpson and Coté, Covering Violence, 25-26. Official diagnoses of conditions like PSTD should come from trained experts who have spent time with likely victims. Yehuda, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," 108. Although only a few weeks had passed, it is possible that Missouri was suffering from acute stress. That standard is difficult for historians to
strike and Patrick’s appearance before the committee so it would be too early to determine the full extent of Missouri’s suffering. But whatever Patrick observed in the change in his wife’s wellbeing or behavior, it did not appear to be abating.

Although Patrick did not discuss his emotional state after the raid, he likely confronted his own personal torment even though he did not articulate it directly. His inability to prevent the attack as well as his actions during it probably left Patrick bedeviled by feelings of guilt and shame. “Guilt,” David Shapiro writes, “is concerned with what one does; shame has to do with what one is.”

Patrick might have felt guilty for running away and leaving Missouri and the family behind. Shame did not involve what Patrick did but who he might have believed he was revealed to be because of his actions or inactions. As such, Patrick’s helplessness during and after the attack might have exposed an inability to meet the responsibilities of a male protector. His feelings of shame might have been exacerbated if members of his family or community expressed contempt for how he handled the attack or acted afterwards.

As the head of his family with his partner distressed by injuries that might leave her incapacitated and in need of care and unable to contribute to the family’s wellbeing, Patrick had a lot of decisions to make. Such a change in circumstances could lead to intense anxiety over his appreciation for the new dangers they faced. The family could stay put and hope that officials might bring known perpetrators to justice. William’s own experience of being visited and reporting it only to be targeted again and then being captured, and whipped on his way to testifying at the hearings would have cautioned against remaining. Moreover, Patrick’s revelation of John Thompson, Jr., as one of his attackers, likely increased the family’s vulnerability to retaliation. The Tanners could leave and minimize their losses but doing so would mean abandoning everything they had built and starting anew. Knowing they hadn’t done anything wrong and Patrick’s advanced age likely made starting over a daunting prospect.

Like many families visited by nightriders, Patrick and Missouri—and by extension Adrianna and William—had few good options. They had gotten close to fulfilling their visions of freedom only to lose them as a result of a strike. In losing even a part of this vision, witnesses like Patrick and William lost not only property or wealth; Patrick’s despair and concern for what might become of them also indicate they might have lost what psychotherapist Jeffrey Kauffman calls

achieve but I take survivors at their word when they convey the ways they believe night rides changed them or their loved ones.


Judith Herman writes that victims who feel or are made to feel that they did not fulfill their roles may be preoccupied with shame, self-loathing, and a sense of failure. Judith Lewis Herman, Trauma and Recovery, Rev. ed. (New York: BasicBooks, 1997), 94.
the “assumptive world.” Kauffman writes that our worlds are made up of “assumptions or beliefs that ground, secure, or orient people, that give a sense of reality, meaning, or purpose to life.” The strikes altered the Tanners’ and Mosses’ assumptions about the world.

First person accounts of slavery suggest that bondage created African Americans’ basic views about themselves and their role as chattel in a slaveholding society. These lessons were forged when children were socialized to understand who they were in the eyes of the law and what that meant. African Americans’ worldviews likely changed as they aged and came into their knowledge of the full weight of their circumstances. Unless they were able to escape or buy their way out or have someone do it for them, lifelong slavery meant there was no way out.

Whenever it came, emancipation upended enslaved people’s assumptive worlds. Men and women like Patrick and Missouri likely knew transitioning from slavery to freedom would be difficult. They would have to assume responsibility for their well-beings and remake their worlds. From reconstituting families often separated by living apart or ravaged by the domestic slave trade or sexual violence to working out new labor arrangements, all evidence points toward most African Americans facing emancipation eager to chart their destinies. This included pressing for a range of social and political rights that would become the civil rights.

As we can see from the life Patrick and Missouri built, they probably initially assumed freedom would mean everything slavery did not, ranging from access to the material resources produced by their labor to acceptance into the body politic. The Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Fourteenth Amendment had been enacted and the Tanners might have understood they could not be denied the right to life, liberty, or property without due process and equal protection under the nation’s laws and acted accordingly, believing they were safe and secure in the fold of American citizenship. If they did not anticipate violent resistance from their racially conservative neighbors then daily interpersonal encounters with hostile whites and maybe even reports of violence, like the killing of Wallace

---


35The processes of creating slavery varied over time but involved getting unfree people and the world around them to accept the theft of their labor. Different forms of cultural, physical, social, and psychological violence were key tools in the establishment of chattel slavery. Enslaved people had to learn what being enslaved meant and societies in which enslaved people lived had to be reorganized to accommodate nearly absolute deference to the master’s will. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982). Walter Johnson calls the developed understanding that children learned, to see themselves through their eyes of their masters and through their own eyes and those of kin, the “chattel principle.” Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 21.
Fowler and the initial attack on William, could have been warning signs of changes to come.

In most witnesses’ estimations, nightriding was outside the normative violence familiar to many black southerners. This isn’t to say that vigilantism was not a part of their lives because it was. South Carolina had a history of collective violence that predated the Civil War but chattel slavery likely shielded many enslaved people from much of it. Klan raids were the kinds of events in which victims were exposed to the kind of violence where they faced possible annihilation, which changed their worldviews. Robert J. Lifton wrote that events wherein victims experience “a jarring awareness of the fact of death” can leave a “death imprint.” Having their survival threatened and vulnerability exposed by a violent attack “abruptly disintegrates one’s inner world.”

Experiencing the strike shattered victims’ basic assumptions, cleaving the life the Tanners built after slavery into halves, and maybe even thirds and fourths. Being attacked, seeing their disposability in the eyes of the perpetrators exposed both the world’s dangers and human malevolence in the age of freedom. Additionally, improper responses by neighbors or elected officials who failed to intervene, or offer protective relief and help victims secure justice likely magnified the horror. This compromised the family’s sense of safety and security. As in most acts of plunder, nightriders took away who the Tanners and Mosses were going to be; the futures they might have envisioned would not be as they imagined. Their trust in individuals or the state might have started dissipating. All of these feelings would have been exacerbated if the victims knew their attackers and trusted them.

Evidence of this shattering of assumptions and of nightriding’s imprint is clear in a refrain that echoes throughout many witnesses’ testimonies at the hearings: “never get over it.” Tanner indicated this belief describing Missouri. It is not a stretch to imagine that he was afraid his family might never be made whole again. It is not likely that Tanner gained any satisfaction or relief from

36Janoff-Bulman, Rachel Yehuda, and others posit that, unlike normative life events such as natural disasters or the usual hardships of life, criminal victimization—the result of decisions people made to do someone harm—are harder to withstand. Yehuda, writes that people experiencing interpersonal violence are at greater risk of PTSD. Yehuda, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," 109. Research suggests that even if people are aware of the possibility of strikes, possibility learning of them from social networks, their assumptions about themselves and their place in the world leads them to believe that they won’t become victims. Even if they anticipated being attacked, there is really nothing they could ever have done to be fully prepared for the horrors they faced. Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma (New York: Free Press, 1992), 54.
39Ibid., 63.
testifying at the hearings. Congressional examiners offered no promises of protection or material relief since that was outside the scope of their purview. Indeed, Patrick’s testimony ends rather abruptly, in a back-and-forth exchange about the identity of the perpetrators.

The Tanners vanished from historical records I consulted. Patrick’s advanced age in 1871 likely meant he could have passed away sometime before enumerators for the 1880 census visited. The family might have stayed put and been wiped out or displaced in a subsequent attack. They might have come to terms with what happened.

The family could have also left Glenn Springs for somewhere else in the Spartanburg County, since Patrick identified it as his home. Or, they could have departed the Upcountry all together, relocating to Columbia or someplace up North like many survivors from the region did. After men came for him three times, William decided to make the city of Spartanburg his permanent home, because he was “afraid to stay out in that country.” But it is unclear if Adrianna and the children moved with William or remained to help with Missouri and her siblings.

Patrick testified shortly after being attacked. Whether they remained or fled, evidence from witnesses who testified months and or years later suggests the Tanners probably struggled. If the family stayed, they might have continued sleeping outside to avoid being attacked in their home. Their social and business relationships might have changed in the ways that are common to survivors, meaning people turn away from people marked by horror. The Tanners’ neighbors might have looked at the family differently, sometimes suspecting they had done something to deserve being attacked and asking accusatory questions that border on victim-blaming. The Tanners could have started looking askance at people in their community for how they treated them. Communal and worldly feelings of alienation, disconnection, and abjection, brought on by violations of what they understood to be moral codes of postwar life or their failure to fulfill their responsibilities to themselves or their families harmed survivors. For many

---

40Nightriding waves in local communities were short-lived affairs, ranging from a few days to a few weeks. Parsons, *Ku-Klux*, 8. But, witnesses often testified at both the Klan hearings and the 1880 Exoduster hearings that perpetrators and their allies revisited victims who attempted to press charges or who appeared before congressional examiners.

41William Moss, 402.

42Examining accounts of slavery, Nell Painter discussed what she calls “testimonies of desolation,” those clear indicators of psychological injury. Painter, "Soul Murder and Slavery: Toward a Fully Loaded Cost Accounting," in *Southern History across the Color Line*, 29. In writing about the ways malevolent acts upend people’s sense of their identity and place, Julia Kristeva writes, “something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.” Abjection, Kristeva writes, “is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells
families, this kind of pressure, on top of their other wounds, was too much, causing them to take flight. “The biggest part of the (colored people down in the country) have gone off,” William Moss informed the committee.\(^4^3\) If the Tanners decided to relocate, if Patrick had been able to sell his property, harvest any crop he had, before leaving, they would be able to better manage the move and start over with needed cash than if they fled with only the clothes on their backs, as some families did. But he left the hearings knowing his attackers might learn he revealed their identities to the committee.

Even though we cannot know for certain what became of the Tanners and Mosses, survivors’ accounting of their injuries provide unmistakable evidence of plunder, not simply of property (although there was a lot of that) but also life, spirit, and livelihood. The night the white men came for the Tanners would be something that haunted the family and their familiares for the rest of their lives. This is what witnesses like Patrick seemed to believe their audiences could not understand—the realities of what nightriding targets had lost to violence. When African American survivors testified about the wounds they and their kin endured they make clear that to them, nightriding was not simply a blitz on radical Republicans’ vision of postwar America. Witnesses’ itemization of various injuries underscored their appreciation of that fact that these strikes were assaults on families, bodies, and souls.

African Americans’ stories of assaults that unmade the worlds they built after slavery call for an accounting.\(^4^4\) Patrick’s concerns for himself and Missouri illustrate that strikes were not one-off events. Families lost their security, homes and property, and sometimes their lives. Accounts such as Patrick’s reveal that strikes had their own afterlives that have thus far escaped extended historical investigation.

In my view, the kind of accounting for which Nell Painter called, when she wrote about soul murder and slavery, is not simply a recounting of the violence; central to its mission is making the complexity of victims’ psychic, spiritual, and emotional experiences of these atrocities visible. Making violence visible effectively can be difficult even when the scholar is interested in such work. Discussing the grammar of collective terror, Marcelo Suarez-Orozco wrote of denial and rationalization as societal coping mechanisms during and after

---

\(^{43}\)William Moss, 401.

\(^{44}\)In discussing the unmaking of survivors’ worlds, I draw on Scarry’s work. Scarry, *The Body in Pain*. 

---

conflict. Postconflict societies are quick to deny or minimize the horrors that transpired and actively erase evidence of what happened. The state pressures conflict-ridden communities to put the troubles behind them under the guise of “healing.” Perpetrators are rarely brought to justice and, in many cases, reap the rewards of their crimes, gaining access to their victims’ property or even positions of authority because of the crimes they committed. They seek to discredit victims’ claims against them, denying their activities except in private spaces until the milieu renders perpetrators safe to discuss their actions publicly and even then engaging in winking and nodding exchanges with both sympathetic and antagonistic audiences. To maintain their illegitimately obtained power and avoid persecution or prosecution, perpetrators and their allies actively dissuade victims from reliving the past with threats of harm. Agents of the state, many of whom are complicit in violence—either because they were perpetrators or failed to prevent or prosecute it—throw up their hands citing their helplessness, dismissing accounts of injury, or taking no responsibility for providing restorative justice to victims. States also fail in providing victims forums for testifying about what happened to them. Even if forums are provided, legislative or judicial objectives that have little to do with restorative justice and everything to do with partisan political objectives dominate the setting and shape the records produced.

Victims themselves may or may not be able to articulate what happened to them. As Elaine Scarry writes, pain eludes language. Some survivors may not speak of what happened to them while others feel compelled to share stories but keep them in their families and kinship groups where they are passed on and sometimes recorded by the keepers of family memory. Still others have fled the area, taking their stories with them. For the willing, hostile environments make some victims realize the futility and sometimes danger of publicly proclaiming their suffering or demanding justice. Even if victims speak out and somehow the state or another apparatus manages to capture survivors’ accounts, many of these records are manipulated, destroyed, or lost to historians through malice or neglect.

The waves of white terrorist violence that struck select African American southern communities corresponds to and diverges from larger patterns of what transpires following conflict. Agents arrested scores of known and suspected perpetrators. Because so much violence occurred and the Grant administration sent armed forces, South Carolina was one of the states that conducted its own

45For a larger discussion on the grammar of terror and the phases of denial, rationalization, and internalization, see Marcelo Suarez-Orozco, “Speaking the Unspeakable: Toward a Psychosocial Understanding of Responses to Terror,” Ethos 18, no. 3 (1990), 364-370.
46I use scare quotes here to convey my understanding that state-sponsored programs for “healing” are suspect largely because the state is complicit in the harm and its denial of either the harm or its responsibility for providing remedy is one of the main barriers to restorative justice. Additionally, healing discourse rarely seems to consider some victims’ belief in the impossibility of that repair.
47Scarry, The Body in Pain.
Congressional Republicans at the federal level felt compelled to investigate Ku Kluxing because of its interference with Radical Reconstruction. This political focus informed examiners’ agenda, shaping the questions Republicans and Democrats asked and the answers they demanded of witnesses. Elaine Parsons has shown how Klansmen and Klan-adjacent southerners strategically framed Ku Klux activities to discourage belief in victims’ reports. Much of the national media was happy to play along. To have their stories recorded, survivors and witnesses had to be able to articulate what happened, travel to the hearings, and fit their stories into legislature priorities of the forum. Witnesses were subjected to racist and indelicate questions about their lives and their character. In some instances, they had to fight investigators’ efforts to derail their testimonies or caricature their accounts by selectively interpreting what they did or did not want to hear about night riding. The communities where nightriding occurred were transformed. African Americans fled nightriding zones in droves, leaving only faint traces of what happened to them there. People who remained risked retaliation if they spoke out and possibly continued to live in fear of being attacked. All of this lends itself to the erasure of these atrocities.

And yet, more than two hundred African Americans testified at the Klan hearings and participated in the production of a history of the undermining of victims’ freedom. Close attention to these witnesses’ testimonies reveals extensive, if incomplete, evidence of multifaceted plunder. Whether or not Patrick, Missouri, or other members of their family were able to “get over” having their worlds upended and unmade and then recover a semblance of who they were before the nightriding strike remains unclear. Critical to recovery from catastrophic events is the restoration of feelings of security and support, something Patrick does not appear to have received in testifying at the hearing or been able to provide his family and the postwar order enjoyed few if any resources that could have provided aid, compensation, or any measure of restorative justice. If the family could not achieve this then the terrorists would have accomplished their goal, unraveling the threads of security, family, and freedom the Tanners created.

For survivors who resisted the erasure of the varied dimensions of their victimization by telling their stories, projecting their individual and even collective voices loud enough to be heard over the din of forced silence, was difficult. Victims at the hearings testified—but hardly anyone in a position to provide remedy truly heard and understood their pain. Many white listeners denied survivors’ testimonies of injury either for political gain or self-protection.

---

48 For analysis of the South Carolina trials, see Williams, *Great South Carolina Ku Klux Trials*.
49 Hannah Rosen has conducted extensive work on investigators’ priorities and how that shaped the historical record. See Rosen, *Terror in the Heart*, 222-41.
Only a few congressional investigators saw nightriding as a product of state-sponsored Reconstruction policies and thus they had little sense of their responsibility for hearing victims’ efforts to communicate their pain because to do so might require providing remedy. For others, permitting African Americans to testify in the hearings was the only response the state would provide and even then some of its agents would undermine the process communicating their disbelief in witnesses’ accounts. Many members of the mainstream press papered over victims’ injuries and the nation indicated its preference for moving on from the war and its violent aftermaths.

Nightriding survivors had only themselves and empathetic allies for creating spaces for them to air and share their personal truths of nightriding’s unmaking of their worlds. It was in these spaces where victims could have their suffering recognized and acknowledged. Because these were closed spaces, the outside world never gained a full appreciation for what nightriding meant to survivors. After the hearings, outsiders could look at the social and economic hardship of families like the Tanners and Mosses and read it as African Americans’ incapacity for citizenship, not knowing or understanding nightriding’s role in their circumstances. Recent research on Reconstruction violence has attempted to open windows into this violence and its implications for politics, citizenship, and the state. But until we direct our full attention to white terror’s victims, until we resist the urge to displace survivors like Patrick Tanner and William Moss analytically with consideration of everything but their efforts to communicate what happened to them, we will not understand and communicate to each other and our publics what victims believed nightriding meant. In not apprehending what nightriding meant to victims, as Patrick insisted, “what they did is hurting my family,” we cannot understand the histories of African Americans and the nation during and after Reconstruction.