

THE COLOR OF HATE

How the Jim Crow era shamed and shaped our city

The series

Defining moment

■ In the fall of 1956, a hardworking young black couple purchase a home on a white block in Riverside, precipitating one of the ugliest racial episodes in Fort Worth history.



Separate but superior

■ The legendary excellence of I.M. Terrell High School is remembered through the eyes of Titus Hall, a retired major general in the Air Force and a 1944 Terrell graduate.



Out at home

■ Baseball hero Maury Wills, the first black to play on the Fort Worth Cats, remembers his time here in 1955 as the most painful year of his career.



Lynching on Northeast 12th Street

■ An angry mob murders meatpacker Fred Rouse, a 1921 tragedy that still resonates with descendants today.



Our own sins

■ How the Star-Telegram covered – or didn't cover – the black community during the Jim Crow era.



Signs of change

■ One day before lunch, savvy businessman and department store owner Marvin Leonard decides to quietly usher in Fort Worth desegregation.



Jim Crow lives

■ In an extraordinary, candid interview, long-time Harvard business dean James Cash – the first black basketball player at TCU – tells it like he sees it.



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In the Riverside neighborhood, east of downtown, word spread quickly of the new Negro family moving in on the 200 block of Judkins Street in September 1956. Protesters gathered, unloading homemade signs from car trunks.

The young black family wanted a house in a nice Fort Worth neighborhood.

Their white neighbors wanted them out.

The racial incident that followed is a little-known footnote of the Jim Crow era in Cowtown.

But it's not forgotten.

Showdown on Judkins Street

STORY BY TIM MADIGAN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RODGER MALLISON AND JEFFERY WASHINGTON
STAR-TELEGRAM

Their happiness was such that Lloyd and Macie Austin scarcely noticed as their new neighbors congregated on nearby lawns and sidewalks, whispering among themselves, angrily folding their arms across their chests, watching as the Austins unloaded their belongings from a borrowed truck.

The couple and their young daughter would be the first black residents in the 200 block of Judkins Street, and obviously, from the murmurs and body language that day, Sept. 1, 1956, residents of the working-class Fort Worth neighborhood known as Riverside were not pleased. In fact, as night came, one woman who lived across the street was not content to whisper.

“One nigger man and all you white men scared of him,” the woman yelled, threatening to march up to the Austins’ doorstep to tell off the newcomers.

“Honey, don’t you go over there,” another neighbor replied. “That nigger might shoot you.”



JET MAGAZINE
Macie and Lloyd Austin relax in their new home in this 1956 photo, which accompanied a story in *Jet* magazine about the protest. The couple had only \$5 left in the bank after they made the down payment on the house on Judkins Street, but they had faith that God would see them through.

More on SHOWDOWN on next page

Inside: Why do this series, and why now? Ombudsman David House explains. Page 12.

Star-Telegram

Reprinted from the editions of October 6-13, 2002

THE COLOR OF HATE | SHOWDOWN ON JUDKINS STREET



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The mob quieted when Ollie Farrow, Macie Austin's brother, walked out to the Austins' car and removed a pair of .22-caliber rifles. Carrying a weapon in each hand, he walked slowly back toward the front door.

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Lloyd and Macie Austin laughed at the woman, who was clearly drunk. With their belongings off the truck and inside their new home, they sat and listened through open windows to the occasional Southern, peeking toward the street through the slats in their blinds. But it had been a long, hot day, and the couple was too tired to be overly worried.

So they put their young daughter to bed and turned in early themselves, delighted with their new home. Their purchase was the culmination of the years Lloyd Austin rose before dawn to deliver hundred-pound sacks of seed across Texas; the years Macie had punched in at Stripling's Department Store in downtown Fort Worth. Every month of their 12-year marriage, they had tucked away a few dollars, dreaming of their escape from the place known as the Rock Island Bottoms, the beleaguered Fort Worth neighborhood near downtown that was tucked into a bend of the Trinity River.

God himself had led them to Judkins Street, the couple was convinced. God would shield them from danger and soften the hearts of their new neighbors. Any unpleasantness, they believed that night, would be muted and temporary.

But the Austins were wrong. The next day brought a confrontation on Judkins Street that would be remembered as one of the ugliest, most dangerous, most revealing racial episodes in Fort Worth history, one that unmasked the profound hatred that roiled beneath the city's deceptively placid surface. That weekend, the customworking truck driver and his wife, the department store maid, became figures of history, not as famous as but certainly akin to Alabama seamstress Rosa Parks, whose desire to rest her weary feet on a Montgomery, Ala., bus ensnared her in mammoth historical events.

The Austins slept soundly that first night, as their neighbors finally gave up and went to bed, too. But on Sunday morning, a local newspaper reporter knocked at the front door of their new home, and his question recalled atrocities perpetrated against Southern blacks since the end of slavery.

"Did you know," the reporter asked then, "that those folks are planning to burn you down?"

In Fort Worth, it would have been easy to scoff at such a notion. Burnings and lynchings might regularly have taken place in the Deep South, in East Texas, Dallas or Houston. But Fort Worth was different. The city had long considered itself more Western than Southern, for one thing, its residents subscribing to the slogan on the masthead of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* that proclaimed the city "Where the West Begins." White Fort Worthians as a whole were thus less wedded to mythology of the Old South, less obligated to defend the honor of the defeated Confederacy, less likely to have visceral fears of and antagonisms toward blacks, or so went the prevailing idea.

For their part, Fort Worth Negroes seemed to know their place, were relatively quiescent in the face of the complex system of segregationist laws and racist social customs known as Jim Crow. Jim Crow was the name of a black-face minstrel character from the early 1820s, a name borrowed decades later to describe a system designed to deprive blacks of their dignity and rights as citizens. And in 1956, Fort Worth blacks remained as deprived as other Negroes in America.

Fort Worth Negro children attended segregated schools (one high school, I.M. Terrell, served black students from 16 surrounding cities, as well). They were forced to the rear of city buses; forced to eat in kitchens of the city's white restaurants; forbidden from using restrooms in white stores downtown; forced to drink from segregated water fountains; allowed to watch movies only from the back rows of the balconies of white theaters (if at all), banned by custom from white areas; at Fort Worth city parks and white-only swimming pools.

But there would be no angry demonstrations against that system in Fort Worth, no militant leader to rise up to inflame the city's blacks and insist on change. As a result, to many whites at least, Fort Worth blacks seemed almost grateful for the status quo because they knew conditions were so much worse for Negroes elsewhere. Fort Worth blacks enjoyed relatively high-paying union jobs at the meatpacking plants, or as railroad porters, or as maids, chauffeurs and gardeners for the wealthy white aristocrats on the west side of town.

Negro servants needed to come in through the back door when they



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The crowd kept swelling throughout that September weekend in 1956. Eventually, more than 200 white protesters gathered in front of the Austins' home. Although police were aware of the protest, they declined to intervene, despite a call placed on the Austins' behalf by a friend of Macie Austin.



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A group of young white protesters fashioned an effigy of Lloyd Austin and tied it to a maple tree near the curb. The effigy had a noose around its neck and a wooden stake sticking out of its chest, with "blood" running down its shirt.

reported for work, and leave the same way at the end of the day, but when the child of a Negro cook got sick, it was her white Fort Worth employer who often made sure the black boy or girl saw a doctor. Many kindnesses were discreetly handed down that way.

Yet much of that tranquility, that comfortable racial equilibrium, was an illusion, a self-serving fiction passed down in white

a white doctor while white patients came and went from airy waiting rooms.

And Fort Worth whites did not understand the chronic terror that was part of the Negro way of life, fear derived from regular reminders of what could happen if blacks strayed from their place. For the dictates of Jim Crow were enforced through fear, and in that regard, Fort Worth, despite its deceptive appearance, was no different from any other place.

In 1956, elderly blacks still shuddered at the memory of what happened to a black man named Fred Rouse, who was strung up from a tree on Northeast 12th Street, his body shot full of bullets and battered by rocks thrown by a mob of whites. In December 1921, Rouse's fatal mistake had been trying to cross a picket line at a north side meatpacking plant. It was perhaps no coincidence that a thriving chapter of the Ku Klux Klan had been formed in Fort Worth only a few months earlier.

Most blacks who lived in Fort Worth during Jim Crow remembered hearing explosions that rattled windows in the dead of the night, bombings that happened most often when Negroes encroached on previously white neighborhoods. In 1926, the *Fort Worth Press* told of one such outbreak at vacant houses on the city's south side, where black teachers and entrepreneurs had begun buying homes previously owned by whites. "This is final notice for all Negroes to leave the 1100 block of Cannon Avenue," read an anonymous note found at the site of one explosion. "The next dynamite will not be placed under a vacant house."

Fort Worth blacks recalled watching white-robed men toss bricks through the windows of their homes, and seeing Negroes regularly hung in effigy, and of finding burning crosses on their lawns. In 1950, a young black man was stabbed and seriously wounded by a white man when he failed to surrender his seat on a city bus. The perpetrator fled and was never arrested.

Then, three years later, in August of 1953, a black couple named Lawrence and Ava Peters purchased a home in the 100 block of Judkins Street, the first blacks to cross Riverside's racial threshold, which until then had held at First Street. About 1 a.m. Nov. 2, 1953, the Peters family car was turned into a mass of twisted tin by several sticks of dynamite ignited beneath the vehicle's hood. Peters

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