

# The Christmas night murders of Harriette Moore and Harry T. Moore in Florida

written by Stephen Millies  
September 13, 2023



Harriette Moore and Harry T. Moore

Ku Klux Klan terrorists planted dynamite under the Mims, Florida, home of Harriette

Moore and Harry T. Moore. The bomb exploded on Christmas night, Dec. 25, 1951, their 25th wedding anniversary.

Nearby hospitals [wouldn't accept Black patients](#), so the Moores were taken 30 miles away. Harry T. Moore died on the way to the hospital, while Harriette Moore died nine days later.

Their two daughters survived. Four Klan leaders were later identified as the killers, but no one was ever prosecuted for the murders.

The Moores were targeted because they were Black leaders. Harry T. Moore was the Florida executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

The [Florida NAACP](#) chapter grew to have 10,000 members in 63 branches. The Moores helped register 100,000 Black voters in Florida, more than any other southern state.

Both had been [fired from their jobs](#) as teachers in 1946 because of their activism. In 1937, along with NAACP lawyer and future U.S. Supreme Court justice Thurgood Marshall, Harry T. Moore [filed the first lawsuit in the South demanding equal pay](#) for Black and white teachers.

One of Harriette Moore's students, [Paij Wadley Bailey](#), described the impact her teacher made upon her:

"Mrs. Moore did not complain or express outrage at having to teach us from old, tattered textbooks passed down to us from the white school. What she did do was teach us primarily from the few boxes of her own private books, which she kept hidden under her desk. Her books were about African-American people who had made important contributions to the world — people like W.E.B. DuBois and Mary McLeod Bethune. Mrs. Moore taught us about the freedom fighters Harriet Tubman

and Sojourner Truth. She read stories to us by Zora Neale Hurston and poems by Langston Hughes, and she shared her Ebony Magazine articles about Black history.”

This is the history that Florida Gov. DeSantis, Trump, and Fox News call “Critical Race Theory” and want to outlaw.

### **The Groveland 4 frame-up**

The Moores fought to get justice for the Groveland Four. Four Black men were falsely accused of raping a white woman in Lake County, Florida, a Klan stronghold about 35 miles west of Orlando.

According to the [Civil Rights Movement Archive](#), “later evidence indicates that the 17-year-old girl had been beaten by her husband and that they concocted a phony rape story to conceal the beating from her parents who had threatened to shoot him if he brutalized her again.”

Sixteen-year-old Charles Greenlee and war veterans Walter Irvin and Samuel Shepherd were arrested in 1949. Ernest Thomas was hunted down by a posse and shot to death.

Following the arrests of Greenlee, Irvin, and Sheppard, a white mob of more than 400 people in 200 cars [attacked Groveland’s Black community](#). Shots were fired at homes, with some set on fire. The National Guard had to be called in.

Local Sheriff Willis McCall was [notorious for his racist brutality](#). He routinely rounded up Black people to be used as convict labor for the orange grove owners. Union organizers were kept out of Lake County.

The Moores [exposed Sheriff McCall](#) torturing the three Groveland defendants, forcing them to stand on broken glass in a failed effort to get false confessions from

them.

The [Orlando Sentinel](#), still published daily, led a campaign to railroad the Black men. Before a grand jury convened — and Ernest Thomas was killed — the newspaper ran a front-page cartoon of four empty electric chairs with the headline “No Compromise!”

An all-white jury convicted the three Black men, with two sentenced to the electric chair. Thurgood Marshall appealed their case to the U.S. Supreme Court, which reversed the verdict and granted a new trial.

In November 1951, while driving the handcuffed Irvin and Sheppard to a hearing, [Sheriff McCall killed Sheppard](#) and shot Irvin in cold blood. Harry T. Moore called for the sheriff to be indicted for murder.

One month later, Harriette Moore and Harry T. Moore were murdered. Sheriff McCall should have been considered an obvious suspect by the FBI.

Irvin and Greenlee were re-tried and again found guilty, with Irvin again sentenced to be executed and Greenlee given a life sentence. Charles Greenlee was paroled in 1962; Samuel Sheppard’s death sentence was commuted, and he was paroled in 1968.

Both men are now dead. Decades later, the Groveland Four were officially exonerated.

In August 2021, Broward Hunter, a grandson of the Groveland Four’s prosecutor Jesse Hunter, told investigators about [material he found in his grandfather’s law office](#). The correspondence convinced Broward Hunter that his grandfather and the judge who presided over the retrial knew that no rape had occurred.

Justice delayed is justice denied.

