

Black History Month

A Florida Focus

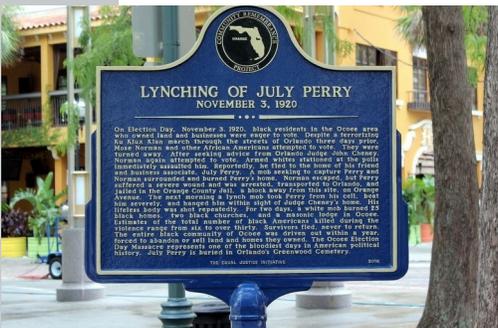
A CIVICS IN REAL LIFE SERIES: CIVICS CONNECTION SPOTLIGHT

Spotlight #3: Ocoee Election Day Massacre

Ocoee is a small community in Florida, just a few miles from Orlando. Right before election day in 1920, the [Ku Klux Klan](#) marched through neighboring Orlando. As they marched, they [threatened](#) Black residents with violence if they tried to vote. And yet, still, there were some Black residents who would not be intimidated, who would not be denied their right to vote. They showed up to the polls but were turned away with threats of violence or mysteriously, their names were missing from the voter registration rolls. But, in the words of Mose Norman and July Perry, two wealthy and influential leaders of the prosperous Black community in Ocoee, "We will vote, by God!". They and other Black residents of Ocoee returned to the polls after [consulting with a friendly judge](#), demanding their right, before being forced away at gunpoint. The Ku Klux Klan and other members of the white community, including very important local leaders, were enraged at this effort to exercise the right to vote. The Klan tried to track down Mose Norman and showed up at the home of his friend July Perry. Mr. Perry defended his home and family, and engaged in a gun battle with the Klan. KKK members, though, captured Mr. Perry, and then [lynched](#) him. The Klan rampaged through the town, destroying dozens of Black homes and murdering an unknown number of residents, [though some estimates](#) say that more than 50 were killed. No one was ever prosecuted for the lynching of July Perry or the murders and the looting and destruction of the prosperous Black community of Ocoee. Instead, people sold pictures of the lynchings and violence. After the massacre, the remaining Black population of Ocoee, which numbered more than 250 people, were [driven from the town](#), with Whites seizing control of their property. Ocoee became one of many 'sundown towns' throughout the United States. The term "[sundown town](#)" refers to towns where non-whites would not be safe in that town after dark. No Black residents settled in Ocoee again until the 1980s.

CONNECTION QUESTIONS

- How has the right to vote been expanded over time in the United States?
- How might the story of Ocoee explain the need for the [Voting Rights Act](#) passed by Congress in 1965?



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