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# Memories of the Herrin Massacre

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Herrin, a small coal mining town in southern Illinois, has earned an infamous reputation because of its bloody family feuds, KKK presence, and perhaps most famously, for being the site of the "Herrin Massacre." After union miners went on strike over wage disputes in 1922, the owner of Lester Mine replaced them with non-union employees. This led to a deadly, violent exchange between the union and non-union miners. My primary research interest in this massacre is to understand the historical trauma and present-day impacts this tragedy has had on the community. Through interviews with relatives and friends of those who took part in the Herrin Massacre, I have discovered the beginnings of a healing process taking place in Herrin, Illinois. The memories of the massacre are still foremost in the community's minds; nevertheless there is some indication that the intensity of the conflict is lessening as a communal memory.

**KEY WORDS** Herrin Massacre, coal mining, communal memory

**H**istory is created by the practice of remembering past events. History and memory are entangled by being cultural recollections of the past (Argenti and Schramm 2012:7). Some histories are welcomed memories of the past, while other memories are challenged in the historical record. The Herrin Massacre is a case of contested history and memory. By examining oral portrayals of this event and comparing them to the historical literature, I seek to determine what the people of Herrin felt needed to be passed down for their posterity.

No anthropologist has yet published on the collective memory of the people of Herrin, Illinois, in Williamson County. Few anthropologists, until recently, have concerned themselves with memory transmission of violent and traumatic pasts (Gill 1999:874; Kidron 2012:198). While traumatic memories associated with the Herrin Massacre are alive in Herrin, they are hard to locate and even harder to access. Not many individuals are willing to speak of this time in the history of Herrin. As I began my research on the history of the Herrin Massacre, I wondered what the people of the town thought of it. When I began meeting with interviewees from Herrin, I became aware of their reserve in speaking about the massacre; they did not wish to be questioned about this time in their past. Indeed, the people of Herrin sought to forget about the massacre, and as a result, my question became

concerned with why the people of Herrin today should want to extinguish an event that occurred long ago. I believe this is not only because those who were alive in Herrin in 1922 did not pass down much information about the massacre, but also because the reputation of the massacre has left a stain on the town itself. This event happened almost a hundred years ago and while no one who actively took part in the massacre still lives, their posterity and their memories live on in Herrin and the surrounding area.

## Literature Review

Massacres have occurred throughout the world and throughout history. The examination of case studies of massacres over the course of history can help form a general set of ideas involving the occurrences and reasoning of cases consisting of multiple deaths. Also examined below are how communities have recovered from traumatic situations and how later generations have dealt with the trauma. By doing this, we are able to further understand how the descendants of the people involved in the Herrin Massacre view the events and current knowledge of their ancestors.

In Gourevitch's (1998) book *We Wish To Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories From Rwanda*, he explores the emotions that are connected with the sites and people associated with the killings in the Rwandan Massacre. The individuals killed in the Rwandan Massacre were of Tutsi origin, or were Hutu individuals who did not support the ethnic cleansing of the Tutsi people (Gourevitch 1998). In Rwanda, the Hutu people had been persecuted by the lighter skinned Tutsi for centuries (Gourevitch 1998). Though the Hutu people largely outnumbered the Tutsi population, the Tutsi's still primarily controlled the government and the upper class (Gourevitch 1998). When the Rwandan government eventually came under Hutu control, it began compelling the people of their county to kill or be killed (Gourevitch 1998:95). Gourevitch points out that "killing Tutsis [became] a political tradition in postcolonial Rwanda; it brought people together" (1998:96).

When conducting his ethnography in Rwanda, Gourevitch (1998:242) was too late to get confessions of participation in the genocide. This was because most people who had earlier boasted about their involvement in the genocide realized how large of an error it was for them to admit their participation (Gourevitch 1998:244). In July of 1994, the genocide stopped because a new government had taken over (Gourevitch 1998:177), and when Gourevitch visited the prisoners in Rwanda that were arrested for genocide, he found "the famous mob mentality of blind obedience to authority often described in attempts to explain the genocide" (1998:243).

Unlike the Rwandan Massacre, there are fewer survivors associated with the El Mozote Massacre. In Leigh Binford's ethnographic book, *The El Mozote Massacre* (1996), the author tells of a massacre that was planned out by the military of El Salvador who were ordered to murder thousands of peasants to send a message to the guerilla fighters who were in opposition to the Salvadoran military (Binford 1996:16). All the men, women, and children in town were murdered, leaving only a few people that escaped as survivors (Binford 1996:21–22). This has left the story of one survivor to be retold many times because she is one of the only surviving witnesses who will speak of the massacre (Binford 1996).

When Binford published *The El Mozote Massacre* (1996), about a decade after the El Mozote Massacre had ended, the inhabitants of El Mozote were debating whether the past should be covered up or allowed to live on to serve as a learning tool (Binford 1996:171). By including violent memories in a physical place of commemoration, the individual may form a connection with the public display, allowing a healing process to begin (Argenti and Schramm 2012:26). Creating physical places of memory transmission including that of museums and small shrines to those who have died has allowed the people of El Salvador to commemorate those who died during the revolution (Binford 1996:174). But, though some in El Salvador are willing to commemorate the massacre, there is a large population of those who are not willing to commemorate it because it brings up the pains of the past.

Those who currently live in the town of El Mozote are terrified of a massacre happening again (Binford 1996:185), and most who lived through the massacre do not wish to speak of it or recount the memory of what happened (Binford 1996:190). For many, “images of the massacre are submerged just below the surface of the mind like a suppressed nightmare capable of breaking unpredictably into consciousness” (Binford 1996:190). El Mozote is, a symbol of repression that will haunt the people of El Salvador for many years to come, and provide historical remembrance for family members of the people killed and the descendants of El Salvador’s government armies who committed these atrocities (Binford 1996:190).

Those who are alive at the time of tragedy and violence are not the only ones who become affected by such acts. Descendants of individuals who have endured some sort of trauma, as well as friends and family of those killed, can be transmitters of violent memories,. According to psychological studies of Holocaust victims, Vietnam veterans, and their children, descendants of people who have had traumatic experiences may have a corrupt sense of self and immoral behavior patterns (Kidron 2012:195). These memories depend largely on the culture one identifies with and this culture transmits such memories from one generation to the next (Argenti and Schramm 2012:15). The anthropologist Edward Sapir describes our tendency to conform to culture as “a healthy unconsciousness of the forms of socialized behavior to which we are subject” (Sapir 1927:246). Furthermore, Clifford Geertz described the culture of a people to have at least “a minimal degree of coherence”, or else the culture would not function as a group (1973:298). Therefore, groups of the same culture share similar thoughts, actions, and ways of dealing with histories.

If it is not culturally appropriate to speak of an event, then the event will not be spoken of. The descendants of trauma victims have a connection to their violent history but are also participants in repressing their cultural histories (Kidron 2012:198). The fear of purposefully uprooting the past causes descendants to listen carefully to their parents when they do speak of their traumatic past, but avoid directly inquiring about the topic. Descendants may commemorate their parents’ traumatic memories by allowing them to keep their memories to themselves (Kidron 2012:207). Kidron concludes that the historical transmission of tragic memories is culturally constructed depending on what memories are transferred from generation to generation, if any at all (2012:220).

Though parents might not recount their knowledge of an event to their posterity, archives do. Archives, which preserve materials such as press releases, recorded interviews, and photographs tell current residents of a community about their past and what

happened in it. As historians Schwartz and Cook (2002) point out, “through archives, the past is controlled. Certain stories are privileged and others marginalized. . . . This represents enormous power over memory and identity, over the fundamental ways in which society seeks evidence of what its core values are and have been, where it has come from, and where it is going” (1). Archives provide people with access to what has happened in the past. They are keepers of memory. But archives only give humans a small piece of the story. The rest remains in memories and the structured stories of historical writers. By providing an archival review of the Herrin Massacre, I hope to give my readers a sense of place of Herrin, Illinois, and the situations surrounding the massacre.

## **Recorded Historical Review of the Massacre**

Below is a comprehensive review of the archival literature found at local libraries of Herrin, and personal collections of literature given to me by one of my interviewees, Deanna Smillie. Information was compiled, reviewed, and compared to construct the most accurate description of the massacre that achieves provided. When first examining southern Illinois, it looks like an uneventful place littered with farms and small towns. However, Williamson County Illinois used to be an active place. Its main source of income was coal, and in the early 20th century, coal brought wealth and prosperity (A History of Herrin Illinois 2009). Southern Illinois was alive and well with growing towns and destination cities such as Herrin (A History of Herrin Illinois 2009).

Working in coalmines was (and still is) hard and grueling work with long hours and dangerous working conditions. These conditions prompted miners to form a union in which they fought for labor rights (A History of Herrin Illinois 2009; Baty 1923). In 1922 a group of union mineworkers from the Lester Mine went on strike demanding increased wages. While a group of people on strike might not seem very important, it is the impact that the union had on the county that made them so important (Angle 1991:4; Parker 1923; Baty 1923:11). In the town of Herrin, “unionism had penetrated every craft and industry. . . the miners had the active sympathy of the entire laboring population” (Angle 1991:13). The whole county of Williamson sympathized with the disgruntled mineworkers because they too understood the importance of the union and how it had made working and living conditions better for the mineworkers (Angle 1991:13; Colby 1982). Before unions, accidents in the mines were recurrent and the average daily payment was barely enough for a family to survive on (Angle 1991:13). Unions protected their member, which garnered worker loyalty within the union (Angle 1991:13; Baty 1923:11; Colby 1982).

When the union miners went on strike because of contract disagreements, the owner of the Lester Mine, William J. Lester, decided that he would not wait for the contract to be settled and hired non-union miners to strip the mine and haul the coal out of town to sell (Angle 1991:14; Baty 1923:12; Colby 1982; Roberts 1989:9A; Topics of the Day 1922). The non-union miners were hired from Chicago and were under the impression that their employment would not cause unrest with the other workers (Roberts 1989:9A). These miners were protected by mine guards who “had earned the hate and fear of strikers” because of previous cruelty to workers (Ballowe 2000:23).

Individuals from the area were being antagonized by the Lester Mine guards who closed local roads and harassed women in the area (Baty 1923:12; Ballowe 2000; Roberts

1989:9A). Local men were growing tired of the mine guards harassing the county and having their work being stolen by other miners, so they decided to take matters into their own hands. The men raided hardware stores and called upon other people of southern Illinois to join them in their cause (Ballowe 2000; Roberts 1989:9A). On June 21, 1922, forces of union mineworkers attacked a truck carrying non-union workers while others began to assemble around the mine (Ballowe 2000; Colby 1982; Roberts 1989:9A). The non-union workers became aware of the growing discontent of the local people and tried to quit but were prevented by the mine guards (Baty 1923:14).

The union miners called for a plane that began dropping bombs around the mine, while about 500 union members and their sympathizers surrounded it, and began firing on it with the non-union men inside (Ballowe 2000; Baty 1923:14; Colby 1982; Roberts 1989:9A). Gunfire was returned with gunfire, and a few union men were killed (Angle 1991:30; Ballowe 2000; Colby 1982; Roberts 1989). The firing continued into the next day, until a truce was reached when the mine guards and men inside the Lester Mine surrendered (Ballowe 2000; Colby 1982; Roberts 1989:9A). The men believed that they would not be harmed and thought they were being marched toward Herrin to be taken out of the county (Angle 1991:4; Baty 1923:14; Ballowe 2000; Colby 1982; Roberts 1989:9A). Instead, the mine guards and non-union mineworkers were taken to Power House Woods, “placed before a barbed wire fence, and told to ‘Run for your lives’” (Roberts 1989:9A). Some men escaped while others were shot to death (Angle 1991:10; Baty 1923:14; Ballowe 2000; Colby 1982; Roberts 1989:9A). Other non-union mineworkers had their throats slit at the Herrin Cemetery (Ballowe 2000; Roberts 1989:9A).

In total, three union mine members were killed as a result of the shootings (Angle 30; Ballowe 2000; Roberts 1989:9A) and nineteen non-union miners were killed (Angle 1991:10; Roberts 1989:8B) (Colby 1982, lists twenty non-union miners and guards). A total of “214 [people were issued indictments]—forty-four for murder, fifty-eight for rioting, and fifty-four for assault to murder” (Angle 1991:40). The people of Herrin gave alibis (Ballowe 2000) and paid bonds for those who were going to be put in jail (Roberts 1989:8B). No one was ever convicted of having a part in the massacre (Angle 1991:47; Colby 1982; Roberts 1989:8B). Though not all of Herrin was in support of the massacre, the overarching attitude of the town was that “greed had claimed its own and was satisfied” (Parker 1923:50).

Newspapers throughout North America expressed outrage over the lack of arrests for the incident (Jones n.d.; Roberts 1989:8B; Topics of the Day 1922). The *Los Angeles Times* called it “blood lust” while Canadian newspapers called for miners to be found at fault (Jones n.d.). President Harding said, “murder is murder” and called for the arrest of the perpetrators of the massacre (Jones n.d.). Everywhere, people called for the state and local governments to do something about the murders, but nothing was to come of it (Roberts 1989:8B; Jones n.d.; Parker 1923:54).

## Methodology

The goal of this project was to generate as many interviews of individuals who had ancestors or close friends who were at the Herrin Massacre, regardless of the type of involvement they had. The goal of collecting this information is to critically examine the discourse and memories that have been passed down through the generations and compare the

transmitted memories with the academic record of the massacre. This was to become a discussion of the memories that have been passed down and how they are collectively used in the town of Herrin, Illinois. Before I spoke with these families, I compiled as much information about the massacre as I could so that I was able to follow the stories of my interviewees.

Upon beginning my research, I was met with much opposition from the locals. For me to collect stories from the town's inhabitants was something of a charged subject. Some individuals wanted to speak of their family's memories of the massacre, while others questioned my motives for wishing to explore their past. I understood the opposition to my questioning of Herrinites on the subject of their violent past as I was not the first person to question the town about it. Their ancestors had been ridiculed in the past for their actions and involvement with the massacre, as well as publicly and nationally condemned as a town (*Topics of the Day* 1922). After hearing rumors of Herrinities occasionally beginning to speak about the massacre, I implemented snowball sampling to gain access to Herrinities who were willing to be interviewed about the Herrin Massacre. First, I began speaking with family friends from the area and from this, I was able to gain access to four interviewees. I also began speaking with a librarian at the Herrin Library who was willing to provide me with textual information about the massacre that was stored in a special collection. The librarian was not willing to be interviewed for fear of reprimand from her employer, but was willing to provide me with contacts from the town of Herrin to speak with me from which I gained nine more interviewees.

All the individuals that I interviewed were aged 45 years or older, with at least ten individuals who were aged 60 or older. Though I did not directly ask my interviewees their age, a few of them mentioned it in the interview, and I was able to deduce age by speaking to them in person. Some individuals relayed to me stories of their grandchildren or great grandchildren, further allowing me to confidently assume the age group of my interviewees. All interviews were conducted in person at the interviewee's home residence, relative's home, or the local nursing home. My interviews were conducted either one on one or in a group setting, depending on the number of residents in the home. Homes with multiple residents spoke with me as a group. The interviewees were all Herrin residents at one time in their life and now either lived in Herrin, or just outside the town. All interviewees were related to or close friends with someone who was present at the massacre. One interviewee was born eight years before the massacre and has memories of the time shortly after it.

I provided my interviewees with consent forms to sign that allowed me to record and later transcribed the interview, with the recordings of the interview to be deleted after transcription. The consent forms also inquired on the use of their names in written and published documents. All interviewees indicated that I could use their names, but I have since decided against the use of my interviewees' names to protect the privacy of my interviewees. Each interview lasted from twenty minutes to an hour, depending on their knowledge of the massacre. I used an interview protocol sheet to guide each of my interviews with eight questions about the town and the massacre itself. I also told my interviewees that they could elaborate as much as they wanted on each question, with the freedom to decline answering. The specific questions used to guide these interviews that can be found in the appendix.

## Presentation of Data

Over ninety years have passed since the Herrin Massacre has taken place, and although those who participated in the massacre have long since passed, their memories of what happened on June 22, 1922, have been passed down to their descendants and the people of Herrin. Though the information that has been passed down is limited, it is still there. Many responses to my questions of the massacre included “I don’t know much because I was never told” and “We don’t like to talk about that here.” I wanted to know what the people of Herrin did know, how they got their information, and why they would rather not talk about the subject. The people of Herrin in 1922 were not the targets of the events surrounding the massacre, but were instead considered to be the perpetrators of the events themselves.

Some of my informants were able to relay memories of the events of the Herrin Massacre that had been passed down to them from parents or grandparents. My informant Chad remembers stories of the people of Herrin and surrounding areas being scared to death of the mine guards at Lester Mine because they were cruel to the non-union mineworkers and disrupted everyday life. The mine guards would “just drive down the road and get out to pick a fight or shoot over someone’s head” (personal interview, Oct. 28, 2014). Although the books written about the incident claim that union men looted local stores to acquire weapons, a man Chad knew said “he didn’t see any looting” (personal interview, Oct. 28, 2014). Furthermore, Chad’s family members tell an account of the massacre where individuals on the non-union coal miner’s side fired the first shot (personal interview, Oct. 28, 2014). The union mineworkers begged the non-union people to surrender, but the mine guards had machine guns set up to deter the union mine works from coming in and taking over the mine.

A few of my informants had family members that remember seeing some of the killings. My informant, John, began by telling me about the events his grandfather and father were involved in on the day of the massacre. His grandfather took his father out to see what was going on, and when they arrived, “the initial killings were over, but it was still in a considerable state of flux” (personal interview, Oct. 14, 2014). He saw the bodies of McDowell, the manager of the Lester mine and a hanging victim on the ground. They also saw a man who was shot asking for a drink of water. John recalled what his father saw and heard.

The first thing that he told me about was that where he had seen the fella killed that there were bodies around, that there were people standing around and grandpa pulled in with the car and got out and told dad to stay in the car and dad was looking through the window, which it was warm so the windows were down, and he could hear everything that was going on. There was a man who was on his knees holding his belly, had been shot through and he was begging another fella for a drink of water, the fella had a pistol and said ‘Yeah you son of a bitch, I’ll give you a drink of water.’ And he pointed the pistol in the man’s face and dad turned away, heard the shot and turned around to find the man down. So ummm he said that it was a carnival atmosphere that people were going to it the way you would go to a carnival. (Personal interview, Oct. 14, 2014)

The Allegrettos told me a story of Mr. Allegretto’s father who saw a man lying in a ditch on June 22, yelling for somebody to help him. But as Mr. Allegretto’s father started across



the road to help, he was told to get back or he would have to be shot as well. After the non-union mineworkers were led away from the mine, some local men, including John's grandfather, took part in the looting of the miners' barracks, stealing items such as canned peaches, canned tomatoes, and a folding cot (personal interview, Oct. 14, 2014).

After the massacre, the bodies were laid out in the Dillard building in downtown Herrin for public viewing. My interviewee, Mr. Blair, told me about his dad's only recollection of the massacre, which was when his grandfather brought his dad into downtown Herrin to see the bodies displayed in the building. Mr. Blair believed that these individuals were in the Dillard building to be embalmed, however, my interviewee Chad told me that according to his dad's recollection, the bodies were not embalmed. Chad recounted stories of his dad being taken by his parents to the Dillard building to see all of the victims laid out. His dad believed that the mineworkers that were killed were all black. Chad later found out that his young dad, seeing bodies that had not been embalmed and laying out for a few days, tricked his young mind into thinking the men were black when really their white skin had just darkened from not being preserved.

Most of my informants knew from reading books that after the massacre, victims were on public display. Afterwards, the claimed victims were taken back to Chicago while the unclaimed victims were buried in a section of the Herrin City Cemetery. My informant May recalled her mom taking her to the cemetery on the Memorial Day after the massacre. May's family was placing flowers on the gravestones of their loved ones when her mother pointed out to her where the potter's field was in the cemetery, and told her that was where the 'scabs' (non-union workers) were buried in the cemetery (personal interview, Oct. 15, 2014). Other than this one incident from when she was younger, May did not remember her family speaking about the massacre much because she was a young girl at the time (personal interview, Oct. 15, 2014).

After the massacre, a trial was held for those involved. My informant Carrie spoke the most about the trial. He recalls stories being told to him of the people who were paid off by the union mineworkers and their supporters to not prosecute the union workers on trial. Carrie claims that the whole town provided alibis for all of the accused, and that no one was ever convicted for the killings of the massacre.

The people of Herrin have mixed views on the events surrounding the Herrin Massacre. Some do not agree with what happened, while others claimed that it was only a matter of time before the United Mineworkers of America (UMWA) were to do something about their jobs being given away. Over half of my informants discussed how their families were mine working families that lived in the area, and how they were proud of their relatives for working in such hard conditions. Mr. Allegretto and his wife fondly recalled Mr. Allegretto's dad, who was a coal miner and held the title of working the longest in mines of Illinois. My informant Chad believes that the union miners did what had to be done to keep the union together. My informants are proud of their heritage and want their ancestors to be remembered as hard workers and not as part of a massacre. They believe that the coal miners who took part in the Herrin Massacre just wanted their jobs back, but unfortunately, some of the rebellious individuals decided to become violent.

Almost all of my informants expressed some form of regret for what happened to the twenty-three people killed in the massacre. John said that after his grandfather's

participation in the lootings of the mineworker's barracks, his developed a distaste for peaches and tomatoes and regretted taking part in it. Mr. Allegretto recalls how it had bothered his dad that he was unable to help the man in the ditch at the massacre. The ancestors have left a veil of regret on the townspeople of Herrin.

Some of my informants displayed an immanent sense of regret and concern about how outsiders see the town. Mrs. Blair commented on the judgment that Herrin has received from having a violent past. She explained that "people . . . say 'oh, Bloody Williamson' . . . but we just kinda roll it off" (personal interview, Oct. 27, 2014). Kevin said that, "Herrin folks are good people. They feel that they have been improperly judged" (personal interview, Oct. 15, 2014). My informants' families and friends who were alive at the time of the massacre did not want to talk about it, leaving their posterity with little information. Mr. and Mrs. Blair did not learn of the massacre until their late teens, and both commented that people in the town did not speak of the event when they were growing up (personal interview, Oct. 27, 2014). As Mr. Blair said, "the skeletons in your closet, you don't want to rattle them" (personal interview, Oct. 27, 2014). Mr. Raven's dad was at the massacre but never spoke of it. Mr. Raven tried to get information out of his father's friends, but when he asked them about the massacre only one of the men responded while "look[ing] around different directions to see if anyone was in there before he would even say anything" (personal interview, Oct. 28, 2014). My informant Carrie has had people tell him that they think their dads were involved in the massacre, but they never asked their fathers about it when they were alive. One of my interviewees, Bob, moved to Herrin in 1923 and knew almost nothing about the massacre.

A few of my interviewees have taken it upon themselves to do research on the massacre. John and Kevin joined a team of locals who have been concerning themselves with the events of the Herrin Massacre and have been trying to educate local individuals on what occurred. They have gained a better understanding of the events that took place around the massacre and are arguably helping the community cope with the title of "Bloody Williamson." The team has received both good and bad reviews from locals, with some glad that they are trying to get the town to accept their past, while others believe that it should stay buried. My informant Carrie even wrote a book about the Herrin massacre. He was always interested about the town's past and had interviewed many people himself about their experiences during the time of the massacre. In particular, his interests were in that of the trial for the people accused of taking part in the massacre.

My eldest interviewee, May, was born in the generation that was alive at the time of the massacre. There is a marked difference in her curiosity about the massacre and the tragic events that took place. May stated "since [the massacre] it [people's questions] have never died down, and people are still asking questions about it", it will take a long time for the town to heal (personal interview, Oct. 15, 2014). May thinks of Herrin as the thriving city that it was before the Depression hit, and not as a place where a massacre occurred.

As for the most recent generation of Herrin, students are being taught the good and bad aspects of Herrin's past. Some teachers have begun to teach the events of the Herrin Massacre in their classrooms, and the Allegretto's daughter is one of these teachers. In a personal conversation with her, she told me about how the younger generation is embracing Herrin's past. The newest generation is taught to not be ashamed of their past, but to learn from it instead.

Herrin has received the title of “Bloody Williamson” over the years because of the violent past of the town. Many of my informants spoke of other occurrences in Herrin that have given it the title of Bloody Williamson. The Bloody Vendetta (a long running family feud that occurred in the area), activities of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), and other murders were brought to my attention by my informants. Carrie informed me that the KKK moved into Herrin after the massacre, using it as an excuse to “clean up the town” (personal interview, Oct. 15, 2014). A few of my informants told me stories about their fathers’ run-ins with them during the short time that the KKK controlled Herrin, and shootouts that occurred between the leader of the KKK, S. Glenn Young, and the leader of the KKK’s opposition (personal interview, Oct. 18, 2014; Sam 2013). Two of my informants even attributed their failing knowledge of the massacre to their family’s ties and fears of the KKK (personal interview, Oct. 28, 2014).

Memories of the Herrin massacre have been obscured over the years, leaving many memories and judgments about the massacre in question. A couple of my informants admitted to their failing memories of what their parents or friends had said about the massacre. John said that his dad told him the story of what happened only a few times in his life and only once did he take him to see exactly where the events of that day occurred. John thought that they happened east of Crenshaw crossing, but later realized that “it was [his] memory that was faulty” (personal interview, Oct. 14, 2014). The landscape had changed so much since he was a boy that his memories could not provide the exact locations of where his father had witnessed the events of the massacre.

Finally, most of my informants were concerned about the current recovery efforts happening in Herrin’s City Cemetery. Within the last few years, geologists and anthropologists from Eastern Illinois University have begun to look into the burial sites of those who were buried in the Herrin City Cemetery after the massacre. The people of Herrin are concerned about what the individuals excavating the potter’s field of the Herrin City Cemetery have found and how the remains of the victims will be portrayed in relation to the town. Some informants are concerned that the graves of their ancestors are being disturbed in the process, while others hope that they find the right bodies and have thoroughly done their research. It is common knowledge amongst the residents of Herrin that the ‘scab’ individuals that were not claimed by family were buried in the potter’s field of Herrin City Cemetery, “an area typically reserved for the unwanted, the unknown, and the unidentified” (Hall 2013). According to the research conducted by an individual named Scott Dooty, author of *Herrin Massacre* (2013), this area is without place markers and subsequently has been subject to commingled burials (Mariano 2013). The current unearthing of the massacre has led some in Herrin, such as John, to reconsider the events of the massacre and begin to provide their own opinions on it. As John says, “You’re entitled to your own opinion but not your own facts. . . , facts are what they are and I think the things that’s most important is for people to understand that it was a different world [in 1922]” (personal interview, Oct. 14, 2014).

## Implications and Conclusions

The goal of this project was to examine oral portrayals of the Herrin Massacre and compare them to the historical literature. By completing interviews with residents of Herrin, I

was able to get a small glimpse of what the people of Herrin felt needed to be passed down for their posterity. I was not surprised that the people I interviewed all knew of the Herrin Massacre, but had varying degrees of knowledge about it. I was even less surprised that none of my interviewees said that they had ever spoken to a person who had physically taken part in the killing of any of the massacre's victims. All the stories that were told to me were from people watching the massacre, trying to help those being persecuted, or from individuals taking part in the looting surrounding the massacre. Historically, the records of the massacre indicated a large population of the town being involved with the massacre and directly supporting the killing. Yet, this is not the information that was relayed to me by my interviewees.

I received a substantial amount of information from the people of Herrin. Though some people were reluctant to speak of it, I managed to record many personal stories about the Herrin Massacre and the personal lives of its inhabitants of 1922. Once I interviewed a few people, many more seemed willing to speak with me. Perhaps it was because I interviewed respected individuals who recommended me to others, or perhaps it was the small-town relationship I drew upon with each person I interviewed. I myself am from a small town, and my dad is from a small town about an hour north of Herrin. I come from a family with great respect for coal miners and was able to translate this to the people I interviewed. I was lucky in the fact that I was not a complete outsider to the culture of the town of Herrin. "Forms and significances which seem obvious to an outsider will be denied outright by those who carry out the patterns: outlines and implication that are perfectly clear to these may be absent to the eye of the onlooker" (Sapir 1927:239). I, as a researcher who was not completely removed from the culture from which I was studying, was able to notice and gain access to the histories of my interviewees.

The information that I received from those I interviewed about the Ku Klux Klan's involvement in the aftermath of the massacre was too great to not look into further. Seven out of the thirteen people I interviewed—Carrie, the Ravens, the Allegrettos, and the Blairs—all mentioned the KKK in their stories about the Herrin massacre. Some people believed the KKK might have had something to do with the massacre, however, while looking into details about the KKK's involvement in Herrin, I found no such ties with the Lester Mine or the proceedings of the massacre. I only found that the KKK was brought into Herrin after the massacre to regulate the county (Lockwood and DeNeal 2011, Pruett 1989). The KKK believed that the prevailing lawlessness in Williamson County had reached its peak after the Herrin Massacre, and therefore needed outside influence to help law enforcement to regulate the county's lawlessness (Lockwood and DeNeal 2011).

All of the individuals that I interviewed told me that the town's way was to keep quiet about the massacre and try their best to bury the past. As Gourevitch found when he tried to interview the perpetrators of genocide in Rwanda, people decided not to speak on the subject once they received ridicule for their actions (1998:244). Further, as in the massacre that occurred at El Mozote, many of the residents of the town did not want to speak of their violent past and remember what happened (Binford 1996). As one resident of Herrin commented, "the more you try to cover it up and keep it secret, it just makes it more enticing" (personal interview, Oct. 14, 2014). Most of the people that I interviewed wished that they could tell me more. My interviewees regretted that they had not asked their parents

more questions about it when they were alive but now will never have the chance to. It has been 92 years since the massacre happened, leaving almost all people who had been alive at that time deceased or too young at the time to remember much.

Perhaps this is why people have been able to talk about the massacre more in recent years. As Kidron found in her study of trauma descendants, the memories of violent histories become less painful to the descendants as generations go by (2012:193). Since their parents are gone, they feel that they can now speak of the massacre without offending them. The same assumption also seems to be the case for those who were not relatives, but provided information about the massacre. One of my interviewees has published a book that recounts tales of the Herrin Massacre, but he has only recently published it because “there are two people I got most of my information from. Both of them are dead. That is why I thought it was OK to go ahead and publish the book” (personal interview, Oct. 15, 2014).

For most of the current people of Herrin, the massacre is an all but forgotten memory. The generation that was alive around the time of the massacre has successfully snuffed out most of the collective memory of June 22, 1922. As Argenti and Schramm state “if a ... community agrees that a trauma did not happen, then it vanishes from collective memory” (2012:11). Though it was not spoken of in Herrin, neighboring towns spoke of it, and newspapers across the country wanted answers to the untimely deaths of 22 young men (Angle 1991:30; Ballowe 2000; Roberts 1989:9A). People have written books on the event, compiling together as much information as possible to let others know of a history that need not be forgotten.

The current population of Herrin is just beginning to learn about their own history. Unless memories are shared, they are forgotten and become less significant to a population (Argenti and Schramm 2012:5). I found this to be true when interviewing people for my project. If the memories of tragedies are not shared and passed on, then a population can never begin to cope with them and heal from them. Some memories of the Herrin Massacre have been passed on and uncovered by a curious first and second generation of Herrinites that were born since the massacre. The memories are still there as they “have a profound impact on the identity of a generation of people who have not directly experienced that which is being remembered” (Argenti and Schramm 2012:23).

These memories have been historicized in the topics that have been moralized in the minds of the people of Herrin. Some stories of the massacre that have been passed down are not the same as what is recorded in historical books. Most of the people of Herrin today try to disassociate themselves and their community from the Herrin Massacre. As one resident of Herrin stated, “we hate to see the past dragged up because it reflects on the current generation, which has nothing to do with it” (Colby 1982). For example, my informant Chad, relayed to me that there was no looting done before the massacre, while Doody’s book, *Herrin Massacre* (2013), leads readers to believe that union miners formed a mob that looted gun and ammunition stores both in Herrin and its surrounding towns (personal interview, Oct. 28, 2014; Doody 2013:54–55). The two sides of this story have been constructed from different perspectives of the Herrin Massacre. Both histories have been formed by their respective interviewees and have been shaped by two

different “socially . . . informed or determined . . . reactions to extreme violence” (Argenti and Schramm 2012:15). The culture surrounding the town of Herrin has been to not speak of their violent past, while scholars and historians have openly examined it.

Some descendants of traumatic situations “show a disinterest in historicizing their familial past and avoid public form of commemoration” (Kidron 2012: 193). Herrin just put up a grave marker last year in 2015 at the site where the ‘scabs’ are thought to have been buried. Some individuals in the town feel that there should not be public commemoration of the massacre, but others feel the need to uncover the past.

The best thing that is coming out (of the recent discoveries and research being done on the massacre) is the more open and public acknowledgement that something awful happened here and . . . ya know we can’t control the history we are dealt. All we have to do is deal with it. (Personal interview, Oct. 14, 2014)

The Herrin Library has recently installed a display commemorating the massacre and to inform the public of what happened in 1922. I was also informed during my interviews that in 2014, Herrinites began giving tours of the Herrin Massacre (Herrin Massacre Tour 2014), and that it has been called “a healing tour” by a local author and tour guide (The Southern Illinoisan 2014). Perhaps the time has come for Herrin to accept their past, both the good and the bad of what has happened in this small town. As one particular interviewee stated, “I think the time is finally ripe for closure. It’s not going to be a total closure, but a healthy acceptance” (personal interview, Oct. 14, 2014). Although I am not part of the Herrin community, I was able to provide an ethnography and a “a vocabulary in which . . . the role of culture in human life . . . can be expressed” (Geertz 1973:304).

Perhaps by trying to understand the archival stories of the massacre as compared to the oral history of the massacre, I have been able to preserve and better understand the community that the Herrin Massacre left behind. My study of the descendants of a community who were the aggressors of violence shows a side of trauma victims who are not readily thought of as victims. Furthermore, it focuses on a group of people who have not yet entered the anthropological discourse as unspoken victims of the Herrin massacre. The people of Herrin seem to be experiencing a change in moral beliefs from that of their predecessors. They have experienced guilt for their ancestors’ and friends’ past crimes. The town shows remorse for the past and is committed to learning about their heritage, both the good and bad parts of the town’s history. By educating the townspeople of Herrin about the past, Herrin has begun to heal as a community.

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### Appendix: Modern Memories of the 1922 Tragedy in Herrin Interview Protocol

I will ask you a list of questions. Feel free to elaborate as much as you want on each. You are also free to decline answering any of these questions.

- 1) How familiar with the town of Herrin?
- 2) How familiar are you with the Herrin Massacre?
- 3) Are you familiar with anyone who has retold stories regarding the events of the Massacre?  
If so, what is your relationship with this person?  
How do you think the events surrounding the massacre affected them?
- 4) Do you have any ancestors who were alive and in or around at the time of the massacre?
- 5) What information can you recall being told about the massacre?
- 6) How is the massacre remembered today? Does anyone speak of it in public or private?
- 7) Do you know other people who might be willing to talk about the Massacre?
- 8) What are your thoughts about the town's past?