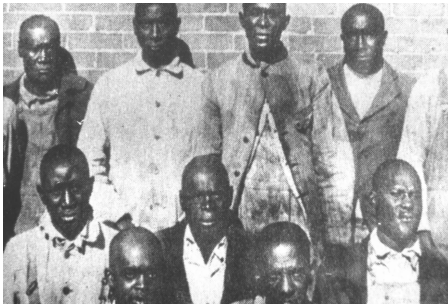


## 1919 Elaine, Arkansas Massacre



**Overview:** The Elaine Massacre took place in Phillips County, Arkansas, from September 30 to October 1, 1919. In response to Black sharecroppers organizing with labor unions to demand fair wages and working conditions, armed white terrorists slaughtered, lynched, and hunted down Black women, men, and children indiscriminately.

**Background:** In post-World War I Arkansas, many Black sharecroppers were trapped in exploitative tenant farming systems controlled by white landowners. These landowners often manipulated accounts, keeping Black farmers in debt and unable to improve their living conditions. In 1919, Black sharecroppers in Elaine joined the Progressive Farmers and Household Union of America, an organization aiming to secure fair compensation and better working conditions.

**Massacre and Aftermath:** On the night of September 30, 1919, Black sharecroppers gathered at a church in Hoop Spur, near Elaine, to discuss union strategies. Armed guards protected the meeting, aware of potential threats. A group of white law enforcement officers and a deputy sheriff approached the church. A shootout ensued, leading to the death of one white officer. In response, white mobs and law enforcement launched a brutal campaign against Black residents. Estimates suggest that between 100 and 240 Black men, women, and children were killed in the ensuing violence. The Governor of Arkansas declared martial law, deploying nearly 500 soldiers from the Arkansas National Guard to “restore order.” These troops often acted violently toward Black residents, leading to further deaths and mass arrests. Hundreds of Black residents were detained. Twelve Black men, later known as the “Elaine Twelve,” were quickly convicted and sentenced to death for allegedly inciting violence, despite a lack of evidence and highly biased trials. The NAACP worked to appeal the convictions. The case ultimately reached the U.S. Supreme Court in [Moore v. Dempsey \(1923\)](#), which ruled that the mob-dominated trials violated due process. This decision was a significant civil rights victory, establishing a precedent for federal intervention in cases of gross injustice.

**Legacy:** The Elaine Massacre occurred at the end of [Red Summer of 1919](#) — a series of brutal attacks on African Americans in more than three dozen cities including Chicago, Washington, D.C., Norfolk, Knoxville, and more cities. The massacre had a devastating effect on Elaine’s Black community, stripping families of property and deepening economic and social oppression. The Elaine Massacre highlights the dangers Black communities faced when advocating for labor and civil rights in the early 20th century. For decades, the massacre was mischaracterized as a “race riot.” Today, the Elaine Massacre is recognized as a mass killing motivated by racial and economic oppression. Efforts have been made to commemorate the victims and educate the public about this dark chapter in American history.

Source:  
Encyclopedia of Arkansas. “Elaine Massacre of 1919.”  
<<https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/elaine-massacre-of-1919-1102/>>

