

The Murder of Black Women in Atlanta from 1910 to 1912  
And the Existence of a Serial Murderer: A Research Note

Vance McLaughlin  
Robert L. Bing III

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The existence of black perpetrators and/or victims of serial murders in the United States have not been examined as closely as its occurrence merits (Walsh, 2005). This dearth of interest is one reason the entertainment media has focused on white serial killers and victims. Based upon the influence of these media images (and general neglect of the subject), many citizens could easily conclude that only white males committed serial murder. Of which is why many individuals and experts were surprised to learn that the DC snipers in 2002 were two lone Black men, camping out along the interstate (Clint, 2009). Like citizens, law enforcement officials are not immune from these false images and often exclude Black suspects to the detriment of future victims (Walsh, 2005). Concomitantly, unsolved serial murders, that is, the actual victims are often neglected completely by researchers (Mott, 1999; Walsh, 2005).

This article, then, provides a chronology and detailed information about the murder of Black women in Atlanta between 1910 and 1912. It is descriptive in nature, and provides insights into media coverage about the killing of Black women in the city of Atlanta during this same time period. It also provides insight into the investigation of a possible serial murderer by local law enforcement that was only intensified when adverse publicity resulted in political pressure on the police. In the end, we discuss various interpretations including those contemporary to the times.

By 1912, the murder of Black women in Atlanta took on a life of their own and became front page news across the United States. On May 12, 1912, for example, the *New York Times* published the following story:

ATLANTA, GA May 11-“Jack the Ripper” claimed his twentieth woman victim in Atlanta some time last night. Like the other nineteen victims he has slain in the last nine month (sic), she was a comely yellow girl and has not yet been identified.

Her body was found this morning by a party of laborers in a secluded alley. The clothing had been removed and was piled nearby. Death was caused by two stabs in the neck, one of which cut the jugular vein. After these fatal stabs, the ripper, as in the case of the other nineteen girls, made other cuts on the body

So far the detectives have been unable to find a clue to the slayer. The negroes, who are in a state of terror and try to keep their women off the street at night, have offered a large reward for the arrest of the murderer (“Another ripper”, 1912, p. 6).

According to the *New York Times*, Atlanta had its own version of London’s Jack the Ripper. Jack the Ripper was a serial murderer who killed five white female prostitutes in London from August 31<sup>st</sup> to November 9<sup>th</sup> in 1888. If the *New York Times* newspaper article is correct, the Atlanta Ripper had killed four times as many women as the infamous Jack.

In Atlanta from 1910 to 1912, the murders of Black women increased and at one point occurred on a weekly basis. These murders have never been investigated as a group to determine if the increased number of homicides was an anomaly or if a never identified serial killer was the cause. With this revelation in mind, the authors conducted a content analysis of a wide variety of documents, such as death certificates and newspaper reports,

with an eye toward further developing the thesis that there existed an Atlanta Ripper. We begin this research paper (with its historical focus), with a discussion about the methods of exploration and analysis for this study.

## Methodology

In this research, we rely upon the principles of content analysis; it is possible to identify themes, to count words, paragraphs and/or to make inferences based upon the reading of articles in newspapers. We rely upon a type of inductive thematic content analysis and report findings based upon the newspaper coverage and a concomitant review of death certificates (Berg, 1998).

Analysis Procedures. The procedure used in the current study is a version of inductive content analysis. This method requires one to gather, collect and organize data. Inductive content analysis also requires one to examine the data for potential patterns. In a nutshell, content analysis is a research technique for the systematic description of manifest data (Berg, 1998). It is governed by the start of theoretical problem (such as newspaper coverage of homicides). The unit of analysis can be words, paragraphs, themes, paragraphs, items and characters. In this case, we lift from the newspaper articles (and death certificates) paragraphs, themes and sentences to support a particular observation.

Analytic Induction. Analytic induction is an important phase in operationalizing content analysis. In general, the principle involves the selection of cases (e.g., newspaper articles,

death certificates, etc.) to test a research question or a theory. The process requires the reader to inductively lift themes or other messages from paragraphs and to make an inference based upon the analytic induction. The use of inductive analysis allows the researcher to link or ground their observations to the data from which they derive (Berg, 1998:230).

Benefits of content analysis. Perhaps, the most important advantage of content analysis is that it can be virtually unobtrusive (Webb, et al., 1981). Content analysis, although useful when analyzing interview data, may be used non-reactively; no one needs to be interviewed, no one needs to fill out lengthy questionnaires. In this case, newspaper accounts, public addresses, libraries, archives, and similar sources allow researchers to conduct content analytic studies (Berg, 1998:243). Next, we define what is meant by a serial murderer (a focal point in the research).

Definitional of terms:? Egger (1990:11) offers the following definition of serial murder.

...one or more individuals (males, in most known cases) commits a second murder and/or subsequent murder; is relationship-less (no prior relationship between victim and attacker); is at a different time and has no connection to the initial murder; and is usually committed in a different geographic location. Further, the motive is not for material gain and is believed to be for the murderer's desire to have power over his victim.

With this definition in mind, we have established as a goal, the identification of three or more consecutive murders that we can likely attribute to one perpetrator (Godwin, 2008, Hickey, 2006). When the Atlanta Ripper was mentioned as a phenomenon, it meant different things when used by different people. The concept of a serial killer was

unknown at the time. Some felt that one person was committing these unsolved murders while others felt that it was some sort of calamity that befell Black women based on other factors, thus known as a “Ripper type” murder.

Source of data. The data for this article is derived from three major newspapers: *Atlanta Journal*, *Atlanta Georgian* and the *Atlanta Constitution*. A list of 19 African-American female murder victims appears in Table 1, whose deaths were attributed by at least one newspaper source to the Ripper beginning on October 6, 1910. The sources for the table (and the number of victims mentioned by each) include the death certificates (**DC-16**), *Atlanta Journal* (**AJ-14**), *Atlanta Constitution* (**AC-8**), *Atlanta Georgian* (**AG-3**) and if a list (**L-9**) of names purportedly being victims of the Ripper were included in any newspaper.<sup>1</sup> Death certificates were then obtained for each of the identified victims.<sup>2</sup> Based upon these sources, we have compartmentalized a list of potentials victims (our original master list); their names appear in Table 1.

Table 1: Victim Information Sources

<b>Name</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>D.C.</b>	<b>A.J.</b>	<b>A.C.</b>	<b>A.G.</b>	<b>List</b>
Maggie Brook	October 3, 1910	X		X		X
Rosa Trice	January 22, 1911	X		X	X	
Lucinda McNeal	February 3, 1911	X	X	X		X
Unknown	February 18, 1911			X		
Georgia Brown	April 5, 1911	X				X
Rosa L. Rivers	May 8, 1911	X				X
Mary Walker	May 28, 1911	X	X			X
Addie Watts	June 16, 1911	X	X		X	X
Lizzie Watts	June 25, 1911	X		X		X
Lena Sharp	July 2, 1911	X	X	X	X	X
Sadie Hollie	July 7, 1911	X	X	X		X
Eva Florence	October 22, 1911	X	X			
Minnie Wise	November 10, 1911		X	X		
Mary Putnam	November 21, 1911	X	X			
Ida Ferguson	January 12, 1912	X	X			
Pearl Williams	January 19, 1912	X	X			
Alacy Owens	February 15, 1912	X	X			
Unknown	April 15, 1912		X			
Unknown	May 11, 1912		X			

Limitations. There are, however, two difficulties that arise when trying to identify the murders that a serial killer could have committed. The first problem is to discover when the first murder occurred. It is possible that the killer has committed prior murders in a geographical area that is outside the interest of the law enforcement agency investigating the current murder. It is also possible to have a series of murders in one relatively small geographic area and incur difficulty in pinpointing the first murder. In other words, the time between murders can vary and lag times can exist. The second problem is one of attribution. Restated, it is possible that these crimes may have been committed by so called copycat criminals.

## Elimination of Victims for this Study

This next section describes the elimination of victims from Table 1 (our original master list). These victims will be eliminated based upon the following reasons: incorrect modus operandi, cases closed by convictions, and if a probable suspect was identified but not successfully prosecuted. With this in mind, the first reason to eliminate victims is if the modus operandi differs from the way the majority of unsolved murders are committed. Modus operandi, or method of operation represent a summary of the habits, techniques, and behavior of the perpetrator. In the instance of murder, it is only those things necessary to complete the act. In some cases, there is a signature, which is expressive instead of necessary. It may involve an expression of emotion or fantasy and requires extra time (Schlesinger, 2000).

If a serial murder was responsible for three or more of these killings, and the method of attack was for the perpetrator to hit his victim on the back of the head with a blunt object, drag the body a few feet, slit the throat, and then drag the body further (if it needed to be concealed), then it remained in our master list. Restated, all Black women who were murdered by means other than blunt trauma to the head or throat slashed were not included in this study. Consequently, Georgia Brown, Rosa Rivers (and the three whose identity was never known) and not killed in the way described above were eliminated from this research (see Table 1). The rationale for exclusion or elimination is detailed below:

The first five to be eliminated. Georgia Brown and Rosa Rivers were both gunshot wound victims and were eliminated. Two of the unknowns were stabbed and one was thrown into the river after her throat was slashed. An unidentified Black female,

approximately 25 years old, was murdered on Friday February 17, 1911 or Saturday, February 18, 1911. Her head had been crushed. She was found Sunday morning just beyond the city limits near the West Point belt car line in the woods. Beer bottles were scattered around the body ("Beer bottles," 1911). There was no mention in the newspapers that her throat was cut. The body of the other unknown woman was found about 15 feet from the corner of Atlanta Avenue and Fraser Street behind a clump of bushes. The second unidentified body was found around 6 a.m. on May 11, 1912. She had been dead approximately six hours. She had been stabbed in the throat. It was felt that her body was dragged after she was stabbed. One stab went through the jugular vein and the other was a very deep cut ("Another Negro," 1912). The last unknown girl's body was found on Monday morning, April 15, 1912. Her age was estimated to be around 15. It was conjectured that her body had been floating down the Chattahoochee River and came to rest near the plant of the Chattahoochee Brick Company, just below the Southern Railway Bridge. A.F. Billings, the chief engineer of the brick company was the first to see the body. He and two men brought the corpse back to the Fulton County side of the river. The girls' throat had been slashed and there was a string with a key attached tightly tied around her neck ("Murdered Negro", 1912).

In short, these individuals were removed from the original list (see Table 1) because their deaths did not fit the modus operandi for the presumed serial murderer. Another four victims, McNeal, Ferguson, Owens, and Florence were eliminated because a suspect was identified and convicted. Detailed information about these four are listed below:

McNeal: Lucinda McNeal's husband, Charles, was convicted of her murder and received a sentence of life in prison. Mr. McNeal was arrested easily, because witnesses to the murder had followed him. Two officers joined in the chase and McNeal ran into the arms of another officer. McNeal had gone home after drinking near beer and nearly decapitated her with a razor ("Murder of Negro," 1911; "18 months", 1911; "Negro Murder starts," 1911).

Ferguson: Lucky Elliott was convicted of the murder of the girl identified as Ida Ferguson. He was convicted on circumstantial evidence which is why the penalty was life in prison. He was dating the woman and was presumed to be exceedingly jealous. His bloody knife was found near the body ("Elliott convicted", 1912). Elliott's attorneys appealed the decision to the Supreme Court of Georgia based on exceptions to certain portions of the trial judge's charge to the jury. A new trial was denied by the court ("New trial", 1912).

Owens: Charley Owens was convicted for the murder of his wife and given a sentence of life imprisonment. His first trial resulted in a hung jury. All of the evidence against him was circumstantial ("Jack the Ripper" loses", 1912).

Florence: In this fourth case, the victim was stabbed in the neck instead of having her throat slashed. Eva Florence was murdered on Saturday, October 21, 1911. Her body was found Sunday morning in a field in the vicinity of Rockwell and Elizabeth Streets. Her head was beaten and she was stabbed in the neck. The woman's brother, John Clowers, who works as a waiter has posted a \$100 reward with the police to find the slayer.

These four solved murders, plus the five eliminated because of a different modus operandi reduced our original initial list of victims (lifted from newspaper articles) from 19 to 10. This adjusted list is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2. Adjusted Master List of Victims

<b>Name</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>D.C.</b>	<b>A.J.</b>	<b>A.C.</b>	<b>A.G.</b>	<b>List</b>
Maggie Brook	October 3, 1910	X		X		X
Rosa Trice	January 22, 1911	X		X	X	
Mary Walker	May 28, 1911	X	X			X
Addie Watts	June 16, 1911	X	X		X	X
Lizzie Watts	June 25, 1911	X		X		X
Lena Sharp	July 2, 1911	X	X	X	X	X
Sadie Hollie	July 7, 1911	X	X	X		X
Minnie Wise	November 10, 1911		X	X		
Mary Putnam	November 21, 1911	X	X			
Pearl Williams	January 19, 1912	X	X			

Further analysis of newspaper articles and death certificates revealed that of the ten remaining in our adjusted list (see Table 2), two may have had probable suspects. We have decided to err on the side of caution and removed two more cases from the original master list. In the next section, we discuss the two probable suspects.

#### Probable Suspects

Pearl William. In two cases, a probable suspect was identified. Pearl Williams had her throat slashed on Friday, January 19, 1912. Her body was found Saturday morning in the middle of a vacant lot at the corner of Chestnut and West Fair). She was on her way

home at 338 West Fair at around 7 p.m., which was a block away from the murder. A few days before the murder, a black man came to visit Pearl in the kitchen of the home where she worked. He said he was an old acquaintance but he quarreled with Pearl. He stated loudly that she had promised to marry him and if she didn't she wouldn't marry anyone. The police arrested their first suspect Saturday morning. He was Frank Harvey and had been seen with her. He had small blood stains on his shirt and a long sharp knife ("15<sup>th</sup> Toll," 1912). A second suspect was arrested Saturday evening. Edgar Evans who was seventeen years old was arrested on Peters Street ("Police hot," 1912).

Minnie Wise. Minnie Wise was murdered on Friday night, November 10, 1911. She was knocked in the head with a rock and dragged a short distance before her throat was cut. Her body was then dragged over 20 feet and dumped in a heap. Her throat was cut in a field on Connally Street, 200 yards from the corner of Georgia Avenue. This location is near where two other women had been murdered. The right index finger had been hacked off at the middle joint. Henderson was still being held by the police for the murders ("Negro woman found," 1911; "Ripper claims," 1911). Bud Wise was arrested for the murder of his wife Minnie. At his commitment trial, Judge Nash Broyles said he never had believed that one man was the ripper. And our analysis of newspaper articles revealed that Bud Wise had been jealous of his wife's attention to another man and had threatened to kill her. Detectives felt that Wise had been emboldened by unsolved Ripper murders. ("Why crimes," 1911). In the case of Pearl Williams, Frank Harvey emerges as one of two possible suspects. Taken together, we have offered information about the removal of eleven victims from our original master list; this was done on the basis our

review of newspaper articles and death certificates. To reiterate, the removal resulted from the differences in modus operandi, identification of suspect to identification of a possible suspect. It should be emphasized that we are erring on the side of exclusion instead of inclusion of serial murder victims. What follows, then, is a description and discussion about eight murdered Black women where there was no suspect and no apprehension. The remaining eight were all killed in the same method, leading one to conjecture that one person killed these eight, a potential Atlanta Ripper.

### Eight Murdered Black Women

With the elimination of eleven cases from the original master list, we continue our examination of the possibility of a serial murderer's existence in Atlanta between 1910 and 1912. Here we offer details lifted from the death certificates on eight remaining victims and information found in the examined newspapers. If there is variance in major elements of the crime based on which newspaper published the story, all accounts will be included.

#### Victim #1

Maggie Brook's body was found in the early morning hours of October 3, 1910. She worked as a cook and was 23-years-old. Her skull had been fractured at the intersection of Hill Street and the Atlanta and West Point Railroad track. Her body was identified by Bessie Daniel, a woman who lived with her (Death Certificate).

#### Victim #2

Rosa Trice, 35-years-old, was murdered on Saturday, January 22, 1911. The left side of her skull was crushed, her throat cut, and her jaw was stabbed. Her body was found 75 yards from her home. The murder occurred during the night and her body was dragged some distance by the perpetrator. She lived in Pittsburg (a neighborhood within Atlanta), on Gardner Street near the Southern Railroad. Her husband (John) was arrested at their

home two hours after her body was found, but released Sunday night based on lack of evidence (“Negro Woman is found murdered,” 1911; “Negro Woman Killed;”, 1911).

#### Victim #3

Mary “Belle” Walker was murdered on Saturday, May 27, 1911. Her body was found Sunday morning in the rear of her home at 228 Garibaldi Street. Her throat was jaggedly cut. She had left work as a cook from 191 Cooper Street on Saturday night. There was no clue as to the perpetrator (“Negress murdered,” 1911).

#### Victim #4

Addie Watts was murdered on Thursday, June 15, 1911. Her body was found early Thursday morning at Krogg and DeKalb Streets in shrubbery. It was hypothesized that her head had first been hit with a brick and then a (train’s) coupling pin had been used to commit further injuries on her skull. Her throat was then slit and she was dragged into the bushes. The police had arrested two suspects (“Another Negress,” 1911; “Was day,” 1911).

#### Victim #5

Lizzie Watts was murdered on Saturday, June 24, 1911. Her body was found at 11 a.m. Sunday in a clump of bushes at White and Lawton Streets. Her body had been dragged and hidden after her throat had been cut (“Negro woman is found with,” 1911).

#### Victim #6

There were two versions of the following crime: (1) Lena Sharpe (40 years of age) according to the *Atlanta Constitution* was murdered on Saturday, July 1, 1911. Her body was found in the vicinity of the Seaboard Railroad and Hanover Street. At dusk, she had told her 20 year old daughter, Emma Lou that she was going to the market. When Lena had not returned within an hour, her daughter walked toward the market in search of her mother. Emma Lou was confronted by a tall black male, with broad shoulders a wide brimmed hat. He asked her, “How do you feel this evening?” She answered that she felt okay and tried to move past him because she was apprehensive. As she passed him he said, “Don’t be afraid, I never hurt girls like you.” He then stabbed her in the back, laughing, and ran. She screamed and a large group of Blacks came to her assistance. Lena’s body was found shortly after the attack. Her throat had been slashed and her head rested in a pool of blood (“Two more,” 1911).

From the second version: The *Atlanta Journal* reported that the mother and daughter were walking together when the Black male perpetrator came out of hiding and hit Lena over the head with a brick. Lena collapse to the ground and he started to slash at Emma Lou. The perpetrator had not spoken a word during the attack. Screaming, Emma Lou broke free and ran, but fainted shortly after the attack because of loss of blood. She is in

serious condition and not expected to survive. The killer then slashed Lena's throat from ear to ear. He then came back to Emma Lou and she looked up and saw him standing over her with the knife. The sound of running feet coming towards them may have caused the perpetrator to flee ("Black "Jack," 1911).

#### Victim #7

Sadie Holley was murdered on Monday, July 10, 1911. Her body was found by workmen on Tuesday morning on Atlanta Avenue, near Martin Street and at the intersection of the new Orme Street sewer. The men had discovered blood and followed the trail to her body. Holley's skull had been fractured and she had been dragged before her throat was cut. Then her body was dragged again for a distance of about 15 feet and left in a little gully away from the road ("Eighth victim," 1911). Holley's head had been smashed with a large stone, which was found by detectives in a nearby field with blood on it. Holley's shoes had also been removed. The trail of the slayer could be traced through the soft dirt ("Reign of," 1911). Holley had worn a comb in each side of her hair. One was found on Atlanta Avenue near the bloody two pound rock and the other was across the street beside her head ("Unknown slayer," 1911).

Henry Huff, a Black male laborer, was arrested on July 11, 1911 in connection with Holley's murder. Two Atlanta detectives took him into custody at the rear of his home at 80 Brotherton Street. His trousers had blood and soft dirt on them up to his knees. He had also been seen with Holley the night the murder occurred ("Reign of," 1911). A Black cabman, Will Williams, signed a written statement alleging that Huff and Holley had been in his cab, constantly quarreling, and left his cab near the spot of the murder ("Slayer and," 1911).

As in the case of Minnie Wise, her shoes had been cut off of her feet. The removal of shoes would be an example of signature behavior, because it was an action that was not required to kill her.

#### Victim #8

Mary Putnam, a small middle-aged woman was slashed to death early Tuesday morning, November 21, 1911. Her body was found buried under loose dirt in a ditch. The location was near the junction of Stewart Street and the belt line, just beyond University Avenue. When her body was found at 7:00 a.m., it was still warm. Her wounds consisted of a slashed throat and breast and her heart was lying next to her. The killer's prints could be seen in the loose dirt that buried the body. A bloodhound was brought to the scene and followed the scent about 200 yards. It ended at the car line ("Jack-the Ripper," 1911). The woman was recognized to be Mary Putnam by her stepson, Walter. Over a thousand people came to view the body at the undertakers. Walter Putnam was one of them. He said he was afraid to tell the authorities, because he felt he might be arrested. He returned to his job as an elevator operator and told a passenger about an hour later. Mary Putnam had recently moved to Atlanta to keep house for a Black male, Elmore Grant, who lived at 53 Newton Street. Grant was seventy years old and not a suspect ("Stepson

of”, 1911). At the coroner’s inquest, the cause of death was a broken skull and lacerated throat wounds. It was brought out that a firearm was discharged around midnight in this case and a firearm was also discharged on Elizabeth Street before Eva Florence had been killed (“Inquest on,” 1911).

In all, we identified eight potential victims who lost their lives by bludgeoning from behind or a slashed throat and the investigation produced no suspects. In six of the cases, newspapers stated that the bodies had been dragged after death.

#### Were These Crimes the Work of a Serial Murderer: Accounts contemporary with the crime?

The first suggestion in an Atlanta newspaper that the same perpetrator may be responsible for the murders of Black women occurred on June 16, 1911. The *Atlanta Journal* reported that unidentified police officers believed certain homicides could be attributed to an insane killer, like Jack the Ripper (“Another Negress,” 1911). On June 26, the newspaper reiterated this viewpoint and observed that the “most insignificant” of clues were not found by the Atlanta police (“Is a,” 1911). Detectives said that Lena Sharpe and Addie Watts were killed in exactly the same manner (“Two more,” 1911).

On July 11<sup>th</sup>, the *Atlanta Journal* reported:

Every movement in the crime of Monday evening corresponds to moves in the series of Saturday night crimes. For seven consecutive Saturdays a Negro women was murdered by an unknown maniac. In every instance the Negress was knocked in the head with a blunt instrument, twice found to be large rocks and then the bodies were dragged from the roadway where the women’s throats were cut, all in the same manner. Their throats having been cut, the bodies were always dragged a bit further and carelessly thrown out of sight of the scene of the first blow... (“Eighth victim,” 1911, p. 2).

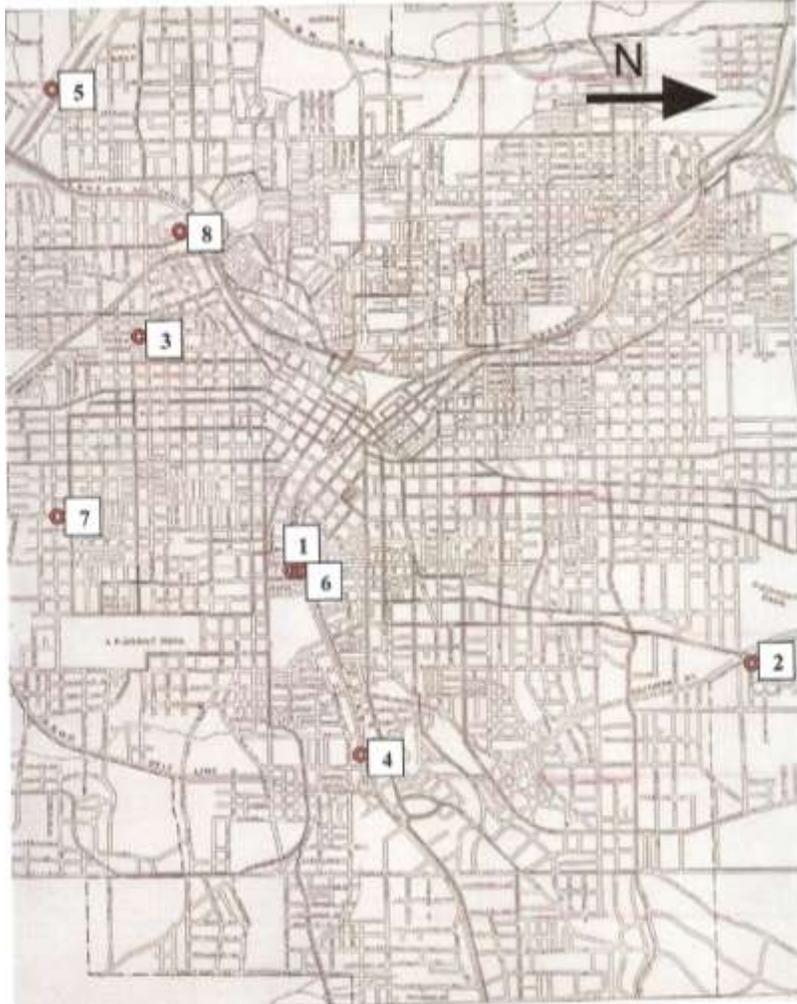
A look at the evidence: A review of the evidence revealed that most of the homicides occurred during the weekend. This information is depicted in Table 3. Six of the eight victims were murdered on Friday or Sunday, making the deaths sound more scheduled.

Table 3: Day of Week Murder Occurred, Victim’s Residence, and Location of Murder

<b>Name</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>Victim’s Residence</b>	<b>Location of Murder</b>
1. Maggie Brook	Monday	R49 E. Ellis Street	Hill Street & A&W RR
2. Rosa Trice	Sunday	76 Gardener Street	Gardener Street & Southern RR
3. Mary Walker	Sunday	228 Garibaldi Street	228 Garibaldi Street
4. Addie Watts	Friday	30 Selman Street	Krogg and DeKalb Streets
5. Lizzie Watts	Sunday	West Oakland	White and Lawton Streets
6. Lena Sharp	Sunday	24 Hanover Street	Hanover Street and Seaboard RR
7. Sadie Hollie	Friday	335 W. North Ave.	Atlanta Ave. near Martin St.
8. Mary Putnam	Tuesday	53 Newton Street	Stewart St. and Belt Line

In this research, we have also developed a map to graphically illustrate the location of the eight victims (see Map 1). The numbers on the map correspond with the identification of victims in Table 3. And while it is outside the scope of this paper to discuss geographical profiling (Canter, 2003; Helms, 2000), Map 1 is illustrative of the relative distance between victims and makes the prospect of an Atlanta Ripper all the more probable. More to the point, the map illustrates that many of the homicides are within geographical proximity.

Map 1: Location of the Victim's Bodies found in Table 3



At this juncture (in an effort to remain objective), we begin with an exploration and discussion about the seeds of doubt with respect to the prospect of a serial murderer.

#### Existence of a Serial Murderer in 1911: Another Look

During the trial of a Black man in Atlanta on July 18, 1911, the defendant Jim Murphey was convicted of threatening to cut his wife's throat. Judge N. R. Broyles did not believe that there was one man who was the Ripper ("The "ripper," 1911). The judge said:

There is no such thing in Atlanta as a negro “Jack the Ripper.” It is just such cases as these that result in these murders of negro women. I am satisfied that everyone of the negro women slain recently in Atlanta were murdered by a different man. There are at least 1,000 negro men in Atlanta today who stand ready to cut the throats of their wives at the slightest provocation (p.1).

In the end, Judge Broyles fined Murphy \$25.75 Broyles added that the reason most of murders occurred Saturday night was that this was when Black men got drunk and would behave violently based on wrongs or perceived wrongs done by Black women (“No “Jack,” 1911). Judge Broyles sentiment explains some of the initial reluctance to treat the murders as the result of a serial murderer.

In another murder, when Lizzie Watts was killed, the *Atlanta Constitution* had attributed it to cocaine and whiskey (“Negro woman is found with,” 1911). On July 16, 1911, Reverend H.H. Proctor, preached to his congregation at the Black First Congregational Church. His sermon was titled, “Hand of God as seen in work of the Ripper.” After reading the names of Negro women murdered in the past two years and supporting prohibition and the general fight against lawlessness, he said:

“But this bloody hand points to the sins of the colored people themselves. Our churches are doing good work, but they are not doing enough. They do not sufficiently relate their efforts to actual life. They have been getting people ready to die when they should have been preparing them to live. The best preparation for the next world is to live right in this one. Our churches are not progressive enough. Shut up six days a week, the people pass by them on to the places prepared for them. The places for evil are never shut.” (“Hand of,” 1911, p. 7).

In this case, prominent members of the Black church assigned responsibility for the killings of Black females to sin and life styles inconsistent with the word of the church; they were not initially concerned about a serial killer.

Third, on November 28, 1911, Sheriff Plennie Minor, while on the courthouse for the Huff trial suggested that jealous Negro women were responsible for the murders instead of men. The police officers and detectives laughed at this theory and accused Minor of being inebriated (“Negro’s trial,” 1911). To reiterate, the deaths of Black women were being attributed to everything but a serial murderer. As discussions about the rationale behind the crimes were further articulated and published; it is was mentioned that the victims were Black women, described as “mulatto” (Two more,” 1911). It was felt by some that the killer chose Mulattoes. Webster’s 1913 dictionary defines Mulatto as “The offspring of a Negress by a white man, or of a white woman by a negro man,--usually of a brownish yellow complexion.” The *New York Times* reported that eight mulatto women had been killed by the Ripper at the time of Lena Sharpe’s murder (Eight victims,” 1911). The women may have been mulattoes (or we believe) that it may have been a more titillating story in the newspapers. In all, these vignettes point toward professionals and prominent members within the community discounting the possibility of an Atlanta Ripper.

Other potential problems. Another problem seems to be that the police did not accord much interest to the murder of a black woman or man (“Black “Jack,” 1911). This may have meant that the initial crime committed by an Atlanta Ripper was never fully investigated and that after the Ripper scare wore off, subsequent murders of Black women were again relegated to minor interest by the police.

A challenge that has not been overcome in this research is to identify the first and last murder attributed to the Atlanta Ripper (Quinet, 2007). The difficulty is that various

newspapers and different public officials kept a different tally. Another potential issue pertains to the coroner, Paul Donehoo. The coroner was legally blind. While coroner he studied medicine without obtaining a formal degree. He did attend the Atlanta Law School and graduated in 1911 (“Blind coroner,” 1911). Donehoo was not the only coroner who was blind, but he would have to rely on verbal and written descriptions of everything that the sighted coroner would receive visually. The nuances present in a crime scene left by a serial murderer need the attention of every sense. This revelation is telling and presents challenges for both positions. On the other hand, it does not mean that a serial murder did not exist.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the victims were poor and had little social status outside their own community. Only when the police were prodded by the mayor, who himself had been motivated by business leaders, did investigations begin in earnest. In the end, we ask: Why is “Jack the Ripper” so well known and the “Atlanta Ripper” lost in time and not recognized by the public, historians, academics, and or social scientist? There were four major differences between Jack and the Atlanta Ripper. First, each of the five murders was perpetrated by only Jack the Ripper. There is little doubt that the same person did them. Second, the fact that all the women had the same occupation as prostitutes; and that their internal and sexual organs were mutilated seemed to titillate public interest. Third, letters attributed to this murderer were sent to the police and published in the London newspapers. He called himself Jack the Ripper and taunted the police for their ineptness. Fourth, much of the original material, including information gathered by the police and letters were saved. The one commonality is that both Jack and the Atlanta

Ripper were never identified by the criminal justice system. As suggested in the introduction, the lack of an identified perpetrator usually consigns a series of murders to obscurity; this research seeks to reclaim one of them.

Concluding comments. Finally, we provide cogent evidence that many Black women were murdered in Atlanta during 1910 to 1912, and that the investigations of these deaths only intensified when it was thought that one man was committing them. These homicides created adverse publicity for Atlanta to the extent that eventually community leaders pressed the mayor to bring the crimes to an end. Our research provides a cautionary historical lesson that is still applicable today: Every homicide should be thoroughly investigated and the perpetrator identified. This would have prevented some single murderers from ever becoming serial murderers.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Atlanta Constitution* on July 12, 1911 reported that the following unsolved murders had been attributed to the Ripper:

1. throat cut by unknown persons, latter part of 1910
2. unknown victim's throat cut, February 19, 1911
3. Rosa Trice, throat cut, January 22, 1911
4. Addie Watts, throat cut, June 19, 1911
5. Lizzie Watkins, throat cut, June 25, 1911
6. Lena Sharpe, throat cut, July 1, 1911
7. Emma Lou Sharpe, stabbed, July 1, 1911 (survived)

The paper continued with a list of seventeen women who had been found murdered in the community in the last two years and no perpetrator had been convicted.

1. April 5, 1909, Della Reid, found dead in trash pile near 71 Rankin Street.
2. September 7, 1909, unknown, found dead in Peachtree Creek.
3. March 5, 1910, Estella Baldwin, 735 North Jackson Street, concussion of the brain.
4. April 5, 1910, Georgia Brown, 167 Martin Street, gunshot wound.
5. April 6, 1910, Mattie Smith, 141 ½ Peters Street, gunshot wound.
6. May 6, 1910, Luvinia Ostin, gunshot wound.
7. May 23, 1910, Sarah Dukes, 119 Curran Street, gunshot wound.
8. Francis Lampkin, 407 Foundry Street, gunshot wound.
9. September 4, 1910, Eliza Griggs, 28 Dover Street, gunshot wound.
10. October 6, 1910, Maggie Brooks, East Ellis Street, killed on Hill Street, near West Point and belt line.
11. February 3, 1911, Lucinda McNeal, 92 Spencer Street, throat cut.
12. May 8, 1911, Rosa L. Rivers, 122 Randolph Street, shot.
13. May 29, 1911, Mary Walker, 228 Garibaldi Street, throat cut.
14. June 15, 1911, Addie Watts, 30 Selman Street, throat cut.
15. June 27, 1911, Lizzie Watkins, West Oakland Street, throat cut.
16. July 2, 1911, Lena Sharpe, 24 Hanover Street, throat cut.
17. July 16, 1911, Sadie Hollis, killed on Gardner Street, throat cut.

(Source: Reign of crime grips Atlanta; police defied. *Atlanta Constitution*, (1911, July 12), p. 14).

<sup>2</sup> Research was hampered by lack of cooperation from The Probate Court of Fulton County. We were not allowed to examine all death certificates from 1910 to 1912 in the archive. This would have provided us with a total number of homicides in both Atlanta and Fulton County which then could have been broken down by race, sex, and cause of death. Because of this non-cooperation, another strategy was devised. A genealogist was employed to submit specific names and dates discovered from other sources and thus obtain death certificates for a fee one at a time. With regard to this following historical research: The spelling of the last name of victims varied at times, depending on the source. One spelling was chosen by the authors to reduce confusion, by relying on the name on the death certificates.