



On Dedication The Elaine Massacre Memorial

They will end; all of them will end:
Words to flare a conflagration.

They will end; all of them will end:
The plots setting hue against hue.
Yes, they will end.

But time and the river shall
Never end; for they begin
To begin, again and over again,
As time and the river wash
Through the land, and over
Its dreams, schemes,
And lauded and unlabeled past.

We've told our stories here
While others listened,
Thinking mainly of their own:
Of those who died killing,
Or of those who found
No finding of an escape
From onslaught upon onslaught.

Now, we gaze on the Memorial,
Which tells of days
That went unclaimed,
Which tells things a hundred years
Of the Elaine Race Massacre
Did not care to hear: that
All history is a struggle
Between what we must end
And what we must begin;

As time and the river ever
Flow between now and then
And delay for neither those
We honor here nor those
Who have or will come here.

Of time and the river,
Beckoning no escape,
Leaves no choice:
So, we shall no longer wait
For more light that we may
Better see light, nor wait
For other dreams that we
May better inspire dreams.

A poem by J. Chester Johnson

The violent episodes that occurred in various locations of Phillips County, Arkansas at the end of September and early October of 1919 resulted in over a hundred deaths—if not hundreds of deaths—to African-Americans with five white persons perishing. Today, the dedication and unveiling of the Elaine Massacre Memorial on the eve of the centennial for the conflagration give regard and attention to the magnitude and significance of the Massacre and its epochal, judicial aftermath. Human affairs and time itself tell us that the Memorial and its overt and implied reverence for those who brought history to this place that was wrought by their deaths and consequence are now due for this community, the State of Arkansas, and nation. May the Elaine Massacre Memorial also be a reminder hereafter that people of good will and commitment to reconciliation have assembled here today to lend support to a firm foundation on which a unified, inclusive, and open community will reside for each of its tomorrows.

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