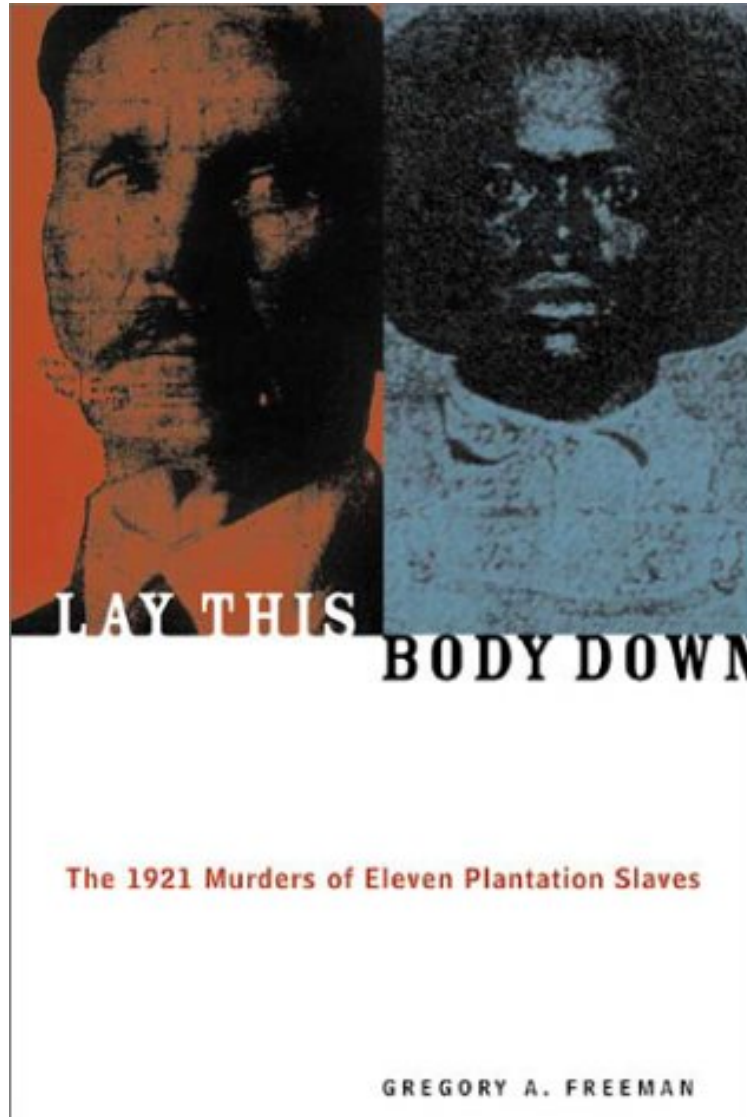


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# Lay This Body Down: The 1921 Murders of Eleven Plantation Slaves

*Gregory A. Freeman*

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**Gregory A. Freeman : Lay This Body Down: The 1921 Murders of Eleven Plantation Slaves** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Lay This Body Down: The 1921 Murders of Eleven Plantation Slaves:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Chilling and cruel By Farley X Wilbur That's about all I can say. I have studied Jim Crow, racism and this nation's tarnished history for forty years. I've read hundreds of books dealing

with lynching alone and have developed a tough stomach for these tales of abject horror in my search to understand white Americans (I'm a white German). This one turned even my stomach. However, it is essential to learn these horrors if one really wants to understand the truth of American culture instead of the myth of American Exceptionalism. It is always better to know the truth, see your nation and culture as it IS, and then work to improve it than simply accept the past as proving our perfection and blithely progressing through life as a fool. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. *A Travesty in Time, Clearly Explained, Slightly Mistitled* By Carol M. Cummings This book picks out one of the travesties of the post-Civil War, Jim Crow era horrors. Note that these were not SLAVES, but primarily grandchildren of slaves, although they were held in a slave-like existence. I selected this book because (a) I have read *Slavery By Any Other Name*, which included elements of this in one chapter, (b) my father's family is from Jasper County, Georgia, and I dreaded finding any of their names, and (c) I write historical fiction, which I try to base on actual events. It is so hard to understand the mindset of the people in this book...yet you know it was true. It did happen. And it was horrible. The author has well portrayed the incidents and well as the impact this had on the people of Jasper, Walton and Rockdale Counties, as well as all of Georgia. It's a tough read because of the content, but worth it for those who believe we must study the past to prevent it from recurring in the future. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. *A Souther Slave Owner's Final Solution* By Michael S. Not much need to be said other than this is a book that had trouble putting down. I would go to sleep thinking about what I had read and wake up ready to learn more. It was a disturbing portrait of a period in the South that kept me wondering what the final outcome would be. John S. Williams could have been the prototype for Adolph Hitler. And the racist southern system he thrived in could have been the blueprint for Nazi Germany.

The John S. Williams plantation in Georgia was operated largely with the labor of slaves and this was in 1921, 56 years after the Civil War. Williams was not alone in using peons, but his reaction to a federal investigation was almost unbelievable: he decided to destroy the evidence. Enlisting the aid of his trusted black farm boss, Clyde Manning, he began methodically killing his slaves. As this true story unfolds, each detail seems more shocking, and surprises continue in the aftermath, with a sensational trial galvanizing the nation and marking a turning point in the treatment of black Americans.

From *Library Journal* Fifty-six years after the end of the Civil War, John Williams, a Georgian plantation owner facing a federal investigation of his use of "peons" (poor blacks bailed out of local jails), decided to kill 11 black men to prevent them from testifying against him. With the help of Clyde Manning, his black overseer, he embarked on a series of cold-blooded murders that resulted in two major trials. Based on extensive newspaper coverage, reports from a federal investigation, and trial testimony, this moving narrative account is arguably the most complete history of this event available. Freeman, a writer for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, concludes that this event helped to define "a complex and crucial, yet almost forgotten, moment in history" A moment when, although the South had fulfilled some of the worst assumptions of outsiders, "the citizens of Georgia stood up and declared their limits." Recommended for larger public libraries and academic libraries. A Robert C. Jones, Central Missouri State Univ., Warrensburg Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Booklist* Fifty years after slavery was believed to have ended in the U.S., John S. Williams, a Georgia plantation owner, was convicted of murdering 11 "slaves" held in peonage on his property. Also convicted was Clyde Manning, the black overseer who had been raised and used by Williams since childhood. Manning, who supplied crucial testimony against Williams, claimed that he was forced to kill most of the men on threat of his own death. The murders were meant to cover the practice of peonage, the forced indefinite labor of black men charged mostly with vagrancy. Peonage was an open secret in the South as late as the 1920s, when the U.S. Bureau of Investigation, precursor to the FBI, began investigating the illegal practice. Freeman, who has written for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, uses newspaper articles and court documents to render a compelling account of the murders, the sensational trial in rural Georgia, and the social mores of the time and the region. And he explores, to chilling effect, the personalities of Williams and Manning. Vanessa Bush From *Kirkus* s Freeman's first book has a subtitle calculated to bring readers up short. *Plantation slaves in 1921? Therein lies a horrifying tale of the Old South.* A Georgia-based journalist, Freeman first came across this story when his hometown, Atlanta, was hosting the 1996 Olympics (although it was widely covered even in the northern press at the time of the events described in the book). Although slavery theoretically died with the Confederacy, in the Jim Crow South there were still forms of debt bondage, called peonage, that were little more than gussied-up versions of the "peculiar institution." A young black man would find himself arrested for some minor offense and issued a fine that he would be unable to pay; a local farmer would pay his fine and put him to work under slavery-like conditions, ostensibly to pay off this unasked-for loan. In the case of gentleman farmer John S. Williams, the result could be death by beating, bludgeoning, shooting, or drowning. Williams, unwillingly aided by his black overseer, Clyde Manning, murdered eleven of his plantation workers in 1921 when he thought that the nascent Bureau of Investigation (later the FBI) was considering federal charges against him for peonage. Eventually, the story came to the surface with a trio of the corpses he and Manning had tossed into a nearby river. Remarkably, Williams was convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment,

primarily on Manning's testimony the first white southern male convicted of first-degree murder of a black man or woman since 1877. (It would be 45 years before it would happen again.) Freeman walks the reader through the eleven murders and their aftermath with cool detachment. The book is scrupulously researched, with an eye for the telling detail. A good true-crime story, with far-reaching implications. (12 bw photos, not seen) -- Copyright 1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.