“The Life and Death of Harry Tyson Moore”

Summary
Harry T. Moore was one of the forerunners of the Civil Rights Movement in America. During the 1930’s and ‘40’s, he did groundbreaking work in Florida in registering African-American voters, investigating lynchings and police brutality toward black people, and fighting for equality for black teachers and students. Tragically, he and his wife, Harriette, became the first martyrs of the Civil Rights era, killed on Christmas night, 1951, when a bomb that had been planted under their mattress exploded. Not only have their murders never been solved, but also Harry Moore’s contributions and sacrifice have been largely forgotten, especially in his home state of Florida. He has been overshadowed by the more public exploits of later leaders of the Movement, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X.

Objectives
Students will:
1.) read a short biographical sketch of the life and times of Harry T. Moore;
2.) conduct an “investigation” into the murders of Harry T. Moore and his wife, Harriette, using testimonials and witness statements from FBI archives and other sources;
3.) explore various reasons why the contributions of Harry T. Moore to the Civil Rights Movement have been largely forgotten in the fifty years since his death.

U.S. History Event
This lesson could be included into any unit dealing with the Civil Rights Movement.

Grade Level
This lesson is appropriate for middle school and high school students. Note: Since some of the reading for this lesson was taken from actual FBI archives, some of the language may be objectionable for modern sensibilities. An effort has been made to remove any text that is overly objectionable, but you may need to explain to students that “Negro” and “colored” were common terms used in the 1940’s and ‘50’s to refer to African-Americans.

Materials:
Every student (or pair of students) should receive one copy of the following: Reading Passage #1-“Biographical Sketch of Harry T. Moore;” Reading Passage #2- “Groveland, Florida;” Reading Passage #3- “The 1951-1952 Investigation;” Reading Passage #4- “O.K. Washington Testimony;” Reading Passage #5- “Interview of Confidential Informant T-1;” Reading Passage #6- “FBI Interview with Earl J. Brooklyn;” Reading Passage #7- “FBI Interview with Tillman H. Belvin;” Reading Passage #8- “The 1978 Investigation;” Reading Passage #9- “FBI Interview with Edward Spivey;” Reading Passage #10- “Testimony of Joseph Neville Cox- March 29, 1952;” Reading Passage #11- “Conclusion;” and Reading Passage #12- “Epilogue.”

Lesson Time
Due to the amount of reading with this lesson, it is suggested that this lesson be implemented as an after-activity independent assignment and not as a lesson that takes up all of your class time, with students working on different parts of the lesson each class period for 4-5 days. Used in this way, it will not distract your students from the important issues and key figures surrounding the Civil Rights Movement; instead, it will give them a wealth of information on a native Floridian who was instrumental in bringing about the Civil Rights Movement to reinforce what they are already learning.
Lesson Procedures

Procedures

1.) When introducing the lesson put your students in mixed-ability pairs. Explain to your students that they are FBI agents that have been assigned a "cold case," or an old case that has remained unsolved through a number of years. This case involves a double-murder that was committed over fifty years ago. The victims were not just ordinary people, however; one was a leading proponent of African-American civil rights in the state of Florida, and the other was his wife. This case has remained unsolved despite being investigated by local authorities and the FBI not once, but three separate times since it happened in 1951.

Day One

2.) Explain to your students that in order to do a thorough investigation, they must start with becoming more familiar with their victims and why someone would want to have them killed. Give each pair a copy of Reading Passage #1- "Biographical Sketch of Harry Tyson Moore," and have your students answer the following discussion questions: a) "What early influences caused Harry T. Moore to become a champion of equality and education for African-Americans?" b) "What kind of personality traits would Harry T. Moore need to possess to be successful?" c) Why would some people have wanted Harry T. Moore dead?"

3.) After all pairs have had sufficient time to read the passage and answer the questions, allow several pairs to briefly discuss their findings. Then, give each pair a copy of Reading Passage #2- "Groveland, Florida." Explain to your students that the trial and subsequent retrial of the Groveland Four rape case is generally believed to have marked the beginning of the end for Harry T. Moore. While reading this passage, have students answer the following discussion questions: a) "What was life like for black veterans returning to Florida after World War II? Did they think they deserved better?" b) "What were some of the inconsistencies in the original statements of 17-year-old Norma Padgett?" c) "Why did a mob of white people attack the settlement of Groveland?" d) "Why was a change of venue for the trial requested by the defense? Were they ultimately successful?" e) "Should Willis McCall have been allowed to transport two of the defendants back to Lake county from the state prison when the original verdict was overturned? Who's side of the story of what happened that night do you believe?"

4.) After allowing pairs sufficient time to read the passage and answer the questions, allow them to share several responses. To close Part I of this lesson, ask students to respond to this question: "Harry T. Moore played an important role in registering black voters throughout Florida, fighting for equality for black teachers and students, and personally investigated the actions of law officials such as Sheriff McCall. At this point of your investigation, do you have any prime suspects?" You can either have them start a "file (sheet of notebook paper, or page in their notebook, where they will keep notes on their investigation's progress)," or turn in their answer to you at the end of class.

Day Two

5.) After a brief review, pass out to pairs the following items: Reading Passage #3- "The 1951-1952 Investigation;" Reading Passage #4- "O.K. Washington Testimony;" Reading Passage #5- "Interview of Confidential Informant T-1;" Reading Passage #6- "FBI Interview with Earl J. Brooklyn;" and Reading Passage #7- "FBI Interview with Tillman H. Belvin." Explain to students that this is Part II of their investigation into the murder of Harry T. Moore and his wife, Harriette. While reading, pairs should keep a running list of prime suspects in the case, any evidence they find through reading that implicates that suspect, and any factors that would make a case against that particular suspect difficult.

6.) Students should also be prepared to discuss the following questions after they have completed the day’s portion of this lesson: a) "Do you think that O.K. Washington's description of the two white men in the candy store matched the descriptions of Brooklyn and Belvin?" b) "Despite not finding much evidence about Moore’s murder, did the FBI
uncover any other significant information in the course of their 1951-1952 investigation?"
c) “In your opinion, did Belvin and Brooklyn have sufficient alibis for their whereabouts on
Christmas night, 1951? Were their testimonies credible?” d) “Why do you think O.K.
Washington may have refused to testify in court, given Florida’s history of racial tension and
Klan activity?” e) “List three reasons why the FBI’s case fell apart in 1952.”

7.) Allow the students to discuss their findings pertaining to the questions. Finish the day’s
investigation by asking the students, “Who do you think the evidence implicates at this
point of the investigation, and give some supporting evidence for your answer: Willis
McCall, Brooklyn & Belvin acting alone only, Brooklyn & Belvin with support from the
KKK, or someone else?” Have pairs write their findings down in their notebooks or in
their “file.”

Day Three
8.) Give each pair a copy of: Reading Passage #8- “The 1978 Investigation” and “1991-1992
Investigation;” Reading Passage #9- “FBI Interview with Edward Spivey;” and Reading
Passage #10- “Testimony of Joseph Neville Cox- March 29, 1952.” In reading this part of
the investigation, have pairs answer the following questions: a) “What significant breaks
in the case did the FBI receive in 1978?” b) Why had Joseph Cox originally been ignored
by the FBI? Was this a wise decision?” c) “Why did Henry’s testimony become
discredited in 1992? Do you think that this reversal on the part of Raymond Henry should
have exonerated Sheriff McCall? Why or why not?” d) “What do you think is the most
likely scenario for the death of Mr. And Mrs. Harry T. Moore? Cite evidence found in your
investigation.”

9.) Allow several pairs to share their findings. When one pair presents what they think is the
most likely scenario, and the most likely suspect, in the fifty-two-year-old double murder,
find out which pairs agree or disagree.

Day Four
10.) Pass out Reading Passage #11- “Conclusion,” to pairs and have them answer the
following questions: a) “Do you agree or disagree with this conclusion? Why or why not?” b)
“Do you have any questions that this version does not answer?” c) “Do you think that
there is enough evidence to now close this case, or should it remain open? Justify your
answer.”

11.) Allow a class discussion for students to share their findings. Then, tell students that
despite all of his work for African-American equality and his murder, Harry T. Moore is not
very well-known, even in Florida. His name does not even appear on the Civil Rights
Memorial in Birmingham, Alabama. Pass out to each individual student Reading
Passage #12- “Epilogue,” and give your students one of the following assignments: a)
discuss why they think Harry T. Moore is virtually unknown, even in Florida, and isn't
included on the Civil Rights Monument in Birmingham, and if he should be included, or
b.) design a monument to Harry T. Moore giving, in one or two paragraphs, his
achievements and why he should be remembered. This assignment may be given for
homework.
Harry Tyson Moore was born on November 18, 1905, in Houston, Florida, a tiny farming community in Suwanee County, in the Florida Panhandle. He was the only child of Johnny and Rosa Moore. His father tended the water tanks for the Seaboard Air Line Railroad and ran a small store in front of the house.

Johnny Moore's health faltered when Harry was nine years old, and he died in 1914. Rosa tried to manage alone, working in the cotton fields and running her little store on weekends, but in 1915, she sent Harry to live with one of her sisters in Daytona Beach. The following year, he moved to Jacksonville, where he spent the next three years living with three other aunts: Jesse, Adrianna, and Masie Tyson.

This would prove to be the most important period in his formative years. Jacksonville had a large and vibrant African American community, with a proud tradition of independence and intellectual achievement. Moore's aunts were educated, well-informed women (two were educators and one was a nurse), who took this spindly, intelligent boy into their house on Louisiana Street and treated him like the son they'd never had. Under their nurturing guidance, Moore's natural inquisitiveness and love of learning were reinforced.

After three years in Jacksonville, he returned home to Suwanee County, in 1919, and enrolled in the high school program of Florida Memorial College. Over the next four years, Moore excelled in his studies, earning straight “A”s, except for one “B+”; he was even nicknamed “Doc” by his classmates. In May 1925, at age 19, he graduated from Florida Memorial College with a “normal degree” and accepted a teaching job in Cocoa, Florida-- in the watery wilderness of Brevard County.

Building a Family and a Career

He spent the next two years teaching fourth grade at Cocoa's only black elementary school. During his first year in Brevard County, he met an attractive older woman (she was 23, while he was barely 20), named Harriette Vyda Simms. She had taught school herself, but was currently selling insurance for the Atlanta Life Insurance Company. Within a year they were married.

Her family lived in Mims, a small citrus town outside of Titusville. The newlyweds moved in with Harriette's parents until they built their own house on an adjoining acre of land. Meanwhile, Harry had been promoted to principal of the Titusville Colored School, which went from fourth through ninth grades. He taught ninth grade and supervised a staff of six teachers.

In March 1928, their eldest daughter, Annie Rosalea, nicknamed “Peaches,” was born. When Peaches was six months old, Harriette began teaching at the Mims Colored School. On September 30, 1930, their “baby daughter,” Juanita Evangeline, was born.

Moore Joins the NAACP

In 1934, Harry Moore started the Brevard County NAACP, and steadily built it into a formidable organization. In 1937, in conjunction with the all-black Florida State Teacher's Association, and backed by the NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall in New York, Moore filed the first lawsuit in the Deep South to equalize black and white teacher salaries. His good friend, John Gilbert, principal of the Cocoa Junior High School, courageously volunteered as the plaintiff. Although the Gilbert case was eventually lost in state court, it spawned a dozen other federal lawsuits in Florida that eventually led to equalized salaries.

By 1941, NAACP work had become Moore's driving obsession. In 1941, he organized the Florida State Conference of the NAACP, and soon became its unpaid executive secretary. He began churning out eloquent letters, circulars, and broadsides protesting unequal salaries, segregated schools, and the disenfranchisement of black voters.
Moore’s Fight for Equal Rights

In 1943, he moved into an even more dangerous arena: lynchings and police brutality. At first, his protests were confined to letters to the governor, but he quickly threw himself directly into lynching cases, taking sworn affidavits from the victims’ families and even launching his own investigations. From that point until his death, Moore investigated every single lynching in Florida.

In 1944, when the Supreme Court ruled in the landmark *Smith v. Allwright* case that the "lily-white" Democratic Party primary's policy of not allowing black people to vote was unconstitutional, Harry Moore immediately organized the Progressive Voters' League of Florida, and in the next six years, due primarily to his leadership, over 116,000 black voters were registered in the Florida Democratic Party. This represented 31 percent of all eligible black voters in the state, a figure that was over 50% higher than any other southern state.

In June 1946, Moore paid a terrible price for his political activism, as he and Harriette were both fired from their teaching jobs. Realizing that he would be blacklisted from teaching, Moore took a bold step: he became a full-time, paid organizer for the Florida NAACP.

During his first two years, he built the Florida NAACP to a peak of over 10,000 members in 63 branches. In January 1949, however, the NAACP national office doubled annual dues from $1 to $2, and membership plummeted all over the country. Florida followed suit, dropping to 3,000 members in the next year. Moore and the national office began having increasing disagreements over his political activities and his full-time status. Moore was eventually ousted as the NAACP’s executive secretary for Florida.

Moore and the Groveland Rape Case

In July 1949, the Groveland rape burst upon the national scene, after four young black men were accused of raping a white woman. A white mob went on a rampage through Groveland's black neighborhood, and the National Guard had to be called out to restore order. Once again, Moore threw himself into the case. After uncovering evidence that the Groveland defendants had been brutally beaten, Moore leveled those charges against the most notorious lawman in the country: Sheriff Willis McCall of Lake County.

Groveland defendants Walter Irvin, Sammy Shepherd, and 16-year-old Charles Greenlee were convicted in 1949, and Irvin and Shepherd were sentenced to death. In April 1951, however, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Irvin and Shepherd’s convictions; Lake County immediately prepared to try them again. On November 6, 1951, while Sheriff McCall was driving two of the defendants, Walter Irvin and Sammy Shepherd, back to Lake County for a pre-trial hearing, he shot them, killing Shepherd and critically wounding Irvin. McCall claimed that the handcuffed prisoners had attacked him while trying to escape. Irvin claimed that McCall had simply yanked them out of his car and started firing. The shooting created a national scandal. Harry Moore began calling for McCall's suspension and indictment for murder.

The Murder of Harry T. Moore

Only six weeks later, on Christmas Day 1951, Moore himself was killed when a bomb was placed beneath the floor joists directly under his bed. Moore died on the way to the hospital; his wife, Harriette, died nine days later.

The protests over the Moores' deaths rocked the nation, with dozens of rallies and memorial meetings around the country. President Truman and Florida Governor Fuller Warren were inundated with telegrams and protest letters.

Despite an extensive FBI investigation, however, and two later investigations, the murders have never been solved. Harry Moore was the first NAACP official killed in the civil rights struggle, and he and Harriette are the only husband and wife to give their lives to the Movement.
Black soldiers returning to Florida from military service at the end of World War II found that although they had taken part in changing the history of the world, their world was little changed. In rural Lake County, citrus was still king and blacks were needed to work in the fields, especially at harvesting time when a shortage of labor meant oranges falling to the ground to rot.

That was the world Sammy Shepherd and Walter Irvin returned to when they came home to their parents' Groveland homes after serving in the Army. Groveland had become the center of black activity in Lake County. They immediately attracted the attention of Lake County Sheriff Willis McCall, whose brutal treatment of blacks had become widely known. McCall's major job was to keep union organizers out of the county and make sure there was a steady supply of fruit pickers who were willing to work for low wages.

Shepherd and Irvin were violating several of McCall's rules. The two continued to wear their Army uniforms, as if to show that they were somehow better; they refused to work in the fields; and their fathers had demonstrated an independence that did not sit well with the whites. McCall told them bluntly to remove their uniforms and get to work in the white-owned orange groves.

Shepherd's father, Henry, had his own farm, carved out of what had been considered worthless swampland. He had prospered during the war and became an icon for blacks living in substandard conditions. But for whites, he was a symbol of what could happen if blacks farmed their own property and stopped working for whites. The Irvin family had also done well.

For McCall, there were other disturbing trends that threatened to upset the power structure. Harry T. Moore, the executive director of the Florida NAACP, had formed the Progressive Voters League to encourage blacks to register to vote and to endorse political candidates. Between 1947 and 1950, the number of blacks registered to vote in Florida more than doubled to 116,000.

But that progress seemed to disappear in the early morning of July 16, 1949. Exactly what happened in the predawn hours remains a matter of dispute. A young white couple, Willie and Norma Padgett, told police that they were on their way home from a dance when their car stalled on a lonely road. The two said that Shepherd, Irvin and two other black men, Charles Greenlee and Ernest Thomas, had stopped to help them. But Willie Padgett claimed that the four attacked him and left him on the side of the road while they drove off with his wife. Seventeen-year-old Norma Padgett told police that she was raped.

Within hours, Greenlee, Shepherd, and Irvin were in jail. Thomas fled the county and avoided a posse led by McCall until he was shot and killed about 200 miles northwest of Lake County. As word spread about the arrest of the three, a crowd gathered at the county jail. An estimated 200 cars carrying 500 to 600 men demanded that McCall turn the three men over to them for their brand of instant justice. According to Ormond Powers, a reporter for the Orlando Morning Sentinel who covered the case, McCall had hidden the suspects in a nearby orange grove, but told the mob they had been transferred to the state prison. Norma and Willie Padgett and Norma's father were allowed to examine the jail. They told the mob the prisoners were gone and McCall promised that he would see that justice was done and urged them to "let the law handle this calmly."

A Night of Terror

The members of the mob rejected McCall's advice. Unable to find the three, the mob looked for a new target. They turned on Groveland. The men drove to Groveland in a caravan and once they arrived, they began shooting into black homes and set them afire. But local blacks apparently had been warned of the approaching caravan and fled. Powers said he remembered blacks being loaded into trucks to get them out of town.

Even with the coming of dawn, the mob was not through. In Groveland, a number of black-owned homes had suffered damage, although the mob saved its greatest vengeance for the home of Henry Shepherd, which was destroyed. They set up blockades on the highway into Groveland and waited for unsuspecting blacks. On July 18, Governor Fuller Warren yielded to the calls of the NAACP and sent in the National Guard. Over the following six days, the Guard gradually restored order.
In Orlando, the president of the Orlando NAACP asked the national office for help and NAACP attorney Franklin Williams promised to come. Williams gathered information that showed the evidence was highly questionable. When Williams met with the three suspects, he found their bodies covered with cuts and bruises - the result of beatings administered by deputies to obtain confessions. The three told Williams that they had been hung from pipes with their feet touching broken glass and clubbed.

Williams had doubts whether the rape had even taken place. Although Norma Padgett claimed to have been raped and kidnapped, a white restaurant owner who gave her a ride after the alleged rape said she did not appear upset and did not mention the rape. Also, she did not claim to have been raped until after talking with her husband. Williams suspected that William Padgett had beaten his wife and the two wanted to hide the truth from her parents, who had warned him against hitting their daughter.

**The Trial of the “Groveland Four”**

Still, a grand jury - which for the first time had a lone black on the panel - quickly indicted the suspects. The major local newspaper, *Orlando Morning Sentinel*, ran a front-page cartoon with three electric chairs and the caption, "No Compromise." Powers said, "We always ran our cartoons on page one and in color, so you couldn't miss it. It was big and it provoked, oh man, they started investigating the newspaper and this upset the publisher very much." As the trial began, the judge rejected a request for a change of venue.

Despite evidence showing that Shepherd and Irvin were in Orlando at the time of the crime, and Greenlee was nineteen miles away, a jury took just ninety minutes to find them guilty. Norma Padgett testified that she had been raped. Powers, sitting only a few feet away in the courtroom, saw her as a "small slightly built, very young, she was 17 at the time, a little country girl. . . . . She looked as though a slight breath of wind would blow her over. She was a good witness. She told precisely in graphic language which was unusual at that time, what had happened to her and who did it, identified each man. . . .I thought she was a good witness."

Irvin and Shepherd were sentenced to death and the 16-year-old Greenlee was sentenced to prison. Powers recalled the atmosphere at the trial. "The blacks sat in the balcony. There was no mixed seating back in those days. . . . There were bailiffs of course, many, many bailiffs, deputy sheriffs, FBI agents. . . . The little girl who said she was raped described in detail that incident. The State Attorney was Jesse Hunter, a self-taught man-he never went to law school. . . one of the best lawyers I ever saw in my life."

The NAACP had been successful in attracting nationwide publicity for the case, even printing a booklet called "Groveland U.S.A." as a device to raise funds for the defense. That publicity led the United States Attorney General J. Howard McGrath to order an investigation. Although McGrath had wanted a fair probe, the man he chose to direct it could not have been a worse choice. McGrath gave the assignment to United States District Attorney Herbert Phillips of Tampa, whose views of race and the guilt of the three defendants was not significantly different from that of the members of the Groveland mob. He refused to call key witnesses and any attempt at a fair investigation vanished.

The Florida Supreme Court upheld the conviction but the United States Supreme Court unanimously overturned the convictions of Shepherd and Irvin (Greenlee had not appealed for fear that a new trial may result in the death penalty for himself). The justices cited pretrial publicity, including the cartoon showing the three electric chairs in the *Orlando Morning Sentinel*.

**The Shooting**

The two were set for retrial in Lake County and McCall drove to Raiford State Prison to bring Irvin and Shepherd back to Tavares. McCall said that during the nighttime trip back, he mentioned that one of his tires seemed to be low. McCall said that when he stopped the car to check the tire, and to let Irvin go relieve himself, Shepherd and Irvin tried to overpower him, even though they were handcuffed together. McCall said he pulled his gun and shot both prisoners. Shepherd was killed, but despite being shot twice, Irvin survived.

Irvin lived to tell a completely different story about that night. He said that McCall pulled the car over to the side of the road and told the two to get out. He pulled his gun and shot Shepherd and Irvin in the upper right chest. Irvin said he pretended to be dead and heard McCall brag on
his police radio, “I got rid of them; killed the sons of b------.” When a deputy arrived and turned his flashlight on Irvin, he noticed that he was still alive and suggested to McCall that Irvin be killed. The deputy pulled the trigger, Irvin said, but the gun misfired. After inspecting his gun, the deputy fired again and shot Irvin in the neck.

Powers said that he went to see McCall in the hospital and that the sheriff did have a bump on his head and was bleeding. “He looked pretty bumped up, so something happened to him.” The coroner's inquiry cleared McCall and even praised him, as did the FBI's investigation of the shooting. According to retired FBI agent Fred Gordon, McCall acted properly in this incident. The FBI lab found microscopic fibers from McCall’s hat embedded in his flashlight, indicating that he had been hit over the head with it. A number of Death Row inmates at Raiford were interviewed afterward, and they claimed to have heard Irvin and Shepherd plotting to escape.

**Thurgood Marshall Takes the Case**

In the second trial, Irvin was represented by future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, who replaced Williams. Marshall had earlier presented the winning side of the landmark *Smith v. Allwright* Supreme Court case in 1944. This time, Marshall was successful in that the change of venue was granted, although neighboring Marion County did not offer a significantly different political environment. The new trial attracted even more national attention and the international press began to cover the trial. The trial became a pawn in the Cold War as newspapers in the Soviet Union pointed to the trial as evidence that American blacks were not free.

There was new defense evidence raising questions about the case, but again, the jury just deliberated ninety minutes before finding Irvin guilty. The case was appealed, but in early 1954, the United States Supreme Court declined to hear it. Acting Governor Charley Johns rejected an appeal for clemency and scheduled Irvin’s execution. What saved Irvin was not the legal system, but the political system; Irvin was granted a last-minute stay and in November 1954, Johns was defeated for reelection by the more moderate LeRoy Collins. He asked for a report on the case and after questions were raised about the evidence, he commuted Irvin's sentence to life in prison.

The decision was denounced in Lake County, and by the United States Attorney General McGrath, whose denunciation of Collins was publicized throughout the state. In 1962, Greenlee was paroled and moved to Tennessee after his release, never returning to Florida. Irvin was released on parole in 1969 and moved to Miami. One condition of his parole was that he not return to Lake County, but the following year he received permission to go home for one day to visit his family. The day he arrived, he dropped dead while sitting on a front porch. The official explanation was a heart attack, although there were unsubstantiated rumors of foul play.

Willis McCall continued to be reelected by the voters despite charges of corruption and abuse. Governor Reubin Askew suspended him from office after a black prisoner was kicked to death. He resigned from office in 1973, and later died of a heart attack in April 1994.
Reading Passage #3- The 1951-1952 Investigation

J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the FBI for almost five decades, was certainly no friend of civil rights, and his abysmal track record in later civil rights cases (including his vicious persecution of Martin Luther King and his extra-legal surveillance operations against other civil rights leaders and organizations) has, not surprisingly, led to decades of speculation that the FBI only half-heartedly tried to solve the Moore case, at best, and at worst, may have even covered up the murders. However, in 1992, hundreds of unedited FBI case files were made available to the public. What those unedited files show is that the FBI conducted a surprisingly thorough and exhaustive investigation, with Hoover taking a strong personal interest in the case. Although he was more likely motivated by a desire to offset the negative publicity that the Bureau was receiving in the wake of the unsolved Florida bombings, rather than by any personal commitment to racial justice, the Bureau nonetheless mounted a full-bore, aggressive investigation of the Ku Klux Klan in neighboring Orange County, which was infested with Klansmen (including the local sheriff and several other elected officials).

Agents developed informants to infiltrate Klan chapters, installed telephone taps (some of which may have been illegal) and maintained intense physical surveillance on suspects; indeed, Hoover used some of the same techniques against the Klan in 1952 that he was later criticized for using against civil rights and leftist organizations in the 1960s.

Agents on the Scene

Before daylight on the morning of December 26, FBI agents from Daytona Beach had arrived on the scene in front of Harry Moore's wrecked home, and by that evening a "special squad" of seventeen agents had turned Mims' only motel into a command headquarters. The local sheriff, whose staff consisted solely of himself and two deputies, deferred almost completely to the Bureau's overwhelming manpower and expertise, although he cooperated with the FBI and provided the first big break in the case.

While one team of FBI agents swarmed over and under Moore's house, searching for clues, other agents fanned out across the state, interviewing every resident of Mims and all of Moore's NAACP and Progressive Voters' League (PVL) associates. Harriette Moore was interviewed three times in her hospital bed, prior to her death on January 3, 1952. Among Moore's friends and relatives, the most likely motive for his death was his involvement in the Groveland case. And when anyone mentioned Groveland, one name inevitably came to mind: Sheriff Willis V. McCall of Lake County, Florida, who in December 1951 was the most notorious law officer in the country. His name would be intractably linked to Moore's for over forty years.

Other initial suspects included A. Fortenberry, the former chairman of the Brevard County Commission, whom Moore had helped defeat in 1950; and a Mims citrus grower who had threatened Moore several weeks earlier, telling a black preacher that Moore's "neck should be broken" because he was "putting notions in n-----s' heads."

The Prime Suspects

The first testimony linking the Klan to the murder surfaced on December 31, 1951, when five black residents of Mims said that two white men had come into the Mims Confectionary Store in July 1951, asking directions to Moore's house. One witness, O.K. Washington, provided detailed physical descriptions of the two men (read O.K. Washington’s testimony).

When his descriptions were relayed to informants in the Orange County Klan, three informants immediately identified them as Tillman H. Belvin and Earl Brooklyn, two "renegade" Klansmen with violent reputations. One informant even claimed that Brooklyn had displayed a hand-drawn floor plan of Moore's house at a Klan meeting and had asked for help to "do a few jobs." (read informant's interview)

This was a sensational break, and Hoover urged agents to "give very prompt and thorough attention." Over the next two weeks, the focus of the investigation shifted powerfully to Brooklyn and Belvin, both of whom were suffering from serious medical problems. Agents began interviewing all known Klansmen in Orange County. Among those was Joseph Neville Cox, 61, an "old-time Klansman" (from the heyday of the Klan in the 1920s) who was secretary of the Orlando klavern (read Brooklyn and Belvin interviews).
Putting Pressure on the Klan

Although agents were not finding any direct evidence linking Brooklyn or Belvin to the Moore bombings, or any corroboration of Brooklyn's showing the floor plan, they were uncovering a great deal of evidence about other violent incidents, including: the murder of a black custodian, Melvin Womack, in March 1951; the shooting of a black taxi driver; the bombing of a ice cream parlor in Orlando that refused to have a separate service window for blacks; and numerous floggings.

FBI leaders developed a strategy of pursuing these other incidents, hoping that by putting pressure on Klansmen about those, someone would eventually crack on the Moore bombing. By late March 1952, the strategy appeared to be working: a half-dozen Klansmen had provided sworn statements implicating their brother Klansmen in a litany of terrorist acts. On March 29, Joseph Neville Cox was interviewed a second time. He kept asking if the FBI's evidence would hold up in court, attributing his inquisitiveness to human nature. The next day, he committed suicide. The FBI was so locked in on Brooklyn and Belvin, and other known members of the Klan's "wrecking crews," that the light bulb never went on.

The Case Falls Apart

And then, in May, the bottom fell out. The Klan informant who had charged Brooklyn with exhibiting the floor plan retracted his earlier offer to take a polygraph. O.K. Washington, the black eyewitness from Mims, was refusing to testify in court. The Bureau's main witnesses were back-pedaling, and its primary suspects were nearly on their deathbeds. In May, Brooklyn underwent surgery for a hemorrhaging stomach. In August, Belvin died of natural causes; Brooklyn followed him to his grave in December 1952. Several other Klan suspects were closely scrutinized, but the Bureau could never find direct evidence linking them to the Moore bombing.

Running out of options, the FBI devised a ploy to convince a federal grand jury to indict local Klansmen for perjury, hoping that once they were brought before a federal grand jury, one of them might crack on the Moore case. In March 1953, a federal grand jury in Miami, after hearing testimony on the Moore case and other Florida bombings, issued a blistering 12-page presentment, describing the Klan as a "cancerous growth" and listing nineteen separate violent acts-"a catalogue of terror that seems incredible"-between 1943 and 1951.

In June, the grand jury returned indictments against seven Orlando klansmen, but the federal judge trying the case eventually dismissed all charges, ruling that there was no federal jurisdiction in any of these incidents (murder and flogging were state crimes, not federal), so it was irrelevant whether the Klansmen had lied to agents about their involvement.

The FBI case was dead. It was officially closed in August 1955. Nearly fifty years after it occurred, the Moore bombing remains unsolved, despite three separate investigations by law enforcement, in 1951-52, 1978, and 1991-92. One fundamental difference between the Moore case and the later assassinations of Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr. is that no suspect has ever been arrested, charged, tried, or convicted in the Moore murder.
O.K. Washington, who resides in Mims, Florida, advised that he was at the Mims Confectionary Store when two white men came in inquiring as to the residence of Harry T. Moore. He said that these men had also asked where that “rich Professor Moore lives.” They also stated that “Professor Moore...doesn’t have to work and just travels around and has money.”

Washington gave the following description of the two men:

**Number One Man**

- **Race:** White
- **Height:** About 6’1”
- **Weight:** About 200 pounds
- **Age:** About 40
- **Hair:** Black
- **Dress:** Had maroon long-sleeve shirt and a light tan zipper windbreaker. Was wearing a large white cowboy hat and boots.

**Number Two Man**

- **Race:** White
- **Height:** About 5’8”
- **Weight:** About 180 pounds
- **Age:** About 45
- **Dress:** Was wearing a flannel plaid shirt with checks of green, brown, and yellow; checks were outlined in white lines and were approximately three inches square. Also wearing khaki pants and a checked plaid red cap, the type worn by hunters.
- **Peculiarities:** Had heavy dark beard, needed a shave
- **Build:** Heavy

Washington said that he remembered the shirt that the short man was wearing because he has one just like it. Washington then exhibited the shirt to FBI agents. Washington also advised that he went to the door of the Confectionary Store when the men left and saw them get into a maroon-colored automobile, which he believed to be a Mercury.

Washington stated that to the best of his memory these two white men had come into the store at about 8:30PM. He stated that he thought this was too late for anybody to be inquiring about the residence of Moore and that was the reason why he did not direct them to the Moore residence, instead directing them to Joe Warren’s house. Mr. Warren is a relative of Moore’s and lives approximately ¼ of a mile from the store. Washington stated that the two white men left the store headed in the direction of Mr. Warren’s house.

Washington said that approximately two to three weeks later he saw Moore and told him about the two white men inquiring about his residence. He said that Moore gave no indication of knowing who these white men might be.
Confidential Informant T-1 recalls that Earl J. Brooklyn and Tillman H. Belvin visited the headquarters of the Apopka klavern on the particular evening when the plans of Moore’s home were seen and Moore was discussed. He definitely recalls this occasion was after the defendants in the Groveland Rape Case were convicted in Lake County.

To the best of the informant’s recollection, Brooklyn said the following: “Listen, fellows, I’ve got a deal. Now this n----- Moore up at Mims is the head of the NAACP and he has played a very important role in trying to get the Lake County n------ cleared of that rape charge. He caused a lot of money to be sent down from New York to be used in defending the n------. I have been over to Mims and have checked over the place carefully.” At this point the informant stated Brooklyn withdrew from his shirt pocket a piece of plain white paper which was crumpled and folded. Brooklyn unfolded the paper which was approximately 8” X 8” square and held the paper in his hands. The informant said he did not clearly see the drawing but to the best of his recollection there was the plan of the house drawn on the paper in pencil and he described it as being crudely drawn.

Upon withdrawing this piece of paper and unfolding it Brooklyn said, “I have here a plan of the house.” The informant at this point could not in any way recollect the general wordage of Brooklyn but recalled his explaining to the group something about railroad tracks and a road running in front of the house. It was the informant’s recollection that Brooklyn continued, “I want to recaze the place carefully and I am going to take some men over. Is there any of you men that want to go with me?” The informant stated that the conversation ended abruptly at this point with the group breaking up and no one offering any help and Brooklyn did not push the question any further.

At this point the informant was asked to draw from his recollection what he saw on the piece of paper held by Brooklyn. He protested, stating he hesitated to even indicate to the agents vaguely what he remembered because he was afraid he would not be accurate. He said if he had examined the diagram or floor plans personally he would not hesitate but his recollection was very vague. However, he drew a rectangular-shaped building and indicated the location of the front door and drew an “X” showing the location of a bedroom. The informant also drew in front of the house the railroad tracks. He did not draw, but indicated somewhere in the general location of the tracks and in the same direction a road appearing on the plan.

It is to be noted here that the informant states he has only visited Mims twice in the past twenty years and has never to his knowledge seen the Moore residence. It is also to be noted that from the crude drawing made by the informant the front door is in the correct location with relation to the house and the “X” drawn was in the same place in relation to the house as Moore’s bedroom. The railroad tracks and the indication of where a road was drawn on the diagram held by Brooklyn were also in the correct direction with relation to the Moore house.

The informant stated emphatically that nothing was said by Brooklyn to indicate in any way the action contemplated with relation to Moore. He said he gathered merely by inference that Moore was to be taken out and given a whipping. The informant explained he believed the men would merely go to Moore’s house, call him out from where he may be sleeping, call him to the front door, take him out and whip him. Nothing whatsoever was indicated by Brooklyn that any explosive was to be used.

When questioned specifically, the informant stated Tillman H. Belvin, to his recollection, was at the Klan meeting that night but he was not in the small group when Brooklyn discussed Moore and exhibited the plans.

He said that at the time he did not gather from the conversation that any action was imminent with regard to Moore but that Brooklyn merely wanted assistance to survey Moore’s house to determine his movements and generally to determine the best time to do the job.

It was reiterated by the Informant he did not believe that at the time Brooklyn discussed Moore anyone had the idea of bombing Moore’s residence. It is the informant’s opinion that the bombing came as a result of ideas planted in the perpetrators’ minds after various bombings in the Miami area.
Earl Brooklyn was tentatively identified by Confidential Informant T-1 at Orlando as answering the description of one of the two white men inquiring at Mims, Florida, during the latter part of July or early August 1951 as to the whereabouts of the residence of Harry T. Moore. The two men making such inquiry were described by a Negro resident of Mims, O.K. Washington. T-1, when making the tentative identification, furnished information that he had seen what was said to be a floor plan of Harry T. Moore’s home in the possession of Brooklyn during the summer of 1950 at which time Brooklyn was seeking help to do a “couple jobs.”

FBI agents contacted Brooklyn at his residence in Orlando on January 18, 1952, and executed a search warrant of his home. Weapons belonging to Brooklyn were observed to be a double-barrel .12-gauge shotgun and a .22 repeater rifle. No plaid green shirt was located, though a red baseball cap was identified. There was no evidence of the presence of dynamite or any other explosive in the home.

Suspect Brooklyn in company of his wife, Annie Brooklyn, were instructed to appear at the Resident Agency office in the Orlando Post Office Building. They followed agents to the office and upon arrival were separated for simultaneous interviews.

Brooklyn advised he was born in Brooksville, Florida, April 1, 1911, and that he has lived in Orlando for 20 years. He stated that he had never been in any trouble and had never been arrested and that he is presently employed as a concrete truck driver with the Super Concrete Company of Orlando.

At the beginning of the interview Brooklyn vehemently denied he is a member or that he has ever been a member of the KKK or any club, not even “the church.” However, upon further insistence by agents based upon information developed from various sources that Brooklyn has been active in the Klan, Brooklyn finally admitted that he had been a member but since his health had failed him a year or two ago he had ceased to be active in the organization.

Brooklyn likewise denied that he had ever seen plans of Harry T. Moore’s home. He stated he had never had the plans of anyone’s home in his possession; in fact, he stated he had never heard of Harry T. Moore until he heard of the bombing incident on the radio.

Brooklyn further stated that he had at no time as much as discussed the incident with anyone nor did he possess any information that would assist in identifying the individual responsible for the incident. According to Brooklyn, he has been in Mims, Florida, possibly one time in the last 20 years, that being when he was returning to Sanford, Florida, from Titusville several years ago after a turtle hunt in the latter city.

During the interview Brooklyn asked agents if he could ask a question. He asked if the agents had talked to Charlie Jones, who lives in Brooklyn’s neighborhood. He immediately related a story of his inability to get along with Jones and stated he felt Jones would tell anything about him, whether or not it was true. To protect Jones in this matter agents advised Brooklyn that Jones was contacted in a routine neighborhood investigation making inquiries in regard to Brooklyn, but that Jones had furnished no information of value nor had Jones made any disparaging remarks with regard to Brooklyn other than the fact that he had never gotten along too well with him as a neighbor.

According to Brooklyn, on the day of the bombing (Christmas Day 1951), he, his wife Annie, his daughter Verma, and his daughter’s friend Margie Cardon, left the Brooklyn residence on Christmas morning at around 9 or 10 o’clock proceeding to the home of Tommie Rice for the purpose of having Christmas dinner with the Rice family. They had dined at about 1:30 or 2 o’clock in the afternoon, and remained until 9 o’clock in the evening. Brooklyn said that the rest of the family had an evening supper with the Rices, though he did not eat as the rich food they had had for dinner in the early afternoon had caused him to become ill.

After departing the Rice home the Brooklyns went directly home and retired for the night shortly after arriving, in the neighborhood of 9:30 or 10 o’clock. He denies he left home after having retired.

Brooklyn denied he had ever been on any “rides” with the Klan. He said he has worked with Negroes all his life but had never had any trouble with them. He was greatly surprised to learn
that many people who have known him a long time had stated during interviews with agents that he had a reputation of being strongly prejudiced against black people.

Brooklyn stated that he knows Mr. Belvin but due to the fact Mr. Belvin lives so far from him he had not at any time been too close with Mr. Belvin. He expressed his opinion as being high with regard to Belvin.

Based upon information in possession of agents from reliable sources relative to Brooklyn’s Klan activities, it is quite obvious that the suspect, Mr. Brooklyn, was untruthful in his statements.

Earl J. Brooklyn is described as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>41</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Born:</td>
<td>4/1/1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of Birth:</td>
<td>Brooksville, Florida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight:</td>
<td>190 pounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height:</td>
<td>5’8”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build:</td>
<td>Stocky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eyes:</td>
<td>Gray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair:</td>
<td>Light brown, hairline receding @ forehead</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FBI agents contacted Tillman Holly Belvin, also known as “Curly” Belvin, at his home, which is 16 miles outside of Orlando on Lake Drawdy. Mr. Belvin consented to a search of his home, upon which FBI agents found one shotgun, two Winchester rifles, one Mossberg rifle, a .38-caliber pistol with identifying markings from the St. Petersburg Police Department, a .44-caliber Smith & Wesson pistol, a pair of high-top hunting boots, and a light red hunting cap in the form of a baseball cap.

Thereafter, Mr. Belvin was interviewed at the Orlando Resident Agency on January 20, 1952. At the beginning of the interview Belvin claimed that he did not know of any reason why he was being interviewed by the FBI, had not even heard that the FBI was conducting an investigation in the Orlando area, but stated that he was willing to cooperate to the extent that he would not have to break his oath to the Klan too badly—that as long as the questions did not interfere with his fellow men he would be willing to answer any questions presented to him. He added that he did not think that the Klan had been guilty of a lot of things it had been accused of throughout the years.

It is Belvin’s belief that Earl Brooklyn was a member of the Orlando lodge of the Klan. He described Earl Brooklyn as a man of limited education whose intentions are “plumb good” but who gets off on the wrong foot if there is no one to guide him. Brooklyn was rabid in his ideas and used to get up on the floor to suggest radical actions for the Klan and could easily persuade the rest of the members (most of whom also lacked any formal education, according to Belvin) to join him in his proposals. The Exalted Cyclops (who, according to Belvin, is the ruler of the Klavern, inasmuch as he controls the procedures and discussions at any meeting), who would be the leader of any discussion at a meeting, would have to use a very strong hand in order to guide the discussion and stop such individuals as Brooklyn. It should be noted that Belvin would not give the exact details of the proposals of Brooklyn but rather spoke in generalities. He also made the statement that Brooklyn has been a hard worker for the Super Concrete Company and hasn’t been able to do very much work in the Klan because he was operated on for a stomach ailment in recent years.

In explaining Brooklyn’s philosophy on blacks, Belvin stated that it was the same as his own. He did not think Brooklyn hated black people; if a “good Negro” was hungry or needed some assistance, it was the duty of the white man to feed him and help him until he could get back on his own feet and could help himself.

Belvin stated that after being out of the Klan for a while, he rejoined in 1948, and was then elected Exalted Cyclops in 1949 for a six-month term. He was unable to furnish specific information concerning the identity of several other Klan officials, however, citing a loss of memory due to a spinal injury he suffered while working at the Orlando Air Base in 1944. He remarked that while he was the Exalted Cyclops he had to “hold Earl Brooklyn down” in making suggestions from the floor.

When questioned about his activities at the time of the Groveland riots and incidents, Belvin advised he went over to Groveland himself after having been picked up by four other members of the Orlando klavern. Belvin stated that since he was the Exalted Cyclops of the Orlando lodge at the time, he went to Groveland to keep his fellow Orlando members out of any violence. He admitted he had heard shots being fired from the direction of nearby Mascot, Florida. He claimed that the members of the Klan who were at the Groveland scene were mainly from the Apopka klavern and again stated that he was unable to recall the identities of these individuals inasmuch as his memory has failed him due to his ill health. He said he did not know whether or not Earl Brooklyn went over to Groveland.

Belvin claims that he has not been on any “rides” in recent years but that many years ago he was with a crew that did go on a “ride;” however, he refused to be specific as to the nature of these “rides.” He also stated that while he was Exalted Cyclops on the Klan Committee of the Orlando lodge, the committee conducted no illegal operations but handled routine work of the Klan.

In further discussing the rights of blacks and the Groveland incidents, Belvin believes blacks to be human beings and should be allowed to vote, but he would not let them eat at the table with him and actually believes few blacks really want to eat with the white people. He explained it is
his idea that if a black man “goes wrong” (like in the Groveland Four case) he should receive a quick trial and quick justice so that people would forget it. He believed the law should prevail; however, he did state that if there was no quick trial a man has the right to overstep the law. When pressed for his conclusion as to whether or not he believed the defendants in the Groveland case received “quick justice,” Belvin persistently evaded the question. He simply remarked that some other action would have to be taken if the law didn’t operate quickly and that it was easy to throw someone into lawless actions.

When questioned concerning his knowledge of Harry T. Moore and any other black leaders and their activities in the state of Florida, Belvin persisted in denying he even knew Harry Moore or the identity of any other leaders. He claimed he never heard that members of the NAACP (which he called the “National Colored People’s Betterment League”) were active in Orlando and the state after the Groveland incident and further claimed that the first time he heard the name “Harry T. Moore” was when he saw it in the newspaper the day after Moore was killed. He insisted that Klan activities, while he was in it, never took into consideration the activities of any specific black leaders but he admits having heard talk of these leaders generally.

Belvin states that he never saw any floor plan of the home of Harry T. Moore and claims that the only time he was ever in Mims or stopped in Mims was 20 years ago when his truck broke down at the center of Mims. He states that he might have driven through Mims but has never stopped there since that time 20 years ago.

Since the death of Harry T. Moore he has heard Moore was trying to get “n----- equality.” When questioned concerning the four or five incidents in Orange County during the past year in which violence occurred, Belvin claimed ignorance of all except the Elmer Jones incident, wherein a black home was burned. He alleges that he contributed a sum of money to assist the family in recovering the loss.

Belvin further claims he was surprised when the Mims explosion happened, doesn’t know who could have done it, and doubts that Klansmen in the Orlando area would have guts enough to stick dynamite under a house. When asked if he knew who might have performed such a deed at Mims, he replied it might have come from the Klan in Miami. Although he has never been there personally and does not know any individual member of the Miami Klan, he has been told there is a “wild cat Klan” in Miami. He was unable to elaborate any further and could not recall who told him about the Miami Klan.

The topic of explosives was brought into the interview. Belvin related that immediately after he bought the property on Lake Drawdy on which he currently resides, he desired to clear a small batch of land for cultivation. Since he had never handled a stick of dynamite in his life prior to that time, he had Roy Ramsey come out to the acreage and blow some of the stumps with dynamite. Because Ramsey was slow about it and only worked at it a few hours a day, Belvin arranged with a bulldozer operator then doing a job nearby to come to his property and push the stumps off the land at the rate of $5 a stump. The bulldozer operator suggested to Belvin that it would be quicker and cheaper to do it with dynamite. The operator furnished one case of dynamite. Belvin claimed that he read the instructionsthat came with the dynamite and blew the rest of the stumps on that small portion of land he was clearing. At the time, which was approximately two years ago, Belvin owned a tract of approximately 160 acres but cleared only a very small portion of the tract.

He further insisted that this was the only time he had ever handled dynamite in his life. There were only three sticks of dynamite left from the case and he threw these three into the lake. As a reason for not being able to use dynamite, Belvin claims that because of his illness, which prevents him from running, or maintaining his equilibrium, he would not be able to run away from a dynamite blast.

Belvin states that he was at home on Christmas Day 1951 with his wife and two sons. He arose at 9:30 or 10 o’clock in the morning and had dinner at 2PM. He claims he does not know whether or not he and his family had supper in a restaurant in Orlando, again citing faulty memory.
In December 1977, on the twenty-sixth anniversary of the Moore bombing, nearly 500 people gathered in Mims for the "Harry T. Moore Pilgrimage," sponsored by the Florida NAACP. The keynote speaker, NAACP Executive Secretary Dr. Benjamin Hooks, called for a reopening of the case. As a result of the extensive press coverage of the pilgrimage, the Brevard County sheriff reopened the case in January 1978, and called for anyone with information about the case to come forward.

One week later, the phone rang. "I know who did it," said the intoxicated man on the other end. The caller was seventy-year-old Edward Spivey, a dyed-in-the-wool Klansman who was terminally ill and wanted to clear his conscience before he died. In an interview at his home, which investigators secretly record, Spivey claimed that in 1952, shortly after the Moore bombing, a fellow Klansman named Joseph Neville Cox, the secretary of the Orlando klavern, told Spivey that he had been paid $5,000 to kill Harry T. Moore. Just a few days after this admission, Cox committed suicide.

When Brevard County investigators began checking out Spivey's story, they found some startling corroboration: Cox' death certificate showed that he had, in fact, committed suicide in March 1952, only one day after his second interview with FBI agents investigating the Moore bombing. During that interview, Cox had repeatedly asked if the FBI had any evidence that would hold up in court. The next day, he killed himself.

FBI agents had talked to the local police chief, who reported that Cox had no known medical or financial problems and that his family had no explanation for his death. At that point in the investigation, however, FBI agents were so focused on other suspects, particularly Earl Brooklyn and Tillman Belvin, that they let it drop. Cox was an older man, sixty-one at the time, and the FBI was zeroing in on younger Klan "head-knockers." Today, with the hindsight of Spivey's 1978 confession, that was clearly a major blunder.

Although Cox had been dead for 26 years, Brevard County investigators repeatedly tried to convince Ed Spivey to testify before a grand jury, but he adamantly refused. When he died several months later, his story was filed away. (read Spivey interview)

Another Confession

Two months after Spivey's phone call, another drunken white man confessed to making the bomb that killed the Moores. Raymond Henry Jr., a house painter with a long arrest record for public drunkenness, made this startling confession to a NAACP leader from Vero Beach and two local police officers, who tape-recorded his statement. Henry claimed he had made the bomb at the behest of the Ku Klux Klan, and that two local law officers had been on the hit squad. The next day, he gave a written statement to FBI agents which greatly expanded on his original story and added a host of provocative details, including a claim that the St. Lucie County sheriff and a Brevard County deputy had also participated. Most sensational of all, Henry claimed that the entire Moore bombing had been bankrolled by Sheriff Willis McCall.

Henry agreed to go to Brevard County and meet with Investigator Buzzy Patterson, but never showed. As suddenly as he had appeared, Raymond Henry vanished without a trace. Shortly thereafter, the Brevard County sheriff closed the Moore case.

The 1991-1992 Investigation

In August 1991, Governor Lawton Chiles ordered the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) to conduct a re-investigation of the Moore case. This occurred after an Orlando woman, Dottie Harrington, claimed that her ex-husband, Frank Harrington, had been a member of the Klan and had boasted to her, on four or five separate occasions, about killing Harry T. Moore.

Inspector John Doughtie headed the FDLE probe, first poring over the 2,000 pages of the original FBI investigative file. Then he set out to locate Frank Harrington. After a circuitous ten-day search, Harrington was tracked down in Hollywood, Florida. He denied any knowledge of or participation in the Moore bombing, and also denied having ever told his ex-wife that he had been
involved. Although he admitted joining the Klan for "two or three years," he claimed it had been in the late 1950s or early 1960s, long after the Moore bombing.

He agreed to take a polygraph test, which he passed. After that, Harrington was essentially dropped as a suspect. It was a combination of two factors: he had passed the polygraph, and his name did not appear in the original FBI files. "Some people won't want to believe this, but I bet the FBI identified ninety percent of all the Klansmen in the Orlando area," Doughtie says. Ironically, Doughtie still believes the ex-wife's claim. "[Harrington] had probably had a beer or two and was bragging about it, but there is no evidence, other than hearsay, to actually tie him to the murder," he says.

The Recanting of a Confession

With Harrington out of the picture, Doughtie turned his attention to finding Raymond Henry Jr., who had not been seen or heard from since 1978. After locating a current address for Henry through the Veterans Administration, FDLE found him living in Vero Beach, where he had been waging a valiant battle to stay off the bottle. In a series of recorded interviews, Henry eventually recanted his entire story, claiming that he had made it up to "get back" at the law officers who had arrested him for drunkenness, implicating them as Klansmen involved in the Moore case. It turned out that the officers Henry had claimed were the killers had been adolescents at the time of the Moore bombing and several were living out of state, as was Henry himself.

Over a six-month period, Doughtie interviewed all of the principals in the Moore case, including three of the surviving Klansmen who had been indicted for perjury by the FBI in 1952; none of them knew Frank Harrington or Raymond Henry.

There was really only one suspect left: Willis McCall. In a tape-recorded interview with Doughtie, the eighty-one-year-old McCall vehemently denied Henry's accusations about him financing the bombing. Doughtie asked McCall to take a polygraph, but his doctor vetoed it, saying that McCall, who had been suffering from heart disease for years, might be adversely affected by the test. Nonetheless, Doughtie had found no evidence linking McCall to the crime. "Ole Willis" had escaped another investigation, the fiftieth of his career.

On April 1, 1992, FDLE officially closed the Moore case, saying "no new evidence" had been uncovered. Doughtie wrote an eighteen-page summary of the FBI's original investigation, identifying the main suspects in the FBI's probe and how the investigation eventually collapsed. He concluded by saying that he hoped his report would "resolve some of the concerns, doubts and myths" surrounding the case.

To this day, the Moore case remains unsolved.
On January 16, 1978, twenty-six years after Harry T. Moore was killed, a stone-drunk white man named Edward Spivey phoned the Brevard County Sheriff’s Office and said he knew who did it. “I’m dying and I want to get this off my chest,” the man said. “I need to talk.”

Investigator Bob Schmader took the call and made arrangements to meet him the next day at his house in Winter Park, a suburb of Orlando. As he and Captain W.J. “Buzzy” Patterson were leaving their office the next day, Schmader popped a microcassette recorder into his front shirt pocket, which he used to secretly record the interview.

Spivey greeted the investigators at the front door, shooed his wife out of the living room, and started crying almost immediately. “I have something to tell you,” Spivey bawled. Spivey was the real thing: a dyed-in-the-wool Ku Klux Klansman. In 1935, he had been indicted with eight others in the brutal flogging and murder of Joseph Shoemaker, a white labor organizer in Tampa—one of the most notorious Klan lynchings in Florida history. The following are excerpts from the conversation that took place between FBI agents and Spivey.

Spivey: “The man committed suicide that done it. He’s been dead a long time.”

Schmader: “Okay, let’s sit down and talk about it. And you relax and don’t get yourself all upset about this.”

Spivey (still bawling loudly): “They call this your duty. Somebody is gonna have to come forward sometime. I knew the man who done it. He is a personal friend of mine. When I found out about it I said, ‘You better get yourself straight or somebody is going to catch you.’ I’m telling you the truth! I’m telling you the truth!” (Spivey breaks down, crying and wheezing)

(Spivey continues to bawl, drink beer; he tells an incredible story about a man named Joseph Neville Cox, who came to Spivey a few days after the bombing and admitted that he had done it. Cox, the secretary of the Orlando Klan, told Spivey that he had been paid $5,000, which he used to pay off his home mortgage. Cox was frightened because the FBI had questioned him about the bombing. Just a few days after that conversation, Cox shot himself.)

Spivey: “I couldn’t keep quiet, I finally had to break. G-----n, it had to come out. And I’ve sit here many a day, out in the orange grove, I’ve cried…I don’t like to see a n----- run over, but g-----n ‘em, they caused every g-----n bit, ain’t they? G-----n ‘em, I hate ‘em worse than a rattlesnake!”

(Although Spivey was obviously tormented by Cox’s confession, that hadn’t lessened his hostility toward African-Americans. He continued to blame them for all of the problems in society, alternating between crying and flying into a rage for several minutes. After that, he began to talk with pride about the years that he had spent in the Klan.)

Spivey: “Cox was a big knocker in the Klan, but he wasn’t high as I was. I was the head-knocker for the wrecking crew [the leader of the Klan’s squad responsible for floggings and lynchings]…we when we reached up and got you, we got you. You didn’t move.”

(Spivey’s biggest concern was not the Moores’ murders, but the reputation of the Klan. Over and over, he kept insisting that Cox had acted on his own, without Klan approval.)

Spivey: “We didn’t authorize it, we didn’t authorize it. I was on the wrecking crew and I, by God, didn’t authorize it.”

Patterson: “Had this guy Moore, had he been discussed in the Klan before Cox blew him up? Was he causing a problem?”
Spivey: “I never knew who the son-of-a-b---- was. I hate it because it will make the Ku Klux Klan look like a g-----n idiot. You follow me? If he [Cox] needed money we would have given him the d--- money…No, he thought he would get it easy.”

(Spivey kept rambling off onto other subjects, but Patterson kept bringing him back to Joseph Cox.)

Patterson: “Who paid Cox the money? Did anyone help him with the bombing or in getting the explosives?”

Spivey: “I tried to pressure that out of him, but I didn’t get it. I know he said his brother went with him, but he died right after the bombing, too…I think a few weeks later.”

Patterson: “Does Cox still have any people that live around here?”

Spivey: “They’re alive, but don’t bother them, they can’t give you no information. It’s been so long ago, just let the dead dog lie…let Mr. Dead Dog lie, please! I don’t want this to ever come out…Now if you have a pistol, I want it because I’m going to have to have some protection…If this ever comes out, me and the n-----s are going to have to suffer.”

(Over the next few weeks, Patterson and Schmader interviewed Spivey several more times. Each time, he was drunk. They tried to persuade him to tell his story to the Brevard County grand jury, but Spivey refused—and if they pushed it, he would get mad and cuss them out. He had only wanted to “get right with his Maker” because he was terminally ill, but had no interest in testifying. Spivey passed away several months later.)

*Joseph Cox’s surviving son, Harvard B. Cox, has been reluctant to discuss any allegations involving his late father and the Moore case. “That was not in his character, that was not like him, and those are just charges people are making,” he says if asked about his father’s alleged involvement. He also denies that his father received any large sum of money before he killed himself. At the time of his death, Cox’s family had no explanation for his suicide, and his son still grapples for an answer. “He had had some heart problems and had a friend that was bedridden—that’s all we know,” says the younger Cox.
Reading Passage #10- Testimony of Joseph Neville Cox- March 29, 1952

Joe N. Cox was reinterviewed for information in his possession regarding Klan membership of the Association of Georgia Klans (with ties to Florida) inasmuch as he was reportedly secretary as recently as one year ago and a present member.

Joe N. Cox, Medlock Tractor company, on reinterview, advised that he had left the Association of Georgia Klans and then joined the Southern Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Florida. He stated that he could not name any of the members of either Klan organization because of his oath as a Klansman. He stated he did not have any records of the Klan and had no records since five years ago. When the Florida Klan transferred to the Georgia Klans the records were destroyed. He continually relied on his oath to the Klan and would not name any of its members and advised that he has not been affiliated with or active in the southern Knights for the past three months. He did not know Harry T. Moore and never heard of him until his death. He stated that he had never seen nor heard of any house plans discussed.

It will be noted that during the course of the interview Cox repeatedly professed great willingness to assist in any way possible in instant investigation, although he constantly maintained his immunity to furnishing information about the Klan based on his Klan oath. Cox also continually asked if the evidence collected by the FBI would hold up in court. He attributed his inquisitiveness regarding the evidence to human nature and emphatically denied this was a point of discussion at any Klan meetings.

In connection with this individual it will be noted that he committed suicide on Sunday, March 30, 1952 (the day after this reinterview), for reasons unknown. Chief of Police Carl Buchanan of Winter Park, Florida, advised Cox did not leave a suicide note and his family is unable to offer any explanation for his action. At the time of the reinterview Cox displayed no suicidal tendencies whatsoever and appeared to be in good spirits as well as cooperative with the exception of maintaining his immunity because of his oath.
So who really killed Harry T. Moore? Was it Tillman Belvin, Earl Brooklyn, Joe Cox, Raymond Henry, Willis McCall, or someone else? Although there is no hard evidence linking him to the murder, Cox remains the most suspicious person in this story. Why would a man with no known financial or medical problems, who was running for public office (Orange County supervisor of elections), suddenly commit suicide one day after his second interview with the FBI, during which he kept asking if its evidence would hold up in court? And why would his fellow Klansman, Ed Spivey, come forward twenty-six years later, wanting to clear his conscience before he died, and finger Cox? One thing is certain: Spivey certainly didn't come forward out of any regard for Harry Moore; his primary concern, repeated over and over in his taped interview, was that the Klan was going to look bad, because, as he put it, "We didn't authorize it." He insisted that Cox had acted on his own, without Klan authorization.

Given all of the evidence, here is one likely scenario for Moore's death. If one accepts Spivey's contention that $5,000 (or even some amount approaching that) was paid to kill Moore, that kind of money would have likely come from prominent grove owners or businessmen concerned about Moore's growing political influence. It is a known fact that one such grove owner, the head of the Mims Citrus Exchange, had threatened Moore shortly before his death, saying that he was "putting notions in n-----'s heads" and "his neck should be broken."

If this man, or others, were willing to put up the cash to take Moore out, who better to turn to than a "reputable" Klan official like Joe Cox, the secretary of the Orlando klavern, to arrange the killing? Cox may have been too old to be on the hit team himself, but could have easily recruited two or three younger "headknockers" to do it. Klan protocol dictated that only the immediate members of the hit team would know the actual details (to protect other members of the Klan), and they would have taken a blood oath of secrecy.

With the Moores living most of the year in Lake Park, it would have been a simple matter to case their house. That may have been the intent of the two white men who appeared in the Mims Confectionary Store, asking directions to the house of "that rich Professor Moore." In fact, several months before the bombing, the Moores came home one weekend and discovered that the house had been broken into, with drawers rifled through and a shotgun stolen out of the closet. Further, it would have required only casual questioning of neighbors to learn that the Moores always came home for Christmas.

With the date set, now the killers needed an alibi, and the Klan barbeque near Sanford on Christmas Day provided the perfect cover. At least twenty-five Klansmen were present, including Sidney Hopper, who only a few days later would be bragging that he had cased Moore's house and had suggested using dynamite.

The barbeque was held near Lake Jessup, east of Sanford, only a twenty-mile drive to Mims. No other towns lie in between. Leaving after dark, the hit men could have traveled on State Road 46 to Old Dixie, arriving at Moore's house in less than twenty minutes. By a stroke of luck, a thick blanket of fog that had rolled in off the Atlantic Ocean would have hidden their movements.

While one man hurried into the grove to set the bomb, the getaway car would have been idling along Old Dixie, which was lightly traveled at night. Sometime after 9 p.m., a man driving down Old Dixie saw a car idling across the road from the Moore's driveway, with a white man behind the wheel. It may have been the getaway car.

Based on footprints found in the grove, the triggerman was apparently stationed behind an orange tree, two hundred feet from the house. If the bomb was detonated by hand, with a long fuse cord, he could have retrieved the remnants of that and fled back to the waiting getaway car before being discovered. And if some sort of timed fuse was used instead, the hit men could have been back at the Klan barbeque before the bomb exploded. The entire operation could have easily been done in less than an hour. After the bombing, a sheriff's bloodhound tracked the bomber's footprints from the Moore's house to Old Dixie, where the tracks ended.

With the Moores living out in the country, isolated from their nearest neighbors by several hundred yards, and surrounded by an orange grove, it wouldn't have taken a genius to plan the murder out. Dynamite was sold over the counter back then as a tree stump remover, and many local men had experience using it. All it took was men with the will to do it, and the Klan had those in abundance.
Upon looking at the life, times, and death of Harry Tyson Moore, one sure fact stands out: he died too soon, especially if one considers that if he had been killed just three years later, in 1954, after the Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas Supreme Court decision which is hailed as the beginning of the American Civil Rights Movement, Harry T. Moore's name would probably be as recognizable as the names of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., or Rosa Parks. He would be part of America's “collective memory,” recognized as the first martyred leader of the Movement. His name would be in every history book. Instead, his name is not even included on the list of martyrs at the Civil Rights Memorial in Birmingham, Alabama; the roster only goes back to 1954.

In 1951, however, there was no identifiable Civil Rights Movement. There was no national publicity about civil rights issues or leaders. And so, a man, a Florida native, who worked so hard and gave his life for the betterment of millions of people, has been largely overlooked and forgotten, especially in his home state.

It seems clear that the work he was doing from 1934 to 1951—fighting to equalize black teachers’ salaries, investigating lynchings, and registering black voters—was as daring, as noteworthy, and as pioneering for that time as any of the later struggles of the Civil Rights Movement. It may have even been more dangerous. There were no television cameras to broadcast those battles to the watching American public, or to constrain white violence, like there were in the heady days of the struggle for civil rights. There were no significant federal civil rights laws or federal marshals to protect Moore. He was virtually on his own, with only his inner strength and beliefs to keep him going.

“He was walking into the lion’s den,” says Clarence Rowe, president of the Central Brevard County NAACP. “To do what he did back then, when the Klan was operating free rein, was suicide. He knew he was dead....”

It was a dangerous time to advocate rights for African-Americans in Florida. Though history more readily associates Deep South states such as Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi with racial violence, Florida had more lynchings per capita than any other state from 1900 to 1930. Though mass lynchings in Ocoee and Rosewood were twenty years distant, the Ku Klux Klan and local officials friendly to their cause remained a powerful threat to black Floridians in the mid-1940’s. Moore saw the Sunshine State’s sinister side, the side that state officials did not want potential tourists to see. Florida was a state where black orange pickers worked as near-indentured servants to white grove owners, black teachers’ salaries weren’t equal to their white counterparts, black students were not allowed the advantages in materials and school buildings that white students were accustomed to, and horrific lynchings went unpunished.

In this atmosphere, Moore’s accomplishments seem even more impressive today. At the time of his death on Christmas Day 1951, 31 percent of all eligible black people in Florida were registered to vote, a rate that was 50 percent higher than any other Southern state. This was in large part due to Moore’s leadership of the Progressive Voters’ League, and was probably one reason why he was killed. The more than 100,000 voters he had registered in the Democratic Party were enough to affect the outcome of every statewide election.

Though his rightful place in history is still sometimes debated, most scholars agree that if Moore had lived to see the Civil Rights Movement, he would have encouraged and even taken part in the nonviolent tactics espoused by Dr. Martin Luther King and his followers. Unlike King, though, Moore would have been in the lead of every struggle. “The difference between Moore and King was that King had to be approached, he had to be persuaded to get involved. Moore didn’t have to be persuaded,” says Robert Saunders, who became field secretary of the Florida NAACP after Moore’s death.

So why isn’t Moore better known? Sandra Dickson, co-producer of the film “Freedom Never Dies: The Legacy of Harry T. Moore,” believes that beside the fact that Moore was killed too soon, Moore’s fight against inequality “happened pretelevision. Ten years later, when African-Americans and moderate whites started seeing Birmingham police commissioner Bull Connor abusing civil rights demonstrators on TV...talk about bringing it home in a real way. It’s tough to deny.” Other reasons for Moore’s relative obscurity might include: local media’s lack of coverage
of his death, low interest among colleges in studying Florida’s civil rights history, the transience of the state’s African-American population, and a reluctance among longtime residents to discuss long ago horrors.

There is a silver lining to this story, however. After so many years of neglect, Moore may finally be achieving the place in history that he has rightfully earned. A street in Mims, Florida, has been named in his honor, as was a multicultural center at Brevard Community College. More importantly, an $18 million courthouse in Brevard County was dedicated as the “Harry T. and Harriette V. Moore Justice Center” in 1996. And in recent years, a memorial park and museum on the original site of the Moores’ house has been approved, with the state of Florida approving a grant of $700,000 to go towards building an exact replica of the Moore house, the museum, and the park. Along with the support of the state, many historians on the national level have also begun to take a look at Moore’s contributions to the Civil Rights Movement. Perhaps, finally, Moore may be getting the recognition that he so richly deserves.

-Taken from the following sources:
  “Lest We Forget,” by Eric Deggans (St. Pete Times, 1/15/2001)
Assessment

The following questions about the life and death of Harry T. Moore could be included in any assessment of the Civil Rights Movement:

1. Harry T. Moore:
   a. was a Florida native;
   b. was a champion for equality in education for Africa-Americans;
   c. worked to register Florida's African-Americans to vote;
   d. exposed many law enforcement officials as being corrupt;
   e. was America's first civil rights martyr;
   f. all of the above

2. True or false. Because of all of the contributions made by Moore in the struggle for civil rights, his name is included on the national Civil Rights Memorial in Birmingham, Alabama.

3. Of all the following names, which one or ones were never considered as a prime suspect in the murders of Harry T. and Harriette V. Moore?
   a. Thurgood Marshall
   b. Sheriff Willis McCall
   c. Earl Brooklyn
   d. Tillman Belvin
   e. Edward Spivey
   f. Joseph N. Cox
   g. J. Edgar Hoover
   h. O.K. Washington

4. List at least two reasons why you think Harry T. Moore is not recognized as a significant figure in the Civil Rights Movement, as opposed to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., or Malcolm X.

5. Should Harry T. Moore's name be included on the Civil Rights Monument in Birmingham? Write a 1-2 paragraph response using evidence from the lesson to justify your position.

6. Prepare a three-way Venn diagram comparing and contrasting Harry T. Moore with Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. (your students should have done extensive research on MLK and Malcolm X, or have taken part in the MLK-Malcolm X debate lesson included in Teachers' Curriculum Institute's "History Alive! The Civil Rights Movement" unit before answering this question.)
Resources

Clark, James C. “Civil Rights Leader Harry T. Moore and the Ku Klux Klan in Florida.” The Florida Historical Quarterly. Vol. 73, no. 2; p. 166-183.


Film

“Freedom Never Dies: The Legacy of Harry T. Moore”- written, produced, and directed by The Documentary Institute of the University of Florida’s College of Journalism and Communications (for more info, click here).

http://www.pbs.org/harrymoore/harry/index.html -PBS website complete with archives and lesson plan ideas