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Nothing remains but the cemetery.  When we arrived at the trail head for Lick Creek, the National Forest had an interpretative station with information about the Lick Creek settlement.  It detailed the history of the community, its Black residents, and their feats in clearing 1500 acres of farmland, planting fields, and establishing a good life during a period when so many other Black people languished in chains.  The interpretation ended with these words, “In 1862, for reasons unknown, the Black families began to abandon the community and their farms, which were resettled by white families.”  For reasons unknown?  That is, of course, untrue.  While we may not know the exact details of why over 200 free Blacks residents left their farms, town, church and the cemetery where their people were buried, we can make an educated guess.  We know these [facts](https://limestonepostmagazine.com/lick-creek-settlement-holds-piece-of-black-history-indiana/)…  …we know the Indiana State Legislature amended the state constitution in 1851 to read, “No negro or mulatto shall come into or settle in the State, after the adoption of this constitution.” This constitution also barred free Blacks from giving testimony in a trial against a white person.  …we know southern Indiana was a hot bed for the kidnapping of free Blacks, with many recorded instances of Indiana free Blacks being forced into slavery in the south.  …we know the State passed a law in 1852 requiring all Blacks to register with the county clerk and Orange County enforced this law.  …we know white mobs attacked Black families and their property in New Albany, Indiana for two days in the summer of 1862 and that New Albany was only 35 miles from Lick Creek.  …we know when the Newby family left Lick Creek in 1862, Solomon Newby sold his land for half of what he paid for it in 1846, and noted he was leaving under “extreme duress.”  …we know the Civil War draft was instituted in 1862 and many whites were enraged at “having to risk their lives to free Black slaves.”  …we know the Knights of the Golden Circle and the Sons of Liberty – precursors to the Ku Klux Klan – operated in Orange County in the 1860s.  …we know William Bowles, a Confederate sympathizer, was a prominent leader in Paoli - the white community nearest Lick Creek - and was later convicted of treason for planning to free and arm Confederate POWs and overthrow the Indiana government.  ...we know Indiana was nicknamed the middle finger of the South.  While we do not know the exact details for why the Black families of Lick Creek began to abandon their community and migrate to Canada, we can safely assume white supremacist hostility and harassment was the primary factor.  Yet, instead of offering these many verifiable facts about the racist environment in 1862 in Lick Creek, Indiana, the National Forest service decided to state that those families left "for reasons unknown."  Editorial decisions like this uphold white supremacy and white mythology today.  By leaving the reason unknown, we allow white people to fill in the blank with whatever makes them most comfortable or confirms their deepest biases.  The white progressive can speculate better jobs in the industrializing north enticed these families to leave.  The white supremacist can argue they were too lazy or unintelligent to manage their farms and sold them to more qualified white families.  Obscuring history always allows white people to control the narrative.  This is why white supremacists have made opposition to “critical race theory” and the teaching of Black history a target for hostility and legislative action.  The last thing white supremacy wants is a full exposure of the ugly history of white violence, harassment, and injustice toward people of color.  When it comes to countless instances of historic injustice done by white people to Black people, white supremacists would prefer the reasons for the murders, kidnappings, lynching, rapes, house and church burnings, community destruction and property theft remain unknown.  As my friend and I stood at the Lick Creek cemetery and read the names of long departed Black residents on weathered tombstones, I was moved.  Into the silence of that place. I said, “I know why you left.  I’m so sorry for how white people like me harassed you, destroyed your community, ran you off your farms and stole your property.  Please forgive us for what we did in 1862 and what we continue to do today.”  I cannot repair what was done to the families at Lick Creek.  But I refuse to allow white people to pretend the hundreds of statistical inequities between white people and Black people in our society are for reasons unknown.  A short hike to Lick Creek is all you need do to see the evidence of what was destroyed and stolen. | | |