

**Remarks given by Yahney-Marie Sangare, a sophomore at Alexandria City High School and Vice President of the Black Student Union.**

Hello, my name is Yahney-Marie Sangaré and I am a Sophomore at Alexandria City High School. I am honored to have the opportunity to speak today.

One-hundred and twenty-five years ago, the storm spit out lightning and a black body hung from a lamppost. One-hundred and twenty-five years later, the infrastructure has grown poisonous roots that run through the ground I stand on, from the West End to the East End. An apology does not rectify the foundational trauma, nor does the acknowledgement in my voice as I give what I have left of my words. A familial history has intertwined our bodies with this land; from Franklin and Armfield's boats that floated to the docks carrying Black bodies as cargo to T.C. William's racist Superintendent and the modern-day disparity of the bewildering scarcity of Black kids in our TAG and AP classrooms, the deep Potomac running a dirty red. A familial history and our presence here, now, in this moment, has tied us to this land, and there are no words, no apologies, no statements and no neutrality that can break those chains when the storm is still brewing, when even now, there is acid rain falling on what has transformed from Negro to Black to African American skin.

Joseph McCoy's death was a series of what I will not call structural failures, but of the structure working exactly to its intent. The blind-eye of the mayor, the half-ear of the Police, the Commonwealth Attorney and the individuals, at that time, makes the whole of white supremacy haunt this conversation.

One-hundred twenty-five years ago, the storm spit out lightning and each cloud was as white as snow. One-hundred twenty-five years later, each morning it seems the headlines offer a new Black body, bleeding out on the street, under the knee of an officer if not hanging from a tree. Even when it's not here, it's somewhere, everywhere, and its roots are the sidewalk on which we stand. He was hanged from a lamppost by a mob hypnotized by the spell of systemic racism that manifested in the bullet holes found in his body. Is that spell yet revoked? He is buried in a pauper's grave, for in its aftermath, what of his family? One-hundred and twenty-five years later, and we are turning a blind-eye to the storm.

I will not hesitate to be radical about my survival, the survival of my family and my community. I am reaching out for love, but does love signal nonviolence? How do we resist a legacy of hatred with only peace? How do we tip-toe around the sharp mountains of this legacy? How do we say that *it isn't here* when it is, when it was? I am asking this question and I am reaching out for love, but you must understand that at some fundamental level, a body swinging from a lamppost is only rectified when we take down not only that lamp post, but its commissioners. We remember and we reform, but reform does not imply abolition. I will repeat, reform does not imply abolition.

I commend the City of Alexandria for its continual efforts to acknowledge this unforgivable and tragic portion of our history. I honor and love both Joseph McCoy and his family, for I have no doubt his bloodline still flows as deep as the Potomac River.

I would love to end this speech with a call to action. I would love to tell you to do something as simple as protest, or vote, or read an article, or check your bias: and I do commend those who take those actions and encourage them. But I am afraid such an ultimatum of improvement is a naive prayer.

I enlist you, in this forum, remembrance. Both in standing here and walking around the city, in the well-deserved joy and love that I hope can come with this rising Spring. In the hot summers of 2020, I remember, hatred ran wild and vile on the streets; I remember it not in the resistance, but in its dissidents for the need to change, in its deniers of its necessity here. I enlist your remembrance, in hopes that in knowing, we may find love. For what is love, if not revolution?

Rest in peace, Joseph McCoy.

Thank you.