

## **A TALE OF TWO NAMES** ***For Benjamin***

*An Original Poem by KaNikki Jakarta, the First Black Poet Laureate of Alexandria, Virginia (July 22, 2020)*

You were Benjamin Thomas  
also known as Benjamin Thompson  
lynched in Alexandria, Virginia on August 8, 1899  
due to a varied crime  
during a time  
when the newspapers didn't care enough to print your name right  
That night,  
the story seems a bit blurry  
between blurred lines of testimony of what really took place  
Your history is traced  
121 years  
and still unclear  
Did Lillian walk by your house or come to your door to borrow an ax?  
Did she flee in an outcry after an attack?  
Was she with her younger brother or was she alone?  
Did Lillian indeed come to your home?  
I've read enough black history of lynching's and tragedies  
to know that even with a testimony and blatant discrepancies...  
justice would not be the outcome  
Accuser's accusations could have a black person hung  
Who cares if these stories were accurate? Who cares about the truth?  
when the mission of the accuser is to kill the black youth  
they painted you as a horrible person,  
shot you in the heart and hung you from a lamp post in an attempt to burn out your light  
but there were protestors of Black people willing to fight for your life  
the writers stated that when they learned of this accusation, the White community was enraged  
no writings about your mind state or anything that you said while you were engage  
Breaking into the jail and taking your life was a white mob's intent  
while falsehoods spread that the Black community was willing to kill White residents  
There was one man named Albert Green  
who was jailed when he tried to intervene  
The journalist wrote that they didn't think you would be lynched  
especially since Lillian and her parents were the only witnesses  
how frightening it must have been listening and wondering why  
and having to sit silently with no chance to testify  
I'm not sure if you were 16 or 20 in your final days  
because the writers also didn't care to verify your age  
to them you were just another black boy  
killed two years after they murdered Joseph McCoy  
I'm certain that living in this city; Joseph's murder was a tragedy of which you knew  
and never in yourself imagination you would think this would also happen to you

Throughout the city, the Black community demanded your protection  
and was willing to help in your defense  
And here we are 12 decades later to hold up your name in remembrance  
You didn't deserve to die this way; leaving your mother heart broken and in grief  
Unfortunately your story doesn't leave us in utter disbelief  
You deserved to be the person to create your own legacy  
Yet, you are another fallen ancestor in our tragic history  
We will pour libations and hold you in the light  
and say your names as Thomas and Thompson in an attend to get it right  
We will make people aware of injustice that was done to you  
and say you lived until you were murdered and leave that to be true  
These sad murder stories are a part of the city of Alexandria's DNA  
and affect what Alexandria was and continue to affect Alexandria today  
We celebrate your life and create a memorial for you, Benjamin  
and mourn at the loss of who you could have been