

Remembering the lost lives of Alexandria's lynching victims Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas

That is until the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) began a conversation with its report, *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror* that documented 4,743 lynchings in 12 Southern states between the end of the Civil War and World War II. Then they launched a movement with their Community Remembrance program to foster truthful dialogue about race and justice in an effort to bring about healing and reconciliation for traumatized communities.

In 2019, Alexandria's City Council established the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project (ACRP) to partner with EJI with the mission of creating an inclusive community bound by equity. Since then, ACRP has held public education programs, erected historic markers at the sites of the lynchings, continues to research the lynchings of McCoy and Thomas and holds remembrance ceremonies for both men.

The EJI asks participating communities to host ceremonies to collect soil from the ground where lynchings occurred to memorialize the victims and recognize the terror that was inflicted on the community.

On Saturday, September 24, 2022, Alexandrians are invited to a Soil Collection Ceremony at Market Square at 4 p.m. where participants will have an opportunity to touch earth excavated from sites known intimately by McCoy and Thomas. Two wooden vessels designed and built by eighth grade students at Jefferson-Houston IB K-8 School will house soil representing the lives of each man. Partic-

ipants will take soil and place it into glass jars bearing each man's name that will be delivered by the Alexandria community to the EJI on October 7, 2022.

Such traumatic aspects of our history are difficult to bear but city leadership, city staff, community leaders, and community members are committed to sharing Alexandria's history in its entirety.

"By confronting the failures of our past, we take steps in creating a more equitable future for the Commonwealth and our nation," Virginia Sen. Tim Kaine stated in a letter to ACRP,

adding, "Your commitment to telling the full and truthful story of Alexandria's history, is a step towards healing for our nation."

The days of infamy suffered by McCoy, Thomas, their relatives, and the entire African American community are no longer unspoken. Alexandria City High School students, who will be among the 170 Alexandrians making a pilgrimage to Montgomery, Ala., in October now know their names and our history too.

This piece was provided by the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project.



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