

# PROCLAMATION

**WHEREAS**, on April 23, 1897, and August 8, 1899, Alexandria wielded the devastating sword of racial violence lynching two Black youth who were natives of this city and terrorizing the African American members of this community; and

**WHEREAS**, on this day, in the year 2022, Alexandria acknowledges these gross miscarriages of justice and accepts responsibility by telling the truth of those histories; and

**WHEREAS**, the events began on April 22, 1897, when Richard Lacy, a white man accused Joseph McCoy, an African American teenager who had worked for him for many years, of sexually assaulting Lacy's child. McCoy was taken to the Police Station, where he denied the charge and McCoy was locked in a holding cell and then interrogated by Lieutenant James Smith who reported McCoy confessed to the crime, despite the earlier denial; and

**WHEREAS**, at 1 a.m. on April 23, a lynch mob pulled McCoy from his cell, dragged him to the southeast corner of Cameron and Lee streets, and strung him to a lamp post. He was struck with cobblestones, beaten, and shot, and he died without anyone being held responsible; and

**WHEREAS**, just two years later, on August 7, 1899, a 16-year-old Black youth named Benjamin Thomas was accused by a seven-year-old white girl who lived next door of assaulting her; her father, Edward Kloch, swore out a warrant and police arrested Thomas; and

**WHEREAS**, despite his plea of innocence, he was charged with a crime but never tried. Thomas was taken from the City jail on August 8, a rope pulled tight around his chest, and he was dragged for half a mile down Saint Asaph Street and then King Street. The white mob pelted him with stones, bricks, and pieces of iron. Wounded and bleeding, Thomas cried out for his mother. The mob stopped at the southwest corner of King and Fairfax streets and hanged Thomas on a lamp post. An inquiry revealed he died by "hands unknown"; and

**WHEREAS**, no white Alexandrian was held accountable for the murders, and

**WHEREAS**, Alexandria deeply regrets the actions and inactions of our white forebearers and on September 24, in the year 2022 acknowledges the terror experienced by McCoy, Thomas, and the African American members of this community; and we recognize these two men whose legal rights were thwarted, to whom justice was denied and who lost their lives to racial hatred; and we apologize to Joseph McCoy, Benjamin Thomas, to their families, and the Black community, posthumously; and

**WHEREAS**, this Alexandria soil represents the lives of McCoy and Thomas, as well as the heritage and accomplishments of the African American members of this community; and

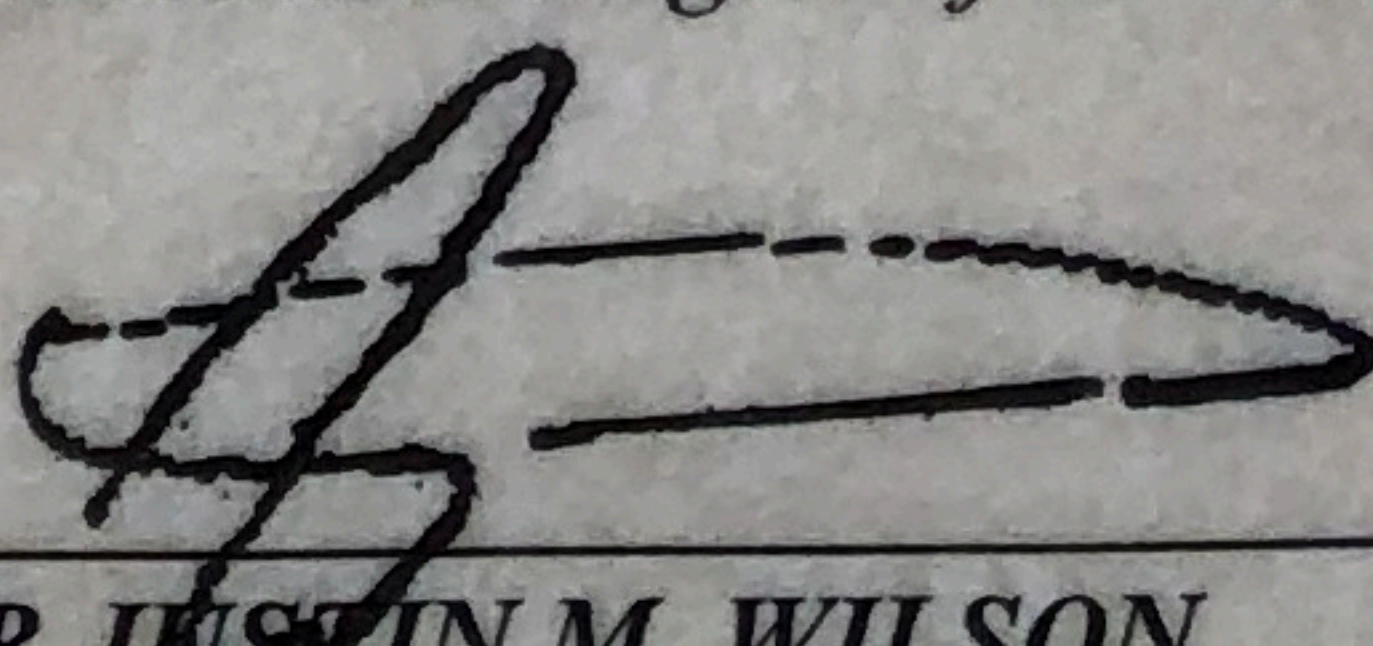
**WHEREAS**, as such this soil is sacred to us; and

**WHEREAS**, Alexandria citizens will carry this hallowed soil to a final resting place at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama to bring peace to the souls of McCoy and Thomas, and to the community of Alexandria; and upon our return from this pilgrimage this City will continue to lay bare past and present inequities, to expose our troubled racial history, and to bear witness to these atrocities. Alexandria is committed to reconciliation, so our community emerges stronger and more inclusive. In this way, the deaths of Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas will never be forgotten.

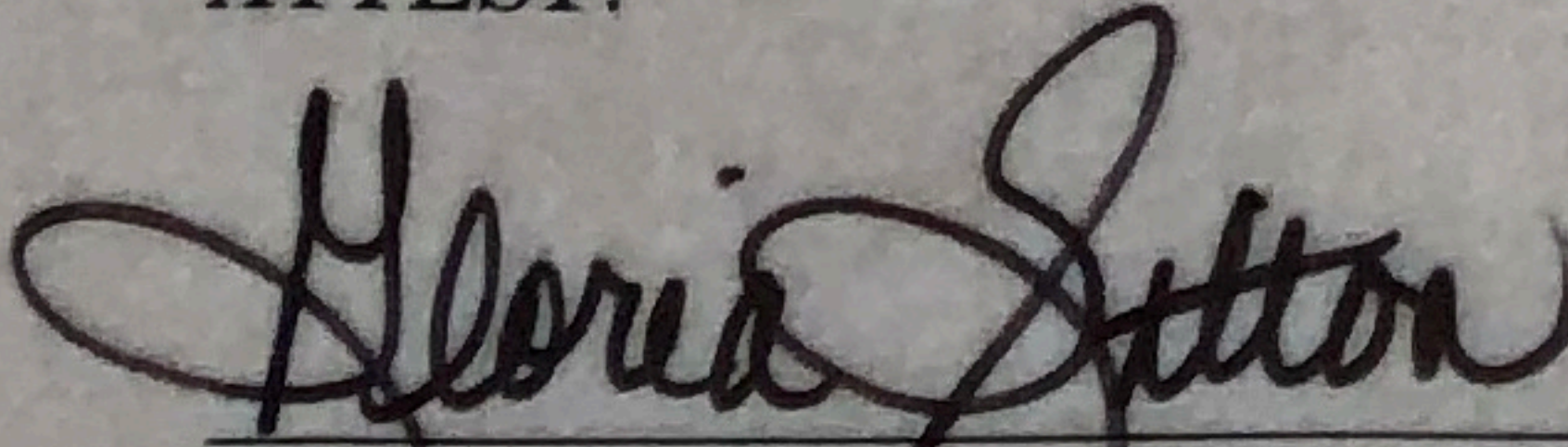
**NOW, THEREFORE, I, JUSTIN M. WILSON**, Mayor of the City of Alexandria, Virginia, and on behalf of the Alexandria City Council, do hereby recognize this soil collection ceremony as the memorialization of the lives and legacies of:

## "JOSEPH MCCOY" & "BENJAMIN THOMAS"

The City of Alexandria and I call this observance and pilgrimage to Alabama to the attention of all our citizens, so that all will know the City of Alexandria will continue to place first and foremost the rights of all humanity, so that our city may be an example for all.

  
MAYOR JUSTIN M. WILSON  
On behalf of the City Council  
of Alexandria, Virginia

ATTEST:

  
Gloria A. Sitton, CMC City Clerk

