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BALTIMORE COUNTY MARYLAND

Lynching of 15-year-old Howard Cooper at Towson jail to be memorialized Saturday

By TAYLOR DEVILLE
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Howard Cooper, a 15-year-old Black boy, was dragged from his cell and hung from a sycamore tree outside the Towson jailhouse by a mob of white men 136 years ago.

He was one of approximately 40 Black Marylanders lynched, as [documented by historians](#). On Saturday, Cooper will be memorialized with a marker and ceremony to dignify his memory near the Towson jail where he was imprisoned.

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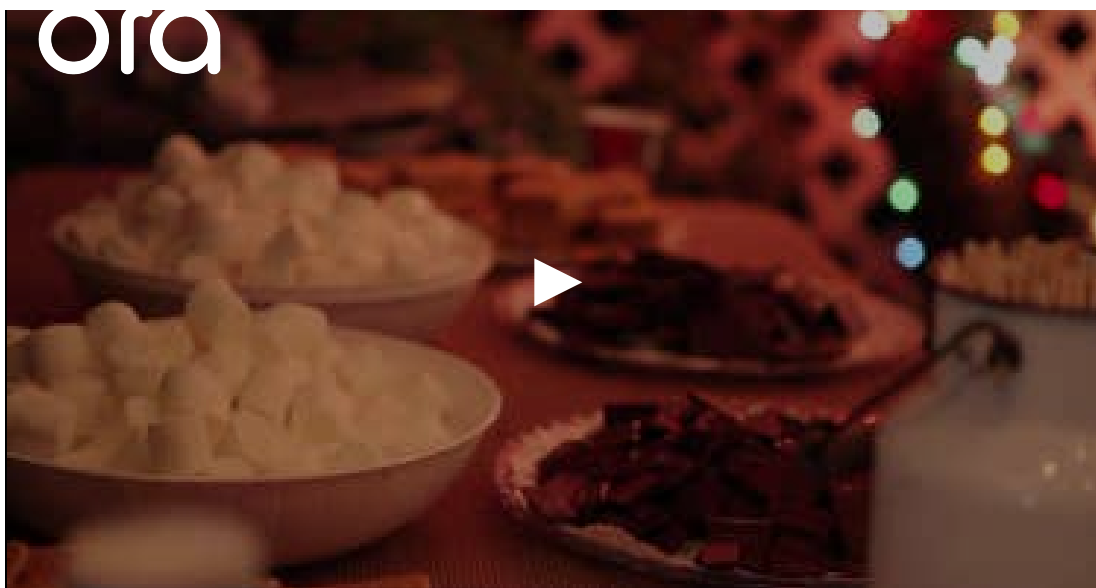
The ceremony is part of an ongoing effort by [The Maryland Lynching Memorial Project](#), a group of 13 county chapters working to document the history of lynching in Maryland, advance the cause of reconciliation in the state and advocate for public acknowledgment of lynchings. The Equal Justice Initiative, which has [documented more than 4,400 such killings](#) nationwide, calls them racial terror lynchings because the goal was to “enforce racial subordination and segregation.”

“We are taking important steps in Maryland to acknowledge and overcome the overt and [structural] racism throughout our State’s history,” said House Speaker Adrienne A. Jones, who is among those who will speak during the Saturday ceremony, in an emailed statement.

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“Recognizing the absurdity of lynching [a] 15 year old child — more appropriately, the murder of a child in the late 1800s — is another step in the healing process so that every Marylander can truly feel invested in our future,” she said.

It’s a history that has been “dismissed and marginalized,” said Will Schwarz, a longtime television and video producer who established the Memorial Lynching Project and serves as its president.



“I live a mile and a quarter away, maybe, from that jail,” Schwarz said. “I had driven by it all the time. I had no idea.”

Will Schwarz, left to right, founder of the Maryland Memorial Lynching Project, Nancy Goldring, president of the Northeast Towson Improvement Association, and Baltimore County Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer Troy Williams, stand with a historical marker honoring Howard Cooper, who was lynched outside the Towson jailhouse when he was 15 years old. The Maryland Memorial Lynching Project partnered with the Equal Justice Initiative and Baltimore County to install the plaque honoring Cooper’s memory outside the old jail. The commemoration is part of

Cooper was convicted by an all-white jury that, within minutes, concluded he was guilty of raping Katie Gray, a white teenager, in an area then known as Rockland in Baltimore County. Neither Gray nor Cooper testified that Gray was raped.

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His sentence was death by hanging. He was lynched in the early hours of July 13, 1885, [before his attorneys could appeal](#) his conviction to the U.S. Supreme Court on the grounds that Cooper's 14th Amendment rights had been violated because Maryland effectively prohibited Black people from serving on juries.

His body was left hanging "so angry white residents and local train passengers could see his corpse," according to Cooper's plaque. His mother, Henrietta, retrieved his remains and buried him in an unmarked grave in Ruxton.

[Towson residents working to memorialize 1885 lynching of 15-year-old Howard Cooper »](#)

Cooper's marker is funded by the [Equal Justice Initiative](#).

Lynchings have been documented in 18 of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions from 1854 to 1933. The most occurred in Anne Arundel and Prince George's counties.

without trial, and likely under false accusation, in Anne Arundel County.

Cooper's marker in Towson will be the second of its kind in the state. A third historical marker memorializing three lynching victims in Salisbury will be installed May 22 in the Eastern Shore town by the Salisbury Lynching Memorial Task Force and the Equal Justice Initiative.

Historians recently discovered a second lynching that occurred in Baltimore County. A Black man named William Ramsey was killed in Rosedale in 1909, but little is known about his life or death, Schwarz said. The county chapter of the Memorial Lynching Project is searching for records about him.

"What we're asking people to do ... is to look, is to confront the truth," Schwarz said. "We're acknowledging what happened and now we have to think about how it continues to influence our lives and what we can do to dismantle this machinery of white supremacy. And it's gotta be local."

The Towson plaque will stand on a right of way near the old jailhouse, known as Bosley Hall, just beyond where Cooper was lynched. Baltimore County owns the land of the former jail but leases it to a third party, Azola Building Rehab, which repurposed it as an office building in 2011.

"Our path towards reconciliation must be multifaceted," said Troy Williams, Baltimore County's chief diversity officer, in a statement.

That means "having difficult conversations in the public square, and using those conversations as a catalyst to address policies and practices that have perpetuated systemic inequities," said Williams, who helped secure the site for the memorial.

The memorial comes two years after legislation passed by the Maryland General Assembly established the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a task force that is the first of its kind in the United States.

The task force's goal is to research lynchings known to have occurred in the state, hold public meetings in the communities where the killings took place, and include

ACK findings and recommendations in a report to the governor and state legislature by the end of 2021.

The 11 a.m. ceremony Saturday in Towson is open to the public, but limited attendance is encouraged due to the pandemic. It will be attended by Attorney General Brian Frosh, Jones, County Executive Johnny Olszewski Jr., Police Chief Melissa Hyatt and others.

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Taylor DeVille covers Baltimore County government for The Baltimore Sun. A 2017 Towson University graduate, she previously covered the Towson, Catonsville and Arbutus areas for Baltimore Sun Media and prior to that was a staff writer at The Enterprise in St. Mary's County.

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