

Salisbury looks to honor Wicomico lynching victims through memorial coalition

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Salisbury has taken a major step toward installing a memorial that commemorates African-Americans lynched in Wicomico County.

Mayor Jake Day has announced the city will establish a Lynching Memorial Task Force, a group that will facilitate the creation of a permanent monument.

"In a memorandum delivered to the Mayor this past October, the Human Rights Advisory Committee detailed the horrific nature of the murders, noting the fact that, detestably, not a single person from amongst the three mobs had ever been identified publicly — much less brought to justice," a release from the Mayor's office states.

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Three black men have been lynched in Salisbury. In 1898, a mob hanged Garfield King, accused of shooting a white man.

King claimed self-defense but was denied due process when a mob broke into the jail where he was held and attacked him, according to the release.

The mob kicked, beat, clubbed and hanged King before shooting his body over 50 times.

More: [Lynching in Maryland: Proposed commission could shed light on history](https://story/news/local/maryland/2019/02/28/lynching-maryland-proposed-commission-could-shed-light-history/2804010002/) ((story/news/local/maryland/2019/02/28/lynching-maryland-proposed-commission-could-shed-light-history/2804010002/))

More: [Eastern Shore lynching victims remembered in new memorial](https://story/news/2018/04/30/eastern-shore-lynching-victims-remembered-new-memorial/558746002/) ((story/news/2018/04/30/eastern-shore-lynching-victims-remembered-new-memorial/558746002/))

In 1931, a mob hanged 23-year-old Matthew Williams, who was accused of killing his employer. Williams was forced out of a hospital bed and lowered from a second-story window to a mob below.



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The mob took Williams to the courthouse lawn, where he was beaten and hanged. They then dragged Williams' body from an automobile through black neighborhoods before burning his body.

The burned body of another young black man was discovered in Salisbury the next day. The second victim was never identified, according to the release.

"The events which led to the deaths of these men represent the darkest, most despicable acts of which we are capable," Day said in the release. "It's not enough to tell the world that we're better than these acts, and then just try to move past them. What we have to understand is that the scars left upon a community by coordinated acts of mob violence don't heal overnight.

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"They don't heal over decades. They can only begin to heal when we acknowledge and address the reprehensible acts themselves. And, most importantly, the three men who died deserve basic human dignity. They were denied that. By erecting this monument, we are doing what we can to try to give it back."

Maryland's first commission tasked with investigating racial terror lynchings was established in April 2019. Dubbed the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the group was created by [House Bill 307](https://msa.maryland.gov/lynching-truth-reconciliation/pdf/ch_41_hb0307t.pdf) (https://msa.maryland.gov/lynching-truth-reconciliation/pdf/ch_41_hb0307t.pdf), according to a report from the [Equal Justice Initiative](https://ej.org/news/maryland-establishes-first-statewide-commission-on-racial-terror-lynchings/) (https://ej.org/news/maryland-establishes-first-statewide-commission-on-racial-terror-lynchings/)

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The bill acknowledges that at least 40 African Americans were lynched in Maryland between 1854 and 1933 by white mobs who "intended to terrorize African American communities and force them into silence and subservience to the ideology of white supremacy."

More: [Time to break the silence on lynchings, race in Wicomico](https://www.wicomico.gov/news/2018/09/05/wicomico-resident-challenges-community-break-silence/1176642002/) ([/story/opinion/readers/2018/09/05/wicomico-resident-challenges-community-break-silence/1176642002/](https://www.wicomico.gov/news/2018/09/05/wicomico-resident-challenges-community-break-silence/1176642002/)).

More: [Days after KKK flyers, event will mark 1931 Salisbury lynching](https://www.wicomico.gov/news/2018/12/04/event-mark-1931-salisbury-lynching-matthew-williams/2080668002/) ([/story/news/local/maryland/2018/12/04/event-mark-1931-salisbury-lynching-matthew-williams/2080668002/](https://www.wicomico.gov/news/2018/12/04/event-mark-1931-salisbury-lynching-matthew-williams/2080668002/)).

Mary Ashanti, president of the Wicomico County NAACP chapter, applauded the city's recent undertaking.

"We think it's a great idea and we commend the mayor and the city for taking such a task on," Ashanti said.

Additional organizations and residents alike also praised the move.

The Wicomico Truth and Reconciliation Initiative, a community organization that partnered with the Salisbury Human Rights Advisory Committee to craft the task force proposal, issued a statement Tuesday morning.

"Our movement is grateful that the recommendations were accepted in full, and are fully ready to help our community to move forward in truth and reconciliation," the statement reads.

"This continues the work that our members have done since 2016; with the first vigil for Matthew Williams, followed by subsequent vigils for Garfield King and the Unknown Man; and partnering with the Equal Justice Initiative in 2017 to collect soil from 7 Lynching sites on the lower Eastern Shore."

Edward S. Lee, a chairperson for the community-based nonprofit organization the Circle of Leaders, said he supports the move but noted that more should be done to counter racial injustice.

"We want to look at and address the issues of what has taken place," Lee said. "But I'm concerned about what's actually being done to bring justice."

The city's Human Rights Advisory Committee established the following expectations for the Lynching Memorial Task Force:

- Create community buy-in for the Memorial via outreach projects and meetings with key leaders in the Salisbury community
- Ensure that discussions with community members include issues both past and present, and include topics such as economics, criminal justice, health and education
- Coordinate with the Equal Justice Initiative, which will fund the memorial once it is planned by the city and sufficient community buy-in is achieved
- Coordinate with the mayor and other city officials on the design, language and location of the Memorial
- Plan and implement an unveiling ceremony for the memorial once all other steps have been completed

The proposed memorial will be funded by the Equal Justice Initiative and installed and maintained by the city of Salisbury.

Citizens of Salisbury, Wicomico County and the lower Eastern Shore may apply to serve on the Lynching Memorial Task Force. To apply online, visit salisbury.md/task-force (<https://salisbury.md/task-force>).

For more information on the Equal Justice Initiative, visit eji.org (<https://eji.org/>).

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City of Salisbury, Maryland

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City to Establish Lynching Memorial Task Force

Mayor Jake Day announced that he is accepting the recommendation of the City's Human Rights Advisory Committee to establish a Lynching Memorial Task Force to facilitate the creation of a permanent monument in honor and solemn remembrance of the three American citizens who lost their lives at the hands of lynch mobs in Wicomico County.

In a memorandum delivered to the Mayor this past October, the Human Rights Advisory Committee ... [See More](#)



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