



HARFORD COUNTY

Harford County lynching victims remembered with soil collection ceremony

By Jason Fontelieu

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Dr. Iris Leigh Barnes, Chair, Harford County Committee of the Maryland Lynching Project (HarCo MLMP), speaks at the Remembrance Ceremony and Soil Collection held at Shamrock Park in memory of three victims who were lynched in Harford County. HarCo MLMP is collecting historical information from the sites where Isaac Moore (July 22, 1868), Jim Quinn (October 2, 1869) and Lewis Harris (March 26, 1900) were lynched. March 26, 2022. (Kim Hairston/Baltimore Sun)

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The Harford County Committee of the Maryland Lynching Memorial Project held a remembrance ceremony and soil collection Saturday morning in Bel Air's Shamrock Park in

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honor of three Black men who were lynched in Harford County.

The three victims — Isaac Moore (died in 1868), Jim Quinn (died in 1869) and Lewis Harris (died in 1900) — were accused of assaulting white women, kidnapped from police custody and lynched by angry mobs. The ceremony took place on roughly the 122nd anniversary of Harris' death.

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“Lynching is local,” Will Schwarz, president of the Maryland Lynching Memorial Project, said during his speech, “and that’s why reconciliation has to be local, too.”

Dr. Iris Barnes, chair of the county’s MLMP committee, noted that she’d spent much of her life in the county and was proud of it but that it’s not perfect and that the long-term effects of racial terror lynchings still linger. She urged attendees to keep an open mind and remain reflective.

“It’s important to see that these victims were people,” Barnes said.

There were multiple poem recitations and songs performed by members of the community, as well as remarks from Harford County Executive Barry Glassman, Harford County Councilmembers Curtis Beulah and Andre Johnson and Bel Air Mayor Kevin Bianca.

Attendees were then each invited to add soil to one of three jars that were presented to the Equal Justice Initiative, the Historical Society of Harford County and the Hosanna School Museum for display and preservation.

Schwarz told the Aegis that it’s not enough to tell the truth about racial terror lynchings — people need to also understand how white supremacy manifests in society today.

“The national psyche is still gripped by this white supremacy,” Schwarz said. “We have an obligation to understand how it continues to manifest.”

There are other statewide efforts acknowledging Maryland’s history of lynchings, including the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was instated by a 2019 House bill. According to the commission’s website, it researches racially motivated lynchings and holds public meetings where African Americans were lynched by white mobs.

Dr. Charles Chavis, vice chairman of the commission, also noted the importance of continuing to have these conversations and acknowledging the state’s past indiscretions.

“It doesn’t weaken our democracy by telling these stories; it strengthens our democracy,” Chavis said.

Vicki Jones, president of the Harford NAACP, said it’s likely there were more lynchings in the county.

“I think that’s really key for people to understand, that there had to be many, many, many, many more people who were murdered and just their bodies disposed of,” Jones said.

According to the MLMP’s website, racial terror lynchings have been documented in 18 of the state’s 24 counties, and the project has coalitions in 13 of those.

The Harford soil ceremony was originally planned for March 2020 but postponed due to the pandemic.