



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Office of the Lieutenant Governor

Winsome Earle-Sears
Lieutenant Governor

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Dear Alexandria Community Remembrance Project,

September 24, 2022

Today, you gather in remembrance of a dark time in our American History: racism and hate covered our land. Rightfully, we honor the memories of those who bravely fought to secure for us a better tomorrow.

We reflect on the life of Joseph McCoy- a Black nineteen-year-old who was lynched in 1897 based on the word of a white man. A mob broke into the jail, dragged him out, and tortured him. The actions of the mob were so repugnant, that the newspapers, at the time, refused to publish the most graphic details. Despite this brutality, justice was never delivered for the McCoy family.

Two years later, in 1899, the mob was back. This time their homicidal intent was fixated on a Black sixteen-year-old boy named Benjamin Thomas- whose alleged crime was reported by an eight-year-old! The city officials ignored the pleas from the African-American community who knew what lay ahead. The mob dragged him from his cell, throwing bricks, iron, and stones; however, that did not quell their appetite. The mob did not cease until they had stabbed, shot, and hung Thomas!

These two lynchings represent a time when the law treated our Black community differently than our white neighbors. But today, as we remember the young souls-that were lost in this fight, we can proclaim that they did not die in vain. Since those somber days, our Commonwealth and nation has changed. There is no better proof of that than myself. I write to you as a Black woman, who is second in command in the former capital of the Confederacy. Our nation may not be what she should be, but thank God she isn't what she once was.

To God be the glory,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. Earle-Sears".

Winsome Earle-Sears
Lieutenant Governor
Commonwealth of Virginia