

Statement of the Baltimore County Lynching Memorial Project (BaltCoLMP) in Support of the Senate Resolution of Apology and Acknowledgement of the State's Responsibility in Racial Terror Lynchings

The Baltimore County Lynching Memorial Project (BaltCoLMP) supports the Maryland Senate's joint resolution concerning the *Apology and Acknowledgement of the State's Responsibility in Racial Terror Lynchings*.

This resolution comes out of the Final Report of the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission (MLTRC)—which was directly informed by the county hearings held in our communities and as a result of the partnership between the MLTRC and MLMP local coalitions. We add this statement to the hearing for this bill in the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee, Thursday, March 12th at 1:00 p.m.

In our work to inform citizens about the history of racial terror lynchings, the BaltCoLMP has discovered disturbing facts about the practices and decisions (allowed and implemented) by the State of Maryland regarding the lynching of Howard Cooper in Towson, Baltimore County; the lynching of Matthew Williams in Salisbury, Wicomico County; and many other occurrences of lynching in counties across Maryland.

BaltCoLMP is interested in an apology from the State especially because of one particularly disgraceful feature of the decisions condemning 15-year-old Howard Cooper to death. Records show that in 1885, the all-white jury appointed in the Cooper case was in violation of U.S. Supreme Court decision taken five years earlier in *Strauder v. West Virginia (1880)*. The resulting all-white jury never left the jury box to deliberate and returned its guilty verdict after only one minute. Somehow overlooking or ignoring *Strauder v. West Virginia*, the Appellate Court of Maryland turned down Cooper's appeal. Cooper's legal advisors raised the funds to prepare to file further appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, but on the Sunday night before they could file, a mob of dozens of men, led by a well-known Towson lawyer, broke into the Old Jail in Towson, dragged Cooper from his cell, hung him from a nearby tree, and thereby murdered him. Judge William Shepard Bryan of the Maryland Court of Appeals expressed little sympathy and condoned the circumvention of the courts by mob violence by reportedly saying, "The summary disposition of the case would not have occurred if the friends of the condemned man had not resorted to the extreme measures they took to raise funds, *The Baltimore Sun, 14 July 1885*.

Similar disturbing facts were uncovered in the lynching of Matthew Williams in Salisbury in December, 1931. Williams was wounded in an exchange of gunfire with his white employer. While he was receiving medical

attention, a violent mob dragged him from the hospital. He was beaten and stabbed. His body was hung from a tree and set afire. None of the well-known perpetrators—whose actions and crimes were witnessed by hundreds of citizens—were ever charged much less prosecuted for the lynching.

The State of Maryland, and Baltimore and Wicomico Counties, could have and should have protected Mr. Cooper's and Mr. Williams' Fourteenth Amendment Rights of "equal protection" and "due process" as defined by the United States Constitution. These facts indicate that the State of Maryland failed in its responsibility under the Constitution to protect Mr. Cooper and Mr. Williams from the clear threat posed by lynch mobs that formed at the time.

For these compelling reasons, the members of BaltCoLMP support the joint resolution calling for the State of Maryland to apologize as partial remedy for the injustices caused by its failure to protect the rights of those lynched in the State.

An apology from the State of Maryland is highly warranted.