

Say Their Names

Lynching in America & The Legacy of Racial Terror



*Anthony P. Crawford; community leader, father, entrepreneur;
killed October 21, 1916 in Abbeville, SC*

Remembering lynching victims

1860 to 1955

Throughout Black History Month, Unitarian Universalist churches in Concord, Stow, and Sudbury will honor, acknowledge, and say the names of lynching victims, who were targets of racial terrorism. In preparing the *Say Their Names* observance, we were inspired by the leadership of Maynard Anti-Racism Alliance, known as MARA. We were also guided by Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism and America's Black Holocaust Museum, both of whom responded generously when asked for advice.

According to journalists Jamiles Larney and Sam Morris, most "historians broadly agree that lynchings were a method of social and racial control meant to terrorize black Americans into submission, and into an inferior racial caste position."

Lynching terrorized black people and continued slavery's violent methods of oppression. The vast majority of lynchings occurred in the South, from 1877 through 1950, but lynching of Black people occurred in almost every state, and also targeted Asians, Mexicans, First Nation Peoples, and other minorities. Our schools fail to teach the hard truth that hateful, organized mobs of white people lynched many black people, burned their property, and ran them out of town, as in Slocum, TX, and Tulsa, OK.

State and county vagrancy laws sanctioned forced labor practices through convict leasing programs which often worked black convicts to death, a practice that continued throughout the Jim Crow era.

Today, racial terrorism continues. We see it in hate crimes harming or killing peaceful black individuals and groups, as well as in unwarranted police harassment and killings, and the workings of our racially biased criminal justice system, which has created mass incarceration that robs people of color of years of their lives, and sometimes leads to state-sanctioned executions.

These injustices are the legacy of slavery. We have benefited from slavery, often without knowing it, let alone taking responsibility and atoning. Past members of our UU congregations owned slaves. Some of our past ministers owned slaves, including Israel Loring, the first minister of First Parish in Sudbury. Indeed, it was common for New England professional men in pre-revolutionary times to own slaves. Neither the practice of slavery in the United States nor lynching afforded enslaved people of color any right to justice or made perpetrators accountable.

"No other nation civilized or savage burns its criminals," said activist Ida B. Wells in a famous speech in 1909. "Only under the stars and stripes is the human holocaust possible" and used to further the lie and justification that "negroes are lynched to protect (white) womanhood."

"Lynching victims were seized and subjected to every imaginable manner of physical torment," write Lartey and Morris, "with the torture usually ending with being hung from a tree and set on fire or burned alive." Quite often their body parts were cut away and sold as souvenirs. Photographs were often taken and sold as postcards that found their way throughout the United States.

We are painfully aware that the names of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Rekia Boyd, and Philando Castile are included among lynching victims. Fearful, hateful white people continue to kill black people today. When white citizens kill black people and no one is held accountable, our continual silence means we are complicit.

MARA and the UU churches will say the names of many lynching victims this month, but we won't come close to naming the thousands of known, or the thousands more of unknown people of color whose lives were robbed through lynching. And, in the case of enslaved victims, we acknowledge that their very names marked them as their master's property.

As we hear the names, let us keep in mind these words from the Memorial to the Victims of Lynching at America's Black Holocaust Museum:

"Each of these victims was once a living human being with feelings, hopes and dreams - but the drama of their deaths has overshadowed their lives.

We must remember that...

Each had talents and pleasures: singing, dancing, telling stories, playing cards or sports, creating beautiful and useful things.

Each worked for a living or struggled with unemployment.

Each was part of a family and community: a father or mother, husband or wife, son or daughter, friend or neighbor – loved ones who retrieved the mutilated body and grieved over it."

Say Their Names - First Parish Sudbury

Peter Bland	February 3, 1884
Henry Smith	February 1, 1893
Robert Morton	February 4, 1897
Henry Lowry	January 26, 1921
Jim Roland	February 1, 1921
Alfred Blount	February 14, 1893
Anne Holbert	February 7, 1904
Luther Holbert	February 7, 1904
Andrew Williams	February 7, 1913
David Rucker	February 8, 1913
Charles Tyson	February 14, 1913
Jim McIlherron	February 12, 1918
Will Burts	February 18, 1900
George Ward	February 26, 1901
[Unknown] Anderson	February 24, 1913
Robert Perry	February 24, 1913
Young Reed	February 26, 1915
Unidentified Negro	February, 1923
Unidentified Negro	February, 1923
John Henderson	March 13, 1901
Ballie Crutchfield	March 16, 1901
William Carr	March 17, 1906
Nelson Nash	February 19, 1933
Ab Young	March 12, 1935
George Lee	May 7, 1955
Lamar Smith	August 6, 1955
Emmett Till	August 31, 1955