

PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, as in 1899, on the southwest corner of Fairfax and King streets, in the shadow of City Hall, a 16-year-old Black teenager named Benjamin Thomas was lynched by a white terror mob comprised of Alexandria citizens; and

WHEREAS, he was imprisoned and charged with an alleged crime, for which he was never tried. Thomas was pulled out of the jail at Princess and St. Asaph streets and dragged half a mile with a rope around his neck through Old Town by a mob numbering two thousand, to a street corner at the time known as Leadbeater's corner. They pelted him with stones, bricks, and pieces of iron. They stabbed him, kicked him, and shot him. Wounded and bleeding, Thomas cried out for his mother. In the midst of these atrocities, 15 African American men stepped forward to protect him. They, too, were arrested; and

WHEREAS, between 1882 and 1968, 100 Virginians, including at least 11 in Northern Virginia, were lynched. The lynchings were among 4,743 reported nationwide during the same period. Just two years earlier, Joseph McCoy was lynched on a lamp post at Lee and Cameron streets. Lynching was never a federal offense; and

WHEREAS, The City of Alexandria condemns such acts and seeks to inform all of our past and our history, and bear witness to them in our minds and in the minds of others, and that martyrs such as Benjamin Thomas and Joseph McCoy will never be forgotten; and

WHEREAS, The City of Alexandria invites residents and friends to join the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project to educate the public about racial terror hate crimes and further the cause of equity and social justice in our city.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, JUSTIN M. WILSON, Mayor of the City of Alexandria, Virginia, and on behalf of the Alexandria City Council, do hereby recognize today, August 8, 2021, as a day for us to remember the life, spirit and legacy – exactly 122 years later – of the death of:

“BENJAMIN THOMAS”

In the City of Alexandria and I call this observance to the attention of all our citizens, so that the City of Alexandria continue to always place first and foremost the rights of all humanity, so that our City may be an example for all.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have here unto set my hand and caused the Seal of the City of Alexandria to be affixed this 8th Day of August, 2021.



MAYOR JUSTIN M. WILSON
On behalf of the City Council
of Alexandria, Virginia

ATTEST:

Gloria A. Sitton, CMC City Clerk