



It Happened Here: The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Remembrance Project

We cannot heal the deep wounds inflicted by racial terror lynching until we tell the truth about it. Only then can we meaningfully address the contemporary problems that are its legacy.

It happened here.

Two men died in racial terror lynchings in Mecklenburg County, as documented by the Equal Justice Initiative. There were almost certainly more.

This project, part of a national movement led by Bryan Stevenson and EJI, seeks to memorialize the people who died. It seeks to help our community face the truth of our history. By doing this, we can reflect honestly on the idea of racial inequality that this terrorism reinforced. We can look at how that idea of inequality, of injustice, shows up in today's criminal justice system, in how people live and work and how much money they make, in the social and political and economic conditions here.

In research for its groundbreaking 2017 [Lynching in America](#) report, EJI identified two men in Mecklenburg County. In 1913, Joe McNeely was shot to death in front of Good Samaritan Hospital, on land that is now beneath Bank of America Stadium, where the NFL's Carolina Panthers and MLS's Charlotte FC play. In 1929, Willie McDaniel was found dead on the Grier farm, most of which is now Reedy Creek Park and Nature Preserve in northeastern Mecklenburg County. Their stories illustrate how racial terrorism was enacted and justice evaded. It shows how deadly force inflicted upon African-Americans is woven into the fabric of our home and nation.

The project's work is to center the African-American experience of racial injustice, empower African-American community members who have directly borne this trauma, and invite the entire community to use truth to give voice to those experiences and expose their legacies.

How?

Soil collections: These are somber ceremonies in which soil is dug from each of Mecklenburg's racial terror lynching sites and put into large glass jars, to be displayed permanently at the Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama. As counties across the nation complete this work, the Montgomery display continues to grow. EJI has documented nearly 6,500 racial terror lynchings that occurred between the end of the Civil War and 1950.

Soil was collected at the site of Joe McNeely's death, inside Bank of America stadium, on May 21, 2021, in a small and sacred ceremony. A collection at the site of Willie McDaniel's death is being planned.

Historic markers: Markers will be installed at each site, telling each man's story, and giving context for their deaths within the larger history of racial terrorism in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina and the United States. The City of Charlotte and Tepper Sports & Entertainment (for McNeely, on Bank of America Stadium grounds) and Mecklenburg County (for McDaniel, on Reedy Creek Park and Nature Preserve grounds) have committed to erecting these markers. Ceremonies are being planned.

Mecklenburg's monument: The National Memorial for Peace and Justice displays hundreds of 6-foot steel monuments, one for each county in which EJI has documented racial terror lynchings. It is the project's ambition, when both of Mecklenburg's markers are erected and other work completed, to claim a duplicate of its monument and bring it home, to be installed in a to-be-determined place.

Ongoing community engagement: Through conversations and events, listening to and seeking the guidance of people here, a website, high school essay contests, and sharing of educational resources, this project seeks to help us all confront this history and expose the persistent narratives of racial difference and bias that sustained the practice of lynching and continue to fuel mass incarceration and racial injustice today.

The CMRP invites people, especially those most hurt and harmed by this history, to become storytellers by going to the website, learning about Mr. McNeely and Mr. McDaniel, sharing the stories with their neighbors and signing the **Declaration of Support**. The website offers tools for people to host community conversations and, if needed, Steering Committee members are here to support them.

Current Charlotte-Mecklenburg Remembrance Project Steering Committee members include:

- LaShaun Carter and Eboni Lewis; Mecklenburg County, Office of Equity and Inclusion
- Elisa Chinn-Gary and Brittany Foster; Race Matters for Juvenile Justice and Mecklenburg County Clerk of Superior Court Office
- Kate Flynn, project manager
- Annetta Foard; Community Building Initiative
- Scott Gartlan; Charlotte Teachers Institute
- Emily Makas, Ph.D. and Marc Manack, UNC Charlotte, Arts and Architecture Department
- Justin L. Perry, MSW, LCSW, LCAS; Perry Counseling Healing and Recovery
- Willie Ratchford and Sue Green; City of Charlotte, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Community Relations Department
- Helen Schwab; journalist
- Karen Sutton; Levine Museum of the New South
- Krista Terrell; Krista Faye Public Relations

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