

*"The art of life lies in a constant readjustment to our surroundings."*

– Kakuzō Okakura

April 2020

To the friends of the Maryland Lynching Memorial Project:

Every day the current public health emergency challenges our ability to adapt. Okakura's observation is perhaps a more elegant way of expressing the Darwinian principle that it's not the strongest nor the most intelligent species that survive, but "the one that is the most adaptable to change."

It's now becoming clear that **adaptability is not just a survival skill, it's an endurance sport**, as well.

True to that spirit, the work of those seeking racial justice, truth and reconciliation is also adapting to our new "surroundings". This issue of our newsletter highlights some of the ways "the light of truth" continues to shine, even in dark times.

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# New research on lynchings in Frederick, Cecil Counties

Renewed interest in the history of racial terror in the US is reflected in the quickening pace of scholarship on the subject, including here in Maryland.

Recently, two independent researchers have made significant contributions to the body of knowledge about racial terror lynchings in the state.

**Dean Herrin, Ph.D.** is an historian with the Federal government and the Chair of the Research Committee of the African American Resources Cultural and Heritage Society (AARCH) of Frederick, MD.

His recent monograph, [“The ‘Mob Fairly Howled’: Lynching in Frederick County, Maryland, 1879-1895”](#) examines three racial terror lynchings that occurred in the county in that sixteen year span.

The title of paper, **“The ‘Mob Fairly Howled”**, is the description a policeman offered in the Washington Post account of the ambush and lynching of James Carroll at the Point or Rocks railroad station in 1879.

Dr. Herrin was kind enough to answer questions about his research for the newsletter.

*Q: Why did you pursue this research?*

**Herrin:** Several reasons. I heard about the interest in memorializing the victims of lynching in Frederick County and in the State. The AARCH Research Committee has recently discussed the history of lynching in Frederick County and the need for a good history of the topic. Finally, **there is too much misinformation out there** and this seemed the opportune moment to complete research I had started several years ago.

*Q: What is the most important thing you learned?*

**Herrin:** The degree to which **people and communities can develop historic amnesia** about unpleasant topics.

*Q: What is the value of researching cries that occurred more than a century ago?*

**Herrin:** There has to be **Truth before there can be Reconciliation**.

**Both of these reports are being provided to the MD Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission** to aid its ongoing investigations into the racial terror lynchings that occurred in the state

## PARTICULARS OF THE LYNCHING—FURTHER DETAILS OF THE OUTRAGE.

**FREDERICK, Md., April 17.**—James Carroll, the negro fiend who perpetrated a most diabolical outrage upon the person or Mrs. Richard Thomas, at Lickville, in this county, on Monday night last, while being brought to this city this evening, was taken from the train at Point of Rocks by a band of lynchers and hanged until dead.

*The Herald and Torch (Hagerstown, MD)  
April 23, 1879*

The Baltimore papers to-day, both Democratic and Republican, are calling upon Governor White to take immediate steps to procure the arrest of persons engaged in lynching the negroes in Cecil County, Maryland, on Monday last. Intimation is made that the Sheriff in whose hands the negroes was when they were seized by the assassins, were in collusion with them, and really knows who the guilty parties are.

*Helena (MT) Weekly Herald, August 8, 1872*

*Q: Why did you pursue this research?*

**Dixon:** Nearly twenty-years ago, while doing some fieldwork on the Lower Shore for a series of new lectures on criminal justice in one of my university classes, I encountered some sketchy indicators about a lynching that occurred in Crisfield, MD. As a result, I started digging more deeply into the subject as little documentation existed. The **unbelievable violence**, as well as the reaction to the much earlier work of a Salisbury University professor, shocked me so I expanded my work around the Shore and in Cecil County as virtually nothing existed in print. **What I discovered** by investigating primary sources – courthouse, criminal justice, and newspapers – **stunned me. It was there, if anyone wanted to look.**

*Q: What is the most important thing you learned?*

**Dixon:** The **accepted interpretations usually don't represent the full story** of complex, difficult matters, especially violent murders of this type. It is important to question the assumptions that have been passed down through the generations, as the **memory of these tragedies are suppressed** or fade.

*Q: What is the value of researching cries that occurred more than a century ago?*

**Dixon:** It is important that we question interpretations of the past, especially in sensitive matters, and **establish evidence-based interpretations** in order for us to understand the present.

**Both of these authors are generously providing their reports to the MD Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission** to aid its ongoing investigations into the racial terror lynchings that occurred in the state.

**Mike Dixon** is a social historian and adjunct history professor. For over four decades, he has worked to encourage public interest and participation in the preservation of the past while creating understandings between earlier eras and the present.

His recent history [Investigation of Racial Terror Lynchings: Cecil County, MD](#)

appears to have uncovered a previously undocumented racial terror lynching in 1861.