

# The National Memorial for Peace and Justice

The **National Memorial for Peace and Justice**, informally known as the **National Lynching Memorial**,<sup>[1]</sup> is a national memorial to commemorate the victims of lynching in the United States. The memorial is intended to acknowledge past racial terrorism and advocate for social justice in America. Founded by the non-profit Equal Justice Initiative, it opened in downtown Montgomery, Alabama on April 26, 2018.<sup>[2][3]</sup>

## Contents

**Background**

**Description**

**Importance for Montgomery tourism**

**The Legacy Museum**

**Gallery**

**See also**

**References**

**External links**

## Background

The memorial was built on six acres in the downtown area of the state capital by the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), a non-profit based in Montgomery. The related Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration opened the same day. The complex was built near the former market site in Montgomery where enslaved African Americans were sold.<sup>[4]</sup> The development and construction of the memorial complex cost an estimated \$20 million, raised from private foundations.<sup>[5]</sup> Bryan Stevenson, founder of the EJI, was inspired by the examples of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, Germany, and the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, South Africa, to create a single memorial to victims of white supremacy in the United States.<sup>[6]</sup>

By studying records in counties across the United States, researchers documented almost 4400 "racial terror lynchings" in the post-Reconstruction era between 1877 and 1950. Most took place in the decades just before and after the turn of the 20th century.<sup>[7][3][8]</sup> An error at the memorial in the name of a victim from Duluth, Minnesota, was quickly corrected.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Description

### The National Memorial for Peace and Justice



The memorial includes 805 hanging steel rectangles, representing each of the counties in the United States where a documented lynching took place

<b>Established</b>	April 26, 2018
<b>Location</b>	Montgomery, Alabama
<b>Coordinates</b>	
<b>Founder</b>	Equal Justice Initiative
<b>Website</b>	Official website ( <a href="https://museumandmemorial.eji.org">https://museumandmemorial.eji.org</a> )

In the central position is the memorial square with 805 hanging steel rectangles, the size and shape of coffins. These name and represent each of the counties (and their states) where a documented lynching took place in the United States, as compiled in the EJI study, *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror* (2017, 3rd edition). Each of the steel plates also has the names of the documented lynching victims (or "unknown" if the name is not known). The names and dates of documented victims are engraved on the panels. More than 4075 documented lynchings of African Americans took place between 1877 and 1950, concentrated in 12 Southern states. In addition, the EJI has published supplementary information about lynchings in several states outside the South. The monument is the first major work in the nation to name and honor these victims.<sup>[10]</sup>

The central memorial was designed by MASS Design Group<sup>[11]</sup> with Lam Partners lighting design,<sup>[4]</sup> and built on land purchased by EJI.<sup>[2][12]</sup> Thomas's work, *Rise Up*, features a wall, from which emerge statues of black heads and bodies raising their arms in surrender to the viewer. The piece suggests visibility, which is one of the intentions of the monument. The viewer is asked to focus and see the subject of the artwork. This is a more current piece (<https://the1a.org/shows/2018-04-24/a-new-national-memorial-to-victims-of-lynching>)<sup>[13]</sup> commenting on the police violence and police brutality prevalent in the years preceding the memorial. Thomas has said about his artwork, "I see the work that I make as asking questions."<sup>[14]</sup>

In the landscaped area outside the monument are benches where visitors can sit to reflect. These are dedicated to commemorating such activists as journalist Ida B. Wells, who in the 1890s risked her life to report that lynchings were more about economic competition of blacks and whites, than actual assaults by blacks of whites.<sup>[15]</sup> Laid in rows on the ground are steel columns corresponding to those hanging in the Memorial. These columns are intended to be temporary. The Equal Justice Initiative is asking representatives of each of the counties to claim their monument and establish a memorial on home ground to lynching victims, and to conduct related public education.<sup>[16]</sup>

A month after the monument's opening, the *Montgomery Advertiser* reported that citizens in Montgomery County were considering asking for their column. Both county and the city of Montgomery officials were also discussing this.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Importance for Montgomery tourism

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Prior to the 1990s, there was limited acknowledgement in Montgomery to the painful legacy of slavery and racism, although the city had numerous monuments related to the Confederacy, many erected by private organizations. The city has developed a Civil Rights trail marking such events as the 1965 Selma to Montgomery marches, and also identified buildings and sites associated with slavery, such as the former market site.<sup>[18]</sup> With the opening of the monument, the city was ranked by the *New York Times* as its Top 2018 Destination.<sup>[19]</sup> Lee Sentell of the Alabama Department of Tourism acknowledged that the National Memorial offers a different and painful encounter: "Most museums are somewhat objective and benign...This one is not. This is aggressive, political. ... It's a part of American history that has never been addressed as much in your face as this story is being told".<sup>[18]</sup> Mayor Todd Strange suggested that the memorial offered "our nation's best chance at reconciliation".<sup>[20]</sup>

The opening celebrations, in May 2018, attracted thousands of people to Montgomery,<sup>[20]</sup> perhaps as many as 10,000. Artists who performed included Stevie Wonder, Patti LaBelle, and Usher; speakers included Congressman and civil rights activist John Lewis from Georgia.<sup>[21]</sup>

The memorial and its attendant museum are expected to generate heightened tourism for Montgomery,<sup>[22]</sup> even if it is dark tourism.<sup>[19]</sup> *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* noted that, with the addition of the memorial and the museum, Montgomery and Atlanta together provide a narrative of African-American history, as the latter has sites associated with national leader Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and local history as well.<sup>[22]</sup> Tourism officials said that possibly 100,000 extra visitors per year may arrive.<sup>[23][24]</sup>

## The Legacy Museum

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Opened on the same date as the outdoor memorial, The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration is a museum that displays and interprets the history of slavery and racism in America. The progress through the museum is chronological, beginning with slavery, and passing through the decades of lynching, extrajudicial violence against blacks, through the Civil Rights era, and dealing with present issues.<sup>[11]</sup> This includes the enslavement of African-Americans, racial lynchings and disenfranchisement of black voters, segregation and Jim Crow, and racial bias. Artwork in the museum includes a sculpture on slavery by Ghanaian artist Kwame Akoto-Bamfo, at the beginning; a sculpture "dedicated to the women who sustained the Montgomery Bus Boycott" by Dana King, to help illustrate the Civil Rights period; and a piece about today's police violence and the biased criminal justice system, by Hank Willis Thomas.<sup>[11]</sup> The museum features artwork by Hank Willis Thomas, Glenn Ligon, Jacob Lawrence, Elizabeth Catlett, Titus Kaphar, and Sanford Biggers. One of its displays is a collection of soil from lynching sites across the United States.<sup>[5]</sup> This exhibit expresses the vast effects of slavery, lynchings, and black oppression across state lines. The exhibits in the 11,000-square-foot museum include oral history, archival materials, and interactive technology.<sup>[25]</sup>



A collection of soil from lynching sites across the United States on display at The Legacy Museum.

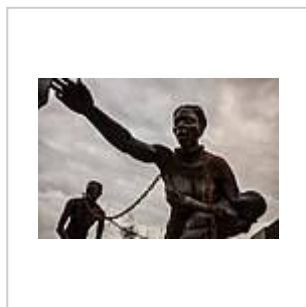
Publishers of the *Montgomery Advertiser* reviewed and formally apologized for its historic coverage of lynchings, which was often inflammatory against black victims, describing it as "our shame" and saying "we were wrong".<sup>[26][27]</sup>

## Gallery

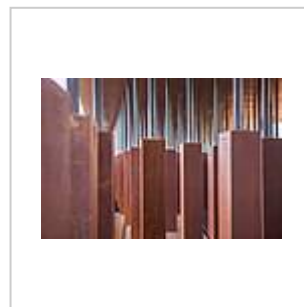
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Outside view of the memorial



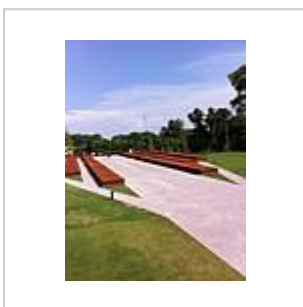
Installation by Kwame Akoto-Bamfo



Memorial Monuments



Installation by Hank Willis Thomas



Steel columns intended for each county



National Memorial for Peace and Justice Center



National Memorial for Peace and Justice Garden

## See also

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- List of lynching victims in the United States

- List of museums focused on African Americans
- Lynching in the United States
- National Museum of African American History and Culture
- Topography of Terror: museum in Berlin, Germany dedicated to the victims of the Nazi regime

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## External links

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- Official website (<https://museumandmemorial.eji.org>)
  - "Architecture that's built to heal": Michael Murphy presenting the proposed memorial at the ([https://www.ted.com/talks/michael\\_murphy\\_architecture\\_that\\_s\\_built\\_to\\_heal](https://www.ted.com/talks/michael_murphy_architecture_that_s_built_to_heal))TED conference (2016).
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