

Maryland's Disgrace— The Shame of the Eastern Shore

AN EDITORIAL

THE BLOOD lust of the Eastern Shore has claimed a victim. Lynch law has prevailed. The mob has had its way. It has wreaked its vengeance. It has made its kill, and upon the altar of its cruelty it has immolated not merely the Negro, Matthew Williams, but the justice and the decency which are the foundation of a civilized community.

Yesterday's lynching at Salisbury makes assurances from across the bay about the "law-abiding spirit" of the peninsular counties the bitterest of mockeries. Where was this law-abiding spirit in the metropolis of the Eastern Shore? Where was any spirit at all, save the spirit to kill and the ghoulish, obscene spirit to gloat over the death?

The crime for which the Negro, Williams, paid the penalty was shocking. The evidence indicates he shot and killed his employer, Daniel Elliott. But even more shocking was the action of the mob in exacting a life for a life, without that fair and impartial trial of which we have been lately hearing so much.

Himself wounded, the Negro had been taken to a hospital. Six men invaded that hospital. Was there any to say them nay? True, it is reported, officers of the law blocked the front entrance. The sinister six merely went to the side entrance, proceeded to the Negro ward, lifted their victim, blinded with bandages, from his bed, took him to the street and then, escorted by a mob of several hundreds, marched him—most gruesome of ironies—to the Courthouse square where he was hanged.

The mob, by this time grown to some 2,000, applauded the dying convulsions of a fellow creature. It was a 'Shoreman's holiday. But not yet was the 'Shoreman's vengeance satiated. The body of the wretched victim was cut down, taken to a vacant lot near the Negro quarter, saturated with oil, and set on fire. Ghastly and brutal crime! Was the arm of authority raised to curb the mob? Apparently not. Was there any voice lifted in the name of mercy and humanity? None was audible. Perhaps fear held silent those whom cruelty had not maddened.

The deed is done. The reproach upon Salisbury will not soon be effaced. It remains to punish the perpetrators. If local authority is paralyzed and impotent, there is the state. Governor Ritchie should act. He should see to it that those responsible for so hideous a crime get their just deserts. Moreover, as there is no assurance that the desire for slaughter is appeased on the 'Shore, it will be well to make doubly sure that another potential victim does not fall into the clutches of the mob, that if mob vengeance was too swift for the law in the case of Matthew Williams, it will not circumvent the law in the case of Orphan Jones.

The lynching yesterday was a disgrace to the Eastern Shore; another lynching there would be the shame of Maryland.