

# Brooklyn Museum

## Press Release

July 2017

### Brooklyn Museum in Partnership with the Equal Justice Initiative Presents *The Legacy of Lynching: Confronting Racial Terror in America*, July 26 through September 3

#### Exhibition features groundbreaking research on racial terror and its effect on the nation today

The Brooklyn Museum is proud to join forces with the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), headed by acclaimed public interest lawyer and MacArthur Foundation “genius grant” recipient Bryan Stevenson, and Google to present a timely exhibition: *The Legacy of Lynching: Confronting Racial Terror in America*. On view from July 26 through September 3, the exhibition presents EJI’s groundbreaking research on the history of racial violence in the United States and its continuing impact on our nation to this day.

The exhibition will include video stories featuring testimonies from descendants of lynching victims and a former death-row inmate directly affected by the legacy of lynching, a short documentary, photographs, an interactive map presenting EJI’s research, and informational videos featuring Bryan Stevenson. Much of EJI’s research on display in the Museum can be viewed at [lynchinginamerica.eji.org](http://lynchinginamerica.eji.org), an interactive platform that EJI recently launched, with support from Google, that digitizes their research on the more than four thousand racial terror lynchings of



Shirah Dedman, Phoebe Dedman, and Luz Myles visiting Shreveport, Louisiana, where in 1912 their relative Thomas Miles, Sr., was lynched. 2017. (Photo: Rog Walker and Bee Walker for the Equal Justice Initiative)

African Americans between 1877 and 1950. This work underscores the profound effects of the racial terror committed against black people and black communities, which continue to shape our nation today.

To deepen the conversation, a team of Brooklyn Museum curators selected more than a dozen artworks from its collections by African American artists whose practices respond to racism in the United States in several forms. Artists include Sanford Biggers, Mark Bradford, Elizabeth Catlett, Melvin Edwards, Theaster Gates, Rashid Johnson, Titus Kaphar, Jacob Lawrence,

Glenn Ligon, Dread Scott, Clarissa T. Sligh, Kara Walker, and Jack Whitten.

The exhibition also presents materials from the Museum Library and Archives on the institution's support for efforts against lynching. They include a 1935 pledge by Museum Director Philip N. Youtz supporting an NAACP anti-lynching art exhibition as well as documents from a benefit art auction and exhibition for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund that the Museum hosted in 1963. More recently, the Museum presented Bryan Stevenson in a conversation with death-row exoneree Anthony Ray Hinton—whose story is featured in the exhibition—in 2016, as part of the ongoing program “States of Denial: The Illegal Incarceration of Women, Children, and People of Color,” organized by Elizabeth A. Sackler and the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum. The Museum has also held numerous exhibitions on related topics, including *Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties*, *Agitprop!*, and *Sanford Biggers*, among others, as well as *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965–85*, currently on view.

*The Legacy of Lynching: Confronting Racial Terror in America* will include a special public program featuring Bryan Stevenson, artists Glenn Ligon and Sanford Biggers, and Elizabeth Alexander, poet and Director of Creativity and Free Expression, Ford Foundation, on Tuesday, July 25, at 7 pm. Admission is \$25 and includes a private viewing of the exhibition.

By highlighting the historical impact of systemic racism in our country, the exhibition is conceived to raise awareness for EJI's forthcoming *Memorial to Peace and Justice* in Montgomery, Alabama. Opening in 2018, the memorial will be the country's first ever national monument to commemorate the more than four thousand black men, women, and children who were lynched between 1877 and 1950. EJI also plans to open an accompanying museum of racial justice that will trace a direct line between slavery and the practice of mass incarceration.

To approach this topic respectfully, the exhibition focuses on personal stories. It does not contain explicit photos. In order to appropriately acknowledge the

subject of racial violence with the utmost care and sensitivity, the Museum will provide a space outside the gallery for visitors to explore reading material and to reflect.

“Our nation's history of racial injustice casts a shadow across the American landscape. This shadow cannot be lifted until we shine the light of truth on the destructive violence that shaped our nation, traumatized people of color, and compromised our commitment to the rule of law and equal justice,” said EJI Executive Director Bryan Stevenson. “We all must engage this history more honestly.”

Mr. Stevenson continues, “Art has always been a powerful tool in getting a society to think more honestly about human rights and human dignity. Our great artists have often found critically important ways to speak truthfully about history and the human condition. It's energizing to take on a difficult topic like racial terrorism surrounded by the bold insights of brilliant African American artists.”

Anne Pasternak, the Brooklyn Museum's Shelby White and Leon Levy Executive Director, states, “When Bryan Stevenson and Google approached us in late May to co-produce this exhibition, we didn't hesitate. Throughout its nearly two-hundred-year history, the Brooklyn Museum has never shied away from difficult but important conversations—the very conversations our audiences are having every day—including racial exclusion and inequality. We are proud to work with the Equal Justice Initiative in its fight to confront America's painful past in order to educate and heal, and to contribute to a more empathetic and just society.”

*The Legacy of Lynching: Confronting Racial Terror in America* has been assembled and organized by a team of Brooklyn Museum curators, librarian and archivist, educators, and designers in collaboration with the Equal Justice Initiative and Google.

### **About Bryan Stevenson**

Bryan Stevenson is the founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama. He is a widely acclaimed public-interest lawyer who has dedicated his career to helping the poor, the incarcerated, and the condemned.

Under his leadership, EJI has won major legal challenges eliminating excessive and unfair sentencing; exonerating innocent death row prisoners; confronting abuse of the incarcerated and the mentally ill; and aiding children prosecuted as adults. Mr. Stevenson has successfully argued several cases before the United States Supreme Court and recently won a historic ruling that mandatory life-without-parole sentences for all children 17 or younger are unconstitutional. Mr. Stevenson and his staff have won reversals, relief, or release for over 130 wrongly condemned prisoners on death row. He has initiated major new anti-poverty and anti-discrimination efforts that challenge the legacy of racial inequality in America, including major projects to educate communities about slavery, lynching, and racial segregation. Mr. Stevenson is also a professor of law at New York University School of Law.

Mr. Stevenson's work fighting poverty and challenging racial discrimination in the criminal justice system has won him numerous awards including a prestigious MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant; the National Medal of Liberty from the American Civil Liberties Union after he was nominated by United States Supreme Court Justice John Stevens; the Public Interest Lawyer of the Year by the National Association of Public Interest Lawyers; and the Olaf Palme Prize in Stockholm, Sweden for international human rights, among others.

He is the recent author of the critically acclaimed *New York Times* bestseller *Just Mercy*, which was named by *Time* magazine as one of the 10 Best Books of Nonfiction for 2014 and has been awarded several other honors, including a 2015 NAACP Image Award.

### **About the Equal Justice Initiative**

Founded in 1989 by Bryan Stevenson, EJI is a private, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that provides legal representation to people who have been illegally convicted, unfairly sentenced, or abused in state jails and prisons. EJI is committed to ending mass incarceration and excessive punishment in the United States; to challenging racial and economic injustice; and to protecting basic human rights for the most vulnerable people in American society.

*The Legacy of Lynching: Confronting Racial Terror in America* is organized by the Brooklyn Museum and the Equal Justice Initiative with support from Google.

### **Press Contact**

Brooklyn Museum Press Office,  
[press@brooklynmuseum.org](mailto:press@brooklynmuseum.org), 718.501.6354

Meryl Cooper, The COOPERation,  
[meryl@thecooperationinc.com](mailto:meryl@thecooperationinc.com), 917.974.0022

### **GENERAL INFORMATION**

#### **Admission:**

Contribution: \$16; students with valid I.D. and seniors \$10. Ages 19 and under FREE. Also FREE first Saturday of the month (except September), 5–11 pm. Group tours or visits must be arranged in advance by calling 718.501.6234.

Programs are subject to change without notice. For more information, visit [www.brooklynmuseum.org](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org).

#### **Directions:**

Subway: Seventh Avenue express (2 or 3) to Eastern Parkway/ Brooklyn Museum stop; Lexington Avenue express (4 or 5) to Nevins Street, cross platform and transfer to the 2 or 3. Bus: B41, B69, B48. On-site parking available.

#### **Museum Hours:**

Wednesday and Friday, 11 am to 6 pm; Thursday, 11 am to 10 pm; Saturday and Sunday, 11 am to 6 pm; first Saturday of each month (except September), 11 am to 11 pm. Closed Monday, Tuesday, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.