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Senate Issues Apology Over Failure on Lynching Law

By [SHERYL GAY STOLBERG](#)

Published: June 14, 2005

WASHINGTON, June 13 - Anthony Crawford's granddaughter went to her grave without speaking a word to her own children about his lynching, so painful was the family history. On Monday, Mr. Crawford's descendants came to the Capitol to tell it - and to accept a formal apology from the Senate for its repeated failure, despite the requests of seven presidents, to enact a federal law to make lynching a crime.

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Americans for their internment in World War II and to Hawaiians for the overthrow of their kingdom, have apologized to African-Americans for any reason, proponents of the measure said.

"The Senate failed you and your ancestors and our nation," Senator Mary L. Landrieu of Louisiana, chief Democratic sponsor of the resolution, said at a luncheon attended by 200 family members and descendants of victims. They included 100 relatives of Anthony Crawford, as well as a 91-year-old man believed to be the only known survivor of an attempted lynching.

He is James Cameron, who in 1930, as a 16-year-old shoeshine boy in Marion, Ind., was accused with two friends of murdering a white man and raping a white woman. His friends were killed. But as Mr. Cameron felt a noose being slipped around his neck, a man in the crowd stepped forward to proclaim Mr. Cameron's innocence. Mr. Cameron came here in a gray suit and a wheelchair, his voice shaky but his memories apparently fresh.

"They took the rope off my neck, those hands that had been so rough and ready to kill or had already killed, they took the rope off of my neck and they allowed me to start walking and stagger back to the jail, which was just a half-block away," Mr. Cameron told a news conference. "When I got back to the jail, the sheriff said, 'I'm going to get you out of here for safekeeping.' "

He learned only later, he said, that the sheriff was a member of the Ku Klux Klan. "I was saved," Mr. Cameron said, "by a miracle."

There have been 4,742 recorded lynchings in American history, Ms. Landrieu said. Historians suspect that many more went undocumented. Although the House passed antilynching legislation three times in the first half of the 20th

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century, the Senate, controlled by Southern conservatives, repeatedly refused to do so. Senator George Allen of Virginia, chief Republican sponsor of the new resolution, called it "this stain on the history of the United States Senate."

Although the Senate garnered praise on Monday for acting to erase that stain, some critics said lawmakers had a long way to go. Of the 100 senators, 80 were co-sponsors of the resolution, and because it passed by voice vote, senators escaped putting themselves on record.

"It's a statement in itself that there aren't 100 co-sponsors," Senator John Kerry, Democrat of Massachusetts, said. "It's a statement in itself that there's not an up-or-down vote."

Others described the resolution as an act of expediency for Mr. Allen, who is a likely presidential candidate and who has been criticized for displaying a Confederate flag at his home and a noose in his law office. Mr. Allen said that they were part of collections of flags and Western paraphernalia and that he was motivated not by politics, but by a plea by Dick Gregory, the civil rights advocate, who wrote him a letter urging him not to "choose to do nothing."

The memories were especially painful for the relatives of Anthony Crawford, whose family was torn apart by the lynching. Mr. Crawford had been a wealthy black landowner in Abbeville, S.C., a cotton farmer, registered voter and community leader who founded a school for black children and a union for black families. In 1916, after a dispute with a white man over the price of cotton seed, he was hanged from a pine tree and shot more than 200 times. His family lost his land, and the relatives scattered.

"Someone is finally recognizing our pain," said Alberta Merriwether, a retired schoolteacher who is his great-granddaughter and whose mother never spoke of the lynching.

Mrs. Merriwether's aunt Magdalene Latimer, 84, was not so certain about the senators. "I have to let God be the judge," Ms. Latimer said, "because I don't know if they meant it out of their heart or they're just saying it out of their mouth."

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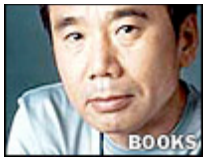
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