

TEAM ROC

US Attorney General William Barr
U.S. Department of Justice

Attorney General Barr,

We write to you about a recent hate crime that took place in Indiana which has outraged and appalled Americans nationwide: the attempted lynching of Vauhxx Booker. We write as a group of concerned citizens and lawyers working with Team Roc—the social justice division of entertainment company Roc Nation LLC— in order to respectfully call on your office to fulfill its duty to see that justice is done, by taking swift and sure action to hold the perpetrators of this heinous crime accountable pursuant to the Shepard Byrd Hate Crimes Prevention Act, 18 U.S.C. section 249.

On July 4, Mr. Booker, a civil rights activist, was enjoying the holiday weekend with friends at Lake Monroe, in Bloomington, Indiana. A group of white men told him that he was trespassing on private property. Mr. Booker left, to avoid trouble, but later returned in an attempt to smooth things over. The group rewarded Mr. Booker's good faith by cornering and assaulting him, violently pinning him against a tree, and threatening to lynch him. The attackers used numerous racial slurs, and Mr. Booker distinctly heard at least one of them say "get a noose"—a threat that conjures up the brutal murder of thousands of Black Americans since this country's founding, exactly as the attackers intended. A full description of the attack by Mr. Booker can be found here: <https://www.facebook.com/vauhxx/posts/10222147157086001>.

Thankfully, Mr. Booker was saved by the intervention of bystanders, but this attack is of course not any less deserving of public outcry and government investigation because it did not end tragically. In fact, Mr. Booker was lucky in one way: unlike countless hate crimes over the years that have remained invisible, his attackers were captured on camera, and word of the incident has been reported nationwide. Numerous public authorities have already taken at least the first steps to call out this racist assault and bring justice to those responsible. Governor Holcomb has spoken out, calling the video of the attack "beyond disturbing," and the FBI has already begun an investigation. Prosecutors have announced state law charges against two of Mr. Booker's assailants; however, these charges fail to treat the attack as the hate crime that it was, and therefore they do not go far enough. We believe it is your duty to take things one step further to ensure that justice is done.

Authorities all too often think of hate crimes as purely local events. The impact of hate falls most heavily on the local community, true, but especially with a notorious case such as this one, hate crime has much broader consequences. A violent, racist attack such as this, additionally, is a federal crime. Because of this, the attempted lynching of Mr. Booker is not beneath your office's notice. The opposite is true: the nationally-reported attempted lynching of a civil rights activist demands your attention and your full efforts to guarantee that justice is done, by prosecuting the people who attacked Vauhxx Booker for their violent hate crime, and all other charges that apply. This crime fits the language of the statute precisely, as prosecution for it is "in the public interest and necessary to secure substantial justice."

Now more than ever, it is crucial that federal law enforcement entities show that they take racism seriously, and stand on the same side as the Black Americans who face it every single day. Americans are watching: only bringing the attackers to justice will honor their trust.

Respectfully,

Skylar Diggins-Smith
Mario Mims (a/k/a Yo Gotti)
Jordan W. Siev, ReedSmith LLP
Joseph Tacopina, Tacopina, Seigel & DeOreo