Governor Spessard L. Holland
State Capital
Tallahassee, Fla.

Dear Governor:

The Negro citizens of Florida and the nation were shocked to learn of the lynching of Cellos Harrison near Marianna, a few days ago. We feel that fair-minded white citizens, too, heartily condemn this horrible crime.

Newspaper accounts of the circumstances surrounding this lynching tend to show a certain degree of carelessness and neglect of duty on the part of local officials. We understand that the highest court of our state already had twice reversed Harrison's sentence on the grounds that there was insufficient evidence to sustain his convictions. Each time Harrison was convicted by the lower court on the basis of a confession which the prisoner declares was obtained under duress. The United States Supreme Court has repeatedly spoken out sharply against the use of such confessions, and the State Supreme Court had twice made it clear that this confession was not sufficient evidence to convict Harrison. Evidently, this was the major evidence that the State had to use against Harrison, otherwise it could have been introduced at one of the previous trials. We wonder, then, why local officials continued to hold Harrison, and persisted in obtaining a conviction, when the higher courts already had ruled out the available evidence.

Moreover, we question the behavior of the jailer on the night that Harrison was lynched. On a previous occasion, we understand, it had been necessary to remove Harrison to the Tallahassee jail, because mob violence was feared. Why, then, was the jailer so willing and so quick to open the jail at that hour of the night to four strange masked men? A real thoughtful individual would hardly open the door of his private home at that late hour, without first making some investigation as to the identity of the persons on the outside. Evidently, the jailer did not cherish very highly his responsibility as protector of the helpless inmates of the jail.

We wish to commend you for ordering a prompt investigation of this unfortunate affair. We urge that every effort be made to find the guilty parties and bring them to justice. We especially urge the suspension of any local official whose carelessness or negligence might have helped to make this crime possible.

It is hardly necessary to say that such incidents only tend to create a spirit of doubt and fear among Negro citizens. While our country is engaged in a gigantic struggle against the forces of hate and evil abroad, it is even more important that a stronger spirit of unity and hope should exist among all American citizens, regardless of race or color. Nothing could do more to lift the sagging morale of colored Americans than to see justice done in a case like
this. If the morale of American Negroes is to be lifted to higher level in this fight for democracy abroad, it must be done through a more practical application of the fundamental principles of democracy at home.

We anxiously await further developments in this case.

Respectfully yours,

Harry T. Moore

Harry T. Moore
July 13, 1943

Harry T. Moore
Box 4
Mims, Florida

Sir:

Governor Holland is engaged in board meetings today and he requested that I acknowledge your letter of the 12th relative to the recent lynching of Cellos Harrison a short time ago at Marianna.

A full investigation has been made of this unfortunate incident by the Highway Patrol, the Sheriff of Jackson County and the State Attorney of that circuit, and it is my hope that we will be able to gain sufficient information from these investigations to learn who was responsible for that crime.

With best regards, I remain

Yours faithfully,

Governor

SLH/dgw