

Hillsborough County Black Republican Club Presents: **VOICES FROM THE GRAVE.**

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INTRODUCTION:

On January 5th I attended my first Tampa City Council meeting. I listened, I listened from the gallery as Reva Iman delivered another plea to the Tampa City Council. “I am Reva Iman from the Zion Project. For three years I have come before the [Tampa City] Council regarding Black Cemeteries in Tampa. No one has addressed my concerns.” That was the first time I heard anything about the cemeteries in Florida.

If you are reading this, you may not be aware of the disrespect shown to African American families in Florida. Many graves have been left on construction sites and were left under schools, apartment buildings, business offices and even a parking lot at the Tropicana Ballpark. I will focus only on one that I have personally discussed with Reva and Tampa City Council (“Council”).

ZION CEMETERY:

There are other voices who only get involved during election cycles; and nothing gets done. Our group is focused on honoring Reva's request to Council.

Zion Cemetery was the first African American Cemetery in Tampa founded in 1901. During the 1940's, the cemetery was erased from maps in order to begin construction over the site - an apartment complex, named Robles Park Village, was built over part of the cemetery. In 2019, ground penetrating radar was used and found two hundred graves on the grounds of Robles Village Park and a neighboring business. At that time, Reva lived in Robles Park Village. Needless to say, she and other residents were horrified.

Instead of being silent, she began the Zion Project. Since then, they have found over three hundred graves in the cemetery. There is a Zion Archaeological Cemetery Committee which began investigations in June 2020. They were contracted to confirm if more graves existed on the property. They used ground penetrating radar to detect images buried underground. They verified over one hundred graves are still buried at the property. However, they suggested that any demolition in the future be supervised by archaeologists.

There are now many cemeteries around the country that have been built upon or erased. To be fair, not all cemeteries are African American. This indicates in every incident the total disrespect for American decency.

Back to Florida – in St Petersburg, the parking lot at the Tropicana Ballpark is over another African American Cemetery. On September 4, 2023, the Tampa Bay Times reported “ Tampa buys back cemetery for \$100,000 after ACCIDENTALLY losing it”. That was Memorial Park Cemetery. By the way, Tampa didn't accidentally lose it. They bid \$9,000 against 2 developers who continued bidding for 10 minutes. The winning bid, since Tampa did not continue the bid, was \$18,000. After residents with loved ones in the Cemetery raised their voices, Council approved, by accident, \$100,000 to repurchase it.

So on January 5, 2023, after visiting the Council for 3 years, Reva handed each Councilperson a yellow folder. She demanded a one-on-one meeting with each Councilperson. To date, only one approached Reva and claimed “no one will look at this information because they are focused on the election on March 7th.”

Did Reva want to be elected, paid, or reimbursed? No! Out of respect for the deceased and their families, all she asked for was a memorial. Which would have cost much less than the “accident”

Tampa bid for. Please be vocal! This is still happening with zero memorials in Tampa. Did you Know?

FINAL REMARKS:

The Hillsborough Black Republican Club is not associated with the Zion Project or the Zion Archaeological Cemetery Committee.

You can hear Reva Iman on YouTube for the Tampa City Council meeting from January 5, 2023.



Hillsborough County Black Republican Club. Join our movement now!

<https://hcbrc.org/join-us>