

Petition to Reclaim Richmond's African Burial Ground

Part 1 of 2

Richmond's "Burial Ground for Negroes" lies abandoned under a rundown parking lot just north of East Broad Street, east of the VCU Medical Center and west of the railroad overpass that crosses Broad Street. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of both enslaved and free Africans were buried there, along with poor whites and executed criminals. This was also the site of the city's gallows, where the great slave rebellion leader Gabriel was hung on October 10, 1800. Earlier this year, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), a state institution funded by our tax money, quietly reacquired the 1.6 acre site that includes the burial ground. The Defenders for Freedom, Justice and Equality have known and reported for some time that VCU's Master Plan included plans to "upgrade" the parking lot. This would be a criminal insult both to the ancestors and their descendants, who include many thousands of Richmond's present-day Black residents. In addition, since Richmond was a major point of sale of enslaved Africans to other parts of the country, it is likely that millions of other black Americans could trace ancestors to this site. The parking lot must be permanently closed. Then there needs to be an investigation into what actually lies below the lot. This can mean a full-blown archaeological dig, such is already happening right now just blocks away at the former Lumpkin's Jail. Or it could mean using the latest techniques for a less invasive process that would not disturb actual burials. But either way, THIS SACRED GROUND MUST NEVER AGAIN BE DEBASED BY USING IT AS A PLACE TO PARK CARS.

We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens who urge our leaders to act now to reclaim the 250-year-old burial ground for free and enslaved Black people that now lies beneath a parking lot at 15th and East Broad Streets in the City of Richmond. Therefore, we call for the following:

- 1) The city and state should arrange to acquire the property now owned by Virginia Commonwealth University that includes the site of the "Burial Ground for Negroes." this could be done by a "land swap" with another city- or state-owned property that could provide the parking that VCU needs for its staff and students.**
- 2) Pursue the archaeological excavations and investigations needed to determine the actual extent of the Burial Ground and the probable number of burials, using the best practices available to us.**
- 3) Use a community based process to guide the design and development of a memorial for the site that recognizes it as a component of Richmond's Slave Trail and the community and economic development planning for Shockoe Bottom that starts with an emphasis on the single social attraction that makes Richmond unique to visitors and locals alike: its History. From this work, develop ongoing educational programs that VCU and our regional public school systems could utilize to benefit their own academic programs and deepen their connections to the academic and cultural institutions that are another unique feature of this region as well as the broader Richmond community.**

Please Print your Name, Zip Code, E-mail or Mailing Address and Phone Number with Area Code – Thank You!

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