

Black History Month

A Florida Focus

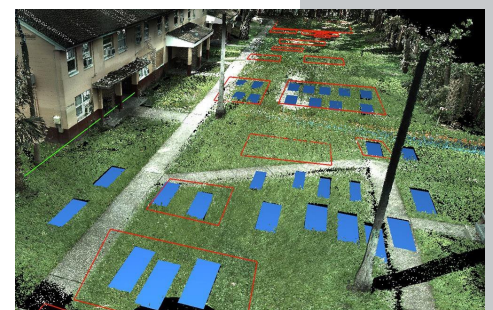
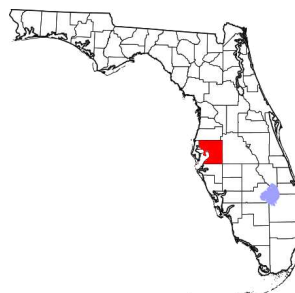
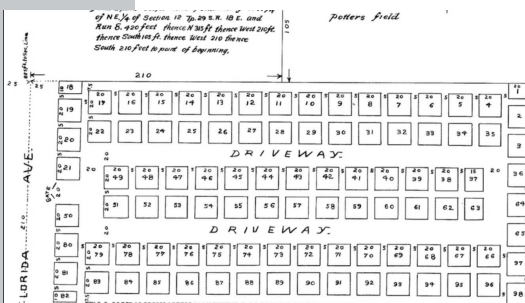
A CIVICS IN REAL LIFE SERIES: CIVICS CONNECTION SPOTLIGHT

Spotlight #7: Forgotten Black Cemeteries

Zion Cemetery, located in Tampa, Florida is believed to be one of the oldest Black cemeteries in the state. Between 1900 and 1929, it is estimated that more than 800 African-Americans were buried in this segregated cemetery. Over time the cemetery became neglected, and eventually forgotten. Consequently, in 1951, as the City of Tampa continued growing, a public housing complex was built on top of Zion Cemetery. It was not until 2019 that Zion would again be remembered. Then, a Tampa area journalist published an investigative piece in the *Tampa Bay Times* highlighting the [history of the lost cemetery](#) and questioned whether the human remains had been relocated prior to construction. To help answer this question, a team of archeologists was brought to the site. Through the use of ground penetrating radar, the archeological team discovered that the bodies were never relocated and were still there. Over the next two years [four additional](#) Black cemeteries would be uncovered. Those discoveries included cemeteries under a local high school, MacDill Air Force Base, and the parking lot of Tropicana Field. By some estimates, the number of forgotten Black cemeteries that have been built over is believed to be nearly 3,000 statewide. These discoveries raise an important question of who bears responsibility for righting a wrong of the past. After the discovery of bodies at the Zion site, the Florida Legislature [created](#) the “Abandoned African-American Cemeteries Task Force.” The Task Force had the responsibility of researching this issue and making recommendations for “identifying, recording, and preserving” this history in a respectful way. The [final report](#) of the Task Force led the way for [new legislation](#) which aims to establish a designated office to monitor recently discovered cemeteries and assist in any future investigations. For the apartment complex that lies on top of Zion Cemetery, a redevelopment project is already underway and includes plans to honor this significant history with a park and memorial cemetery.

CONNECTION QUESTIONS

- Why might historic cemeteries like Zion be forgotten over time?
- How does the creation of a state task force bring about solutions to an issue?



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