



# Richmond Branch NAACP

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Good evening Madam President and Members of Richmond City Council.

I am Lynetta Thompson, President of the Richmond Branch NAACP. I am speaking to you this evening both in that capacity and as a representative of the many organizations and individuals who support the Community Proposal for a Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park.

The nearly 100 sites once associated with the slave trade in Shockoe Bottom made Richmond the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade. It would be hard to think of a place more important to Black History in the entire United States.

The Richmond Branch believe that a nine-acre Memorial Park, encompassing the African Burial Ground, the site of Lumpkin's Jail and two more blocks east of the CSX railroad tracks, would be large enough to tell the full story of Shockoe Bottom, while allowing for appropriate economic development within a recognized historic district.

In many ways we are offended by the much narrower plan proposed by Mayor Jones, which does not even mention the 3.1-acre African Burial Ground. And it includes no provisions for blocking inappropriate development in this uniquely historic district.

In Richmond, great fortunes were made from the buying and selling of human beings. Many of the mega-corporations in this city, still operating and growing, are the result of inheritances gained from that inhuman trade. It is past time to give back to the individuals who suffered, resisted, built, fought and died for this county. They deserve recognition and an appropriate memorial.

In 2011, a broad community movement succeeded in forcing the state of Virginia to abandon its parking lot that once desecrated Richmond's African Burial Ground.

In 2014, the continuation of that movement succeeded in blocking the mayor's ill-conceived plan for a baseball stadium in the Bottom.

The third stage in this protracted struggle is to set aside enough land in the Bottom to be able to adequately explain the events, both tragic and heroic, that happened there, as well as how the economics of the slave trade and the unrelenting resistance to it shaped the development of the new republic and influenced social, racial and economic relations up to the present day.

If we do this correctly, Richmond will become known worldwide as the center for this country's long-overdue process of Truth and Reconciliation. We demand more than just signs identifying where our ancestors were moved from point A to Point B in Shockoe Bottom.

Even today, Richmond's Black community and low-income residents are being deprived of opportunities to achieve economic justice. Section 3 of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968 requires that local procurement contracts include provisions to educate, train and provide skills to below-poverty residents. In Richmond, Section 3 is not taken seriously. This City Council must do better in providing for all the people of this city and not just a select few.

Today each of you was sent a digital version of the Memorial Park proposal. We are asking you to endorse this plan. We are making the same request of all the individuals campaigning this year for public office in Richmond. The future of Shockoe Bottom must be a central issue in this campaign season.

Thank you for your time and consideration. You will be hearing from us again, very soon.