



**Society for Preservation of African-
American History and Antiquities**

A Virginia Nonstock Corporation
**24 Overbrook Road
Richmond, VA 23222
804-439-8515**

June 14, 2009

The Honorable Dwight C. Jones, Mayor
The Honorable Kathy C. Graziano, President
The Honorable Ellen V. Robertson, Vice President
The Honorable Bruce W. Tyler
The Honorable Charles R. Samuels
The Honorable Chris A. Hilbert
The Honorable E. Martin Jewell
The Honorable Reva M. Trammel
The Honorable Betty L. Squire

Re: Professional Baseball in Shockhoe Bottom

Dear Mr. Mayor and Members of Council:

Among the many issues and concerns facing the City of Richmond is whether you should endorse and approve the location of professional baseball and ancillary development in Richmond's Shockoe Bottom. This project has been dubbed, "Shockhoe Center".

Although you have yet to reach a definitive conclusion and decision with regard to Shockoe Center, I want to bring to your attention some important facts and considerations regarding the history of Shockoe Bottom and Shockoe Slip which I strongly believe make the Shockhoe Center project grossly inappropriate for this site.

In order to provide some balance to the various arguments, pro and con on this issue, I have prepared and attached to this letter a position paper which focuses on the important history of Shockoe Bottom and Shockoe Slip. I have done so because I feel that this history has not been fully considered or respected by the proponents of the project. The lack of appreciation and concern for the area's history is troubling to me because it

continues the marginalization of African-American history and culture, which has unfortunately been the rule rather than the exception in this city and beyond.

In my position paper I referred to the attempts to preserve the former Nazi death camp of Auschwitz. In that same genre, and more recently, we witnessed President Barack Obama's visit to the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany. Mr. Obama was clearly moved by the crematory ovens, barbed-wire fences, guard towers and the clock set at 3:15, marking the moment of the camp's liberation by the U.S. Army in the afternoon of April 11, 1945. All of this was preserved and the area was left intact so that the stark horrors memorialized there could, in the president's words, serve as vigilance against evil, against subjugation of the weak and against the "cruelty in ourselves". I again ask, is the history of the enslavement of African people in the Bottom and Slip any less sacrosanct and therefore not as worthy of preservation as Auschwitz or Buchenwald?

I only ask that you read carefully the history, which I assure you is accurate. After you have read it, I hope you will find, as I have, that the City of Richmond owes to the hundreds of thousands who were victimized by the inhumanity and immorality of slavery, as well as the ancestors of those victims, the respect and dignity of not allowing this hallowed ground to be desecrated by Shockoe Center or any other incompatible use.

It is interesting to note that within the sixty-two (62) square miles comprising the corporate limits of the City, not a single inch of ground has been dedicated to the victimization and dehumanization of African descended people. In contrast, multiple acres have been dedicated to the Confederacy.

I also recommend that you initiate a land use plan for Shockoe Bottom and Shockoe Slip which will once and for all dedicate the Bottom and Slip and make it unnecessary for us to have to go through this kind of exercise in the future.

This can be done by using your zoning power. Available to you are the provisions of Section 15.04.520 of the City's Zoning Ordinance which is

known as the SFO-special features overlay district. The SFO can be used to “promote the conservation, preservation, protection and enhancement of natural resource and historic, cultural or architecturally significant buildings or areas...to insure aesthetic quality [of] buildings or sites with historic, cultural or architecturally significant characteristics.”

Without oversimplifying this issue, I think that your decision is a no-brainer. Shockoe Center is clearly an incompatible use or activity for Shockoe Bottom and Slip. I therefore respectfully urge you to reject in any form, revision or iteration this proposal.

Sincerely yours,

Sa'ad El-Amin,

cc: Richmond Slave Trail Commission
Print and Electronic Press