



October 23, 2020

DELIVERED VIA EMAIL

Governor Ron DeSantis
400 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32309
GovernorRon.Desantis@eog.myflorida.com

Re: Ocoee 1920 Election Day Massacre Proclamation

Dear Governor DeSantis:

We write to ask you to honor the lives lost in the 1920 Ocoee Election Day Massacre by adopting the attached Proclamation.

We were pleased to see broad bipartisan support for HB 1213, *Education Instruction of Historical Events*, as demonstrated by the bill's unanimous passage this past session, and we are grateful for your signing this bill into law. As you know, HB 1213, among other things, requires that the Ocoee Election Day Massacre be taught in our public schools to ensure that Floridians understand the violence inflicted upon Black Floridians who tried to exercise their right to vote in 1920.

A Proclamation honoring the lives lost in the 1920 Election Day Massacre will acknowledge Florida's past role in one of the worst election day racial violence incidents in the country and will demonstrate the state's present commitment to ensuring that this will never happen again.

History of the November 1920 Ocoee Election Day Massacre

According to the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Governmental Accountability (OPPAGA) report entitled, *Ocoee Election Day Violence – November 1920*¹:

On the day of the general election, November 2, 1920, Mose Norman went to the polls to vote but was told that he was not permitted to do so because he had not paid his poll tax. Norman left the polling area and traveled to Orlando to meet with attorney and former judge John Cheney (also the Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate in 1920), who recommended that he return to the polling place in Precinct 10 and record the names of

¹ Office of Program Policy Analysis and Governmental Accountability, *Ocoee Election Day Violence – November 1920*, Report No. 19-15 at 2 (<http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/MonitorDocs/Reports/pdf/1915rpt.pdf>)

anyone who was not permitted to vote and the names of the polling officials who were denying anyone the right to vote. When Mose Norman returned to the polling place, he was again denied the opportunity to vote... Norman went to the home of July Perry before fleeing Ocoee later that day. Later in the day, some white Ocoee residents formed a posse and were deputized by Orange County Sheriff Deputy Clyde Pounds. The posse, led by Ocoee resident Sam Salisbury, a former Army colonel and former Orlando Chief of Police, was charged with arresting July Perry and Mose Norman..... After additional people and Orange County Sheriff Frank Gordon arrived, the posse captured Perry's daughter in the house. July Perry was captured in a sugarcane patch near his house and transported to a hospital in Orlando to treat his gunshot wounds. After leaving the hospital, Perry, in the custody of the Orange County Sheriff's Office, was taken by a white mob, lynched by hanging, and shot.

...After the posse captured July Perry and his family, a mob set fire to all of the African-American buildings in the northern (Methodist) African-American area of Ocoee throughout the night, as late as 4:45 A.M. on November 3, 1920. The fire destroyed more than 20 houses, two churches, and one fraternal lodge. There is a wide range in the reported number of African Americans killed during this violence. The lowest number of reported African Americans killed was 3, including July Perry, and the highest number was close to 60.

... With subsequent threats and violence directed toward the remaining African-American residents of Ocoee in the months that followed, they fled Ocoee, leaving their homes and property. ... Based on data from the U.S. Census, at least 253 African Americans were displaced from Ocoee after the Election Day violence. The 1920 census shows 560 whites and 255 African Americans (31%), and the 1930 census shows 1,180 whites, 11 Indians, and 2 African Americans (0.2%). (See Exhibit 3.) Census data also show that African Americans did not return to live in Ocoee until the 1970s.

We have attached a draft Proclamation for your consideration. We ask that on the 100th anniversary of this stain on Florida's history you acknowledge the harms done to the Black residents of Ocoee and honor their legacy by issuing this Proclamation.

We are available to discuss if you desire. Thank you for your prompt attention.

Sincerely,



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