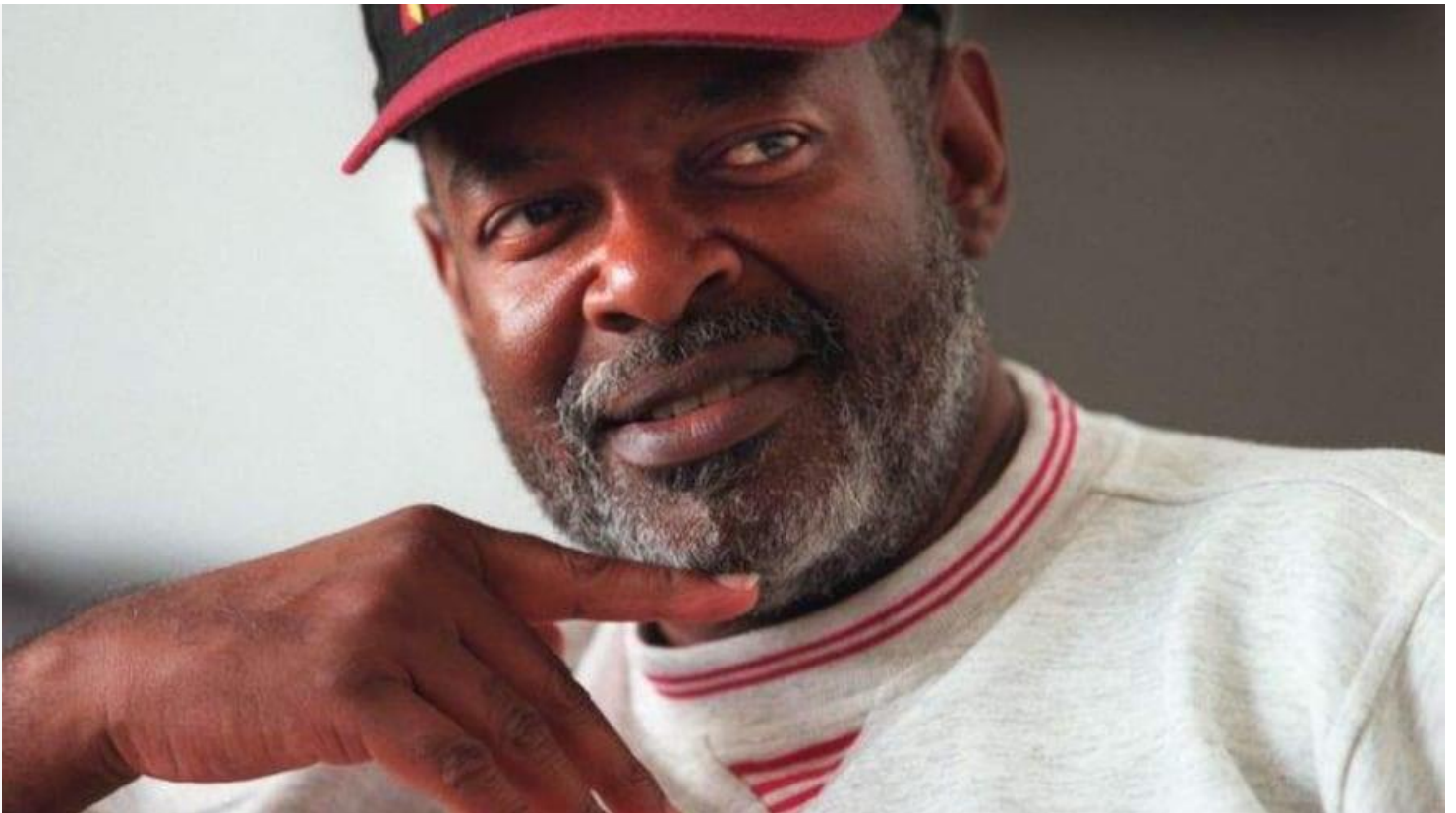


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# Tampa Bay Times

FLORIDA POLITICS

## Arnett Doctor, driving force behind Rosewood reparations, dies at 72



Arnett Doctor, a descendent of people involved in the Rosewood attacks that left six black people and two white people dead, helped win \$2.1 million for Rosewood survivors.

By **Times Staff Writer**  
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SPRING HILL — A lot of factors contributed to the passage of the historic Rosewood compensation law 21 years ago.

Witnesses were still alive to share their harrowing accounts of the racially motivated 1923 massacre that left at least six black and two white residents dead. High-powered lawyers got behind the bill. They produced crucial evidence of the loss of property, as well as lives.

But the biggest factor, lawyers and family members said, was the advocacy of one Rosewood descendent, Arnett Doctor, who was found dead in his Spring Hill home Monday at the age of 72 after a long illness.

"He was the one who created the narrative, who gathered the facts and said those facts entitle us to reparation," said Steve Hanlon, a law professor at St. Louis University and one of the Holland & Knight lawyers who helped push the bill.

"I called him the Moses of the family," said his cousin, Gregory Doctor of Atlanta. "God implanted in him the spirit to lead the family and fight for reparations."

"My dad *is* Rosewood," said Mr. Doctor's daughter, Robin Conyers of St. Petersburg.

One story he told often was of hearing about Rosewood for the first time himself, as a young boy in the Pasco County mill town of Ladoochee.

Mr. Doctor said that one Christmas Day his mother told him about the week of violence that destroyed the prosperous town in Levy County. She also said that due to fear of revenge, none of the residents had returned to the town and that all of them, Arnett included, had to promise never to speak of it.

"The Rosewood family were all witnesses to unprosecuted murders," Hanlon said. "They were terrified. They spent their whole lives terrified."

Mr. Doctor didn't just break this vow of silence — he made talking about Rosewood his life's work, starting in 1982, when he helped a reporter with the then-*St. Petersburg Times* expose the long-buried story.

Mr. Doctor served 12 years in the Army and later owned a cleaning company, but spent much of his time on Rosewood.

He traveled across Florida to talk to survivors, said his daughter, a traffic investigator with the St. Petersburg Police Department, "and it just amazed me how he would sit for days, talking to them over and over to get every detail."

Eventually, he took his findings to Hanlon, who enlisted the support of his colleague Martha Barnett, a veteran lobbyist and former American Bar Association president who had grown up in Ladoochee.

"Arnett was able to do what neither Steve nor I could do, which was speak from the perspective of a family member," she said.

He was also the most determined member of the team, she said, and was a quick study in legislative maneuvering.

He, too, carefully avoided the politically loaded term "reparations," Hanlon said, "though that's clearly what it was." Mr. Doctor helped sway conservatives by saying the bill was about property rights, not race.

And with the bill stalled and the "clock ticking" toward the end of the 1994 session, Mr. Doctor defied Barnett's advice to be patient and advocated the more aggressive and ultimately successful approach; the black caucus in the House of Representatives threatened a walk-out on a bill that was a priority of leadership unless the Rosewood legislation was given full consideration, Barnett said.

The \$2.1 million award was small, but the significance was huge, Barnett said.

"I think what the survivors really wanted was recognition . . . for the state of Florida to say, 'We failed you and we accept responsibility and we're sorry.' "

It was the first time in the country's history that a state paid compensation for racial violence, and it was — according to everyone involved in the case and a University of Florida history professor — the last.

Money might not have been most important to the survivors, but it was to Mr. Doctor, several Rosewood descendants said. They criticized him for claiming some of the reparations and for his paid role as a consultant to the 1997 film, *Rosewood*.

There's no doubt that Mr. Doctor did "play both ends against the middle," said Mike D'Orso, author of a bestselling book about the massacre, *Like Judgment Day*. "But there's also no doubt that he was extremely passionate about Rosewood."

Proof of that, his daughter said, is the Chevrolet Silverado pickup that she retrieved this week from his home in Spring Hill. The personalized plate reads "ROSEWOOD."

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