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FDLE Ignores Groveland Four Exoneration Pleas, Retaliates

ORLANDO, Fla. – In 2019, **State Representative Geraldine F. Thompson (D – Windermere)** and **Agriculture Commissioner Nikki Fried** met in Fried's offices with administrators of the **Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE)** to discuss exoneration of the **Groveland Four**—four young African American men who in 1949 were falsely accused of raping a white woman in Groveland, Florida. After being represented by **Thurgood Marshall**, the United States Supreme Court granted a new trial for the Groveland Four in 1951. Though the Florida Cabinet, at the urging of **Commissioner Fried, Representative Thompson** and others, granted a pardon to the **Groveland Four** on January 11, 2019, **Representative Thompson** understood that a pardon is something that is granted to guilty individuals and she continued to push for exoneration to clear the names and have the innocence of the **Groveland Four** acknowledged.

Directors of **FDLE** indicated during the January 2019 meeting that they would review all information regarding the **Groveland Four** and issue an opinion. Nothing from **FDLE** has been forthcoming regarding the **Groveland Four** in 2021, though members of the families of the men have pressed for resolution. **Representative Thompson's** contacts with the **Florida Department of Law Enforcement** to urge exoneration of the **Groveland Four** have been ignored and instead **FDLE** filed a complaint against **Representative Thompson** with the **Florida Commission on Ethics** regarding an appropriations' request that then **Senator Thompson** made for the Sankofa Project in 2016. The complaint from **FDLE** to the **Florida Commission on Ethics** was filed on April 28, 2021, outside of the five-year statute of limitations under which the Ethics Commission is bound.

Representative Thompson said, "This is reprisal from **Governor DeSantis** and his appointees including the Florida Secretary of State, **Laurel Lee**, who referred the Sankofa issue, despite no findings of improprieties, to the U. S. Attorney of the Middle District where she once worked. She also once worked for **U. S. District Judge James Moody**, the father of State Attorney General, **Ashley Moody. Lee** was appointed as judge by former **Governor Rick Scott** and as Secretary of State by **Ron DeSantis** and is married to former Florida **Senator Tom Lee**. The referrals from **Laurel Lee** and the **Florida Department of Law Enforcement** follow a lawsuit which **Thompson** filed in 2020 with the **Florida Supreme Court**. **Representative Thompson** won that lawsuit through a ruling by the **Florida Supreme Court** when the Court ruled against **DeSantis** and affirmed **Thompson's** contention that the Governor acted unlawfully to appoint a constitutionally unqualified political crony to the **Florida Supreme Court**. "There was no finding of criminal wrongdoing regarding Sankofa after numerous examinations, so this is a reach and another approach to attack me in a different arena even though it is outside of the five-year statute of limitations which applies to complaints with the **Florida Commission on Ethics**. This is straight out of the **Trump** play book to use governmental agencies to bully and silence detractors," said **Representative Thompson**.

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