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'White House Boys' win inquiry of reform school graves

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- Four former reform school students in residents push for investigation
- Florida authorities agree to investigate after governor's request
- There are 32 graves on land of former Florida School for Boys
- The former residents call their group the White House Boys

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MARIANNA, Florida (CNN) -- Four men, now in their 60s, met over the Internet, shared stories about the darkest days of their pasts and spurred an investigation into 32 graves at a reform school.

Roger Kiser, Michael McCarthy, Bryant Middleton and Dick Colon talked about whippings and beatings and other boys who disappeared.

They discussed the 32 crosses marking the graves of persons unknown on the grounds of the former Florida Industrial School for Boys.

They called their group the White House Boys, taking the name from the single story concrete building where, they say, boys were beaten and tortured decades ago.

The White House Boys believe that delinquents and orphans sent to the concrete White House were killed and their remains buried to cover up the brutality.

This week, the four called on Florida Gov. Charlie Crist to investigate. Crist agreed and asked the Florida Department of Law Enforcement to search for remains, identify them and determine whether any crimes were committed.

The department agreed to look into the mystery of the 32 crosses on the grounds of what is now known as the Dozier School, in Marianna, just south of the Alabama state line. [Watch how the White House Boys dug into the past »](#)

Two of the White House Boys, Middleton and Colon, spoke with CNN. The stories they told were chilling.

Middleton said he was "an incorrigible youth of 14 or 15" when he was sent to the reform school for breaking and entering. During a 30-minute phone interview, he recounted story after horrific story about his time there.

Middleton said he took six trips to the concrete White House, where he endured brutal beatings. He says boys were regularly struck with a metal-reinforced double strap with a long wooden handle.

"You could hear it coming through the air, and when it hit your body, the pain was unbelievable," he recalled. "They just beat you to the point of unconsciousness, or you could no longer understand what was happening to you."

He recalled another occasion in which he and another boy decided to get drunk. They mixed orange juice with rubbing alcohol. It make Middleton sick and his friend intoxicated.

A guard confronted the other boy and began to treat him roughly, Middleton said.

"He dragged him to the administration building, and I never saw him again. He never came back to work or to the cottage," Middleton said. "He literally disappeared off the face of the Earth."

Colon is an electrical contractor in Baltimore, Maryland. But in the 1950s, he acknowledged, he was a wayward youth who gritted his teeth through 11 beatings inside the White House.

Colon said he remembers entering the laundry one day, and his life has never been the same.

Inside a large tumble dryer was a black teen.

The White House boys, who are all white, said black kids at the school were beaten even more savagely than white kids.

"I said to myself, 'What's going to happen to me if I take him out?' " Colon said.

He recalled being about 15 feet away from the boy in the dryer. He thought about helping him but was afraid.

"I said to myself, 'I can't do it, 'cause I'm gonna be the next one in the God----- dryer if I take him out,' " he said.

"I turned my back and walked out, and it torments me every day of my life."

So far, all authorities have are allegations and the collective memories of the White House Boys. But they say it's worth looking into the case.

"Questions remain unanswered as to the identity of the deceased and the origin of these graves," [Crist](#) wrote in his letter to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

"The main goal is to determine the location of the graves, who owned the property at the time, and determine if any crimes were committed," agency spokeswoman Kristin Perezluha said.

Authorities are only now beginning their investigation, so no one can say for certain who, if anyone, is buried under the 32 white metal crosses.

Middleton learned about the investigation from a CNN producer.

"My God! That's remarkable. My God! That's all I ever wanted," he said. "That will begin a lot of the healing for those that survived that school.

"Some of us will never get over the brutality, the sexual assaults and the fear. But this is a major step in the right direction," he added.

Colon has established an educational trust fund at the same campus, the Dozier School for high academic achievers, today operated by the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice.

At least one former student says the school was strict but fair.

"They were justified in giving me these paddlings, because, hey, I was wrong," Phil Hail of Anniston, Alabama, told The Miami Herald.

Hail told the Herald he remembers going to the white building once for getting low grades in 1957. "Was [the school] run with a very strict hand? Yes, it was ... Were the paddlings very severe? Yes, they were," he told the newspaper.

There are lingering questions no one seems able to answer: Why was there no outcry from the parents of boys who disappeared? Why did no one look for them?

Colon and Middleton say they're valid questions. They firmly believe that bodies will be found and that they will be the bodies of both black and white boys.

"I believe, in my own heart, that there has been a coverup," Middleton said.

Added Colon, "White, African-American, they're all there ... I believe they will find crushed skulls, and broken bones -- and hopefully, one day, the murderers."

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