

IMAM ASKIA MUHAMMAD AQUIL
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Askia Muhammad Aquil has been an activist, social reformer, religious leader and community builder for all of his adult life. In 1968 following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., he was labeled a "black militant" by the Tampa Tribune for his leadership of the student movement on the Tampa campus of the University of South Florida. Among other enduring achievements, his efforts led to creation of the first Black Studies Program at a Florida college or university.

Aquil worked with others, including the late Tampa NAACP Branch President Bob Gilder, to register thousands of African-Americans in Hillsborough County during the 1970's and 1980's. His protests against the Hillsborough County School Board, citing "taxation without representation" among other grievances, contributed to the election in 1976 of the first African-American to ever serve on that Board, the late Rev. Dr. A. Leon Lowry. By contrast, the first African-American, Mary Brown, was elected to the Pinellas County School Board 16 years later in 2002.

Aquil was raised as a member of historic Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in St. Petersburg. He began serious study of the Islamic way of life after Dr. King was killed. He became a student minister/Imam in 1977. He has led mosques and Islamic centers in Tampa and St. Petersburg. He also served for several years as the Convener for mosques and Islamic centers in six Southern states. His interfaith activities span 40 years, highlighted by his service as Secretary for the Hillsborough Association of Religious Leaders (HARL), his service on the Board of Directors of Congregations United for Community Action (CUCA) in St. Petersburg and his service on the Board of the National Conference for Community and Justice (now Community Tampa Bay).

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