

*In the Spirit of
Gabriel & Nan,
Nat Turner,
Solomon Northup,
Madison Washington,
John Brown,
Mary Bowser,
Elizabeth Van Lew,
John Mitchell Jr.,
Barbara Johns,
Oliver Hill & all who
struggle for Justice*

The Virginia DEFENDER

FREE

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Two proposals for Shockoe Bottom compete for community support

Defenders & allies promote one, stadium supporters back the other



Photos by Phil Wilayto

Members of the public unanimously vote to approve a proposal for a nine-acre Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park. The green sheets of paper mean “yes,” red means “no” and yellow means “I have a question or suggestion.” The open meeting, the culmination of a five-month community process to develop a plan for Shockoe Bottom, was held Aug. 15 at Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church in Richmond’s East End. The process was led by the Defenders, assisted by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and Preservation Virginia. It involved more than 100 people and did not cost taxpayers a single dime.

By Ana Edwards & Phil Wilayto

There are now two proposals for Richmond’s Shockoe Bottom competing for community support.

One is for a nine-acre Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park, the result of a five-month open process led by the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality, with assistance from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and Preservation Virginia.

The other proposal, presented by Richmond Mayor Dwight Jones, is for a memorial at the site of Lumpkin’s Jail. This plan was developed in private and then presented to the community for suggestions.

Both proposals include memorializing the site of Lumpkin’s Jail, the most notorious of the Bottom’s slave-trade sites.

The Defenders’ proposal also includes the African Burial Ground.

The mayor’s proposal does not.

The Defenders’ proposal calls for protecting the rest of Shockoe Bottom from inappropriate commercial development.

The mayor’s plan does not.

The Defenders’ proposal would be implemented in two stages, starting with the \$8 million already promised by Richmond City Council for Shockoe Bottom memorialization. Further development would come from the up-to-\$11 million promised by the Virginia General Assembly, \$9 million of which is contingent on private fund raising.

The mayor’s plan would require using the \$8 million from City Council and all \$11 million from the state, but does not mention private fund raising.

The Defenders’ plan was unanimously adopted at an open community meeting.

There are no plans to allow the public to vote on the mayor’s plan.

The Defenders’ process was based on the Black community having the primary voice in developing a proposal for Shockoe Bottom.

The mayor’s plan includes no such consideration.

Developing the Defenders’ plan hasn’t cost taxpayers a single dime.

Promoting the mayor’s plan depends on hiring for-profit companies.

The Defenders’ proposal calls for related business contracts and jobs to go first to Black-owned businesses and Black workers.

Of the four companies already work-

ing on the mayor’s plan, none are Black-owned.

All the organizations supporting the Defenders’ plan previously opposed the mayor’s proposal to build a commercial baseball stadium in the heart of Shockoe Bottom.

Virtually all the organizations and individuals supporting the mayor’s plan previously supported a Shockoe Bottom stadium.

Supporters of both proposals are now making presentations to community organizations, schools, religious and civic groups, seeking support for their proposal.

Which proposal these groups decide to support will go a long way in determining the future of Shockoe Bottom.

Richmond’s Shockoe Bottom once was the center of the U.S. domestic slave trade. More than 100,000 women, men and children were sold from there to the plantations of the Deep South. The majority of African-Americans today could trace some ancestry to this small historic district.

Those of us living in Richmond today are the stewards of this sacred ground. It is up to us to decide what legacy we will leave for our children and our children’s children.

We do not have the right to sell their birthright for a bowl of porridge.

To get involved, please call the Defenders at (804) 644-5834 or email Defenders-FJE@hotmail.com.



Three days before the Aug. 15 community meeting, Mayor Dwight Jones announces his own proposal for Lumpkin’s Jail, one of nearly 100 sites in Shockoe Bottom once associated with the massive domestic slave trade. The first phase of the project will cost taxpayers nearly \$200,000. From left: Matt Laird of the James River Institute for Archaeology, Joy Bailey Bryant of Lord Cultural Resources, Richmond City Councilwoman Cynthia Newbille, “Slave” Trail Commission Chair Delores McQuinn and Mayor Jones. Not shown: Dr. Claude Perkins, president of Virginia Union University. The press conference was held at An-carrow’s Landing on the south bank of the James River.



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Down with Davis! — Speakers at a Richmond press conference held on the first day of the UCI bicycle races denounce the races’ highlighting of Confederate shrines. In the background is the monument that honors slaveowner and Confederate president Jefferson Davis, chosen as the halfway turning point for the elite women’s and men’s races. The four chairmen of the race organizing committee included Richmond Mayor Dwight Jones. (See story and more photos on page 2.)

**MORE ON
SHOCKOE BOTTOM**
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The Two Proposals
Fact vs. Fiction: The Money
Q & A with Mayor Jones

“The price of apathy toward public affairs is to be ruled by evil men.” — Plato, ancient Greek philosopher

THE DEFENDERS

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The Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality is an organization of Virginia residents working for the survival of our communities through education and social justice projects.

We started out in June 2002. Many of us had relatives in the Richmond City Jail or state prisons and were concerned about the physical conditions of these institutions.

As we worked around these issues, we learned more and more about the connections between jails, jobs, poverty, racism, sexism, class, war and political representation. We began to organize around these issues as well.

We now have a quarterly, statewide newspaper, a monthly radio program and a website. Our members meet monthly to discuss issues and plan actions. We are affiliated with the Virginia People's Assembly, the Virginia Immigrant Peoples Coalition and the National United Antiwar Coalition.

If you agree with the principles below and want to work to make these ideals a reality, we invite you to join us.

Together, we can make a real difference in the life of our communities.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

We believe in Freedom

We believe that all people must be free to develop to their full potential as human beings. We must be free from hunger, from preventable diseases, from homelessness, from ignorance. We must be free to work and to provide for ourselves and our families. We must be free to pursue our education and to develop ourselves culturally and spiritually. We must be free from fear of the arbitrary use of police power and from the physical and cultural attacks of white-supremacist organizations. Women must be free from physical, cultural and emotional oppression. Children must be free from dangers like lead poisoning, asthma and sexual exploitation. Our youths must be free both from police harassment and the mindless violence of the streets. We must all be free from unjust wars fought in the interest of the wealthy few at the expense of the struggling many.

We believe in Justice

We believe that every human being has the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And we believe that these rights are meaningless unless we also have the right to a job at a living wage, to decent housing, to adequate health care, to a meaningful education. We believe that all people have the right to stand equally before the law, to equal and fair treatment by the police, by the court system and in jails and prisons. And we believe that the death penalty is the ultimate exercise in injustice.

We believe in Equality

We live in the richest country in the world. But it's a country that owes its tremendous wealth to the barbaric oppression of Black labor on a historic scale, as well as the theft of American Indian and Mexican lands, the cruel exploitation of Asian labor and the labor of waves of poor European immigrants.

This country does not belong to the wealthy few who have claimed it for their own. As human beings, we all have an equal right to its resources. As descendants of those whose blood, sweat and tears paid cruelly for its development, we have a right to collective reparations. And as people who struggle every day with ongoing inequality, we have the right to affirmative action.

We believe that for any one of us to be free, we must all be free. We believe that for any one of us to have justice, we must all have justice. We believe that equality for anyone is impossible without equality for everyone

As members of The Defenders, we pledge ourselves to defend our community, its men, its women and especially its children, from all forms of oppression.

We pledge to fight for a world where all people can live in dignity, freedom and peace.



More than 100 people turned out Sept. 19 at Richmond's Jefferson Davis monument to say "Honor Black History, not Confederate Shrines!" The Defenders had called the press conference to denounce the choice of the monument as the prestigious halfway turning point for the UCI Road World Championships bicycle races. (Photo by Phil Wilayto)

'Honor Black History - not Confederate Shrines!'

The monument to slaveowner and Confederate President Jefferson Davis is the largest of five statues that honor Confederate leaders on Richmond's Monument Avenue, a broad residential boulevard listed on the National Register of Historical Places.

Erected 25 years and more after the Civil War, the statues were meant to signal the return to power of the same white-supremacist Southern ruling class that was in charge until 1865.

In the aftermath of the terrible racist massacre of nine African-Americans at a historic Black church in Charleston, S.C., cities across the South are removing symbols honoring those who defended the system of chattel slavery.

But not Richmond.

Here in the former capital of the Confederacy, in the Sesquicentennial year after Emancipation and the end of the Civil War, leading politicians and corporate leaders decided to highlight the Davis monument as the prestigious halfway turning point of the UCI Road World Championships bicycle race, held in Richmond from Sept. 19-27. Some 300 million people around the world were expected to watch the event on television.

The race route also included statues of Confederate generals Robert E. Lee, J.E.B. Stuart and Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, all of whom owned enslaved people.

The route avoided the avenue's one statue dedicated to an African-American:

Arthur Ashe, a tennis world champion and Richmonder known for his AIDS education work and active opposition to South African apartheid.

Far from a fringe group, Richmond 2015, the race's local organizing committee, was composed of Virginia's corporate elite.

Its four chairs were Gov. Terry McAuliffe, U.S. Sen. Mark Warner, Richmond Mayor Dwight Jones — all Northern-born Democrats — and Thomas F. Farrell II, CEO of Dominion Resources, the state's most politically powerful corporation.

The Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality had asked the committee chairs to move the race from Monument Avenue to save the city from an international embarrassment.

"They refused," said Ana Edwards, who chairs the Defenders' Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project and counts among her ancestors two women sold from Richmond in the 1840s.

"This is our heritage, this is who we are," explained McAuliffe, a former chair of the Democratic National Committee who was born in Syracuse, N.Y.

The Defenders also wrote to the UCI International Committee in Europe, which did not respond.

Edwards was the main speaker at a Defender-hosted press conference held Sept. 19 in front of the Davis monument.

More than 100 people attended.

"So we are here today to tell the world that most Richmonders do not support showcasing these monuments to Confederate military and political leaders during this world-famous sports event," Edwards said.

Others speakers were Rebecca Wooden Keel of Black Lives Matter and Deric Beale of Virginia ("Fight for \$15") Raise Up.

The National Trust for Historic Resources and Preservation Virginia presented written statements. These two groups are prominent nonprofits working with the Defenders to reclaim and properly memorialize Shockoe Bottom, a neglected section of downtown Richmond that once was the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade.

The Defenders also produced a special edition of The Virginia Defender, explaining to visitors the significance of Monument Avenue. (www.DefendersFJE.blogspot.com)

Helping to make the race route a national issue, the United National Antiwar Coalition set up an online petition supporting the position of the Defenders, a founding UNAC member organization.

A pro-Confederacy group called the Virginia Flaggers had threatened to come to the press conference, but instead hired a plane to circle the event while towing a Confederate flag.

Behind the flag was a banner with the slogan "Confederate Heros Matter," evidently expressing the view that Confederate submarine sandwiches have merit.

Mumia supporters accuse prison authorities of attempting 'murder by medical neglect'

By Taylor Janay Manigault

Internationally known political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal's health is in rapid decline, a direct result of diabetic mismanagement, denied treatment and overall medical neglect by the Pennsylvania state prison system.

In response, his lawyers have filed a lawsuit demanding a very specific medical treatment plan based on the tentative diagnosis of his medical condition made by one of his doctors.

Mumia's supporters are calling for action and charge that the maltreatment of his ailments is a deliberate exploitation of his health condition in order to advance him toward death.

This is the former Black Panther's 33rd year in the Pennsylvania prison system. In 1982 he was sentenced to death for the murder of Daniel Faulkner, a Philadelphia police officer. As a result of a powerful worldwide support movement, his death order was overturned in 2001.

His demand for a new trial is supported by many activists, politicians, governments and organizations, including Amnesty International.

Now removed from Death Row, Mumia is once again subject to attempted execution, this time through medical neglect and malpractice.

Since April 2012, when he tested positive for the Hepatitis C antibody, Mumia has received close to none of the medical care necessary for his condition. This has exacerbated

many issues he faces today.

A year-old tingling rash, ignored by the prison staff, has metastasized to 70 percent of his body, resulting in countless lesions as well as swollen extremities.

It is likely that this is a symptom of infected Hepatitis C, but he was not diagnosed until two months after a blood test he was given in March 2015 at an outside hospital where he had been taken for emergency treatment.

On March 30, with no history of diabetes and after having three blood tests only weeks earlier, Mumia went into diabetic shock.

He was hospitalized with life-threatening high-blood sugar, but just two days later was transferred back to the same prison that failed to diagnose or treat him, even though he was still very ill.

His diet is dangerous and his health is deteriorating. Once again, only massive pressure

will prevent his death.

Mumia's lawsuit demands treatment for the active Hepatitis C in his system before he suffers irreparable damage.

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections has yet to determine a protocol for dealing with Hepatitis C.

Supporters may help by calling the following numbers and demanding that Mumia be granted (1) treatment by specialists of his choosing who are outside the Department of Corrections, (2) an appropriate diet and (3) daily visits by family, friends and attorneys.

John Wetzel — Secretary, PA Department of Corrections — (717) 728-4109

Thomas Wolf — Governor of Pennsylvania — (717) 787 2500

For more information, see:

www.freemumia.com.

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community news

Family Representative Council leads phase two of VCU Well Project

By Ana Edwards

A group of 19th century Richmonders now have 20th century representation to make long overdue decisions about the disposition of their remains, this time with dignity and respect.

The Family Representative Council (FRC) is phase two of the work of the Planning Committee of the East Marshall Street Well Project, established in 2013 by the Office of the President of Virginia Commonwealth University.

The bodies of these primarily African American residents were used for anatomical studies at the Medical College of Virginia from the 1840s to about 1860.

At that time there was no legal way to obtain cadavers for medical use and it was common practice to obtain them by grave-robbing the recently deceased.

The remains in the old MCV well were discovered in 1994 during construction of the Hermes Kontos Medical building, but

were stored at the Smithsonian Institution for nearly 15 years before being rediscovered by university professor and documentary filmmaker Shawn Utsey. The bones then became the catalyst for the documentary “Until the Well Runs Dry: Medicine and the Exploitation of Black Bodies.”

The members of the FRC were selected by a public nomination process and began meeting in July. According to Dr. Kevin Allison, project liaison to the Office of the President, “The current work of the FRC is designed to lead to a set of recommendations on the possibility of additional study, as well as memorialization and reburial” of the remains. The recommendations would “be presented to the community prior to being finalized.”

Dr. Allison also said that the process was designed to allow the FRC to work together with a minimal university role. The council’s recommendations are expected to be ready in early 2016.

Follow this project at emsw.vcu.edu.



Photo by Phil Wilayto

HONORING GABRIEL — Janet “Queen Nzinga” Taylor leads a traditional libation ceremony to open the 13th ANNUAL GABRIEL COMMEMORATION. At top left is Ram Baghat of Drums No Guns. The annual event is hosted by the Defenders’ Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project to honor the great slave rebellion leader Gabriel, who was executed on Oct. 10, 1800, at the town gallows in Richmond’s African Burial Ground. The ceremony normally is held on Oct. 10, but this year it was moved to the 11th to accommodate the “Justice or Else!” rally in Washington, D.C.



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Bobby Seale, who in 1966 with Huey Newton co-founded the legendary Black Panther Party, speaks at Ancarrow’s Landing on the south bank of the James River, once an important site for transporting enslaved Africans. Seale was the featured speaker at “Juneteenth: A Freedom Celebration,” held June 19-21 in Richmond and sponsored by the Elegba Folklore Society.

Defender co-founders named to Style’s Political Power List

Ana Edwards & Phil Wilayto, co-founders of the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality, were included by Style Weekly in its 2015 Power List, in the category of Politics.

The listing read:

“Longtime activists – Wilayto was a member of the Students for a Democratic Society back in the ‘60s – this married couple has questioned the power structure and pushed for equality for years. They challenged the UCI bike race’s plan to pass repeatedly by statues of Confederates on Monument Avenue. And with the Shockoe Bottom ballpark off, they’re pushing an open park to honor the memory of slaves. They’ve proven that you don’t need formal positions of power to be heard.”

Others who made the 10-member Power List for Politics were Gov. Terry McAuliffe (1st), Richmond Public Schools Superintendent Dana Bedden (2nd), Richmond Police Chief Alfred Durham (4th), Richmond City Council President Michelle R. Mosby (7th) and Equality Virginia Executive Director James Parrish (8th).

Edwards and Wilayto were listed 10th – just below Richmond Mayor Dwight C. Jones.



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Organizers and supporters of the Virginia mobilization for the Oct. 10 “Justice or Else!” gathering in Washington, D.C., announce their plans at a press conference held at Richmond’s Second Baptist Church. Among the mobilization co-coordinators were Min. Tracy Muhammad of Muhammad Mosque No. 24, Dr. Charles Shannon and Richmond activist Jay Jay Minor.

‘Justice or Else!’

Staff Report

Updates at www.justiceorelse.com.

“The atmosphere here in D.C. at this ‘Gathering’ is electric!” texted Defender Chris Rashad.

It was Oct. 10, 2015, 20 years since the historic Million Man March, and the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan had called for another mass gathering at the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

This time the theme of the event, which was open to women and men of all races, was “Justice or Else!” with the minister calling for a boycott of Christmas shopping to put economic pressure on those in power.

“You can feel the connection of the elders and the youth, despite racial and ideological differences. All of us yearning for and demanding justice for all,” texted Rashad, who attended the event along with Defenders Rolandah McMillan and Dieyah Rasheed.

In Virginia, buses were organized from a several cities, including Richmond.

To support the mobilization, the Defenders included information in a mass emailing and hosted Virginia organizers Dr. Charles Shannon and Min. Hassan Muhammad on the organization’s monthly “Talk to the Editor” program.

For updated information, see www.justicerorelse.com.



Photo by the Valentine Museum

The 2015 Richmond History Maker honorees, from left: Darcy S. Oman, Jesse Oremland, Carol Olson, Ana Edwards, Paula Buckley, Ayn Welleford, Elizabeth E. Heggie and Thelma Watson.

Valentine names 2015 History Makers

Ana Edwards, a co-founder of the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality and chair of the organization’s Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project, is one of five individuals and organizations to be honored by the Valentine Museum as this year’s “Richmond History Makers.”

Edwards is being honored for her work in the area of “Improving Social Justice.” In addition to her day job of promoting early childhood education and nutrition for low-income communities, she has been a leader in the ongoing struggle to reclaim and properly memorialize Richmond’s Shockoe Bottom, once the center of the U.S. domestic slave trade.

“For the last 13 years, Ana Edwards has been one of the most tireless advocates for Richmond communities, particularly in the areas of racial justice and inequity in historical representation,” reads part of the Valentine statement on Edwards.

The Valentine launched Richmond History Makers in 2005 “to annually recognize, honor

and celebrate those everyday citizens and outstanding organizations that are making significant contributions to the greater Richmond region.”

The other History Maker honorees are: Darcy S. Oman of the Community Foundation, in the category of “Promoting Stronger Communities;” GRASP (Great Aspirations Scholarship Program, Inc.), for “Creating Quality Education Opportunities;” WRIR-LP 97.3 FM, for “Demonstrating Innovative Solutions;” and the Greater Richmond Age Wave, for “Encouraging Regional Collaboration.”

The honorees will be formally recognized at a reception and awards ceremony to be held Oct. 20 at the Valentine Museum, located at 1015 E. Clay St.

For ticket information and reservations, contact: call 804-649-0711 ext. 339 or log onto: <http://thevalentine.org/calendar>.

The Professor & the Madwoman! Accordionist virtuoso BARRY BLESS and singer/dancer extraordinaire KHALIMA lent their considerable talents for a fund raiser to benefit The Virginia Defender. The carabet-style evening took place Oct. 5. Missed it? Then we’ll do it again! Stay tuned.

NOTICE: The Continuations Committee of the VIRGINIA PEOPLE’S ASSEMBLY FOR JOBS, PEACE & JUSTICE is proposing that the 2016 VPA be held this spring, in March or April, instead of in January, as in the past. To give your feedback, contact the VPA through its website at: www.vapeoplesassembly.org or leave a message at 804-644-5834.

cops, courts & prisons

Court date for Black Lives Matter activists postponed again

By Taylor Janay Manigault

The July 27 court date for three Richmond Black Lives Matter activists was postponed from July 27 to Oct. 9, and then to Nov. 23. The first postponement was due to an absence of witnesses and the inability of all three activists to make the earlier date. The Nov. 23 is a continuance decided by the clerk.

On Sunday, June 28, Shan Davis, 24; Heaven Imanchinello, 22; and Ashleigh Shackelford, 24, protested police murders of Black women. This protest took place at the intersection of Broad and Harrison streets. The three activists were among a small group of protesters.

After a police officer spoke with the group and instructed them to keep off the Broad Street median, the protesters allegedly were found on the median 15 minutes later as

patrolling officers passed by the area.

This resulted in the arrest of Davis for “pedestrian on a median” and resisting arrest and Imanchinello for “pedestrian in a roadway.” Shackelford was charged with “pedestrian in a roadway,” but released with a summons.

A Facebook status by Davis clarified that the charge of illegal use of a median was dropped for him and Heaven, as it is only a valid charge in the case of soliciting.

Davis declared that the illegality of standing on a median became valid for arrest “while black, and holding up signs that uplift black lives, specifically black women + black trans women + black girls.”

It is important to note that the Virginia Flaggers, who stand at the Monument Avenue median to display the Confederate battle flag, have not been arrested.

Portsmouth cop charged with murder

Staff Report

A Portsmouth police officer has been indicted in connection with the shooting death last April of an 18-year-old Black youth.

“Stephen David Rankin, 36, faces charges of first-degree murder and use of a firearm in commission of a felony in connection with the death of William Chapman II,” according to a report in The Virginian-Pilot.

Back in 2011, Rankin was cleared by a grand jury after he fatally shot a 26-year old-white man, Kirill Denyakin, after responding to a burglary call. According to the Pilot, Rankin said Denyakin “... charged at him and refused to take his hand out of his pants. He was struck 11 times, according to the autopsy.”

Denyakin was not armed. His family filed a federal civil suit, but a jury sided with the officer.

After that shooting, Rankin posted an image of a lynching on Facebook – and a punk

band’s song title, “Mommy Can I Go Out and Kill Tonight?” Despite an internal police investigation, Rankin remained on the force.

On April 22, Rankin killed again. This time it was a 19-year-old Black youth, William Chapman II.

That same day, Portsmouth police issued a statement that said a police officer had responded to a call about a shoplifter, that there was a struggle and the officer shot the man.

According to the Pilot, “Witnesses also said there was a close-quarters fight between Chapman and the officer.”

An autopsy report obtained by the Pilot revealed that Chapman was shot twice, once in the face and once in the chest – but that there was “no evidence of close-range fire to visual inspection.”

The lesson? It’s that official police statements and “eyewitness” reports don’t necessarily mean that police shootings don’t deserve a closer look.



sacred ground
HISTORICAL
Reclamation
PROJECT

Black History Matters: Reclaim Shockoe Bottom!

Rich developers and their political allies in Richmond, Va. want to build a commercial sports stadium in the city’s Shockoe Bottom neighborhood, once the epicenter of the U.S. domestic trade in enslaved Africans. A local movement has blocked development plans so far, but a national effort is needed to assure reclamation and proper memorialization of this sacred ground. You can help by contacting:

SacredGroundProject.net

Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project of the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality



TALK TO THE EDITOR!

The Defenders’ live, call-in radio show with host PHIL WILAYTO, Editor of The Virginia Defender.

Get the latest updates on the Shockoe Bottom campaign and other important community news.

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cops, courts & prisons



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Richmond Police Chief Alfred Durham reacts strongly to a charge by a community member of police misconduct in the fatal shooting of Keshawn Hargrove. The 20-year-old died Aug. 5 in an alley near West Cary and South Meadow streets.

How did Keshawn Hargrove really die?

By Phil Wilayto

More than two months after the fatal police shooting of a young Black man in Richmond, the city’s media has turned its attention to other things.

But when 20-year-old Keshawn Hargrove died in an alley near Meadow and West Cary streets in the city’s near West End, it was national news.

“Shootout leaves black man dead and officer wounded,” read the headline in the Huffington Post.

“Virginia police kill black man, officer wounded,” reported Reuters, an international news agency.

As of mid-October, the Richmond Police Department had completed its internal investigation of the shooting and sent the results to Richmond Commonwealth’s Attorney Michael N. Herring, who told the Defender he expected his office would complete its review by the end of the month and suggested calling back in a few weeks.

Between 2001 and 2008, more than two dozen people were fatally shot by Richmond police officers. All but two were Black men. A few of the killings resulted in prosecutions and at least one conviction.

Hargrove’s fatal shooting was the first by police “in several years,” Herring said.

Its’s also the first since Police Chief Alfred Durham took command of the department in February, and so it’s a test of how he deals with such situations.

From the beginning, there have been conflicting versions of what happened on that hot August afternoon in the low-income, predominantly Black neighborhood wedged between the largely white, middle-class Fan district and Virginia Commonwealth University

Chief Durham arrived in the neighborhood about two hours after the shooting, after visiting the hospital to see Officer Ryan Bailey, a nine-year police veteran who was hit in the arm during the incident.

Standing behind yellow police tape, Chief Durham vehemently denied claims by some neighborhood residents that his officers had acted improperly.

At that point, no internal investigation had yet begun.

The Associated Press reported that Chief Durham repeated the assertion at a press conference held the following day:

“Durham said 20-year-old Keshawn Hargrove was killed by a single gunshot Wednesday. Officer Ryan Bailey was shot in the arm and wounded.

“Bailey and officer Jacob DeBoard had responded to a report of an armed man,

the chief said, and Hargrove fled when the officers approached him. He said Hargrove refused orders to drop his weapon and opened fire on the officers, who returned fire as they chased the suspect down an alley.

“‘My officers did what they had to do,’” the chief said.

A report on the press conference by Channel 6 (CBS) had a little more detail:

“‘This is not Ferguson, this is not South Charleston,’ [Chief Durham] said. “And I refuse to allow the community to make and paint a picture of our officers that we have a bunch of rogue officers here who are out of control. That is not the case.

“My anger if you will is that to know that folks are accusing my officers, two officers, who were defending themselves, saving their lives, when we use force, it’s not to kill, we use force to eliminate the threat,” Durham said.

Two months later, questions raised by community members immediately after Hargrove’s death had not gone away.

“What the police are saying and what the street and witnesses are saying are two different stories,” Rod Boone, one of Hargrove’s older brothers, told the Defender.

“There was one witness that I spoke with personally,” Boone said, “and she said what she saw, and there were a lot of other witnesses, word of mouth, in the neighborhood and they all have the same story.

“The girl I talked with said Keshawn had his hands up and she asked the police to let her talk with him. She turned to give a girlfriend her bag, heard shots and hit the ground.

“I asked if she would speak up, she said no,” Boone said. “The witnesses had info, but they won’t give it up. It’s between them and God. Everybody’s so, ‘Rest in peace, Keshawn, justice for Keshawn,’ but they won’t speak up.”

Boone said that neither he nor anyone else in his family had been approached by police concerning the shooting.

“The fact that they never reached out to us, never asked us any questions, that’s what makes me think they’re just trying to brush it off like it didn’t happen,” he said.

Then there’s the video.

The Defenders spent a week after the shooting trying to find out exactly what had taken place. One evening we met with some of Hargrove’s family members. Also present was a young man with a video he said he had taken shortly after Hargrove had been shot. He played it for us, several times.

In the video, a man family members identified as Keshawn is seen lying on his back, arms and legs sprawled out, in an area

just off the alley. There are red splotches on his right shoulder and lower left abdomen. About six police officers can be seen in the immediate area.

Keshawn’s body is not moving, but one officer, a white male, approaches the body three separate times and briefly holds one of Keshawn’s wrists. He appears to be checking Keshawn’s pulse.

The video lasts several minutes. No one is seen administering first aid to Hargrove and there is no ambulance seen in the video.

The young man said he was afraid for his life and wanted to sell the video to a media outlet to get money to leave the area. This apparently did not happen, and the young man did not release the video, either to the media or to the family.

These are serious issues: a young woman reportedly says she saw Keshawn with his hands in the air seconds before he was shot. A video allegedly taken shortly after the shooting apparently shows a police officer repeatedly checking to see if Keshawn is alive, but no one is applying first aid.

However, neither the young woman or young man are willing to come forward.

According to police, multiple shots were fired at the scene. The Defender spoke to several people who said they believed Keshawn had been hit multiple times, but none said they had seen the actual shooting.

The Defenders advised the family to arrange for an independent autopsy, so they would not have to rely solely on the office of the Medical Examiner. The Defenders also located a local doctor willing to perform the autopsy.

They also advised the family to visit the Joseph Jenkins Jr. Funeral Home, where Keshawn’s body had been taken after the official autopsy, and ask to see the body themselves.

Rod Boone later said that he and his mother, Charlene Boone, did examine the body. Rod said they saw one bullet hole, in Keshawn’s lower back.

“If that’s what they saw, then that’s your answer,” the doctor told the Defender.

As a result, the family decided not to have the independent autopsy, which would have cost \$3,500.

Apparently, Keshawn was shot once, in the back, which is what the police had reported.

However, that still leaves many questions unanswered, such as: did Keshawn have a gun? If so, was it the same caliber as the bullet that struck Officer Bailey? If he had



Photo courtesy the family of Keshawn Hargrove

Keshawn Hargrove

a gun, was it fired? Did the police smell the gun and did they swab Keshawn’s fingers and send the swabs to the FBI to test for gunshot residue, as is standard in shootings?

If Keshawn did fire at the officers, did he then raise his hands? If he was firing at police as he was running, which would account for his being shot in the back, who fired first?

Did Keshawn immediately die after being shot, or was he alive for some time after? If he was alive, did police administer first aid or call for an ambulance? If not, then why did one officer apparently check Keshawn’s pulse three times as he lay on the ground?

Independently, members of the Richmond Branch NAACP also met with members of Hargrove’s family in the days after the shooting. Members of Richmond CopWatch also were interviewing neighborhood residents, trying to find out what had happened.

During this time, neither the Defenders, the NAACP, CopWatch nor the family made any public accusations about what may or may not have happened on Aug. 5.

“My main thing is, I, my family needs some closure,” Rod Boone said. “There are so many holes in the story, so many question marks in the air, we don’t know if Keshawn was right in this incident or wrong. We just don’t know.

“Whether right or wrong, we just need to know what happened.”

The Defender will be reporting on the Commonwealth’s Attorney’s review of the police investigation of Keshawn Hargrove’s death in its Winter edition, due out in early December.

Doss family still waiting for decision on pardon request for son Jermaine

By Phil Wilayto

It’s been 17 months since the parents of Norfolk native Jermaine Doss filed a request that Gov. Terry McAuliffe grant their son a full pardon for a crime they say he did not commit. As of Oct. 8, there still was no word as to how the governor will decide.

In fact, it’s possible that no one has even yet read the request.

On Sept. 29, this reporter spoke about the pardon request with Secretary of the Commonwealth Levar Stoney, whose office reviews pardon requests. The secretary said he would look into the case and see if was being investigated.

The General Assembly allocates just enough money to employ one part-time attorney to review all pardon requests.

Jermaine Doss was convicted in 2000 of being involved in the murder of Norfolk businessman James Webb.

Sentenced to life plus 38 years, he has always maintained his innocence. The only evidence against him was the testimony of the man who admitted shooting Webb, Nathaniel McGee.

McGee later tried several times to retract

his testimony, saying he was pressured by the authorities into falsely testifying in order to avoid the death penalty.

Jermaine maintains he is innocent and was framed by a crooked cop, Norfolk Detective Robert Glenn Ford – who is now serving a 12.5-year sentence for extorting defendants and then lying about it to the FBI.

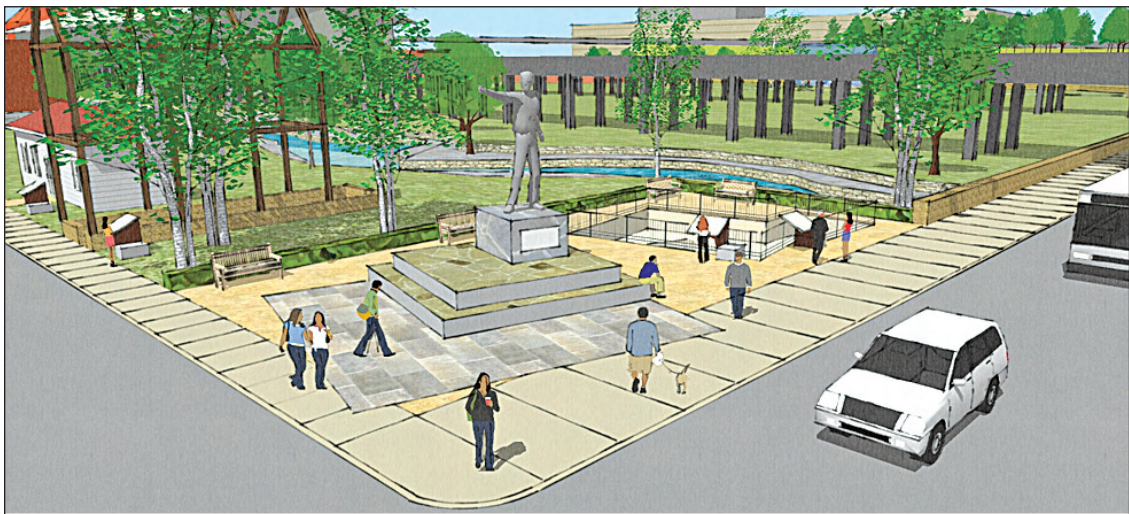
Jermaine has exhausted his legal appeals and his extremely supportive family has run out of money to pay for attorneys. On May 21, 2014, with the help of the Defenders, his parents submitted a request for a full pardon to Gov. Terry McAuliffe.

It usually takes at least a year to get a response.

More than 1,100 people have signed a petition asking the governor to set Doss free. Jermaine’s parents, Willie Mae and Ray Doss, his sister Felicia and many other family members and supporters continue to build support for Jermaine, by speaking out at public events and collecting signatures on the petition.

For a copy of the petition, please contact the Defenders at 804-644-5834 or DefendersFJE@hotmail.com.

The community plan for Shockoe Bottom



An artist's rendition of the proposed Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park, with a recreated Shockoe Creek.



Ana Edwards and allies present the proposal to City Council Sept. 28.

The proposal for a **SHOCKOE BOTTOM MEMORIAL PARK** was the result of a five-month community process and was unanimously adopted at an open, citywide meeting held Aug. 15 at Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church in Richmond's East End.

The main points

Create a 9-acre Memorial Park – large enough to convey a sense of the enormity of the slave trade as practiced in Richmond from the mid-1770s to 1865, during which time more than 100,000 women, children and men were sold into lives of abject misery for the profits of the merchant class. Six of the acres are already reserved for memorialization: the site of **Lumpkin's Jail** and the reclaimed **African Burial Ground**. To these would be added the **two now-empty blocks** between East Broad and East Grace streets, from the CSX railroad tracks to 17th Street. **Extend the Trail of Enslaved Africans** to wind through the park,

with signage describing the various sites associated with the slave trade (Richmond historian Elizabeth Kambourian has identified nearly 100 such sites in this district.) and resistance efforts, large and small.

Establish an Interpretive Center – possibly in the newly renovated Main Street Station train shed overlooking the Memorial Park – to tell the entire story of Shockoe Bottom, from the indigenous peoples who first lived here, to the founding of the city of Richmond to the histories of the Quakers, Masons, the Jewish people, but concentrating on the central issue of the trade in enslaved Africans. That story should begin with the cultures of Africa as they existed before the first European slavers arrived; through the Trans-Atlantic slave trade; the suffering and the resistance; the Civil War and its aftermath; Reconstruction and its overthrow; the establishment of Jim Crow apartheid; Massive Resistance; the Virginia eugenics movement and the Virginia Civil Rights Movement.

Symbolically recreate Shockoe Creek in a way that recalls how Shockoe Bottom looked during the slave trade, acknowledges the environmental role of the creek and James River watershed in Richmond's development, and adds an attractive water feature to the park's green lawns, trees, shrubbery, paths, signage, monuments, and more.

Finally, create a "Design Overlay District," which means some new zoning restrictions that would prevent inappropriate development in this uniquely important historic area. The proposal would **NOT** prevent appropriate economic development, but it would mean an end to the seemingly endless number of proposals to build a baseball stadium here.

How much will it cost? Who will pay for it? Who will be responsible for it?

Richmond City Council has already pledged **\$8 million** for memorializing

Shockoe Bottom. **The Virginia General Assembly** has pledged **\$2 million**, with **\$9 million more** in reimbursement funds if the City is willing to raise money. This is more than enough to purchase the few privately owned lots east of the CSX railroad tracks, remove the asphalt, install sod, shrubbery and trees, extend the Trail of Enslaved Africans and create signage. The Interpretive Center, recreation of Shockoe Creek, statutory and more can be built as the City raises funds, to be reimbursed by the General Assembly. In this way, we can begin with the money available and grow the site as interest increases, both here and around the country.

As for who will be responsible for the Memorial Park, the proposal calls for the creation of an **independent nonprofit organization**, working with a **Community Advisory Committee** made up of advocates with proven records of working for the reclamation and proper memorialization of Shockoe Bottom.

The complete 18-page proposal is posted at: www.sacredgroundproject.net

Q & A with Mayor Jones

The following are questions Virginia Defender Editor Phil Wilayto emailed to Mayor Dwight Jones concerning the mayor's proposal for memorializing the site of Lumpkin's Jail. The questions are followed by the mayor's responses.

How much money has been spent so far on the proposal for Lumpkin's Jail?
No fees have yet to be billed against the recent "Richmond Speaks" project. The cost proposal for the community engagement/conceptual design is [attached].

What was the source of the money?
Source of the funding is the funding assigned for the advancement of Lumpkin's Jail (State and City budgeted funds).

What companies or nonprofits have received money or contracts?
Work is being accomplished under Commonwealth Architect's annual city contract. Commonwealth Architects has not yet invoiced the city for this work.

Are any of these firms Black-owned?
Burt Pinnock is African American as is Joy Bailey Bryant of LORD Cultural Resources.

Will the community be given a chance to vote on the proposal for Lumpkin's Jail?
The process of selecting the appropriate conceptual design (proposal) to best memorialize the site is based on Community Engagement and input.

Our understanding is that your office and the "Slave Trail" Commission have been saying that \$19 million is available for memorialization of the site of Lumpkin's Jail and that it can only be used for that site. Is this your position?
Attached is a slide showing what we have said about the allocation of funds.

Our understanding is that significant memorialization must be carried out at the African Burial Ground or it will revert next year back to state ownership. Is this correct? And if so, what are your plans for memorialization of the African Burial Ground?

That is incorrect. While there are continued improvements that will be pursued for that site, it is our understanding that the process of removing the asphalt and establishing the burial ground space, grounds improvement, commemorative markers, and a new gateway for access are all actions that meet the requirements of memorializing the site.

Our comments

First of all, we appreciate the mayor responding to our questions. We are encouraged by his statement that the existing improvements to the African Burial Ground are sufficient to satisfy the state requirement for this site. We hope the General Assembly agrees with this assessment. We note that the mayor does not say that the community will be allowed to vote on his proposal, as it did on the Defenders' proposal for a Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park.

"The mayor has said we should be building up historical commemoration 'in ways that establish a proper sense of balance and fairness ... to tell a richer and more accurate story of Virginia's history.' An expansive Shockoe Bottom commemoration — not unlike the memorial park and historic overlay district proposed by the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality — would fit neatly into that vision."
Michael Paul Williams
Richmond Times-Dispatch columnist

Finally, the response to our question about Black-owned firms receiving contracts for this project is misleading. Burt Pinnock is the only African-American among 16 principals at **Baskervill** (www.baskervill.com), a Richmond-based design firm that has previously received contracts from the Slave Trail Commission. Pinnock is a talented and sensitive professional and it's appropriate that a Black architect has the opportunity to design a memorial at the Lumpkin's Jail site. But Baskervill is not a Black-owned firm. Similarly, **Lord Cultural Associates** (www.lord.ca), a global company that describes itself as "the world's largest cultural professional practice," isn't Black-owned. Joy Bailey Bryant, who leads the Richmond Speaks discussions promoting the mayor's plan for Lumpkin's Jail, is managing director of Lord's U.S. operations and the only African-American among its 14 executives and directors. (The name "Lord" comes from its co-presidents, Gail Dexter Lord and Barry Lord.) In his responses, Mayor Jones says that work on the Lumpkin's Jail project "... is being accomplished under Commonwealth Architect's annual city contract." **Commonwealth Architects** (www.comarchs.com) is a Richmond-based firm certified as a small business by the Commonwealth of Virginia. Of its eight principals, only one, an assistant principal, is African-American. The fourth company performing work for the mayor's project is the white-owned **James River Institute for Archeology**. So it appears that, of all the companies currently working on the mayor's proposal for Lumpkin's Jail, none are owned by African-Americans.

"It is time for Richmond's leaders — in the public and private sectors — to expressly abandon the idea of a baseball stadium in Shockoe, build on the Slave Trail Commission's work, and throw their support behind a new vision for Shockoe Bottom, like the sacred ground memorial park now being envisioned by the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality."
Elizabeth Kostelny
Preservation Virginia
Rob Nieweg
National Trust for Historic Preservation

The mayor's plan for Lumpkin's Jail



Mayor Jones' plan focuses only on the site of Lumpkin's Jail, wedged between I-95 and the CSX railroad tracks. It does not mention the nearby African Burial Ground or any of the other nearly 100 slave-trade related sites in Shockoe Bottom. (Photos by Phil Wilayto)

Mayor Dwight Jones' proposal for Lumpkin's Jail is essentially taken from the his Revitalize RVA plan, which included building a commercial baseball stadium in historic Shockoe Bottom.

The heart of the proposal is a pavilion, or open structure, that would be built over the site of Lumpkin's Jail, the most notorious of the nearly 100 slave-trade related sites in Shockoe Bottom.

Although the mayor says that no money has yet been paid for work on this project, four companies are in fact working: Commonwealth Architects, Lord Cultural Resources, Baskervill and the James River Institute for Archeology.

According to documents provided by the mayor's office, the total cost of the companies' projected contracts, for the first

phase of work, is nearly \$200,000.

None of the companies are Black-owned. (See "Our comments" on the preceding page.)

To promote the plan, Richmond's "Slave" Trail Commission in September hosted four public meetings, called "Richmond Speaks." At each meeting there was strong community support for expanding memorialization beyond Lumpkin's jail.

It seems clear that whatever final plan emerges will be similar to the one that was part of Revitalize RVA.

According to a story by reporter Graham Moomaw in the Aug. 12 Richmond Times-Dispatch, "Jones said the project likely will resemble what already has been envisioned, but it can change depending on public input."

"We have an idea about the pavilion and what it could look like. We know the Lumpkin's Jail site, we know what that's all about," Jones said. "It can't go too far from that, but we do want public input, and we want to have their feelings about how the history should be approached."

Virtually all those now supporting the Lumpkin's Jail proposal previously supported building a stadium in Shockoe Bottom.

These include "Slave" Trail Commission Chair Delores McQuinn, who spoke in favor of Revitalize RVA as Commission chair, despite the fact that the Commission decided not to take a position.

McQuinn later received more than \$8,000 in campaign contributions from stadium supporters or companies that stood to make money from Revitalize RVA.



After announcing his plans for Lumpkin's Jail, Mayor Jones receives an award from Slave Trail Commission Chair Delores McQuinn, who said it was to recognize his efforts to promote Richmond's Black history. Looking on are Joy Bailey Bryant of Lord Cultural Resources and VUU President Claude Perkins. McQuinn and Dr. Perkins had previously supported the mayor's proposal for a Shockoe Bottom stadium. Lord Cultural Resources expects to receive \$86,000 to promote the mayor's plan for Lumpkin's Jail.

While the mayor's plan for Lumpkin's Jail has much to recommend it, the main criticisms have been that (1) it only addresses the story of Lumpkin's Jail, (2) there is no mention of the African Burial Ground and (3) there is no protection against inappropriate development in the rest of Shockoe Bottom.

For more information, see: www.richmondspeaksaboutlumpkins.org

How much money is really available - and for what?

Staff Report

Richmond Mayor Dwight Jones and state Del. Delores McQuinn have been saying there is \$19 million available from the City and State for memorializing Shockoe Bottom, but it must all be used for a memorial at the site of Lumpkin's Jail.

That is not correct.

Richmond City Council has promised \$8 million, but, according to two members of council, its use is not restricted to the jail site.

"No," 1st District Councilman Jon Baliles told this reporter after being asked if it were true that the City money could only be used for memorializing Lumpkin's Jail.

Baliles gave his answer during a conversation on the sidelines of the first Richmond Speaks meeting held by the mayor to promote his plan for Lumpkin's Jail.

Later in the meeting itself, this reporter asked the same question of Del. McQuinn, who referred it to 7th District Councilwoman

Cynthia Newbille, who is council's representative on the City's "Slave" Trail Commission — and the only commission member whose term has not expired.

Newbille explained that the \$8 million was allocated to be used for memorializing Shockoe Bottom, *including* the site of Lumpkin's Jail.

So, contrary to what Mayor Jones and Del. McQuinn have been saying, there appears to be no reason why the \$8 million in City money couldn't be used to fund a Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park, which would include a memorial on the jail site.

As for the State money, the mayor and McQuinn have been saying that the General Assembly has allocated \$11 million, all of which must be used for the jail site.

But that's not what the legislation authorizing the \$11 million actually says:

"State funding ... shall be allocated only as follows: no more than \$5,000,000 shall be allocated for the planning, design, and construction of the Pavilion at Lumpkin's Jail, no more than \$1,000,000 shall be allocated for improvements to the Richmond Slave Trail, and no more than \$5,000,000 shall be allocated for the planning, design and construction of a slavery museum."

So that's \$1 million for the Trail of Enslaved Africans, \$5 million for the Lumpkin's Jail site and \$5 million for a slavery museum.

Slavery museum? Who's talking about a slavery museum?

Further, there isn't \$11 million in state money just sitting out there to be used.

In order to receive the money, the City must first commit and allocate at least \$5 million toward the Lumpkin's Jail project's total costs AND have raised at least 50 percent of the remainder of the project costs AND have provided and dedicated any "contiguous real

estate" for these purposes.

The City has committed \$5 million, but hasn't — as far as the public is aware — yet raised the minimum 50 percent of remaining project costs and has not appropriated any contiguous real estate for these project purposes.

Further: If the City does fulfill the above requirements, the state will:

- (1) give \$1 million for costs associated with Lumpkin's Jail Pavilion;
- (2) give \$1 million for "Slave Trail" im-

provements (from Manchester to Shockoe); and

(3) reimburse the City up to \$9 million, at a maximum of 25 percent per project.

Got that? Of the \$11 million in state money supposedly available for the Lumpkin's Jail site, \$9 million is for REIMBURSEMENT of money the City must raise and spend.

And remember, there's a cap of \$5 million on how much state money can be spent on the jail site.

So no, there isn't \$19 million available only for the mayor's project.



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Promoters of the mayor's plan for Lumpkin's Jail say it will be the only place in the country where a visitor can stand in an actual slave-trading site and examine artifacts from that period. Above: The Old Slave Mart Museum in Charleston, S.C., which occupies a building once used as a slave market. The museum is owned by the city of Charleston, which also is building a \$70 million International African American Museum that will examine Charleston's central role in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

LORD CULTURAL RESOURCES is proposing a contract to the City for \$86,000 to promote the mayor's plan for Lumpkin's Jail.

The Defenders are volunteering their time to promote the community plan for a Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park.

YOU CAN HELP - by inviting us to make a presentation to your community organization, house of worship, union, civic organization or school.

Just call the Defenders at 804-644-5834 or email DefendersFJE@hotmail.com

Kids above profits

Special to the Defender

The Roanoke Education Association’s “Let’s Put Kids Above Profits,” campaign is gaining support in the city and beyond.

The REA, an affiliate of the Virginia Education Association and National Education Association that represent teachers and support staff, is demanding that Roanoke’s school board vote to keep food services in-house and not privatized.

In February, the board allowed three corporations — Aramark, Chartwells and Sodexo — to submit requests for proposals (RFPs). According to the NEA and other public sector unions such as AFSCME and UE, all three corporations have a decades-long record of opposing unions, attacking worker’s rights, discrimination and low-quality food (nea.org).

At a Sept. 8 Roanoke city School Board meeting, school administration officials reported the status of negotiations with the three companies. The goal of the administration officials is to have a vendor contract voted on at the Dec. 8 board meeting.

Over the past few years, the privatization of bus drivers, teacher substitutes and nurses in Roanoke’s public schools has seen a variety of ongoing problems, such as high turnover, which is negatively affecting children and their parents. A significant number of support staff, such as food service workers, are women and people of color.

In its latest leaflet, the REA describes why it’s opposed to outsourcing:

* The nutritional needs of the city’s children will not be best met by a contractor seeking to cut costs and make profits.

* At a time when our city needs workers with good, family-supporting jobs, the school board is talking about laying off staff and replacing them with even lower-wage, almost entirely part-time workers, with inferior benefits. This weakens our community and local economy.

* The cost-cutting benefits of outsourcing are often overstated: Contractors frequently bid unreasonably low to get the business and then raise fees as soon as they can.

* School divisions often prefer to do business with local firms. Large contractors often have their own suppliers, which doesn’t benefit the local economy.

* After privatization, who would own all the expensive kitchen equipment in our schools?

* Profits made by large companies usually leave the community, too.

Support for the REA’s campaign includes a solidarity resolution passed unanimously in September by the Virginia Western Federation of Labor, an AFL-CIO affiliate. The resolution reads in part: “... [We] go on record opposing the outsourcing of food services in the Roanoke City Schools and that our member unions will lend assistance and solidarity to the Virginia Education Association now fighting to stop this privatization.”

The REA is asking supporters to contact Roanoke City School Board members to tell them to vote NO to the food service privatization. Call 540-853-2381 or email: board-clerk@reps.info. For updates and how to support the REA campaign: facebook.com/roanokekidsaboveprofits.



Sen. Rosalyn Dance, left, and Rev. Rodney Hunter listen to a worker at the Virginia People’s Wage Board describe trying to live in Virginia’s \$7.25 minimum wage.

Fighting for \$15

Inspired by the success of low-wage workers in New York State who recently won a \$15 minimum wage, more than 50 Richmond-area workers and their supporters recently held a Virginia People’s Wage Board hearing.

Gathering Oct. 8 at Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church in Richmond’s East End, workers in the fast-food, home care and child care fields told a panel of judges how working for minimum wage affects their daily lives.

Taking their testimonies were state Sen. Rosalyn Dance, Wesley Memorial pastor Rev. Rodney Hunter and University of Richmond law school professor Ann Hodges.

While various cities have legislated their own higher minimum wages, New York appears to be the first state to mandate a statewide \$15 minimum wage for whole industries.

According to The New York Times, a panel called a Wage Board appointed by Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo recommended that “... the minimum wage be raised for employees of fast-food chain restaurants throughout the state to \$15 an hour over the next few years.

“The panel’s recommendations,” stated the Times, “which are expected to be put into effect by an order of the state’s acting commissioner of labor, represent a major triumph for the advocates who have rallied burger-flippers and fry cooks to demand pay that covers their basic needs.

“They argued that taxpayers were subsidizing the workforces of some multinational corporations, like McDonald’s, that were not paying enough to keep their workers from relying

on food stamps and other welfare benefits.”

Last year the multinational McDonald’s corporation paid its chief executive more than \$7.5 million.

The Richmond hearing was sponsored by Virginia Raise Up, which is planning to participate in a national day of action for a \$15 minimum wage to be held Nov. 10 in cities across the country.

In Richmond, organizers say low-wage workers will stage a strike in the morning, followed by other actions and culminating in a 5 p.m. march to City Hall.

For more information, see “Raise UP” on Facebook.

GRTC Job Action

The Richmond Free Press reported in its Sept. 3-5 edition that a job action by GRTC bus drivers has resulted in “back pay they were due.”

According to the Free Press, “... some operators refused overtime and others called in sick or did not report, forcing GRTC to park buses and slow service.”

GRTC bus drivers have a union, Local 12230 of the Amalgamated Transit Union. A union contract approved by members July 31 was supposed to result in a pay raise of \$1.10 over the contract’s three-year term. When the raise was not immediately implemented, some of the drivers took action.

GRTC management has stated that there would be no reprisals taken against drivers who took part in the work action, according to the Free Press.

AC at the PO

By Phil Wilayto

There’s just one thing I dread about working on the Defender newspaper: going to the post office to mail the bundles and subscriptions.

Ours is the East End office, at 414 N. 25th St. in Richmond’s Church Hill neighborhood. There’s usually just one worker servicing customers and we have a lot of bundles and subs, so it can take 20 minutes or more to get everything mailed. Meanwhile, the line grows longer and longer. People are patient, but there’s a limit.

And on July 31, when I was mailing out the Summer issue, it was really hot.

The post office is usually a refuge from the summer heat, but not this day. The AC was out. Standing at the window while the clerk weighed each bundle, the sweat tricking down my face, I could hear the sighs and groans behind me.

I finally asked the clerk why there wasn’t any air conditioning — not even a fan in the customer area. I could see the sweat was tricking down his face too.

As it turned out, the AC had been out all summer.

I promised the clerk and the other customers I’d look into this: why there was no AC, no fan and not enough clerks assigned to the service window.

Later that morning I called the PO’s Consumer Affairs department and explained the problem to a service representative, who said she’d investigate.

Less than 15 minutes later, she called back. She said she reached the regional office and was told a part was needed for the air conditioning unit.

A few hours later I got a call from the media relations person for the mid-Atlantic region. I again explained the situation and she promised to check it out and get back.

That was a Friday. The following Monday I dropped by the post office. Still no AC and no fan in the customer area.

It took a few more days, but when I went by the post office again, the AC was on — after a few months of some of the hottest summer weather on record.

As for getting more help, the media relations person said a decision had been made that there wasn’t enough traffic at the East End PO to justify more workers.

So if you’re reading this story while standing in line behind me while I’m mailing out the Autumn Defender and the line is getting longer and longer, please remember that I did try. And that we did get the AC back on.

Now if we just have some heat this winter.

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE VIRGINIA DEFENDER

is published quarterly on the first Thursday of the month, starting in March. Information for the Community Calendar must be received by the Friday before the publication date. Please include the name of the event, the event sponsor, contact information, time, date, place and any admission charge. Be sure and call ahead to make sure the information listed is still current. Note: Listing of an event does not necessarily imply an endorsement by this newspaper. To place a display ad with more information, or for events with an admission charge of more than \$10, please contact our advertising department at (804) 644-5834 or e-mail DefendersFJE@hotmail.com.

ONGOING - RICHMOND

TALK TO THE EDITOR – The Defenders’ live, call-in talk radio show with host **PHIL WILAYTO**, Editor of The Virginia Defender. Get the latest updates on the Shockoe Bottom campaign and other important community news. 2-3 pm at WCLM 1450 AM and online at: www.wclmradioonline.com. Call in at (804) 231-7685.

FOOD NOT BOMBS – Sundays at 4 pm. Free vegan meals served in Monroe Park, corner of Main and Belvidere streets. Volunteers welcome. (804) 303-544, a16rva@hotmail.com or www.myspace.com/richmondfnb.

RICHMOND CRUSADE FOR VOTERS – Membership meetings on the third Tuesday of each month. 7 pm. Information: rcfv1956@gmail.com.

RICHMOND BRANCH NAACP MEETING – Membership meetings on the fourth Tuesday of each month. 7 pm, Club 533, 700 N. 3rd St. Information: 804-505-0083.

RICHMOND EVENTS

Thurs., Oct. 15 – SPECIAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE LEGISLATIVE MEETING – Senate Rehabilitation & Social Services. 10 am, House Room D, General Assembly Building, 201 N. 9th St. The prison reform group R.I.H.D. is encouraging the public to attend.

Sun., Oct. 18 – “HEALING THE DIVIDE IN ISRAEL AND PALESTINE” – Dr. Alice Rothchild, Boston physician, human rights advocate and Jewish advocate for peace in Israel and Palestine, will present on her recent and ongoing travels to Gaza. Followed by Q&A. 1-3 pm, Richmond Friends Meeting, 4500 Kensington Ave. Sponsored by the Adult Spiritual Education Committee of Richmond Friends Meeting. Contact: Betsy Brinson - Brinson422@comcast.net.

Sun., Oct. 18 – “VOICES ACROSS THE DIVIDE” – A powerful documentary and oral history project by Dr. Alice Rothchild, followed by a Q&A with the filmmaker. 6-8:30 pm, First Unitarian Universalist Church, 1000 Blanton Ave. Sponsored by Richmonders for Peace in Israel and Palestine, First Unitarian Universalist Church and the Richmond Peace Education Center. Contact: Nancy Wein - RPIP.RVA@gmail.com.

Mon., Oct. 19 – “BROKEN PROMISES, BROKEN DREAMS: STORIES OF JEWISH & PALESTINIAN TRAUMA & RESISTANCE” – Dr. Alice Rothchild, a Jewish physician and author, shares her journey as she deepens her understanding of the Palestinian experience and advocates for human rights. 7-9 pm, VCU Academic Learning Commons, 1000 Floyd Ave., Room 2104. Parking available at West Main St Garage (Main & Cherry). \$3-5. Sponsored by Richmonders for Peace in Israel and Palestine, Religious Studies Program in VCU School of World Studies and the Richmond Peace Education Center (RPEC). Contact: Nancy Wein - RPIP.RVA@gmail.com

Thurs., Oct. 22 – “THEY CLOSED OUR SCHOOLS” – This film documents the efforts of officials in Prince Edward County to

close their public schools rather than integrate them. A 20-minute trailer of the film, which is still in production, followed by a discussion. Part of the Created Equal Film Series. 6-9 pm, Virginia Historical Society, 428 N Boulevard, Richmond, VA 23220. Information: (804) 358-4901 or www.vahistorical.org.

Sun., Nov. 1 – “A CORD OF THREE STRANDS IS NOT EASILY BROKEN” – The Richmond Crusade for Voters, Richmond Branch NAACP and the 26th Masonic District of Virginia cordially invite you to an Evening of Fellowship to honor Dr. Ferguson Reid’s “90 for 90 Request,” with special guest Virginia Secretary of Education Anne Holton. 3-6 pm, Crown Plaza Richmond Downtown. Information: Call Amelia Lightner at 804-279-8816 or email lightneramelia@yahoo.com.

Sat., Nov. 7 – RICHMOND BRANCH NAACP FREEDOM FUNDS AWARD GALA 2015 – See display ad below.

Sat., Nov. 7 – RICHMOND PEACE EDUCATION CENTER ANNUAL AUCTION – Crown Plaza Richmond Hotel, 555 E. Canal St., Richmond. Information and tickets at: www.rpec.org.

Tues., Nov. 10 – NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION TO DEMAND A \$15-AN-HOUR MINIMUM WAGE – In Richmond, a series of actions, including a strike, followed by a 5 pm march to City Hall. Information: See “Raise Up” on Facebook.

Tues., Nov. 10 – RePHRAME’S 8TH ANNUAL COMMUNITY FORUM – 6:30 pm. Location to be announced. On facebook: “Residents of Public Housing in Richmond Against Mass Evictions”

Nov. 26 – RVA’S COMMUNITY THANKSGIVING FEAST – The Greater Richmond Convention Center, 301 North Third Street, Richmond. 9:30 am - Doors open for Guests. 11:00 am to 2:30 pm – Dinner. Free Admission. Free Parking (3rd and Marshall St. Parking Deck only). Information: <http://www.thegivingheart.org/community-thanksgiving-feast>

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Fri., OCT. 16 – 4th MOBILE JUSTICE TOUR & RESTORATION OF RIGHTS ASSISTANCE – “Improving the fairness and effectiveness of Virginia’s Justice System.” 6 p.m., Gethsemane Community Fellowship Baptist Church, 1317 E. Brambleton Ave., Norfolk. Sponsored by Resource Information Help for the Disadvantaged (R.I.H.D.) Information: Lillie (Ms. K) Branch-Kennedy – 804-426-4426 or rihd23075@aol.com.

In Memoriam: Dr. Haskell S. Bingham, Ph.D.

Bingham Family Historian and Genealogist, Great-great-grandson of Gabriel

October 15, 1930, Vicksburg, MS – October 23, 2014, Petersburg, VA

We Love and Miss You!
Dr. Robbie Barnes Bingham,
Pamela, Gail and Jonathan S. X. Bingham

Perhaps fate deemed that Gabriel should die so that his efforts for liberty would not be forgotten and would live on in future generations. And so today, some ten generations later, we have come to this place to unveil a marker not only to commemorate Gabriel, the slave patriot and freedom fighter, but also the many enslaved Africans who died with hope for liberty.

It is both right and proper that we do this, for it represents our recognition of the important role and major contributions made not only by Gabriel, my great, great-grandfather, but also by the many enslaved Africans who contributed to the economy, development, and culture of Virginia, and dare I say AMERICA.

This city of Richmond may take little notice of what we are doing here today, but with this marker it cannot forget what Gabriel did here. He was an ordinary man, a slave, who under extraordinary circumstances, slavery, rose above his normal self and did an extraordinary thing. He ventured his life in endeavoring to obtain the liberty of his African countrymen, and was a willing sacrifice in their cause. This marker, then, will make known to future generations the noble sacrifice he made.

In keeping with their motto, “Death or Liberty”, Gabriel gave his life.

Dr. Bingham’s Speech at the Unveiling of Gabriel’s Marker
Richmond, Virginia Oct 10, 2004

The Richmond Branch NAACP cordially invites you to our annual:

FREEDOM FUND AWARDS GALA 2015

Save the Date
Saturday, November 7, 2015

Richmond Branch NAACP Freedom Fund Committee • Email: rvnaacp.freedomfund@gmail.com
Chair: Monique Randolph 804.647.6972 • Co-Chair: Mary Love 804.248.8827
Richmond Branch NAACP President: Lynetta Thompson 804-982-8072

We are excited about this year’s keynote speaker Reverend Dr. William J. Barber II, pastor of Greenleaf Christian Church in Goldsboro, NC. Rev. Barber is a National NAACP Board Member, National Chair of the Legislative Political Action Committee and President of the North Carolina State Conference NAACP. His profound knowledge, dedication, ongoing fight for Social Justice and speaking Truth to Power makes him an exciting speaker. It is our distinct honor to share this wonderful man of God as he continues to emerge as one of today’s illustrious leaders and profound Civil Rights advocates.

Richmond Branch NAACP Freedom Fund Awards Gala 2015

Date: Saturday, November 7, 2015

Time: Reception 6:00 p.m.
Freedom Fund Dinner at 7:00 p.m.

Where: Second Baptist Church
3300 Broad Rock Richmond, VA 23224

Event: Semi Formal Attire

Event Cost: \$40.00

You may purchase tickets at:
Barky’s Music Store-18 E. Broad Street
or at www.richmondbranchnaacp.com

For more information contact:
Lynetta Thompson, Richmond Branch NAACP President at 804-982-8075 or
Monique Randolph, Freedom Fund Chair
804-647-6972

In our opinion

It’s not the guns - it’s us

As we go to press, the country is still reeling from the news of another terrible domestic massacre, this time at a community college in Roseburg, Oregon, where nine people were shot and killed by a 26-year-old student.

“Somehow, this has become routine,” commented President Obama, who, once again, called for more gun control.

We are not in favor of 12-year-olds running around with Uzis. And people who demonstrate homicidal or suicidal tendencies; who have expressed plans to harm others because of their race, gender, religion or political beliefs; who are threatening their spouses – none of these folks should be able to walk into a gun shop or gun show and buy a lethal weapon. That’s just common sense.

The right wing likes to tell us that “Guns don’t kill people, people kill people.” And that’s true.

But it doesn’t address the deeper question, which is WHY people kill people.

According to a chart published by The Washington Post, “The United States has the highest gun ownership rate in the world and the highest per capita rate of firearm-related murders of all developed countries.”

It’s true. We have more guns per capita than any other country on earth: 88 for every 100 people.

And also the highest number of homicides by guns: 3.2 for every 100,000 people.

But not all countries with lots of guns experience the same domestic carnage.

Of the next nine countries with the highest rates of gun ownership, six have significantly lower rates of gun-related homicides: Switzerland (0.77 per 100,000), Finland (0.45), Serbia (0.46), Cyprus (0.46), Uruguay (2.8) and Sweden (0.41). *

(No data for homicides by gun were listed for the three other countries on the Top Ten list, Yemen and Iraq, countries at war, and Saudi Arabia.)

What this shows is that **there is no clear relationship between the number of guns in a country and the frequency with which people kill people with guns.**

Besides the mass murders, mostly committed by mentally unbalanced white men, there’s the seemingly unending street violence in our poor neighborhoods.

Back in early 2003, when I was living in the Chimborazo neighborhood of Church Hill, this editor had an interesting conversation with a teenage neighbor. There had been a lot of shootings in the area, mostly either domestic violence or what the police were comfortable calling “gang-related” shootings.

I asked my young neighbor a question: “What do you do if you know somebody is out to get you?”

“You get him first,” the kid said, matter-of-factly.

When I tell people about that conversation, they inevitably shake their heads and say something like, “That is just so sad.”

And then I remind them that it’s the same argument the government uses to convince us to go to war.

Young people who live without hope, without jobs, without stable families, with the constant threat of street violence, either random or directed, don’t get their ideas about using guns from hip-hop videos.

They get it from the daily news.

Anyone younger than about 25 has lived in a country at war since the day they were born. Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq again, Libya, Syria – and these are just the open wars. The U.S. also has been involved in numerous other conflicts, in Somalia, Colombia, the Philippines, Ukraine and many other countries.

In fact, we are so used to being at war that we hardly even notice that war is the context of our daily lives.

War is what we do. It’s necessary to defend and expand the Empire, which is what the U.S. is at this stage of its history.

And war feeds the military-industrial complex, which provides fabulous profits, along with one out of every five U.S. jobs.

We worship the military. Not just the warrior, but the institution. We weave it into our daily lives. Military recruiters are welcomed into our schools. Fourteen-year-olds are recruited into Junior ROTC. Cities, counties and states compete to attract and keep military bases, seen as sources of jobs and business contracts.

Remembering Shockoe Bottom

I am a 27-year-old New Afrikan that was born in New York but moved to Richmond, VA, with my mother at a very young age. And as many times as I road my bike through them sacred grounds of Shockoe Bottom, I had no idea that it was RICH with the history of my ancestors.

And it’s wild now that I know, because now I know and understand why I was so drawn to that area. Back then, I figured it was simply because I was attracted to all the different faces and movement amongst the area.

Every day after school or on week-ends, my best friend and I would sneak and ride our bikes from the 1900 block of Raven Street (Mosby Court) to the Shockoe Bottom area and would stay there for hours at a time!! Knowing this only makes me even more curious to what else in Richmond, VA, holds great significance to my ancestors.

I haven’t seen what Shockoe Bottom looks like since July of 2004, the beginning of my incarceration. I’m currently serving the remaining seven years of my 20-year sentence (freedom, justice, and equality, am I right?) However, I was hoping I could aid and assist, upon my release, with our historical and everyday struggles. Because I’ve made a vow to myself that I would get more involved.

Maybe I can write and send some poems, or I can send some quotes from all of our greats and ancestors. So, The Virginia Defender can have a small section for entertainment or quotes for the day.

In closing, I would like to leave a quote for the mayor, Dwight Jones, H. Louis Salamonski and all their “supporters” that comes from a great man:

“History is a light that illuminates the past, and a key that unlocks the door to the future.” — Runoko Rashidi.

Your comrade,

Dwayne Percer
DILWYN, VA

Then there are the police, who have become increasingly militarized themselves, equipped with “surplus” weaponry from the Pentagon. And police violence doesn’t take place in some country overseas, it’s right in our neighborhoods.

Our TV shows, movies and music all glorify violence. Department stores sell guns alongside the pots and pans.

We live in a thoroughly militarized society. From all sides, in every way, we tell people that guns are how you deal with your problems.

When I visted in Iran in 2007 and again in 2010, I was struck by the absence of any glorification of the military, other than billboards honoring soldiers who died in the 8-year war with Iraq. And only child I saw wearing a military T-shirt had one with the words “U.S. Army.”

Small wonder that unbalanced and/or hateful people here feel so comfortable in taking up a gun. Violent rampages grow from the fertile soil of a culture drenched in war and militarism.

The answer to the seemingly endless, brutal, bloody massacres isn’t banning guns. Guns are not the problem, any more than are knives, clubs, axes or baseball bats.

The problem is a society that accepts endless war, endless brutality, endless violence as its norm, along with the cold objectification of the “other.” And those responsible run the political spectrum from the Donald Trumps to the Bernie Sanders.

If we want to end the massacres, we first need to end this country’s addiction to war and violence.

* <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/nation/gun-homicides-ownership/table/>



Letters to the Editor

A duty to educate the younger brothers

My name is Lawrence Stephens and I am currently serving a sentence of three life terms plus 23 years in the Virginia Department of Corrections for robbery.

At the time when I committed my offense I was only 18 years old, I had no prior juvenile or adult record, which made me a first-time offender when I was sentenced in the York County Circuit Court in York County, VA.

There was a pre-sentencing report conducted before my sentencing and my sentencing guideline was 13 years (high, low and medium range). However, I was sentenced outside of the recommended guidelines in my case.

I am now approaching my 14th year of incarceration and it hasn’t been easy, but I have learned that the only way to

bring justice to an unjust situation is to be a better person daily and continue to show others that I am no longer that misguided teenager who committed that awful crime 14 years ago.

Though I am still seeking to receive some form of relief in my sentence, I feel as if I have a duty and an obligation to educate the younger brothers here behind these walls who may not understand how they got here but still seek ways to overcome this trying experience so that together we can become more productive and constructive men and citizens in our homes and communities.

I thank each and every one of you who chose to read my story today, and may God bless you all.

Sincerely,

Lawrence Stephens
VIRGINIA D.O.C.

The Virginia Defender

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We welcome letters, while reserving the right to edit for clarity, length and style.

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Black Love: The Movement for Black Lives Convening in Cleveland, Ohio

By Taylor Janay Manigault

The love movement. Blacktopia. Black on Black love.

The movement for Black Lives convening felt like church. Except I believed every word we preached: Black Lives Matter. Furthermore, Black Trans Lives Matter, and I never heard that in church. It was the community and pervasive feeling of love and family that reminded me of a Sunday sermon.

"I Wish I Knew How it Feels To Be Free: Part One." This was the name of the first convening-wide meeting. Twice a day everyone met in the auditorium of Cleveland State University.

I've never wished for freedom. Because my existence was dependent on the robbery, enslavement and perpetual oppression of my family and ancestors, my freedom is contingently nonexistent. My encompassing feelings of fear and danger are ordinary. With the acceptance of my oppressed reality, and the ignorance of what it was, I did not question my freedom for the majority of my life.

Something radical happened to me at the Movement for Black Lives convening where I felt free, and realized my default feeling is confinement. While walking amongst groups of dancing and rapping, I felt a confidence in my step.

For three days in late July, people who identify as people of African or African American ancestry gathered to heal and grow.

We are living in a historic moment; the Black Liberation front is being (re)built for all Black Lives. This means we are unapologetically loving Blackness in order to



liberate Black Trans folx, Black women, Black differently-abled folks, elder Black people, Black kids — everyone.

Those who are the most severely impacted by the racism embedded into the land of this country have to be at the forefront of movement. That is why #Black Lives Matter was started by three queer Black women (Patriesse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometti) and the convening itself was greatly lead by Black women and trans folx.

I'll never forget when a group of trans and gender nonconforming folks stormed the stage and straight called everyone at the convening out for not really being here for our trans siblings. This happened the night after two transgender women experienced transphobic violence at a club.

But the indignance and frustration felt by our trans fam was about more than the violence they experienced at the club. It was about the fact that no one took the initiative to put up gender-neutral bathroom

Hemp hope

By Kwame Binta

It is not an accident that many people in the Commonwealth of Virginia and the United States do not know much about hemp.

The Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress estimates that this plant has more than 35,000 uses across at least nine industries, from the lining of a BMW electric car to hand lotion to a lightweight concrete substitute called hempcrete. Its fibers are a stronger and lighter substitute for wood. It can be used for paper and clothing. Oil from hemp seeds can be used in food or converted into plastic and biodiesel fuel.

The reason the public does not know all this is because this government's law enforcement agencies have conspired with major petrochemical, lumber, medical, food and media companies to keep the informa-

signs. The name of a trans woman who was recently killed was not mentioned during the previous memorial. Pronouns were rarely asked, and absent from our name tags.

We can do better for our siblings. That's right — we are siblings. Not just brother, sister. It is time to be inclusive of all genders. Several speakers of this group made it clear that if you're not here for Black trans liberation, than you're not here for Black liberation. I was forced to hold myself accountable and really ask myself how I had been there for the trans people in my life. It wasn't enough.

The violence we experience as Black people is exhausting. This convening was refreshingly powerful, once I realized that when we get together, and love each other — it's lit.

"Alright," by Kendrick Lamar off his new album "To Pimp a Butterfly," was the anthem of the weekend, and if we weren't dancing to that we made our own music.

Rapping to this, making a beat off this table, dancing in the grass, shooting photos of our beauty everywhere. Without the energy of love to propel us through this repressive world, we cannot liberate ourselves.

So, when a 14-year-old Black boy was arrested, people from the convening reacted as we usually do to protest: interlocking arms, chanting and doing what we could to prevent the police from leaving with the child in custody.

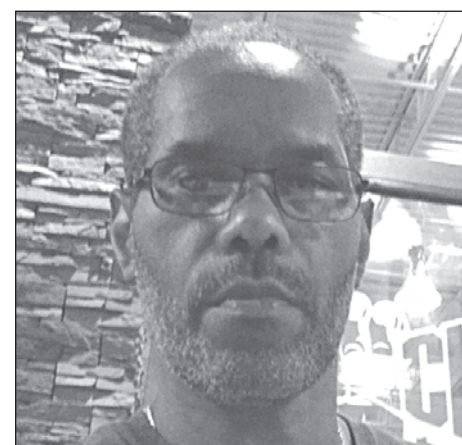
Unfortunately, this interception was met by violence from the police. They pepper-sprayed anyone in their path and were not clear with the mother on the arrest of the boy.

At the end of this encounter, it was our resistance that lead to the release of the boy into the custody of his Mother, as everyone chanted "We love you," and a butterfly flew above us to join the rejoicing.

This was a direct homage to Kendrick, and it was then we really knew we gon' be alright.

This is what community looks like.

Taylor Janay Manigault, a resident of Richmond, is active in the Black Lives Matter movement and is a member of the Virginia Defenders.



tion hidden (emperor wears no clothes).

Many Virginia citizens do not know that SB 955 and HB 1277, which became state law on July 1, 2015, allows the hemp industry to re-emerge as Virginia's premier cash crop.

Democrat Gov. Terry McAuliffe signed this legislation into law, allowing the cultivation of industrial hemp in accordance with state-sponsored research programs. Currently, Virginia State University and Virginia Tech, two public, land-grant research universities, are conducting the studies that are needed before hemp can be available for public production and use.

There was no public signing of this bill. I believe that was because of the many years of mis-information taught to the public about this plant. The governor doesn't even know how important this piece of legislation is to the Commonwealth of Virginia. It appears that the governor and Sen. Rosalyn R. Dance and Del. Joseph R. Yost, who introduced this legislation, do not want their voters to know that they introduced this bill that can provides hundreds of thousands of jobs while cleaning our environment and providing quality food and medicine that will help make the people healthier and wealthier and help sustain our planet.

Most citizens do not know that hemp cultivation was effectively ended in the USA with the passage of the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937. With the Controlled Substances Act of 1970, hemp was classified as a Schedule 1 controlled substance, which classifies the plant as being more dangerous than cocaine, even though hemp is not a narcotic and cannot get a person high.

The ending of hemp prohibition will be a positive, world-changing event, if we do not allow greed to cloud our vision. The passing of the Virginia bills is only the beginning. Because of the many years of this government's ban on the use of this plant, this country has a lot of catching up to do in order to become a more just, healthy and humane society.

The criminal justice system and legislators must take a look at how to help repair the lives of the many who have been negatively affected by the unjust prohibition of this sacred plant.

Kwame Binta, a native of Richmond, is District 3 Commissioner for the UNIA & ACL, East Coast Representative for the November Coalition and a member the Virginia Defenders.



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