

Special 4-page Middle Section:

Shockoe Bottom, Confederate Statues & the Demand for Accountability

*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.*

FREE The Virginia DEFENDER

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Does RVA have a Master Plan to *Push out the poor?*

By Phil Wilayto

Why is it that Richmond's leaders can't seem to solve the city's many problems?

POVERTY

One out of every four Richmonders lives below the poverty line. This includes one out of every three children. And this is the capital city of the eighth richest-state in the country. (1) How is this possible?

SCHOOLS

Only 18 of 44 Richmond public schools gained full state accreditation this year. (2)

Some of this has to do with the fact that many of the schools are in bad shape. At nearly 100-year-old George Mason Elementary, "Teachers, parents, and students have reported falling ceiling tiles, terrible bathrooms, bugs, faulty heat and air conditioning units, gas fumes, drafts and water leaks." (3)

This is in the poverty-stricken East End. And yet new schools are being built in other parts of town.

PUBLIC HOUSING

Ten thousand Richmonders live in subsidized public housing. The housing units are old and often substandard, but it's still better than living on the street. City officials say they want to replace these "concentrations of poverty" with so-called "mixed-income" developments. But they refuse to commit to a policy of "one-to-one replacement," meaning for every low-

income apartment torn down another must be built. So where are the people supposed to go?

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Many low-income people do not own cars and depend on GRTC buses to get to work, do their shopping, visit the doctor and more. Former Mayor Dwight Jones succeeded in moving the city's transfer station off busy Broad Street to in front of the old Public Safety Building. Out of sight, out of mind. It took a public outcry to get some shelters built to protect waiting riders from the elements.

Now the City is sinking millions into the new Pulse bus line that will run along Broad and Main streets between Rockett's Landing and The Shops at Willow Lawn. Great news for shoppers. But rerouting the system has resulted in a reduction of service in poor neighborhoods.

FOOD DESERTS

There's a supermarket war going on in Richmond, with new chains coming into neighborhoods that already have one or more grocery stores. But none of them are coming into the East End. That area is what's called a "food desert." Other than Farm Fresh at 23rd and Main, Community Supermarket on Mechanicsville Turnpike and Chimbo Market on Chimborazo Boulevard, the only food options are the corner stores that sell junk food and beer. (One of these rip-off joints near Chimborazo Ele-

mentary was recently selling a dozen eggs for \$2.49. Food Lion on Janke Road had them for a dollar less, while Aldi on Forest Hill Avenue was charging \$0.48.) No wonder obesity, heart disease and diabetes are taking so many lives.

VIOLENCE

Per capita, Richmond's murder rate is now higher than Chicago's. (4) But the violence mainly happens in the same few neighborhoods, so most of city just ignores it. Do neighborhoods cause murders? Or are murders the result of deep social illnesses?

Why are so many young people in such despair that they risk their lives - or take the lives of others - over petty disputes and turf battles? Is it possible there are no solutions? Or are the approaches that actually work just being ignored by the Powers That Be?

WHERE ARE THEY GOING?

Where are the people going? Richmond used to be a majority-Black city. Today that's no longer the case. One reason is there are more white people moving into the city, but it's also because many low-income Black and Latino/a people are leaving. This is a big reason why poverty is increasing in neighboring Henrico and Chesterfield counties.

Who benefits from this increasing exodus? Is it possible it's actually being encouraged?

See PLAN on Page 2

Property owner says East End post office to reopen soon

Staff Report

The owner of the building that houses Richmond's East End post office says he expects the facility to reopen "before it really gets cold outside."

The branch office at 414 N. 25th St., which has long served a low-income, predominantly African-American neighborhood, closed for repairs on April 10 - with no advance notice to the community. After a local uproar, a Postal Service trailer was parked in front of the building to handle most, but not all, of the station's functions.

Josh Bilder, who in recent years has purchased several properties in that area of Church Hill, bought the privately owned building in 2015. Reached by telephone on Oct. 30, he told the Defender he already has had a lot of work done on the building.

"The roof has been fixed, we painted the interior, replaced a portion of the floor and took out a lot of asbestos. It wasn't in the air, but in about 10,000 square feet of tiles. And we fixed the gutters," which he said had been clogged with debris.

Bilder also said that just that day he had signed a work order to replace some 300 light fixtures. He also plans to "redo the bathrooms and the break room in back."

He said the Postal Service also has been doing repair work in the interior of the building, including replacing the customer counter. He estimated the

See POST OFFICE on Page 2

"The only way we'll get freedom for ourselves is to identify ourselves with every oppressed people in the world." -- Malcolm X

regional & national news

National conference in Richmond demands: ‘Stop the Wars at Home & Abroad!’

Staff Report

The Greater Richmond Convention Center is generally known for hosting big business conferences or expensive galas hosted by well-heeled organizations. But on June 16-18 it was the venue for an international gathering of activists from a very wide range of struggles, both domestic and international.

The “Stop the Wars at Home & Abroad!” conference, sponsored by the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC), drew participants from 29 states, the District of Columbia and 11 countries.

This was the first U.S. national multi-issue antiwar conference to be held after the election of Donald Trump as president and commander-in-chief. It was also the first to be held by UNAC in the South. Previous gatherings took place in Albany, N.Y. (2010), Stratford, Conn. (2012) and Secaucus, N.J. (2015).

There were seven plenary panels, 15 workshops, a Saturday evening rally and a Sunday afternoon march to Richmond’s Shockoe Bottom district, once the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade, to show support for the community-generated proposal for a nine-acre

memorial park.

A major feature of the Richmond conference was the strong presence of Black and other speakers of color, many of whom expressed a desire to join or work more closely with UNAC. The majority of the 60 people with speaking roles were people of color and women, more than 40 percent were Black and nearly 20 percent were youth.

Dividing the conference into panels addressing both domestic and international issues was designed to further move UNAC toward a multi-issue coalition and showed this could be done while keeping antiwar issues front and center. Many of the speakers drew the links between the two areas of struggle.

The “Color Revolutions” workshop, attended by more than 100 people, was especially significant, with speakers from Hungary, Serbia, Russia, Venezuela and Ukraine. Iran was also addressed.

The Defenders played the leading role in organizing the conference, both organizationally and politically.

The entire conference was livestreamed. All sessions can be viewed at: <http://www.unacconference2017.org>

PLAN

(Continued from page 1)

In other words, are the rich and powerful people who really run Richmond purposely allowing conditions in poor communities to deteriorate so badly that people will just give up and move out of the city? Could they really be that callous, that cruel?

It’s not true that poverty, discrimination, unemployment, violence and despair are inevitable. These are problems that can be examined and targeted and solved. A better life is possible.

But the solutions won’t come from the cops, the courts, the jails and prisons. And they won’t come from the politicians or the nonprofits that provide services but never address the real issues.

They will come from the community. So

let us hear your voice.

We’re waiting to hear from you.

To talk, call the Defenders at (804) 644-5834 or email us at DefendersFJE@hotmail.com.

(1) <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/slideshows/the-10-wealthiest-states-in-america?slide=4>

(2) http://www.richmond.com/news/local/education/accreditation-ratings-in-richmond-and-statewide-improve-as-more-schools/article_1c2f7bbf-8b4b-5eee-a337-f8f279f6bf2c.html

(3) <http://wtvr.com/2017/08/22/george-mason-elementary-volunteers-funding-1/>

(4) http://www.richmond.com/opinion/our-opinion/editorial---is-richmond-a-bloodier-city-than-chicago/article_19b21398-4f39-5103-b1da-753b9dda9abb.html

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 for Jobs, Peace & Justice 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



A National Antiwar & Social Justice Conference:

“Stop the Wars at Home & Abroad!”

POST OFFICE (Cont. from page 1)

remaining work might take another three weeks.

Bilder blamed the problems on “50 years of deferred maintenance” by previous owners.

“And dealing with the USPS [United States Postal Service], it just takes a little bit for them to coordinate. I have to get approval for everything prior to doing it,” he said.

The Defender also called the main post office on Brook Road and spoke with Postal Service spokesperson Michelle Martell. Asked when the branch office would reopen, she said she would find out and get back with the information.

That was on Oct. 30. By noon on Nov. 1 there had been no return call.

Back in April, many people suspected the station closing might be permanent. In recent years the hours had been cut and the number of workers was reduced from three to two and then one. In 2015 customers and workers went the entire summer without air conditioning - until a call from the Defender to the regional office resulted in repairs to the AC system within two days.

The abrupt, unannounced closing of the

branch office in April really angered the neighborhood, with a lot of media coverage of customers’ reaction. Virginia Rep. Donald McEachin looked into the situation.

A letter demanding answers was sent to the USPS regional inspector general from longtime local pharmacist Dr. Leonard Edloe; the Rev. Rodney Hunter, pastor of the East End’s Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church; and the Defenders, who have had a post office box at that station since 2002.

John Murden Jr., founder of the locally-focused online publication Church Hill People’s News, said the reopening of the branch office would be good news for the neighborhood.

“It’s a real service to the community,” he said. “People use it to get money orders to pay their bills, mail packages. A lot of older people really rely on it.”

Bilder agreed.

“This was a lifeline for a lot of people,” he said. “It wasn’t my intention to harm anyone. I didn’t realize what a community asset it was for the entire area.”

The only folks who don’t seem to realize that - or care - are the bosses at the United States Postal Service.

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.

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. We all must be free to define our own gender identification. 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.

THE DEFENDERS for Freedom, Justice & Equality

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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

community news



After marching nearly two-and-a-half miles under threatening skies from the Robert E. Lee statue on Monument Avenue, community activists hold a rally in Shockoe Bottom. A highlight of the gathering was when two young children (assisted by adults) tore down a cardboard "statue" of Lee, created by Richmond videographer Jen Lawhorne.

Photo at left by The Virginia Defender. Photo at right by Barry Bless.



Two dozen organizations join together to demand **ACCOUNTABILITY!**

Staff Report

The dark clouds gathering overhead looked threatening. In fact, weather reports were calling for severe thunderstorms.

But that didn't stop more than 80 people from marching from the Lee statue on Monument Avenue nearly two-and-a-half miles to Shockoe Bottom to demand city officials stop talking about solving problems and start acting.

The idea for the Oct. 10 March for Accountability came from activists in Richmond's Black community working on issues such as the sorry physical state of city schools, attacks on public housing and reductions in public transit in low-income communities.

A statement issued by the newly formed Coalition for Accountability explained the reasoning behind the march:

"We all know that Richmond is a city with many serious problems that only seem to get worse over time. One out of every four Richmonders lives in poverty, including one in every three children. Our public school buildings are a disgrace, posing real health and safety dangers to our children.

"Our public housing neighborhoods are being targeted for demolition, with no real plan for affordable replacement housing. Public transit in poor communities is being reduced instead of expanded so workers can travel to where there are jobs. And all these conditions produce the

anger, frustration and despair that leads too many young people to take each others' lives.

"Symbolic of this utter disrespect for the lives of Black people is the extremely weak response by public officials to demands to take down the Confederate statues on Monument Avenue that are no more than blatant symbols of white supremacy.

"The other side of this same coin is the refusal of City government to heed the clear community demand for a nine-acre Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park, and instead going right ahead with its own narrow and expensive plan to memorialize just one of nearly 100 Shockoe Bottom sites associated with the slave trade.

"Enough is enough. We have begged and pleaded, petitioned and rallied, made phone calls, sent emails and packed meetings of City Council. But all we get is talk, talk and more talk. We demand ACCOUNTABILITY!"

The statement explained that the date of Oct. 10 was chosen because it was the 217th anniversary of the day the great slave rebellion leader Gabriel was executed at the town gallows in what today is known as Richmond's African Burial Ground. For the past 14 years Richmonders have marked the day with a public forum on the rebellion and its relevance for addressing the city's current problems.

The march demands were as follows:

Take down the Confederate Statues!
Build Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park!

Fix the Schools!
Expand Public Transit!
Hands off Public Housing!
Fight for \$15!
Hands Off Immigrants!
LGBTQ Rights!
No Pipelines!
Serve the People!

By the day of the march, two dozen organizations had signed on as co-sponsors. (See list at right.) After gathering next to the Lee statue, the marchers set off east on Monument Avenue, through the Virginia Commonwealth University Monroe Park campus, then along Broad Street to City Hall, where they stopped for a few brief talks.

Then it was on to the site of the Devil's Half-Acre (Lumpkin's Jail) in Shockoe Bottom for a rally where all the demands of the march were addressed.

Meanwhile, a public hearing was taking place at the Main Street Station, just a few hundred yards from the rally. The state-sponsored meeting was to solicit public comments on three proposals to bring high-speed rail into the city. One of the proposals would encroach on the African Burial Ground and also take part of the proposed Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park for two parking decks.

Dividing their forces, several members of the Coalition for Accountability attended the high-

speed rail meeting, including

the Rev. Rodney Hunter, pastor of Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church; Ana Edwards, chair of the Defenders' Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project; and Joseph Rogers, a Church Hill resident who supports the memorial park proposal.

Of the 10 public speakers, almost all expressed opposition to any plan that would threaten the burial ground or memorial park.

So what was accomplished?

Building Unity!

Asked to comment on the significance of the march and rally, key organizer Lynetta Thompson said:

"I appreciate having the opportunity to stand front and center with other community activists seeking to speak truth to our City elected officials. What is apparently sad and disheartening about speaking our truth is that our elected officials won't respond willingly. Many of them don't care.

"Our fight must now be taken into the City Council chambers, into the boardrooms and on the General Assembly floor. We must organize, increase our numbers and speak with a unified voice.

"We have the power to demand change when we organize around our issues and genuinely hold these elected officials accountable. Accountability to the People only happens when the People hold elected officials accountable."

March Co-Sponsors

Advocates for Equity in Schools
Antifa Seven Hills (ASH)
Florence Breedlove - Member, RVA Archaeology
Community Unity In Action (CUA)
Democratic Socialists of America - Richmond
Ana Edwards - Chair, Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project
Lillie A. Estes - Community Strategist
First Alliance Consulting Group LLC
First Unitarian Universalist Church of Richmond
No ACP
Pastor James Henry Harris, 2nd Baptist Church West End
Pastor Linda Higgins - St. John's United Church of Christ
Pastor Rodney Hunter - Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church
ICE Out of RVA
Marty Jewell - Former Member, Richmond City Council
Anita Lee - Co-Creator, Richmond Pledge to End Racism Workshops
River City Medic Collective
Scuffletown Anti-Repression Committee
Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) - Richmond
Southerners On New Ground (SONG) - Richmond
Lynetta Thompson - Former President, Richmond Branch NAACP; Member, CUIA
United Parents Against Lead National (UPAL)
Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality
Virginia Workers of Raise Up for \$15



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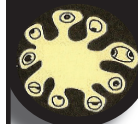
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Sept. 16 Neo-Confederate ‘rally’ in Richmond: Did Stoney & Durham hype the danger?

By Phil Wilayto

How much does it cost to let seven yahoos hold a rally?

When a Tennessee-based group calling themselves the New Confederate States of America (CSA II) announced it would hold a “Protect the General Robert E. Lee Monument Rally” Sept. 16 at the Lee statue on Richmond’s Monument Avenue, city officials were understandably concerned.

The announcement came shortly after the Aug. 12 “Unite the Right” rally in nearby Charlottesville that saw more than 500 modern-day fascists, many of them armed, gather at the foot of that city’s Lee statue.

Before the day was over, anti-racist activist Heather Heyer had been murdered, two state police officers had died in a related helicopter crash and more than 30 people had been injured.

Further, city and state police and elected officials were being heavily criticized for

CSA II members held a press conference at Capitol Square. They videoed the event, but since there were only three of them, one had to hold the cell phone camera.

This was not the Second Coming of the Right Wing.

But that didn’t stop the mayor and police chief from sounding a very big alarm.

On Sept. 14, Stoney and Durham addressed a police-initiated meeting of some 300 people at the First Baptist Church on Monument Avenue.

Stoney urged the residents to avoid the area of Monument Avenue during the rally and protests.

“Black Lives Matter was the only group mentioned by name, though city officials have said their biggest fear is violence by far-left demonstrators who identify as antifa, or anti-fascist,” reported the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

Funny - we always thought being against fascism was a good thing. Isn’t it?

At least one of the local groups that identify as antifa had said it would be out of town that day.

Police Department: \$252,328 for personnel and \$254,041 for equipment and other operating expenses.

“We didn’t have a budget,” Chief Durham was reported as saying. “I got direct orders from the mayor that we were to purchase whatever we need to ensure another Charlottesville



Despite the official fear-mongering, hundreds turned out to protest the fans of the slavery-defending Confederacy.

Photos by Phil Wilayto



More than 500 city, state and county police officers were mobilized for the Sept. 16 “rally.”

failure by law enforcement to intervene when widespread street fighting broke out.

Why the police and National Guard stood down is another story.

(For a Defenders report on Charlottesville, log onto www.DefendersFJE.blogspot.com.)

So Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney and Police Chief Alfred Durham had reason for concern. On the other hand, there were huge differences between Aug. 12 and Sept. 16.

Before Charlottesville, the Internet was exploding with chatter about the impending fascist rally. Many well-known white-supremacist organizations were planning to attend. It was clear this was going to be very big - and dangerous.

But in the days leading up to the Richmond “rally,” the Internet was largely silent. A Facebook event page set up by CSA II attracted a mere 50 people who said they would attend.

The night before the Charlottesville rally, hundreds of torch-bearing fascists marched through the University of Virginia campus and viciously attacked about 30 members and supporters of the Black Lives Matter movement - while campus police stood by and watched.

The day before the Richmond “rally,” three

Also, in written statements, top officials at Virginia Commonwealth University and the University of Richmond urged their student bodies to also avoid the “rally” area.

Note: Just before the Charlottesville “Unite the Right” rally, University of Virginia President Teresa Sullivan urged UVA students to stay away from downtown Charlottesville. Instead, the rally came to campus.

Anyway, Sept. 16 came and went. The three CSA II yahoos were joined by four local supporters. Seven in total.

That was it.

Opposing them were several hundred anti-racists. One effort, by the Richmond Peace Education Center, Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy and First Unitarian Universalist Church of Richmond, held what was billed as a “nonviolent” rally at the new Maggie Walker statue on Broad Street and then a march to the Confederate Gen. J.E.B. Stuart statue on Monument, a block east of the Lee statue.

Other groups, including Democratic Socialists of America, Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ), Raise Up / Fight for \$15 and the Defenders joined the Walker statue rally and then together marched on to the Lee statue.

But there were hundreds of cops, many outfitted in full riot gear. Trucks from the Department of Public Works were parked to create roadblocks along Monument Avenue. (Actually, that was a good idea, given the white-supremacist who used a car to murder Heather Heyer and injure 30 more people.)

There were seven arrests, four of which were of young people wearing Halloween masks.

The cost

So - how much did making sure the yahoos could hold their “rally” cost city and state taxpayers?

At least \$574,412, according to reports in the Richmond Times-Dispatch. And that

didn’t happen here.”

More revealing is Durham’s next statement:

“I did not have the ability to purchase (the equipment) in 2015, 2016, 2017. This situation, that protest, afforded me the opportunity to get the resources that were needed for the department,” Durham said.

So there it is. The mayor and the chief of police hyped up what anyone with access to Google could have figured out was going to be a bust of a “rally.” Then, feeding on the resulting fear, spent a quarter-million dollars on equipment they couldn’t get City Council to authorize.

According to an article in the Richmond Free Press, that equipment included three laser printers, eight high-definition camcorders, specialty jerseys for the SWAT team, a license



Marching to the gathering at the Maggie Walker statue and then on to Lee Circle.

doesn’t include costs incurred by the Virginia State Police - you know, the cops at the protest who covered their name tags with black tape.

Here’s the breakdown, as reported by the RTD: Capitol Police: more than \$4,400. \$3,828.36 for officer overtime and \$650.90 for equipment.

City of Richmond: \$570,012, more than \$506,000 of which was billed by the Richmond

plate reader, 50 gas mask kits, 75 radio earpieces and 75 body cameras.

By the way, the same yahoos now say they’ll be back on Dec. 9 for an even bigger “Protect All the Monuments on Monument Ave. Rally - Round 2.”

Be careful: This time there might be eight of them.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE VIRGINIA DEFENDER

is published quarterly on the first Thursday of the month, starting in January. 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.

Readers: Be sure to 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.

RICHMOND – ONGOING

TALK TO THE EDITOR – 1st Monday of the month. The Defenders' live, call-in talk radio show with hosts **ANA EDWARDS** and **PHIL WILAYTO**, Editorial Board 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.

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

BIRDHOUSE FARMERS MARKET – Every Tuesday until Nov. 22, 3-6:30 pm, 1507 Grayland Ave. A farmer's market in the Randolph neighborhood featuring locally-grown fruits and vegetables, more. Each week a nonprofit hosts a table with information. Vendors accept SNAP EBT (food stamps). Information: birdhousefarmersmarket.org

EVERGREEN CEMETERY CLEANUP – Every Saturday, noon, at Evergreen Cemetery, 4100 E. Richmond Road. An all-ages volunteer cleanup of the historic Black cemetery established in 1897. Approximately 5,000 people are buried there, including Maggie L. Walker and John Mitchell Jr. Wear comfortable shoes. All are welcome.

WMMT'S CALLS FROM HOME – Every Monday, 7-9 pm, at WMMT Hot 88.7 FM. This radio station records messages for prisoners in Appalachian Kentucky and Virginia state prisons from 7-9 pm and then broadcasts the messages from 9-10 pm. Call 888-396-1208 to leave a message. Information: wmmt.org/callsfromhome

OPIATE OVERDOSE LAY RESCUER TRAINING – Training on REVIVE, Virginia's Opioid Overdose and Naloxone Education (ONE) program, held on the second Thursday of the month. Teaches people how to recognize opiate overdoses and respond with naloxone, a medicine that can reverse overdoses. Medical experience is helpful but not required. Lunch is provided. 11 am - 1 pm, SAARA Center for Recovery, 2000 Mecklenburg St. FREE. Information: call 804-762-4445, email johnb@saaracenter.org or visit www.saara.org.

RICHMOND – EVENTS

Thurs., Nov. 2 – **SHOWING OF “BACKPACK FULL OF CASH”** – In the second of their two-part “Protecting Public Education” series, Richmond Teachers for Social Justice, Richmond Education Association and the Richmond City Council of PTAs is screening the documentary film “BACKPACK FULL OF CASH” about the cost of privatizing America's public schools. 6:30 - 9:30 pm, Third Street Bethel AME Church, 614 N. 3rd St. FREE.

Fri., Nov. 3 – **JUVENILE JUSTICE PARADE** – “Join us for the 3rd Annual Juvenile Justice Parade on Friday, November 3 to

honor and celebrate the voices of youth affected by the school-to-prison pipeline.” Gather at 5:30 pm at 900 E. Marshall St., beside the GRTC transfer plaza. Parade will end at Abner Clay Park. Sponsored by Art 180. Information: “Juvenile Justice Parade” on Facebook.

Fri., Nov. 3 – **ADVOCATES FOR RICHMOND YOUTH BENEFIT** – With Chino Amobi, McKinley Dixon, Toxic Moxie & Lotus. 8 pm doors at Strange Matter, 929 W. Grace St. \$8 Suggested Donation. 18+. Information: <https://rampages.us/advocatesforrichmond-youth/>

Sat., Nov. 4 – **EVERGREEN CEMETERY ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOP** – The Enrichmond Foundation is holding a meeting on the reclamation of Evergreen Cemetery, which it recently purchased. The historic East End Black cemetery has been maintained in recent years by community volunteers. 9 am - 12 pm, at Evergreen Cemetery. For directions and to RSVP: goo.gl/JcMtYX.

Tues., Nov. 7 – **GENERAL ELECTION DAY** – Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, House of Delegates and local Constitutional Officers.

Tues., Nov. 7 – **100th ANNIVERSARY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION** – Workers & Oppressed Peoples of the World Unite - You have nothing to lose but your chains!

Mon., Nov. 13 – **STREET LAW FOR TEENS** – It's important for young people to understand their rights. This will be a civics workshop led by University of Richmond law students. For ages 10-18. 4 pm at Richmond Public Library, 1400 Hull St. Information: “Street law for teens: Know your rights”

Tues., Nov. 14 – **SURJ RVA RESEARCH & POLICY MEETING** – The Richmond chapter of Showing Up for Racial Justice will hold a meeting of its Research and Policy Committee. “All who are interested in working to dismantle systemic racism in the RVA area and beyond are welcome to join.” 5:30 - 7 pm, Richmond Public Library Main Branch, 101 E. Franklin St. For more info and to RSVP: goo.gl/ExRqHi.

Wed., Nov. 15 – **ETHICS LESSONS FROM THE FLINT WATER CRISIS** – Siddhartha Roy of Virginia Tech and LeeAnne Walters, Flint resident and activist, will describe their experiences living through the crisis and what transpired to allow this modern tragedy to unfold. 6:30 - 9 pm, Science Museum of Virginia, 2500 W. Broad St., FREE. For more info and to RSVP: goo.gl/jZmi62.

Thurs., Nov. 16 – **SHOWING OF “DISTURBING THE PEACE”** – The Arab American Association of Central Virginia and Richmonders for Peace in Israel and Palestine are cohosting a showing of the documentary film DISTURBING THE PEACE. Dr. Michael Fischbach will lead Q&A after the film. Light refreshments provided. 6 - 8:45 pm, Richmond Public Library Main Branch, 101 E. Franklin St., FREE. For more info and to RSVP: call 804-646-7223 or see goo.gl/aHVku7.

Thurs., Nov. 16 – **VA AIR POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD MEETING** – The state air pollution control board is meeting to discuss Virginia's implementation of carbon pollution standards. The Sierra Club is encouraging environmentalists to come out and show the board they will be held accountable. 9:45 am - 12:45 pm, Virginia State Capitol, 1000 Bank St. ID required to get in the building. To RSVP: goo.gl/LYkEEC.

Fri.-Sun., Nov. 17-19 – 0.....**POCAHONTAS REDEFINED: NATIVE AMERICAN STORYTELLERS FILM FESTIVAL** – This free, three-day film festival was created by leaders from several Virginia tribes to celebrate American Indian cinema. This is its first year. All weekend, the Byrd Theatre, 2908 W. Cary St. FREE. For more information and schedule of films and performances: pocahontasreframed.com.

Sat.-Sun., Nov. 18-19 – **VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE ADVOCACY TRAINING** – The Virginia Civic Engagement Table, SEIU Virginia 512, Virginia Latina Advocacy Network and more are holding a two-day training on the state legislative process and how to advocate at the General Assembly. Lunch will be provided. 9 am - 4:30 pm, VCU's Learning Center, 1000 Floyd Ave. FREE. For more info: elena@engageva.org. To RSVP, goo.gl/xLeCBA.

Mon., Nov. 20 – **TRANSGENDER DAY OF REMEMBRANCE SERVICE** – Save the date for this observance of the 2017 Transgender Day of Remembrance, the annual day to grieve lives lost to anti-transgender violence. TBA, Diversity Richmond, 1400 Sherwood Ave. FREE. For more info as the date draws nearer: diversityrichmond.org.

Thurs., Nov. 30 – **SCREENING OF “DOCUMENTED: A FILM BY AN UNDOCUMENTED AMERICAN”** – As part of the Created Equal Film Series, the Virginia Historical Society is screening Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Jose Antonio Vargas' 2013 film in which he chronicles his childhood journey from the Philippines to the U.S., his role in the fight for immigration reform and his reunion with his mother, whom he hadn't seen in 20 years. 6:30 - 9 pm, Virginia Historical Society, 428 N. Blvd. FREE. To register and for more information: goo.gl/BZFJVJ.

Wed., Dec. 13 – **“THE VIRGINIA ROOTS OF TODAY'S RADICAL RIGHT AND THE CRISIS OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY”** – Historian and author Nancy MacLean of Duke University will give a talk based on her new book, which asserts that the modern far-right traces its ideological roots to the capitalist economist James McGill Buchanan. 7-9 pm, VCU's Cabell Library, 901 Park Ave. FREE. Open to the public, but registration is required: goo.gl/3AToh5.

Wed.-Thurs., Dec. 6-7 – **VIRGINIA STATE WATER CONTROL BOARD MEETING ON THE MOUNTAIN VALLEY PIPELINE** – The Virginia State Water Control Board has set a two-day meeting to consider certifications needed for the construction of the Mountain Valley Pipeline, a proposed 303-mile fracked gas pipeline network. Residents of the affected areas and activists, including Chesapeake Climate Action Network and Appalachian Voices, encourage Virginians to come out and share their concerns about this project that threatens large areas of river systems and groundwater. 9:30 am - 6 pm, Trinity Family Life Center, 3601 Dill Rd. For more information: goo.gl/4yb4AQ.

Sat., Dec. 9 – **“RALLY”?** – The New Confederate States of America (CSA II), which held a “rally” of seven people on Sept. 16 at the Lee statue on Monument Avenue, says it will be back on Dec. 9. Information: <http://www.newcsa.com/events.html>. (Be careful: They might have eight people this time ...)

Sat., Dec. 16 – **2017 ECONOMIC JUSTICE FORUM** – The Virginia Civic Engagement Table, Virginia Latina Advocacy Network, and others are holding an day-long event to discuss economic justice issues, including student loan debt, affordable housing, raising the minimum wage, access to healthcare and wage theft. 10 am - 3 pm, venue TBA. FREE. For more info and to register: goo.gl/RJyuxN.

Fri., Jan. 19 – **THEM AGAIN?** – Rumors have it that Virginia neo-Confederates plan to gather at the Lee statue on Monument Avenue to mark the old boy's birthday. Hmmmmm.

AROUND VIRGINIA

Wed., Nov. 15 – **8TH VIRGINIA IMMIGRANT ADVOCATES SUMMIT** – The Virginia Coalition of Latino Organizations and others will hold their annual summit to bring together statewide immigrant rights advocates, supporters and allies serving the immigrant population in Virginia to discuss and strategize on issues affecting the state's immigrant community. 8:30 am - 5 pm, Faith Lutheran Church, 3313 Arlington Blvd., Arlington VA, \$35. Some scholarships are available. For more info and to register: goo.gl/1ryK6k.

BALTIMORE


Jan. 12-14 – **CONFERENCE ON U.S. FOREIGN MILITARY BASES** – University of Baltimore Learning Commons Town Hall. Organized by: Coalition Against U.S. Foreign Military Bases, “a group of 13 organizations that believe U.S. foreign military bases are the principal instruments of imperial global domination and environmental damage through wars of aggression and occupation, and that the closure of U.S. foreign military bases is one of the first necessary steps toward a just, peaceful and sustainable world.” Information: www.noforeignbases.org (Speakers will include Virginia Defender editor Phil Wilayto.)

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our working lives

Poultry workers fight for a union in Shenandoah Valley

Staff report

Poultry workers in the Harrisonburg area are trying to organize a union. It's not easy.

This October they rallied outside the Cargill Turkey & Cooked Meats plant in Dayton, claiming the company is violating its own Code of Conduct, which states it is committed to "maintaining our employees' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining."

If that's so, the workers asked in a letter delivered to management, why has Cargill contracted with Kulture Consulting, a "labor relations" firm that companies hire to oppose union organizing? Or, as Kulture's website puts it, "During a union organizing campaign, both the employees and their employer find our services of great value because we provide an invaluable service to both — that is providing an education in what unionizing actually means to employees — what it is and what it is not."

The letter was written by "Concerned Citizens of the Shenandoah Valley mobilized by the Committee for Community Solidarity with the Poultry Workers," which has been supporting the unionizing campaign.

The letter also pointed out that "Cargill recognizes and works with a significant number of unionized work forces in North America, rep-



Raise Up & Fight for \$15! — Fast-food, child-care and other low-wage workers from across Virginia raised this demand loud and clear on Labor Day in Richmond. They were up before dawn to demonstrate at this McDonald's restaurant on Hull Street and then march to another Mickey D's in Shockoe Bottom. Along the way, they stopped to rally outside the Main Street Station, located in the heart of what once was the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade. Their purpose was to draw the connection between the no wages paid during slavery and the low wages paid today. As one supporter put it, "It took us 152 years to get to \$7.25!" Among the rally speakers was Defender Ana Edwards, a leader in the campaign for a Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park. Photo by Phil Wilayto

resented by the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), the union involved in the current organizing campaign. ... This raises the question: If Cargill is capable of accepting a unionized workforce in other localities and co-operating with it for the benefit of their employees and the families, then why not here in the Shenandoah Valley?"

Further, the support committee wrote, "The overwhelming majority of our area's poultry workers are recent immigrants and refugees from countries devastated by war and economic crises. They need to be treated in a way that does not exploit their vulnerability, but instead affirms their humanity, including the key human right of

free assembly and collective bargaining."

Poultry production is hard work, and often dangerous. According to the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration, "... hazards include exposure to high noise levels, dangerous equipment, slippery floors, musculoskeletal disorders, and hazardous chemicals (including ammonia that is used as a refrigerant). ... Employees can also be exposed to biological hazards associated with handling live birds or exposures to poultry feces and dusts which can increase their risk for many diseases."

According to the Dayton plant's website, starting pay for production workers ranges from \$11.20 to \$13.30 an hour. After 60 days of em-

ployment - "upon qualification" - workers get a 20-cent raise.

By revenue, Cargill is the largest privately owned company in the United States. According to its website, its net earnings for Fiscal Year 2018 were \$2.84 billion - up a whopping 19 percent from 2016.

The poultry industry in Virginia employs about 17,600 workers and, among other products, produces more than a quarter-billion broiler chickens each year, making the state the 10th largest such producer nationally.

For more information on the poultry workers organizing campaign, see "Justice For Poultry Workers" on Facebook.

RESIST



The United Food and Commercial Workers Local 400 represents 35,000 members working in the retail food, health care, retail department store, food processing, service and other industries in Maryland, Virginia, Washington, D.C., West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee. Learn more at UFCW400.org

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Shockoe Bottom, Confederate Statues & the Demand for Accountability

What's happening with the Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park?

By Ana Edwards

On the surface, not a lot seems to be happening. But under the radar, progress is steadily being made toward the creation of the Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park.

The proposal for the nine-acre park was the end result of a five-month-long community engagement process led by the Defenders' Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project.

The park would include the 3.1-acre African Burial Ground, reclaimed after a long community struggle from its shameful use as a state university parking lot; the 1.7-acre site of the Devil's Half-Acre (Robert Lumpkin's slave jail) that the City is already committed to memorializing; and two city blocks to the east of the CSX railroad tracks where several other slave jails and a number of trader offices and supporting businesses once stood.

Overwhelming community support for the proposal has been expressed at all the public meetings held by the City's Richmond Speaks effort and by the SmithGroupJJR private company hired by the city to shepherd the development of the limited Lumpkin's jail project.

But in Richmond, it's one thing to have public support for a project. It's quite another to get the elected officials to agree to make it happen.

The ongoing campaign to convince Mayor Levar Stoney and Richmond City Council is being led the Sacred Ground Project with support from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and Preservation Virginia and a predominantly African-American advisory group of community activists and subject matter experts.

These are some of the latest developments:

- A "March for Accountability" was called by the Coalition for Accountability and led by Lynetta Thompson, former president of the Richmond Branch NAACP and current member of the Coalition for Unity in Action.

Held on the 14th annual Oct. 10 commemoration of Gabriel's Rebellion and the African Burial Ground, the march began at the Lee monument, moved east through VCU's Monroe Park campus to City Hall and concluded with a rally at the tunnel between the Devil's Half-Acre and the African Burial Ground.

The route was designed to connect the Confederate statues on Monument Avenue to the issues of most concern to the city's embattled Black neighborhoods and public housing communities: schools and education; jobs; public transportation; affordable housing; water - the proposed Virginia pipelines and lead poisoning locally; health care; nutrition; LGBTQ and immigrant rights - issues related to the legacies of slavery and policies crafted during one of the most racist periods in American history: the reassertion of white supremacy through Jim Crow codes and practices.

Meanwhile, the Commonwealth Transportation Board was holding a public hearing the

same evening next door in the Main Street Station's newly renovated Train Shed event space. The meeting was to solicit public input on the recommendation to use both the Staples Mill and Main Street stations for Richmond stops on a proposed high-speed rail system.

Properties along the entire route would be affected, including the southeast corner of the African Burial Ground and the Memorial Park plan for the two blocks east side of the CSX tracks.

While the March for Accountability gathered outside for its rally, three members of the Defenders and others declared their opposition to any disturbance of the Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park footprint, especially of the African Burial Ground.



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Lynetta Thompson, in white shirt, and Ana Edwards, to her right, lead a program June 18 at the African Burial Ground. More than 100 people had marched from the "Stop the Wars at Home & Abroad!" conference. (See story on page 3.)

Second District City Councilwoman Kimberly Gray and former Virginia Commonwealth University President Eugene Trani were among those who spoke for moving the high-speed rail stations to the Boulevard-Scott's Addition neighborhood. One person recommended repurposing the original Broad Street station, now the Science Museum. (See story on page 3.)

- City Council has yet to take a position on the Memorial Park, but an effort is being made by 5th District Councilman Parker Agelasto to help move forward on the previously passed resolution to conduct archaeological research on the Seabrook Tobacco Warehouse (1810-1910) site on East Grace Street between 17th and 18th streets that later served as a city park before becoming another Shockoe Bottom parking lot.

- The controversy over the Jim Crow-era Confederate statues on Monument Avenue triggered 9th District Councilman Michael Jones to introduce a resolution to ask the General Assembly to give council authority to remove monuments on Monument Avenue if it should decide it wanted to do so.

More than 100 people attended the council meeting in which Jones introduce his resolution.

The following week a city attorney announced that the city does not now have the authority to take down the statues.

- Meanwhile, Councilwoman Gray has been working on a resolution for council to endorse the Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park.

- After repeated requests for a meeting, Mayor Stoney finally agreed to sit down with four memorial park advocates: Lynetta Thompson; the Rev. Rodney Hunter, pastor of Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church; and Ana Edwards and Phil Wilayto of the Defenders.

At the meeting, the mayor repeated his previously stated position that he supports a larger footprint than the Devil's Half-Acre's 1.7 acres, but

ted to the city clerk no later than 15 days following a meeting.

All members of the "Slave" Trail Commission have served more than two terms and so would be ineligible for immediate reappointment. And the commission apparently never keeps minutes of its meetings.

- The Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project is in the process establishing a non-profit to continue advocacy work on Shockoe Bottom and develop the memorial park into a digital historical site.

- The City of Richmond is pursuing National Historic Landmark status (NHL) for Lumpkin's jail as part of its current development planning for the site, but it has given no indication that it will include the African Burial Ground. The Sacred Ground Project and its allies are pursuing the designation for both sites as part of the memorial park.

- Old and Historic District (OHD) is technically known as "single resource historic designation." This past April, the Sacred Ground Project submitted a request to the city Commission for Architectural Review (CAR) for this designation to be applied to the parcels which make up the footprint of the Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park: the Devil's Half-Acre, the African Burial Ground and several parcels on the east side of the CSX railroad tracks with significant archaeological potential.

This designation provides regulatory protections that, combined with the historical and archaeological resources narrative that Preservation Virginia commissioned from Commonwealth Architects and James River Archaeology, would be useful tools against inappropriate development. CAR's process, however, has stalled.

- In 2015, City Council unanimously passed a resolution calling for \$50,000 in archaeological research to be done on the Seabrook Warehouse (1810-1910) site behind the Exxon Station on Grace between 17th and 18th streets, thereby expressing its belief in the value of archaeology for identifying cultural resources.

- Development discussions getting attention include the DC2RVA section of the high-speed rail project (20 years down the road), not to mention all of what is already underway in Shockoe Bottom, where the Loving family and developer H. Louis Salomonsky own many parcels, and on the Boulevard, where Salomonsky also owns many parcels. You can check the city's reporting of its economic development activity at <http://www.yesrichmondva.com>.

- The city has issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a firm to conduct the upcoming Richmond300 Master Planning Process in anticipation of the 300th anniversary of the city's founding in 2037.

- The state MLK Memorial Commission is working on plans for 2019, the 400th anniversary of the first Africans landing in Tidewater, and is finalizing the Emancipation Proclamation monument project, to be installed on Brown's Island.

- The Pulse is GRTC's Bus Rapid Transit line which drove the rerouting and reduction in services in poorer parts of town and has a development plan of its own that will change zoning and affect development from Willow Lawn to Rockett's Landing.

Within a few blocks of the line's Main Street Station stop is the site proposed for the Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park.

Ana Edwards chairs the Defenders' Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project. See www.sacredgroundproject.net.



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member is ineligible for immediate reappointment after serving eight consecutive years. The ordinance also requires meeting minutes to be submitted to the city clerk no later than 15 days following a meeting.

Shockoe Bottom, Confederate Statues & the Demand for Accountability

Why the rich & powerful promote Robert E. Lee

Editor's note: Jan. 19, 2007, marked the 200th anniversary of the birth of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee. To mark the occasion, this article was published in the January 2007, edition of The Richmond Defender (now The Virginia Defender).

By Phil Wilayto

Robert Edward Lee – the Virginian who owned and exploited Black people; helped steal half of Mexico during the U.S.-Mexican War; led the attack on abolitionist hero John Brown at Harper's Ferry; deserted the Union Army; took up arms against the country he had sworn to defend in order to preserve the immensely profitable system of chattel slavery; and lost the Civil War by getting his reactionary butt decisively kicked by a force that included 200,000 armed people of African descent – was born on Jan. 19, 1807, in Stratford, Va.

The statue of him on Monument Avenue, owned, maintained and promoted by the state of Virginia, was intended to celebrate the political re-emergence of the state's white oligarchy after the brief period of post-Civil War Black freedom.

2007 marks the 200th anniversary of Lee's birth. And that means that Virginia can expect to see a wide assortment of neo-Confederate yahoos coming out to march around Lee statues, practice the Rebel Yell and wave the Battle Flag of the Army of Northern Virginia, while piously insisting that they are simply celebrating "heritage, not hate."

But what is more disturbing and outrageous is that the state government of Virginia is using our hard-earned tax dollars to promote the myth that Lee was some kind of hero, a saintly role model for all Virginians – including our school children.

This sick official campaign is being promoted by both Democrats and Republicans. It involves elected politicians as well as the appointed heads of government departments.

And it has been proceeding – till now – with little or no opposition.

In this issue of The Richmond Defender we take a look at the real Robert E. Lee. We expose his state-funded promotion. And we examine why the "Lee-as Hero" myth has been – and still is – so useful to the rich and powerful.

And, because this is the Defender, we will do more than just investigate, analyze and report. We are also working with civil rights, anti-war and other progressive forces to oppose this official reactionary, pro-Lee, pro-Confederate, pro-white-supremacist campaign. Stay tuned.

Virginia's government takes on 'coordinating' the Lee celebrations

Virginia's government is not at all embarrassed that one of the state's most famous sons led a war to defend slavery.

Far from it. In fact, the state – headed for the past five years by Democratic governors – has been in the forefront of promoting Lee as a hero.

In 2005, the Virginia General Assembly established a joint subcommittee called the "Lee Memorial Commission of the Commonwealth." The mission, according to a commission press release, was "to plan and coordinate the celebration of Robert E. Lee's 200th birthday."

Co-chaired by Delegate Benjamin L. Cline

and Sen. Emmett W. Hanger Jr., Republicans from the 24th District, this official state commission also includes representatives from the Virginia divisions of the Sons of Confederate Veterans and United Daughters of the Confederacy.

Also represented are the Department of Historic Resources and the Virginia Tourism Corporation, as well as the state Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction is Billy K. Cannaday Jr., who, as head of Chesterfield Public Schools, provoked a community uproar by using the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday as a snow day.

The inclusion of the state's top education official in the Lee commission is particularly disturbing.

According to the commission's press release, the committee is planning educational initiatives which "might" include a "teachers institute at the Museum of the Confederacy" and essay or poster contests.

Plus, "efforts to develop curriculum materials that focus on history, civics, and leadership that could be incorporated into the Standards of Learning"

Studying Lee as "hero" in order to pass the SOL tests – life just gets grimmer and grimmer for Virginia's schoolchildren.

Commission spokeswoman Lisa Wallmeyer told the Defender that the commission had received a grant from the state's tourism department to produce a brochure and website listing the various Lee birthday celebrations around the state.

Wallmeyer said the commission had not received state funding to promote its own events. "Our main role is coordination," she said.

The brochure, available at www.rlee2007.com, doesn't even pretend to be objective:

"Many words have been used to describe Robert E. Lee," the brochure states, "soldier, unifier, educator, leader, gentleman, father, husband, man of faith, honor driven – but none characterize him better than as one of Virginia's finest sons."

Your tax dollars at work.

Tax dollars have also been spent in other ways to promote the "Heroic Lee" myth.

Richmond has literally dozens of buildings, bridges and organizations named for the commander of the Confederate Army, but none are as prominent as the Robert E. Lee Monument (its official name) on Monument Avenue.

That broad boulevard also includes statues

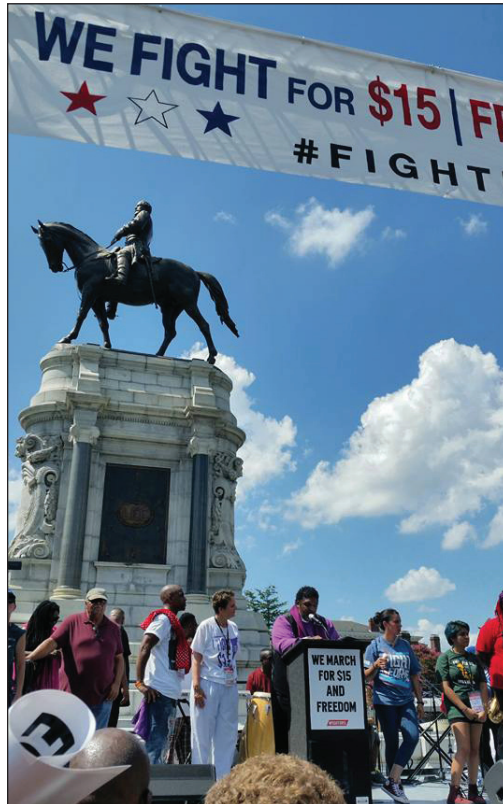


Photo by Phil Wilayto

The Rev. William Barber, president of the North Carolina State Conference NAACP, speaks to more than 5,000 Black, Latino/a and white workers during the 2015 Fight for \$15 rally at the Lee statue. Anti-racist working-class unity is the only way for all of us to get what we need.

of other Confederate figures, such as J.E.B. Stewart, "Stonewall" Jackson and Jefferson Davis, but the Lee statue is the only one actually owned by the state government – specifically, by the Department of General Services.

And the state has been a worthy steward.

Last year, the Department of General Services shelled out some \$450,000 to clean up the statue in preparation for 200th Lee birthday celebrations.

And last fall, the state's Department of Historic Resources added the statue to the official Virginia Landmarks Register, also in preparation for Lee's birthday.

That process included an application from General Services to the National Park Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior. The GS application included this description of the statue's historical significance:

"Placement of the statue was intended to perpetuate the memory of Lee's character as a man of heroic action, as well as to herald the emergence of a New South from the adversity of defeat and Reconstruction."

In other words, the Lee statue on Monument Avenue, owned, maintained and promoted by the state of Virginia, was intended to celebrate the political re-emergence of the state's white oligarchy after the brief period of post-Civil War Black freedom.

Happy birthday?

How the 'Lost Cause' cult serves the rich & powerful

To understand why rich and powerful people still promote the cult of the Confederacy, you have to understand just how useful that mythology has been to them over the years.

The Civil War took a great economic toll on the South. Richmond, an industrial center, seemed on the road to recovery when the country was hit by a great economic downturn, the Panic of 1873. Poor and working people, of course, felt the greatest blows, and began to fight back.

Historian Howard Zinn describes this period in his book "A People's History of the United States."

"The year 1886 became known to contemporaries as 'the year of the great uprising of labor.' From 1881 to 1885, strikes had averaged about 500 each year, involving perhaps 150,000 workers each year. In 1886 there were over

1,400 strikes, involving 500,000 workers."

There was the great railroad strike of 1877 and mass struggles for the eight-hour day. Across New York and New England, women textile workers were walking out of factories, demanding the recognition of their unions. All these developments were responses to an economic system that was bringing great riches to a few but mass misery to many.

Labor rebellions were also affecting the fundamental source of white Southern wealth and power – the super-exploitation of Black workers. In 1887, close to 10,000 Black Southern sugar workers went on strike, demanding a dollar a day instead of the worthless company script they were given as wages.

The great fear of the Southern plantation and factory owners was that Black and white workers might unite and challenge their employers together. That fear was deepened by an event that took place in Richmond.

The Knights of Labor, launched in 1869, was developing as one of the country's most powerful labor organizations – and it was organizing workers regardless of race or gender. By the mid-1880s it had chapters in Richmond.

In 1886, the Knights decided to hold their 10th annual convention here in the "Holy City of the Lost Cause." The results were nearly explosive.

When a Black delegate, Frank J. Ferrell of New York City, was denied lodging in a local hotel, the entire New York Knights delegation moved out to another hotel.

When that same delegation, including Ferrell, attended a public play together, the rest of the audience walked out. The next night an armed mob gathered outside the theater to prevent a repeat performance by the Knights.

In an act of racial solidarity, Ferrell was chosen to introduce the Knight's leader, Grand Master Workman Terence V. Powderly, to the convention. According to Powderly's autobiography, that gesture caused a furor far beyond Richmond:

"The Southern press was much exercised over the condition of affairs, and many unjust editorials were written on statements which were sent out from Richmond by sensational writers."

The potential for solidarity between white and Black workers was deeply threatening to those who depended on racial divisions to stay in power, and no one understood that better than Virginia's property-owning class. After all, this was the ruling class that during the colonial period invented modern chattel slavery by declaring that white indentured servants could gain their freedom, but that Blacks – because they were Black – would remain enslaved.

Richmond had already established itself as the center of pro-Confederate mythology. In 1873, four years before the end of Reconstruction, the newly organized Southern Historical Society moved its headquarters from New Orleans to Richmond – and into rent-free offices in the State Capitol. Hollywood Cemetery, site of the city's first Confederate Memorial, became a shrine. Pro-Confederate associations proliferated.

After Robert E. Lee died in 1870, various memorial associations bickered over which would sponsor the city's ultimate monument, the one that would honor the Patron Saint of the Lost Cause. Finally, the state government stepped in to take charge.

Shockoe Bottom, Confederate Statues & the Demand for Accountability



They never were about ‘history’ — Top left: Hundreds of anti-racist protesters square off against fascists at the so-called “alt-right” rally Aug. 12 in Charlottesville. Top right: A State Police officer in an armed personnel carrier points an automatic weapon at protesters minutes after a white supremacist rammed his car into the crowd, killing Heather Heyer and injuring some 30 others. Bottom left: The Defenders were among scores of organizations that mobilized for the protest. Tributes to Confederate figures were first erected during the violent Jim Crow era and then again in reaction to the modern Civil Rights Movement. Today they are embraced by white-supremacist organizations. They tell no history. They only keep alive a legacy of racist hatred. Richmond City Council has yet to even say it would like to see the city’s statues come down. (Top left photo by Al Long. Others by Phil Wilayto)

The dedication of the Lee statue on Monument Avenue took place on May 29, 1890. Marie Tyler-McGraw describes the scene in her book “At the Falls: Richmond, Virginia, and its People.”

“The celebration that accompanied the placement and unveiling of the statue of Lee on horseback was elaborate, ritualized and well attended. Although donations had come from all over the South, Richmond’s citizens played a central role in the commemorative ceremonies, which featured most of the white citizenry involved in transporting the statue through the streets.

“Infants and toddlers were taken from the nursery to touch the ropes that pulled the statue; one of four ropes was especially for young ladies, and pieces of the rope were kept as souvenirs and passed down in families.”

The cutting and distribution of the rope was also a common ritual after lynchings.

A 1996 account in The Virginian-Pilot adds that “Confederate Gen. Joseph E. Johnston unveiled the statue while an estimated 100,000 spectators gave vent to their feelings with Rebel Yells, punctuated at intervals with the booming of cannon.”

It seems safe to assume that the city’s Black community viewed this display as a hostile act, intended to declare that whites were back in charge — or least rich whites, strongly supported by many white workers.

Writing in The Richmond Planet, editor John Mitchell Jr. declared that the Confederate flags and yells “told in no uncertain tones that they still cling to theories which were presumed

to be buried for all eternity.” Instead, he wrote, the ceremonies “handed a legacy of treason and blood to the future.”

Commenting on the project’s male committee members, Mitchell added that “Most of them were at a table, either on top or under it, when the war was going on.”

So the myth-makers accomplished their goal — for a time. White workers were waving Confederate flags instead of union picket signs. And whenever the specter of working-class unity threatened to re-emerge, as during the Great Depression, the icons of the Confederacy could be exhumed and paraded again — backed up, when necessary, by the threat of racist violence.

The result? Today the South is the least unionized region of the country. White workers may have the corner on the best jobs, but they are paid substantially less than their counterparts in the rest of the country.

Today, 117 years later, working people are again facing hard times. The country is at war, wages are stagnant, the housing market is tanking. But, once again, organized labor is beginning to show signs of life.

So it seems far more than a coincidence that the rich and powerful have chosen this time to try and reinvigorate the myth of Lee-as-Hero. 2007 will be a year of ceremonies, parades, meetings and rallies honoring Lee and designed to persuade white workers that their loyalty should be to their race, not to their own multiracial class.

Hopefully, this issue of The Richmond Defender will help persuade them otherwise.

On July 8, about 30 members of a Pelham, N.C.-based KKK group arrived in Charlottesville to rally in support of the city’s Lee statue. Protected by more than 100 police officers, the fascists were met by more than 2,000 antiracist protesters.

It ain’t just Monument Avenue

After the 2015 murder of nine Black churchgoers by a white supremacist in Charleston, S.C., the Southern Poverty Law Center made a list of “Confederate place names and other symbols in public places, both in the South and across the nation.”

While stating the list was “far from comprehensive,” the SPLC came up with a total of 1,503, including 223 “publicly supported spaces” in Virginia “dedicated to the Confederacy.” The total “does not include approximately 2,570 Civil War battlefields, markers, plaques, cemeteries and similar symbols that, for the most part, merely reflect historical events.”

Culled from that list and several others, these are just some of the tributes to Confederate figures in Richmond: Note when the statues were erected: almost all went up during the worst years of the Jim Crow era.

STATUES

Gen. “Stonewall” Jackson
Capitol Square (1875)

Gen. Robert E. Lee
Monument & Allen (1890)

Gen. William Carter Wickham
Monroe Park (1891)

Gen. A.P. Hill
Laburnum & Hermitage (1892)

Richmond Howitzers
Harrison St., Park & Grove avenues
(1892)

Confederate Soldiers & Sailors Monument
Libby Hill (1894)

Gen. William “Extra Billy” Smith
Capitol Square (1906)

Pres. Jefferson Davis
Monument & Davis (1907)

Gen. J.E.B. Stuart
Monument & Lombardy (1907)

Gen. “Stonewall” Jackson
Monument & Boulevard (1919)

Admiral Matthew Fontaine Maury
Monument & Belmont (1929)

Gen. Fitzhugh Lee
Monroe Park (1955)

STREETS & HIGHWAYS

Confederate Avenue — Maury Street
Jefferson Davis Highway
Semmes Avenue — Mosby Street
Stonewall Avenue — Davis Avenue
Stuart Circle

OTHER

Robert E. Lee Memorial Bridge
When the City purchased the original structure in 1933, it was called the James River Bridge. The City later renamed it for Lee. When the present reconstructed bridge was completed in 1989, the City kept the Lee name.

J.E.B. Stuart Elementary School
District 3; opened in 1922

Stonewall Jackson Professional Ctr
Shockoe Bottom. Formerly the Stonewall Jackson School, so named in 1909.

Shockoe Bottom, Confederate Statues & the Demand for Accountability

The Significance of Shockoe Bottom

Editor's Note: This article first appeared in the Spring 2015 issue of The Virginia Defender under the title "The Significance of Shockoe Bottom - and why it's the wrong place for a baseball stadium." It has since been referenced in scores of academic papers.

by Ana Edwards & Phil Wilayto

Most people in Richmond know that Virginia was long associated with slavery. Few, however, are aware of the central role the capital city played in that "peculiar institution."

In the early days of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, African men, women and children who survived the horrors of the Middle Passage were brought by ship up the James River, unloaded at Manchester Docks and forced to walk to the slave jails of Shockoe Bottom.

This is the origin of the Richmond Slave Trail, also referred to as the Trail of Enslaved Africans. Richmond's role in this trade actually was relatively minor compared to other areas, particularly the port city of Charleston, South Carolina. Other cities had their periods as leading entry ports, including Boston and New York.

But Shockoe Bottom later took on a much larger role: rather than receiving human cargo from overseas, it functioned increasingly as the point of departure for enslaved Africans being sold from Virginia to plantations in the Deep South.

One big reason for the change was the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804. This was the world's first successful slave insurrection and it frightened the U.S. political establishment to its core. Political leaders were all for slavery, but fearful of the growing numbers of Black people in the country relative to the white population.

The result was that in 1807 Congress banned the importation of Africans, with the ban taking effect the following year. (Virginia itself had banned importation in 1778.)

At the same time, three other things were happening. The world market for machine-made linen was expanding, driving up the value of cotton. In 1793, Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin, which greatly facilitated the harvesting of cotton. And with Napoleon abandoning his dreams of a New World empire after being driven from Haiti, France in 1803 sold the vast territory of Louisiana to the U.S. for a song.

So at the same time that the importation of captured Africans became illegal, the demand for slave labor in the Deep South had greatly increased as new cotton plantations were established. This led many plantation owners in Virginia and Maryland, where years of cotton growing had exhausted the soil, to realize there was more money to be made in selling human beings than in growing cotton. And as the demand rose, supply had to rise to meet it.

Virginia became what was known as a "breeder state" — human beings were literally grown as a cash crop. One successful entrepreneur bragged that his plantations had produced 6,000 children for sale.

And so the great trading center of Richmond came into its own. By the time the Civil

War broke out in 1861, the downtown area known as Shockoe Bottom was the largest and most important slave-trading district in the United States north of New Orleans. In the three decades before the end of the Civil War in 1865, between 300,000 and 350,000 people of African descent were sold out of Virginia, most of them passing through the auction houses of Shockoe Bottom. In the decade from 1830 to 1840 alone, it is estimated that between 10,000 and 11,000 people were sold each year from Richmond and transported by ship, railroad or by foot, fastened together in "coffles," to the sweltering fields of their new owners.

In the process, the district bounded by Main, Marshall, 14th and 19th streets became one of the great wealth-producing areas of the South. And it wasn't only slave traders who plied their trade there. An enterprise this large required many skills.

The heart of the business, of course, was made up of the traders themselves, some of them formal corporations, some freelance individuals. Many of these had their offices and homes north and south of Broad Street between 17th and 18th streets.

But slaves also had to be held somewhere secure. Lumpkin's Jail, the largest of the slave-holding businesses, was located just west and north of the present Main Street Station. (This area, known as the "Devil's Half Acre," later housed the origins of Virginia Union University.) Omohundro's Jail sat at the southeast corner of what is now 17th and East Broad streets. William Goodwin's jail, at the corner of 17th and East Grace streets, for a night held Solomon Northup, author of the book "Twelve Years a Slave," now an Oscar-winning movie.

Other jails were scattered around the district, often attached to the traders' offices. Shockoe Bottom held some 40-50 auction houses, most of them along 15th Street, known at the time as Wall Street. Other auctions were held in places like the Exchange, St. Charles and City hotels, the Metropolitan and Odd Fellows' halls and Bell Tavern, located a block or so west of 15th. In addition, commodity brokers, who sold anything, including people, had their offices along East Cary Street from west of 15th to about 19th streets. The town whipping post likely stood in what is now the 17th Street Farmer's Market.

For those who didn't survive the Passage, or who died from their labors in the city, there was the municipal cemetery just north of what is now East Broad Street between 15th and 16th streets. In the center of that unhappy place was the town gallows, where the great slave rebellion leader Gabriel was executed on Oct. 10, 1800. Abandoned around 1816, the site was variously used for the city jail and the dog pound. In the early 1970s it became a commercial parking lot, used by students and faculty at the VCU Health Center. After a decade-long community struggle, what is now known as the African Burial Ground was reclaimed from its latest owner, Virginia Commonwealth University, a state institution.

Then there were the offices of the many businesses that serviced the slave trade: law

firms, insurance companies and the shipping and railroad lines. One of those railroads developed into the present-day CSX Corporation. To help attract the trade of the slave dealers, it offered free transportation for children.

There were blacksmith shops and dry good stores, including the original Thalhimer's one-room establishment. There were the clothing houses to make sure human beings waiting to be sold were properly dressed for viewing.

And there were the newspapers. The media wasn't located in Shockoe Bottom itself, but the direct predecessors of today's Richmond Times-Dispatch contributed by announcing the auctions, complete with the number, ages and genders of the "products" to be sold. They also assisted the slave owners by publishing advertisements for runaway slaves.

In this period, selling people was the most profitable trade in Virginia, and in one way or another most of the city's merchants and professionals found ways to take part. For example, famed attorney Patrick Henry did legal work for Thomas Prosser, who owned Gabriel.

The trade in slaves and the profits from slave labor built the fortunes that allowed a privileged few to rise to the highest political offices in the country and later assume the political leadership of what was to become the capital of the Confederacy — the political expression of the rule of the slaveholders and their merchant allies.

But in addition to the suffering and humiliation that Shockoe Bottom represents, there is also a story of incredible courage. From Gabriel's Rebellion of 1800 to the successful mutiny on the slave ship Creole in 1841 to the thousands of instances of individual defiance, this tradition of continuous resistance to injustice and brutality is a tribute to the deep resilience of the human spirit.

And there is another reason why present-day Shockoe Bottom is so ill-suited for a stadium. In many ways it was the crucible where the present-day African-American community was forged.

As stated above, in the 30 years before 1865 around a third of a million people were sold from Virginia, most of them out of Shockoe Bottom. By 1865 there were fewer than 4.5 million Black people in the entire country. That means that, all across the United States, as well as in Canada and Mexico, most African-Americans have some ancestors who passed through the auction houses and slave jails of Shockoe Bottom.

The slave prison on Goree Island off the coast of Senegal in West Africa is recognized as a sacred place for African-Americans. It is the bit of land where many of their ancestors were held before their final journey from the Motherland. In a similar way, Shockoe Bottom is that bit of land where many of the ancestors were held before their forced journey South to lives of desperate servitude.

This is why Shockoe Bottom has significance far beyond Virginia. There may be no place in the United States that hold more meaning for Black Americans. Just as those of European descent can travel to the Statue of Liberty to see where their ancestors first

stepped ashore in the New World, so Americans of African descent should be able to travel to Richmond to see where their ancestors were forced to leave behind the Old World.

Because of all this, this small piece of land does not belong to Richmonders alone. It belongs to the whole country and especially to all those people whose ancestors once stood there, bound and chained, forced to watch while their mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers and even their own children were sold away to lives of torment.

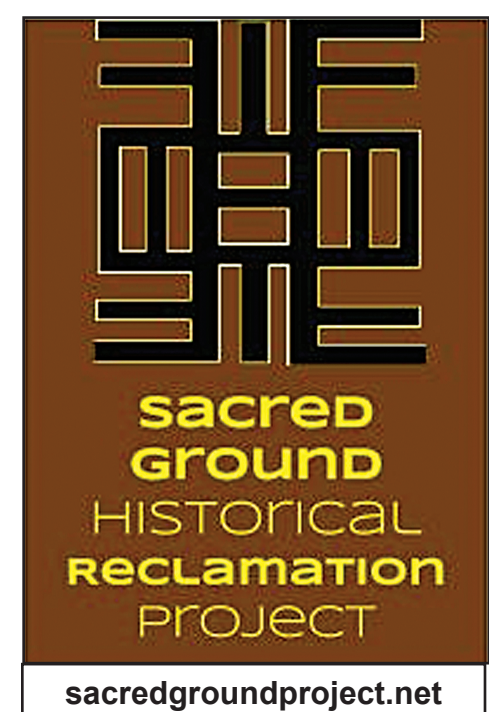
Richmond's Shockoe Bottom has the potential to become an educational center of international significance. Properly preserved, this small area that once held such cold, commercial brutality could become a life-affirming place of study, reflection and meditation.

Like the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., it could become a place where people of all backgrounds gather and resolve to never again allow such inhuman cruelty. It could become a place of understanding, of healing, of reconciliation born of a country finally facing the reality of its origins, finally resolving to make right what has been so wrong for so long.

And yet this is the area that Richmond Mayor Dwight Jones and developers like the multi-millionaire H. Louis Salomonski (who famously went to prison in 2003 for bribing a member of City Council) and the owners of the Richmond Flying Squirrels AA baseball team along with their supporters among Richmond's present-day merchant class have now targeted for a baseball stadium.

Shockoe Bottom is exactly the wrong place for this commercial project. We do not have the right to allow that kind of desecration to compound all the wrongs already committed there.

What was once a place of horror and sorrow must be restored materially and spiritually, so that it can play its rightful role as a reminder of what once was, and what can never be allowed to be again.



cops, courts & prisons

Va. prisoners & allies organize for Justice

Staff Report

Virginia prisoners, their family members and supporters have started two new organizations to try and promote justice in the state's prison system.

VAPAC

Based in Clintwood, the **Virginia Prisons Accountability Committee** is trying to harness the potential power of what it estimates are more than half-a-million Virginians with family members or friends in the system. The goal is to promote accountability and transparency in the Virginia Department of Corrections.

"VAPAC was born from the 'deficiency of action' shown for many years by DOC officials," VAPAC co-founder Dee Thorpe told the Defender. "Or better said, 'all talk and no action.'"

The group's website states it was organized "to ensure that the Virginia Department of Corrections [VADOC] complies with Virginia laws and Prison officials and guards follow VADOC policy and procedures."

Ms. Thorpe's husband and VAPAC co-founder, William Thorpe, has been incarcerated in the Virginia prison system for more than 30 years, with most of that time spent in solitary confinement. He has been held at the state's notorious Red Onion supermax prison in far-western Wise County since that institution opened in 1998.

Directing her comments to our readers, Ms. Thorpe said, "Please join us in our struggle, our fight against a corrupt system. Help us to make them accountable."

For more information or to get involved:

Virginia Prisons Accountability Committee
P.O. Box 213, Clintwood, VA 24228
Website: vapac.blogspot.com
Email: vapaccommittee@gmail.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/vapaccommittee/
Twitter: @vapaccommittee

that, since McGee said he had lied once in court, his testimony was no longer credible.

It was a Catch-22: McGee's testimony was credible enough to send an innocent man to prison, but not enough to free him.

Jermaine has always maintained that he was set up by a crooked cop after refusing to pay a large bribe. The officer in question, former Norfolk Det. Robert Glenn Ford, was sentenced in 2011 to serve 12 ½ years in prison for taking money from criminals in exchange for getting them favorable treatment in courts and then lying about it to the FBI.

VAPOC

Also recently launched is **Virginia Prisoners of Conscience**, or VAPOC.

Adopting as its motto "Mass incarceration Affects Us All," VAPOC states that its mission is "To end Mass Incarceration in Virginia by promoting awareness among the incarcerated and those in society by enlightening them in the fields of prison reform, law, politics, community rebuilding/reentry, thereby motivating them to become more involved in the struggle for freedom, justice, and equality."

VAPOC is being supported by the Blacksburg Coalition for Justice, a longtime community alliance whose website now hosts links to the new prisoner organization, stating:

"We must look in our communities and campuses to see the invisible hands that connect us - from the prison made furniture at VT [Virginia Tech], to reintegrating prisoners back into our community in just and responsible ways.

"Also, Virginia schools refer more students to law enforcement than other states, and that, nationally, schools refer black and special-needs kids to cops and courts disproportionately, at three times the national rate.

"The youth to prison pipeline starts here. We have state codes that include life without parole and our state's 21 Day Rule, whereas an accuser can be charged with perjury and be free but the accused can't get out of prison because the rule prohibits trial judges from reviewing newly discovered evidence if it is presented more than three weeks after sentencing."

Blog entries and audio posts produced by VAPOC members held in prisons throughout Virginia can be found at:

<http://coalitionforjustice.wixsite.com/blacksburg>.

Ford was the officer who arrested McGee after Webb's murder.

He also was the lead investigator in the case of the Norfolk Four, sailors convicted in 1999 for rape and murder. Last year a federal judge ruled that the four men were actually innocent.

Their convictions were largely based on confessions they say were coerced with threats of receiving the death penalty if they didn't plead guilty.

The Innocence Project got involved in that case and is now investigating Doss'.

The Defenders have been supporting the Doss family for many years. In May of 2013 the organization helped submit a formal request for a pardon from then-Gov. Bob McDonnell. The request was resubmitted after Terry McAuliffe was sworn in as Virginia's governor in January 2014.

To date, there has never been a response.

In response to a request from a reporter for an update on the Doss investigation, Eily Raman, screening director for the Mid-Atlantic Innocence Project stated by email that "there's nothing we can say publicly right now."

New DOC rules: Fascist policies disguised as 'crisis intervention'

By Askari Danso

In an attempt to slow the Opioid Epidemic's reach, the Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) has implemented new procedures to the Mail and Visitation policies. Now when you all send us Virginia prisoners a letter, picture, card, etc., the mailroom must photocopy the contents and then shred the original. We no longer receive the the original contents of anything except legal mail.



Askari Danso

As for the visitation, prisoners are now forced to strip prior to the visit and put on state-issued boxers, socks, a jumpsuit that zips up from the back without a T-shirt and orange crocs. Inside the visiting room, all food items except candy bars have been removed. If prisoners want to use the restroom, we must be escorted to a bathroom outside the visitation room and strip again when we return. Once the visit ends, we are forced to strip again.

Marie Vargo from Corrections Operations this past May acknowledged that these new procedures are not evidence-based and that VADOC was tracking the results and would have data in a few months.

In 2016 from Jan. 6 to late June, visitors made 22 attempts to smuggle in drugs during visitation, compared with four attempts from July 1 to Dec. 31. There have been nine deaths due to overdoses in the VADOC since 2015.

There are approximately 38,000 prisoners in the 47 prisons in the VADOC. Each prison hosts hundreds of visits and visitors every weekend, amounting to several hundred thousand visits a year - and yet the VADOC is taking these extreme measures for 26 attempts to smuggle drugs. Why?

The fact is, there are a few reasons for these excessive measures. One is the goal to exploit the funding being doled out by governments to fight the "Opioid Crisis." A second is to reduce the liability of VADOC for injuries or deaths suffered as a result of drug overdoses. A third is to reduce the amount of contact visitation to increase the use of for-profit video visitation.

Fourth, and lastly, the state is just naturally becoming more fascist. As Corporations control more prison services and the Prison Industrial Complex produces a billion dollars annually, the state has a greater desire to operate much more efficiently ... including with security. Security costs are appropriated from state budgets and state budgets are shrinking. Therefore the prison needs to restrict prisoner activity that could lead to organized resistance.

Follow us on Facebook at "END MASS INCARCERATION IN VIRGINIA."

Get involved!



Jermaine Doss, left, with his parents, Willie Mae and Ray Doss, at Suffolk II.

Update: Jermaine Doss

By Phil Wilayto

On Sunday, Oct. 29, Ray and Willie Mae Doss drove the 70 miles from their home in Norfolk to the Suffolk II State Prison in Waverly. It's a trip they have made many times over the years.

Their son Jermaine was 25 years old when he was sent to prison. In January he'll be 45, serving a life-plus-34-year sentence for a crime the Defender firmly believes he did not commit.

According to a 2006 story in the Virginian Pilot, "Jermaine S. Doss was convicted of hiring a janitor to kill a man in a drug dispute. The victim, James M. Webb, was shot execution-style in his Larchmont home. The triggerman, Nathaniel McGee, testified that Doss - his boss at a local hair salon - had hired him to commit the murder. Doss was sentenced to life in prison, but he never stopped claiming that he was innocent."

He has good reasons for his claim.

The only evidence against him was McGee's testimony. McGee refused to testify at Jermaine's first trial, so the prosecution had to drop the charge of murder-for-hire. McGee's testimony was all they had.

Then McGee went to trial and was convicted of murder, but not yet sentenced. That's when he said he was told that unless he testified against Doss he would be facing the death penalty.

Doss was brought back to trial and this time McGee stated that his former boss was behind the murder.

Since then, McGee has repeatedly stated that he lied in court to avoid the possibility of a death sentence. He stated this in a letter to Doss, in a sworn affidavit taken by one of Doss's many attorneys and in court during one of Doss's appeal hearings.

It didn't matter. The appeal judge said

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In our opinion

Happy Anniversary!

Before I moved to Richmond in 2000, I lived for seven years in Milwaukee. An interesting town. Cold winters, but the place had stories.

I knew a man there named Frank Zeidler, a very revered former mayor with a reputation for honesty and knowing how to run a city.

Frank was also the last of the big-city Socialist Party mayors, of which Brew City had several. Members of the competing Communist Party called them “sewer socialists” - not because they frequented the underground, but because they were known for concentrating on efficient city management.

Wisconsin is one of the most German of the 50 states and this had a big influence on its politics. German workers who immigrated to this country after the mostly failed 1848 revolutions in Europe were strongly influenced by socialist ideas. In Milwaukee these skilled and semi-skilled workers were the political base for the SP. They were one reason Milwaukee became such a strong union town.

The downside - and it was a very big downside - was that these well-paid white workers had a big stake in keeping a corner on the good skilled jobs in town. No Blacks or Mexicans need apply. This in turn led to Milwaukee becoming one of the most hypersegregated cities in the country.

So when you talk about the Socialist Party in Milwaukee, you have to consider the good as well as the bad.

I was thinking about all this as I perused what seems to be a steady stream of opinion pieces in the Richmond Times-Dispatch marking the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, which is Nov. 7.

Ross Mackenzie and A. Barton Hinkle had the best titles: Ross’ was “100 years of communism: Thoroughly planned Hell.” A.’s was “A century of ghastly Communist sadism.”

Now, anyone who tries to say that nothing bad happened under Joe Stalin is either deluded or just plain ignorant. But the man did, against incredible odds, lead the Soviet Union’s successful defense against the Nazi invasion during World War II. That’s no small potatoes.

But anyway, “100 years of communism” must mean more than the Soviet Union, which collapsed after 74 years. It must also mean socialist Cuba, which is still going strong.

I never visited the USSR, but in 1991 I did travel to Cuba, as a member of a trade union delegation invited by the Cuban Federation of Workers. I liked what I saw. All the government buildings could have used a fresh coat of paint, but all the kids looked healthy. Somebody had their priorities right.

And the little island country is known for a health care system second to none and an educational system that’s the envy of - well, not well-to-do people in the U.S., but millions of poor people around the world.

It’s interesting that the RTD is spending so much ink on the subject of communism, which, after all, isn’t the biggest issue in the world today.

No, Ross and A. must be thinking of that report that came out a year ago from the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation - by its name, not a particularly leftie outfit.

Titled the “Annual Report on U.S. Attitudes towards Socialism,” it found that 55 percent of millennials believe communism isn’t so bad, compared with 80 percent of Baby Boomers and 91 percent of the elderly who do. Only 37 percent have a “very unfavorable” view of communism, compared to 57 percent of the rest of the population. And two-thirds of all U.S. Americans agree with Karl Marx’s famous statement “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.”

I’m sure that Bernie had a lot to do with this. He’s really just a very liberal Democrat, but he did call himself a socialist, and it seemed to have helped him.

Anyway, I don’t know how the RTD editorial board plans to spend Nov. 7, but I’m going to down a few shots of Polish potato vodka, watch Sergei Eisenstein’s “Ten Days That Shook the World” and sing the one verse I know of the Internationale.

Any young folks are welcome to join me. - P.W.

Trump Hyper-Militarizing Law Enforcement

The Black Alliance for Peace (BAP) condemns the announcement by U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions before a gathering of the National Fraternal Order of Police (NFOP) that the administration of President Donald Trump intends to remove the restrictions on the government’s 1033 Program - transfer of deadly military-grade equipment to local and state police forces.

According to BAP national organizer Ajamu Baraka, “Since President Barack Obama’s administration’s so-called restrictions were merely a publicity stunt that had no measurable impact on the flow of deadly weapons going to police forces, the Trump administration’s announcement is intended to send another public message - that it intends to make war on Black and Brown people in the United States.”

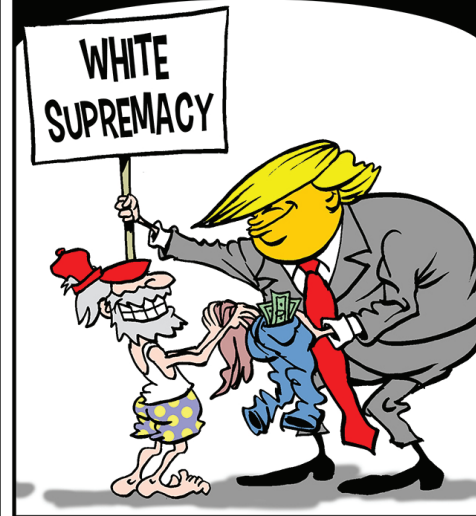
Jeff Sessions claimed in his Aug. 28 speech that the Trump administration is “rescinding restrictions from the prior administration that limited your agencies; ability to get equipment through federal programs.” However, we at BAP understand this order is meant as yet another green light for increased repression and brutality against Black and Brown working class and poor communities.

Therefore, BAP demands an immediate halt to the racist, repressive 1033 Program and a suspension of all transfers of military-grade equipment to local and state police that are currently being processed.

“If you can convince the lowest white man he’s better than the best colored man, he won’t notice you’re picking his pocket...”



“...Hell, give him somebody to look down on, and he’ll empty his pockets for you.”
- President Lyndon Baines Johnson



Letters to the Editor

Furthermore, we specifically call on members of the Congressional Black Caucus (the “conscience of Congress”), and all progressive-minded congressional representatives to take a public stand against all aspects of the 1033 Program.

The 1033 Program evolved out of the 1990 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)’s original authorization to facilitate the transfer of surplus military-grade weaponry to state and local police forces as part of the federal government’s so-called “War on Drugs.” In the 1997 NDAA, the authorized transfer was named the 1033 program and it was expanded to include counterterrorism. It has been largely responsible for the militarization of police forces across the nation as a result of over \$5.4 billion worth of equipment being transferred to state and local police agencies.

Pressure from some members of Congress and demands from various

organizations associated with the Black Lives Matter movement led to the Obama Administration placing some restrictions on a small class of equipment. But the flow of deadly equipment did not stop. In fact, according to the Department of Defense’s Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), which oversees the transfers, the value of the equipment reaching state and local police agencies actually increased the year after the restrictions were imposed.

It is clear that this “domestic weapons supply” program was never meant only to fight drugs or terrorism, but to contain and control Black and Brown bodies victimized by the rapacious consequences of a racist, capitalist order that has rendered whole sectors of the U.S. population disposable.

Ajamu Baraka
National Organizer
Black Alliance for Peace

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

To submit a letter, an item for the Community Calendar or to place an ad, contact:

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A Palestinian view from the West Bank

By Ali Johar

Ali Johar was born in Palestine in 1946, two years before the establishment of the state of Israel. A retired educator who taught for several years in the United States, he now lives in the West Bank. He recently shared his views on the situation there with the Defender.

Historic Palestine is the land from the Mediterranean Sea to the west to the Jordan River in the east, and from the Lebanese border in the north to Aqaba and Eilat, or Um Rashash, the original Arabic name, in the South.

Today the West Bank and Gaza combined are only 22 percent of historic Palestine. Since 1967, many settlements were built under the pretext of so-called security for Israelis, but really they were nothing more than a land grab. And all the settlements, without exception, are in violation of U.S. principles and the Geneva Convention. They have been rejected literally by the entire world and all U.S. presidents have called them obstacles to peace.

Despite this, the Israelis continue to build new settlements and expand the old ones. They are funded by U.S. money, mostly from the U.S. government and I'm sure some by pro-Israeli forces. They never call them settlements. They say the money is for "economic development," but without stipulating how it is to be spent.

There are now no less than 170 settlements. They vary in size, usually starting small, a few trailers, and after a while they increase in numbers and before you know it there are houses, roads being extended to them, all done with Israeli support and protection.

A network of apartheid roads has been built throughout the West Bank to connect the Israeli settlements to the 1948 areas, which they call Israel. Arabs are not supposed to use these roads. The Israelis use yellow license plates, the Palestinians green, so the soldiers can tell who is supposed to be on the road and who isn't, for stopping at checkpoints.

If a Palestinian is caught on one of these roads, they are turned back, but they don't really know what will happen. I was stopped one time, they checked my car and kept people for about an hour, an hour and 20 minutes. Then they told us to turn back and take a different road. The only thing that worked in my favor was they saw I happened to have a U.S. passport.

Sometimes they allow Palestinians to share these roads, but we cannot go through settlements. Most of time we use separate roads. For example, there is a road that goes from Ramallah to Beit Inan and passes through several villages. Along the way there are two

Israeli settlements. So what the Israelis did was to build a tunnel close to a mile long, maybe less than a mile, for the Palestinians to use so they would not interfere with the settlements above.

The Palestinians asked that they put lights in the tunnel. The Israelis said we are not going to put any lights and we are not going to let you put in any lights. It's a two-lane road. There's no place for a car to stop if there is a problem with the car and no walkway. Sometimes the Israelis even put a checkpoint at one end or the other or in the middle. This is just one example of how they restrict Palestinian movement, harass, make it difficult to get anywhere, to schools, to their fields.

So is it possible to have a separate Palestinian state? With all the settlements they have built, and the roads, there isn't a continuous, contiguous section of the West Bank left. We are stopped by these roads or tunnels or checkpoints and every day or at least every week you can see that the Palestinian areas are getting smaller and smaller.

The Israeli goal is to basically expel the Palestinians from their lands. From the time of [early European Zionist leaders] Theodor Herzl, Jaim Weizman and Jacob Jabotinsky, the goal has been to expel all Palestinians. The same view is being held these days, from [Israeli prime ministers] Menachem Begin to [Benjamin] Netanyahu. The whole idea of Zionism is building an exclusively Jewish state in Palestine, and it is racist and unjust. And it should be rejected by the entire world.

There's a concerted effort to make life so difficult and so hard that many people would opt to find a way to leave the country. Unemployment is extremely high, as much as 50 percent in the West Bank and 70 percent in Gaza.

The Israelis look the other way about the flow of drugs in Palestinian areas, and even encourage it, especially in East Jerusalem and other areas. A lot of murders go uninvestigated, because Palestinian police are not supposed to enter certain sections under Israeli control. Israelis will not check into them and will not allow Palestinian police to look into them, so these become somewhat lawless areas and Palestinians must use self-discipline and their own means to maintain some kind of stability. So this fits into the overall design of pushing people out.

These are the problems: unemployment, unchecked violence, difficulties in moving around. And the Israelis' own violence. The

See PALESTINE on Page 14

On Nov. 7, Vote YES for Schools!

By Paul Goldman

In 1955, the U.S. Supreme Court specifically said obsolete, decrepit, inferior school facilities for minority children denied these youngsters their federally protected Constitutional right to equal educational opportunities. This facility-focused part of that decision, known as Brown II (the lesser discussed follow-up to the universally acclaimed 1954 Brown v. Board of Education I ruling establishing the broad Constitutional education right), has been largely forgotten.

Local Richmond officials, along with Virginia state leaders, naturally promised to fix any such facilities in order to satisfy the Supreme Court's Constitutional command. Indeed, the segregationist-based Virginia Constitution underwent a required rewrite, adding a new Article VIII, the first-ever section recognizing an additional fundamental state constitutional right to a "high quality school" for all children. As Brown II pointed out, this is not possible in aged, obsolete school buildings.

But Virginia State government basically left localities to shoulder the cost of maintaining modern facilities. City of Richmond officials began purposely short-changing school modernization and maintenance funding in the 1980's. They promised it would be a temporary fix to a budget shortfall. But many tens of billions of dollars in wasteful spending later, as shown by city and state audits, our K-12 school facilities have been permitted to age into chronic obsolescence.

More than half the facilities still in use today were originally constructed prior to the Brown II decision. Indeed, many were already considered inferior back then! Virginia Tech Professor Glenn Earthman, the state's leading educational expert on school buildings, has proven the devastating effect these conditions have on the city's youngsters, damaging them for the rest of their lives.

In the spirit of Dr. King, a few of us therefore said: Enough is enough.

We were joined by dozens of others. We worked for months trying to do something never before achieved in Virginia or any other city: to get on the election ballot a School Modernization referendum to make our leaders accountable for this intolerable and deplorable situation - and to end 62 years of broken campaign promises to the city's schoolchildren.

Amazingly, we managed to do what the experts said couldn't be done. Last August, the Richmond Circuit Court found we had amassed an all-time number of qualified Richmond voters who had personally signed our petitions. (Online petitions, I must tell you, have no legal force or effect in Virginia.)

Accordingly, the court placed on this year's November ballot the School Modernization



Charter Change Referendum for your vote. While the ballot will contain the full language of the Charter Change proposal, the key wording is as follows:

Section 6.15 – FULFILLING THE PROMISE OF EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES.

(a) Preamble – Dr. King famously observed a right delayed is a right denied. We, the people, have therefore chosen to lead.

(b) DUTY OF THE MAYOR - Not later than six months after this section becomes law, the Mayor shall formally present to the City Council a fully-funded plan to modernize the city's K-12 educational infrastructure consistent with national standards or inform City Council such a plan is not feasible. In fulfilling the duties herein, the Mayor shall consult with the School Board, City Council, consider cost savings available in state or federal law and further provide an opportunity for public participation.

(c) NO NEW OR INCREASED TAXES - The fully-funded plan required in subsection (b) cannot be based on the passage of new or increased taxes for that purpose.

(d) DUTY OF THE SCHOOL BOARD - Nothing herein shall alter powers previously given to the School Board.

(f) DUTY OF THE CITY COUNCIL - Once the Mayor has complied with subsection (b), the City Council shall have 90 days to take such action as it deems appropriate.

By voting Yes, all of us in Richmond can unite beyond a simple proposition: equal education for all is still what we believe.

Richmond government has long had the money to do what is right. But sometimes we, the people, have to step up and show the politicians the right thing to do.

Passage of the School Modernization Charter Change proposal isn't a magic cure. But after 62 years - in truth, far longer than that - of broken promises to our children, you and I need to do what Dr. King would have wanted us to do: tell our politicians our children have waited long enough.

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Hundreds march to protest attacks on Dreamers

By Briana Boyer

RICHMOND -- The chant of "No hate, No fear, Immigrants are welcome here!" was heard loudly Sept. 5 from Richmond's Abner Clay Park to 8th and Broad streets.

The peaceful protest against the DACA repeal decision hit home for many city residents who decided to join the rally to share in the disappointment of 45's most recent repugnant political decision.

Once the marchers made it to the corner of Broad and 8th we were led in prayer and held a vigil for the most vulnerable in our society who are now in fear of their future here.

It was at this moment that I glanced to my right and saw a young girl of 10 sitting down on the sidewalk. She was trying to hide her face in tears.

I asked her if she was OK and her aunt explained that she has many friends who would likely be negatively impacted by this decision and that this was very overwhelming for her.

I told that sweet girl that it was because of young folks like her, who care and understand that it's important to take a stand for what they believe is right, that I have hope. She gives me hope.

As brave as she is, I couldn't help but be reminded of the slogan from the 2016 Presidential Campaign "Our children are watching."

They were watching. They still are, and they are afraid, too.

The quickly organized protest, which may have exceeded 200 at its height, was impactful. I hope we can take these moments of mobilization as a conduit to organize and prepare next steps and actions that can drive us into a better place - a place where our children can have faith again, that as adults, we will do what's right for our neighbors and their friends.

RVA immigrant rights activists take on ICE

By Phil Wilayto

Immigrants, undocumented or not, don't make a practice of willingly visiting the offices of ICE, the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency notorious for its treatment of noncitizens. But on Sept. 12 a delegation of 14 immigrant rights activists and supporters, half Latino/a, the rest African-American and white, descended on the Richmond ICE office to demand information about massive deportation raids reportedly scheduled for later that month.

According to the activists, news outlets had reported on Sept. 7 that ICE was planning a massive immigration enforcement operation called Operation Mega to apprehend noncitizens. All 24 ICE field offices were expected to implement this operation in mid-September with the goal of apprehending anywhere between 8,400 to 10,000 noncitizens.

After these media reports, ICE officials announced there was "no coordinated nationwide operation planned at this time." However, on Sept. 8, Univision television showed a redacted document referencing that ICE planned to execute "Cross Check VII Operation Epic (Mega)" from September 17-21.

In response, national immigrant rights activists sent a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the ICE national office in Washington, D.C., asking for a detailed account of Operation MEGA and any similar raids being planned.

To back up their demand for answers, activists across the country on Sept. 12 delivered copies of the request to all 24 ICE field offices, including the one located at 7200 Arboretum Parkway off Midlothian Turnpike in South Side Richmond.

When the Richmond-area activists arrived at the office, located in a corporate office park that includes social service agencies serving low-income people, including immigrants, they were met by four law enforcement officers, including two from the Department of Homeland Security. The officers claimed they were not there because of the planned FOIA delivery.

When the activists asked to meet with an ICE supervisor to deliver the FOIA request, a DHS officer who said his name was Sweeny said that no supervisor was available. When the activists pressed the issue, the officer went

inside the ICE office, came back outside and again said that no supervisor was free to accept the request.

The activists then asked to speak to any ICE official about their concerns about impending raids. Again they pressed Sweeny to look for an official. Again Sweeny went inside the ICE office and returned to say no one was available.

The activists then laid the FOIA request at the officers' feet and told them to deliver it to the ICE supervisor. They then stood in front of the office with signs denouncing ICE and made videoed statements about why they were there.

"I heard one of you say, 'She looks like an immigrant,' Carolina Velez, who works with ICE Out of RVA, boldly told the officers. "Do you want to know my citizenship status? We are no longer afraid! We are standing here unapologetically!"

The seriousness of the issues was laid bare in a press release announcing today's action:

"In the Richmond metropolitan area, including Chesterfield, Henrico and Hanover counties, the silent nature of white supremacy has manifested in unlawful and violent ICE practices and raids, largely through the collaboration with local police. ICE has fed on the vulnerability of our community members through tactics of terror and secrecy such as:

- surveilling people with their "fugitive ops" teams in unmarked vehicles;
- detaining people outside of local courts and jails as they are being released;
- interrogating children and youth at their bus stops to get information about parents;
- snaring drivers not permitted by the state to receive licences through police checkpoints;
- and baiting families into opening their doors by detaining family members just outside.

As they were leaving the area, the activists stopped to take photos of the large, caged-in area that sits in the back of the ICE offices. This is where detained immigrants are held until they are processed and transported to the Farmville Detention Center in Farmville, Va., a private, for-profit facility that houses adult immigration detainees. It was a grim reminder of the unhuman nature of the ICE operations.

The Richmond action was co-sponsored by ICE Out of RVA, the Virginia Anti-Violence Project, SONG-Richmond, Richmond Conexiones and the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality.

For more information, see the "ICE Out of RVA" page on Facebook.

PALESTINE (Continued from Page 13)

settlers are basically given a free hand to go down and commit violence against Palestinian lands. They burn fields. On several occasions they have turned the sewage from their settlements onto productive Palestinian land so it cannot be used. They let loose wild pigs into the fields, to mess them up.

What's the solution? The best and most just longterm solution is to have one state: one secular, democratic state for all, in all of historic Palestine, whereby all people's rights are guaranteed through a constitution. I believe this is the best solution. I think you will find that nearly all young people are in favor of this solution. You may find some small groups of religious people who say, yes, one state, but it would be an Islamic state.

The people who continue to favor the two-state solution are those who are benefiting right now from the status quo, or would from a two-state solution. They are a very small minority, the people in charge of the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] right now and a few big capitalist people.

The problem with the two-state solution is that the Israelis have already destroyed that option, injecting more and more people, the roads. Plus, it does not address the problem of those people who were pushed out in 1948, the refugees. What is their solution? A two-state solution would just allow the problem to fester, so why go down that road when it will just lead to more and more bloodshed?

Then there's the wall [the Israeli-built wall separating Israeli and Palestinian areas in the West Bank.] It's basically an admission by Israelis that, number one, they want an exclusively Jewish state, and an admission that their grand vision of a Greater Israel is maybe coming to an end. To add a wall to an area that is no larger than the state of New Jersey and disrupt people's lives shows just how racist the Israeli government and the Zionist idea is.

Given all these problems, could young Palestinians envision a society in which Muslims, Christians and Jews could live in harmony? It's quite possible, if Israelis abandon the idea of an exclusively Jewish state. The only reason they don't is that at the moment they have the military advantage and the support of the United States.

And Israel is ensured of continued U.S. support. Not that Obama was stingy. He gave more than any other president. But now Israel is being promised \$38 billion over the next 10 years.

Am I hopeful? Yes, I think eventually oppression has an end. History is full of examples whereby an occupier even as strong and pernicious as the Zionists came to an end. The occupation will come to an end. The demographics are certainly changing in favor of the Palestinians. The rotten and corrupt leadership of many of the countries of the Arab world will eventually change for the better.

And military tools and weapons have changed. The rocketry and missiles have made Israel vulnerable and it will not maintain its dominance forever. I'm against violence in principle, but when it comes to a person's self-preservation, it is justified. People should use all possible means to preserve themselves.

Hopefully the Palestinians will unite again and end these divisions that exist among them. And hopefully people around the world will see the justice of the Palestinian cause and will translate that into action by their governments, particularly in the United States, which is the main cause of injustice in the Middle East and in Palestine.

I hope someday we will have that democratic state, and enough Jews will realize that it is in their own self-interest to work with the Palestinians to build that state.



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Editor's note: The following are excerpts from a longer opinion piece published on www.english.khamenei.ir, the website of the Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Khamenei, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, under the title "Obama differed from Trump only in his method of hostility."

By Phil Wilayto

What are we to make of U.S. President Donald Trump's extremely hostile attack on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, usually referred to in the West as the "Iran nuclear deal"?

The president is required by Congress to certify every 90 days that the Islamic Republic of Iran is in compliance with the agreement and that the deal is beneficial to the United States. On Oct. 13, Trump refused to issue what would have been his third certification. However, he stopped short of pulling the United States out of the agreement, instead lobbing that political powder keg over to a deeply divided Congress.

If there were some question about Iran's compliance with the JCPOA, perhaps there could be a rational discussion about Trump's position.

But there is no such question. The International Atomic Energy Agency, known as the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, says that Iran is in total compliance with the agreement.

So does the European Union, a signatory to the deal. So did the leaders of Britain, France and Germany in their response to Trump. So does U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, bluntly contradicting his own boss.

It would be easy to dismiss Trump's rants and raves as the product of a demented mind, except for one thing: He is motivated by the same hostility to the Islamic Republic as is the entire U.S. ruling class, as represented by both the Republican and Democratic parties.

What is the source of this unrelenting hostility? Is it a real fear of a military attack by Iran on the U.S. or its allies? Does it go back to the U.S. embassy hostage crisis of 1979? Is it part of some modern-day crusade against Islam?

I think the answer is much simpler: It's that Iran is a powerful obstacle to the U.S. goal of achieving political, economic and military hegemony in the oil-rich Middle East. ...

The truth is that President Barack Obama

was just as hostile to Iran as is Trump. But Obama agreed to the nuclear deal because he knew that the United States had reached a crossroads in its dealings with the Islamic Republic. It had imposed, or succeeded in forcing others to impose, a wide range of punishing sanctions against Iran - so many, in fact, that it was running out of options. A military strike seemed to loom ever larger as the Final Solution.

But 2015 - or 2017 - would be a bad time for the U.S. to start another major war in the region. It was and is bogged down in multiple unwinnable wars across the Middle East and North Africa. Taking on a military power like Iran - and, more importantly, its 82 million patriots, would not be a wise move, and Obama knew it. So he bought some time with the nuclear deal. The goal was not to stop Iran's nonexistent pursuit of nuclear weapons, but to postpone the decision to launch a new war.

Trump does not seem so wise. He's more like a madman who could wake up one morning and start a war just because he felt like it. ...

There is no doubt that, faced with a military attack by the United States, the vast majority of Iranians would rise to defend their country and their government. Whatever political disagreements may exist, Iranians are patriots. The U.S. government knows this, and that knowledge is a tremendous deterrent to military action.

But Iran should not have to stand alone. And it doesn't stand alone. Millions upon millions of people around the world admire Iran for having been able to survive the hostility of the U.S. Empire. ...

One thing that is missing is a strong people's movement within the United States that can oppose U.S. wars and threats of war. That movement still exists, and has begun to awaken from years of slumber. In fact, it has been rudely woken from that slumber by the election of a billionaire, white-supremacist, warmonger as president.

Regardless of what the U.S. government does in relation to the nuclear deal, we must have faith that the combined forces of Iran, its political allies and the mobilization of progressive movements around the world - especially in the United States - will be able to hold back the threat of war. ...

In the final analysis, international solidarity will prove more powerful than any weapon of war.



Photo courtesy of The New Communist Party of Britain

Antifascists protest on Downing Street, government center of the United Kingdom.

In London: Solidarity with Ukrainian antifascists

London activists brought a strong antiwar message to the seat of the United Kingdom's government Oct. 28, calling for an end to British military and other aid to Ukraine; implementation of the Minsk peace agreements; justice for the scores of antifascists murdered on May 2, 2014, at the House of Trade Unions fire in Odessa and solidarity with all antifascists in the Donbass and Ukraine.

Those participating in the protest included members of the Labour Party, New Communist Party, Socialist Fight and Solidarity with the Antifascist Resistance in Ukraine.

During the protest, organizers read messages of solidarity sent from Ukraine and the United States.

A statement from Dmytriy Kovalevich, a Ukrainian antifascist in exile, reported that "the Kiev government mercilessly suppresses the left and antifascist forces inside Ukraine, while our army and fascist volunteers daily shell the defiant miners' cities of the Donbass region - punishing them for the resistance against Nazis and neoliberal policies imposed by the IMF [International Monetary Fund]. ...

"The Western mainstream media keep silent about the conflict now in its fourth year, or misrepresent our civil war as an alleged 'conflict with Russia.' Currently Western instructors train our cops and soldiers to suppress dissidents and kill antifascist rebels in Ukraine.

"The entire Kiev regime is so unpopular that it can hold power and keeps plundering the country only due to the West's financial aid and military supplies, while millions of Ukrainians leave the country heading to Europe or Russia.

This is actually your taxes at work - your authorities supply our outright Nazis with arms.

"Just yesterday a family of Donetsk workers suffered as a result of shelling - a woman died and her daughter was injured. And it is American and British governments that encourage, supply and finance our troops and Nazis in their geopolitical games.

"This situation is now in its fourth year. This should be stopped as soon as possible. We're sure that the public budgets of the UK can be used for more decent and urgent aims at home."

Another solidarity message came from Phil Wilayto, editor of The Virginia Defender and coordinator of the Richmond-based Odessa Solidarity Campaign, who warned that Washington was preparing to provide \$500 million in military aid to Ukraine, including so-called "defensive lethal assistance."

"What we are told on this side of the pond is that the problem in Ukraine is Russian aggression," the statement read. "What we don't hear is that the present crisis is the direct result of the U.S.-promoted right-wing coup of 2014. Or that the coup was just part of the overall strategy of U.S. imperialism to reduce Ukraine to a vassal state and staging area for its own aggression, which is rapidly intensifying.

In addition to the half-billion authorized by the U.S. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018, \$750 million in non-lethal aid, such as uniforms and radars, has been provided by the United States since 2015, according to the Reuters news agency.

Further, there are the annual multinational military exercises such as Exercise Rapid Trident and Sea Breeze, involving hundreds of U.S. soldiers and sailors. This year the U.S. role in both exercises was the largest ever.

And all this is in addition to the ongoing training of Ukrainian soldiers by National Guard members from a number of U.S. states.

"Members of the U.S. Congress and the media accuse Russia of meddling in the last U.S. election, but the U.S. did more than meddle in Ukrainian politics - it overthrew the country's president with the help of neo-Nazi organizations that have unleashed a reign of terror in the east, from Odessa to Donbass." Wilayto stated.

"We need to take this information to the working people of Great Britain, the United States and all the countries of the world. We need to show how imperialist aggression abroad is intimately connected with attacks on working people and communities of color at home. ...

"It's our job to bring them this truth, and that is just what you are doing today."

U.S. forces in Africa: It's not just Niger

When four U.S. soldiers were reported killed in Niger on Oct. 4, you may have asked yourself, "Where is Niger? And what is the U.S. military doing there?"

You wouldn't have been alone.

According to The New York Times, "... two high-ranking senators, Chuck Schumer of New York, the Democratic leader, and Lindsey Graham, an influential South Carolina Republican, said in recent interviews on 'Meet the Press' that they had not realized the extent of the military's involvement in Niger.

"We don't know exactly where we're at in the world, militarily, and what we're doing," Mr. Graham said."

The U.S. has about 800 troops stationed in Niger, a West African country that borders troubled Mali.

But it's not just Niger. There are now about 6,000 U.S. troops deployed all across the continent. Each year they conduct some 3,500 exercises, programs, and engagements - almost 10 missions a day.

About a third of the troops are Special Forces, or Special Operations forces, many working on so-called "advise-and-assist" missions in which they partner with the local military. That's what was happening in Niger when the joint U.S.-Nigerian patrol was attacked.

This deepening military involvement in Africa, which proceeded quietly under the Obama administration, is having the same effect that U.S. troops have had in Iraq and Afghanistan: It's creating enemies.

In Niger, about 200 U.S. troops have

come to work at a \$50 million drone base under construction at Agadez, the country's largest city.

That's \$50 million for a military base in a country where the annual per capita income is \$420. Nearly half the population lives in poverty, less than a fifth of the people are literate, the average life expectancy is 55 and the infant mortality rate is the seventh highest in the world.

And the government is notorious for neglecting the large areas outside the cities, leaving the rural population vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups.

For more information, see "It's not just Niger - U.S. military activity is a 'recruiting tool' for terror groups across West Africa," an article by Nick Turse at <https://theintercept.com>.

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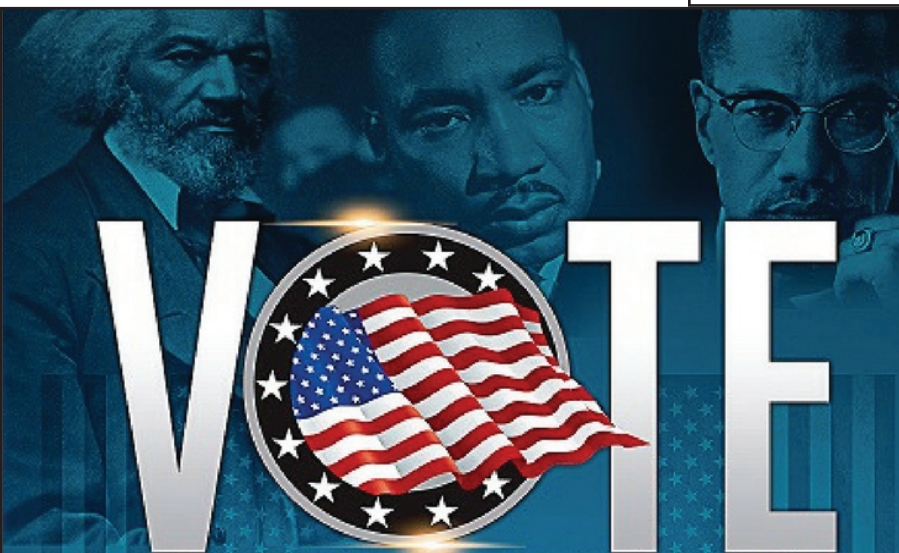
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