

*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.*

D The Virginia **DEFENDER**

FREE

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TRUTH & CONCILIATION in the 400th YEAR: A PUBLIC HISTORY SYMPOSIUM on SHOCKOE BOTTOM

By Ana Edwards & Phil Wilayto

We are approaching the end of the year marking the 400th anniversary of the first captured Africans arriving in English-occupied North America, and Virginia's capital city has yet to properly memorialize its Shockoe Bottom district, one of the most important historical sites for people of African descent anywhere in the United States.

For the three decades before the Civil War, the downtown Richmond area of Shockoe Bottom was the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade. It was one of the country's largest slave markets, second only in size to that of New Orleans.

More importantly, it was the wholesale district that supplied enslaved labor to all the other retail sites in the South: Charles-

ton, Savannah, New Orleans, Vicksburg and so many more.

So many women, men and children were sold out of this small downtown area that today the majority of African-Ameri-

cans could trace some ancestry there. But, aside from an empty field, a few markers and some slabs of stone, it remains a neglected area of rundown parking lots.

To their public shame, this neglect lies

squarely with the elected officials of the city's municipal government.

An ongoing struggle

For more than 20 years, Richmonders and their allies across the country have struggled to reclaim and properly memorialize this sacred ground. This effort has involved education, protest, ritual and writings, evolving from an education campaign into a demand for collective reparations, while addressing institutional racism, economic disempowerment and social repression.

This ongoing struggle has had three stages:

(1) The fight to force the removal of a state-owned parking lot from what today is known as Richmond's African Burial Ground (2002-2011).

See SHOCKOE on page 10

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"SANKOFA: It is not wrong to go back and get that which has been lost." – Sankofa is a word in the Twi language of Ghana

regional & national news

By Phil Wilayto

The small town of Pittsboro, N.C., has become a flashpoint in the ongoing battles over Confederate monuments.

The multiracial county seat of about 4,300 people, located 34 miles west of Raleigh, has had a statue of a Confederate soldier standing for more than 100 years outside the Chatham County courthouse. This past August, county commissioners voted 4-1 to move the statue and asked the local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, which donated it in 1907, to come up with a plan for its removal.

If nothing is agreed on by Nov. 1, commissioners say they will make their own plans to remove it. The UDC has refused to cooperate, saying a state law forbids the county from removing the statue.

So almost every week, groups of neo-Confederates have been coming to Pittsboro to protest the expected removal of the statue, gathering along busy streets to wave the Confederate battle flag. And every week antiracists show up to let them know they're not welcome in Pittsboro.

A few weeks ago, the Virginia Flaggers contributed to the growing tension by erecting a large Confederate flag across the street from a predominantly Black middle school named for George Moses Horton, an enslaved poet.



Neo-Confederates from around the region, some of them armed, mobilized for Oct. 19 in Pittsboro.



Pittsboro residents were joined by regional allies, greatly outnumbering the neo-Confederates. Photos courtesy Tony Crider

Confederate statue fight heats up in Pittsboro

Saturday, Oct. 19, was a big day for the dueling protests. According to the Raleigh-based News & Observer, “roughly 30 people representing members of several extreme far-right and neo-Confederate groups,” including the white supremacist League of the South, gathered to support the Confederate statue.

Opposing them were “about 200 members of antiracist and progressive groups” who held a march called “Pittsboro is No Place for Hate and then stood across the street from the pro-Confederates. The day passed with

some shoving and pushing, but apparently no arrests.

One of the anti-racist protesters was Heather Redding, who has been actively involved in anti-racism movements in North Carolina.

“Removing and relocating confederate monuments is one of many ways our nation can begin to engage in reparations and healing,” Redding told the Defender. “For too many, the Civil War never ended and they are still waging a cultural war against anyone who doesn’t buy into Lost Cause propaganda.

“For others, the ripple effects of our history of slavery and Jim Crow are still being felt and are still causing harm. We can’t separate our nation’s racially violent past from the ways Black communities continue to experience inequities. From the classroom to incarceration, we are still far from living in a racially equitable society.

“Until we stop venerating the confederacy, and until we are ready to have an honest conversation about white supremacy in America, this nation will never heal.”

THE DEFENDERS: WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE BELIEVE

WE BELIEVE IN FREEDOM

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

WE BELIEVE IN JUSTICE

We believe that every human being has the

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

WE BELIEVE IN EQUALITY

We live in the richest country in the world. But it's a country that owes its tremendous wealth to the barbaric oppression of Black labor on a historic scale, 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.

THE VIRGINIA DEFENDERS for Freedom, Justice & Equality

PO Box 23202, Richmond, VA 23223

Phone / Text: 804-644-5834

Email: DefendersFJE@hotmail.com

www.DefendersFJE.blogspot.com
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is there a master plan to remove the poor from richmond?

No meals for a year at Abner Clay Park

By Phil Wilayto

It was the end of September when the fences and barbed wire went up around Abner Clay Park, the 4-acre green space in the heart of Jackson Ward. That came as a surprise to at least one of the organizations that serves free meals there.

“We were given no warning or notice,” read a post on the Facebook page of Richmond Food Not Bombs, which has been providing meals in Richmond parks for the past 25 years.

The fencing marked the beginning of what is expected to be a year-long park renovation, to include upgrades to utilities, sidewalks, landscaping, and a new plaza and basketball court.

In the meantime, it means one more place where the all-volunteer FNB won’t be able to provide their free meals.

Jackson Ward, once the heart of Richmond’s Black community, has been undergoing gentrification for years.

“They keep getting rid of places,” member Aaron told the Defender. “Kanawha, then Monroe, Festival Park by the Coliseum. These all have long been used as gathering places.

“The places where people can hang out are gradually disappearing over time.”

Kanawha Plaza by the 9th Street Bridge used to be a place where some homeless people would spend the night, until the police evicted Occupy Richmond from their encampment there in late 2011. Then the park in the downtown banking district was “renovated.”

It was 22 months of renovation before Monroe Park was reopened in late September of last year. That’s where FNB had for years served its Sunday meals. Once the public park was closed, FNB moved to Abner Clay.

“With Monroe, we got plenty of advance,” Aaron said. “This time we weren’t informed by the city.”

Aaron said the group isn’t opposed to the city upgrading Abner Clay, especially if the project includes bathrooms, which it now lacks. Also, he said it could use more water fountains and better trash facilities. But the group questions why the whole park had to be closed, instead of doing the renovation in stages.



Photo courtesy Richmond Food Not Bombs

That question also was raised when Monroe Park was fenced in. At the time, many park advocates suspected it was to “encourage” homeless people to move away from the park, which is located near the campus of Virginia Commonwealth University.

When Monroe was reopened, it had a nice new coffee cafe - but the public bathrooms had been removed. At present there are no plans for public restrooms at the renovated Abner Clay.

The Defender emailed some questions to the city’s Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities. These are the questions and the answers we received:

How long will Abner Clay Park be closed for renovations?

We are expecting the park to be closed for renovations until September 2020.

Is it true that the park was closed with no notice to park goers or service providers, specifically those who provide meals?

Users that previously held permits were contacted about the park undergoing renovations this fall and given alternate locations that could be used. We also communicated with the civic associations about the closure for renovations. If there happens to be a group that we were not in contact with that needs an alternate location, please have them contact our Permit Officer at 804-646-0761.

If so, why was notice not given?

Fortunately for PRCF, we selected a very eager contractor that began work prior to the date selected. Notice was given on our Facebook page once we learned that the contractor was installing the construction fence around the park.

Before the park was closed, was there an announced period for public input or comment?

The renovation of Abner Clay Park has been a long time coming. The Master Plan for the park began in 2014 with several community meetings with the surrounding

Mass evictions hit Creighton Court

By Phil Wilayto

The first of a developing tsunami of public housing evictions are now sweeping through Creighton Court, home to hundreds of low-income, mostly African-American families in Richmond’s East End.

In the 30 days prior to presstime, some 35-40 households were evicted by the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority. The main reason was their inability to pay the rent.

Many more evictions are expected.

RRHA is now in the beginning stages of tearing down all six of the major public housing communities it oversees and replacing them with “mixed-use” developments. Some residents will be able to move into new low-income housing now under construction, but the newly hired RRHA president and CEO, Damon Duncan, has made it clear that returning to public housing will not be an option for everyone.

According to the Richmond Times-Dispatch, “Duncan directed RRHA staff to stop leasing vacant apartments in Creighton shortly after becoming CEO in the spring, citing plans to eventually demolish the complex and redevelop the plot it stands on.”

That decision has resulted in an October occupancy rate of just 82 percent, compared to 95 percent or higher at the other public housing courts, according to the RTD.

So between not renting out vacant units and carrying out mass evictions, the total number of low-income housing units in the city is shrinking. At the same time, rents are rising: between 2012 and the end of 2018, the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in the Richmond metro area went up from about \$800 to just under \$1,000, according to CoStar Realty Information, an industry research company.

civic associations. Community members that attended provided a great amount of insight that assisted in creating an open and inviting space that can host a variety of events, while still keeping the charm of the Jackson Ward neighborhood.

Why was barbed wire used to close off the park?

The barbed wire was a mistake of the contractor. Once the department was notified, we promptly rectified the situation.

By the way, Richmond Food Not Bombs is always looking for new volunteers. If interested, message them through their Facebook page or call (804) 505-0365.

And the evictions in RRHA housing are not an isolated phenomenon. According to a Princeton University Eviction Lab analysis published last year in The New York Times, Richmond has had the second highest eviction rate in the country (Hampton and Newport News were also among the top five cities for evictions.)

In response, Richmond has set up a \$450,000 Eviction Diversion Program, a public, private and non-profit partnership involving the city, Central Virginia Legal Aid Society, Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia and the city courts.

Duncan, however, initially refused to allow RRHA to participate, only relenting after media attention and an outcry by housing advocates.

Daryl Hayott, an attorney with the Virginia Poverty Law Center, was one of the organizers of an all-day tenants rights workshop held Oct. 12 at Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church in Richmond’s East End.

The VPLC is working in partnership with the Central Virginia Legal Aid and the Legal Aid Justice Center on a special project to address evictions in the area.

“We teach people about their rights as tenants, filing claims for tenant assertion, what to do when a place is not up to standards of habitability, some of the things the housing authority can or cannot do. It’s important to let people know that they have rights and that they can assert those rights.

“And you also have to understand that RRHA has the goal of tearing down all the public housing, as soon as possible,” Hayott said. “That’s why they’re giving people these vouchers that you can give to a private landlord.

“The problem, of course, is that in Virginia the landlord does not have to accept those vouchers, so if you give everyone vouchers and knock down the buildings, now you just have 4,000 families homeless and out on the street.

“So we want to make sure we do everything we can to make sure this doesn’t happen. It’s a very dire situation for these people. Winter is coming, and you’re going to have people out here with their kids, and they can lose their kids.

“For a lot of people, it doesn’t affect them unless it’s right in their face or it’s pounding on their door. But it will be pounding on their door. These people won’t go quietly or peacefully.”

Hayott said the information about tenant rights isn’t yet online, but that anyone can obtain it by emailing him at: daryl@vplc.org.

community news

Defenders' Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project responds to Mayor's Stoney's attempt to lease a sacred ground site in Shockoe Bottom to H. Louis Salomonsky

September 24, 2019

*Editor's note: On Sept. 19, the Richmond Times-Dispatch ran a story with the headline **"Stoney seeks to lease to a developer a Shockoe Bottom parking lot that could sit atop slavery site."***

The story, by Mark Robinson, reported in part the following:

"A city-owned parking lot in Shockoe Bottom may sit atop archaeological evidence of Richmond's history as a notorious slave-trading hub.

"Mayor Levar Stoney wants to lease it to a developer who donated to his political action committee, an arrangement that would help the developer secure financing for a high-rise hotel.

"The proposed 40-year agreement with Weimans Bakery LLC — an entity associated with Louis Salomonsky — drew condemnation on Thursday from City Council members who decried inaction to investigate and preserve the property's history."

For those with short memories or who are new to Richmond, Salomonsky is the high-power real estate developer who has been known to be a generous contributor to a wide range of local elected officials. In 2003, his generosity to a certain member of City Council earned him a prison term for bribery.

In response to this development, the Defenders' Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project wrote the followig statement:

Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney's attempt to lease to a political contributor a city-owned Shockoe Bottom parking lot that sits on a site of proven archeological significance calls into serious question his commitment to the Shockoe Alliance, a body he formed and tasked with developing a Small Area Master Plan to guide development in this internationally recognized historic district, once the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade.

Shockoe Bottom has been the well-publicized and well-documented focal point of research, commemoration and struggles to reveal and honor the horrors and resistance of Africans and people of African descent through and beyond slavery.

Many individuals and organizations have made important contributions to this effort, including discovering and marking the Trail of Enslaved Africans; making public the 1809 City map with the notation "Burial Ground for Negroes;" scholarly work on the area by many historians; the archeological discovery of the site of the Devil's Half-Acre, the slave jail owned by the notorious Robert Lumpkin; and the community struggles led by the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project of the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality.

As the only community organization

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speak out now and raise the following questions and points:

1. Is the Shockoe Alliance a collaborative body with a true mission, or is it merely a cover to buffer public opinion while behind the scenes things quietly move in the wrong direction?

2. The development of the community-generated proposal for a nine-acre Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park includes the Devil's Half-Acre, the African Burial Ground and two blocks of parking lots east of the CSX railroad tracks where several other slave jails, many slave trader offices and supporting businesses once were located.

Although support for this proposal has been clear in every public forum called to solicit community input on the future of Shockoe Bottom, neither City Council nor Mayor Stoney has yet taken a tangible position for or against the memorial park.

3. The Seabrook Warehouse site is where enslaved workers once labored in the tobacco industry for private profit - an important example of the industrial, urban slavery in which Richmond was a pioneer. The site abuts the footprint of the proposed memorial park.

Years ago, City Council passed legislation and appropriated \$50,000 to

conduct research on the Seabrook site, because its significance already had been proven by preliminary research. However, then-Mayor Dwight Jones did not act on the initiative. To date, neither has Mayor Stoney.

To these realities we respond:

1. There is no point in forming city-run committees with no actual power to effect the tasks or changes they were asked to assume. The Shockoe Alliance should be allowed to complete its stated mission of creating a Shockoe Bottom Small Area Master Plan before any further development decisions are made in the district, and specifically before any decisions are made about known historic sites such as the Seabrook Warehouse 1810-1910 site.

2. The already ordered and funded research project on the Seabrook Warehouse site should go forward.

3. The nine-acre Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park - inclusive of the Devil's Half-Acre interpretive institution - should be implemented as part of the Small Area Master Plan, reflecting the public and dedicated stakeholder consensus that the history of slavery and the slave trade in Richmond and their significance to the development of the city, the state and the country be the central theme of this district's next phase of evolution.

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE VIRGINIA DEFENDER ...

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

AROUND VIRGINIA

Tues., Nov. 5 – **ELECTION DAY** – For all seats in the Virginia General Assembly Senate & House of Delegates; in Richmond, City Council 5th District. To find your voting site, visit: elections.virginia.gov/citizen-portal/index.html.

RICHMOND – ONGOING

RICHMOND FOOD NOT BOMBS – Serving a free meal every Sunday to anyone who wants/needs it. 4 pm at Monroe Park, across from the Sacred Heart Cathedral. Help with cook-

ing and serving always welcome. Information: Facebook page or 804-505-0365.

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: birdhouse-farmersmarket.org.

WMMT'S CALLS FROM HOME – Every Monday 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.

RICHMOND – EVENTS

Thurs., Oct. 31 – **HARVEST FEST** – 5:30-7 pm, 900 Decatur St. Sponsored by New Life Deliverance Tabernacle. For information on vendor and nonprofit tables, contact Shabe Scott at 804-629-0745.

Fri., Nov. 1 – **COOL JAZZ AT THE BLACK HISTORY MUSEUM** – Featuring "Sweet Potatoes" duo, plus wine & wings! Doors open at 5 pm; first set at 5:30. Free admission, cash bar & food. Information: 804-780-9093.

Sat., Nov. 2 – **MEMORIAL CELEBRATION FOR ED PEEPLES** – 1 pm, VCU Cabell Library, 902 Park Ave., Lecture Hall, 3rd Fl. Information: Facebook event page.

Sat., Nov. 9 – **AUCTION AND CABARET FOR PEACE** – 5:30-10 pm, Diversity Thrift, 1407 Sherwood Ave. A benefit for the Richmond Peace Education Center. Information: Facebook event page.

Thurs., Nov. 14 – **10th VIRGINIA IMMIGRANT ADVOCATES SUMMIT**

– "Learn, discuss, strategize on issues impacting the immigrant community in the commonwealth." 8 am - 5 pm, Annandale United Methodist Church, 6935 Columbia Pike, Annandale. Sponsored by Virginia Immigrant Advocates Summit & nine others. Information: Facebook event page.

Wed., Nov. 20 – **TRANSGENDER DAY OF REMEMBRANCE & RESILIENCE** – 6-8 pm, Richmond Public Library Main Branch, 101 E. Franklin St. Hosted by Nationz Foundation. Information: Facebook event page.

Wed., Dec. 4 – **SHOCKOE ALLIANCE PUBLIC MEETING** – To present the first concepts from the Small Area Master Plan. Time & location to be announced.

Sat, Dec. 7 – **TRUTH & CONCILIATION IN THE 400TH YEAR: A SHOCKOE BOTTOM PUBLIC HISTORY SYMPOSIUM** – See story on page 1.

Wed., Dec. 11 – **CRIME COMMISSION MEETING** – 10 am, Pocahontas Building, 900 E. Main St., Shared Committee Room. Open to the public. Information: vssc.virginia.gov/meetings.asp.

Sat., Jan. 11 – **3rd ANNUAL VIRGINIA PRISON JUSTICE RALLY** – 1-2 pm, by the Bell Tower in Capitol Square, 1000 Bank St. Sponsored by the Virginia Prison Justice Network. Information: vapjn.wordpress.com.

CHESTERFIELD – EVENTS

Thurs., Nov. 21 – **GIRLS FOR A CHANGE AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM INFORMATION SESSION** – "Learn about what we offer at the Chesterfield branch during the school year!" – 6-7 pm, 100 Buford Road, North Chesterfield. Information: girlsforachange.org.

WASHINGTON, D.C. - EVENTS

Wed., Oct. 30 – **RECLAIMING JUDAISM FROM ZIONISM** – Carolyn Karcher, editor of "Reclaiming Judaism from Zionism," and five of the book's contributors will discuss their personal experiences. 6-8 pm, Middle East Books & More, 1902 18th St. NW. FREE. Information: Facebook event page.

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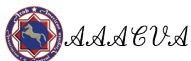
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Photo by Phil Wilayto

Teach-In on Immigrant and Social Justice - A member of the League of United Latin American Citizens staffs an information table at "Listen, Learn, Connect, Act - A Teach-In on Immigrant and Social Justice," held Sept. 21 in Richmond's Monroe Park. The event was initiated by the Richmond Peace Education Center and co-sponsored by LULAC, ReEstablish Richmond and other immigrant and social justice advocacy organizations. Security was organized by the Virginia Defenders, along with special protection for undocumented immigrants.

Yes, you can fight ICE!

Staff Report

They say you can't fight City Hall, but how about ICE? A group of mostly women in the Richmond area are showing that you can.

ICE is Immigration and Customs Enforcement, an agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security responsible for arresting immigrants who

lack documents. Founded in 2003, it now has more than 20,000 employees and an annual budget of more than \$5.7 billion.

In early September, a young man named Eric Hernandez was arrested for possession of marijuana and held in the Henrico County jail. His mother, Rebeca Jimenez, came and paid his bail, but he wasn't released.

He was being held on a detainer for ICE. It wasn't the first time this had happened,

according to Leonina Arismendi Zarkovic, a friend who told the story to the Defender.

"The same thing happened last year with her son," Leonina said. "He was arrested for a joint, held in jail and had an ICE detainer."

That time, Rebeca and a friend, both local immigrant rights activists, started calling people to help and within a short time about 50 people had shown up at the jail.

"And they let him go," Leonina said.

This time, she was out of town when they got the call from Rebeca.

"We started making calls to organizers here to have a plan of action to occupy the jail like we did last year," Leonina said. "We talked to a couple of lawyers, so Rebeca would have one. We called the Never Again action group, and Shannon Lewis showed up to jail in the middle of the night and didn't leave until Eric was released."

Others also answered the call for action, with new people showing up every hour.

And, once again, Eric was released.

"The magistrate told Shannon they didn't want a whole bunch of people showing up at the jail, so they were just going to let him leave," Leonina said.

"And after Eric was liberated, Rebeca called us and said she wanted to work with us."

"I want to do what you do," she told us. "Lobbying, immigrant justice, whatever."

We asked her, "What do you want?" and she said, "I want ICE collaboration to stop in the jail. I want to talk with the sheriff. I want people to know what is happening."

"Now Rebecca has started her own group," Leonina said, "called Rompiendo el Hielo en Henrico County, Va. (Breaking

she wants to work with us on lobbying at the General Assembly."

Yes, you can fight City Hall - and ICE.

And these women are showing us how to do it.

For information on Rompiendo el Hielo, see the group's Facebook page.



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Abbie Arevalo-Herrera, speaking at a Poor People's Campaign meeting held at the First Unitarian Church of Richmond.

Update on Abbie

Staff Report

Immigration and Customs Enforcement has rescinded a nearly \$300,000 fine it had threatened to levy against Abbie Arevalo-Herrera, a Central American immigrant who has been living in the basement of the First Unitarian Church of Richmond since June of 2018. The fine was for violation of a deportation order.

ICE also withdrew fines for six other women living in churches across the country to avoid deportation, according to the National Sanctuary Collective. One of those women is Maria Chavalan Sut, an indigenous Guatemalan woman who came to this country in 2015 to seek asylum and who late last year took sanctuary at the Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church of Charlottesville.

A notice sent to the women rescinding the fines stated that ICE reserves the right to reimpose the fines.

For more information on Abbie Arevalo-Herrera, including how you can help, see the Facebook page "Hands off Abbie."



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Gabriel - Breaking Chains in Virginia

Mel Edwards, brush and ink on paper, 2016

The beautiful drawing at right is a depiction of Gabriel, the enslaved black-smith who led the clandestine campaign to overthrow slavery in Virginia.

Along with a trusted cadre of co-conspirators, Gabriel organized hundreds of other enslaved people, free Blacks, Indigenous people and some white artisans in a plan to seize the city armory in Richmond, take the governor, James Monroe, hostage and demand an end to slavery in Virginia, the state that was key to the national system of chattel slavery.

Had the rebellion succeeded, it would have changed the course of U.S. history. And had it not been for a terrible thunderstorm and a subsequent betrayal, it may well have succeeded.

At the time, Gabriel was 24 years old.

On Oct. 10, 1800, Gabriel was executed at the town gallows, located in what is now known as Richmond's African Burial Ground.

This year the Defenders' Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project

held its 17th annual commemoration of Gabriel's death at the site where he died.

The drawing's creator, Mel Edwards, is an internationally acclaimed artist whose works are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City; the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C.; the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond; and dozens of other venues across the U.S., as well as in Senegal, Zimbabwe, Brazil, Venezuela, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, among other countries.

Mel Edwards is also the father of Ana Edwards, who chairs the Defenders' Sacred Ground Project. He created this drawing as a fundraiser for our work.

Prints are available from the Defenders for a suggested donation of \$50.

To order your copy, contact the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project at PO Box 23202, Richmond, VA 23223; DefendersFJE@hotmail.com; or phone or text 804-644-5834.



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Fighting
Mass
Incarceration
in Virginia

defending mother earth

By M.L. Bartell

With the stifling, record-breaking heat waves this year and students striking in the streets, climate change is heating things up in Virginia.

Here are a few of the local impacts:

- * All the seasons are warmer, particularly night temperatures, and winters are warming the most.

- * Spring comes earlier. Summer lasts longer. That changes migration patterns, habitats, and the timing of natural cycles for some plants and animals.

- * Warmer seasons have lengthened allergy seasons and increased asthma attacks across the Southeast. Tick season lasts longer and mosquito season is now more than 30 days longer than in 1980, increasing the risk of illnesses like Lyme Disease and West Nile Virus.

- * We have longer dry spells and more concentrated bursts of rain throughout the Southeast, with large rainfall events increasing 16 percent in frequency over the last 70 years.

- * Coastal Virginia has seen 14 inches of relative sea level rise since 1930, the highest rate on the Atlantic Coast.

- * Heat waves are more frequent and intense, exacerbated in cities due to the “urban heat island” effect.

- * Research suggests that the frequency of Category 4 and 5 hurricanes in the North Atlantic will increase by 50 percent in coming years, with a 20 percent increase in rainfall.

Who gets hit the hardest?

Like so many social issues, climate change will hit the most marginalized members of society the hardest. This is true across the globe and in Virginia, where communities of color and low-income neighborhoods are already feeling the brunt of the changes.

Consider heat waves, the largest weather-related cause of death in the United States. Research by Jeremy S. Hoffman, Ph.D, the first climate scientist to work at the Virginia Science Museum, found that neighborhoods within Richmond can vary by 16°F depending on the amount of green space and tree cover. The hottest neighborhoods in Richmond have the highest rate of heat-related illnesses. Lower-income homes and public housing without AC are the most vulnerable, because warmer nighttime temperatures mean houses don’t cool off.

All these risks are exacerbated when people can’t access health insurance. Kids, the elderly



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Some 800 people, most of them young, march from Monroe Park to Richmond City Hall Sept. 20 to demand the city government declare a “climate emergency.” The march and a following rally were part of a Global Climate Strike.

CLIMATE CHANGE: What does it mean for Virginia?

and people living with chronic illnesses are the most vulnerable.

The risk of toxic flood waters also makes the 10,000-square-mile James River watershed one of the most vulnerable areas to climate change in the country. According to the Center for Progressive Reform, the most socially vulnerable communities in the watershed have on average 25 industrial facilities that store toxic waste vulnerable to expected levels of sea level rise, storm surges and river flooding.

Just a Category 3 storm could flood more than 779 of these sites, potentially releasing carcinogenic pesticides, coal ash and toxic chemicals. The 125 most socially vulnerable communities with flood-exposed industrial facilities are home to more than 473,000 Virginians. Most of these sites are around Richmond and Hampton Roads.

Crisis Capitalism in Norfolk

Despite - or because of - these threats, corporations, politicians and nonprofits have been swooping in to profit off the \$1.5 trillion-dollar climate change adaptation and mitigation industry at the expense of low-income communities and people of color.

In Norfolk, scientists expect another foot of sea-level rise in Hampton Roads by 2050, which means an expected loss of approximately 2,800 square miles of coast and 27,000 buildings by 2060 unless they are flood-proofed.

In response, Norfolk officials are working furiously to rebrand the city as the “Silicon Valley of sea level rise,” as Director of City Planning George Homewood has said. As part of the city’s Vision 2100 Plan for climate adaptation, city officials rezoned Norfolk into four areas based on sea-level rise projections, development and economic assets. High-value areas will be secured with major flood-control investments, whereas low-value areas with high flood risk will receive “educational programs” about flood risks and programs to help property owners recover their economic losses from sea-level rise.

Unfortunately, “climate adaptation” is often a codeword for gentrification, as in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina.

In May, Norfolk won a \$30 million grant through the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Choice Neighborhoods Initiative to “revitalize” the St. Paul’s public housing neighborhood, one of the most flood-prone areas in the city. In 2020, the city will begin tearing down the area’s public housing complexes and replacing them with “mixed-income development.” Part of the low-lying area will be converted into parks and a water-eco center.

While city officials once assured current residents they wouldn’t be displaced, apparently only a third of the 4,200 people currently living in St. Paul’s will be able to

return. About half the residents will be given Section 8 vouchers to find housing elsewhere, but city officials have acknowledged that there won’t be room for everyone to stay in Norfolk. Many community members have spoken out against the plan, as a similar “redevelopment program” displaced hundreds of families from the area in 2000.

The St. Paul’s area also will be turned into an “Opportunity Zone,” one of President Trump’s federal programs that offer tax incentives to steer private investment to low-income neighborhoods.

The Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority did not respond to multiple requests for comments.

Environmental racism

While Gov. Ralph Northam has set a “carbon-free” energy goal for 2050 and pays lip service to “climate adaptation” and “environmental justice,” his policies and allegiance to corporations like Dominion prove otherwise. In early October, Northam appointed Grant Neely, Dominion’s previous Director of Strategic Communications, to be his new Communications Chief.

Gov. Northam did sign a bipartisan deal this year requiring Dominion to clean up more than 27 million cubic yards of coal ash that have been causing widespread groundwater contamination around the sites for years. While the deal looks like a “win” for Northam, it also allows Dominion to shift to taxpayers the cleanup costs, estimated at \$2.4 billion to \$5.7 billion, according to the Richmond Times Dispatch.

In North Carolina, there are suspected cancer clusters near Lake Norman, where one of Duke Energy’s coal ash ponds is located. Due to a lack of state funding, one mother has had to fundraise \$110,000 to test the air and drinking water after her daughter was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. Professor Mary Finley-Brook of the University of Richmond is concerned that the same pattern may occur in Virginia and recommends rigorous water testing with maps to demonstrate any spread of contamination to groundwater and wells.

In Norfolk, the historically Black neighborhood of Lambert’s Point is still being blanketed in coal dust spewed by the Norfolk Southern rail company. Coal dust inhalation is linked to respiratory diseases, which are exacerbated by climate change.

Like Dominion, Norfolk Southern has donated heavily to Northam.

See **CLIMATE** on page 15

cops, courts & prisons



Photo by John Long

Willie Mae Doss, center, speaks Sept. 14 at a Norfolk rally to demand freedom for her son, Jermaine Doss. To her left is Henrietta Trotter, Jermaine Doss' godmother; to her right is Ray Doss, his father. Nearly 50 people attended the event.

Norfolk shows continued support for demand to 'Free Jermaine Doss!'

Staff Report

It's been nearly 20 years since Jermaine Doss of Norfolk was sent to prison for a crime he did not commit, but his family and supporters have never wavered in their commitment to fight for his freedom.

That was proven again on Sept. 14 when nearly 50 people gathered by the Martin Luther King Memorial in downtown Norfolk for a rally to support a habeas corpus brief recently filed on Jermaine's behalf.

The brief, filed in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia by attorney Bryan J. Jones of Charlottesville, asks that Jermaine be released from prison.

Speaking to the gathering were Jermaine's parents, Willie Mae and Ray Doss; his sister, Felicia Doss; his godmother, Henrietta Trotter; and Phil Wilayto of the Virginia Defenders, who have been helping the Doss family with the case for more than 10 years.

A highlight of the rally was when Jermaine called in from Sussex II State Prison and addressed the crowd, many of whom were relatives or friends from his youth. Jermaine thanked everyone for their support and said he feels like he is being held in a state of modern-day slavery. He currently works in the prison laundry for \$0.47 an hour.

Jermaine Doss, now 46, was charged with murder-for-hire in connection with the 1998

shooting death of Norfolk businessman James Webb. The only evidence against Jermaine was the testimony of Nathaniel McGee, who admitted to committing the murder. McGee since has stated in an affidavit and in court testimony that he lied about Jermaine's involvement because prosecutors had threatened him with the death penalty if he did not.

The police officer who arrested McGee and then pursued the case against Jermaine was former Norfolk detective Robert Glenn Ford, who is now serving a sentence of 12.5 years for extorting defendants and then lying about it to the FBI.

Further, although charged with murder-for-hire, Jermaine was acquitted on that charge and instead convicted of first-degree murder. The problem here is that murder is not what is called a "lesser-included offense" in the charge of murder-for-hire, so Doss never should have been convicted of that charge.

The court is under no obligation to grant an evidentiary hearing or habeas corpus relief in response to the habeas filing. It is the hope of Jermaine's family, friends and supporters that the Norfolk rally will help convince the court that this case of extreme injustice must be addressed.

The Norfolk rally was co-sponsored by Family, Friends & Supporters of Jermaine Doss and the Virginia Defenders.

(For a longer version of this story, see the Facebook page for The Virginia Defender.)

Fatal Henrico County police shooting still under investigation

By Phil Wilayto

As of Oct. 22, the fatal police shooting of a mentally challenged Henrico County woman was still under investigation, according to County police spokesperson Lt. M.C. Pecka.

Gay Plack, 57, was shot and killed Sept. 17 in her own home after police were called by her doctor to check on her welfare.

After entering the house and breaking down the door to Plack's bedroom, the woman came at the police officers with an ax, according to police reports.

Ms. Plack died from a gunshot wound to the abdomen, according to the medical examiner.

Prisoners organize to support the community

The League of Direct Action: Old Problems, New Solutions

By Hassan Shabazz

The League of Direct Action is an alliance which evolved out of a congruous relationship between organizations founded by prisoners who are residents in the Augusta Pre-Reentry Self-Governing Community to address deficiencies in our communities.

With a focus on the issues of literacy/education, physical and mental health care, poverty and prison and criminal justice reform, "Kids Doin' Bids," "Healing Hearts," "Trillionaire Academy" and "Virginia Prisoner of Conscience" (VAPOC) have come together in a conglomerative effort to link with other organizations to serve the community through creative direct action by providing grassroots solutions to problems which have largely gone unaddressed, thereby fostering positive change where there once was none.

The first project to be spearheaded by LDA is called "Read to L.E.A.D." L.E.A.D. is an acronym that stands for Learn, Explore, Advance and Discovery.

The "Read to L.E.A.D." initiative was founded upon the principle of promoting literacy in the communities of those who have been disproportionately affected by the social ills of mass incarceration and poverty.

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vapjn.wordpress.com

This literacy program will provide free books to children that they can check out and then return to their local community recreation center. After writing a short essay about the book that they have read, they will receive a raffle ticket. Raffles will be done at a certain time of the month for prizes and this will provide an incentive for their participation in the "Read to L.E.A.D." program.

As a part of this mission, leading up to the "Read to Lead" launch the LDA will be at the "Harvest Fest" October 31, 2019 in Richmond, VA, 900 Decatur St. We will be there to show community support, introduce ourselves and distribute books to the children as a precursor to our own event.

We are inviting all organizations that are about the work of direct action to join the league and come out to participate in this event. If you are a vender, tables are \$25. If you are a nonprofit, tables are free.

If interested contact: Shabe Scott at 804-629-0746.

The LDA is also a part of the "Virginia Prison Justice Network" (VAPJN)

For more information on LDA organizations and updates for the date and time of events, please go to Facebook:

**Virginia Prison Justice Network
Kids Doin' Bids
Trillionaire Academy
Healing Hearts Incorporated**

and the websites:

**vapjn.wordpress.com
thevapoc.wixsite.com**

reclaiming our sacred ground

SHOCKOE Continued from page 1

(2) Three campaigns to prevent a baseball stadium from being built in Shockoe Bottom (2005, 2009 and 2012-2014).

(3) The present ongoing struggle to win City support for the community-generated proposal for a nine-acre Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park (2015-present).

This community proposal, developed in 2015 from a series of public meetings sponsored by the Defenders' Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project, calls for a defined green space that would include the site of the slave jail owned by Robert Lumpkins and known as the Devil's Half Acre; the African Burial Ground, which was saved by a prolonged community struggle from its desecration as a Virginia Commonwealth University parking lot; and two more blocks east of the CSX railroad tracks where several other slave jails once operated, along with many trader offices and supporting businesses.

While the two more blocks are important in and of themselves, including them would prevent any more attempts to build a sports stadium or other inappropriate development in the immediate area.

The public wants the Park ...

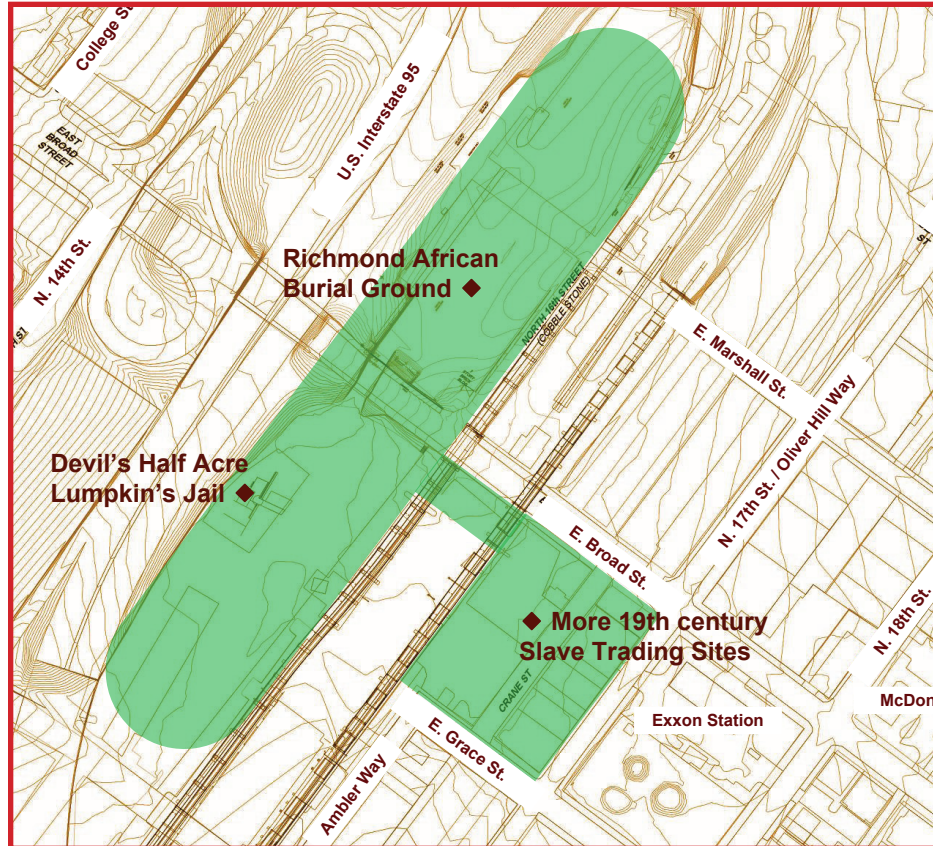
Meanwhile, it has been shown over and over again, at every public forum called to address the future of Shockoe Bottom, that the people of Richmond support the Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park. This support has grown to the point that the proposal has been included in the official strategic planning deliberations for the City of Richmond, and the Sacred Ground Project has been included in the "small-area" master planning process as a member of the mayor's newly-formed Shockoe Alliance.

The City already says it wants to memorialize the 1.7-acre Devil's Half Acre. It already maintains the 3.1-acre African Burial Ground - though it has yet to enact any kind of zoning to protect it from commercial development. And the additional two blocks are just parking lots, owned either by the City or the Loving family, which used to operate a produce business there.

So what's the problem?

... but the developers, corporations & politicians don't

First, this downtown land is coveted by profit-motivated real estate developers. And they have been very generous with their financial contributions to elected officials.



The Community Proposal for a 9-acre SHOCKOE BOTTOM MEMORIAL PARK

For details, see sacredgroundproject.net

Second, the wealthy, mostly white corporate class that really runs this city is horrified by the idea that Richmond might finally honestly examine its past, deal with the ongoing consequences of slavery and the slave trade, and move on to a more truthful future.

It's been more than 150 years since Black people were bought and sold in the auction houses of Shockoe Bottom. How long must we wait until that sacred ground is reclaimed and properly memorialized? Will it be enough to develop a small memorial crammed between Interstate 95 and the CSX tracks, surrounded by commercial and residential development?

It's time to bring this struggle to its conclusion.

Why we need the Symposium

In order to try and educate Richmond's mayor and members of City Council, along with the governor and members of the General Assembly, as to the pressing logic of the memorial park proposal, the Sacred Ground Project is organizing "Truth & Conciliation in the 400th Year: A Shockoe Bottom Public History Symposium," to be held Saturday, December 7, 2019, at the Library of Virginia.

This nationally significant event will be co-sponsored by the Library of Virginia, which will present some of the resources it has available for African-American academic topics and family history researchers, as well as the public as a whole.

Through panel discussions and cultural

We are formally inviting Mayor Levar Stoney to join us at the Symposium and declare his support for the community proposal.

presentations, this all-day symposium will examine the history of Africans and people of African descent in Virginia, from their earliest days to the present, and the important role that Shockoe Bottom has played in that history.

Our goal is to make crystal-clear the historic importance of Shockoe Bottom; its tremendous potential for education, reparations and conciliation; and the great crime that would be committed if its physical presence were lost to inappropriate development.

A centerpiece of the symposium will be presenting the community-generated proposal for a nine-acre Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park as it has evolved over the past four years, highlighting the potential economic, social and cultural benefits for the city as a whole, and particularly for today's Black community.

We are formally inviting Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney to join us at the symposium and to issue a Proclamation declaring his support for the community proposal.

Further, thanks to a \$75,000 grant from the African American Cultural Heritage and Action Fund of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, an independent economic benefit and impact study of the Memorial Park proposal is now underway, with a report expected to be released soon.

This study has examined how much the memorial park would cost, how it would be paid for, how it would benefit the city as a whole, and specially how would it economically benefit the Black community.

The Symposium Program

The symposium will consist of three panel discussions, each with a moderator and presenters, along with exhibits, breaks for networking and special cultural presentations. Refreshments will be provided, including box lunches available for pre-purchase.

We are at an important historical crossroads. Either we will all reclaim Shockoe Bottom, or it will be lost forever.

We need you in this struggle, and no one else can take your place.

Please plan to join us Dec. 7 at the Library of Virginia to learn more about Shockoe Bottom and what you can do to see that it is finally reclaimed and properly memorialized.

Ana Edwards chairs the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project of the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality.

Phil Wilayto is editor of The Virginia Defender newspaper.

reclaiming our sacred ground

SYMPOSIUM PARTICIPANTS - As of Oct. 28

Ram Bhagat, Ph.D. - Manager of School Climate & Culture Strategy, Richmond Public Schools

Elvatrice Parker Belsches - Public Historian, Author & Consultant to the movie "Lincoln;" Co-Founder, Central Virginia African-American Genealogical & Historical Society

Pamela Bingham - Family Historian & direct descendant of Gabriel

Michael Blakey, Ph.D. - Founder/Director, Institute for Historical Biology, College of William & Mary

Christy Coleman, Ph.D. - CEO, American Civil War Museum

Ana Edwards - Chair, Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project; Graduate Student in Public History, Virginia Commonwealth University

Douglas Egerton, Ph.D. - Author, "Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802"

Carmen Foster, Ed.D. - Public Historian, University of Virginia

Gregg Kimball, Ph.D. - Director of Public Services & Outreach at the Library of Virginia

Elizabeth Kostelny - CEO, Preservation Virginia

Lauranett Lee, Ph.D. - Adjunct Asst. Professor, School of Professional & Continuing Studies & Jepson School of Leadership Studies, University of Richmond

Lenora McQueen - Descendant of an ancestor interned at Richmond's 2nd African Burial Ground

John V. Moeser, Ph.D. - Senior Fellow at the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement, University of Richmond

Brian Palmer - Peabody Award-winning Journalist; Event Photographer

Rhonda Pleasants - Co-Chair, Memorialization & Interment Committee, East Marshall Street Well Project

Autumn Rain, Ph.D. - Senior Research Associate, Institute for Historical Biology, College of William and Mary; Co-Director, Remembering Slavery, Resistance & Freedom Project

Joseph S.H. Rogers - Historical Re-enactor; descendant of Apostle James Fields, formerly enslaved member of the Virginia General Assembly

Ryan Smith, Ph.D. - Professor of History, Virginia Commonwealth University

Ashley Atkins Spivey, Ph.D. - Historian; Anthropologist; Member, Pamunkey Tribe

Midori Takagi, Ph.D. - Author, "Rearing Wolves to Our Own Destruction: Slavery in Richmond, Virginia, 1782-1865"

Shawn Utsey, Ph.D. - Chair, Department of African American Studies, Virginia Commonwealth University; Producer, "Meet Me in the Bottom: The struggle to reclaim Richmond's African Burial Ground"

Phil Wilayto - Editor, The Virginia Defender



Queen Nzinga, at left, declares, "This is OUR land, [Mayor] Stoney!" at the 17th annual Gabriel Gathering at Richmond's African Burial Ground. Looking on is Ana Edwards, chair of the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project, and Pamela Bingham, the family historian for descendants of Gabriel. Photo by Phil Wilayto

17th Annual Gabriel Gathering reaffirms determination to struggle for reclamation

The night was chilly and the forecast was for possible showers, but more than 50 people still showed up to honor the memory of Gabriel, the Richmond revolutionary who led a massive effort to end slavery in Virginia and was executed on Oct. 10, 1800, at the site of Richmond's African Burial Ground.

It was the 17th year in a row that the Defenders' Sacred Ground Project hosted the event.

Speaking at the gathering were Gabriel

descendant and family historian Pamela Bingham; longtime Richmond activist Queen Nzinga; prisoner advocate Richard Walker; Virginia Defender editor Phil Wilayto; and Ana Edwards, chair of the Sacred Ground Project.

Cultural performances were presented by Nickey McMullen and Joseph S.H. Rogers.

The event was co-chaired by Lynetta Thompson and the Rev. Rodney Hunter.

no confederate monuments!



Anti-racists from Richmond, Charlottesville and North Carolina gather Sept. 8 outside the national headquarters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in Richmond. It was two days before the 125th anniversary of the Lost Cause-promoting organization that has been responsible for erecting and defending Confederate-honoring monuments across the country. The day's message was "UDC: 125 Years of Racist Lies!" Photo by Phil Wilayto

In our opinion

Richmond does something good

This issue of The Virginia Defender hits the streets Oct. 28, just after National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week (Oct. 20-26). We're glad to see that Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney has taken the opportunity to use this week to help spread awareness in the city about the dangers of lead poisoning, especially to young children.

According to a media release from the mayor's office, Mayor Stoney, the City's Department of Housing and Community Development, the Richmond City Health District, project:HOMES and the local Housing and Urban Development Office "are joining forces to raise awareness of the dangers of lead exposure and poisoning."

Lead is a naturally occurring element that can be toxic to humans and animals, causing serious health problems. It used to be commonly used in making paint, until that use was banned in 1978. So there's a good chance that any house or apartment built before that year could contain lead-based paint.

The problem comes in when the toxic paint deteriorates and paint chips fall to the floor. The chips taste sweet, and little children like to eat them. The lead accumulates in their bodies and can have serious, long-term consequences, affecting their ability to learn, as well as causing behavioral problems.

In Richmond, close to three-quarters of the housing was built before 1978. When we wonder why so many schoolchildren can't read by grade three, have difficulty sitting still in class and act out in negative ways, there's a chance the reason is lead poisoning.

By the way, before grade three, a child is learning to read. After the third grade, they are reading to learn. If they miss this critical benchmark, it can become more and more difficult to keep up with their classmates. Frustration can lead to dropping out of school and then to trouble in the streets. When we're talking about the "school-to-prison pipeline," one of the often overlooked factors is lead poisoning.

According to the Virginia Department of Health, approximately 16,000 children under the age of six living in Richmond are considered at high risk for lead poisoning. Because children living below the poverty line or residing in rental units built before 1978 are at the highest risk of lead exposure, low-income and families of color are disproportionately affected. Pregnant women residing in older housing are also at high risk.

One of the early campaigns the Defenders worked on was when we supported Queen Zakia Shabazz and

her United Parents Against Lead organization, which was exposing the fact that Richmond's lead-abatement program, funded with a multi-million dollar grant from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, was a sham. Grant money was being given to contractors who hired people off the street with no experience with scraping and repainting housing units that had lead-based paint.

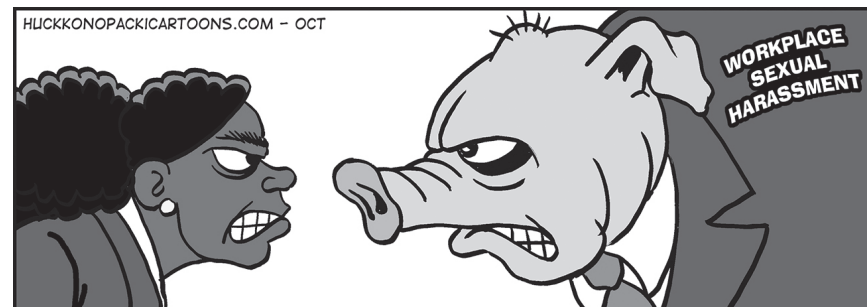
In many cases, the work was so shoddy that the levels of lead were worse after the treatment. Your humble editor checked out a few of the "contractors." One was just a mail box at a UPS store.

The City insisted that the program was working and ignored our alarms. We persisted, and HUD eventually pulled the grant. The grant money is now flowing again to the city - the current HUD grant is for \$2.3 million - and hopefully it's being used in a wiser and more honest way.

One simple solution to the problem of lead poisoning is to test children at age one or even younger. As it is now, we wait until a child is sick to test them, by which time it's often too late to stop the irreparable damage. Families are signed up for lead abatement programs after their children test positive for lead. Essentially, the children are being used as proverbial canaries in the coal mine.

This Oct. 21, the City of Richmond sent out a media release urging parents to have their children and homes tested for lead. If the homes are found to be poisoned, they can make use of a free city program to deal with the problem. If the children are found to be poisoned, there are treatments, but the sooner the problem is detected, the better.

Parents with young children are strongly encouraged to sign up for the city's Lead-



Based Paint Hazard Control Program, which provides free home screenings and lead abatement to eligible homes and rental properties in Richmond.

"This program is essential because it provides a pathway for homes to be made lead safe for Richmond's children," said Zack Miller, Lead Hazard Control Program Project Manager at project:HOMES. "Lead poisoning causes real health problems impacting a child's IQ, mood and behavior in ways

that can limit future opportunities and prevent success. This program provides our city's low- and moderate-income families a cost-free path to knowing their homes are lead safe and not negatively affecting their children's future."

Parents with children under age six and women who are pregnant are encouraged to call project:HOMES at 804-718-0517 or visit <https://www.projecthomes.org/lead-remediation> to learn more about the program.

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Connect the Dots: I Can STILL See

Mighty Queen Nzinga / aka J.B. Taylor

As a 67-year-“young” African-descendant female, please allow me to share a few thoughts about the “black face conundrum” from my perspective. Most assuredly, there will be some who would arguably disagree, but that is the very basis of the First Amendment. However, I plan to use those words, as inextricably pompous as they were, to hold true for ALL people, even though when written I was subliminally NOT included.

Having come of age during the 1950s and the 1960s, I always like to begin by stating, “I survived Chesterfield KKKounty!” I have seen and personally experienced horrors I will NEVER forget!

During those tumultuous days and times, it was also the “standard order of the day” to denigrate people of color, privately and publicly, so much so that now seeing a photo of someone, anyone, in black face is the LEAST of my worries.

However, I must admit seeing that particular photo, regardless of the current stature of the individual, did resurrect some painful memories. Yes, it was racist and quite inappropriate, then and now, but I would surmise it provided some with a certain sense of justification for such incomprehensible behavior toward those who were considered inferior.

After all, we had already been categorized as “chattel” (property), not worthy of any level of humanity or dignity. As my fourth-grade “his-story” (sic) book so disingenuously proclaimed, “The slaves were a happy lot.” Funny, I can STILL see those words I read 58 years ago. Just imagine the damage which could have been done to me and my fellow classmates if I/we had believed and accepted that. As I look back, that was probably my earliest recollection of the justification “concept.”

Hopefully, for the sake of brevity, although that concept often eludes me, I shall offer only a smidgen of what I can STILL see.

I can STILL see the photo of Emmett Till’s face or, more aptly, what was left of it after being beaten beyond recognition based on a lie a white girl told who has yet to be punished. I can STILL see the photo of my brothers and sisters being pummeled by high-powered water hoses and then being attacked by police dogs as they tried to peacefully protest.

I can STILL see the photo and eventual postcard of a black man being roasted on a barbecue spit on just another “ordinary” eve-

ning. I can STILL see the photo of the more than 100 bodies of black men and black women hanging from the trees as “strange fruit” in retaliation for Nat Turner’s Rebellion all because he/we wanted to be FREE.

I can STILL see the photo of the remains of the 16th Street Baptist Church in the aftermath of a bomb which ended the lives of four little black girls—Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, Cynthia Wesley and Addie Mae Collins, not to mention the maimed and scarred survivors still being denied compensation for their injuries and medical care.

I can STILL see the [mental] photo of the dejected look on my dad’s face as he told my sister and me that we could not use the “spic-and-span clean and pretty restroom,” but had to go around to the back to use the “less-than-tidy restroom with the cracked mirror” at a penny-ante carnival which stopped in Petersburg once a year.

And, 58 years later, the most horrific of all is that I do NOT have to look back to the past to find those same types of images.

I can STILL see in “real time” the faces of my people being denied a simple loan even after meeting the necessary criteria. I can STILL see my people being subjected to substandard housing, insufficient education, inadequate medical care and woefully few employment opportunities.

I can STILL see the relentless effects of my people being impoverished, not having enough money to feed our children or to provide our basic needs. I can STILL see my people being held hostage by the virulence of systemic racism that permeates the very fabric of current-day society.

Finally, I debated with myself about whether or not to include this, but then decided I would be remiss if I did not. I can STILL see “the one and his sycophants” who shall remain nameless, but who consistently spew nonsensical madness. So I ask you - no, I demand of you, to take responsibility for YOUR words and subsequent actions—STOP blaming EVERYTHING negative on a predecessor and/or fake news.

And, I shall be so bold as to tweak a now (in)famous slogan, “Make America Great . . .” what?!? How about “Now?” Please pardon me. I cannot bring myself to even write that last word of that slogan, that elusive adverb which suggests at some point that it once was.



Queen Nzinga speaking Oct. 8 at the 17th Annual Gabriel Gathering at Richmond’s African Burial Ground. Photo by Phil Wilayto

I suppose the word “great” is actually what causes my consternation, especially when considering the nationwide resurgence of such vitriolic displays of hatred.

Does that mean that we, as a people, should pine for the “good ol’ days” when we were [physically] enslaved, living and/or dying at the whim of “massa?” Does that mean that we, as a people, must cow-tow, “shuck-n-jive” to the amusement of those who would deny us? Does that mean that we, as a people, must forget the illustrious brilliance of our Ancestors and acquiesce to subservience in the here and now, NEVER to be free?

My response, a resounding NO!

As a matter of fact I was recently “advised” in the waning days of 2018—yes,

2018—that “I could always move back!” Because some have not experienced what I have, as a person of color, does NOT make it any less significantly damaging or real!

Yet, I choose to believe the future does not have to be all gloom and doom. One good thing I have noticed is I can STILL see the spirit of compassion and genuine willingness to help others in the wake of a disaster, with little thought of race, color, gender or economic status.

Is a litany of disasters what it will take? Will the lessons we should have learned from the past continue to haunt us in the future? The renowned author James Baldwin, whom I had the privilege to meet, wrote many years ago, “You cannot fix what you will not face.”

In closing, I Give Thanks and Praises to our Ancestors upon whose shoulders we stand today—a tribute to their indomitable spirit to not only survive, but to persevere and even flourish!

So, I humbly implore my people of color, and anyone else for that matter, to NOT get distracted! We have far greater and more pressing issues than black face that need our FULL attention! In fact black face does NOT even make it onto my “Top 100 List of Things That Bother Me.” In order to facilitate fixing what you will not face, there MUST be open and honest conversations within our communities and beyond which can, hopefully, lead to REAL and ONGOING change!

Lastly, but certainly not “leastly” (sic), a Rasta BIG-UP to my friend and comrade, Sis Lillie A. Estes, and all those who have worked and continue to work tirelessly in service to the people, ALL people! I can STILL see “the dream” which, hopefully, we are destined to bring into fruition!

Peace and Blessings. Ase’

Mighty Queen Nzinga is a long-time member of the Virginia Defenders and 50-plus-year community activist.

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international & antiwar news



Photo by Phil Wilayto

This was the scene on May 2, 2016, outside the House of Trade Unions at Kulikovo Square in Odessa, Ukraine. Some 4,000 people defied terrorist threats by neo-Nazis to honor the memory of those killed in the Odessa Massacre two years before.

The other Ukraine story

By Phil Wilayto

I'm waiting to hear back from the president of Ukraine.

No, I'm not trying to get dirt on a political opponent, or get rid of a prosecutor who might be investigating my son.

Instead, I'm hoping to get an answer to a letter I sent to President Volodymyr Zelensky last Sept. 18 asking him to authorize an international investigation into the Odessa Massacre of May 2, 2014.

I know he got the letter. I sent it Return Receipt Requested, and a few weeks later got back the Receipt, dated Oct. 9. (Slow mail.)

The receipt is signed, but not by the president. I guess he has people who do that kind of thing for him.

Anyway, I'm waiting for his response.

This story goes back more than five years, to shortly after the violent coup in Ukraine that removed a previous president from office.

Viktor Yanukovich was a corrupt official who wanted closer economic ties with Russia. He was replaced by a temporary president, and then by Petro Poroshenko, a corrupt official who wanted closer economic ties with the West. Poroshenko also cozied up to neo-Nazi organizations that supported his brand of right-wing nationalism.

(By the way, the U.S. government was up to its eyeballs in the coup. The Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian

Affairs at the time, Victoria Nuland, later bragged that Washington had spent \$5 billion promoting "democracy" in the former Soviet republic. During the coup she made herself helpful by handing out pastries to the anti-government protesters.)

Anyway, shortly after the coup, the new government unleashed an offensive against ethnic Russian Ukrainians, who today still make up about 17 percent of the population.

You wouldn't know it from the U.S. media, but Russia and Ukraine share a long history. Both grew out of the first eastern Slavic state, called Kyivan Rus, which in the 10th and 11th centuries was the largest and most powerful state in all of Europe.

Today, many Ukrainians have relatives who live in Russia and many Russians have relatives who live in Ukraine. And polls show that most Russians and Ukrainians have positive views about the people of the other country - but not their governments.

Anyway, after the coup, the people of the Crimea Peninsula, most of whom are ethnic Russian, held a referendum and voted overwhelmingly to break off from Ukraine and rejoin Russia.

I say "rejoin," because Crimea was part of the Soviet Republic of Russia until 1954, when it was administratively transferred to Ukraine, for reasons that I still can't figure out.

So Crimea left Ukraine, Russia agreed to annex it, and the U.S. and other Western

countries denounced the process as a Russian "invasion."

Strangely, no one died in the process.

A little further north, in the mostly industrial region of Donbass, the people of two largely ethnic Russian cities - Donetsk and Luhansk, declared themselves People's Republics, and war broke out with the government of Ukraine. The two republics didn't try to join Russia, but the West accused Russia of aggression there too.

And then there was Odessa.

Odessa is like the Key West of Ukraine. It's a very beautiful, multiethnic and cosmopolitan city on the shores of the Black Sea, more given to the arts, commerce, hitting the beaches and merry corruption than with politics.

(Curiously, this third-largest city in Ukraine is actually younger than Richmond, having been founded in 1794 by the Russian empress Catherine the Great.

After the coup, right-wing gangs sporting Nazi symbols began parading in the streets, and the people of Odessa - who during World War II fought a partisan war against the fascist occupation - reacted.

A series of marches and counter-marches raised tensions until May 2, when a large mob of neo-Nazis chased their opponents into the five-story House of Trade Unions in Odessa's Kulikovo Square, and set it on fire.

At least 42 people died, and hundreds were injured - from flames, smoke, beatings and gunfire.

You can Google "Odessa May 2, 2014" and see lots of cellphone videos of the massacre, including the faces of many of the assailants.

And yet, to date, no one has gone to trial for any of the murders.

Local family members and friends of the victims, organized as the Council of Mothers of May 2, go to the site of the killings every week to lay flowers and honor their dead.

They also have never stopped calling for an international investigation, which the Ukrainian government has never agreed to.

In March of 2016, I met some of the council members at a Social Forum conference held in Poland. We were shocked at their stories and the videos they showed us of the massacre, and we asked what we could do to help.

They asked us to come to Odessa that May 2 for the 2nd anniversary memorial - which the fascist organizations were threatening to attack, with machine guns.

I took a hard swallow, and said yes.

And flew to Odessa, with Maine anti-war

activists Bruce Gagnon and Regis Tremblay.

And that was the beginning of the Odessa Solidarity Campaign.

Since then, working with anti-fascist organizations in Europe, Canada and the U.S., the OSC has organized several international campaigns to support the demand by the Council of Mothers for an international investigation.

Up until now, there has been no progress.

Then, this spring, Zelensky was elected president.

Unlike Poroshenko, Zelensky, who is Jewish, doesn't play up Ukrainian nationalism. In fact, in mid-October, more than 10,000 neo-Nazis marched in the capital city of Kyiv to protest his attempts to negotiate a peaceful end to the fighting in Donbass.

And - while we are in no way claiming credit for this - a few weeks after we sent President Zelensky the letter, the federal police opened up an investigation into the role that a former leader of the parliament, or Rada, played in the Odessa Massacre.

Now, this may just be internal politics. Zelensky, a former comedian who became famous playing a reform-minded president on television, may be trying to weed out more of Poroshenko's old allies. But it's something.

Meanwhile, the OSC will continue to tell the story of what happened on May 2, 2014. We'll continue to call for an international investigation into the Odessa Massacre. And we'll continue to pump out information about the reality of present-day life in Ukraine, a country that is so much in the news these days, but about which most people here in the U.S. know very little.

For more information, please visit the Facebook page Odessa Solidarity Campaign and the website www.odessasolidaritycampaign.org.

Phil Wilayto is the editor of *The Virginia Defender* and founder and coordinator of the Odessa Solidarity Campaign.



international & antiwar news

The U.S. foreign policies behind today's immigrant 'crisis'

Based on a talk Virginia Defender editor Phil Wilayto was invited to give at the Sept. 21 RPEC immigrant justice teach-in.

The past few years have seen a sharp increase in the number of people from Central America trying to immigrate to the United States. President Trump and other bigots call it an "invasion" and have enacted barbaric measures to try and terrify people from trying to cross the border.

So why do they come?

The Northern Triangle

According to the human rights organization Amnesty International, the Northern Triangle of Central America, composed of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, is considered one of the most dangerous places on earth, a situation that has caused unprecedented levels of migration.

And much of the violence and resulting poverty can be traced right back to U.S. foreign policy.

For many decades, these countries have been run by small, wealthy elites, known as oligarchs, propped up by the U.S. government because they allowed U.S. corporations to plunder their countries' resources in return for being allowed to run corrupt regimes.

As an inevitable result, the people of these countries have fought back, by any means necessary.

El Salvador

From 1979 through 1992, El Salvador experienced a revolutionary upsurge, along with brutal government repression. Worried about losing its client government, the U.S. threatened to invade. It was dissuaded in part by a strong antiwar movement here at home, but its direct and indirect intervention kept the ruling clique in power.

Today El Salvador suffers from both poverty and an epidemic of violence.

Guatemala

Guatemala's period of revolutionary war was from 1960 to 1996, which included a program of virtual government genocide directed at the native Mayan population. And like in El Salvador, a series of corrupt and

brutal regimes have meant extreme poverty and widespread violence for the poor.

Honduras

Honduras escaped the wars, but in 2009 was saddled with a corrupt and brutal government when Washington, under President Barack Obama and then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, supported a right-wing coup. The result was greatly exacerbated poverty and violence.

Nicaragua

Nicaragua had its Sandinista Revolution in 1979, followed by the U.S.-backed "contra" war, but later electoral victories by the Sandinistas resulted in a high level of public peace and stability and a resulting low level of emigration out of the country. But now the Nicaraguan government is being targeted for "regime change," along with Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia. Why? Because these are the countries that exist outside the area of U.S. domination and exploitation.

Haiti

The Caribbean country of Haiti is the most tragic case of all.

After the Haitian people threw off slavery and the yoke of French colonialism in 1804, President Thomas Jefferson, himself a slaveowner, imposed an economic blockade that lasted 30 years.

France demanded that the newly formed Haitian government repay it and French slaveholders for the "theft" of its enslaved people and the land it had turned into profitable sugar and coffee plantations.

The amount of money the French demanded was the modern equivalent of \$21 billion. This extortionist debt was financed by French banks and Citibank. It took Haiti until just after the Second World War to pay it off.

The U.S. outright invaded Haiti in 1915 and occupied it until 1934. Then came the U.S. support for the Duvalier dictatorships, followed by a military government.

In 1990, the progressive former Catholic priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide became the country's first democratically elected president, only to be overthrown in a coup, brought back to office by the U.S. - which thought it could control him - and then overthrown again in a

coup engineered by Washington. The result has been a series of corrupt governments, violence and the worst poverty in the Western Hemisphere.

Trade, banks, climate & race

Add to U.S. foreign policy the scourges of unfair trade practices, the role of U.S.-controlled international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and now the rapidly growing effects of climate change and you have a perfect storm of conditions that forces people to leave their homelands in hopes of simple survival.

And these are the people, victims of U.S. imperialism, who are the targets of an escalating government repression that is making the United States so hated throughout the world.

Then there's the fact that when someone migrates from Mexico to Texas they are crossing a border that was imposed after the U.S. staged its criminal war of 1846-48. Half of Mexico was stolen. Mexicans didn't cross the border, the border crossed them. Further, many immigrants from Mexico and Central America are indigenous. This originally was their land. They are crossing into the land of the invaders and occupiers.

In conclusion

In order to understand virtually any problem we face today, it's necessary to pay attention to international issues. For example, no recent international event had more effect on the U.S. than the Vietnam War. More than 58,000 U.S. soldiers died, and more than that committed suicide after returning home. Drug addiction, prison, homelessness, generations of kids growing up without fathers - the war came back to us in so many ways.

Not to mention the cost of wars. As the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. said, every bomb dropped in Vietnam exploded in the inner city. It's even more true today, with wars in so many countries. Half your federal tax dollars go to past, present and future wars.

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CLIMATE

Continued from page 8

Instead of reducing these risks, Virginia's Department of Environmental Quality continues siding with corporations to approve projects like the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, Mountain Valley Pipeline and Chickahominy fracked-gas plant. All these natural gas projects disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, and low-income people, stealing land and polluting water and air.

Dominion often frames natural gas as necessary for "carbon mitigation" to limit climate change. In reality, studies show that the estimated methane leakage from natural gas can make it just as bad for the climate as burning coal. Yet Dominion was guaranteed a hefty 14 percent rate of return on the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, which will cost Virginia ratepayers an additional \$2.4 billion.

More than \$57 million in mitigation funds also were distributed to six Virginia foundations and endowments to "offset" environmental damage caused by the pipelines, signed in a secret deal between then-Gov. Terry McAuliffe, Dominion and the other pipeline developers.

In other words, politicians and corporations are polluting the environment in marginalized communities in the name of "carbon mitigation" without actually reducing greenhouse gases, in exchange for profit and cash that is funneled to foundations.

"There's a glaring disparity between when someone has money and a voice," said Queen Zakia Shabazz of the Virginia Environmental Justice Collaborative (VEJC), pointing to the decision to move the Atlantic Coast Pipeline's largest compressor station from near the Mount Vernon plantation to the predominantly Black community of Union Hill in Buckingham County. "How is it not OK to destroy a view, but it's OK to destroy the lives and cultures of families?"

On Oct. 29, the Federal Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit will be hearing a case brought by the Friends of Buckingham challenging the permit for the Union Hill compressor station on the grounds of environmental racism.

On a positive note, Shabazz said the VEJC recently received funding for the planning stage for a resiliency hub in Petersburg. This project will create a solar-powered community center where folks can come for supplies, air conditioning and safety in the case of severe weather.

If the VEJC receives the full funding, this project could demonstrate one way to reduce risks from climate change, rather than amplify them.

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