

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

# The Virginia DEFENDER

FREE

A statewide quarterly newspaper published by the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality

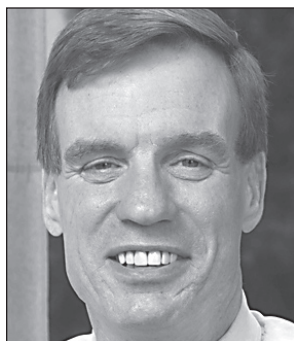
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Summer 2015

Why Sen. Warner, Gov. McAuliffe, Mayor Jones & Dominion head Farrell should

## Move the UCI bike race off Monument Avenue!



Sen. Mark Warner



Gov. Terry McAuliffe



Mayor Dwight Jones

The three men pictured above, a U.S. Senator, the Governor of Virginia and the Mayor of Richmond — all Northern-born Democrats — along with the head of Dominion Resources (at right), the most politically powerful corporation in the state, are the chairmen of Richmond 2015. That's the committee organizing the UCI Road World Championships bicycle race, to be held in Richmond this September. They are expecting 450,000 spectators, reporters from 100 countries and a worldwide television audience of 300 million. And what they decided to highlight to the world is the shrine to the slavery-defending Confederacy known as Monument Avenue.



CEO Thomas F. Farrell II



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Sacred Ground Project Chair Ana Edwards gives an update on the community campaign to develop an alternative plan for Shockoe Bottom, once the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade. The well-attended press conference was held June 19 — June-teenth — in front of Richmond City Hall. While Warner, McAuliffe, Jones and Farrell plan to highlight Monument Avenue during the September UCI bicycle race, they have done nothing to memorialize Shockoe Bottom — a fact the world media is sure to notice.

National coalition organizes to

## STOP THE WARS AT HOME & ABROAD!



Photo by Taylor Janay Manigould

Lawrence Hamm, Chair of the People's Organization for Progress (POP), speaks at the "Stop the Wars at Home & Abroad!" conference held May 8-10 in Secaucus, N.J. Also shown are Defender Rolandah Cleopattrah McMillan (clapping) and Christine Marie, a member of the Coordinating Committee of the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC), which sponsored the conference. (See story on page 7.)

By Ana Edwards & Phil Wilayto

The Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality have called on the organizers of the UCI Road World Championships bicycle race to change the route and get the race off Monument Avenue.

Why? Because Monument Avenue is a virtual shrine to the Confederacy.

Its statues representing Confederate President Jefferson Davis; Generals Robert E. Lee, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson and J.E.B. Stuart; and Naval Commander Matthew Fontaine Maury were erected from 1890 to 1926 — well after the end of the Civil War, after the overthrow of Reconstruction and during a period when the class of people that ruled the South before the war wanted to make it crystal clear that white supremacist rule had returned in force.

These City and state-owned statues are part and parcel of that reactionary period and are an insult to every African-American, every person of color and every decent white person.

The UCI route even makes the Davis monument the highlight of the race by using it as the halfway turning point. The slave-owning Davis is now such a discredited figure that even the conservative Richmond Times-Dispatch has called for the statue's removal. (Later that day, hell froze over.)

Further, the route includes having the cyclists ride their bikes directly over the historic

district of Shockoe Bottom, for decades the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade, when there's nothing there that explains its significance.

Most folks in the United States aren't familiar with the UCI race, but it's one of the world's major sporting events, on the order of the Olympics. Scheduled for Sept. 19-27, it's expected to draw 1,000 racers, 450,000 spectators, reporters from 100 countries and a worldwide television audience of 300 million. So this one race is likely to focus more world attention on Richmond than any event since the end of the Civil War.

The Defenders asked for the race route to be moved in an Open Letter (see page 7) sent June 23 to the four chairmen of Richmond 2015, the committee organizing the race: U.S. Sen. Mark Warner, Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe, Richmond Mayor Dwight Jones and Dominion Resources Chair, CEO and President Thomas F. Farrell II.

These four should have known that Monument Avenue was the wrong place for the race. But now, after the massacre of nine African-Americans by a Confederate-loving white supremacist in Charleston, S.C., and a national outcry against city and state governments sponsoring Confederate symbols, there is no way to explain why these political and corporate leaders are refusing to change the route.

"I disagree with that," Gov. McAuliffe responded when a reporter asked about the

See UCI RACE on Page 5

"Every man of humane convictions must decide on the protest that best suits his convictions, but we all must protest," — Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.



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

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

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

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

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

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

WHAT WE BELIEVE

We believe in Freedom

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

We believe in Justice

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

We believe in Equality

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

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

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

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

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

regional & national news

RVA activists show solidarity with anti-racist rebellion

Eyewitness Baltimore

By Taylor Janay Manigault

*[Editor's note: After the April police murder of Freddie Gray, people from surrounding cities and towns, including Defender Taylor Janay Manigault, traveled to Baltimore to show solidarity with the city's Black community.]*

BALTIMORE — When I went to Baltimore on May 1 – Mayday – I was wearing \$125 Doc Martens, an expensive commodity not common in some of the areas where I ventured. The space between the underfunded rubble of pavement and my vegan rubber soles introduced a bleak confrontation with socioeconomic privilege that was quite jarring.

But regardless of my financial advantages, my color, my Blackness, rendered me into the judged inferiority that lumps all Black people into one general dreg. I know Black as love and beauty. I identify, in color and Blackness, with Black people everywhere. Baltimore, foreign land that it is, still felt like a familiar community.

I'm a student in Richmond. My friend Niko Leiva and I drove up after Freddie Gray died in police custody. A handful of fellow Richmond community organizers had gone up a few days before. It was evident, even from the unrepresentative CNN reports, that those protesting were in need of not only more voices, but medics, legal observers and food.

Micky Alexander, a Southerners on New Ground (SONG) organizer from Richmond, talked with a few people outside the burnt-down CVS drugstore in Baltimore's West End who admitted to igniting the fire. They said they would take more steps if necessary to express their exhaustion from the abuse they experience in their own community.

The CVS became a great symbol of the uprising and a meeting place that week. Richmond organizers Stephen Loughman and Claire Tuite explained that it was occupied by the cops and that their presence was dividing

the neighborhood. Cops brought a dangerous intensity and eventually an enforced curfew. The absence of cops meant celebration and an increase in drug and alcohol use.

The shut-down businesses and schools left the city restless. Churches, humanitarian organizations and a little coffee shop called Red Emma's tended to the devastated West End community by supplying food and shelter. Meanwhile, the mayor enlisted the National Guard to protect the manicured downtown and surrounding businesses and roads/highways.

After dropping off supplies – bandanas for tear gas and snacks for protesters – at a pop-up clinic in the basement of an office building, we walked to a downtown harbor park to join hundreds of people. Among the acres of crunchy blue grass dotted with slow-dripping fountains were elderly, angry people with angry signs and children hand-in-hand with their guardians.

We chanted all the best chants, from "All night, all day, we will fight for Freddie Gray!" to "No Justice, no peace, no racist police!" to "I believe that we will win!"

The trail of people we followed first led us to the Baltimore City Jail to support recently arrested protesters. Our voices were answered by fists and the supporting shouts of incarcerated people at the jail windows.

It seemed that wherever we went, the cops followed – hundreds, with around eight helicopters overhead. The protest progressed to Pennsylvania Avenue, the site of the scorched/ruined CVS.

For around 15 minutes we were on North Mount Street, a stretch of faded brick townhouses that goes on for so long and has so few intersections and alleyways that it acts as a barrier to the neighborhood. This brought the protest to the ghettos of Baltimore. The shops in this area were mostly liquor and corner stores and dinky quick-loan offices – a



Photo by Taylor Janay Manigault

Baltimore protesters came in all ages.

guaranteed police-guarded area.

After passing the cop-barricaded police precinct, we turned onto Riggs Avenue. From there the march was monitored by just two tanks and a few sporadic helicopters.

This area of Baltimore was rife with dilapidated facades and trash, eerily vacant-looking, but the folks cheering on their porches and in the streets made it feel incredibly full. There were Bloods and children and men on motorcycles performing daring tricks.

The end of chanting allowed room for an entirely celebratory crowd. Our ears were full of honks and cheers.

Of course, in this mostly Black neighborhood chanting "BLACK LIVES MATTER" is close to unnecessary. The very presence of the people carried a message of implicit knowing, which was good reason to smile.

Jazz great Ornette Coleman laid to rest

By Ana Edwards

NEW YORK CITY — Some called his music "noise" – discordant, messy, loud, impossible to follow. In truth, he had cracked jazz open like a nut, freeing musicians to explore sounds and ideas simply unheard of before.

Ornette Coleman was born in segregated Fort Worth, Texas, in 1930. He taught himself to play the saxophone and by age 14 had formed his own band. By age 28, with the release of his debut album, "Something Else," it was clear he had ushered in a new era of sound and rhythm, a system he would eventually term "Harmolodics."

His son Denardo, by poet Jayne Cortez, with whom he was married from 1955 to 1965, debuted his own drumming career at age 10 on his father's 1966 album "The Empty Foxhole."

Ornette Coleman died June 11 of heart failure. A memorial was held June 27 at New York City's famed Riverside Church, where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his first major anti-Vietnam War speech, Nelson Mandela was welcomed and memorials have been held for cultural icons such as actress Ruby Dee and poet Maya Angelou.

The pews in the enormous, medieval-styled cathedral overlooking the Hudson River seat 2,000 people and nearly every space was filled as Ornette's casket was slowly carried down the center aisle, accompanied by family members and a processional tune performed by the Master Musicians of Joujouka, Morocco.

Over the next two hours, journalists, musicians, artists and family members shared their stories of life and collaboration with the convention-defying composer. Phil Schaap, host of a renowned 40-year-old jazz program on WKCR radio, officiated the program, which included jazz critics Herb Boyd and Howard Mandel, poets Steve Dalachinsky and Felipe Luciano, sculptor Melvin Edwards and artist Yoko Ono.

Legendary musicians played one after the other: sax player Pharoah Sanders, with his snowy white beard and long, royal blue shirt, seemed to play his solo directly to Ornette. Cecil Taylor improvised piano with spoken word; instrumental duets by Henry Threadgill with Jason Moran, and Ravi Coltrane, son of the late John Coltrane, with Geri Allen, were complemented by a percussive call-and-response piece by drummer Jack DeJohnette and tap dancer Savion Glover.

Two of the most poignant musical moments came when former Coleman collaborators David Murray, Joe Lovano, Al Macdowell, Charnett Moffett and son Denardo reprised one of his most famous pieces, "Lonely Woman," and Ornette's Prime Time Band members – Jamaladeen Tacuma, Charlie Ellerbe, Bern Nix, Ken Wessel, Chris Rosenberg, Badal Roy and Dave Bryant – gathered to play the final tune, a harmolodic expression of joy and grief that engulfed everyone present.

Unanimously described as gentle, soft-spoken and humanity-loving, Ornette Coleman also was attributed with determination and purpose, characteristics essential to someone whose work challenged musical norms, especially in the American musical genre of jazz already revered for its innovative nature.

It was Denardo Coleman who provided the



Ornette Coleman

most succinct description of his father's impact: "It wasn't that he thought outside the box. He just didn't accept there were any boxes."

An archive of Ornette Coleman's recordings is available at: <https://archive.org/search.php?query=ornette+coleman>.

Defender **Ana Edwards** attended Ornette Coleman's memorial program as a member of his extended family.

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community news



Photo by Phil Wilayto

**‘Stop tuition hikes!’** — Students across Virginia held a Statewide Day of Action in early April to demand accessible, democratic and debt-free educations. Local protests were sponsored by organizations including GMU (George Mason University) Student Power, UVa (University of Virginia) Students United, Student Power Network at VT (Virginia Tech), VCU (Virginia Commonwealth University) Student Power, UMW (University of Mary Washington) Students United, and JMUnited (James Madison University). Above, students at VCU press their demands.

July 27 court date for BLM activists

By Phil Wilayto

Three Richmonders active in the Black Lives Matter movement are asking for public support when they attend a court hearing July 27.

Shan Davis, 24; Heaven Imanchinello, 22; and Ashleigh Shackelford, 24; were among a small group of young people June 7 protesting police murders of Black women. They had gathered near the intersection of West Broad and Harrison streets in downtown Richmond when they were approached by police officers.

According to a Richmond Police Department spokesperson, the officers “... observed a few people in the median and one standing in the roadway, impeding traffic. An officer spoke with the group, warning that standing in the roadway or median imposed a safety issue and advised them to move to a sidewalk or corner. The conversation carried on a for a few minutes with multiple warnings.

“A short time later, they [the protesters] did move to a nearby corner. About 15 minutes after that, about 9:30, 9:34, officers patrolling the area passed the intersection a second time and witnessed the same group had returned to the median. Two individuals were arrested after previously having received a warning and cautioned against standing in the median or roadway due to a safety hazard.”

Davis was arrested and charged with pedestrian on a median and resisting arrest.

Imanchinello was arrested and charged with pedestrian in a roadway. Shackelford was charged with pedestrian in a roadway and released with a summons.

Note: In recent weeks, members of the right-wing Virginia Flaggers organization have been standing in the Monument Avenue median near the statue of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, displaying the Confederate battle flag. There have been no arrests of Flaggers.

According to a Facebook post by Davis, “... the charges of ‘illegal use of a median were dropped for the two (Heaven and Shan) arrested, as it could only be valid if soliciting/ asking for money, not standing, while black, and holding signs that uplift black lives, specifically black women + black trans women + black girls.”

Davis continued: “The RPD’s use of force and harassment towards our black bodies was inappropriate, and we need YOU to come out to show that ALL BLACK LIVES MATTER, and we will not stand for violence, racial profiling, or any behavior condoned under white supremacy.”

The three are due in Richmond General District Traffic Court, 400 N. 9th St., at 9 a.m. on Monday, July 27.

Note: Cell phones are not allowed in the courts building.

Hip-hop documentary at Tredegar

“Nearly everyone turns out for this engaging history of hip-hop fashion.” — *New York Daily News*

“Fresh Dressed” is a new (June 26) documentary that explores the history and relationship between fashion and hip-hop culture. Directed by Sasha Jenkins, it features commentary by Kanye West, Pharrell Williams, Big Daddy Kane, Sean “Puffy” Combs, Nas, Pusha T, Swizz Beatz, Damon Dash, André Leon Talley, A\$AP Rocky, Marc Ecko, Kid ‘N Play and many others.

The film also is the opener for Starry Night Cinema, a “lawn chair” series sponsored by Richmond’s Afrikana Independent Film Festival.

The documentary will be shown Friday, July 17, at Tredegar Iron Works, 500 Tredegar St. in Richmond. Gates open at 8 p.m., with the screening at dusk, approximately 8:45. The public is welcome, with a \$10 suggested donation. Concessions and adult beverages will be available. In case of inclement weather, the film will be shown under a large tent in the Tredegar Courtyard.

More information is on Facebook at: Afrikana Independent Film Festival.



Photo by Phil Wilayto

These students thought enough of their education to stage an early-morning protest against teacher cuts. The June 15 protest won a temporary victory.

Student protest brings public attention to teacher cuts

More than 60 Richmond public high school students, most from Open High, gathered at 8 a.m. June 15 in front of Richmond City Hall to protest city plans to cut the number of teachers at some schools.

“We’re on summer break, but we got up early today to do this protest at 8 o’clock,” said Cassidy Ryan, 19, who had just graduated from Open High. “It took just three days to prepare it.”

“This affects everyone,” added Morgan Stubbs, 18, also an Open High graduate.

Students, parents and teachers also attended a School Board meeting that evening at the new Huguenot High School on South Side. Under the plan, no teachers would actually be let go, but because of reassignments, some programs would be cut back or eliminated. An

online petition demanded “Keep the Performing Arts in Richmond Public Schools.”

The reassignment plan was designed to “level” the student-teacher ratio at all schools at 22-1. Schools like Open High, that now have smaller classes, would lose teachers to other schools with larger classes.

Faced with the strong opposition, the board voted to postpone a decision.

One week after the protests, however, it unexpectedly held another vote and implemented the staffing changes.

Richmond Mayor Dwight C. Jones has resisted funding the school system at levels requested by the school administration. The school budget that took effect July 1 is about \$15 million less than RPS Superintendent Dana T. Bedden initially requested.

Movement vs. Dominion pipeline growing

Staff Report

Dominion Resources, the most politically powerful corporation in Virginia, is working hard to win state approval for its Atlantic Coast Pipeline Project.

And environmental and community opponents are working hard to stop it.

Protests are being held across the state to block the \$5 billion project to build a 550-mile pipeline to carry 1.5 billion cubic feet of fracked gas daily from Harrison County in West Virginia, southeast through Virginia with an extension to Chesapeake, and then south to Robeson County, N.C.

Opponents charge that continued reliance on oil, coal and gas threatens the environment, that the gas is being produced by the environmentally harmful “fracking” method,” that the pipeline route threatens private property and important cultural and historical sites and the company’s main motivation is profits, not service.

Gov. Terry McAuliffe, a Democrat who has received at least \$160,000 in Dominion campaign contributions, supports the project.

“There are hundreds of pipelines in Virginia,” McAuliffe (said). “Everyone acts like this is the first one being done.” (*Staunton*) *News Leader*

On Feb. 23, Richmond activists staged a “blockade” of Dominion’s downtown headquarters.

On April 7, the Chesapeake Climate Action Network delivered 5,000 signatures on an anti-pipeline petition to McAuliffe.

On April 15, three pipeline opponents disrupted the governor as he spoke at a Richmond conference called



Photo by David Martin

Dominion opponents gather May 6 in Glen Allen outside the corporation’s annual stockholders meeting.



Photo by Phil Wilayto

A panel of mostly African-American environmentalists discuss the pipeline and related issues at an April 7 meeting at Richmond’s Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church.



Photo by Phil Wilayto

The Virginia Sierra Club holds a protest April 14 outside the Greater Richmond Convention Center where Gov. McAuliffe and Dominion Resources representatives were meeting with others to “discuss” climate

“The Next Frontier of Climate Change: State and Local Action in Virginia.”

On July 2, around 40 people attended a panel discussion on the pipeline issue held at the Rag and Bones Bicycle Co-op in

Richmond’s Scott’s Addition.

Other events and actions are shown in the photos above.

For more information, contact the Chesapeake Climate Action Network at [www.chesapeakeclimate.org](http://www.chesapeakeclimate.org).

Free summer meals for children & teens

Free breakfasts and lunches are available this summer to children and teenagers 18 and younger through the Summer Meals for Kids program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In Richmond, the program is hosted at more than 100 sites by the City’s Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities. The free meals are available by visiting any participating site Monday through Friday at meal time. No registration is required.

In the Richmond metro area, the program operates through Aug. 28. A complete list of participating sites can be found at [http://www.richmond.gov.com/parks/documents/SMFK\\_Locations.pdf](http://www.richmond.gov.com/parks/documents/SMFK_Locations.pdf). For more information in Richmond: (804) 646-5698.

To find meal sites in other cities, log onto: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/summerfoodrocks>.



our working lives



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Virginia Raise Up members bring the fight for a \$15 minimum wage to a McDonald's.

‘Fight for \$15’ winning victories

By Phil Wilayto

Pressing their campaign for a \$15 minimum wage, hundreds of fast-food and other low-wage workers rallied April 15 at Richmond's Monroe Park and then marched a mile and a half to a McDonald's restaurant on Chamberlayne Avenue. Their bright red banner with the slogan "On strike to lift our families up!" was joined by signs that read "Home Care – Fight for \$15," "On strike to raise wages for a better South" and "We have nothing to lose but our chains!"

The Fight for \$15 movement, just two years old, has been winning some significant victories.

Beginning July 1, starting wages at the 1,500 U.S. restaurants directly owned by the McDonald's corporation will be raised to \$1 more than the local minimum wage. The raise applies to only about 10 percent of all U.S. McDonald's, most of which are independently owned, but it's a start and something that seemed impossible before the campaign began.

Walmart, the largest private company in the United States, announced this spring that it would raise the wages of 500,000 full-time and part-time workers — more than a third of its workforce at Walmart U.S. stores and Sam's Clubs, to at least \$9 an

hour. That's \$1.75 above the federal minimum wage, the default minimum for Virginia, which does not have its own minimum wage. By next Feb. 1, the pay will go to at least \$10 an hour, Walmart says.

Individual cities and states also have been reacting to the growing demands for higher wages. Los Angeles, the country's second-largest city, voted in May to increase its minimum wage from \$9 an hour to \$15 an hour by 2020. San Francisco, Chicago, Seattle and Oakland, Calif., have already approved increases. Dozens more are considering it. And last year Alaska and South Dakota raised their state minimum wages as the result of ballot initiatives.

Two unions that have been in the forefront of this movement are the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which backs the Virginia Raise Up campaign, and the United Food & Commercial Workers union (UFCW), which supports the Our Walmart effort.

To get involved in this struggle, see the ads on the back page.

STRIKE!

As we go to press, news is breaking of a strike by Richmond sanitation workers demanding higher wages, health benefits and full-time jobs for part-time workers.

The July 7 work stoppage, carried out without the backing of a union, reportedly lasted several hours, idling more than 20 sanitation trucks and disrupting trash collections for between 61,000 and 62,000 households. A meeting between the workers and management to discuss the demands has reportedly been set for July 9.

The strike was unusual for Virginia, one of just two states where laws forbid local governments from negotiating with public service unions. The action was covered by The Washington Post, Associated Press and most local Richmond news media.

According to Bloomberg Business, sanitation collection is the seventh most dangerous job in the United States, with workers dying on the job at a rate four times that of firefighters and security guards, mostly because of transportation incidents.

(Police come in at 14th, right after taxi drivers and chauffeurs.)

NO HAY FRONTERAS EN LA LUCHA DE LOS OBREROS



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Anayele Guerrero, at left, is a sister of one of the 43 missing Ayotzinapa students. With her is caravan supporter Rosa Maria de la Torre of Texas. Behind them are posters of the missing students. The photo was taken on the final day of their visit to Richmond.

Relatives of disappeared Ayotzinapa students visit Virginia

Staff report

On Sept. 26, 2014, 43 students attending a progressive agricultural college in Ayotzinapa, Mexico, were abducted by local police. More than nine months later, they are still missing, in a case that has sparked a mass movement in Mexico and solidarity actions around the world.

This April, three of the students' relatives — two parents and a sister — visited Richmond

for three days as part of a caravan of relatives on their way to Washington, D.C., to ask President Barack Obama to stop sending military weapons to the Mexican federal police. All along the way, they and other relatives visited U.S. cities to talk about their struggle and ask for public support.

In Richmond, the relatives were hosted by activists with local groups including Black Lives Matter, VCU's Students for Social Justice, Southerners on New Ground (SONG) and the Wayside Center for Popular Education, who organized meetings in the community as well as at VCU and the University of Richmond.

"I think that it was a great effort," said Carolina Velez, a community organizer and Program Coordinator with Wayside who helped to coordinate the caravan.

"When (the relatives) talked with students here, it was a great opportunity for Black and Brown people to coordinate an effort together. One of our strategies was to create popular education in the community prior to their coming to educate people about the U.S. invasion of Latin America and about why people come to the United States.

"So we were able to have a lot of Black and Brown people together in a room, trying to find the commonalities in both and the differences also, and the oppression that Black people suffer here in the United States."

Prior to visiting Richmond, the relatives stopped in Blacksburg for a meeting sponsored by the Coalition for Justice, a local organization active with the Virginia People's Assembly for Jobs, Peace & Justice.

Raise Up 10 in court

By Shelli Cumber

On Sept. 4, 2014, a group of Richmond-area fast-food workers brought their frustrations about low wages to the community. They were leaders in the Virginia Raise Up campaign that is fighting for a \$15 minimum for fast-food and other low-income workers.

The workers gathered in front of a McDonald's on Mechanicsville Turnpike in Henrico County. Then 10 of them, including one from the McDonald's, stood or sat in the middle of the busy street, blocking traffic for close to an hour, until the police became involved.

The 10 workers were arrested, charged with unlawful assembly and public nuisance. Their court date was Nov. 20 at the Henrico County General District Court, where they were sentenced to 30 days of community service, \$92 in fines and court costs. The community service was to be completed within six months. The fines and court costs were covered by Virginia Raise Up.

On May 19, they were back in court to report on their progress. Due to extenuating circumstances, some had not completed all the required service hours and were given extensions until July 24. One participant who had several charges unrelated to the protest was taken into custody for five days.

The Sept. 4 protest was one of 150 similar actions that took place that day around the country.

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cops, courts & prisons

Va. prisoners  
release program  
for prison reform

By Kat McNeal

The prisoner-led organization Virginia Prisoners for Racial Justice, which earlier this year launched a Clemency Campaign to call attention to the state’s extensive history of anti-Black racism, has announced a three-point program for addressing the injustices of Virginia’s modern criminal system.

They are as follows:

1. We want all prisoners who were denied Truth-in-Sentencing to be given a legal remedy to have justice provided to them.
2. We want all prisoners to be able to earn up to 50 percent good time on their sentence.
3. We want an independent commission to be assembled by the Virginia General Assembly to study racial disparities in Virginia’s criminal justice system.

These goals address a specific, controversial policy issue in the state: the 1995 Truth-in-Sentencing Act, passed under Gov. George Allen, which abolished parole for felons in the state and capped good time – the amount of time by which a prisoner could reduce his or her sentence – at 15 percent of the total sentence.

Prior to this act, people convicted of felonies in Virginia served, on average, 30 percent of the sentences assigned to them. Judges and prosecutors knew this and adjusted the sentences they sought accordingly. If a prosecutor wanted a person who committed a robbery to spend 10 years in prison, for example, they might seek a sentence of 30 years, with the understanding that the individual would likely be released sooner as the result of earned good time and parole.

After the act, however, there is evidence that the courts did not immediately transition into seeking shorter sentences. In many cases, juries were not fully informed of the changed law and applied much longer sentences under the mistaken expectation that the defendant would have access to parole.

It is not known exactly how many cases were affected in this manner. However, VAPRJ believes Black prisoners were affect-

Sat., July 25, Newark,  
N.J. - March Against  
Police Killings &  
Economic Inequality

A grassroots community organization in Newark, N.J., has called for a Million People’s March Against Police Brutality, Racial Injustice and Economic Inequality.

“Police brutality is a serious and long-standing problem,” states the People’s Organization for Progress (POP) in a flier announcing the march. “For decades, attempts have been made to reform the police. These efforts have only been successful when tremendous sustained political and social pressure have been brought to bear upon the appropriate government institutions. ...

“We will march to demand an end to police brutality and justice for all of its victims, police reform and an end to the problems of racial injustice and economic inequality which lead to police brutality.”

The march is scheduled to begin at noon, Saturday, July 25, at the Lincoln Monument, Springfield Avenue and West Market Street in Newark.

This action was endorsed by the United National Antiwar Coaliton (UNWSC) at its national conference held May 8-10 in Secaucus, N.J.

The Defenders, a founding UNAC member, are organizing vans to travel to this march. To join us, call 804-644-5834 or email: DefendersFJE@hotmail.com.

ed more extensively and severely, because of the demonstrated tendency of police and prosecutors to overcharge and courts to oversentence Black defendants.

There is ample evidence to corroborate this position. A 2005 report by The Sentencing Project, a national research and advocacy organization, found that Black defendants generally are more harshly sentenced than white defendants in similar situations; less likely to receive sentence reductions for providing “substantial assistance” to the prosecution; and less likely to be able to hire a private attorney, which is understood to lead to shorter sentences.

The organization’s platform announcement comes only weeks after Gov. Terry McAuliffe signed an executive order to convene a commission to study the parole and good time policy and how it has effected crime in Virginia. The public debate is being reignited and VAPRJ intends to add the voice of Virginia’s incarcerated and their families to the discussion.

For more information or to request a copy of the organization’s Clemency Petition, write to Virginia Prisoners for Racial Justice at PO Box 23202, Richmond, VA 23223.

UCI race

Continued from page 1

demand to change the route.” “... That’s part of our heritage, who we are as Virginians. We were the capital of the Confederacy,” said McAuliffe, who was born in Syracuse, N.Y.

As of our press deadline, the UCI race route is still designed to highlight Richmond’s shrine to the Confederacy before the world – 150 years after Emancipation and the end of the Civil War, in the former capital of the Confederacy, in a majority-Black city whose mayor is the former head of the Virginia Democratic Party.

What makes all this especially outrageous is the fact that, just a few miles away, Shockoe Bottom still lies largely unrecognized, disrespected and still targeted for “economic development.”

A determined and broad-based community effort, in which the Defenders are proud to have played a leading role, succeeded in blocking the proposal by the mayor and the developers he serves to build a commercial baseball stadium in Shockoe Bottom. But, other than a few plaques on the sites of Lumpkin’s slave jail and the African Burial Ground, there has been no proper memorialization.

An Alternative Plan for  
Shockoe Bottom

Recognizing that it’s only a matter of time before some other profit-driven scheme is launched for Shockoe Bottom, the Defenders and our community allies have initiated a broad campaign to develop an alternative plan – one that would reclaim and properly memorialize this sacred ground, while providing for significant business income and tax benefits from the increased tourism such a site would bring.

Charleston, S.C., understands the benefits of historical tourism. It was the entry point for 40 percent of Africans brought to what would become the United States. The city estimates that the majority of all African-Americans today could trace some ancestry to Charleston. That’s why it’s building a \$70-million International African-American Museum to explore the city’s role in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

U.S. participation in that trade was banned by Congress in 1807. After that, Virginia, with its played-out cotton fields and resulting “surplus” of enslaved Africans, increasingly became the wholesale supplier of human beings for plantations in the Deep South. Shockoe Bottom was the epicenter of that trade.

So the majority of African-Americans today could also trace some ancestry to Richmond, which means that the potential for historical tourism here is every bit as great as in Charleston.

Gov. McAuliffe  
responds

[Editor’s note: The Defenders received this email at 8:09 am July 8.]

July 7, 2015

Dear Mr. Wilayto:

Governor McAuliffe asked that I respond to your e-mail of June 23, 2015. In your e-mail, you express concerns regarding the route of the UCI Bicycle Race scheduled to take place in the city of Richmond this fall. You are concerned that the route through Monument Avenue, where monuments are displayed that reflect the Confederacy and the bypass of the only African-American statute represented – Arthur Ashe, in addition to cycling over “sacred ground” in Shockoe Bottom the “epicenter” of the U.S. domestic slave trade, would project a negative image of the city of Richmond; particularly in the wake of recent events in Charleston, South Carolina. You ask that the Governor consider changing the route.

We do understand and appreciate your concerns. The Governor does not have control of the 2015 UCI Cycling Championships. Thank you for contacting us and sharing your concerns with the Governor.

Sincerely,  
Nancy Rodrigues  
Secretary of Administration

But Richmond seems to be terminally stuck on stupid.

The Defenders are working to have a viable plan for Shockoe Bottom ready to present to a mass community meeting on Saturday, Aug. 15. If the plan is accepted, we hope to have it introduced at City Council’s next meeting, on Monday, Sept. 14 – five days before the start of the UCI race.

Meanwhile, more and more people outside Richmond are taking note of this deep contradiction in the former Capital of the Confederacy: the continuing honor being shown to symbols of that slavery-defending entity versus the continuing neglect of the city’s slavery-related history.

On July 5, The Boston Globe ran a 3,575-word, front-page feature story with the headline: “Richmond split over Confederate history: In the capital of the Confederacy, calls are rising to properly memorialize the slave trade.” The story featured Ana Edwards, chair of the Defenders’ Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project.

More stories are being prepared by the (Norfolk) Virginian-Pilot and Virginia Public Radio, among others.

It’s only a matter of time before the international media picks up on this issue and Richmond stands vilified before the world.

It’s not too late to change the race route.

And it’s not too late to reclaim and properly memorialize Shockoe Bottom.

All it will take is for progressive and aware people of every race, here in Richmond and around the world, to demand it.

SAVE THE  
DATE!

The Defenders have called for a **NATIONAL PRESENCE in Richmond on Saturday, Sept. 19**, the first day of the UCI bicycle race. We will meet at noon at the Monument Avenue statue of Confederate President Jefferson Davis to tell the world that we don’t honor Davis or any other slaveowner. We call for all the Confederate statues to come down and demand the reclamation and proper memorialization of Shockoe Bottom. This call has already been endorsed by the United National Antiwar Coalition, the largest antiwar network in the United States. Plan to stand with us on Sept. 19.

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sacred  
ground  
HISTORICAL  
RECLAMATION  
PROJECT

Black History Matters:  
Reclaim Shockoe Bottom!

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

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

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# In our opinion

## Summer reading:

When people ask us what books they should read to learn how this world really works, these are the first five we recommend.  
You can find all of them at Amazon.com.

**A People’s History of the United States – by Howard Zinn (1980) Harper & Row; HarperCollins**

The classic history of this country from the point of view, not of presidents, generals and corporate titans, but of the poor and working people of every race and gender who built it and tried to make it live up to its stated ideals.

Zinn: “Our people are basically decent and caring, and our highest ideals are expressed in the Declaration of Independence, which says that all of us have an equal right to ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’ The history of our country, I point out in my book, is a striving, against corporate robber barons and war makers, to make those ideals a reality — and all of us, of whatever age, can find immense satisfaction in becoming part of that.”

**The River Where America Began: A Journey Along the James – by Bob Deans (2007) Rowman & Littlefield Publishers**

A must read for every Virginia activist – U.S. history from the separate views of Africans, Indians and Europeans and of the fundamental contradiction between this country’s stated ideals and its reality.

Deans: “This is a biography of sorts, a tale of the most historic waterway in America, the place where Africans, English, and Native Americans first came together four centuries ago to form the beginnings of a new civilization that would change the world. The story is ugly in places. Seldom is it fully just or fair. It is, though, a fully American story, the story of the river where America began.”

**How Europe Underdeveloped Africa – by Walter Rodney (1972) Bogle-L’Ouverture Publications**

A historical overview of the relations between Africans and Europeans that sheds immense light on race relations today in the United States. Written by a Guyanese scholar and revolutionary murdered by the CIA.

Rodney: “The decisiveness of the short period of colonialism and its negative consequences for Africa spring mainly from the fact that Africa lost power. Power is the ultimate determinant in human society, being basic to the relations within any group and between groups. It implies the ability to defend one’s interests and if necessary to impose one’s will by any means available. In relations between peoples, the question of power determines maneuverability in bargaining, the extent to which a people survive as a physical and cultural entity. When one society finds itself forced to relinquish power entirely to another society, that in itself is a form of underdevelopment.”

**A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East – by David Fromkin (1989) Owl Books (Henry Holt & Co.)**

If you only read one book about the Middle East, this Pulitzer Prize finalist is the one to read. Contrary to what we are told about the “ancient” conflicts in this oil-rich region, most of the countries in the Middle East were not formed until after World War I, by the British and French. And most of the region’s problems are rooted in what those two colonial powers did and what the United States is doing today.

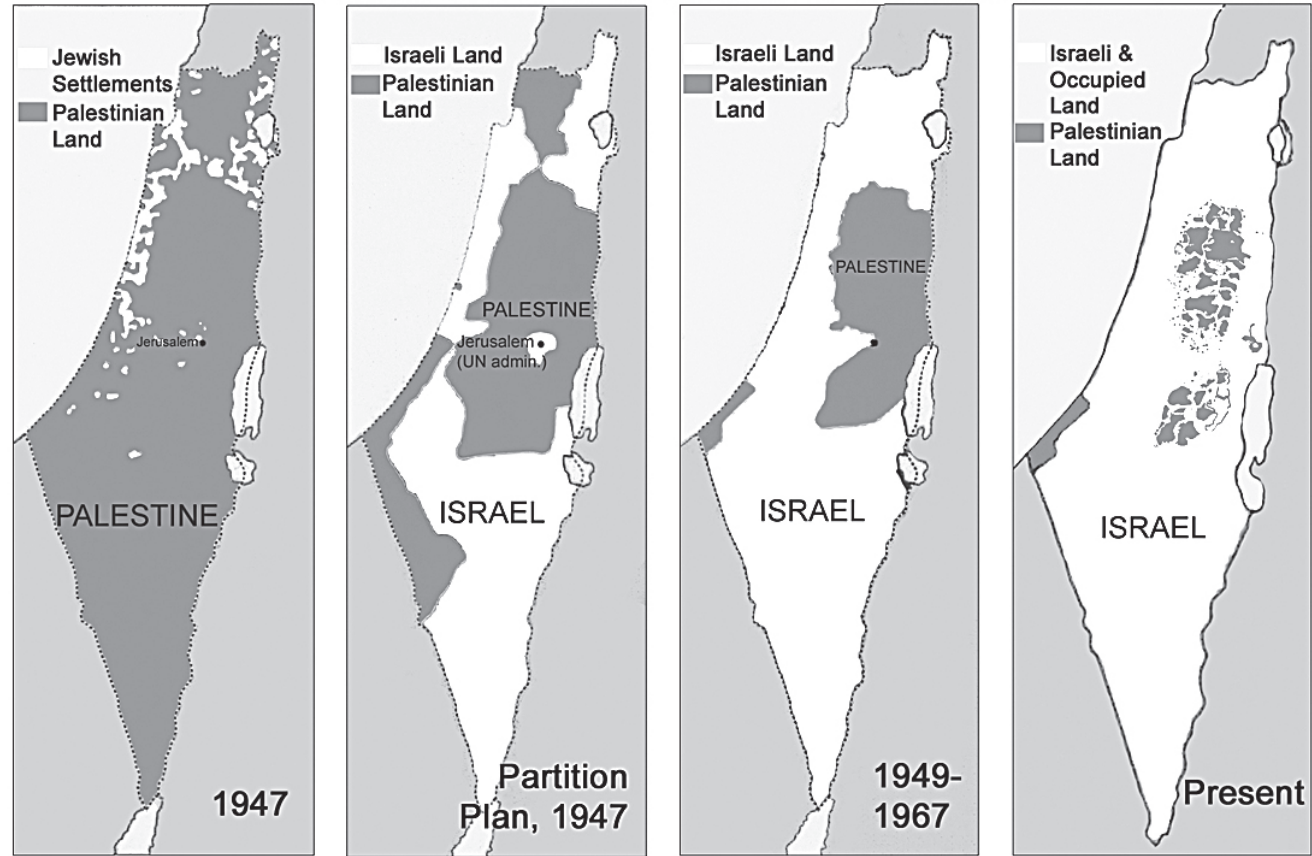
Fromkin: “The Middle East, as we know it from today’s headlines, emerged from decisions made by the Allies during and after the First World War. In the pages that follow I set out to tell in one volume the wide-ranging story of how and why – and out of what hopes and fears, loves and hatreds, mistakes and misunderstandings – these decisions were made.”

**Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent – by Eduardo Galeano (1971) Monthly Review Press**

This is the book that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez presented to President Barack Obama in 2009 at the Fifth Summit of the Americas. A brilliant overview of five centuries of European and U.S. exploitation of Latin America by one of the world’s literary giants. When right-wing generals ruled much of the continent, this book was banned in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay.

Galeano: “The division of labor among nations is that some specialize in winning and others in losing. Our part of the world, known today as Latin America, was precocious: it has specialized in losing ever since those remote times when Renaissance Europeans ventured across the ocean and buried their teeth in the throats of the Indian civilizations. Centuries passed, and Latin America perfected its role. We are no longer in the era of marvels when fate surpassed fable and imagination was shamed by the trophies of conquest — the lodes of gold, the mountains of silver. But our region still works as a menial. It continues to exist at the service of others’ needs ....”

# Palestinian loss of land, 1947 to the present. Still think Israel is the victim?



# Letters to the Editor

## Virginia Prisoners for Racial Justice

Virginia Prisoners for Racial Justice was a movement started by Virginia prisoners to challenge the state’s racist criminal justice policies. We began this movement with a “Mass Clemency” drive, with the goal being to communicate to the state and the people our position. Our Clemency Campaign is an ongoing program that will keep the issue in the minds of our government officials. If you have any friends or family who are incarcerated and Black, please ask them to unite with us.

Virginia Prisoners for Racial Justice has three (3) objectives:

1. We want all prisoners who were denied Truth-in-Sentencing to be given a legal remedy to have justice provided to them.

2. We want all prisoners to be able to earn up to 50 percent good time on their sentence.

3. We want an independent commission to be assembled by the Virginia General Assembly to study racial disparities in Virginia’s criminal justice system.

We hope to be able to mobilize citizens to speak for us at the General Assembly and to support us in their efforts to communicate our message.

Mass incarceration in Virginia is about locking people up and throwing away the key under the guise of being “tough-on-crime.” Black people are victimized by these policies more than any other racial group in this state. It’s because Black people are the poorest people in this state and, in effect, the most powerless.

The police are able to police our communities much more aggressively than they would other neighborhoods where political capital could be used to have a police chief or commissioner fired. There isn’t enough political capital in the hood to keep the paramilitary police force from behaving aggressively. Then judges are able to oversentence us after some prosecutor has more than likely overcharged us.

In claiming that “Black Lives Matter,” we must truly understand the role of crime and punishment in America and how it’s been used historically to marginalize and contain Black people. Let’s unite to bring justice to all people, regardless of race, class, gender, etc.

We’ll explain how you can help soon.

Dale Pughley  
DILLWYN

## Bringing justice to injustice in prison

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

At the time when I committed my offense, I was only 18 years old, I had had no prior juvenile or adult record, which

made me a first-time offender when I was sentenced in the York County Circuit Court in York County, Virginia. There was a presentencing report and my sentencing guidelines was 13 years (High, Low, and Medium range). However, I was sentenced outside of the recommended guidelines.

I am now approaching my 14th year of incarceration. It hasn’t been easy, but I have learned that the only way to bring justice to an unjust situation is to be a better person daily and continue to show others that I am no longer that misguided teenager who committed that awful crime 14 years ago.

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

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

Lawrence J. Stephens  
The Williams and Jones Family  
RICHMOND

## Reclaiming Shockoe Bottom

Several efforts to protect Shockoe Bottom have produced some remarkable successes. The city should celebrate excavating the site of Lumpkin’s slave jail, liberating

the African Burial Ground and protecting Shockoe Bottom from ill-conceived plans to build a baseball stadium on this site of conscience.

Now the hardest work begins: How will Richmond encourage development of this site in ways that respect its role in the horrific internal trade in enslaved people, as the site of one of the earliest identified burial sites for people of African descent, and as the site of the execution of Gabriel?

Several community conversations contributed to a vision for the Bottom to be presented in the next few months, but other one-off, uncoordinated projects involving the train shed, the public market and housing development are moving forward. Shockoe Bottom represents a large, complicated and significant revitalization opportunity for Richmond’s people. Stakeholders must discuss not just what shouldn’t happen in Shockoe Bottom, but what should.

The site must memorialize the treatment of people of African descent and other people of color, become an economic engine in the city focusing on disregarded parts of our history, and become a source of economic opportunity focused on overcoming poverty, the effects of enslavement and its Jim Crow-era offspring. We must stay engaged, insist on an open process respecting preferences of communities of enslaved people’s descendants and communities surrounding Shockoe Bottom, and insist on development in the district that respects all of its history.

Jim Armstrong  
RICHMOND

# The Virginia Defender

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# Open Letter to the Organizers of the UCI Bicycle Race

The following is an Open Letter sent June 23 by the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality to the four chairmen of Richmond 2015, the committee organizing the huge UCI bike race scheduled for Sept. 19-27 in Richmond.

To: Richmond 2015 Chairmen of the Board Gov. Terry McAuliffe; U.S. Sen. Mark R. Warner; Richmond Mayor Dwight C. Jones; and Tom Farrell, Chairman, President & CEO, Dominion

Dear Chairmen of Richmond 2015,

In light of the recent racist massacre of nine African-Americans at a historic Black church in Charleston, S.C., and the resulting calls from Charleston Mayor Joe Riley, S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley, U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, President Barack Obama and many other national figures from both major political parties to remove the Confederate battle flag from the grounds of the S.C. State Capitol, the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality are calling on you to change the route of the UCI Road World Championships bicycle race.

The race, scheduled for Sept. 19 - 27, is expected to draw some 450,000 people to Richmond, plus reporters from 100 countries and a worldwide television audience of 300 million. This likely will be the biggest sporting event held in the United States this year and will be spotlighting our city, state and country before the world.

At the present time, your organization has chosen to use this race to highlight Monument Avenue, a virtual shrine to the slavery-defending Confederacy, with statues of Confederate President Jefferson Davis; Generals Robert E. Lee, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson and J.E.B. Stuart; and Naval Commander Matthew Fontaine Maury. There also is one statue of an African-American, tennis champion and anti-apartheid activist Arthur Ashe, but your chosen route ignores him, making the Davis monument the highlight of the race by using it as the halfway turning point. The route includes having the cyclists ride their bikes directly over the sacred ground of Shockoe Bottom, for decades the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade.

With international attention now focused on calls for South Carolina to end its official promotion of a flag that symbolizes the Confederacy and resistance to civil rights for African-Americans, continuing with this route as planned, during the Sesquicentennial Commemoration of Emancipation and the end of the Civil War, would put Richmond, with its status as the former capital of the Confederacy, in the worst possible light.

Dylann Storm Roof, the accused Charleston murderer, was an avowed white supremacist who delighted in showing online photos of

himself with the flag of the Army of Northern Virginia, led by Gen. Lee.

But Roof is an individual. Your committee includes a U.S. senator, the governor of Virginia and the mayor of Richmond – all Northern-born Democrats – and the leaders of many of Central Virginia’s leading corporations, including Dominion, Genworth Financial, McGuire Woods, Williams Mullen, Atria, Kings Dominion, The Martin Agency, CarMax Inc and Virginia Biotechnology Research Park, as well as Kim Scheeler, president & CEO of the Greater Richmond Chamber (of Commerce); Jack Berry, president & CEO, Richmond Region Tourism; and the other Jack Berry, Executive Director, Venture Richmond, an organization that itself includes the major movers and shakers in Richmond business.

We are well aware that many of these same officials were among the leading proponents of building a stadium in Shockoe Bottom, a proposal that has been defeated – for now – by a sustained community struggle in which our organization has played a leading role.

We appeal to your own self-interest as well as your concern for the good name of our city when we call on you to change the route of this race. Otherwise, it is inevitable that the race will draw the kind of national and international scrutiny and criticism that could set back race relations – and tourism – in Richmond for many years to come.

Sincerely,

Ana Edwards – Chair, Defenders’ Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project

Phil Wilayto – Editor, The Virginia Defender newspaper

Cc: Directors of Richmond 2015; Virginia, National & International News Media

# Take down that flag!

By King Salim Khalfani

Yes, take down that Confederate Flag. Take that emblem off of Virginia license plates. Take those statues off of Monument Avenue and put them all in museums.

But, more importantly, let’s take down those laws, policies and the mindsets that came before the flag became the representation of white supremacy.

When African people see confederate symbols, we know what it means. It resonates deep in our souls. Whether on a bumper sticker, car window, driveway flagpole, Virginia driver’s license plate, etc. We get it!

We must increase our efforts to change that confederate state of mind in the Commonwealth and the nation that creates institutions, laws and policies that place more emphasis on mass incarceration than on education.

The largest state agency in Virginia is the Department of Corrections (which includes the Department of Correctional Enterprise.) Incarcerate or Educate, which do you choose?

“When you ask for the resources to do your job, you are called a whiner!” — Dr. Dana Bedden, Superintendent of Richmond Public Schools

“In 2007, the federal government allocated \$200 billion for correctional systems. In 2014, the largest allocation for education was \$14 billion.” — Dr. Bedden

“If we increase the male high school graduation rate by 5 percent, it will mean \$179 million to Virginia’s economy.” — Dr. Bedden

“Education is the best prevention.” — Dr. Bedden

“Let’s build bigger schools, not bigger prisons.” — Clarence T. Woody, Sheriff, City of Richmond

Early childhood education and preschool work increase the academic success of our children. Early childhood interventions



and reading to children enhance their ability to read and comprehend. Poverty is planned. We sentence children to a lifetime of misery when they are born into poverty. We have wide swaths of poverty here in the State’s Capital and throughout the Commonwealth. Businesses invest and build in places where there is a trained and educated populace.

Our children are living in residences that have lead-based paint, toxic flooring and oppressive heat. Many are not being tested for lead poisoning as they need to be. Age seven is the threshold for opting out of the data on lead poisoning? Really? Let’s take down the flags, emblems and symbols of white supremacy. Let’s also take down the laws, policies, procedures and the allocation of our collective resources for incarceration and allocate them for education, nontoxic, safe, affordable housing and blood tests for lead poisoning in our children.

We can determine where our priorities are by examining where we allocate our financial resources.

King Salim Khalfani is Senior Consultant with Commonwealth Consultation, LLC.

## ‘STOP THE WARS AT HOME & ABROAD!’

Against a background of seemingly endless U.S. wars abroad and growing domestic movements against racist police killings, low wages and devastating climate change, more than 400 activists gathered in Secaucus, N.J., May 8-10 for a “Stop the Wars at Home & Abroad!” conference that ratified an Action Plan addressing both domestic and international issues.

Sponsored by the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC), the conference brought together a wide range of activists, from those who primarily concentrate on international issues to mostly younger activists in emerging movements such as Black Lives Matter, Fight for \$15 and environmental change.

Conference delegates came from 29

states, as well as Canada, Britain, Germany and Ukraine. A number of now-U.S.-based activists represented struggles in their home countries of Colombia, Haiti, Honduras, Iran, Mexico, Palestine, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Syria and Venezuela.

Solidarity messages were received from Cuba, Ireland, New Zealand and Russia.

A total of 116 organizations participated in the conference. There were more than 100 speakers, more than half of whom were people of color and women. There were six plenary sessions, 31 workshops and a Saturday night “Tribunal on the Militarization of the Police & Structural Racism.”

While UNAC conferences have always addressed domestic issues, this one was unique in that it was the first time a national antiwar gathering so clearly took up the need to oppose the war being waged against oppressed communities in the United States. A

central theme of many panels and workshops was support for the resistance of Black youth standing up to the epidemic of police brutality.

As part of the conference’s Action Plan, participants endorsed the POP-initiated “Million People’s March Against Racial Injustice and Economic Inequality” planned for July 25 in Newark. (See page 5.)

The conference also endorsed a call from the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality for a National Presence in Richmond on Sept. 19 to demand an end to the glorification of symbols of the slavery-defending Confederacy and the proper memorialization of Richmond’s Shockoe Bottom, once the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade. (See page 5.)

Founded in 2010, UNAC is now the largest antiwar coalition in the United States, with nearly 120 member organizations opposing U.S. wars in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, South America and the Caribbean.

UNAC’s unifying principles are opposition to all U.S. wars, interventions, sanctions, blockades or interference in the internal affairs of other countries; opposition to the wars at home, as addressed at this conference; support for the right of oppressed peoples to self-determination; promotion of mass actions as the primary, but not only, method of struggle; independence from the two major political parties; and a democratic decision-making process.

For more information on UNAC, see: [www.unacpeace.org](http://www.unacpeace.org)



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