

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

The Virginia DEFENDER

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Serving 14 Virginia cities and counties, primarily in the Richmond Metro Area

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THE UNTIMELY DEATH OF MARCUS-DAVID PETERS

By Phil Wilayto

When Marcus-David Peters was gunned down May 14 by a Richmond police officer, his death quickly became national news. It wasn't only the fact that another unarmed Black man had died at the hands of law enforcement - it was also the circumstances of his death.

By all accounts, Peters was the kind of son every parent wishes they had. The 24-year-old had graduated with honors from Virginia Commonwealth University. He became a high school biology teacher in Essex County, about an hour northeast of Richmond.

He also worked part-time at Richmond's 5-star Jefferson Hotel. He was a role model to his students and was planning to start an organization to mentor at-risk youth. He had never been arrested. A clean record. And no history of any kind of mental illness.

But something happened on May 14. After teaching class as usual, Peters stopped by his Henrico County apartment and then drove into Rich-



Photo courtesy the Peters family

Marcus-David Peters

mond to the Jefferson, parked his car and walked into the hotel.

That's when the strange behavior first showed itself. As recorded by the hotel's security cameras, Peters removed his shirt, had a brief conversation with another employee and then shortly after was recorded leaving the hotel, naked, getting back

into his car and driving away.

Mistake No. 1

Despite this bizarre behavior by one of their employees, no one at the hotel contacted the family until after Peters had died.

That was the first mistake made on that fateful day.

Mistake No. 2

Heading north, Peters sideswiped three cars before driving into a grove of trees at the Chamberlayne Avenue entrance to Interstates 64 and 95. By this time he was being followed by Richmond Officer Michael Nyantakyi, who had observed Peters' erratic driving, which was partially recorded by surveillance cameras. The officer, also African-American and a 10-year veteran of the city's police force, was wearing a body camera, which recorded what happened next. (https://www.youtube.com/embed/9_by1fFSO38?rel=0&ecver=1)

Officer Nyantakyi gets out of his

See MARCUS on Page 8

Sussex I & II wardens are out – what does it mean?

Staff report

In the midst of a prisoner-led campaign to win better conditions at the Sussex II state prison in Waverly, Va., the wardens at both that prison and its sister facility, Sussex I, have been replaced.

Tracy Ray, the warden at Sussex II, has been removed from his position and replaced by Beth Cabell, previously the warden at St. Brides Correctional Center in Chesapeake.

The new warden at Sussex I is Israel Hamilton, previously the warden at Haynesville Correctional Center in Richmond County. Both changes seem to have taken place on Friday, May 25.

What does this mean? Was it a decision by the Department of Corrections to address the long-term problems at the prisons? Cosmetic changes? Even previously scheduled shuffles?

Was it because the Department of Corrections has concluded that both wardens recently have violated the rights of prisoner activists? At this point we can't be sure, but in the context of the ongoing struggle there, it's at least a very hopeful sign.

Prisoners at Sussex II, organized as the Sussex II Human Rights Committee, had

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regional & national news

Removing Confederate statues - Memphis finds a way

Does Richmond have the legal authority to remove its four Confederate statues on Monument Avenue?

That's a question that keeps coming up in the ongoing debate over what to do with the statues that were erected to declare an end to the Reconstruction era in the South and the return to power of the white-supremacist oligarchy.

Like Virginia, Tennessee has laws that seem to deny localities the power to remove statues honoring Confederate figures from public land. So a few months ago, Memphis, anticipating programs marking the 50th anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in that city, took steps to rid itself of two offending statues honoring Confederate President Jefferson Davis and Confederate general and KKK Grand Wizard Nathan Bedford Forrest.

The solution? The city simply sold the public parks where the statues were located to a private entity, which then removed them - legally. The selling price for each park was \$1,000.

The city had asked the Tennessee Historical Commission for a waiver from the state law forbidding it from removing the statues, but the request was denied. An attempt at mediation also failed.

Then opponents of the statues formed a nonprofit organization called Memphis Greenspace Inc. On Dec. 20, the city council

unanimously authorized Mayor Jim Strickland to sell the two parks to the new organization. Wasting no time, the statues were removed that evening at 9:01 p.m. - a tip of the hat to the Memphis area code and the group Take 'Em Down 901, which had been campaigning for the statues' removal.

"This is a victory for grassroots movements in the city," said the group's spokesperson, Tami Sawyer. "This happened because people mandated it and wanted it. Take 'Em Down 901 is now Took 'Em Down 901!"

The Forrest and Davis statues were moved to an undisclosed location. According to the Memphis Commercial Appeal, the nonprofit had received about \$250,000 in pledges and donations from supporters and is now maintaining the two parks.

You see, Mayor Stoney, members of Richmond City Council and members of the mayor's Monument Avenue Commission, where there's a will, there's a way. You just need to find the will.

Note: The City of Richmond owns the statues of Confederate generals "Stonewall" Jackson and J.E.B. Stuart; Admiral Matthew Maury; and President Jefferson Davis. The statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee is owned by the state of Virginia. Gov. Ralph Northam could also use a little will.

issues and plan actions. We are affiliated with the Virginia Prison Justice Network, the United National Antiwar Coalition and the Virginia People's Assembly for Jobs, Peace & Justice.

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

Cleveland team making progress - but not D.C.

Bowing - a bit - to public pressure, the Cleveland Indians professional baseball team has decided it will no longer display the racially offensive "Chief Wahoo" logo on its uniforms, starting in 2019.

Phillip Yenyo, executive director of the American Indian Movement of Ohio, called the team's decision "another step in the right direction," but asked why the change was being put off till January.

"Why wait?" The New York Time reported him saying. "If you are going to go this far and get rid of it, why not do it now?"

The cartoonish red, white and blue logo, used by the team in one form or another for the past 70 years, shows an indigenous person with a huge toothy smile, large eyes and a feather.

Public pressure to drop the racist logo has come in the form of formal appeals, lawsuits and regular protests outside Cleveland's Progressive Field. Over the past year, Commissioner of Major League Baseball Rob Manfred has called on Paul Dolan, Cleveland's chairman and chief executive, to make the change.

While the logo will not be seen on the team's uniforms, on banners and signs at Progressive Field or on items for sale on MLB's website, "Consumers will still be able to purchase items with the logo on them at the team's souvenir shops in the stadium and at retail outlets in the

northern Ohio market," according to the Times.

Meanwhile, owners of the Washington, D.C., football team with perhaps the most racially offensive name in professional sports have been adamant about having no intention of changing the name of their team, which has its training camp in Richmond.

Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney and eight of the nine members of City Council have expressed dissatisfaction with the eight-year deal former Mayor Dwight Jones brokered in 2012 to build the \$11 million facility where the team practices just three weeks each year. According to The Washington Post, "unless the Redskins make significant financial concessions, it appears the team won't be invited back when the eight-year deal expires in 2020." The decision whether to extend the agreement is to be made in July.

Jones committed the city to paying the team, one of the richest franchises in professional sports, \$500,000 each year to hold its practices in Richmond. Then there's the \$750,000 annual debt payments incurred building the practice facility in 2013. Further, the city's daily newspaper has reported the city dipped into its school construction budget to cover more than \$5 million of training-camp costs.

That's a lot of money to pay to have a racist name associated with your city.

THE DEFENDERS for Freedom, Justice & Equality

PO Box 23202, Richmond, VA 23223

Ph: 804-644-5834

Email: DefendersFJE@hotmail.com

Web: www.DefendersFJE.blogspot.com

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

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.

community news

news u can use

Relief from the heat

The City of Richmond offers "Cooling Stations" when the temperature and/or heat index is expected to reach at least 95 degrees. The stations operate from 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. at the Department of Social Services, 900 East Marshall St., and Southside Community Services Center, 4100 Hull Street Road. The stations offer bottled water, but not food. Pets are not allowed, with the exception of service animals. For more information, contact the Department of Social Services Fuel Assistance Office at (804) 646-7046. Elderly residents with cooling-related issues should contact Adult Services at (804) 646-7367. In the event of a heat-related emergency, call 911.

Free braille & audio books for the blind

Do you know someone who has temporary or permanent low vision, blindness, or a physical disability that prevents them from reading or holding the printed page? If so, they may benefit from the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. NLS offers a free library service that mails braille and audio book to your door for free or are available to download from the Internet, regardless of age, economic circumstances or technical expertise. For information, google "That All May Read" or log onto: https://loc.gov/programs/national-library-service-for-the-blind-and-physically-handicapped/about-this-service/?cid=loc-ppc_s=google_c=blind_ag=book_kw=books-for-the-blind

911 help when you can't call

As of June 4, those who are not able to call 911 can send a text message to 911 for emergency assistance in Richmond, Chesterfield County and Henrico County. This service already is available in Colonial Heights and Hanover County. "If you are deaf or hard-of-hearing, you can't speak or it's not safe for you to speak, you can send a text to 911. Otherwise, it's best for you to call," said Stephen Willoughby, director and chief of Richmond's Department of Emergency Communications.

East End PO reopens - finally!

Staff report

After more than a year of confusion, vague promises and seemingly endless delays, the only post office in Richmond's East End finally reopened on Monday, May 21.

The aging, privately owned building at 414 N. 25th St. was suddenly closed on April 10, 2017, with no advance notice to either its customers or workers. Further, a note taped to the locked front door raised the possibility that it would never reopen.

For more than a year, customers, many of whom are low-income without private transportation, have had to rely on a Postal Service trailer parked in front of the building to handle most, but not all, of the station's functions.

The East End branch is where the Defenders have received mail since their founding in 2002. In response, the organization drafted a letter to be sent to the Postal Service's regional office, demanding the regional manager apologize to the area's residents; state "unequivocally a date certain by which the branch will be reopened;" order the rerouting of box holder mail to a close branch; and "continue to offer sidewalk service such as stamp and money order purchases."

The letter was signed by longtime local pharmacist Dr. Leonard L. Edloe; the Rev. Rodney Hunter, pastor of Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church in the East End; and Ana Edwards and Phil Wilayto for the Defenders.

Then-Rep. Donald McEachin, whose district includes Richmond, later also called on the Postal Service to restore full service to the neighborhood as soon as possible.

The building itself is owned by local developer Joshua Bilder, who purchased it in 2015. In an interview with the Defender, Bilder blamed the building's problems on "50 years of deferred maintenance" by previous owners.

For its part, the Postal Service, as reported by the city's daily newspaper, blamed the delays in repairing the building on Bilder, who says he has spent more than \$150,000 on repairs.

"This location, they wanted to close it, honestly," Bilder told the city's daily newspaper. "I think what I did saved it."



The East End post office branch is finally open again for business. Photo by Kwame Binta

The Rev. Rodney Hunter, president of the Richmond chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, presides over an economic summit titled "SCLC, Community and Labor Working for Change: Many Organizations, One Goal." More than 80 people, including many union members, attended the



BUILDING LABOR-COMMUNITY UNITY

event held March 24 at Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church, where Rev. Hunter is pastor. From left: Lynetta Thompson, Civil Rights / Human Rights Committee Coordinator, Community Unity in Action; Rev. Hunter; Frank Thornton, President, Henrico Branch NAACP; Doris Crouse-Mays, President, Virginia AFL-CIO; W. Neal Holmes, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Political Science, Virginia State University; and James Boyd, President, Portsmouth Branch NAACP.

Photo by Phil Wilayto



Martha Johnson - ¡Presente!

The Defenders lost our eldest member on Jan. 9, when our dear comrade Martha Johnson passed. Martha was in her mid-eighties and had been doing poorly for some time.

Martha was a solidly working-class activist. Employed as a cafeteria worker at a local elementary school and very active in her church, her specialty was staffing registration tables at our public events. No one got past Martha without signing in and getting a packet of information, which she always assembled.

She also delivered The Virginia Defender to her church. She was one of the elders we honored at our 15th anniversary banquet this past April.

In the social justice movements of Latin America, when a comrade dies they say "¡Presente!" It means "They are present!" So, Martha Johnson, ¡Presente! You will be sorely missed.

community news

A lesson in Civics 101: Where there's smoke ...

By Phil Wilayto

This spring, Richmond City Council voted down a proposal for a new cigarette tax that could have produced \$5.3 million in desperately needed potential revenue for capital repairs to city schools. The city's daily newspaper reported that fact.

Here's what it didn't report:

Of the six council members who voted against the tax, five had received campaign contributions in 2016 from Altria, the parent company of the giant cigarette manufacturer Philip Morris USA, headquartered in Richmond.

Of the three council members who voted for the tax, only one received Altria campaign contributions in 2016. The tax proposal was introduced by Parker Agelasto of the 5th District, who did not receive Altria contributions in 2016.

According to its website, Philip Morris makes all its cigarettes at its Richmond plant - and that's half of all cigarettes sold in this country.

The company openly admits that it is

promoting and selling a very dangerous product. This is from its website:

"Philip Morris USA agrees with the overwhelming medical and scientific consensus that cigarette smoking causes lung cancer, heart disease, emphysema and other serious diseases in smokers. Smokers are far more likely to develop such serious diseases than non-smokers."

Richmond is Virginia's only major city without a cigarette tax. More than 90 other Virginia cities and counties have one.

The breakdown of Altria campaign money to present city council members in 2016:

VOTED AGAINST CIGARETTE TAX:

1st District - Andreas Addison:	\$500
2nd District - Kim Gray:	\$500
6th District - Ellen Robertson:	\$2,000
7th District - Cynthia Newbill:	\$0
8th District - Reva Trammell:	\$2,000
9th District - Michael Jones:	\$500

VOTED FOR CIGARETTE TAX:

3rd District - Chris Hilbert:	\$0
4th District - Kristen Larson:	\$500
5th District - Parker Agelasto:	\$0

(Source: Virginia Public Access Project)



Photo by Phil Wilayto

WATER IS LIFE! — The threats posed by the proposed Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley pipelines have galvanized thousands across Virginia: environmentalists, landowners, Indian and Black communities, the youth and more. From marches and rallies to lawsuits to protesters sitting high in trees to block construction crews, this fight has struck a chord deep in the hearts of Virginians. Well, not all Virginians. Politicians who feed at the troughs of Dominion Energy and its ilk have many creative ways to justify their support for the projects. They should remember the old Cree Indian prophecy: "Only when the last tree has been cut, the last fish has been caught, and the last stream poisoned, will we realize we cannot eat money."

no hay fronteras en la lucha de los obreros

Richmond's new sheriff says she won't hold inmates for ICE

By Phil Wilayto

At a time when the human turd who is currently president of the United States has sunk to the moral level of a 19th-century Richmond slave trader by forcibly separating children from their incarcerated immigrant parents, it's good to know that Richmond's new sheriff has committed to breaking with local tradition by stating she will limit her cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE.

Our Q&A with Sheriff Antionette Irving:

The Defender: What is your policy regarding requests by ICE to hold inmates past their discharge dates so that ICE agents can pick them up? Our understanding is that it's up to local sheriffs whether or not to honor these requests.

Sheriff Irving: We will not keep individuals jailed past their release date. We must have a judicial warrant with probable cause to keep a person in custody.

Sheriff Irving also had a welcome answer to another question we asked:

Defender: The daily newspaper has reported that your administration gave Correctional Medical Care Inc. a "poor review," citing, among other issues, "CMC double-charging inmates for medication." Have those inmates been reimbursed for the extra charges?

Sheriff Irving: All of the "invalid" medical charges for inmates were either voided or reimbursed to the individual.

So far, so good. We wish the new sheriff much success in her new position.



The Spanish words above this news section translate into English as "There are no borders in the workers' struggle." It means that all of us who work for a living have more in common with each other than we do with any boss, any cop or any politician, no matter what race or nationality we may be. The Defender urges all our non-immigrant readers to keep this in mind when we see our immigrant sisters and brothers - and their children - under attack. Remember the old union slogan, "A Injury to One is an Injury to All!"

confederates on the defensive



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Ana Edwards addresses members of Mayor Stoney's Monument Avenue Commission as Joseph Rogers, to her right, takes notes. The March 29 meeting hosted by the Defenders was one of the larger ones held by local groups and the only one in the Black community. All but one of the more than 30 people who attended called for the Confederate statues to come down.

Mayor's MAC report due ... soon

Staff Report

Mayor Levar Stoney's Monument Avenue Commission, established last summer to provide recommendations on what to do with the city's controversial Confederate statues on Monument Avenue, was supposed to deliver its final report by the end of May. It didn't.

Instead, it asked for an extension, which the mayor granted. The report is now supposed to be out by the end of June.

Rumors are swirling that the commission members - mostly historians, other academics and museum officials, three of whom previously supported putting a baseball stadium in historic Shockoe Bottom - will recommend taking down the monument to Confederate President Jefferson Davis, ("Why, he's not even from Virginia!") but leaving up the statues honoring Confederate generals Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson and J.E.B. Stuart, plus Admiral Matthew Maury.

The Lee statue is actually owned by the state of Virginia, which in 2007 spent \$450,000 to try to clean it in time for the 200th anniversary of Lee's birth.

Spolier: It will never be clean.

But no matter what the commission recommends, the struggle to remove these deeply offensive homages to slavery-defending Confederates will go on - as long as it takes.



Photo by The Virginia Defender

More than 100 people hold a Rally Against Racism at the state-owned monument to Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee on Richmond's Monument Avenue. The gathering was held to counter a pro-Confederate rally called by the Tennessee-based New Confederate States of America, which drew fewer than a dozen supporters.

For third time, anti-racists humiliate neo-Confederates at Lee statue

Staff Report

The tiny Tennessee-based New Confederate States of America (CSA II) came back to Richmond, for the third time, on May 5, to "defend" the Confederate statues on Monument Avenue. It did not go well for them.

The group first showed up in town just a month after the white-supremacist rally in Charlottesville that ended with the murder of antiracist activist Heather Heyer. Three armed CSA members and four local supporters gathered Sept. 16 at the Robert E. Lee statue on Monument and were met by more than 400 opponents. They came back again on Dec. 9, the same three members and about a dozen supporters, and were met by about 40 protesters after local opponents decided to downplay the return visit.

For the third "rally," scheduled for 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on May 5, Richmonders took a different approach, calling for a Rally Against Racism - for the same time and place.

By 9 a.m., the activists were already holding the space. By 10 a.m. there were about 40 lining the sidewalk around the state-owned statue, with another 15 or so across the street where the street medic team and folks with water and energy bars had stationed themselves.

By the time the CSA and a few allies arrived - less than a dozen total - more than 100 anti-racists were holding the ground at the head of the statue, with signs, banners and a portable sound system.

The Rally Against Racism began about 10:30, with prepared talks by a wide range of organizations. The neo-Confederates, forced to gather at the side of the statue, milled around, humiliated.

Around noon, as the rally was wrapping up, some of the protesters noticed that a TV reporter was about to interview some of the CSA members. Positioning themselves across the street, separated by a line of police, they haranged the reporter and the CSA, effectively disrupting the interview.

The CSA had said they would rally at the Lee statue until 6 p.m., but, as happened at the December event, the anti-Lee Virginia Defenders and the pro-Lee Dixie Defenders negotiated an early end to the event by proposing that both sides leave at 1. The Virginia Defenders presented this proposal to the rest of the anti-racist protesters, who agreed.

By shortly after 1 p.m., both sides left the area. Richmonders had shown they will not stand idly by when armed supporters of the slavery-defending Confederacy come to town in a public display of support for symbols of white supremacy.

The Rally Against Racism was initiated by the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality and the Richmond chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America. Preparations for first aid were provided by the River City Street Medic Collective. Other groups that attended included ICE Out of RVA, United Faith Leaders, Richmond Peace Education Center, First Unitarian Universalists of Richmond, Rise Up and Sing Out.

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.

RICHMOND – ONGOING

NO ACP, NO MVP, NO PIPELINES PROTEST – Wednesdays, held by the Virginia Pipeline Resisters, to tell the governor to reject the dangerous and unnecessary Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley Pipelines. Bring signs. 10-10:45 am, on Governor Street, behind the governor's office at 1111 E. Broad St., Richmond VA. FREE. Information: <https://bit.ly/2JQSDGR>.

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

CLINIC DEFENSE – Every Saturday, 9-11 am, Richmond Medical Center for Women, 118 N. Boulevard. A volunteer force escorts patients past anti-abortion protesters. Clinic defense is not a protest; do not bring signs. Information: Richmond Clinic Defense on Facebook or email rvaclinicdefense@gmail.com.

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

KICKBACK FRIDAYS AT KANAWHA – A weekly event with live music, food trucks and refreshments for sale, held every Friday in July. 4-7 pm, Kanawha Plaza, 801 E. Canal St. Hosted by Kanawha Plaza and the Enrichmond Foundation. FREE. Information: <https://bit.ly/2yg8DAR>.

RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY – For information on events at all branches, see <http://rvalibrary.libcal.com>.

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

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

RICHMOND – EVENTS

Sat., June 30 – **MARCUS-DAVID PETERS: A COMMUNITY MEETING COMMANDING JUSTICE & REFORMATION!** – 1-3 p.m., 2nd Baptist Church, 1400 Idlewood Ave. in Richmond's Randolph neighborhood. All are encouraged to attend. Hosted by the Peters family and supporting organizations. (Story on page 9.)

Sat., July 21 – **ENDING THE MASS INCARCERATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS TOWN HALL** – 1-5 pm, 3080 Chamberlayne Ave. FREE. Hosted by Resource Information Help for the Disadvantaged and Disenfranchised (RIHD) and the National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls. Light refreshments. Information: nationalcouncil.us.

Sat., July 21 – **BLACK PRIDE RVA: DAY OF PURPOSE** – “Come out for a day of learning and fun with a purpose. Enjoy workshops, vendors, food trucks and entertainment. This is a family friendly event.” FREE - Registration required. Ticketed events on July 20. Hosted by Us Giving Richmond Connections (UGRC). Information: Call 804-293-0797 or email blackpriderva@gmail.com. Facebook: Black Pride RVA. Web: <https://www.blackpriderva.com>

Tues., July 24 – **LGBTQ COMMUNITY RESOURCE SPEED DATE** – A follow-up event for a previous LGBTQ Women's History Month event where you can learn about groups to get involved with. 7-9 pm, Diversity Richmond, 1407 Sherwood Ave. Hosted by Diversity Richmond. Information: <https://bit.ly/2JO4569>.

Sat.-Sun., Aug. 11-12 – **VIRGINIA ADVOCACY TRAINING** – Fifth annual two-day legislative engagement training from the Virginia Civic Engagement Table, with SEIU Virginia 512, the Sierra Club and more. 9 am-4 pm, VCU's Learning Center, 1000 Floyd Ave. Information: <https://bit.ly/2tdStbY>.

Sun., Aug 19 – **27TH ANNUAL DOWN HOME FAMILY REUNION, A CELEBRATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FOLKLIFE** – “Bring your family to this spirited celebration of African American Folklife.” 4-11 pm, Abner Clay Park. FREE. Hosted by the Elegba Folklore Society. Information: efsinc.org.

Sat., Aug. 25 – **16TH ANNUAL HAPPILY NATURAL DAY** – “A celebration of black consciousness whose main purpose is promoting cultural awareness, holistic health and social change throughout the Black Diaspora to combat the debilitating psychological effects of racism/white supremacy on African people worldwide. Festival attendees can expect music, workshops, demonstrations, vendors, urban agriculture and more!” Noon - 10 pm, Fifth District Mini Farm. Hosted by The Happily Natural Day. Information: <http://thenaturalfestival.com>

Thurs., Aug. 30 – **218TH ANNIVERSARY OF GABRIEL'S REBELLION**

Wed., Oct. 10 – **15TH ANNUAL GABRIEL FORUM** – An event to honor the heroes of the past and reflect on their relevance for today's struggles for freedom, justice and equality. Time and place TBA. Sponsored by the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project of the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality. Information: <http://sacredgroundproject.net>.

BLACKSBURG

Fri., July 6 – **MONTHLY ANTIWAR VIGIL** – “We gather to bring the attention of our community to the spread of mass conflicts across the world. Thank you for joining us!” 5:15 pm-6 pm, N. Main Street Post Office. Sponsored by the Coalition for Justice. Information: <https://coalitionforjusticeva.com>

FLOYD

Sun., June 24 – **“JUST TO LIVE IN PEACE: CHRISTIANS OF THE HOLY LAND”** – Documentary film about Arab Christians living under Israeli military occupation. 2 pm, Jessie Peterman Memorial Library, 387 W. Main St. Sponsored by Plowshare Peace & Justice Center and the Floyd Friends Meeting. Information: Jim Best at jimbest@jimbestdesign.com or 276-734-5544.

Sun., Jul. 22 – **“OCCUPATION OF THE AMERICAN MIND: ISRAEL'S PUBLIC RELATIONS WAR IN THE UNITED STATES”** – Documentary film about the distorted coverage of the Israel/Palestine conflict in the U.S. corporate media. 2-4 pm, Jessie Peterman Memorial Library, 387 W. Main St. Hosted by Plowshare Peace & Justice Center and the Floyd Friends Meeting.

CHARLOTTESVILLE

Sun., Aug. 12 – We shall see.

NEWPORT NEWS

Sat., July 7 – **HAMPTON SPEAK-OUT FOR PRISON JUSTICE** – An opportunity for prisoners, former prisoners, family members, supporters and advocates to tell your stories and inform the public about the inhumane conditions in Virginia Prisons and the Criminal “Justice” System. FREE. 1-3:30 pm, Miracle Temple Church, 617 32nd St. Information: call 757-303-0364 or email houseofdreamsoutreach@gmail.com. Story on page 11.

NORFOLK

Sat., July 14 – **RIHD MOBILE JUSTICE TOUR** – Join Resource Information Help for the Disadvantaged and Disenfranchised (RIHD) on a stop on the Mobile Justice Tour to End Mass Incarceration. 9 am: refreshments. 9:30 am - 11:30 am: program. Gethsemane Community Fellowship, 1317 E. Brambleton Ave. FREE. Information: rihd.org.

ROANOKE

Sat., June 23 – **ROANOKE SPEAK-OUT FOR PRISON JUSTICE** – An opportunity for prisoners, former prisoners, family members, supporters and advocates to tell your stories and inform the public about the inhumane conditions in Virginia Prisons and the Criminal “Justice” System. 2-3:30pm, Hope Center, 506 11th St. Sponsored by the Coalition for Justice (Blacksburg). FREE. Information: <https://bit.ly/2lcuAHD>. Story on page 11.

Sun., June 24 – **PASTORS FOR PEACE PROGRAM** – A potluck followed by a discussion of the work of the Pastors for Peace/IFCO caravan, which collects and delivers humanitarian aid to the people of Cuba and protests the U.S. embargo. Potluck at 6 pm, program at 7 pm, Roanoke Quaker Meetinghouse, 505 Day Ave. Hosted by the Roanoke Friends Meeting. Information: Mike Bentley at 540-389-3752 or mbentle1@verizon.net.

Sat., Jul. 7 – **ROANOKE CLIMATE CHANGE VIGIL** – Organized by the Sierra Club and co-sponsored by the Plowshare Peace Center. 11 am-12 pm, City Market Building, 32 Market Sq. SE. Information: Dan Crawford at 343-5080 or dbcrawford@cox.net.

Sat., July 14 – **TEEN PEACE JAM** – Teen conference with workshops on peace, justice, art and life skills, music, speakers, food. 9 am-5 pm, Unitarian-Universalist Church, 2015 Grandin Rd. FREE. Information: Gary Sandman at 540-597-8127 or plowshare@plowshareva.org.

our working lives

Hint of strike moves contract negotiations with GRTC

By Ashley Collier

“No contract, No Pulse” was the slogan on buttons worn by members of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1220, which represents drivers and mechanics who work for the Greater Richmond Transit Company, or GRTC.

The members had been working without a union contract since last Oct. 1. The buttons hinted at a strike that would have threatened the implementation of GRTC’s new Bus Rapid Transit or BRT, a \$65 million project dubbed the Pulse, if a contract were not negotiated prior to its launch.

Union local president Frank Tunstall III reported June 16 that the union and GRTC Transit System’s governing board had agreed on a tentative contract, ending the seven-month-long negotiations. He said exposure from the buttons was helpful in getting the company’s attention.

GRTC spokeswoman Carrie Rose Pace acknowledged the buttons, but said the negotiations had been “going on for months.”

The contract is retroactive to the expiration of the previous contract on Oct. 1, 2017, and would be in effect until Sept. 30, 2020. While it includes a \$1.70 hourly pay raise, Tunstall said that “Money is not the issue. We were able to maintain health care. In my opinion, it is a good contract.”

It there had been a strike, it would have

been the first by GRTC drivers and mechanics in 42 years, according to GRTC spokeswoman Pace.

The Pulse is set to launch on June 24 and travel along Broad and Main streets between Willow Lawn and Rocketts Landing. Proponents argue the project will promote access to jobs and provide much-needed transportation at little cost to the city. According to the GRTC website, the federal and state governments contributed an estimated \$57 million to the \$65-million dollar project.

Critics argue that the Pulse’s route, among other drawbacks, neglects Greater Fulton, a low-income, primarily Black area that includes Fulton, Fulton Hill and Montrose Heights. Greater Fulton is designated a food desert by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That’s a term used for an area with little to no access to affordable and nutritious food. There is no grocery store in Greater Fulton, and also no bank, school, post office or library.

Pace refutes critics’ claims that the Pulse neglects low-income or “minority” populations. She cited the conclusion of GRTC’s Title VI’s analysis that “minority” ridership is expected to increase by 68 percent.

Routes 4A Montrose and 4B Darbytown as well as Main and 25th were added following public outcry by Greater Fulton residents. These steps will connect the folks from Greater Fulton to the Pulse every 15 minutes.

Union fights for members’ jobs

By Ashley Collier

With 74 Kroger employees in Norfolk at risk of losing their jobs, hundreds of union members descended on Kroger’s Mid-Atlantic headquarters in Roanoke June 12 to protest the potential closing of a Norfolk grocery store.

More than 300 members of United Food & Commercial Workers Local 400 attended the rally, including members from several neighboring states. The workers marched to the Kroger headquarters’ front door to deliver five full shopping carts worth of petitions to Mid-Atlantic Division President Jerry Contz.

In March, Kroger purchased eight Farm Fresh stores in the Hampton Roads area and announced plans to reopen them as Kroger stores. One location is directly across from a Kroger store and rumors have circulated that

the existing store will close and the employees will lose their jobs.

“We have asked for information from Kroger management and have been met with silence,” reads the union’s petition. The workers are demanding to know if and when the store is closing, the option to transfer to the new store, and the right to keep their union contract and benefits.

According to Local 400, Kroger expects current employees to quit and reapply to work at the same company across the street, or else transfer to another union Kroger. If and when they are rehired, the union says there is no guarantee they will keep their pensions, health care benefits or current wages.

“We are not done with this campaign and plan to keep fighting to preserve these jobs and maintain the benefits that have been

VCU adjunct professors fight for a living wage

By Ashley Collier

Wage gaps within higher education are nothing new and are felt around the country. Based on national data from the American Community Survey, 31 percent of part-time faculty live near or below the federal poverty line. According to the UC Berkeley Labor Center, one in four families of part-time faculty are enrolled in at least one public assistance program, such as Medicaid and SNAP (formerly known as food stamps), or qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit.

Virginia Commonwealth University is no stranger to this injustice. Adjunct professors at the VCU School of the Arts, known as VCUarts, have said, “Enough is enough!” and are fighting for fair wages.

In the fall of 2017 they formed VCUarts Adjuncts Organizing for Fair Pay (AOFPP) and have since been actively advocating for a living wage. Last February they delivered a petition to the VCU Board of Visitors demanding an increase from \$800 per credit hour to \$2,000 per credit hour. According to their petition, VCUarts adjunct pay falls well below the national average of \$30,000 per year.

In addition, the AOFPP requested that the Dean’s Office and Board of Visitors approve the increase through means other than raising student tuition.

Also in February, AOFPP organized a rally with Students for Equal Adjunct Pay and

negotiated in their contracts,” said Local 400 Communications Director Jonathan Williams. “Right now, they stand to lose their health care coverage, retirement benefits and their seniority.”

Kroger is the largest supermarket chain by revenue in the country. It is the only unionized grocery in Virginia and recently edged out Walmart to claim the top grocery market share in the Richmond region.

the Young Democratic Socialists at VCU to decry the school’s acquisition of a dance club, formerly known as the Mansion, located at 354 Harrison St. VCU paid \$3.5 million for the property that was assessed by the city at just \$819,000.

According to organizer and VCUarts Adjunct Professor Tom Burkett, the purpose of the protest was to call attention to the irresponsible real estate purchase, while highlighting the pay inequity existing within the VCU Art School.

Adjuncts make up 50 percent of the employment pool within the VCU art school. The adjuncts argue that, even though VCUarts is a Top 10 nationally ranked art school, the wages for adjuncts are not enough to support employees with families or student loans. Furthermore, they say, by not adequately addressing the pay inequity, the school will not maintain its top ranking.

On May 11, the Board of Visitors approved a salary increase to a minimum of \$1,000 per credit hour for all adjunct professors, but also a 6.4 percent increase in tuition for in-state students. AOFPP states that the tuition increase is an “irresponsible way to achieve equity and would in fact cause harm to the security of our students’ financial investment in their education at VCU.”

Despite this pay increase, however, AOFPP contends that VCUarts continues to rank last in adjunct pay among all other Top 10-rated art schools in the country.

Reached for a comment, Suzanne Silitch, Communication Director for VCUarts, said the increase to \$1,000 per credit hour was based on market-value and, while it is the minimum wage allocated, some professors receive higher wages. Additionally, she said, VCUarts grants its adjuncts exclusive access to professional development grants.

Most recently, in response to the 6.4 percent in-state tuition increase, AOFPP drafted a letter to VCU President Michael Rao and the Board of Visitors, calling on them to reverse their vote for the increase and reallocate funds being used on new building acquisitions to ensure resources go towards living wages for VCU adjunct faculty and employees.

Note: In Fiscal Year 2015-16, Rao was the highest paid state employee in Virginia, with a total compensation of \$900,940.

**Live Better -
Work Union!**

cops, courts & prisons



Photo by Phil Wilayat

‘Justice & Reformation!’ — More than 500 people march through the streets of Virginia’s capital city to demand justice in the case of Marcus David-Peters, a 24-year-old high school science teacher who, while experiencing a severe emotional crisis on May 14, was fatally shot by a Richmond police officer. The June 2 march started outside the Virginia Commonwealth University Siegel Center on West Broad Street to pay tribute to the fact that Peters had graduated from VCU, with honors. It stopped briefly at the Jefferson Hotel on West Franklin Street, where the young man held a part-time job, to denounce that fact that the hotel waited hours to report that he was experiencing an obvious emotional crisis. The march then continued to the Richmond Police headquarters on West Grace Street, where Peters’ sister Princess Blanding read a family statement and list of demands. The crowd defied a sudden thunderstorm to chant and demand “Justice and Reformation!”

MARCUS

Continued from page 1

vehicle and walks a short distance towards Peters’ car while training his handgun in Peters’ direction, shouting, “Stay in the car!” Then, speaking into his mic, the officer says, “427 - Male seems to be mentally unstable as we speak.”

Peters is then seen climbing feet first out of the driver’s window of his vehicle and hopping and skipping across the entrance ramp onto I-95, where he is sideswiped by a slow-moving car.

At this point Nyantakyi is heard to say, “Can I get [unintelligible] ASAP?”

Is Nyantakyi calling for backup? It appears so. But instead of waiting for help, he moves closer to Peters. He walks across the entrance ramp up to the highway guardrail, then moves even to the right of the guardrail as Peters is rolling on the ground in the breakdown lane, kicking his feet in the air and finally making “snow angel” motions while lying on his back.

All this time, Peters seems to be in his own world, not even noticing the cars going by, the RV stopped in the right-hand lane just feet away from him, and not the officer, whom he ran past to get to the highway.

It is only when Peters looks up and sees Officer Nyantakyi pointing a bright yellow Taser at him that he becomes hostile, gets up, threatens the officer and moves aggressively toward him.

Nyantakyi is heard to order “Back up!” several times before firing the Taser. One of the two Taser darts fails to connect with Peters, so there is no charge. Peters keeps coming. The officer fires his gun twice, hitting Peters in the abdomen. Peters dies a short time later from the fatal wounds.

Officer Nyantakyi realized that Peters was “mentally unstable.” If he had not approached Peters alone, if he had waited for backup - which arrived seconds after he fired the fatal shots - Marcus-David Peters might be alive today.

This was mistake number 2.

Mistake No. 3

Richmond Police Chief Alfred Durham almost immediately took the position that even a naked man can be dangerous. To prove his point, he reached back to a 16-year old case from Seattle, Wash., in which a naked man was able to wrest a gun from an officer. To his credit, Durham made the decision to show the ho-

tel, City and body-cam video to Peters’ family, and also to release it to the public. But he did so with his own commentary.

Durham presented the video May 25 at police headquarters on West Grace Street to a room packed with reporters. The chief told the reporters to pay particular attention to the 18 seconds between the time Peters sat up and yelled at Officer Nyantakyi and when the officer shot him.

“It was all said and done in 18 seconds,” Police Chief Alfred Durham told the reporters. “That’s fast. That’s important.”

The next day, the city’s daily newspaper dutifully opened its story on the shooting this way: “Eighteen seconds before he

When this reporter asked Chief Durham if it were standard practice for a lone police officer to approach someone in obvious mental distress, Durham insisted that Officer Nyantakyi did not approach Peters.

That statement is contradicted by the police body-cam video. Using Peters’ car as a reference point, it is clear that Officer Nyantakyi moved from his position by his own vehicle toward Peters, who only became hostile when he looked up and saw the uniformed officer pointing the Taser at him.

At the same time, Durham seemed to admit that his officers were not receiving sufficient training in how to handle situations like this one. “We give 40 hours [of training],” he said, “and people expect us to get it right.”

Durham’s statements concerning the shooting were mistake number 3.

The community responds

As soon as the fatal shooting of Marcus-David Peters was first reported, the Defenders contacted his sister Princess Blanding, who was acting as the family spokesperson. When we asked what we could do to help, Blanding answered, “We want a protest.”

Just a few days before, at the Richmond Speak-Out for Prison Justice, the Rev. James Henry Harris, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Richmond’s Randolph neighborhood, had



Photo by Kwame Binta

Peters family spokesperson Princess Blanding responds to the police department’s release of video showing her brother’s death. To her left is Marcus’s uncle Jeffrey Peters,

was fatally shot by a Richmond police officer on May 14, Marcus-David Peters, naked and unarmed, sat straight up after rolling around the northbound lanes of Interstate 95/64 and looked directly at the officer, as if noticing him for the first time.”

No, the critical part of the story was when Officer Nyantakyi approached the emotionally distraught but non-hostile, non-aggressive Peters and pointed a Taser at him.

announced he would hold a community meeting to discuss Peters’ shooting. So the Defenders put Blanding and Rev. Harris in touch with each other.

We also suggested other organizations that might be interested in supporting the family: Community Unity in Action and Leaders of the New South, as well as the nonprofit organizations Southerners on New Ground and New

See MARCUS on Page 9

cops, courts & prisons

MARCUS Continued from page 8

Virginia Majority, which along with the Legal Aid Justice Center had been working on a police transparency and accountability project.

The result was an ad hoc coalition that, under the leadership of the Peters family, has been organizing to demand “Justice & Reformation” in the fatal shooting of Marcus-David Peters.

On May 25, the Peters family held a press conference at Second Baptist to respond to the police department’s release of video showing Marcus’ final minutes.

On May 26, more than 500 people attended a Community Speak-Out and Rally for Peters, also held at Second Baptist. On June 2, more than 500 people marched from the VCU Siegel Center, where Marcus graduated, to Richmond police headquarters on West Grace Street.

Despite a torrential downpour, everyone stayed as Blanding read the family’s demands in front of the police station.

MARCUS-DAVID PETERS:

A COMMUNITY MEETING COMMANDING JUSTICE & REFORMATION!

**1-3 p.m
Sat., June 30**

**2nd Baptist Church
1400 Idlewood Ave.
Richmond**

**All are encouraged to attend.
Hosted by the Peters family
& supporting organizations.**

stated the case she had presented June 2 outside police headquarters, insisting that her brother needed help, not death, and asked the council members for their support in seeing that the family’s demands were met. (See list of demands in box below.)

Those demands include that both Chief Alfred Durham and Mayor Levar Stoney attend a meeting hosted by the family and the community to discuss the Richmond Police Department’s policies, procedures and accountability, especially for people suffering from a mental health crisis.

This community meeting will be held Saturday, June 30, from 1-3 p.m, at Second Baptist Church, 1400 Idlewood Avenue in Richmond’s Randolph neighborhood.

All are encouraged to attend.

EDITOR’S NOTE: *Marcus-David Peters’ sister Princess Blanding has been acting as the family spokesperson. The Defender spoke with her on June 14, one month after her brother was fatally shot by a Richmond police officer.*

“A month after the shooting, there still has been no apology from the city, just condolences. When we saw the police officer’s body camera video, the police said they hoped it would bring us some closure - like they wanted us to shut up and go home and that’s it. But the questions just continue to come.

“We’ve never seen any video from the other officers’ body cameras. There was a State Police officer on the other side of the highway who just watched the whole thing come down, but we’ve never seen his video. We haven’t seen any of the video from the other witnesses, just a glimpse from one person.

“Marcus was not acting normal. The officer clearly said he was dealing with a person who was not mentally stable, and yet he was shot and killed. Like we keep saying, Marcus needed help, not death.

“I’m a school administrator. I’ve seen many cases in which students have gotten out of control. Some have even attacked teachers. In Texas, some schools allow teachers to carry firearms. So let’s play out this situation in a school setting: An unarmed student charges at a teacher and says, ‘I’m going to kill you.’ Is that student going to be shot too? The answer has to be absolutely not! There has to be respect for human life.

“After my brother was shot, there was another case, a Caucasian who had a problem, and he wasn’t killed. I’m glad that he’s alive, but why was it that Marcus was killed? Being Black intimidates, even with a Black officer. Whether you’re grocery shopping, driving in an expensive car, even breathing too hard.

We’re not giving up. Even if everyone else drops out, we will continue to be vocal. I have children, I have nephews and nieces. I can’t walk away and let my children think that their mother didn’t do everything she could have done. And I do feel optimistic that we’re going to make some changes as far as our demands are concerned.

Students demand statement from VCU

Staff report

Following the death of Marcus-David Peters at the hands of a Richmond police officer, grassroots activists mobilized to call for “Justice and Reformation” in the city, particularly regarding the manner in which law enforcement interacts with individuals with mental illnesses.

One branch of this grassroots activity was centered at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Marcus-David Peters worked as a residential assistant while a student at VCU and graduated magna cum laude in 2016. Despite these facts, VCU had failed to release an official university-wide statement about his death and so has drawn the attention of grassroots student organizers.

At the March for Justice and Reformation on June 2, student activists Taylor Davis and Khudai Tanveer read aloud portions of an open letter to the VCU administration, calling for a response from the university. The letter, crafted in response to the requests of the Peters family, calls for the release of a statement regarding the death of Marcus-David Peters, including specific outreach to the family, and the release of an additional statement with a critical stance on the use of force against Marcus at the hands of the Richmond Police Department.

As of June 14, the letter had been signed by more than 250 people and numerous local organizations. This letter was then hand-delivered by a group of seven undergraduate and graduate students on June 4 to the offices of 12 VCU officials.

The full text of the letter, as well as a link to add a signature, can be found at:

www.bit.ly/VCULetter

Community continues to demand justice for Marcus-David Peters

By Joseph Rogers

Richmond City Council chambers were covered in burgundy. Nine days after the March for Justice and Reformation drew more than 500 people from across the metro area, supporters of the family of Marcus-David Peters arrived with signs and posters, wearing Marcus’s favorite color.

At the June 11 council meeting, more than 50 people stood in solidarity as Marcus’ sister Princess Blanding addressed the council and demanded change and transparency. Blanding

The demands of the family of Marcus-David Peters

1. That the Richmond Police Department publicly release the details of its Crisis Intervention Training program so that its effectiveness can be thoroughly assessed by independent professionals;
2. The creation of a “Marcus Alert” that can call on mental health professionals to respond when members of the public are clearly in crisis;
3. A sincere apology from Chief Alfred Durham for the preventable death of Marcus-David Peters;
4. The creation of a democratically elected Civilian Police Review Board with subpoena power to investigate police actions;
5. That Chief Alfred Durham and Mayor Levar Stoney attend a community meeting held by the Peters family and supporting organizations to discuss the Richmond Police Department’s policies, procedures and accountability;
- 6: That the Jefferson Hotel management explain why it did not immediately notify the Peters family that their employee, Marcus-David Peters, was experiencing a severe crisis;
- 7: That Officer Michael Nyantakyi be terminated from the Richmond Police Department. Marcus needed help, not death.

cops, courts & prisons

Jermaine Doss' long struggle for freedom

By Phil Wilayto

Ray and Willie Mae Doss of Norfolk have received some disappointing news: the Washington, D.C.-based Innocence Project is no longer looking into the case of their son Jermaine, whom many people believe is serving a life sentence because of the actions of a crooked cop.

"I can let you know that we are no longer working on his case," project counsel Frances Walters emailed The Virginia Defender June 18 in response to an inquiry about the status of the investigation.

"As we told Mr. Doss," the email stated, "a decision to close a case does not necessarily mean that we do not believe someone is innocent or that the person does not deserve an exoneration. The decision is simply a reflection of the types of evidence that may or may not be available to prove innocence."

It's been more than a year since the family had heard anything from the project, which opened an investigation in 2013 in response to a request by Jermaine.

Reached by phone, Ray Doss declined to comment on the email.

"I want to talk first with Jermaine and see what we want to do," he said.

Jermaine Doss was convicted in 2000 of being involved in the murder of Norfolk businessman James Webb. Sentenced to life-plus-38 years, he has always maintained his innocence. The only evidence against him was the testimony of the man who admitted shooting Webb, Nathaniel McGee.

Called as a witness at Jermaine's first trial, McGee refused to testify. The prosecution had to drop charges, because McGee's testimony was all they had.

McGee was then convicted on the murder charge, but not yet sentenced. That's when he said he was told he would be risking the death penalty if he refused again. So he testified, and Jermaine was convicted.

McGee got 17 years.

Doss got life-plus-38.

McGee later tried several times to retract his testimony, but without success.

Jermaine has always insisted that he is



Photo courtesy the Doss family

Jermaine Doss with his sister Felicia during a prison visit.

innocent and was framed by Norfolk Detective Robert Glenn Ford for refusing to pay the detective a large sum of money. Ford is now serving a 12-and-a-half year sentence for extorting defendants and then lying about it to the FBI.

This is the same detective responsible for the "confessions" of four sailors in the infamous Norfolk Four case. Those men have since been proven innocent of the crimes for which they were convicted.

Jermaine has exhausted his legal appeals. His extremely supportive family has run out of money to pay for attorneys. Under the administration of Gov. Bob McDonald, with the help of the Defenders, his parents submitted a request for a full pardon for Jermaine. They resubmitted it after Gov. Terry McAuliffe took office in 2014.

The family has yet to receive any response.

More than 1,100 people have signed a petition asking for Doss' freedom. His parents, his sister Felicia and many other family members and supporters continue to build support by speaking out at public events and collecting signatures on the petition.

The struggle continues.

WARDENS Continued from page 1

drawn up a petition requesting remedies for eight very basic issues, such as access to clean drinking water, immediate health care for prisoners experiencing serious health crises and an effective grievance system. (The petition is posted at vapjn.wordpress.com.) While removing the warden was not one of the requests, Ray's name appears several times in the petition.

Between 50 and 100 men signed the petition, which was addressed to the general public. The organizers then asked representatives of the Virginia Prison Justice Network (VAPJN) to deliver the petition to top officials at the Department of Corrections.

The VAPJN requested a meeting with A. David Robinson, Chief of Corrections Operations, who is the second highest DOC official, to discuss the petition, the ongoing conditions at Sussex II and the situations of prisoner activists Askari Danso and Uhuru Rowe and of D. Braxton.

In late April, Danso, a co-founder of Virginia Prisoner of Conscience and the Virginia Prison Justice Network, and his cellmate, D. Braxton, were transferred from Sussex II and placed in solitary ("restrictive housing") at Sussex I, a more restrictive prison. Rowe, a longtime prisoner activist, also was put into solitary, but kept at Sussex II.

After about 10 days, the three were reportedly charged with trying to instigate some kind of "group disturbance," tried and given 30 more days in solitary.

The prisoners' petition, apparently the basis for the charges, does not call for any kind of group action, legal or otherwise.

On May 22, VAPJN members Lynetta Thompson and Phil Wilayto met at DOC headquarters with Robinson; Eastern Regional Office Operations Chief Jamilla Burney-Divens; Gregory Holloway, director of the office that oversees Sussex II; and the heads of the DOC legal services and communications departments.

Thompson is the State Advisor for the Youth and College Division of the Virginia State Conference NAACP. Wilayto is editor of The Virginia Defender newspaper. Both are cleared to speak at Virginia prisons and together have spoken a half-dozen times at prisoner-organized events at Augusta and Buckingham correctional centers.

During the 45-minute meeting, Thompson and Wilayto presented the officials with the prisoners' petition, went over the cases of the three prisoners and gave the officials copies of two Times-Dispatch newspaper articles that mentioned the situation at Sussex II.

Robinson and Burney-Divens pledged to

look into the issues raised by the Sussex II prisoners and to be in touch with the two VAPJN representatives about their investigation. They also said they would look into the cases of the three prisoners.

The VAPJN representatives left the meeting feeling cautiously optimistic that the officials had seriously listened to the prisoners' grievances.

Three days later came the news that the wardens at Sussex I and II had been replaced.

At the end of their sentences, Rowe and Braxton appear to have been released back into general population, but Danso remained in solitary. Repeated attempts to reach Robinson and Burney-Divens to discuss Danso's situation and their pledge to investigate conditions at Sussex II were initially unsuccessful.

Meanwhile, Danso received a visit, in his cell, from Gregory Holloway, the DOC's sub-regional director, who asked if Danso was through with "petitions." When Danso said yes, Holloway started to leave, so Danso asked when he was going to be transferred out of Sussex I.

"You just lay back and I think everything will turn out to your satisfaction," Holloway said.

The implication seemed clear: stop organizing, and you might get sent to a less restrictive prison. But keep organizing ...

Then, on June 19, Wilayto received call from Robinson, who said he had been under the impression that Danso's situation had been resolved. When he learned it had not, Robinson apparently intervened and had Danso released to general population, at Sussex I.

When asked if Danso were going to be transferred, Robinson replied that that depended on Danso. Asked what that meant, Robinson said only that Danso was free to file grievances, if he felt the need.

Later that day Wilayto and Thompson received an email from Robinson. It read:

Thank you for following up regarding our May 22 meeting. We have looked into all of the issues that were raised at the meeting, namely the offender grievances outlined in the offender petition. No wardens were moved as a result of this. The Department has a well-established procedure for the filing of offender grievances, and all offenders need to follow that procedure. As we said at the meeting in May, an individual offender's confidential record is not something we can discuss with you. You are always welcome to reach out to the offenders themselves. Thank you for sharing your concerns with us. We appreciated the opportunity to meet with you.

Sincerely,

David Robinson Chief of Corrections Operations

"While one of us is in prison, none of us are free." - Anonymous

cops, courts & prisons



Photo by Phil Wilayto

More than 300 people rally outside the State Capitol Jan. 20 in the largest show of support in memory for prison justice. The rally was called by Virginia Prisoner of Conscience and was organized by the Coalition for Justice and the Virginia Defenders.

Va. prisoners organize for Justice

By Margaret Breslau

Virginia Prisoner of Conscience

Virginia Prisoner of Conscience is an organization of prisoner activists from around the state committed to ending mass incarceration and awakening the consciousness of the prison population by educating them on the need for prison and criminal justice reform.

The group's name plays on "Prisoners of Conscious," the name given by Amnesty International to people "imprisoned and/or persecuted for their nonviolent expression of their conscientiously held beliefs."

VAPOC has been active for two years and now is a member of the Coalition for Justice, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization located in Southwest Virginia.

In November 2017, VAPOC organized a state-wide conference call during which prisoners and supporters spoke about issues of legislative reform and also the need to help prisoners address grievances. More than 100 people from around the state took part.

Following the conference call, VAPOC asked the Coalition for Justice and the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality to organize a rally during the 2018 Virginia General Assembly to bring attention to the pressing need for criminal justice reform.

The coalition and the Defenders agreed, and the date for the rally was set for Jan. 20, 2018. Prisoners urged their friends and relatives to attend, while organizers on the outside promoted the event through Facebook, emails and press releases.

The result was that more than 300 people attended the rally, held on the grounds of the

State Capitol. Prisoners' statements were read and family members and supporters took to the mic to air their grievances. Nearly 30 organizations were represented. More than 100 people signed up to stay involved.

Virginia Prison Justice Network

The success of the event underscored the need for organizations to mobilize, organize and collectively build power for change. Inside and outside organizers decided to form the Virginia Prison Justice Network, a statewide network of prisoners, relatives, friends, supporters and advocates, with the purpose of building public awareness of the problems in the Virginia prison system in order to pressure the General Assembly to make real changes.

The first VAPJN project was to set up a website (<https://vapjn.wordpress.com>), which serves as a communications hub for events, actions and legislative developments, as well as a place where prisoners can be heard.

The next step was to launch a hard-copy VAPJN newsletter, the first issue of which was sent out this past February. It's now sent to more than 60 prisoners who share it extensively in at least 11 prisons. The newsletter also is sent to more than 100 family members and supporters and is shared through those networks as well. New subscribers are added each week.

Prisoners report that the newsletter provides critical information on legislative efforts, that they use it to share information on actions and events with their families and communities, and as an effective networking tool with organizations around the state.

In addition to sharing information, VAPJN

Prison Justice Network holds 'Speak-Outs for Prison Justice'

Staff Report

More than 100 people turned out May 19 for the Richmond Prison Justice Speak-Out, held at Second Baptist Church in the city's Randolph neighborhood.

For nearly three hours, the public heard the stories of prisoners, the formerly incarcerated, family members, friends and advocates. What emerged was an understanding that injustices are both personal and systemic, that Virginia's prisons are in a state of crisis and that the problems must be addressed in a systemic way.

Also raised were cases of local police violence, including that of 14-year old autistic McKhyl Dickerson, represented by his mother Nichele Lewis, and the recent fatal shooting of Marcus-David Peters, a high school biology teacher shot to death on I-95 while naked and obviously suffering from some kind of mental crisis.

The Speak-Out was sponsored by the Richmond chapter of the Virginia Prison

Justice Network. The event was co-chaired by Lynetta Thompson, immediate past president of the Richmond Branch NAACP and an activist with Community Unity in Action, and Joseph Rogers of the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality.

Also participating were representatives from Bridging the Gap in Virginia, House of Dreams Outreach & ReEntry, Interfaith Action for Human Rights, Mary G. Brown Transitional Center, RIHD, Inc. and RISE for Youth.

Today's Speak-Out for Prison Justice was the first of many similar events to be held around the state. (See boxes above.)

The goal is to raise public awareness about issues of injustice in the Virginia prison system, build a powerful statewide movement and prepare to decisively intervene in the 2019 session of the Virginia General Assembly.

For more information and to get involved, please see: vapjn.wordpress.com.

SPEAK-OUTS FOR PRISON JUSTICE: Confronting Injustice, One Story at a Time

An opportunity for prisoners, former prisoners, family members, supporters & advocates to tell your stories & inform the public about the inhumane conditions in Virginia prisons & the Criminal "Justice" System.

ROANOKE

2-3:30 PM

SAT., JUNE 23

HOPE CENTER, 506 11th St.

Hosted by the Coalition for Justice

NEWPORT NEWS

1-3:30 PM

SAT., JULY 7

MIRACLE TEMPLE CHURCH
617 32nd St.

Information: 757-303-0364

Information: vapjn.wordpress.com

also has coordinated actions to apply pressure to prison authorities around issues such as solitary confinement and the effort to halt the building of new youth prisons, as well as supporting prisoner-organizers.

The VAPJN also has started a series of regional Speak-Outs for Prison Justice, at which statements from prisoners are read, followed by testimony from former prisoners, family members and advocates.

More than 100 people turned out for the first Speak-Out, held May 19 at Second Baptist Church in Richmond's Randolph neighborhood. Some of the issues addressed were unsafe and unhealthy conditions in prison, human rights

abuses, solitary confinement, inadequate meals and Fishback prisoners still seeking remedy.

The next Speak-Out is scheduled to take place June 23 in Roanoke, followed by a third event in Hampton Roads on July 7.

You can connect with the VAPJN by logging on to: vapjn.wordpress.com

The VAPJN newsletter is posted on the website under "News."

Margaret Breslau is a co-founder of the Coalition for Justice in Blacksburg, member of the steering committee of the Virginia Prison Justice Network and editor of the VAPJN newsletter.

In our opinion Guns

We're all deeply saddened by news of what seems like an endless series of school shootings. Our hearts go out to the victims and their families. Since the infamous Sandy Hook massacre in September 2012, there have been some 1,500 mass shootings in this country. How can so many tragic events keep happening? What's the answer?

Some of our FB friends are posting very emotional statements demanding more laws controlling the ownership of guns. The U.S. has 5% of the world's population, but owns 50% of the world's privately owned guns. That works out to about one gun per person, although only one in four actually owns a gun, with most of those owning one or two. A mere 3 percent of the population owns half of all the privately owned guns. But how many of these ever misuse them?

We agree that guns don't kill people, people kill people; and also that there are way too many guns out there. Not because guns can jump up and shoot people, but because if you have a gun and also have a problem, it's very tempting to use that gun to solve your problem. That's one reason why the majority of gun-related deaths in this country are actually suicides.

But the real problem goes much deeper than guns. The vast majority of people who own guns, for hunting, sport or personal protection, have no desire to use them against another human being.

The real problem is with society as a whole. It's not just guns - this country has a love affair with violence in general. As Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin (H. Rap Brown) once put it, it's as American as cherry pie. We grow up playing with toy guns. We watch super-violent TV shows and super-violent movies. We play super-violent video games. Our favorite national sport consists of grown men bashing each other up and down a field.

And deeper, our country was born in hideous violence - massacring indigenous people, enslaving millions of Africans, waging wars nonstop from our founding right up to today. We glorify the military and the wars it fights. We teach our young, by example, that the best way to defend yourself from any threat is to eliminate that threat. It's not just Trump. Every president, whether Democrat or Republican, has done the same thing.

The real problem with gun violence in this country is that we have a very, very sick society. It's deeply racist, deeply militaristic and deeply violent. This is what we have to fight against. We need to constantly project the vision of another way of living.

We are for the right to own guns and for sensible gun laws. But no gun laws can protect us from violent people who want to hurt other people. And there are times when owning and knowing how to safely use a gun may save your life. Not always, but sometimes, and people should have the right to be prepared for those situations.

If you don't want to own a gun, don't. If you want to protect us all from gun violence, then change society. Guns don't kill people - sick, violent people who grow up in a deeply unhealthy society that glorifies violence and promotes violence as a reasonable solution to almost every problem kill people.

And, thanks to our history and our continuing militarism, we seem to have more of those kinds of people than any society on earth.

Letters to the Editor

Not newsworthy?

I am writing to call attention to the lack of media coverage of the Prison Reform Rally hosted Jan. 20 in Capitol Square.

The Prison Reform Rally was organized by Virginia Prisoner of Conscience (VAPOC) - a prisoner organization - with the support of the Coalition for Justice of Blacksburg and the Richmond-based Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality. It took place on the grounds of the Virginia State Capitol, the former capital of the Confederacy and a building constructed with the help of enslaved people. The rally drew close to 300 participants.

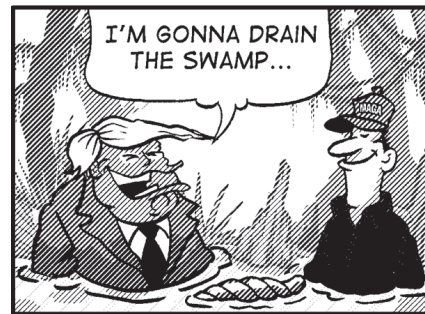
On the morning of the same day, the Women's March RVA took place in the Carytown shopping district, along with Women's Marches around the country - big news, for sure. Photographs of that and many other moments from the Women's March appeared in the RTD and other local news outlets.

Despite the fact that reporters and photographers could easily have attended first the Women's March and then the Prison Reform Rally, I saw no photographs or mention of the rally in the RTD or other mainstream RVA media. Only The Richmond Free Press and the Virginia Defender, both publications focused on African American issues and life in Richmond and central Virginia, covered the rally.

The Richmond of today is far and away more progressive than the Richmond I knew growing up here in the 70s and 80s. But white supremacy still shapes RVA as surely as does the James River, and in ways both overt and subtle. Dozens of photographs of smiling white faces in pink hats, and none of black, white, and brown faces speaking the terrible truths of how mass incarceration has torn apart their lives and the lives of those they love, tell a story impossible to misread.

Keep working, RVA.

Lea Marshall
RICHMOND



Help this Haitian school?

Please help Gampson St.-Louis keep the Ecole Classique Mixte du Rivage school open for street kids in Hinche, Haiti. Gampson and his mother sell handicrafts to help keep the kids in school. They desperately need help to pay the teachers so that the street kids can continue to go to school. The school provides education, life skills, food, and clothing for kids with no parents or whose parents do not care for them. They are the poorest of the poor in Haiti. I know

Gampson through my pen pal program with Richmond Christian Preparatory Academy. Please help Gampson keep his school open with a small contribution. Onward our goal. Address: 2 Rivage Street, Hinche, Haiti HT5111. Phone: (509)3746-2462 / 4647-6616 / 4309-6805 Mail: gampson007@yahoo.com, ralfwesleyd@yahoo.com. Founder: Gampson St.-Louis. Director: Ralf-Wesley Dessables

Peace be with you,

Ramona Hinkle
HENRICO

The Virginia Defender

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Editorial Board: Ana Edwards, Phil Wilayto **Editor:** Phil Wilayto **Staff Writers:** Ana Edwards, Kat McNeal, Janet "Queen Nzinga" Taylor, Phil Wilayto **Photographers:** Ana Edwards, Kwame Binta, Phil Wilayto
Production: Ana Edwards, Phil Wilayto **Tech Support:** Ana Edwards **Community Calendar:** Kat McNeal
Spanish Translation: Aileen Rivera **Advertising:** Ana Edwards, Aileen Rivera, Shannon Hertz, Phil Wilayto
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our sacred ground

Is the City choking off possibility of a Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park?

By Ana Edwards

Last October, the Rose Center for Public Leadership, a partnership of the Urban Land Institute and the National League of Cities, announced that Richmond's Levar Stoney had been selected as one of four mayors to receive expert assistance crafting a land use project. In Richmond's case, the project was Shockoe Bottom.

"The Rose Center's fellowship program has a consistent track record of mayoral teams effectively working together to help solve the land use challenges of our nation's leading metropolitan areas," said ULI Global Chief Executive Officer Patrick L. Phillips.

Mayor Stoney's team includes City Councilmember Cynthia Newbille; Deputy Chief Administrative Officer of Operations Robert Steidel; and Jane Ferrara, Chief Operating Officer for the Department of Economic and Community Development. They are assisted by project manager Ellyn Parker, Public Art Coordinator at the Department of Planning and Development Review, and a "panel of visiting experts" assembled by the Rose Center.

As part of the process, volunteer experts came to Richmond in February 2018 for two days of interviews with Shockoe Bottom stakeholders and advocates. They also were provided copies of all manner of documents related to planning for Shockoe Bottom - commercial, transportation, infrastructure, economic development, archaeology and historic preservation, including the Community Proposal for a Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park.

On Feb. 9, this team held a public meeting at the newly renovated Main Street Station train shed and presented their findings, making six recommendations to Mayor Stoney and the fellowship team:

1. Hire / designate a full-time manager for Shockoe Bottom.
2. Synthesize all the existing plans, concepts and proposals to find shared elements and conflicts.
3. Research examples of truth and reconciliation processes with local community, private sector and institutions.
4. Create an archaeological do-no-harm policy until a vision is established.
5. Develop an inclusive community engagement strategy.
6. Begin conversations with potential funding partners to gauge interest and capacity.

Since then, while no formal update has come from the mayor's office, it seems the fellowship team has decided to focus on recommendation numbers two and four. According to city press secretary James Nolan, "A person has been hired for the summer through the Mayor's Internship program who will work on researching archeological do-no-harm policies that have been done in other cities. She will be based in the Office Of Economic Development. She will be working to help overlay all of the existing land use studies, plans and community proposals to look for shared elements."

Separate from this process, the Sacred Ground Project of the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality partnered with Preservation Virginia, the Center for Design Engagement and The Valentine museum to submit an application to the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund for an economic impact and benefits study of the Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park concept. Awards announcements are expected by early July.

Meanwhile, Shockoe Bottom continues to be one of the city's fastest developing areas. Developers have transformed almost all existing former industrial and warehouse buildings into apartment buildings, so the focus now is on clearing blocks of smaller buildings and putting up new, high-end apartment rental properties for "empty-nesters" and "millennials."

DC2RVA is the multi-state federal initiative for high speed rail along the I-95 Atlantic Coast corridor, to be planned, financed and constructed over the next 20 to 30 years. When the Federal Department of Transportation team was in Richmond last fall, it hosted a public meeting, also in the Main Street Station's event space.

DC2RVA documents offer one- and two-station options for public consideration: expansion of the station at Staples Mill or Main Street, or both. Others suggest a third option: Scott's Addition, a site west of downtown and north of Broad Street and the Boulevard.

Any option that includes the Main Street Station, requiring platform expansions and additional parking spaces, could prove a risk to nearby historic areas where archaeological excavation and research are most likely to yield significant finds.

Following the public meeting, Mayor Stoney sent a formal letter of response stating his preference for the two-station solution, as long as sufficient parking could be provided.

East Marshall Street Well Project: One year later, still no final report

By Ana Edwards

Long before there was a Virginia Commonwealth University, there was the Medical College of Virginia, now part of the VCU Health System. For decades before the Civil War, students at the college would study anatomy by dissecting the bodies of mostly Black people whose graves had been robbed to provide the school with fresh cadavers. When the bodies were no longer useful, they were dumped into a well next to the school. The exact location is under the south sidewalk of East Marshall Street by the VCU Egyptian Building.

In April of 1994, the remains were

That parking would likely abut the community-proposed memorial park.

On May 29, City Council approved developer H. Louis Salomonsky's request to rezone the Weiman's Bakery property at 127 N. 17th St. Salomonsky - a major promoter of the defeated attempt to build a baseball stadium in Shockoe Bottom, along with his partner David White of Historic Housing, want to build a Wyndham hotel on the property and needed the rezoning to allow for taller building heights - as high as 12 stories. The hotel would be kitty-corner across the street from the southeast corner of the memorial park.

Then there's the renovated train shed at the Main Street Station, which now provides a venue for parties. With its glass windows, guests at last New Year's Eve gala could take a moment from sipping champagne to glance down at the site of Lumpkin's slave jail just next door.

Add to all that the fact that, three years after a fierce, more-than-10-year community struggle succeeded in reclaiming Richmond's African Burial Ground from a state-owned parking lot, city government has yet to provide any legal protection for that sacred ground.

Taken together - the proposals for the train platform extension, new parking, a hotel as tall as 12 stories, the use of the train shed as a commercial party space and the continued vulnerability of the Burial Ground - and you can see that the community-generated proposal for a nine-acre Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park is in real danger.

To fight back, the Defenders are planning an expanded Advocates meeting in the near future. Stay tuned.

discovered during an excavation of the area. Eugene Trani, then president of VCU, gave the work crew a weekend to remove whatever remains they could - and then ordered the well resealed. Some of the remains were sent to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., to be studied. Others were unceremoniously stored in a Richmond warehouse.

Under the current VCU president, Michael Rao, VCU initiated the East Marshall Street Well Project to decide what to do with the remains. The project includes an advisory Family Representative Council made up of members of the local Black community, some of whose ancestors may have been victims of the grave robbing.

In June of 2016, the council presented its recommendations for the study, reburial and memorialization of these human remains recovered from that nineteenth century well. A period of public comment followed, and those comments were to be factored into the preparation of a final report that would be submitted to President Rao's office to begin the implementation phase by the spring of 2017.

A year later, that final report has yet to be completed.

The report, titled "Draft Recommendations for Research, Memorialization and Interment of the East Marshall Street Well Project Ancestral Remains," is divided into three primary sections: recommendations for research, memorialization and interment.

In the section on interment, the FRC states that its preference is that "the EMSW Ancestral Remains and associated artifacts" be interred "underground at the African Burial Ground located in the City of Richmond" due to its status as "a sacred site of tremendous historical importance, reverence and cultural significance to the city's African American community."

One research priority is for further study into the history of the well site and its impact on Richmond's African-American community, as well as DNA research that could supplement genealogical resources in hopes of identifying individual remains and descendants.

The draft report can be found online at:

http://emsw.vcu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/5206/2016/06/Current-EMSW-FRC-Report_Summary.pdf

international & antiwar news



in front of the Ukrainian Consulate in San Francisco. At right, outside the Federal courthouse in Richmond, Va. The actions were supported by Prague Spring 2 and Activists for Peace in Sweden and the Richmond-based Odessa Solidarity Campaign in the United States.



Protests in solidarity with the anti-fascist struggle in Odessa, Ukraine, were held on May 2 in some 40 cities across Europe and the United States. At left,

May 2: International Day of Solidarity with the People of Odessa!

On May 2, 2014, the people of Odessa, Ukraine, experienced the worst civil atrocity in Europe since World War II. Scores of people died when a fascist-led mob chased a group of progressive activists into the five-story House of Trade Unions in Kulikovo Pole (Square) - and then set it on fire. Some died from the flames, some from smoke inhalation, some from gunshot wounds. Some leapt from the building, only to be beaten to death when they hit the ground. Dozens of cellphone videos posted on the Internet clearly show that this was a mass lynching. Just google "May 2, 2014, Odessa."

Relatives and supporters of those who died on May 2 have steadfastly demanded justice in the form of an international investigation to identify and punish those responsible for the massacre. To date, the Ukrainian government has refused to cooperate with any international body trying to pursue such an investigation.

The massacre came just months after a right-wing coup backed by the U.S. government overthrew the elected president and ushered in a right-wing regime backed by openly fascist forces.

Despite the hostility of both the government and the fascist forces that support it, the people of Odessa continue to regularly gather at the site of the May 2 massacre and demand justice. This May 2 they held another mass gathering - even though the fascists had called for a march on their memorial. This is

why solidarity events were carried out in so many countries on the same and succeeding days. Together we can raise our voices and say to the world:

**Solidarity with the People of Odessa!
Justice for the Victims of the
Massacre of May 2!**

**US, EU, NATO & IMF out of Ukraine!
No to Fascism - from Charlottesville
to Odessa!**

The above was excerpted from a statement issued by the Odessa Solidarity Campaign, which works in support of the Council of Mothers of May 2 in Odessa. The OSC is a project of the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC).

For more information, visit us at: <https://odessasolidaritycampaign.org>

No to NATO! Close all U.S. foreign military bases!

The rapidly increasing militarization of countries across the world, especially those in North America and Europe, has fueled a surge of activity by antiwar activists.

In February, a coalition of organizations held a conference in Baltimore, Md., to demand the closing of all U.S. foreign military bases. That gathering led to the call for an international conference now scheduled to take place this November, in Ireland.

This summer, some 5,000 war opponents are expected to gather at the massive U.S. Ramstein Air Force Base in southwestern Germany. Plans include using nonviolent civil disobedience to block access to the base. The gathering, from June 23 to July 1, will also include workshops, cultural presentations and a conference.

In Brussels, Belgium, protesters will gather July 6-8 for conferences and protests the weekend before NATO holds its annual summit, this time in its new international headquarters.

Among the U.S. organizations that will be at Ramstein and Brussels will be the United



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Speakers at the Baltimore, Md., conference demanding the closing of all U.S. foreign military bases. From left: Alexandr Prigarin, Ph.D., of Odessa National University, Ukraine; Anna Rebrii, staff member of the Odessa Solidarity Campaign; Ray McGovern, former CIA analyst and now noted antiwar activist; and John Lannon, Ph.D., of the University of Limerick, Ireland.

National Antiwar Coalition, represented by Virginia Defender Editor Phil Wilayto, a member of UNAC's Administrative Committee and coordinator of UNAC's Odessa Solidarity Campaign.

Virginia Defender sponsors antiwar forums

This spring, the Defender newspaper sponsored a series of forums on international issues. At left is **Maria Rincon** of Charlottesville, who is working in Honduras with the organization Witness for Peace. Maria spoke at a May 29 forum in Richmond co-sponsored with ICE Out of RVA.

Other forums included a talk by Washington, D.C., activist **Netfa Freeman** speaking on Zimbabwe.



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international & antiwar news

The U.S.-North Korea Summit

Statement by the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC)

After months of harsh talk towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), during which he threatened to destroy the country in "fire and fury," Donald Trump will meet with Kim Jong Un in Singapore. The world is hoping that the meeting will pull us away from the brink of nuclear war. This hope is understandably strong among Koreans, as reflected in a recent statement initiated by a host of Korean American organizations and signed by many other supporters. The statement calls for the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

The strong-armed tactics and bluster from the Trump administration was deflated due to the diplomacy between North and South Korea initiated by South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who was elected partly on the promise to cool down the tension between North and South Korea. Today, polls show that Moon enjoys a popularity rating of 85% in South Korea. The results of the diplomacy became visible to the entire world at the recent Winter Olympics in Seoul, South Korea, as a joint team from the North and the South marched into the stadium carrying a flag representing a unified Korea. The entire stadium of thousands, including dignitaries from the various countries represented, took to their feet in prolonged celebration, demonstrating the desire of the entire world for peace. The only people who remained seated were Vice President Pence and the right-wing president of Japan, Shinzo Abe.

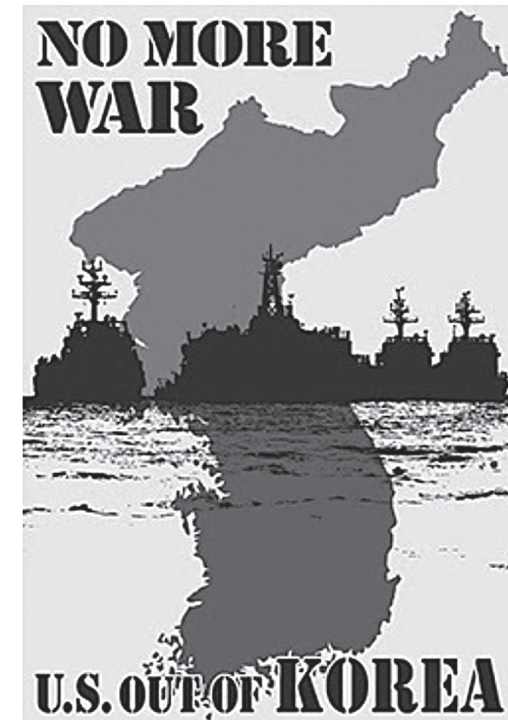
It became clear to the Trump administration that the strong-armed tactics were not working, so he changed his tune and started speaking about Kim Jong Un in more friendly terms, claiming that his belligerent threats

worked and resulted in better relations.

While the Trump administration started speaking in more friendly terms towards North Korea and Kim Jong Un, he appointed Mike Pompeo to the position of Secretary of State and John Bolton as National Security Advisor. Both men have advocated military action against N. Korea in the past. In a recent interview, Bolton called for the Libyan solution for North Korea.

Libya was a country that started a nuclear program to deter threats from imperialist powers who wanted their oil and a more subservient government in Libya. Libya agreed to give up its nuclear program on the guarantee that the government would

not be continually threatened with regime change. However, the U.S. and NATO did not keep to their side of the agreement. They started bombing Libya and, with the help of mercenaries paid for by Qatar, overthrew the government and created another failed state rife with war, human trafficking, and misery for the Libyan people. Hillary Clinton,



during her campaign for president, famously quipped about Libyan president Muammar Qaddafi, who was killed by a pro-western military faction. Clinton said, "We came, we saw, he died" before giving out a maniacal laugh. People, including the corporate media, understood and commented on what

Bolton meant by the "Libyan solution" for North Korea: He wanted the same done to North Korea that had been done to Libya.

North Korea has already made agreements with the U.S. and its Western allies in the past and has had the experience of seeing the U.S. renege on its agreements. It is also instructive to see how the U.S. recently trashed the non-proliferation treaty with Iran. These examples should give pause to the leadership in North Korea as they meet with Trump in Singapore.

In the U.S. corporate media and among politicians from both the Democratic and Republican parties, North Korea is portrayed as a threat to the United States.

This is always done when the U.S. wants to build support for regime change wars against governments that are not totally subservient to the dictates of Washington and Wall Street. In such narratives, the truth is never important. By the U.S. government's false account, we went to war with Iraq because Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and were a threat to us. Of course, Iraqi oil and Saddam Hussein's independent stance had nothing to do with it. So, a war was started that may have been responsible for the deaths of as many as 1.5 million people, caused refugees to flee the war-torn country and inflamed that entire region of the world.

The reality today is not that North Korea is a threat to the U.S. but that the U.S. is a threat to North Korea. The U.S. maintains a string of bases in South Korea and keeps a force of close to 30,000 troops in that country. They hold yearly war games right at the North Korean border that have been described as

practice invasions of North Korea. During the Korean War, the U.S. led coalition killed a large portion of the population of North Korea and carpet bombed the entire country. They then started bombing the dams, which is illegal by international law during warfare. After the Korean War was fought to a standstill, an armistice was agreed upon to end the fighting. But the North Koreans also wanted a peace treaty to end the war. From then until now, the U.S. has refused to sign a peace treaty, making it clear that their aim is still the same: regime change in North Korea and U.S. dominance in the region.

Of course, North Korea is well-aware of what happened in Libya and has seen that when the U.S. was the only country in the world with nuclear bombs, it did not hesitate to use them. In Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the U.S. dropped atomic bombs that in a flash destroyed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Today, the U.S. is the main aggressor in the world. While North Korea has never attacked another country, the U.S. does so continuously. The U.S. military is in 172 foreign countries and maintains foreign military bases numbering about 20 times that of all other countries combined.

For these reasons, as U.S. antiwar advocates, we do not make demands on the government of North Korea or its people. Peaceful reunification and denuclearization, both desirable outcomes, can only come from the democratic desires and actions of the Korean peoples, not by the military imposition of U.S. imperialism.

As leaders of a major antiwar coalition in the U.S., we demand:

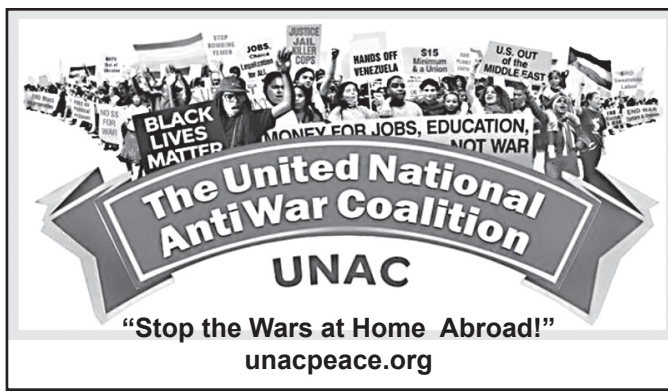
Bring all the U.S. troops home from Korea and all foreign countries!

Close the U.S. military base in South Korea and end all military exercises and threats directed at North Korea!

End all Sanctions on North Korea!

Ban all nuclear weapons, starting with those from the U.S.!

Self-determination for the peoples of North and South Korea!



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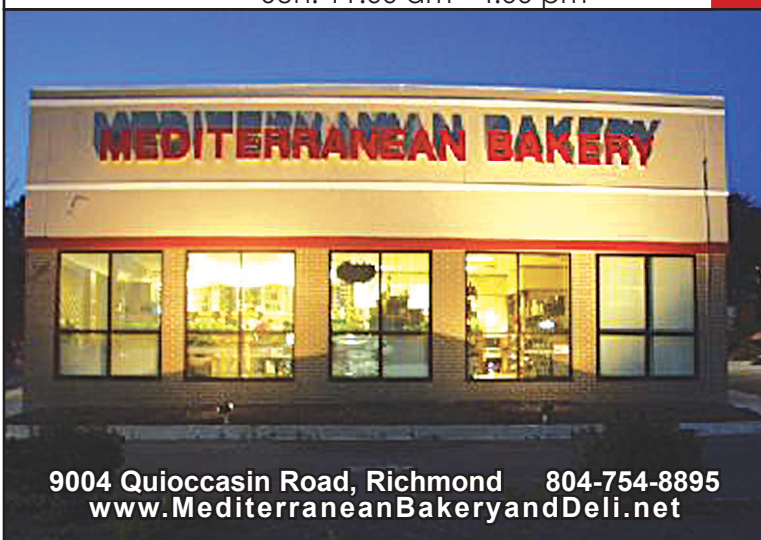


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purged from the voter rolls.**

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to check your registration
or to register.**

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Email: andrea@peopledemandingaction.org**