

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

# **D** The Virginia **DEFENDER**

**FREE**

**A statewide quarterly newspaper published by the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality**  
**Serving 14 Virginia cities and counties, primarily in the Richmond Metro Area**

**Vol. 15, No. 1, Issue 59**

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**Late Summer 2019**

***2019 marks 400 years since the first captured Africans  
were brought to British-occupied North America. It's past time to***

# **RECLAIM SHOCKOE BOTTOM!**

**"About the latter end of August, a Dutch man of Warr of the burden of a 160 [tons] arrived at Point-Comfort, the Comandors name Capt Joep, his Pilott for the West Indies one Mr Marmaduke an Englishman. ... He brought not any thing but 20. and odd Negroes, w[hich] the Governo[r] and Cape Merchant bought for victuall[s]."**

**-- John Rolfe, writing in 1619 about the arrival of the first captured Africans to the English colony of Virginia**

**By Ana Edwards & Phil Wilayto**

John Rolfe, the illegal alien who became famous for marrying the native princess Pocohontas, was also the businessman who introduced a particularly valuable strain of Virginia tobacco to England, thus creating a market that required large-scale agriculture, which in turn required enslaved labor to be profitable.

Rolfe must have seen the unexpected arrival of "20 and odd" captured Africans as a gift from heaven, especially after the governor, Sir George Yeardley, put them to

## **Shockoe Bottom Truth & Conciliation Symposium**

**9 am - 4 pm, Saturday, Dec. 7, 2019**

**(Location to be announced)**

You are invited to an all-day educational forum on the history of Black people in Richmond & Virginia & the central role that Shockoe Bottom played in the domestic slave trade.

Hear from scholars, historians, authors, researchers, advocates & cultural workers. Learn more about the Community Proposal for a nine-acre Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park & how it would benefit Richmond's Black community & the city as a whole.

This event is initiated by the

**Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project of the  
Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality**  
[SacredGroundProject.net](http://SacredGroundProject.net) -- [DefendersFJE.blogspot.com](http://DefendersFJE.blogspot.com)

**For an update on Shockoe Bottom, see the story on page 10.**

work on his struggling tobacco plantation. With a now-profitable crop to sell to the mother country, the ground was set for a successful colony that would lead to the establishment of the United States.

So: a bunch of imperialist white businessmen stole land from its original inhabitants to grow a dangerous drug cultivated by stolen African labor - that's

the origin of our country.

After the successful slave rebellion and independence war in Haiti (1791-1804), the U.S. ruling class became so afraid of a domestic rebellion that it banned the further importation of Africans to the new country.

But when the French leader Napoleon abandoned Haiti, he also sold off the lands of Louisiana, thus doubling the size of the

fledgling United States and offering the prospect of vast new sugar, rice and cotton plantations. But those plantations couldn't be profitable without enslaved labor, and U.S. participation in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade had just been banned.

As a result, the new "planters" turned to Virginia and Maryland, which had "surplus" populations of Africans. This trade in human beings became so profitable and the demand for enslaved labor so great that slave owners would force young fertile woman to have babies, since human beings were viewed as a cash crop grown for profit.

In time, the Shockoe Bottom district in Richmond became the center of this domestic slave trade, centrally located among the plantations of Virginia and offering traders easy transport to the Deep South by the James River, railroads and a 1,000-mile overland route that stretched from Virginia to Louisiana.

In the three decades before the end of the Civil War, so many men, women and children

**See SHOCKOE on page 10**

***"It is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten." – African proverb associated with the Sankofa symbol***

## regional &amp; national news

## Chicago Defender ends print edition - part of a trend

Marking the end of an era, the 114-year-old Chicago Defender released its final print edition on July 10. Succumbing to trends that have fundamentally transformed the newspaper industry, the iconic Black newspaper has switched to an all-online model.

In its heyday, the Defender was one of the most influential newspapers serving the Black community, reporting news from the mundane to the historic that often was ignored by the white-owned press. Among its many notable writers were Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks.

Along with its courageous exposes of racial atrocities, the Defender also portrayed a view of Black economic progress in the North, which played a major role in encouraging the Great Migration that in the 20th century saw some 6 million African-Americans move from the rural South to the urban North. Based in the industrial center of Chicago, the newspaper was carried to Southern communities by Pullman railway porters.

The country's first Black newspaper, Freedom's Journal, was founded in 1827. In the three decades after the end of the Civil War, more than 500 Black-owned newspapers had been published, according to a report by the

Democracy Fund.

Today there are 208 Black-owned newspapers attracting 22.2 million print and online readers each week, according to the National Newspaper Publishers Association, a trade organization for African-American-owned newspapers.

Note: We are often asked if The Virginia Defender was named after the Chicago Defender. Founded as The Richmond Defender, our name was an extension of our organization, the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality. However, we were well aware of the Chicago icon and try to follow in its heroic tradition of speaking Truth to Power.

## More than half of all trans males attempt suicide

More than half of all male trans teenagers have attempted suicide. That's according to the new study "Transgender Adolescent Suicide Behavior" by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Overall, nearly 14 percent of all teens reported they had tried to kill themselves. Fifty-one percent of transgender males reported at least one attempt, the highest percentage of any gender identity group, followed by nonbinary teens at nearly 42 percent; transgender females

at about 30 percent; questioning teens at 28 percent; cisgender females at nearly 18 percent; and cisgender males, at 10 percent. Data for the study came from more than 120,000 11- to 18-year-olds between June 2012 and May 2015.

Similar trends were reported by the Human Rights Campaign in its "2018 LGBTQ Youth Report."

"These harrowing statistics lay bare the urgency of building welcoming and safe communities for LGBTQ young people, particularly for transgender youth," said a statement released by Ellen Kahn, the HRC Foundation's director of children, youth, and families programs.

Note: If you are a trans or gender-nonconforming person considering suicide, Trans Lifeline can be reached at (877) 565-8860. LGBTQ youth (ages 24 and younger) can reach the Trevor Project Lifeline at (866) 488-7386. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273-8255 can also be reached 24 hours a day by people of all ages and identities.

In Richmond, Side by Side (formerly ROSMY) "is dedicated to creating supportive communities where Virginia's LGBTQ+ youth can define themselves, belong, and flourish."

The organization runs a Youth Support Line at 888-644-4390. Its website is <http://www.sidebysideva.org>.

## Imam Jamil Al-Amin, aka H. Rap Brown

Back in the Sixties, H. Rap Brown was known as the fiery chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee who famously declared that "Violence is as American as cherry pie."

Today his name is Imam Jamil Al-Amin, a respected Muslim leader and 75-year-old prisoner in the federal penitentiary in Tucson, Arizona, whom many supporters believe was framed on a 2000 murder charge because of his uncompromising resistance to this country's systemic racism.

Since his incarceration, he has been forbidden to speak to journalists or to academics wishing to interview him about his leading role in the Black Liberation Movement.

Al-Amin was in court this past May in an unsuccessful attempt to win a new trial. Meanwhile, his health has been deteriorating as he battles Myeloma, an incurable blood plasma disease, as well as arthritis, Hepatitis B and high blood pressure. Supporters fear he is being set up for "death by medical neglect," a charge that has been raised in other political cases, including that of the celebrated prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal.

For more information, visit: <http://imam-jamilactionnetwork.weebly.com>

To send a message of support, write: Jamil al-Amin, #99974-555, USP Tucson, U.S. Penitentiary, P.O. Box 24550, Tucson, AZ 85734.

## THE VIRGINIA DEFENDERS for Freedom, Justice & Equality

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

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

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

We now have a quarterly, statewide newspaper, a monthly radio program and a website. Our members meet monthly to discuss

issues and plan actions. We are affiliated with the Virginia Prison Justice Network 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 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 must 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.



# is there a Master Plan to drive poor people out of Richmond?



Photo by Phil Wilayto

An overflow crowd attends the July 17 RRHA Board of Commissioners meeting to ask one simple question: If you tear down Richmond's public housing, where will the people go?

## RRHA has big plans for public housing, but do they include the residents?

### Staff Report

There was one overriding question that drew an overflow crowd July 17 to the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority's Board of Commissioners meeting:

"You tear down that housing, where are the people supposed to go?," Virginia Defender Editor Phil Wilayto asked in a post-meeting interview with Channel 6 News. "Well, RRHA is not considering that."

Wilayto was among a half-dozen Richmonders who had addressed the RRVA commissioners. Other speakers included longtime public housing resident and

community advocate Cora Hayes, former City Council member Marty Jewell and Community Unity in Action activist and now Legal Aid Justice Center housing organizer Omari Al-Qadafi.

The meeting was held in an RRHA building in Gilpin Court, which was appropriate, since that community of 783 housing units is to be the first of the city's six major public housing communities to be demolished, according to newly-hired RRHA Director Damon Duncan.

The former director of public housing in Elgin, Ill, had been quoted in Richmond's daily newspaper as saying, "I'm not going to let nobody convince me to rehab [Gilpin], put a new facade, a new canopy over the doors.

No - we're not doing none of that. We're tearing it down."

RRHA's 10,000 public housing residents have an average annual income of around \$10,000. Living in subsidized housing, they are not required to pay more than 30 percent of their income for rent.

Thirty percent of \$10,000 is \$3,000 a year, or \$250 a month. Now, where in Richmond can you find even a studio apartment for \$250? That's why previous RRHA directors were forced by the community to agree to "one-to-one replacement," meaning if one low-rent unit is torn down, it must be replaced by another.

Duncan has refused to honor that commitment.

"Some folks would live in the redeveloped properties," the city's daily newspaper quoted him as saying. "Some folks will take vouchers and live somewhere else. Some folks may not make it at all because they're not in good standing."

So who's going to live in the "redeveloped" housing?

In late June, according to the city's daily newspaper, "RRHA issued a 'request for

qualifications' to line up private developers to replace its biggest properties with mixed-income neighborhoods.

"A new market analysis the housing authority commissioned shows how the existing communities could be carved up to make way for young singles and empty-nesters, capitalizing on new residents moving into the city who pay higher rents."

"Young singles" and "empty-nesters" who can "pay higher rents." This is the demographic city government has identified as ideal residents.

Why? Because they have more money. More importantly, they don't have kids, which means fewer children in the public schools, which means a less expensive school system, which means lower property taxes, which makes Richmond even more attractive for millennials and retired people, who more often than not are white.

Get it?

RRHA officials have promised to hold public hearings to discuss the five-year plan. Public housing residents and their allies would be wise to make sure that those meetings are even better attended.

**EDITOR:** *Richmond housing advocate Omari Al-Qadafi has chaired the housing committee of the activist coalition Community Unity in Action and is now a Housing Organizer with the Legal Aid Justice Center. We asked him his thoughts on RRHA's redevelopment plans and how he thinks they will affect the residents.*

RRHA has expressed their desire to transform all the housing courts into what they would call mixed-income developments. That doesn't necessarily mean they all will be demolished, but some will, and some will be

rehabbed.

The plans right now don't seem, at least on paper, like a large percentage of the residents would be able to afford to come back. And so with the lack of replacement housing being developed in the city, whether in the private market or public housing, it seems like there would be a lot of displacement.

The plans rely on a lot of vouchers, and the city's fair housing analysis had already identified three problems in the Richmond area: racial discrimination in the rental market in general; the discriminatory effects of how policies affect non-white people in particular, and the fact that not all landlords accept vouchers.

The Legal Aid Justice Center, Virginia Poverty Law Center and Central Virginia Legal Aid Society have come together in a program in which they're trying to address issues of housing instability: evictions, slumlords who don't keep up their property, the demolition of housing, all those kinds of issues.

So in this program what we, the Legal Aid Justice Center, are doing is getting these three law firms better access to the community and giving the community better access to them. So with that comes better representation of tenants and high-impact litigation for policy change.

## Thad Williamson

5th District

Richmond City Council



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## community news



Photo by Martin Images

Religious leaders and environmental activists march in Richmond to oppose environmental racism and the fracked gas pipelines being built by Dominion Energy.

## Why is Dominion targeting this historic Black community?

Union Hill is a small, rural, unincorporated community in Buckingham County, about an hour-and-a-half drive west of Richmond.

It's also historic, having been founded by the descendants of formerly enslaved people. The county also is home to the Buckingham Correctional Center, adding to the area's Black population.

So of all the places in Virginia, why has Dominion Energy targeted Union Hill for the controversial compressor station it says it needs for its 600-mile-long Atlantic Coast Pipeline that will transport fracked gas from West Virginia to Virginia and North Carolina?

Religious leaders and climate change activists who marched in Richmond May 17 believe the answer is environmental racism: compressor stations are criticized for their effect on the air and water, as well as their noise.

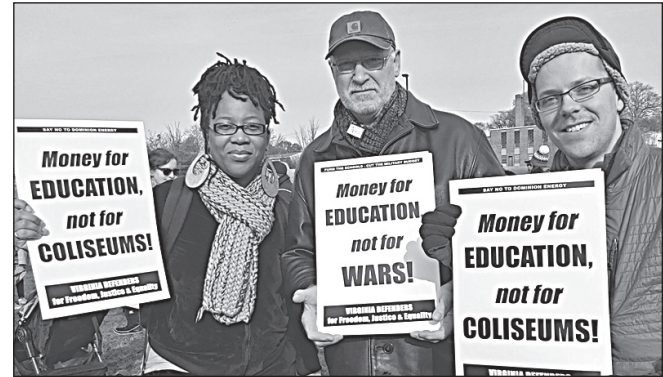
The following day, activists rallied at the courthouse in Leesburg in Northern Virginia, hometown of Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring, "to encourage him to rise above the incompetence, corruption, and climate consequences associated with fracked gas pipelines."

The Leesburg event focused on the Mountain Valley Pipeline, in which Dominion Energy also is involved.

The two actions were part of a week-end of activities sponsored by Virginians for Justice: Progress Not Pipelines, a collaboration of some 15 environmental organizations, including Appalachian Voices, Friends of Buckingham County, Friends of Nelson, Chesapeake Climate Action Network, Virginia Interfaith Power & Light, Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, Mothers Out Front, Water is Life: Protect It and the Virginia Poor People's Campaign.

Supporters of full funding for Richmond public schools prepare to join a Dec. 8 march to the Virginia State Capitol. Many Richmonders see public spending on a new coliseum as taking tax monies away from education. (The endless wars do the same thing.)

Photo by someone nice enough to take a photo for us



## Coliseum project promises 'affordable housing' - Really?

NH District Corp., the developer hoping to revamp a 10-block area of downtown Richmond, has said the project will include "affordable housing," as well as a new event venue to replace the aging Coliseum.

An Aug. 19 investigative report by VPM (until recently known as WCVE, a National Public Radio affiliate) asked some questions about the meaning of the word "affordable."

According to the report, a studio apartment in the project would cost from \$977 to \$1,180. A one-bedroom will rent for between \$1,047 and \$1,509, while a two-bedroom would run between \$1,256 and \$1,811.

So we did a little calculation. The rule of thumb in real estate is that housing

one-bedroom would require a monthly income of \$3,490.00 (\$19.83 an hour), while the cheapest two-bedroom would mean \$4,186.60 a month, or \$23.79 an hour.

So who thinks these rents are "affordable?"

The guy spearheading the Navy Hill project is none other than Thomas F. Farrell II, CEO of Dominion Energy, who happens to be the highest-paid utility executive in the entire country, with an estimated net worth of \$29.3 million.

So for him, these apartments would be "affordable."

For the rest of us, using that word to describe the rents is nothing more than a cruel joke.

### Union Hill Town Hall Meeting

1-4 PM, SAT., SEPT. 7

on the historic Taylor Harper land  
537 Union Hill Road in Union Hill

Sponsored by many environmental & social justice organizations

For more information, see the  
Facebook page "Friends of Buckingham County, Virginia"

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**PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRAT**



# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## THE VIRGINIA DEFENDER ...

is published quarterly on the first Thursday of the month, starting in January. Information for the Community Calendar must be received by the Friday before the publication date. Please include the name of the event, the event sponsor, contact information, time, date, place and any admission charge.

**Readers:** Be sure to call ahead to make sure the information listed is still current. **Note:** Listing of an event does not necessarily imply an endorsement by this newspaper.

To place a display ad with more information, or for events with an admission charge of more than \$10, please contact our advertising department at 804-644-5834 or e-mail [DefendersFJE@hotmail.com](mailto:DefendersFJE@hotmail.com).

## RICHMOND

Aug. 27 - Sept. 2 - **GABRIEL WEEK** - In honor of Richmond's great slave rebellion leader. Sponsored by Untold RVA. Information: [untoldrva.org](http://untoldrva.org).

Sat., Aug. 31 - **2019 AFROFEST RVA** - Noon - 5 pm, Pine Camp Arts and Community Center, 4901 Old Brook Road. FREE. Presented by the City of Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation & Community Facilities and the Office of Multicultural Affairs in partnership with the African Community Network. Information: [www.RichmondGov.com/parks](http://www.RichmondGov.com/parks).

Sat., Aug. 31 - **HAPPILY NATURAL DAY** - "An afrikan summer festival dedicated to holistic health, cultural awareness and social change." Noon - 8 pm, Fifth District Mini Farm, 2208 Bainbridge St. Information: [thenaturalfestival.com](http://thenaturalfestival.com).

Sun., Sept. 8 - **PROTEST THE UNITED DAUGHTERS OF THE CONFEDERACY** - This pro-Confederate organization will mark its 125th anniversary on Sept. 10. The Defenders and other organizations will hold a vigil outside their national headquarters to

say "No Shrines to White Supremacy! Take Down the Confederate Monuments!" 3:30 pm, 328 N. Arthur Ashe Blvd. Information: [DefendersFJE@hotmail.com](mailto:DefendersFJE@hotmail.com) or call or text 804-644-5834.

Tues., Sept. 10 - **INTRODUCTION TO LEGAL RESEARCH** - "This class will discuss the basics of the Court system and resources for legal research." FREE. 6 - 7:30 pm, Richmond Public Library Main Branch, 101 E. Franklin St. Information: [rvalibrary.libcal.com](http://rvalibrary.libcal.com)

Sat., Sept. 21 - **LISTEN, LEARN, CONNECT, ACT - A TEACH-IN ON IMMIGRANT & SOCIAL JUSTICE** - "Learn how ongoing racism and unjust policies have harmed Richmond families. Hear voices of directly impacted people. Make connections to one another, and to broader issues of social justice and racial justice in Richmond. Music. Art. Come listen, learn, connect ... and take action! Together let's build a more just and inclusive community for all. All are welcome. Free!" Noon - 4 pm, Monroe Park (corner of W. Franklin & N. Laurel streets). Sponsored by the Richmond Peace Education Center. Information: [www.rpec.org](http://www.rpec.org)

Thurs., Oct. 10 - **16th ANNUAL GABRIEL FORUM** - Come together to remember, reflect and strategize for present and future struggles. 6:30 pm at Richmond's African Burial Ground, just north of East Broad Street between I-95 and the CSX railroad tracks. Hosted by the Defenders' Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project. Information: [DefendersFJE@hotmail.com](mailto:DefendersFJE@hotmail.com).

Sat., Oct. 12 - **HOUSING SYMPOSIUM** - Housing instability and your legal rights to address it. 11 am, Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church, 1720 Mechanicsville Turnpike. Sponsored by the Legal Aid Justice Center, Virginia Poverty Law Center, Central Virginia Legal Aid Society and Wesley Memorial.

Oct. 14 - **"HISTORY HAPPY HOUR: ONE IMAGE, TWO FREEDOM FIGHTERS"** - A presentation by Public Historian Ana Edwards. 6:30 pm, the Graduate Richmond hotel, 301 W. Franklin St. Sponsored by the American Civil War Museum. Information: [acwm.org](http://acwm.org) or 804-649-1861.

Sat., Dec. 7 - **SHOCKOE BOTTOM TRUTH & CONCILIATION SYMPOSIUM** - Examining Shockoe Bottom from the earliest days of Richmond to the present time, to gain a better understanding of why this sacred ground needs to be reclaimed and properly memorialized. 9 am - 4 pm. Location to be announced. Hosted by the Defenders' Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project.

## HOPEWELL

Sat., Sept. 28 - **JUVENILE JUSTICE & PAROLE RALLY** - 3:30 - 5:30 pm, Appomattox Regional Library System, 209 E. Cawson St, Hopewell. Information: See the Facebook page "Juvenile Justice & Parole Rally."

## ROANOKE

Sat., Sept. 7 - **CLIMATE CHANGE VIGIL** - 11 am - noon, in front of the City Market Building. Organizer: Sierra Club; co-sponsor: Plowshare Peace Center. Information: Dan Crawford at 540-343-5080 or [dbcrawford@cox.net](mailto:dbcrawford@cox.net).

Sat., Sept. 14 - **PALESTINE PROGRAM** - Speaker: Nabil Alamy. 7 pm, Plowshare office, 505 Day Ave. Information: Gary Sandman at 540-492-3582 or [plowshare@plowshareva.org](mailto:plowshare@plowshareva.org).

Sat., Sept. 21 - **SILENT PEACE VIGIL** - Noon - 1 pm, in front of the City Market Building, Campbell Ave. & Market St. Information: Mike Bentley at 540-389-3752 or [greenprof2@gmail.com](mailto:greenprof2@gmail.com).

Sun., Oct. 13 - **PROGRESSIVES POTLUCK** - "An opportunity for individuals and groups working for peace and justice to get together." 6 pm, Friends Meetinghouse, 505 Day Ave. Information: Gary Sandman at 540-492-3582 or [plowshare@plowshareva.org](mailto:plowshare@plowshareva.org).

# A DEFENDERS GUIDE FOR PREPARING FOR BIG STORMS

A big storm hit the Richmond area earlier this summer. The Defenders heard a tornado warning on the radio and went door-to-door

in the community, warning the neighbors and advising them how to protect themselves: unplugging all electric devices and staying in a

windowless room for protection against flying glass from broken windows.

After the storm passed - with several

tornados touching down in town - we were wishing we had a good list of things to do

to prepare for bad storms, but most of the information we could find online involved spending a lot of money, like buying generators.

So we put together a list of more-or-less working-class tips, which now is posted in downloadable form on our website:

**DefendersFJE.blogspot.com**

Please think about sharing it with your neighbors and your social media networks.

And above all, look out for each other. In the event of a disaster, the government may or may not be able - or willing - to help.



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# our working lives



Photo by Phil Wilayto

**Hundreds of union carpenters rally on Tax Day at the State Capitol to protest some contractors' illegal anti-labor practices.**

## Union carpenters rally at State Capitol

Hundreds of construction workers rallied at the Virginia State Capitol April 15 for a "Construction Industry Tax Fraud Day of Action."

"Construction industry tax fraud is an issue that is costing our communities millions in tax revenue and destroying middle-class jobs in the skilled trades," explained Doris Crouse-Mays, President of the Virginia AFL-CIO, in a notice promoting the rally.

"Corrupt contractors pay workers off the books or misclassify their workers as independent contractors instead of full employees," she wrote.

"That allows them to evade state, local, and federal taxes, so they can illegally lower their labor costs to underbid law-abiding competitors. If left unchecked, we risk losing an entire sector of the American job market to

the underground economy."

The non-union workers who get hired by these corrupt employers are often undocumented workers who, because of their immigration status, are ripe for exploitation. Not only are they often paid less than the going rate for the work they do, but they often work in dangerous situations without the oversight that comes with union protection.

In the past, such anti-labor practices would pit immigrants desperate for work against native-born, mostly white, male workers. But at this Tax Day rally, the majority of the union members were Latino and Latina, along with African-Americans and whites, a reflection of the changing face of the country's workforce.

The State Capitol rally was organized by Carpenter's Local 205 and the Keystone Mountain Lakes Regional Council of Carpenters.

## Organize for a Better Life!

Your right to stand together in union with your coworkers is established law -- based upon your freedom of association guaranteed by the Bill of Rights and specifically by the National Labor Relations Act, which states:

"Section 7: 'Employees shall have the right to self organization, to form, join, or assist labor organizations, to bar-

*gain collectively through representation of their own choosing, and to engage in other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining..."*

For information about organizing a union in Virginia, contact the Virginia AFL-CIO at:

**<https://www.va-aflcio.org>**

## Virginia: Best state for bosses, but worst for workers

Richmond's daily newspaper recently touted a report that ranked Virginia as the best state in the country in which to do business. The financial news cable network CNBC had ranked Virginia number one, citing what it called its "world-class workforce, high-performing education system and business-friendly regulations."

But how does Virginia rank for workers?

Dead last, according to a report by the global anti-poverty organization Oxfam titled "The Best States to Work Index: A guide to labor policy in US states."

Counting the District of Columbia, which came in first, Virginia's rank was 51, just below Mississippi, a much maligned state which presumably now is saying "Thank God for

Virginia!"

All data was based on laws and policies in effect as of July 1, 2018.

One big problem is that Virginia has no state minimum wage. Instead, we follow the federal minimum, currently \$7.25 an hour, with a mere \$2.13 for waitstaff and other tipped workers.

Further, only 4.3 percent of all Virginia workers have a union, the major way most workers can improve their wages and benefits. Only six other states have lower levels of unionization. All are in the South.

So the next time someone tells you Virginia is the "best state," be sure to ask "Best for whom?"

'Cause it ain't us.

## Sanders' presidential campaign 1st in U.S. history to unionize

Workers with the Bernie Sanders Campaign are now the first presidential campaign employees in U.S. history to win union representation.

On Feb. 26, the Bernie 2020 Campaign and United Food & Commercial Workers Local 400 signed a card check and neutrality agreement. By March 15, a majority of the campaign's 44 bargaining unit-eligible employees had signed union cards, triggering recognition and a countdown to the launch of negotiations.

Over the course of the campaign, the bargaining unit could potentially grow to more than 1,000 members.

This victory resulted from the Bernie 2020 Campaign's decision to stay neutral in the employees' organizing drive and its agreement to recognize UFCW Local 400 when a majority of workers signed union cards. As a result, all campaign employees below the rank of deputy director are now represented by UFCW Local 400.

The local represents 35,000 members working in the retail food, health care, retail department store, food processing, service and other industries in Maryland, Virginia, Washington, D.C., West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee.

## UVA to raise minimum wage to \$15 an hour

Workers at the University of Virginia will have a special reason to celebrate this coming New Year's Day.

That's when Charlottesville's largest employer will increase its minimum wage for full-time employees eligible for benefits to \$15 an hour. The university's current minimum wage has been \$12.75 since December 2017.

The new minimum will apply to around 1,400 full-time university and medical center workers, according to the university. Around 700 more employees now earning close to \$15 an hour also will see an increase.

The university has said the higher wages will come from "existing resources" and "identification of cost savings and efficiencies," not tuition hikes.

This victory comes after decades of student organizing for a living wage at UVA, but still falls short of what the Economic Policy Institute has said is a living wage for Charlottesville: \$16.84 plus benefits.

Left out of the deal will be workers for outside contractors, such as Aramark, which provides UVA's dining services. Aramark, a notoriously anti-labor outfit, pays employees \$10.65.

In a community-wide email statement, UVA President Jim Ryan has pledged to work on a plan to extend the same \$15 commitment to contract employees.



# no hay fronteras en la lucha de los obreros

## Abbie Arevalo-Herrera hit with nearly \$300,000 fine by ICE

By Phil Wilayto

The eighth amendment to the U.S. Constitution states that “Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.”

So how that does square with the nearly \$300,000 fine the government says it wants to impose on a young immigrant mother in Richmond who for the past year has been living in a church basement?



Photo by Phil Wilayto

**Abbie Arevalo-Herrera speaking at a Virginia Poor People's Campaign rally at the First Unitarian Church of Richmond.**

Earlier this summer, the First Unitarian Church of Richmond received a “notice of intent” by Immigration and Customs Enforcement that said ICE intended to levy a fine of \$295,630 against Abbie Arevalo-Herrera, who

has been living in the church since June of 2018. The fine would be for violation of a deportation order.

Six years ago, Arevalo-Herrera fled her native Honduras with her eldest daughter to escape what she says was eight years of violent domestic abuse. (See her interview with the Defender in the Summer 2018 edition online at DefendersFJE.blogspot.com.) She left behind an infant child, fearful it would not survive the dangerous journey, and came north, hoping to start a new life in the safety of the United States.

Instead, she arrived about the time U.S. Attorney General William Barr ignored more than 30 years of legal precedent and ruled that domestic violence would no longer be considered a basis for granting asylum.

Arevalo-Herrera was arrested by border agents in Texas and spent days in what she said was a small cage. After being released, family members helped her find a place to stay in Richmond. She followed what she thought were proper procedures to obtain legal status, but, thanks to what she says were mistakes made by attorneys working on her case, her application for asylum was denied and she was ordered to leave the country.

Fearful about returning to Honduras, one of the poorest and most violent countries in the Western Hemisphere, she accepted an offer for sanctuary from the First Unitarian Church of Richmond, a liberal congregation bordering Byrd Park..

Arevalo-Herrera is now married to a man who is a lawful permanent U.S. resident. They have a child together, who also lives in the church. Because of her husband's legal status, she has applied for a U.S. visa. But even if she receives it, she still faces deportation and would have to return to Honduras for five years.



**Solidarity with immigrants - A huge crowd fills the plaza in front of the Virginia State Capitol July 12 in response to new attacks on immigrants by the Bigot-in-Chief. It was one of many displays of solidarity across Virginia, a state in which almost one in every eight residents was born in another country.**

Photo by Phil Wilayto

And now she may owe the government more than a quarter-million dollars. The fines are a tactic ICE is using across the country, apparently to try and frighten threatened immigrants to leave.

Another Virginia case is that of Maria Chavalan Sut, an immigrant from Guatemala who has taken sanctuary since October at Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church in Charlottesville. ICE is threatening to fine her \$214,132.

Arevalo-Herrera's new attorney, Alina Kilpatrick, says it may be possible to appeal the fine or fight it in federal court.

In the meantime, Abbie and her two children are staying in the church, hoping that ICE

continues its present policy of not arresting people taking sanctuary in a place of worship.

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

### CONOCE TUS DERECHOS

Independientemente de su estatus migratorio, usted tiene derechos garantizados por la Constitución. Aprende más aquí sobre sus derechos como inmigrante y cómo expresarlos:

**[www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/immigrants-rights](http://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/immigrants-rights)**

**MIRA LA MIGRA**  
ICE Watch 804-453-2122

*Wesley Memorial*  
*United Methodist Church*  
**R. M. HUNTER**  
Pastor  
1720 Mechanicsville Pike  
Richmond, VA 23223  
Church (804) 644-5830  
Residence (804) 329-1375  
11 am Sunday Worship  
7 pm Wednesday Bible Study

**Listen, Learn, Connect, Act -  
A Teach In on Immigrant and Social Justice**

**Saturday, September 21 from 12 - 4 pm in Monroe Park**  
(Corner of W. Franklin and N. Laurel Streets)

Learn how ongoing racism and unjust policies have harmed Richmond families. Hear voices of directly impacted people. Make connections to one another, and to broader issues of social justice and racial justice in Richmond. Music. Art. Come listen, learn, connect ... and take action! Together let's build a more just and inclusive community for all. All are welcome. Free!

[www.rpec.org](http://www.rpec.org)

**Richmond Peace Education Center**





# cops, courts & prisons



## VAPJN prepares for 2020 GA & 3rd Prison Justice Rally

The Virginia Prison Justice Network is hard at work preparing for the 3rd Prison Justice Rally, to take place in early January at Capitol Square in Richmond. The annual rally promotes the network's lobbying effort at the General Assembly, led by network affiliate R.I.H.D. (Resource, Information, Help for the Disadvantaged & Disenfranchised). Above: Richmond VAPJN leader Lynetta Thompson addresses the 2019 rally.

Photo by Phil Wilayto

## About the Va. Prison Justice Network

The all-volunteer Virginia Prison Justice Network was launched in early 2018 following a prisoner-requested Rally for Prison Justice attended by 300 people at Virginia's Capitol Square. Today it has nearly 20 affiliated organizations and a network of prisoners working for change in the Virginia prison system.

### PROGRAM

There are four aspects to the VAPJN work:

**Education** - The Network maintains a website ([vapjn.wordpress.com](http://vapjn.wordpress.com)) that publishes prison news, information about bills in the General Assembly, upcoming events and a Prisoner Justice Blog in which prisoners can post their thoughts and stories.

Members of the VAPJN affiliate Coalition for Justice in Blacksburg produce a monthly newsletter that is mailed to hundreds of prisoners in more than half of VDOC facilities. The newsletter informs its readers of the work of the network, changes in VDOC rules and provides educational articles.

The network also publishes articles in The Virginia Defender newspaper.

**Legislative** - Each year during the Virginia General Assembly, members

and allies of the VAPJN lobby assembly members and attend committee meetings to support or oppose bills related to prisons and the criminal justice system.

**Service** - Network members experienced in prison procedures answer many hundreds of letters each year from prisoners asking for help with individual cases or systemic issues.

**Organizing** - The network sponsors local Prison Justice Speak-Outs to inform the public about issues in the Virginia Department of Corrections and the state's criminal justice system. It also holds an annual rally at Capitol Square at or before the beginning of the annual General Assembly.

### ORGANIZATION

- The Network is coordinated by a Steering Committee composed of the four network co-founders:

Askari Danso - Co-founder, Prisoner of Conscience, presently incarcerated at Red Onion State Prison

Hassan Shabazz - Co-founder, Prisoner of Conscience, presently incarcerated at Augusta Correctional Center

Margaret Breslau - Co-founder, Coalition for Justice (Blacksburg); Editor, VAPJN Newsletter

Phil Wilayto - Co-founder, Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality; Editor, The Virginia Defender

### PRISON JUSTICE SPEAK-OUTS

A VAPJN Speak-Out is a public meeting in which ex-prisoners, families of prisoners and prisoner rights advocates speak out about the conditions in the facilities operated by the Virginia Department of Corrections.

Issues addressed include access to medical care, educational and recreational programs, food and nutrition, the grievance system, relationships with corrections officers and the administration, etc., as well as the criminal justice system as a whole. Individual prisoners send in statements to be read, allowing them to directly participate in these meetings.

### Speak-Out Goals:

- \* bring to the public's attention ongoing issues of prison injustice in order that they can be addressed;

- \* recruit people to attend committee meetings at the annual Virginia General Assembly where prison and criminal justice bills are considered;

- \* build the network so that prisoners and their advocates will be better able to work for justice in Virginia's prison and criminal justice systems.

### Speak-Out Structure:

The Speak-Outs are held in a community setting: a community center, house of worship, union hall, etc.

There are usually two co-chairs, who

work together to facilitate the meeting.

The meetings open with a welcoming talk and explanation of the purpose of the event by a VAPJN member.

Then a member of one of the network affiliates gives a presentation on some issue that we are following, such as ending solitary confinement, bringing back parole, fighting for healthy meals, etc.

Then there is an open mic for presenting written statements by prisoners and oral statements by former prisoners, family members and advocates.

Finally, the chairs encourage everyone to stay in touch with the network by signing up on sign-up sheets, and volunteering to attend committee meetings during the General Assembly.

There is also a collection to raise funds for the network's newsletter

### HOW TO GET INVOLVED WITH VAPJN

- \* Contact the VAPJN through its website: **[vapjn.wordpress.com](http://vapjn.wordpress.com)**

- \* For help in organizing a local Speak-Out, email **[DefendersFJE@hotmail.com](mailto:DefendersFJE@hotmail.com)** or call or text **804-644-5834**.

- \* **TO SUPPORT THE NEWSLETTER**, Just go to the website "Coalition for Justice" and click on the **"Donate"** tab on the home page to donate by check or online. Please make a note that the donation is for the newsletter.



# cops, courts & prisons



Photo courtesy of the Doss family

**Jermaine Doss, shown here with his sister Felicia in Suffolk II State Prison.**

## Jermaine Doss Update

There's a new legal development in the case of Virginia prisoner Jermaine Doss, now 20 years into a sentence of life-plus-38 years for a crime many believe he did not commit.

In July, Doss' new attorney, Bryan J. Jones of Charlottesville, filed a petition for habeas corpus in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia. The petition asks for an evidentiary hearing (where evidence in the case can be presented) or habeas corpus relief (a hearing in which the state must explain its reasons for keeping someone in custody).

Doss, a Norfolk native, is now held in Sussex II State Prison in rural Sussex County. He was 25 when he was sent to prison for murder in a case in which he was originally charged with murder-for-hire. In January he'll be 47.

"I think it's a strong case," Jones told the Defender. "Of particular concern is the issue of his being indicted for one thing and convicted of a different charge."

Some of the issues raised in the habeas petition are:

- \* Doss was convicted of first-degree murder as an accessory before the fact, which Jones says is not a lesser-included offense to murder for hire.

- \* At Doss' trial, it was was presiding Judge Everett A. Martin Jr. who suggested the jury could find Doss guilty of the "lesser included offense," not the prosecution.

- \* Doss' attorneys at the time did not strongly object to the judge's instructions to the jury about this. Jones says this violates the Sixth Amendment's guarantee of counsel for the accused.

In addition, the only evidence against Doss was the testimony of the actual confessed killer, Nathaniel McGee, who repeatedly has insisted that Doss is innocent and that he only testified against Doss because prosecutors had said that if he did not that he himself would face the death penalty.

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

Ford was the officer who arrested McGee after the murder. He also was the lead investigator in the infamous case of the Norfolk Four, Norfolk sailors falsely convicted for rape and murder. They have since been pardoned after maintaining that their confessions had been forced from them during police interrogations.

In May of 2013, the Defenders helped submit a formal request for a pardon from then-Gov. Bob McDonnell. The request was resubmitted after Terry McAuliffe was sworn in as Virginia's governor in January 2014. McAuliffe's Secretary of the Commonwealth, in charge of reviewing pardon requests, was Levar Stoney, now mayor of Richmond.

To date, there has never been a response to the pardon request.



Photo by Phil Wilayto

**Panelists at the Criminal Injustice Reform Network launch included, from left: Paul Taylor, RVA League for Safer Streets; Lorraine Wright, I Vote for Me; Travis L. Williams, Ph.D., sociology professor at Virginia Commonwealth University; Nneka H. Bartlett, Tidewater Counseling Group; Chioma Adaku-Griffin, Traffik Stops; Kandice Lucas, Advocates for Equity in Schools; and Queen Zakia Shabazz, United Parents Against Lead & Other Environmental Hazards.**

## Criminal Injustice Reform Network launched to do 'intentional' advocacy

"Intentional" was the key word used to describe a new prisoner advocacy organization headed by longtime prisoner rights activist BeKura Waliah Shabazz Branch.

"The professionals have not been doing the intentional work and holding the lines with the politicians," Shabazz Branch told the Defender. "The bills we propose get watered down. So we won't be doing that. We will encourage people to say 'No, we will not allow you to water down our bills. Your power comes from the consent of the governed, and you are not doing that.'"

The Criminal Injustice Reform Network held a Launch and Day of Advocacy July 20 at The Highpoint on West Broad Street in Richmond. The event featured a panel discussion with activists representing a wide range of issues.

One of the things the new network will be doing, Shabazz Branch said, is attempting to connect larger, well-established organizations

with the grassroots, offering speakers and an all-day seminar.

"They do not care about the people, and that's what they need to do," she said.

More information is at the network's Facebook page.

## ACLU seeks to end solitary

The ACLU of Virginia, in collaboration with global law firm White & Case LLP, has filed a federal class-action lawsuit against the Virginia Department of Corrections seeking to end the practice of solitary confinement in two of VDOC's most notorious prisons.

The lawsuit was filed May 6 in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia on behalf of people who have suffered in torturous conditions, some for decades, at Red Onion and Wallens Ridge state prisons.

Both facilities, super maximum-security prisons located in the far southwest corner of the state, were designed to hold people in near-constant isolation and deprivation.

Restoring Parole [www.rihd.org](http://www.rihd.org) RIHD INC  
 Sentence Reform RIHD INC  
**RIHD INC**  
 Reentry Virginia RIHD INC  
 Help RIHD INC  
 Mobile Justice Tour RIHD INC  
[www.rihd.org](http://www.rihd.org) RIHD INC  
 Information RIHD INC  
 Ban-the-Box RIHD INC

**Fighting  
Mass  
Incarceration  
in Virginia**

## Redemption

A collection of essays  
by Danny R. Thomas & Yusef H. Sykes Sr.

"As the call for prison reform grows louder, our objective in this work is to offer the reader an opportunity to learn about the men who authored this work and their quest to regain their lives and their humanity. Prisoners are more than their crimes; we are men of substance and through years of hard work and reflection we write from our experiences and share our views on incarceration, crime and above all else "REDEMPTION."

Available from Amazon - In Paperback & Kindle

## Life from the Pen

A book of poetry  
By Leon Cherry

"Keep Marching; even when it's hard to believe anything will ever go your way ... Keep Marching; when the hardships of the fight inside seems to be overwhelming, and you're struggling to get over that addiction, vice, or whatever it is you're dealing with ... Keep Marching; even when it seems everyone else is Marching harder and faster than you, Keep Marching at your own pace; even when there are moments of you just Marching in place ..."

Available from Amazon - In Paperback & Kindle



# reclaiming our sacred ground

## Shockoe Update

By Ana Edwards

### Shockoe Alliance proceeds with planning

Last year, as he faced mounting pressure to concretely address Richmond's nationally historic Shockoe Bottom district, Mayor Levar Stoney created the Shockoe Alliance, a committee of city officials, preservationists, real estate interests and one community organization: the Defenders' Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project. (For a list of members, see [www.shockoealliance.org](http://www.shockoealliance.org).)

The new grouping was charged with the following mission:

"... guiding design and implementation of concepts and recommendations for the future of Shockoe as a holistic area rooted in history and informed by those with shared interests to advance these efforts in support of the mission. The Shockoe Alliance aims to strike a balance between preservation, interpretation, restoration, and development, using Shockoe's wealth of cultural and historical memory to maximize its impact on the contemporary community in the form of economic development, recreation, and education."

Alliance members meet monthly at City Hall to craft a Shockoe Bottom Small Area Master Plan - an overall development plan for the district. So far the committee has held two of a projected four public meetings; April 15 at Main Street Station in the Bottom and July 17 at Martin Luther King Middle School near Mosby Court. Both times the attendance was nearly at capacity, but the racial demographics were majority white, older and professionals.

On the other hand, the feedback on the themes identified for small area master planning of the neighborhood reflected the well-established consensus of community advocates for the nine-acre Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park concept: that the Black history significance of the area should be the central feature; that current plans for the Lumpkin's Jail/Devil's Half-Acre museum (or interpretive center) should be supported; and that the area of preservation and development should include the African Burial Ground and enough area to the east of the CSX railroad tracks to make clear the scale of impact of Shockoe Bottom on the economy of Richmond from slavery through freedom and into the present.

The next public meeting has not yet been scheduled, but Alliance facilitator Sal Musarra announced that the purpose will be to present the first conceptual representation of the small area master plan. The meeting is to be interpreted in Spanish.

What's needed now is for more members of the Black community to attend these

public meetings and voice their concerns and preferences about the future of Shockoe Bottom.

### Shockoe Economic Study

The final report of the Economic Impact and Benefits Study of the Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park is expected to be published in September. The two-part study was designed to make the case for the creation of the Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park as a heritage tourism destination and catalyst for equitable economic development, and inform the Shockoe Alliance's Small Area Master Planning process.

In the first part of the study, facilitated by Ebony Walden Consulting, a group of urban planning and equitable development experts was convened to make recommendations for future redevelopment of the Shockoe Bottom area through case studies of successful projects in other U.S. cities that could be used in Richmond.

In the second part, Virginia Commonwealth University's Center for Urban and Regional Analysis (CURA) examined the memorial park as a heritage tourism destination and its potential economic impact on the city as a whole and the Black community in particular.

The full report will be presented to Mayor Stoney, the Shockoe Alliance and the public. The project partners then would like to make presentations to any community group interested in learning more.

The study is being funded with a \$75,000 grant awarded to Preservation Virginia by the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

For more information on the grant project, visit <https://www.sacredgroundproject.net/p/sb.html>.

### Shockoe Advocates Group

The community-driven process for creating the Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park proposal took place in 2015 and underwent two updates, in 2016 and 2017. A core group of participants has consistently contributed their time and resources to this campaign. We refer to them as the Shockoe Bottom Advocates.

There are 40 people in this group, 25 of whom are African-American, including students, retirees, religious leaders, civil rights activists and a few organizational representatives. The Advocates meet with the Sacred Ground Project to discuss new developments and plans for activities that work toward the achievement of the Memorial Park. The purpose is to make sure that Sacred Ground's work is rooted in the community.

In the next issue of the Defender we will report on the work of the East Marshall Street Well Project, the Second African Burial Ground vs. High Speed Rail, the Virginia State Penitentiary and the role of archaeology in social justice and historic preservation.

## SHOCKOE Continued from page 1

were sold out of Shockoe Bottom that the majority of African-Americans today could likely trace some ancestry to this district that once held 40 to 50 auction houses, six to eight slave jails, dozens of trader offices and scores of supporting businesses. As a slave-trading district, New Orleans was larger. But Richmond's significance was as the wholesale center, the fountainhead, the epicenter of the trade.

We know the names of some of those held in the hellholes of the Bottom. There was Solomon Northup, who in his book "Twelve Years a Slave," later made into an award-winning movie, writes of the night he spent in a slave jail there. There was Anthony Burns, who escaped from slavery in Virginia and fled to Boston, only to be captured and returned to Richmond, where he was held and tortured for months in Robert Lumpkin's slave jail.

There was Madison Washington, who had escaped to freedom in Canada, then returned to Richmond to try and free his enslaved wife, only to be caught and imprisoned in Lumpkin's jail. He would later lead a mutiny on the brig Creole as he and other Africans were being transported from Richmond to New Orleans.

And there was the great slave rebellion leader Gabriel, executed on Oct. 10, 1800, at the town gallows in Shockoe Bottom after attempting to lead what, had it succeeded, would have been the greatest slave rebellion in U.S. history.

Since Shockoe Bottom is a place of such deep historical significance, you would expect it to be memorialized in a way that helps people understand the central role it has played in U.S. history. After all, other cities have invested heavily in their slavery-related historical sites, if only because they understand the economic benefits that come from tourism.

### THE MEMORIAL PARK

It has taken a more than 20-year, volunteer community effort to educate the public about the importance of Shockoe Bottom.

It took a massive community struggle to force Virginia Commonwealth University, a state institution, to remove its parking lot that desecrated what is now known as the African Burial Ground.

It took an even larger community battle to block former Mayor Dwight Jones and the business elite organization Venture Richmond from putting a baseball stadium in the Bottom.

The latest stage of this protracted struggle is the ongoing fight to win a nine-acre Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park, a community-generated proposal that would include the African Burial Ground; the site of Lumpkin's slave jail, known as the Devil's Half-Acre; and two more blocks east of the CSX railroad tracks where three more slave jails once stood, along with many trader offices and supporting businesses.

That plan for a memorial park, developed through an inclusive process of open community meetings, has won the support of Richmond's Black community, as evidenced by the views expressed at what has seemed an endless series of city-sponsored forums designed to build support for a much smaller memorial centered around the single site of the Devil's Half-Acre.

### AN INTERPRETIVE CENTER

The community is not asking for a new museum. That would be very expensive and would compete for funding and attendance with the nearby Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia, as well as Richmond's Valentine Museum, the Virginia Museum of History and Culture and the American Civil War Museum, all of which address the issue of slavery - but not Shockoe Bottom.

Instead, the community proposal calls for an interpretive center, which involves audio, visual and video exhibits explaining the area's history. The interpretive center, along with sculpture, interactive exhibits and meeting rooms for educational and cultural activities, would all be contained within a beautiful, nine-acre urban park, promoting education, reflection, conciliation - and concrete economic benefits for the Black community.

The guiding principles for this memorial, as proposed at many community forums, must first be to tell the truth about what happened in this cauldron of human suffering and resistance. The memorial must explain how the vast profits accumulated in the slave trade provided the capital that built the city of Richmond, the state of Virginia and ultimately the United States. It must examine the issue of collective reparations due the descendant community. And it must be a shining example of how a city born in horrific oppression and exploitation can rise above its past and move forward to a more just and equitable future.

### SELF-DETERMINATION

The Black community has shown that it supports this plan. That's critical, because the guiding principle in the Shockoe Bottom struggle has been the right of an oppressed people to self-determination. As applied here, that means the Black community must have the primary voice in determining the future of this site so central to the African presence in this country.

Now all we need is for the politicians to resist the pressure from the downtown developers who want this valuable real estate for short-term profit-making and the corporate leaders who dread the world learning the true story of Richmond's beginnings.

Richmond will not be judged by what happened in Shockoe Bottom in the past, but how we face and deal with that past today.

It's time to properly reclaim this Sacred Ground.



# take down the confederate monuments!



Photo by Phil Wilayto

In addition to promoting a backwards version of history, these pro-Confederates who turned out June 1 to “defend” the Lee statue also had trouble with their banner.

## In the war of the statues: Anti-racists 6, pro-Confederates 0

### Staff Report

For the sixth time since the deadly fascist gathering in nearby Charlottesville on Aug. 12, 2017, gun-toting, flag-waving pro-Confederates came to Richmond June 1 to rally in support of the Confederate statues on Monument Avenue.

And for the sixth time, antiracist Richmonders turned out to shout them down.

The rally, called by the tiny, Tennessee-based New Confederate States of America (CSA II), was held at the massive statue of Gen. Robert E. Lee, which has become a magnet for white supremacists and other supporters of the Lost Cause mythology. At 60 feet, it's the tallest of the five Confederate statues on Monument Avenue and the only one owned by the state of Virginia, as opposed to the City of Richmond.

The CSA II had their usual allies, the Virginia-based Dixie Defenders, but also some new supporters, like the Hiwaymen, a self-styled street-fighting group that was present in Charlottesville.

The 26 pro-Confederates, including two small children, spread out on the sidewalk of the traffic circle where the Lee monument stands. On Monument Avenue's medium strip across from the Confederate flag-wavers were 30 anti-racists, including members of the Richmond chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America and the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality.

A few hours into the rally, the Defenders turned on a portable sound system, placed the mic in front of the amplifier and let the resulting feedback screech out a siren-like howl in the direction of the Lee supporters, most of whom quickly moved out of the way of the blast.

At 12:30 p.m., the antiracists began a press conference, chaired by activist Rachel Robinson, which featured an Open Letter to Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam calling on him to honor his as-yet-unfulfilled 2017 election campaign promise to work to take down Virginia's Confederate statues and other racist monuments.

The letter (posted at [DefendersFJE.blogspot.com](http://DefendersFJE.blogspot.com)) was signed by four longtime Richmond antiracist activists: Ana Edwards, Chair of the Defenders' Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project; the Rev. Rodney Hunter, Pastor of Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church; Lynetta Thompson, State Advisor of the Youth Division of the Virginia State Conference NAACP; and Phil Wilayto, Editor of The Virginia Defender newspaper.

After the letter was read, it was an open mic. The first to speak was Goad Gatsby, one of the antiracists who was viciously attacked Aug. 11, 2017, by torch-wielding fascists on the University of Virginia campus in Charlottesville. Goad has been a mainstay of the anti-Confederate movement in Richmond.

“I think it's very disingenuous that you come out and say you're for history, you're for having

## The biggest promoters of the ‘Lost Cause’ mythology are based right here in Richmond

By Phil Wilayto

There's a low, wide, white, sepulture-looking building in Richmond that you've probably passed by many times without really noticing it. It sits at 328 North Arthur Ashe Boulevard between the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and the Virginia Museum of History and Culture, a location that gives it an aura of respectability.

But the truth is that this building is the headquarters of the organization that has done more to promote a false history of the slavery-defending Confederacy than any other group in the country.

It's the national office of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, which will celebrate its 125th anniversary this September.

Founded on Sept. 10, 1894, in Nashville, Tenn., what began as a benevolent organization providing support for Confederate widows and their families soon developed into the major force promoting the Lost Cause mythology. (See box below.)

The UDC initiated and funded many of the Confederate memorials that today litter the country, including in 1907 the massive one honoring Confederate President Jefferson Davis on Richmond's Monument Avenue.

The organization developed a very successful campaign to censor school textbooks that presented a truthful view of the Confederacy and taught that slavery was a major cause of the “War Between the States.”

It founded a Children of the Confederacy affiliate that since 1898 has indoctrinated generations of white Southern youth into believing that the Confederate rebellion was a

noble cause.

And its members wrote books and glowing reviews of books extolling the virtues of the Ku Klux Klan.

As of 2001, the UDC estimated its national membership at 20,000. Today it claims divisions in 18 states and the District of Columbia, with individual chapters in another 14 states. While disavowing connections with “hate” groups, the organization remains very active in opposing any attempts to remove the statues and other memorials honoring those who fought for slavery.

The entry on the UDC in the Encyclopedia Virginia explains that “In the aftermath of the civil rights movement, the Daughters' veneration of their Confederate heritage - and, by association, white supremacy - has made them the subject of controversy.”

But not in Richmond, the former capital of the Confederacy and the city whose memorials to this day continue to officially venerate the Confederate figures who rebelled against the Union in order to form a new government dedicated to the preservation and extension of chattel slavery - as was clearly stated by the rebellious states when they declared their independence from the Union.

This year the organization will celebrate its 125th anniversary with a program on Sept. 6 and 7 in Nashville, and then later will hold its 126th national conference in Atlanta.

Here in Richmond, the Defenders along with other anti-racist organizations are calling for a vigil outside the USC offices at 3:30 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 8, when we will demand: “Take down all the Confederate memorials: No shrines to white supremacy!”

We invite you to join us.

a conversation,” Goad told the monument supporters, “but you're just hear for the theatrics. ... I really want you to be better people, but very often you just degrade yourselves down to the lowest common denominator .... I wish you could turn yourselves around.”

Defender Dieyah Rasheed told how she felt as a Black woman having to drive past these monuments to white supremacy. Wilayto derided the pro-Confederates for not having the guts to come to Richmond without guns.

The CSA II typically calls for their rallies to last from 10 am to 4 pm. At their previous two rallies in Richmond, the Virginia Defenders had negotiated with the Dixie Defenders for both sides to wrap up early, leaving the few members of the CSA II behind. This time, at about 1 p.m., a police officer approached the anti-racists and asked if they would be willing to leave early if the other side did the same.

Once again, there was mutual agreement, isolating the CSA II.



# In our opinion

## McAuliffe, Heather Heyer & the height of hypocrisy

Former Vice President Joe Biden was recently in Richmond, raising money for his bid for the Democratic Party nomination for president. While he was here, he made the stunningly opportunist claim that the reason he decided to try for the country's most powerful office was because of the horrific events in Charlottesville in August 2017.

But if you think Joe could thereby lay claim to the title of the country's Number One Hypocrite, you'd be short-changing the real winner in that field.

This summer, former Gov. Terry McAuliffe came out with "Beyond Charlottesville: Taking a Stand Against White Nationalism," published by Thomas Dunne Books. In it, he berates Cville elected officials for its preparations for the "Unite the Right" fascist rally and claims the city ignored advice from the state on how to prepare for the event.

In the aftermath of the events, Charlottesville asked Hunton & Williams attorney Timothy J. Heaphy, a former U.S. attorney for the Western District of Virginia, to review what happened on Aug. 12. His report stated that the Virginia State Police "directed its officers to remain behind barricades rather than risk injury responding to conflicts between protesters and counter-protesters," and that the Charlottesville police brass "similarly instructed their officers not to intervene in all but the most serious physical confrontations."

It's now generally accepted that Charlottesville's then-chief of police, Al S. Thomas Jr., ordered his officers not to intervene. But the State Police - and the National Guard, which also was on the scene - are under the control of the governor. He's the one who would have had to order them to stand down.

We believe the reason was that both the chief and McAuliffe deliberately let things get out of hand so they could shut down the "alt-right" rally without risking getting sued by the ACLU - which, to its eternal shame, already had gone to court to force the city to let the fascists rally in the city park.

The Defenders were in Charlottesville on Aug. 12. Just before Heather Heyer was killed, we heard that a large group of fascists was marching toward a nearby Black housing complex and that people were massing to stop them.

That's what Heather was doing when she was killed: putting her own body in the path of the Nazis to defend the Black community.

Our squad of four Defenders was one block away when James Field's car tore into the crowd. One of our members, a former Marine and cardiac nurse, performed CPR on an injured woman who had stopped breathing. When the police did finally show up - in armored personnel carriers - they pointed automatic weapons at our faces.

Heather Heyer died because law enforcement - city, county, state and the National Guard - all allowed armed white supremacists to march toward a Black community.

And those officers stood down because they were ordered to do so.

The blood of Heather Heyer is on Terry McAuliffe's hands - the country's Number One Hypocrite.

# Letters to the Editor

## Buckingham prisoners raise funds for youth

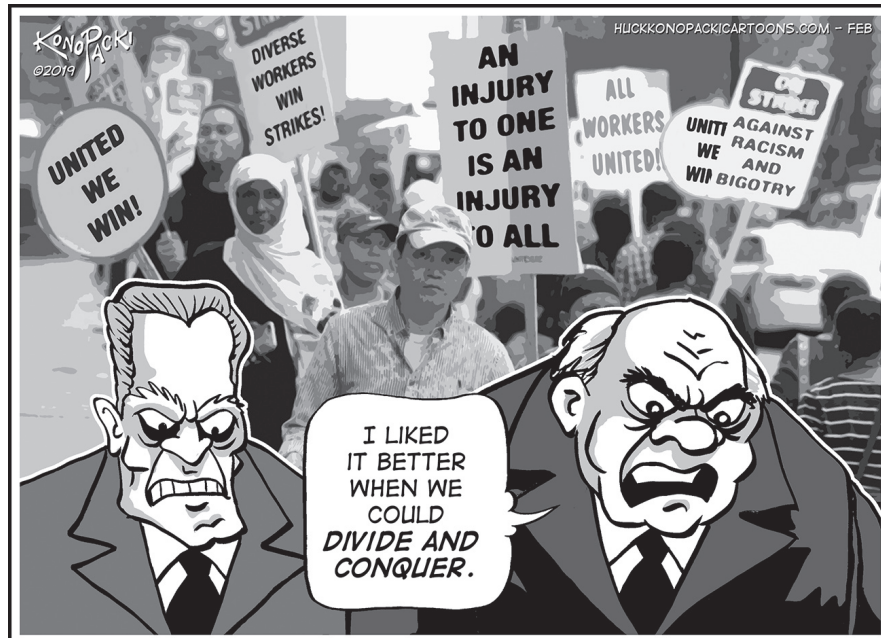
After reading speeches on self-help and self-determination by H.I.M. Haile Selassie I and Hon. Rt. Marcus Garvey, I started brainstorming on ways I could possibly assist my community despite being behind these walls. Considering the limited amount of resources at my disposal, I knew I would have to reach out to find someone like-minded and willing to assist me in bringing my vision to reality.

The vision was to provide a way for youth to learn self-reliance, self-discipline, and self-worth. After thinking on it for several days, I decided the best way to achieve this would be through a work-and-reward system.

I decided to come up with an avenue to start them on a pathway to entrepreneurship, working for themselves. What kid doesn't like money? This would hopefully teach them accountability, responsibility, and reaping fruit for the hard work put in. Next I had to choose the business that would be age-appropriate and one within my means of funding.

I chose to go with a "lawn care kit" (mower, gas can, gas card, business cards, personalized "company shirt"). While I pondered on this venture, I ran it by a couple of comrades and, not only were they supportive in words, they were even more so in action, contributing funds and a commitment to future support for any upcoming endeavors. This is a testament to the fact that there are some good men in prison who shatter the selfish/predator stereotypes given to those incarcerated by some too ignorant or self-righteous to know otherwise.

The next order of business was to tap into an organization that would be willing to spearhead the movement and not be biased or intimidated to coordinate with a group of prisoners. Through the help of Restore Justice in VA, I was introduced to Angela Antoine of House of Dreams Outreach and Reentry, an NGO doing much-needed work in Newport News, VA. House of Dreams was just that, a "dream" come true. They were ready and willing to put in the necessary groundwork needed by using the funds raised to purchase all the equipment, as well as doing the com-



munity outreach to find suitable recipients.

The end result was that we were able to raise enough money to purchase two kits (\$400+). In the beginning, I imagined I'd probably be able to start out with one kit for one person, but with the collaborative efforts of all those involved, that goal was doubled.

I hope this will inspire others in prison to look beyond their own situation and recognize the influence they can have on the world as a whole. With unity and faith, we can make a change. Eventually the negative perception some hardliners have of us in prison will be chipped away.

I wish to give thanks to all those who were

instrumental in making this happen: Shaheed James, Jemarr Jordan and James Carmack, for their generous donations and valuable input; the House of Dreams Outreach & Reentry for their work in bringing everything to reality; Restore Justice in VA for their hard work and dedication in supporting all things dealing with prison reform; Majestic Creations LLC for donating the business cards and shirts.

Sincerely,

LeMar Anderson #1021639  
BKCC

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# Criminal Justice Reform (CJR) in Virginia: A Critical Analysis

By Dale Pughsley

Many groups today are currently touting themselves as Criminal Justice Reformers. The designation allows a wide range of individuals and groups to list their work under this rubric. But what exactly constitutes “Criminal Justice” and the systems it uses to function?

Essential to the definition of Criminal Justice is the term “Criminal,” which is defined as a person who commits a crime or something involving crime. “Crime” is defined as a violation of the Penal Code for which one can be punished by the state. However, what behaviors are criminalized is decided by the government, specifically the legislative branch here in America’s Democratic Republican system.

Justice, on the other hand, describes how the law is administered. From here the procedures, remedies, and punishments involved with the process of criminalization and punishment all become part of what’s known as the Criminal Justice System.

In Amerika, the lawmakers who are creating law have to run campaigns that costs money. These campaigns are financed by corporations and individuals who have interests, thus they “support” the officials who share their interests. Campaign finance, as it’s euphemistically called, is used to make candidates and their message more visible. Advertisements, events and staff cost a lot of money. So we must always remain aware of the corporate interest in lawmaking.

Criminal Justice policy is no different. With this in mind, when we examine Virginia’s Criminal Justice policy over the last 25 years, we see that the state has adopted what’s known as Truth in Sentencing (TIS) measures. That is, requiring prisoners to serve a minimum of 85 percent of their sentence without any possibility of parole. Now, if we accept the premise that money drives politics or, in other words, lawmaking, then we must begin our analysis of Virginia’s criminal justice system by asking, what is the corporate interest in it?

Now, it’s widely accepted that Law correlates to Order. In other words, Law is produced in a society to establish order. Yet here in Virginia laws are always being made and still there’s no order. In fact, what I see the Law produce in Virginia is prisons - 45 of them, to be exact.

These prisons are filled primarily with Black people (65 percent), while the state population itself is only 20 percent Black. There



are some poor whites (35 percent) who are also contained in Virginia’s prisons, but in comparison to the states overall white population (70 percent), it’s clear there’s a major problem with disparity in impacts.

This means that Criminal Justice in Virginia involves locking up Black people and throwing away the key. In fact, contrary to Ralph Northam’s current veneration, second chances aren’t something Virginia’s lawmakers have had a lot of tolerance for over the last quarter-century. After his gubernatorial election in 2017, Northam himself announced that he supports TIS.

Simply put, the current Criminal Justice policy in Virginia is racist. Whether or not it’s the result of disparate treatment, impact or both, Black communities are the primary beneficiaries of Virginia’s Tough on Crime policy.

The legacy of criminal justice in Virginia has its roots in slavery. Afrikans brought to Jamestown in August 1619 were in fact the first Black criminals and prisoners in Virginia. Their enslavement, too, was rooted in economic interest. To support the criminalization of their blackness, an ideology of white supremacy developed. This ideology is still an inherent ethos of the State’s punishment culture.

Mass Incarceration in Virginia was driven by the profit motive, coupled with the need to contain and control its surplus populations.

Now, when we consider the question of Reform, we have to ask if the phenomenon being rejected is inherently destructive or just being used destructively? Regardless of where you come down on that question, what we all must accept as the logical conclusion is that CJR in Virginia requires a political struggle.

Specifically, TIS must be rescinded in favor of a policy that is both fair and equitable. There-

# The Case for Reparations and who pays

By P. Muzi Branch

In most cases, when an enterprise or corporation causes injury to people or property, the “injured” are compensated for the damages. The fine or judgement that is levied is ultimately paid at the expense of the shareholder in the corporation. The enterprise passes the settlement expense on to stockholders by reducing dividends or, heaven forbid, ceases to exist. It matters not that you bought your shares when the company began or the day before the judgement and fines were levied, your shares are included in the settlement. But, like I said, “In most cases.”

The USA is actually a business enterprise/corporation with shareholders we call citizens. Each shareholder/citizen of lawful age gets to vote on the direction of the enterprise and they are entitled to a share of, and a share in, the prosperity of the USA Business Enterprise.

It doesn’t matter if your family has been a shareholder for 200 years or if you just joined yesterday - you are an equal shareholder/citizen. Therefore, contemporary shareholders are fully vested into the entirety of the USA: the past, present and future of the enterprise.

So if the USA owes a debt because it caused injury, each shareholder/citizen takes on that debt. No shareholder/citizen can claim they have nothing to do with the debt, unless they divest their shareholdership/citizenship.

The injury caused to Black Americans through acts perpetrated by agents of the local, state and federal governments, private corporations, financial institutions and white-suprem-

fore, any real effort at CJR must involve implementing policies that excludes the profit motives of corporations and racist or (for my liberals) “racially biased” notions of lawmakers.

**Dale Pughsley #1108909 (JPAY.com)** is a Political Prisoner and Jailhouse Lawyer in the Virginia Department of Corrections.



acy-radical-Christian terrorists is well documented and must be rectified. The reparations debt that the USA owes is connected to the obdurate wrongdoing by the aforementioned that injured Black people, which permitted the USA enterprise, financial institutions and multinational corporations to be prosperous.

As it should be with all these enterprises, when it is proven that they have caused harm to the environment or the Black community and have accumulated substantial assets, it is obliged that they pay the injured parties. The injured parties, in this case, are all Black American citizens.

So it matters not that your family did not own slaves or that you are an immigrant and naturalized citizen; you are a stockholder in this USA Corporation, and all benefits, privileges and rights that are bestowed come with the baggage of the past. Every citizen will be affected by the reparations litigation and settlement.

The irony is that Black American citizens, who have paid taxes or own stock in one or more of the private corporations, are the plaintiffs as well as the defendant stockholders. And we vote to pay the reparations.

**P. Muzi Branch** is a Richmond artist and musician.

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## international &amp; antiwar news



Photo by Phil Wilayto

A multiracial, multigenerational march weaves its way through the streets of downtown Washington, D.C., to kick off a week of actions demanding “No to NATO, War & Racism!” and “U.S. Hands Off Venezuela!”

## No to NATO, War & Racism! U.S. Hands Off Venezuela!

More than 600 people rallied and marched through the streets of downtown Washington, D.C., on March 30 to kick off a week of actions protesting “NATO, War & Racism!” and demanding an end to the U.S. campaign to overthrow the government of oil-rich Venezuela.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was coming to town on April 4 to celebrate its 70th anniversary. The date also happened to mark the 51st anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., a particularly inappropriate time to celebrate militarism.

NATO is the military alliance that has joined the U.S. in wrecking death and destruction across the Middle East and North Africa. That includes destroying the once prosperous African country of Libya. NATO is now moving into Latin America, recruiting countries that border Venezuela.

The march and two rallies were initiated

by the United National Antiwar Coalition and endorsed by more than two dozen antiwar and social justice organizations.

Other protests and meetings took place throughout the week, sponsored by a range of organizations, including World Beyond War, Black Alliance for Peace, the U.S. Peace Council and Popular Resistance.

Two weeks before these actions, a march and rally of about 1,000 people focusing on Venezuela was held in D.C. by the ANSWER Coalition.

The Virginia Defenders played a leading role in the March 30 actions, including writing the initial Call, proposing the rally speakers (emphasizing youth, women and people of color), arranging for the rally stage and sound and coordinating security, planning the march route and arranging for the march and rally permits.

## Defend the Embassy Protectors!

One of the most effective protests against U.S. imperialism in many years took place this past May in Washington, D.C. It was at the height of the attempted U.S.-backed coup led by Juan Guaido. The staff at the Venezuelan embassy had been ordered out of the country and Guaido supporters were planning to take over the building.

With the permission of the Venezuelan government, dozens of antiwar and solidarity activists began staying at the Venezuelan Embassy to protect it. Furious, National Security Advisor and noted war hawk John Bolton and Elliot Abram of Iran-Contra fame and now special envoy overseeing policy toward Venezuela, called for them to be arrested.

But the activists were guests of the Venezuelan government and so were not committing any crime. If they were arrested and charged with trespassing, the issue in court would be whether the government of Nicolas Maduro was illegitimate, as the Trump administration is claiming. But the claim has no legal basis, so the administration didn't want to go to court.

Instead, the U.S. government allowed at times up to 150 right-wing Guaido supporters to mass outside the embassy, screaming, yelling, blowing horns, banging pots and pans and blocking any deliveries of food or water.

The building's electricity and water were both cut off. The noise outside was deafening and the physical threat very real, but the Embassy Protection Collective, as the activists called themselves, stood firm.

Friends and allies, including members of the Defenders and Richmond Democratic Socialists of America, joined the supporters outside and spent days facing down the right-wingers.

Finally, after 37 days, the federal police moved in and arrested the final four Protectors, who were charged with “interference with certain protective functions” - the height of irony, since it was the Protectors who were defending the building, not the police.

Those arrested are Margaret Flowers, a medical doctor and co-director of the online activist group Popular Resistance; David Paul, an antiwar activist who has visited Venezuela three times; Adrienne Pine, Ph.D, a medical anthropologist; and Kevin Zeese, an attorney and Popular Resistance co-director.

They are expected to go to trial sometime this spring. Each faces up to a year in prison and a fine of up to \$100,000.

A defense committee has been formed to raise legal funds and educate the public about the case.

You can help. To find out how, see: <https://defendembassyprotectors.org>.

## Richmond forum hits NATO, U.S. role in Venezuela & Ukraine, domestic issues

A thoroughly multiracial and multigenerational crowd turned out Feb. 23 for a Defenders forum covering a wide range of issues, all tied together by the understanding that what the U.S. government does in other countries directly and indirectly affects us here at home.

The forum, held at the First Unitarian Church of Richmond, was called to publicize the national march that was to take place March 30 in Washington, D.C., to protest the 70th anniversary of the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO.

But with the developing crisis in Venezuela, the agenda was expanded to include an examination of how the U.S. government, with bipartisan support, has been plotting the overthrow of the Venezuelan government in order to seize control of that country's vast oil reserves. The forum was considered part of an international day of protest against U.S. intervention in Venezuela.

In addition, Feb. 22 marked the fifth anniversary of the U.S.-backed right-wing coup in Ukraine, which ushered in a reign of fascist terror against ethnic Russians and other minorities. The Defenders coordinate the Odessa Solidarity Campaign, which co-sponsored an international day of protest on May 2, the fifth anniversary of the massacre of scores of progressives in the Ukrainian city of Odessa. (See story on page 15.)

In addition to these international issues, the forum also heard from Abbie Arevalo-Herrera, a young mother of two who fled her native Honduras to escape a life-threatening domestic situation. (See story on page 7.)

Also, Queen Zakia Shabazz, national director of United Parents Against Lead, gave a report on a community struggle in nearby Hopewell that is demanding justice in the case of Angel Decarlo, a young African-American woman who was fatally shot under suspicious circumstances by a Hopewell police officer.

### Support incarcerated activists!

#### JULIAN ASSANGE

Wikileaks founder charged with espionage for reporting the news.

<https://defend.wikileaks.org>

#### CHELSEA MANNING

Persecuted for her role in exposing U.S. war crimes

<https://popularresistance.org/free-chelsea-manning-again>

### Why does Washington really hate Venezuela?

“Social investment in Venezuela during the [Hugo] Chavez administration reduced poverty from nearly 50 percent in 1999 to about 27 percent in 2011, increased school enrollment, substantially decreased infant and child mortality, and improved access to potable water and sanitation through social investment.”

(From the CIA World Factbook, available online.)

In Venezuela's case, “social investment” means using the country's vast oil resources for the benefit of the people instead of bolstering the already obscene profits of U.S. oil companies. This is the real reason for Washington's hostility.



# International solidarity with the people of Odessa

By Phil Wilayto

In a major breakthrough for the people of Odessa, Ukraine, a United Nations human rights monitoring mission has criticized the Ukrainian government for its failure to investigate and prosecute those responsible for the fascist-led massacre of scores of people on May 2, 2014, at the city's House of Trade Unions.

The U.N. "Briefing Note" was issued on the fifth anniversary of the massacre, when vigils were held in 10 countries across Europe and North America as part of an International Day of Solidarity with the People of Odessa.

And in a major departure from the near-total media whiteout of the issue in the U.S. media, an Associated Press story (<https://apnews.com/c5778c9fa0034e04a38ae36d9f6d60d7>) on the U.N. report was carried by media outlets across the United States and beyond, including The Washington Post, ABC News, Yahoo! News, (Minneapolis) Star-Tribune, Houston Chronicle, Seattle Times and the (UK) Telegraph and Daily Mail.

This doesn't mean there will be an impartial investigation, but it does help to shine a light on the massacre and the government's failure to act.

Five years ago this past February, the U.S. government promoted a right-wing coup in Ukraine, ushering in a period in which openly fascist organizations are playing a real role in the country's politics.

A few months later, on May 2, 2014, in the Black Sea city of Odessa, a rabid mob led by neo-Nazis set fire to the House of Trade Unions building, murdering scores of progressive activists who were simply asking for the right of local people to elect their own governors instead of having them appointed by the now

openly reactionary central government.

Although there are many cellphone videos posted online clearly showing the perpetrators of this massacre, to date none have been brought to justice.

Starting immediately after the massacre, relatives and supporters of the victims have regularly gathered at the site of the fire to honor the dead and wounded and demand an international investigation, something the Ukrainian government has consistently blocked.

In 2016, at the request of Odessa's Council of Mothers of May 2, the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality organized a three-person delegation to travel to Odessa and attend the second annual memorial in hopes that the presence of U.S. North Americans would influence the government not to allow the fascist organizations to carry out their threats to attack the memorial.

The delegation members were antiwar activist Bruce Gagnon, independent documentary videomaker Regis Tremblay and Virginia Defender Editor Phil Wilayto.

After returning home, the Defenders founded the Odessa Solidarity Campaign, originally as a project of the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC). Now an independent effort, the OSC continues to support the anti-fascist struggle in Ukraine and to push for an international investigation into the massacre of May 2, 2014.

May 2, 2019, saw the third International Day of Solidarity with the People of Odessa, promoted jointly by the OSC and the Sweden-based group Prague Spring II. Events supporting the call for an international investigation and an end to the ongoing repression of relatives of the May 2 victims and of journalists attempting to uncover the truth about the massacre took place in Berlin, Budapest, London, Moscow, New York City, Prague, Stockholm, Vancouver, Vienna and Wrocław, among other cities.

In Washington, D.C., a delegation from the Odessa Solidarity Campaign, along with members of Struggle/



La Lucha, held a vigil outside the Ukrainian Embassy and then hand-delivered a letter to embassy staff addressed to Ukrainian then-President-Elect Volodymyr Zelensky.

The letter urged the incoming president, who overwhelmingly defeated the ultra-nationalist incumbent, Petro Poroshenko, to break with the reactionary policies of his predecessor and agree to allow an international investigation into the massacre, as well as end the ongoing repression of relatives of those who died in the trade union building fire and journalists attempting to investigate the tragedy.

Meanwhile, police in Odessa reported that 4,500 people came out for that city's fifth annual memorial. Among those attending was Joe Lombardo, co-coordinator of the United National Antiwar Coalition and a member of the Advisory Board of the Odessa Solidarity Campaign.

For ongoing news and analysis about developments in Ukraine, see [odessasolidaritycampaign.org](http://odessasolidaritycampaign.org) and the Odessa Solidarity Campaign Facebook page.

## Aug. 27 UPDATE

Aug. 27 marked the 100th day of the administration of the new president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky. The Odessa Solidarity Campaign took the occasion to resend the president a copy of the Open Letter the OSC had delivered on May 2 to the Ukrainian Embassy in Washington, D.C. The letter calls on Zelensky to allow an international investigation into the massacre at Odessa's House of Trade Unions.

An online petition supporting the Open Letter will be posted soon on the OSC website. Please look for it, sign it and share it with all your friends and contacts. The government of Ukraine must understand that the world is watching it and wants Justice for the victims of May 2, 2014.

## Trump tightens U.S. blockade of Cuba

The U.S. Treasury has announced new regulations governing licensed travel to Cuba from the U.S.

At the core of the June 4 announcement was that, effective immediately, U.S. cruise ships could no longer visit Cuba, and that the most popular category of licensed group travel, called People to People, also would be scrapped, except for travel bookings that were already confirmed.

The goal of these measures is to do the maximum possible damage to the Cuban economy, in line with the dominant strategy towards Cuba that Washington has followed since 1961: to grind down the Cuban people in the belief that eventually they will rise up against their own government. The strategy has always failed, but the economic damage it does is real.

Despite the new restrictions, it's still possible to travel to Cuba. U.S. citizens with family in Cuba remain free to go, and all the 12 categories of licensed travel to Cuba remain in place, such as religious, academic and student travel.

The rest of the world can freely travel to Cuba, but U.S. citizens have a much harder time - not because of Cuba, but because of their own government. To remove all restrictions on travel to Cuba would require an Act of Congress.

One such bill was introduced in both houses in the 2017-18 Congress. The bipartisan bill in the Senate had 55 signatories - a majority - but the Republican leadership would not allow a vote.

In response to the new travel restrictions, the Cuban government issued a statement that said it "... condemns in the strongest terms the measures announced by the United States Government on 4 June 2019, further tightening the economic blockade imposed on Cuba for over 60 years ....

"The intent continues to be to extract political concessions from the Cuban nation through suffocation of the economy and hurting the population. In this particular case, these measures are also aimed at preventing the American people from knowing the Cuban reality thus bringing down the effects of the slanderous propaganda that is fabricated on a daily basis against our country.

"Such actions disregard the majority view of Americans, whose interest to know Cuba and exercise their right to travel was proved by the 650 thousand US travelers who came in 2018, together with half a million Cubans residing in the United States."

For information on traveling to Cuba, contact: Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization: [ifconews.org](http://ifconews.org).



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## Join UPAL in observing International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week October 20-26, 2019

Thousands of families are still suffering from the effects of drinking government sanctioned tainted water that poisoned upwards of 10,000 children in Flint, Michigan.

There's a current water crisis in Newark, NJ. Citizens are having to drink bottled water because even their filtered water is filled with lead.

In Virginia, many children are unknowingly drinking leaded water every day at school because school divisions were allowed to disregard a legislative mandate.

*How many more of our children have to be sacrificed before we see this as intentional neglect?*

**One way to address the lead in water issue is to promote FULL LEAD SERVICE LINES REPLACEMENTS.**

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environmental stewards:**

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we're from Earth and I don't  
think we're going to live any-  
place else in this lifetime."*

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Natural Resources Defense Council  
New Virginia Majority  
Progress VA Education Fund  
SERCAP, Inc.  
Sierra Club VA Chapter  
Southeast CARE Coalition  
United Parents Against Lead (UPAL)  
Virginia League of Conservation  
Voters  
Virginia Organizing  
VA State Conference NAACP  
We Are the Remnant of Hope

FAITH BASED  
VA Interfaith Power and Light  
NOI Mosque # 24

GREEN / CONSERVATION  
Audubon Naturalist Society  
Appalachian Voices  
Choose Clean Water Coalition  
Virginia Conservation Network

ACADEMIC  
University of Richmond