

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

The Virginia DEFENDER

FREE



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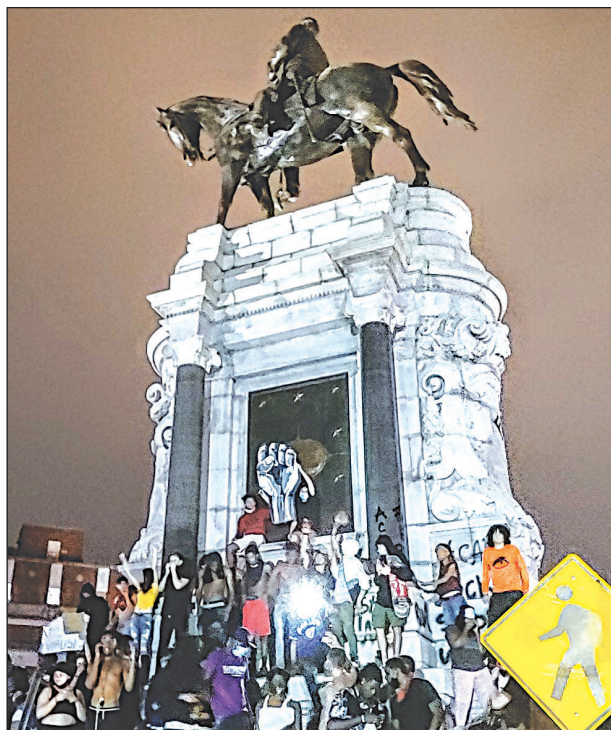
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Lessons from the Rebellion

At left: A dumpster set on fire in the 300 block of West Grace Street May 29, the first night of the Rebellion. Middle: The Robert E. Lee statue on Monument Avenue, tagged on May 30. Right: Another dumpster fire, this one next to police headquarters on West Grace May 29. Photos by Phil Wilayto

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"We are going to emancipate ourselves from mental slavery ... none but ourselves can free the mind." — Marcus Garvey, Aug. 17, 1887 - June 10, 1940

no hay fronteras en la lucha de los/las obreros/as

Commemorating the 2nd Anniversary of Abbie's time in Sanctuary

By Kat McNeal

RICHMOND, VA, June 28 -- A multiracial crowd of nearly 75 people gathered last night at the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Richmond near Byrd Park to commemorate the second anniversary of a young immigrant mother taking sanctuary at the church to avoid deportation.

It's now been two years since Abbie Arevalo-Herrera took refuge at the church after being threatened by the U.S. government with forcible removal to her native Honduras, which she fled after her life was threatened by her now-divorced husband. The strain of living with two children in a church basement is now compounded by the coronavirus pandemic and the tensions resulting from police repression of the city's Black Lives Matter protests.

At the commemoration, Arevalo-Herrera spoke about the serious difficulties of being confined during the quarantine. She remarked that, though this has been



very difficult, it is worth it to her to remain with her children. She described how many people are without the support that she has been receiving, unable to pay their rent, buy food, seek medical care, etc., on top of the daily racism and discrimination

endured in Virginia.

She also spoke about anti-Black racism and violence from within the Latinx community and the need to combat these elements. "We immigrants are not going to be free until everyone is free," she said. "We have a responsibility of solidarity toward our Black neighbors. We also must remember that our Latino immigrant community includes Black Latinos."

Also speaking, by Internet connection, was Princess Blanding, sister of Marcus-David Peters, the young African-American biology high school teacher fatally shot by a Richmond police officer in May 2018 while experiencing a mental health crisis. Representing Justice & Reformation, Blanding spoke about that organization's updated list of demands, including the need to defund the police and redirect that money to systems of community care, which she said need to be expanded to benefit our immigrant communities.

"An injustice to one of us is an injustice to all of us," Blanding said. "Justice & Reformation will continue to stand in

solidarity with Abbie and continue to speak out against this injustice. Our love and support is with Abbie, our immigrant community and our Latinx community."

Also speaking were incoming UU president Denise Rimes; members of New Virginia Majority, a nonprofit organization promoting immigrant rights in the city; and several community activists.

Present but not speaking were a number of elected officials, including state Sens. Jennifer McClellan and Ghazala Hashmi and Delegate Dawn Adams.

The event was live-streamed and can be viewed on the Facebook page "Hands Off Abbie."

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

NOTICE:

For several years, The Virginia Defender has run a complimentary ad for Mira la Migra's ICE Watch hotline for undocumented residents of Richmond facing problems with ICE. The hotline organizers have informed us that the service is currently inactive. In our next issue, we will publish a list of resources available to the immigrant and undocumented community.

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, the United National Antiwar Coalition and the Virginia People's Assembly for Jobs, Peace & Justice.

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

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

WHAT WE BELIEVE

We believe in Freedom

We believe that all people must be free to develop to their full potential as human beings. We must be free from hunger, from preventable diseases, from homelessness, from ignorance. We must be free to work and to provide for ourselves and our families. We must be free to pursue our education and to develop ourselves culturally and spiritually. We must be free from fear of the arbitrary use of police power and from the physical and cultural attacks of white-

supremacist organizations. Women must be free from physical, cultural and emotional oppression. Children must be free from dangers like lead poisoning, asthma and sexual exploitation. Our youths must be free both from police harassment and the mindless violence of the streets. We must all be free from unjust wars fought in the interest of the wealthy few at the expense of the struggling many.

We believe in Justice

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

We believe in Equality

We live in the richest country in the world.

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

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

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

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

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

community news



Photo by Phil Wilayto

A resident of Cathy's Camp walks back to her tent after receiving a meal at the tent city set up outside Richmond's cold-weather shelter on Oliver Hill Way.

Cathy's Camp exposed Richmond's homeless crisis - so the City tore it down

By Phil Wilayto

It's no secret that Richmond is in a severe housing crisis. To its shame, Virginia's capital city has the second-highest rate of evictions of any city in the country, with some 2,000 city households currently facing the possibility of being evicted. While some may find cheaper housing or double up with relatives or friends, others will inevitably end up on the street.

From January 2018 to January 2019, the number of people in the region staying in shelters or sleeping outside increased for

the first time since 2011, with the numbers shooting up a staggering 10 percent.

The Annie Giles Community Resource Center, located in a desolate area of the East End on Oliver Hill Way across from the city jail, is the shelter of last resort for the city's homeless folks, but it isn't opened unless the temperature drops below 40 degrees - even in a rainstorm, flood or hurricane. As a result, people without housing are left to fend for themselves in the worst kinds of weather.

Last summer, a few people began setting

up tents behind the shelter, on a

grassy area owned by Virginia Commonwealth University. As word spread, more people joined them and the encampment grew into a little tent city. At its height, some 130 people were being sheltered in around 125 brightly colored, neatly spaced tents.

Several nonprofit organizations provided the tents and other support for the camp, chief among them Blessing Warriors, a Black-led, all-volunteer group that brings food, water, blankets, clothing and other supplies to homeless people around the area.

The community came to be known as Cathy's Camp, in honor of a volunteer at the camp who died from long-standing health problems. There were regular camp meetings to establish rules and means to enforce them: no drugs, alcohol or harassment of other campers. A few portajohns were brought in. Meals were provided. Security teams were organized. Richmond Food Not Bombs set up a hand-washing station. Rides for doctors' appointments and other personal errands were arranged. The tent city became a functioning, self-governing, multiracial community.

And it also became a powerful and public symbol of the depth and breadth of the local homelessness crisis, which became a political problem for Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney.

On Dec. 29, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Human Services Reggie Gordon sent a letter to the camp saying the residents must leave. The letter didn't set an eviction date, but neither did it offer any alternative shelter.

A meeting hosted Feb. 5 at the cold-weather shelter by 6th District Councilmember Ellen Robertson to discuss City homelessness policies drew more than 200 people, most of whom were not homeless. (The Defenders helped by setting up a Facebook page to promote the event.) The meeting became tense, with participants demanding the City promise not to close the camp until all residents had found permanent housing. After an hour, Robertson was escorted from the building by

security personnel.

By then, the media coverage was creating a huge public relations problem for the mayor's administration, which responded by arranging for social service agencies and nonprofits to meet with camp residents and counsel them about existing services.

Then the residents were told they had until March 30 to move.

With the development of the coronavirus pandemic, most camp residents agreed to be moved to temporary shelter in hotels or motels. But the way the camp was finally dismantled became just one more example of official callousness and disrespect toward people whose only crime had been not to have a home.

The administration told Blessing Warriors that crews would begin removing tents on March 19. The assumption was that the residents would be moved into temporary housing before the tents, most of which had been donated, were removed.

Instead, workers showed up the evening before with a grapple truck - a large truck with a boom-and-claw attachment - along with VCU police.

At about 7 p.m., just before dark, the crew went to work, lifting up empty tents with the claw and unceremoniously dumping them in the back of the truck.

The sight was too much for the residents still at the camp. Some suffered anxiety attacks. One woman reportedly was taken to a hospital after exhibiting signs of a stroke.

A City press release issued the next day claimed that, "On Wednesday, March 18, the Blessing Warriors organization began removing their property from the site and requested help disposing of vacant and unwanted tents, the residents of which had been moved into emergency shelters or alternatives."

Many of the camp residents were put up by the City in local hotels, although some that this reporter visited were among the most disreputable in town, with reports of filthy conditions, bedbugs and other problems.


Blessing Warriors Director Rhonda Sneed said she had been told that no one would have to leave the temporary housing until more permanent housing had been found. Whether that promise has been kept is not known at this time. Meanwhile, Blessing Warriors continues its nightly rounds caring for the city's homeless.

The tent city that grew outside Richmond's cold-weather shelter is no more, but the spirit of defiant dignity that it represented lives on in the ongoing fight for housing justice.

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community news

Feeding the hungry: Picking up where the City left off

By Phil Wilayto

After the Richmond city government tore down Cathy's Camp, displacing more than 100 formerly homeless people, it promised to house the residents in temporary housing until they could find something more permanent. Camp residents were placed into local hotels and motels, including the Day's Inn on Midlothian Turnpike, the Diamond Inn on Arthur Ashe Boulevard and the Massad House hotel on North 4th St. in downtown Richmond.

The Defenders, who had been supporting Cathy's Camp, volunteered to deliver meals to the folks in the hotels, once a week, with the food coming from organizations that are part of the Communities of Care network coordinated by the Homeward organization.

We settled on the 20 or so people staying at the Massad House.

But around April 22, about half those folks were transferred to other hotels, and the meals stopped being available.

After calling Commonwealth Catholic Charities, Homeward and the city jail, whose deputies also had been delivering some meals, this reporter reached Reggie Gordon, Mayor Stoney's Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Human Services - the guy who had sent the eviction letter to Cathy's Camp.

After having the situation explained to him, Gordon said he would speak with Kelly King Horne, head of Homeward.

In a few minutes he called back, and said that the people left at the Massad were "not our responsibility."

Taken aback, I said "They're your people!" He said no, they weren't.

I said some of the folks were having trouble with getting their SSI direct deposits, had no money and now no meals. Gordon said there were churches in the area that served meals. I had already compiled a list of those resources for the people at the Massad, and only two sites were providing evening meals, and only for two nights out of the week.

Gordon suggested the Defenders could



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Since mid-April, the Defenders have been delivering groceries to formerly homeless people at the Massad House hotel in downtown Richmond.

provide meals for the people left at the Massad.

So we bought some bread, peanut butter and apples and delivered the bags of food to the hotel. After that, we were able to arrange with Catholic Charities to pick up food once a week from its food pantry and deliver it to the Massad.

The number of people the city is still putting up at the hotel is now down to four. However, Catholic Charities' food pantry has gone to a biweekly schedule, and in September will resume its former monthly schedule.

Meanwhile, Blessing Warriors, which has also been delivering food to the Massad residents, has offered to provide food for the Defenders' deliveries. And an old friend of ours who pastors a church in the East End has been sharing sandwiches he gets from a local gas station, which supplements the other food we deliver to the Massad.

This has been a modest effort, but a new project for the Defenders. We took it on because, as far as we're concerned, the most oppressed are "our responsibility."



Black Lives Matter activists hold a protest outside the Willow Lawn restaurant where a homeless man was arrested by 10 cops on July 22. Photo by Taimir Gore

Arrest of homeless man leads to protest at Willow Lawn

By Phil Wilayto

If you're sitting at a table outside a restaurant, you're expected to buy something. That's understood.

But if you're homeless and it's a really hot day and the unused table is in the shade, you might think it wouldn't be a big deal to rest there a bit.

But on July 22, at the Which Wich sandwich shop at the Willow Lawn shopping center in Henrico County, you'd be wrong.

That's when around 10 police officers arrested Aaron Coleman, whom several people who say they know him have said is homeless and has been struggling with mental health issues.

Kallie O'Dell, 28, says she was getting a bite to eat at the sandwich shop when a police officer came in and spoke with one of the employees.

"Then the officer went back outside and spoke with a Black man who was sitting at one of the outside tables," she said. "The man was on his phone, not bothering anyone. I didn't hear what was being said, but I'm guessing the officer was telling him he was trespassing and had to leave."

The day's high temperature was 96 degrees. The area where the man was sitting was in the shade.

O'Dell says she went outside, where someone had started videoing what was happening.

"Then there were two officers asking him to leave," she said. "Two elderly women and a man were also talking to him, asking if he

had anywhere to go, but he said he didn't want to talk with anyone, that he just wanted to be left alone.

"Then two more officers came up and told the man he was under arrest for trespassing," O'Dell said. "They put him in handcuffs behind his back, and also ankle cuffs, and said if he resisted arrest, that would be another charge. He kept saying he wasn't trespassing, that he wasn't bothering anyone."

Soon more officers arrived - a total of 10, according to reports on social media, along with a Henrico County police van.

"They picked him up to put him in the van," O'Dell said. "At first he almost fell out. Then two ambulances arrived. He kept asking why he was being arrested, saying he wasn't doing anything. Then they strapped him down on a stretcher and put him in an ambulance and waited for about 15 minutes before leaving."

O'Dell said all the officers were from Henrico County. The shopping center is in the western part of the county off Broad Street, just outside the Richmond city limits.

In response, a protest was held July 25 outside the sandwich shop to promote "the Marcus Alert and the Civilian Review Board, and get more people on board with pushing that," said the Rev. Donte McCutchen, pastor of Love Cathedral Community Church and a co-founder of Clergy Action RVA, which recently had held a protest at the Marcus-David Peters Circle in Richmond.

While describing the protest as a "communal effort," Rev. McCutchen said the

See ARREST on page 5.

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community news

DEMANDS

Continued from page 9

were “both very strategic moves to make people think they are doing what the people want, but are just buying the City time until the elections.”

On the state level, Sen. Ghazala Hashmi and Delegate Patrick Hope are sponsoring bills that would allow, but not mandate, localities to create civilian review boards. They also are working with the Peters family. “This bill has no teeth,” Blanding said. “This is NOT what the people are demanding.”

5) The DROPPING OF ALL CHARGES *of those members of our community who have been arrested in connection with the recent protests against the police murder of Mr. George Floyd.*

Richmond Commonwealth's Attorney Colette McEachin has refused to drop all charges against all protesters, agreeing only to not ask for jail time for the hundreds of people charged with violating Gov. Northam's 8 p.m. curfew. At the same time, she has declined to charge any Richmond police officers involved in a number of incidents that protesters have described as cases of police brutality, including one in which an officer drove his vehicle up onto a median strip and into a crowd of protesters. The only incident McEachin has said she is still investigating is the one at the Marcus-David Peters Circle when police officers fired tear gas at peaceful protesters a half-hour before the 8 p.m. curfew was to take effect.

6) IMMEDIATE REMOVAL OF THE FIVE CONFEDERATE STATUES ON MONUMENT AVENUE *and all other statues and memorials to Confederate leaders in the city.*

This demand has seen the most progress so far, with protesters themselves taking down the statues of Confederate President Jefferson Davis on Monument Avenue and Gen. Williams Carter Wickham in Monroe Park, along with that of Christopher Columbus, who took a nose dive into Fountain Lake in Byrd Park.

In response, Mayor Stoney decided not to wait for action by a mostly hesitant City Council and ordered the removal of other symbols of the Confederacy, including the Monument Avenue statues of Generals J.E.B. Stuart, “Stonewall” Jackson and Admiral Matthew Maury and the statue honoring Confederate soldiers and sailors at Libby Hill, plus several other white-supremacist symbols. The only remaining City-owned Confederate statue is the one honoring Gen. A.P. Hill, whose body is buried - standing up - under the statue itself. The fate of that statue is wrapped up with a court suit, as is the 60-foot-tall monument to Gen. Robert E. Lee, which is owed by the state of Virginia.

Meanwhile, the life-sized statue of Lee and busts of seven other Confederates were removed from the Virginia Capitol's Old House Chamber by order of House Speaker Eileen Filler-Corn (D-Fairfax). City Council has at least discussed changing the name of the Lee Bridge and the section of the Jefferson Davis Highway that runs through Richmond. Many other symbols remain, including streets named after Confederate figures.

7) MAKE PUBLIC THE NAMES OF ALL POLICE OFFICERS CHARGED WITH ACTS OF ABUSE DURING THE PROTESTS

Richmond CA McEachin has said she will do this going forward, but will not make public the names of any officers already charged.

ARREST

Continued from page 4

idea was first raised by the young woman who witnessed the incident.

According to a police report obtained by the Defender, Coleman was charged with trespassing, disorderly conduct and obstruction. According to social media accounts, a hearing

date was set for November - and no bail. Later reports stated an attorney had been able to obtain a bail hearing for July 30.

Rev. McCutchen said that after he heard about Coleman's arrest, he and some friends went to the Which Wich shop and handed out food to homeless people in the area. He said the owner came out and apologized for the incident, said he would be training his employees how to handle similar issues in the future and then donated sandwiches to the food distribution effort.

A fundraising effort to support Aaron Coleman has been set up at: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/dzgck-help-for-aaron>. As of Aug. 12, more than \$7,000 had been raised.

Anti-eviction rally attacked by law enforcement; 2 arrested

By Phil Wilayto

RICHMOND, VA, July 1 -- At the very moment today when close to 1,000 people stood in the rain to watch the City unceremoniously remove the 100-year-old statue of Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson from his perch at the intersection of Monument Avenue and Arthur Ashe Boulevard, just five miles away deputies from the Richmond Sheriff's Department were wrestling to the ground a well-known local housing activist attempting to attend eviction hearings in the John Marshall Courts Building.

Omari Al-Qadafi, a longtime and well-respected housing organizer who now works with the Legal Aid Justice Center, was one of some 150-200 people who attended a rally against evictions outside the courts building at 400 N. 9th St. near City Hall in downtown Richmond.

Today was the day a statewide moratorium on evictions during the coronavirus pandemic ordered by Gov. Ralph Northam was due to expire, and social justice organizations had called for the rally outside the courthouse where eviction cases are heard. The sponsoring groups included Leaders of the New South, New Virginia Majority, Richmond Strike and the Richmond Tenants Union.

After speaking about the eviction crisis and what they felt Gov. Northam was not doing to address what could be an impending eviction crisis, the activists marched to the Governor's Mansion at Capitol Square, then to City Hall, circling it while chanting, and then returned to the John Marshall Courts Building.

“People decided they wanted to enter the courts building so they could go to the eviction hearings, which is normally allowable,” eyewitness and local activist Breanne Armbrust told the Defender in an interview later outside the city jail. “So they opened the door to do that, and once they did, the sheriff's officers started to move in on people at the door. Omari was just standing there and they grabbed him and tackled him to the ground. He was being completely nonconfrontational.”

Video of the incident posted by the Richmond Times-Dispatch shows an orderly crowd outside the courthouse doors with a few people beginning to quietly enter into the lobby. Then video taken through the building's windows shows at least five deputies on top of Al-Qadafi on the lobby floor. A woman inside

the lobby apparently objecting to his arrest is also seen being seized.

Outraged at the unexpected arrests, the crowd began banging on the doors and windows demanding, “Let them go!” At some point - after the arrests - one of the building's floor-to-ceiling windows was reportedly broken.

Another eyewitness, who asked not to be identified by name, said that everything had been peaceful until the arrests.

“No one expected this,” they said. “It seemed to move from zero to hundreds in seconds, and it wasn't because of us. More cops showed up, and a lot of people got maced, or pepper sprayed - it was some kind of handheld spray - and people retreated from the door and were treated by medics. Other police, maybe Capitol Police, showed up and moved people out, including people being treated by the medics, so the crowd dispersed.”

“Things only really got heavy when we opened the doors,” said another eyewitness, a 29-year-old woman who asked not to be identified by name. This person, who is white, said the deputies seemed to single out Black people in the crowd. “No one ever touched me,” they said. “At one point I was holding the door open, and an officer there didn't even look at me.”

Shortly after, supporters, including attorneys, went to the city jail to wait for those who were arrested.

Al-Qadafi was later released after being charged with two counts of felony assault on law enforcement officers, obstruction of justice and trespass. The other person - whose name the Defender does not have permission to report, was hit with obstruction of justice and trespass.

According to a report published last year by the Eviction Lab at Princeton University, Richmond has the second-highest eviction rate of all large U.S. cities. That 11.44 percent rate has held steady for the past 16 years. Incredibly, each year nearly a third of all Richmond renters receive a notice of eviction.

Further, VCU researchers with the Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs last week reported that 3,800 eviction cases are pending in Richmond and the counties of Henrico and Chesterfield.

The report said the threatened renters owe an average of about \$1,200.

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A Defender Analysis

The protests that erupted after the public police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis have grown into the broadest and most sustained rebellion against racism in U.S. history.

They have not been as violent as those during the Long Hot Summer of 1967, or the uprisings in more than 100 cities after the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968 or the Los Angeles Rebellion after the vicious police beating of Rodney King in 1992, but they have now taken place over more than 10 weeks in more than 2,000 cities, in every state and in more than 60 countries. This includes more than a third of the 133 cities and counties here in Virginia.

The result has been a national, radical reckoning on the issues of race and police brutality that the ruling class has up till now successfully managed to either prevent or control. A recent Washington Post poll found that two-thirds of the country now believes that George Floyd's death represents a broader problem in law enforcement - a low bar, to be sure, but a dramatic increase from how people felt about the 2014 police murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., and it represents a fundamental shift in the views of many whites.

So where are we now? What has been won? What lessons can be learned? What did we do right, what mistakes can we learn from - and where do we go from here?

The following is meant to be a Defender contribution to that discussion.

NATURE OF THE PROTESTS

First of all, it must be emphasized that this was a true rebellion: An organic, mass uprising against government authority motivated by deep and long-standing oppression. And while mostly Black-led, from the beginning this rebellion has also been very multiracial.

Like all true rebellions, it has had its excesses, but that doesn't change the fundamental fact that the Rebellion was/is legitimate and must be supported by all true progressives.

Part of that support must be demanding complete amnesty for all those facing charges as a result of their participation. We can't allow the police and politicians to divide us into "good protesters" and "bad protesters." This is a form of war, and in war you demand the return of all your soldiers, period.

TARGETS & TACTICS

Property damage is usually a part of any rebellion. Think "Boston Tea Party." The issue isn't "peaceful" vs. "violent," but rather a question of tactics, targets and timing.

Tagging and tearing down symbols of white supremacy are righteous acts. The Confederate statues, long protected by double-talking politicians, were an obvious target. An institution like Wells Fargo is known for a long history of corruption and racial discrimination. A GRTC Pulse bus is a symbol of gentrification. The national headquarters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the organization that played a key role in the development of the "Lost Cause" mythology, is an open sore on Richmond's landscape.

On the other hand, tossing a brick through the window of a Jewish synagogue or a 120-year-old, Black-owned business shows a severe ignorance of community and global history and a deep lack of political consciousness.

Politicians who take reactionary positions should be targeted for protests, which can be done in various creative ways. But bringing a mostly white crowd after dark to the home of a Black single mother, yelling at her to come out while shining lights into her children's bedrooms betrays a fundamental lack of understanding of race and gender, not to mention showing crass political opportunism.

As for timing, the question has to be this: Did a particular tactic move the struggle forward, or set it back? Because unless you think the masses are ready for the Final Conflict, what we're talking about here is winning over public opinion.

Examined this way, the property damage carried out in the first nights of the Rebellion moved things forward. It thoroughly frightened the local ruling class and its political representatives, who at least started making noises about meeting the protesters' demands.

On the other hand, the more recent and much smaller actions were seen as the work of isolated activists divorced from the larger struggle, and so handed the police and elected officials a potent argument against the perpetrators and militancy as a whole.

To its credit, the Richmond Community Bail Fund supported all those arrested in all these actions.

THE ROLE OF WHITES

The police, politicians and media have tried to project the Rebellion as being hijacked by young whites pursuing their own agenda over the needs of the Black commu-

LESSONS FROM

nity. While there have been some who seem to see chaos as a strategy, this argument ignores the fact that broad layers of white youth have their own grievances. They are facing a rapidly shrinking future beset by

against organization and collective decision-making in general, often saying that approach is necessary for security reasons. In previous movements, such as Occupy people would gather in open, public meet-



Photos by Alex Matzke

Scenes from the area around City Hall when the police broke up Reclamation Plaza.

climate change, the current and probably future pandemics and an economic crisis due more to the approaching end days of capitalism than the failings of any individual politician or party. Add to that a heightened sense of injustice over racial and gender oppression and you have the basis for white youth going beyond sympathy for the Black community to becoming actual allies willing to put their own bodies on the line.

Fundamentally, the Rebellion is directed against racism and the police murders of Black people, and it's correct that Black people should be in the leadership. And many in this new movement have demanded that the most marginalized voices finally be heard, particularly young Black women and trans folk. Of course, this doesn't mean that whites should be deciding which Black voices are authentic. Real leaders emerge in times of real struggle. For now, just showing up and standing firm against the oppressors is enough.

COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING & DEMANDS

The largely spontaneous nature of the early days of the Rebellion had both positive and negative sides. On the one hand, spontaneity is what has made the Rebellion genuine. On the other, there has been a tendency among some activists to argue

ings - people's assemblies - and discuss goals and how to achieve them. This has been happening in informal ways, but has not led to broad, democratic decision-making.

Fortunately, there already were long-standing demands that were picked up by the movement as a whole. The family of Marcus-David Peters, the young biology high school teacher fatally shot in 2018 by a Richmond police officer while experiencing a mental health crisis, had been demanding a Marcus Alert system to address situations of mental health crises; a civilian review board with subpoena power; and the reopening of the Marcus-David Peters case. Early in the Rebellion, the family, operating as Justice and Reformation, updated these demands, adding defunding the police, which was being raised by the protesters. The Defenders suggested adding amnesty for all protesters and taking down all Confederate symbols in the city. A seventh demand, that all officers charged with abuses during the Rebellion be publicly identified, was added by protesters at the Reclamation Plaza encampment at City Hall. These seven demands (see page 9) have now been accepted and promoted by the movement as a whole.

And, also on the plus side, the Rebellion has shown how the people can self-organize to provide needed services: Street medics; a community bail fund; a consor-

THE REBELLION

tium of volunteer lawyers; free food distribution and library at the Circle; security teams; clothing repair, and more.

CONTRADICTIONARY ROLES OF THE NONPROFITS

While nongovernmental organizations (NGOS) addressing social problems date back to the 1800s, the creation of official nonprofit status (Section 501(c)3 of the Tax Reform Act of 1969) led to an explosion in the creation of nonprofit organizations. Today they are so prevalent that many young activists think their goal should be to get a job with a nonprofit so they can “do political work” full time.

While many of these groups do very good work, there are severe downsides. Nonprofits are funded by grantmaking foundations that dictate the groups’ permitted agendas. And since most liberal foundations are sympathetic to if not tied to the Democratic Party, a nonprofit’s agenda must align with that party’s limited economic, political and social goals. Most importantly, the nonprofits must never question U.S. foreign policy, in which the Democrats are just as guilty of crimes to humanity as are the Republicans.

Nonprofits also are fundamentally undemocratic organizations. Their directors are hired by boards, not elected by staff members, let alone the communities they purport to serve.

And the paid staff organizers are now fundamentally removed from and positioned above the targeted communities. Win or lose any struggle, they still will have a job, so long as they can convince their grantmaking foundations that they have been carrying out the assigned agenda - an effort that also breeds competition between nonprofits and often the exaggeration of accomplishments.

Ever since the first workers decided to organize against an oppressive boss or enslaved people planned a rebellion or escape, “activists” have lived and worked among the people they aimed to serve. They experienced the same class, racial and gender oppression. That authentic experience shaped their political consciousness. Today’s nonprofits cultivate a sense of petit-bourgeois, individualistic careerism that is far removed from revolutionary consciousness.

ROLE OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The argument that there is no difference between the Republicans and Democratic parties falls on deaf ears in the working class and oppressed communities. Donald Trump comes as close to a fascist as any U.S. president in history. Just the thought of small children being separated from their families and left in despair in cages should be enough to oppose his re-election.

But fundamentally, both parties are



funded and controlled by the same small, fabulously wealthy elite of U.S. society. Both are thoroughly committed to the defense of corporate interests and capitalism itself, at home and abroad. Because of their very nature, neither party can be an effective vehicle for fundamental social, economic or political change.

And so, faced with something like the Rebellion, Democrats - supposedly representing the working class and communities of color - understand that they have two responsibilities: Co-opt the movement and dilute it if they can, or crush it if they can't.

In Richmond, the local Democratic Party machine has tried both tactics at the same time. Under mass pressure, Richmond's Democratic mayor twice replaced his chief of police, but all three chiefs have directed crackdowns on protesters. Democratic politicians and the head of the Richmond Branch NAACP - who said he was not representing the Richmond Branch NAACP - held a press conference with the police at

Libby Hill to denounce the protests.

But the Dems and their allies also organized the June 13 5,000-Man March to the Lee statue that included the cops and the mayor, as well as the Aug. 8 Conversations at the Monument dog-and-pony show, both of which were intended to corral and tame the Rebellion. So far, most protesters seem to have clearly seen through this dual crack-down/co-op strategy.

On the other hand, we now have the spectacle of media-anointed movement “leaders” publicly cheering the selection of California's Top Cop as Joe “1994 Crime Bill” Biden's running mate, simply because she is Black and a woman. This is political bankruptcy at its worst.

ROLE OF SECURITY

Much has been made of the fact that some of the protesters have been armed, on protests and at the Marcus-David Peters Circle. Here are a few examples of why that was felt to be necessary:

On June 7, a self-described leader of the KKK drove his truck into a group of BLM protesters just outside the city in Henrico County.

On June 12, three carloads of heavily armed white men - some carrying zip-ties - stopped by the MDP Circle. One driver drove his vehicle into a young Black man at the Circle.

On June 19, then-interim Police Chief William “Jody” Blackwell issued a “reminder” to the public that “the Richmond Police Department has the authority to declare protests that become violent, dangerous or disruptive as unlawful assemblies. ... Failure to disperse will result in arrest and/or exposure to chemical agents.”

The next day, about three dozen cops showed up at the Circle, some of them with assault rifles, some with zip-ties. People already had been on edge because several right-wing organizations had announced their intentions to come to Richmond to “defend” the Confederate statues. And, earlier in the day, an armed, off-duty Richmond International Airport police officer had been arrested for trespassing after being seen standing on the roof of a nearby building, filming the people gathered around the Lee state.

The police officers approached the Circle and stood in the street for about five minutes, not saying a word, just staring at the people inside. The officer in charge finally announced that if they moved their cars from around the Circle that the officers would leave. The cars were moved and the police gingerly walked backwards down the street to their cars, got in and drove in reverse out of the area.

Defenders at the scene were convinced the police were there to provoke an incident in order to clear the Circle, and only retreated when they saw that some in the Circle were as heavily armed as they were.

Yes, some protesters armed themselves and provided security for the others. This was necessary, justified and proper.

REFORM VS. ABOLITION

There's a heavy and at times acrimonious debate going on now about whether we should fight for “reform” or “abolition” of police departments.

The reformists promote changes like civilian review boards; mandatory police wearing of body cams; the Marcus Alert; “defunding” the police (which usually means taking funds the police use for non-police activities and transferring it to human services agencies), as well as demilitarizing the police, meaning relieving them of military-style equipment like tanks, grenade launchers, and tear gas, which is already banned under international law for use in combat.

On the other hand, abolitionists argue that the police are an inherently oppressive institution and should be done away with altogether and replaced with some form of less-lethal, community-based public safety system, or nothing at all.

In our view, this is a false dichotomy. Any reform that results in less bodily harm or death to the public, especially people of color, is something worth fighting for. And besides the reform itself, the struggle for the reform teaches people both how to fight and also the limitations of reforms under the present political system. Meanwhile, the oppressed communities in particular have the very real problem of street violence, which leads many people of color to support the police in a general way, while opposing their specific acts of abuse and brutality.

Our ultimate goal should be the total elimination of all means of repression in society: The cops, courts, prisons and military. The present ruling class is never going to agree to that, because those means of repression are what keep it in power. So abolition will only come with the elimination of capitalism, not before.

But fighting for reforms helps build the fighting organizations that we all need; gives us the opportunity to work through challenges like forms of organization, decision-making and leadership; and ultimately teaches us that true justice cannot be won within an unjust system.

There are many other issues we could examine, but we hope this is at least a modest contribution to an ongoing discussion.

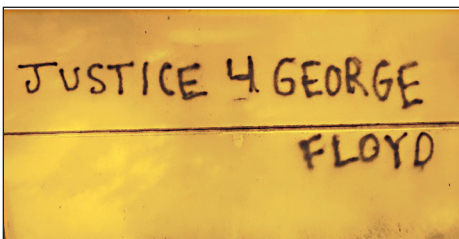
For more on the REBELLION, see page 8-9.

May 29: Day 1

By Phil Wilayto

The online flier called for people to gather on Friday evening, May 29, at Richmond's Monroe Park, a traditional site for protests. Deep anger had been building over the brutal murder days before of George Floyd in Minneapolis, and uprisings were already happening in other cities.

This reporter drove downtown to see what was happening.



Photos by Phil Wilayto

Graffiti on West Grace Street, May 29.

The first thing I noticed was the number of Black people in the streets around 9th and Broad. That area is usually pretty deserted after dark. A mother walked by with two young children, headed toward the park. Two young men in a flashy car drove by with the radio blaring NWA's "Fuck the Police." A young couple stood on a street corner. When I asked what was happening, they said they weren't sure, but "everybody" was coming out.

I drove east on Grace Street, toward Monroe. That's when I saw the first anti-cop graffiti: "ACAB." "Fuck 12." And over and over, "Justice for George Floyd."

I saw the first dumpster fire in the 300 block of East Grace. I pulled over, took a few pictures - and then noticed the cops standing by their cars on the other side of the dumpster.

Maybe time to keep moving.

The next dumpster fire - the one with "George Floyd" tagged on the side - was in the 100 block of West Grace, right next to police headquarters. A crowd was in the parking lot; I heard what sounded like firecrackers going off. I figured no one would really appreciate having their photo taken, so I got a few shots of the dumpster, got back in my car and kept going.

Elsewhere in the city, someone torched a GRTC Pulse bus and trashed a Whole Foods store, both widely seen as symbols of gentrification. A Wells Fargo branch also got hit, mabe by someone familiar with that bank's long history of corruption and racial discrimination.

And some people with apparently no sense of history or politics threw bricks through the windows of a 120-year-old, Black-owned jewelry store and a Jewish synagogue.

And so began The Rebellion.

May 30: Day 2

By Phil Wilayto

Tonight the action was on Monument Avenue, the country's pre-eminent shrine to the slavery-defending Confederacy.

There were a lot of people around the statue of Gen. J.E.B. Stuart. I looked for a parking space. By the time I got back, the crowd had pretty much covered the whole statue with graffiti.

It was stunning. So many times I had driven past these symbols of white supremacy, just hating their smug arrogance. And here were scores of young people, of all races, venting their anger and providing the "context" that the mayor's Monument Avenue Commission had recommended as a way to avoid actually taking them down.

After a bit, we all headed west, toward the 60-foot-tall monument to Gen. Robert E. Lee, a slave owner and patron saint of the Confederacy. The crowd was growing and had taken the street.

Suddenly I noticed a police car driving in our same direction. A young man walking his bike in the street had to hug the parked cars to his right to avoid getting hit. Some in the crowd began yelling.

Then a young Black guy hurled an egg toward the car. I didn't see it hit, but the "splat" sound was unmistakable.

The cop turned a sharp left, scooted across the median and headed west, against the traffic, rapidly picking up speed. I don't know whether it was fear or anger or both, but either way it was impressive.

Then we moved on to the massive memorial to Confederate President Jefferson Davis and the statue of Gen. Stonewall Jackson at Arthur Ashe Boulevard. It was the same story at each stop: people spray painted the statues with every insult to the police and racism they could think of.

I thought of all the times we had protested at these statues, going back to Jan. 19, 2007, the 200th anniversary of Lee's birth, when the state had spent \$450,000 to spruce up his statue.

On this night, the statues were finally spruced, and they looked wonderful.

I decided to call it a night and headed home.

On the way, I saw a crowd of cops and guys in full military battle gear, plus fire trucks, by the Rumors of War statue in front of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. I thought maybe some right-winger had vandalized it, so I stopped and asked one of the soldier-looking guys what was going on.

"Move your car!" he yelled.

When I got home and checked the news, I learned there had been a fire next door at the national headquarters of the Daughters of the Confederacy, the 126-year-old organization responsible for putting up many of the Confederate monuments around the country. Someone had apparently tossed a Molotov cocktail through a window and it landed on Stonewall Jackson's revered battle flag, burning it to a crisp.

There simply is no substitute for a good aim.

May 31: Day 3

By Kat McNeal

I was arrested at a protest last night and spent the night in the Richmond city jail. I was charged with a misdemeanor for breaking the governor's new 8 p.m. curfew and released after nine hours - approximately three of which I spent on a bus with my hands zip-tied behind my back. When I left the jail premises after 12 hours, there were still people sitting in buses waiting to be processed. From reports this morning, I see that 233 people were arrested.

According to a VPM story, Police Chief William Smith said, "I want to make sure that the citizens of Richmond know that our enforcement of the curfew was directed solely at those that were involved in violence and destruction of our city."

Police further claimed, according to a WRIC article, to have arrested "members of ANTIFA and numerous people from outside of the Richmond area and Virginia."

These are absolute lies. From the time I arrived at the Lee monument around 6 p.m. to the point at which I was arrested on Leigh Street around 10 p.m., I didn't see any kind of violence or even vandalism from any of the many thousands of protesters who took the streets.

The protest was high-energy and vocally militant, but not destructive. The crowd began as a multiracial group slanted heavily to younger people. As the evening wore on and 8 p.m. passed, the proportion of Black protesters and youth only became higher.

Some of those in the crowd may have had out-of-town addresses - Richmond is home to three major universities, with a collective student population in the tens of thousands - and I am certain that many did in fact share "membership" in the ideology of anti-fascism, as I do.

But the cops didn't bring up the boogeyman of "antifa" or the specter of outside agitators to account for these expected, benign elements of the crowd. They did so, and lied about the actions of those arrested, to tell the public that this was a Bad Protest. By telling us what a Bad Protest looks like, the police are also telling us what a Good Protest looks like: small, nonthreatening, compliant, easily-appeased. This narrative is an establishment tactic to corral the uprising of people enduring the unendurable: Racist murders and brutality at the hands of the country's police, against which they have no recourse, year after year and death after death - and render them ignorable.

We were not ignorable last night. Black Lives Matter.

June 1: Day 4

By Joseph Rogers

Last night, the Richmond Police Department used tear gas and other chemical agents against city residents gathered at the Lee and Stewart monuments. I watched as a mother buried her daughter's face in her shirt to spare her from the gas. People with their dogs fled to keep their pets safe, having brought them to a peaceful gathering. Friends, siblings and total strangers got up from being on their knees with hands in the air to grabbing for one another to get whomever they could to safety. The police last night were brutal and unwarranted in their aggression.

But this post isn't about that.

This post is about the marchers who formed back up. It is about the people who stayed after an ambulance had to carry away someone who had inhaled the gas. It is about the folks who reclaimed the statues from which they had been driven away.

This post is about the people who left their houses as the march picked up again down Monument Avenue. The people who waved and chanted and offered food and drink and rest to anyone who needed it.

This post is about the drivers of the cars who, after hearing about the gassing, dropped whatever they were doing, wherever they were and put themselves in the front and back of the



J.E.B. Stewart, conceptualized, May30.

line to shield marchers from other vehicles and the only source of violence last night, the police.

This post is about the young Black man - because they were almost all young and almost all Black last night - who said, "I really thought that Richmond hated each other, but all I feel is love here."

This post is about our city rising to demand a better life, a better world. About doing it together, brought out by grief, fueled by anger and guided by love.

This post is about Richmond.

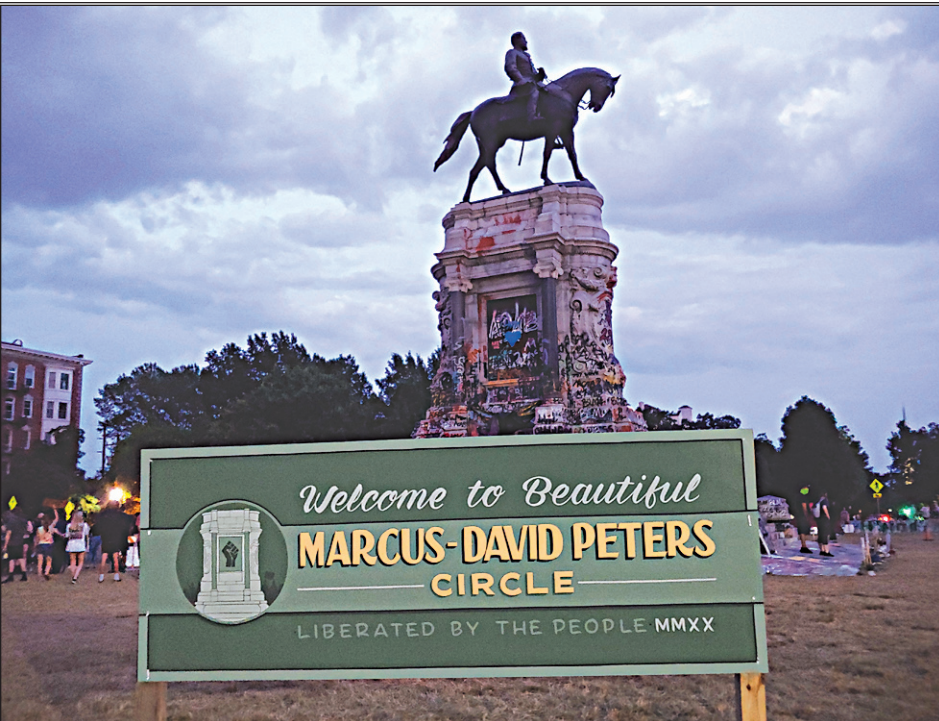


Photo by Phil Wilayto

The Robert E. Lee statue may still be standing, but the circle around it is now named in honor of a Black man fatally shot on May 14, 2018, by a Richmond cop.

At the MDP Circle

Staff Report

It was Monday, Aug. 10, about an hour before sunset, and Jeffrey Peters was where he often is these days: At the circle named for his nephew, Marcus-David Peters.

"It's real peaceful here," he told the Defender. "It's community. People are walking around, sharing fruit and herbs from the garden. I usually come during the day, but I met a gentleman who's down here in the evenings more than I am, and he says it's the same feeling. People bring their families, there's cold water, food, just a good atmosphere."

Peters says he's been coming to the Marcus-David Peters Circle for about a month and a half.

"I was a little hesitant to come out when the first uprising started, because I didn't want people to think I was stepping on George Floyd and Breonna Taylor," he said. "But then a friend said, Hey, why aren't you going down there? And that changed my mind. And when we came down, we were well-received."

"There's food now, but people aren't cooking anymore, because they took all their grills. They used to cook and feed the homeless, give out hot dogs, hamburgers, juice, chips. The police were complaining about that, giving people stuff for free."

So when did people start calling it the Marcus-David Peters Circle?

"The first day I came down here, I saw a handwritten sign. Then that disappeared and someone put up another. Then that disappeared and another one went up, a little bigger, and in a couple of days that was gone."

"Then the big one went up. I don't know who did it. It was done organically, by the community. It just brought my nephew back into the conversation. If you come down here and you see the big sign that says Marcus-David Peters, you say, Who is that? So that's why I come down here, to tell people who he was. People talk about Black Lives Matter, but we need to address the people who have been killed here, right in this town."

"The only time there's really trouble is when someone drives by and calls us [the n-word]. A few days ago, someone drove by and yelled at a white woman that they were going to cut her head off. Inside the Circle, in the last two months, there were maybe one or two verbal confrontations, but people work it out. The only time I see violence is when the cops come."

The grassy circle around the Lee statue is owned by the state, so technically it comes under the capitol or state police.

"The police don't come into the Circle, only if the state police come in, they'll go in behind them," Peters said. "The only people

Where we're at with the demands

The following seven demands have been generally adopted as the goals of the Richmond Rebellion.

1) REOPEN THE MARCUS-DAVID

PETERS CASE - *We call on Richmond Commonwealth's Attorney Colette McEachin to reopen Marcus' case to provide a second chance for Justice.*

Princess Blanding, sister of Marcus-David Peters and founder of Justice & Reformation, says she and her uncle Jeffrey Peters met July 7 with Richmond Commonwealth's Attorney Colette McEachin to ask that the case be reopened. She said McEachin said she would review the case and, if she came up with a different conclusion than her predecessor, Michael Herring, she would reopen the case. McEachin worked under Herring for about 20 years. As of Aug. 13, Blanding says her family has yet to hear anything more from McEachin.

2) DEFUND THE POLICE - *Reallocate funds from the Richmond Police Department's extremely large budget to fund the Marcus Alert System and Civilian Review Board, as well as human services addressing health care, employment, our public education system, the environment and general community welfare.*

On July 27, Richmond City Council voted 7-2 against a resolution that would have "requested an analysis of what the city gives the Richmond Police Department, with a goal of reassigning funds for mental health, social services and drug abuse services," according to ABC Channel 8. The only council members supporting the resolution were 4th District representative Stephanie Lynch and the 9th District's Michael Jones.

they're bothering now are the ones with the tents. Their main thing is to come down here and agitate the people on the outside, where they have jurisdiction. And that's the only time there are problems.

By then it was dark, and Peters was getting ready to go home.

"It's community taking care of community," he said. "All of us are playing our part. We can't let them divide us. We work out our differences in private, and then come together in public as one."

3) A MARCUS ALERT SYSTEM - *The Marcus Alert System would mandate that mental health professionals be the first responders in a suspected or confirmed mental health crisis, with police only as their "back up" in the event that NON-LETHAL force is needed.*

Also on July 27, City Council agreed to create a working group to develop the Marcus Alert, even though the Peters family is already working on this with Mayor Stoney. Princess Blanding and several other community organizers met with Stoney and one of his senior aides on July 13, along with officials from the Richmond Behavioral Health Authority, Richmond and Henrico Health Departments and the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Mayor Stoney has publicly pledged that the Marcus Alert will be implemented in Richmond. Says Blanding, "My feelings are that actions speak louder than words. The City agreed to a follow-up meeting two weeks later and now they have pushed it out more than a month." The next meeting with the mayor is now scheduled for Aug. 20.

On the state level, Delegate Jeffrey Bourne and Sen. Jennifer McClellan are sponsoring bills that would mandate localities create their own Marcus Alert systems. The two legislators are working with the Peters family and supporters on this effort. However, Blanding says her family is getting "MAJOR pushback on naming the bill after Marcus-David Peters. Political games all day. They do not want Marcus-David Peter's name to be attached to this bill."

4) AN INDEPENDENT CIVILIAN REVIEW BOARD WITH SUBPOENA POWER - *to receive and investigate claims of police abuse. We do not trust the police to police themselves.*

Also on July 27, City Council voted to appoint a review board that, according to the Richmond Times-Dispatch, "would be charged with laying the groundwork for an oversight body that could investigate complaints and other incidents involving the Richmond Police Department." The board would be responsible for submitting a final report with recommendations for its framework and a proposed annual budget by March 1. Princess Blanding, who applied to join the board but was rejected because she is not a city resident, told the Defender she thought council's decisions on the Marcus Alert and the Civilian Review Board

See **DEMANDS** on page 5.

cops, courts & prisons

Some of the people who have been shot by Richmond law enforcement since 2001

These are just some of the shootings of civilians by Richmond law enforcement officers over the past 19 years. Unless otherwise noted, all the victims were Black.

LEVESTER CARTER, 22, June 8, 2001 - Shot to death in Fairfield Court. Police report Carter fled a car after a routine traffic stop, wrestled a gun from a pursuing officer, shot the officer and then was shot three times in the chest while pointing the gun at approaching officers. Numerous eyewitnesses reported Carter was shot repeatedly after being wounded and lying unarmed on the ground. The autopsy report obtained by Virginia Defender Editor Phil Wilayto, at the time a staff writer for the Richmond Free Press, revealed that Carter was hit 13 times - 11 times in the back of his body, with 10 shots at an upward angle, showing he was lying face down when hit with those bullets. The case went to a grand jury, but testimony by eyewitnesses was contradicted by others who repeated the police version of the killing.

PABLO HERCULES (Latino), 29, June 10, 2001 - Shot to death by an off-duty Richmond sheriff's deputy working as a security guard at a restaurant in the 600 block of East Belt Boulevard. Police report Hercules threw rocks at the deputy's head after being denied entry to the restaurant. A companion of Hercules said the slain man threw some pebbles. Hercules was shot twice in the head.

JAMES A. LEWIS (race not known), 49, Oct. 21, 2001 - Shot to death when police entered his home after he threatened to kill himself and asked his girlfriend to call 911. Reportedly a depressed alcoholic, police said he aimed a gun at an officer. The police shot him four times.

VERLON M. JOHNSON, 29, May 17, 2002 - Shot to death on his front porch in South Side as a nine-member police team attempted to arrest him on robbery and firearms charges. Police report Johnson, naked from the waist up, thrust one hand into his pants pocket and refused to remove it when ordered. No gun was

found on or near Johnson. Detective David Melvin, the only officer at the scene to pull his gun, was charged with involuntary manslaughter. Following two mistrials, he was acquitted at the third trial. The City settled out-of-court with Johnson's widow for an undisclosed amount.

JERAMY ONASSIS GILLIAM (race not known), 26, July 20, 2002 - Shot to death near the 2300 block of Idlewood Avenue by Officer William "Jody" Blackwell, who was investigating a report of a burglary in progress. Police report Gilliam aimed a gun at the officer and was shot during a struggle. The autopsy showed Gilliam was shot twice in the back at close range. His fingerprints did not appear on the recovered weapon, which was found 35 feet from his body. There were no witnesses to the shooting. In June 2020, Blackwell was briefly appointed interim police chief, and then returned to his previous position as a major.

ISAAC JEROME THOMPSON, Dec. 16, 2002 - Shot to death just north of Walmsley Boulevard. Police report Thompson fled after a vehicle stop and fired on officers, hitting one several times. Initial Police Department media release stated the vehicle was stopped for "improper registration." Police Spokesman Det. Ron Brown was quoted in the Richmond Times-Dispatch as saying it was not immediately clear why Thompson was stopped.



MARCUS-DAVID PETERS

DWAYNE SWANN & TAIQUAN BYRD, Feb. 4, 2004: Both shot and wounded in Hillside Court when police shot into a car the two men had entered while being pursued by police. Neither man was armed. The officers were all in plain clothes, although reportedly wearing vests marked "Richmond Police." Police report the two men tried to run over an officer. Then-Chief Andre Parker said on Oct. 27 that the officers involved were still on administrative leave and that the incident was being investigated by State Police.

QUINSHAWN BOOKER, 20, May 29, 2004: Shot to death in the 1200 block of Admiral Gravelly Boulevard. Police report Booker slipped and shot himself in the head as he was being pursued by officers. The autopsy reported that a bullet entered the back of his head. A witness reported hearing three shots.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN (race not known), June 13, 2004 - Shot to death on Oliver Hill Way at East Clay Street. Police reported the man shot himself in the head after the car in which he was riding was stopped for a traffic violation.

CURTIS BLOUNT, Sept. 20, 2004 - Shot

to death in an alley behind a convenience store on Mosby Avenue. Newspaper reports suggested a contact wound to the head. The case was not referred to State Police for review. All officers were returned to duty. Then-Chief Andre Parker refused to discuss the shooting.

KESHAWN HARGROVE, 20, Aug. 5, 2015 - Shot to death in an alley near West Cary and Meadow streets. Police said he was running from officers when he fired at them, hitting one. When then-Chief Alfred Durham arrived on the scene, he immediately announced to the crowd that had gathered that he would not stand for any criticisms of his officers. Virginia Defender Editor Phil Wilayto later reported that he had viewed a video of the incident that showed an officer seemingly taking Hargrove's pulse three times over several minutes while the man lay bleeding in the alley.

MARCUS-DAVID PETERS, 24, May 24, 2018 - Shot to death on the edge of Interstate 95 while unclothed and experiencing a mental health crisis. At a press conference held at police headquarters, then-Chief Alfred Durham denied that the officer had precipitated the confrontation by approaching Peters, even though the police cam video of the incident clearly shows that the officer had approached him, with a drawn Taser gun. The shooting attracted national attention and has led to local and statewide calls for a Marcus Alert system in which trained mental health professionals would be in the lead in similar situations, with police only available as back-up if needed, with nonlethal force.

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COVID-19 cases found in Richmond jail; activists had pressed for testing



Photo by Phil Wilayto

More than 50 vehicles, honking horns and displaying signs, circle in front of the Richmond jail, demanding the release of inmates threatened by COVID-19.

By Phil Wilayto

Yes, there are COVID-19 cases in the Richmond city jail. And not all those infected are showing symptoms.

In response to a FOIA request by The Virginia Defender, Richmond Sheriff Antionette Irving has provided the following information:

The jail administration has arranged for the testing of 503 inmates who volunteered to be tested. Of these, 340 were tested on July 7, 21 and 27. On those days, there were an average of 644 inmates in the jail, so about one in five were not tested.

Of the inmates who were tested, 12 were found to be infected with the virus. Of these, four were not exhibiting any symptoms.

The sheriff reported that deputies and administrative staff also were tested. Two out of the 325 staff members tested positive, she stated, both of whom were exhibiting symptoms.

As of Aug. 6, there had been no COVID-19-related deaths among inmates or staff at the jail, according to the sheriff.

Earlier this year, the jail, officially known as the Richmond City Justice Center, was the target of four weekly car caravan protests demanding the early release of inmates because of the dangers the novel coronavirus poses to confined populations, such as those in correctional facilities and nursing homes.

The protests were sponsored by the Richmond #FreeOurPeople coalition, which included the Legal Aid Justice Center, Richmond Community Bail Fund, Southerners On New Ground and the Virginia Defenders.

After the fourth protest, Sheriff Irving agreed to participate in a conference call with coalition representatives, including this reporter.

Toward the end of the April 27 conversation, I asked the sheriff how many jail inmates and staff members had been tested for COVID-19. She said the jail tests those who ask for the test or are showing symptoms. Pressed on how many tests had actually been administered, she said none.

Irving added that she did not have any test kits, but would use them if she had them.

On May 11, the coalition emailed Dr. Danny Avula, director of the Richmond and Henrico health departments, asking if he could arrange for test kits to be supplied to the jail.

He responded May 15, stating, "To date, the Richmond City Justice Center has no confirmed cases, and as a result, we have not considered widespread testing. The Richmond City Health District has provided test kits to RCJC medical staff so that testing can be conducted on any inmates or staff who exhibit symptoms, and a PPS would be considered and likely recommended if COVID-19 was identified."

PPS testing involves testing a representative sampling of a population.

Across the state, testing in jails and prisons have found both symptomatic and asymptomatic cases of the novel coronavirus, demonstrating that testing only when an inmate shows symptoms is completely inadequate to determine if there are any active cases in the facility.

Local and regional jails are independent of the DOC, but as of June 17, Chesterfield County's jail, which tests all its inmates, was reporting 37 active COVID-19 cases among its 230 inmates, about 16 percent of its population. The majority of those cases were asymptomatic.

As of Aug. 5, the jail was reporting no cases among 300 inmates.

The Chesterfield jail posts the number of current cases on its website. To date, the Richmond jail does not do that.

According to Dr. Avula, whether to do so would be up to Sheriff Irving.



Photo by Queen Zakia Shabazz

Participants in the latest "Angel Walk" march to the Hopewell police station.

Police shooting victim Angel DeCarlo remembered in Hopewell

By Queen Zakia Shabazz

June 23 would have been Angel DeCarlo's 33rd birthday - if she hadn't been fatally shot by a Hopewell police officer on Dec. 19, 2018.

Angel's family, friends and supporters marked the occasion by holding another in a series of "Angel Walks" to remember the young woman and continue to demand justice for her. This walk, held on Saturday, June 20, drew more than 100 people chanting "Justice for Angel!" and "Black Lives Matter!" The event was hosted by Angel's mother, evangelist and former special education teacher Emily DeCarlo.

The walk began at the scene of Angel's death in the 600 block of Elm Street and traveled more than a mile to Ashford Civic Plaza, right across from the Hopewell police station, where several officers stood watching the procession.

Standing socially distanced, Angel's supporters stood at the plaza and listened as speakers took turns paying tribute to Angel's life. Her mother was the first to speak, reciting a poem titled "One Tiny Tear."

The rally's featured speaker was state Senator Joe Morrissey, who stated that he would introduce legislation to create a mental health court. Angel struggled with mental health issues and may have been experiencing a crisis when she was killed. Morrissey also stated his support for a community service board "with teeth," the prohibition of the commonly used (by police) choke hold and a registry of bad cops.

First Lady Bell of Hopewell's Jesus Christ Holiness Church of God told the Defender that Angel's death was a "wake-up call."

"We have been in the community six

years and have seen some devastation, some signs that we need to improve in our Black community," she said. "Angel DeCarlo's death really hurt and hit us hard. We need to be more proactive in the house, in making decisions in our lawmaking. We have been lax. But now it's time for us to stand up and say the things we have been fearing to say: That we matter, that our vote matters. If our money matters, then our vote matters. That's why I'm here to speak for Angel, 'cause she's no longer here to speak for herself."

There has been no justice for Angel. The police officer who shot and killed her has not been charged and, according to her mother, is still a member of the Hopewell Police Department.

Angel's death was the third officer-involved fatal shooting in Hopewell in the previous four years.

The advocacy organization United Parents Against Lead continues to demand:

- Full transparency and criminal charges for the officer who killed Angel
- Release of the police body cam and dash cameras from the scene on Elm Street
- Community training of police officers to include implicit bias and respect for life
- NAMI or other reputable mental health crisis de-escalation training for police officers
- Mandatory periodic lead testing of all police officers who handle munitions

Queen Zakia Shabazz is the founder and national director of United Parents Against Lead, which advocates for lead-free environments for children and their families. For information: <https://upal.org>.

In our opinion

It's past time to Free Jermaine Doss!

Jermaine Doss has a parole hearing scheduled for Aug. 25, his first since he was sent to prison back in 2000 for a crime he did not commit. The irony is that, after 20 years of fighting his conviction in the courts, it may finally be another judicial injustice that opens his cell door to freedom.

Jermaine is one of more than 300 so-called "Fishback" prisoners - those sentenced after 1995, when Virginia abolished parole, but before 2000, when jurors were finally told it had been abolished.

During those five years, jurors would often recommend long sentences on the assumption that defendants would only serve part of the time. That assumption was wrong.

Finally, in 2000, the Virginia Supreme Court decided in the case of Richard David Fishback that it "simply defies reason" not to tell jurors about the abolishment of parole, and ruled that jurors had to be told of the change.

But nothing was done about the hundreds of defendants who had received the long sentences - until last January, when the 2020 General Assembly passed a bill allowing Fishback prisoners to be considered for parole.

In Jermaine's case, he was charged with murder-for-hire, but convicted of murder and sentenced to life-plus-38 years.

The man who actually committed the murder got 17 years, plus a few more for related charges.

There's a good chance the parole board might decide to let Jermaine return to his family in Norfolk. They know he didn't kill anyone. He's already served 20 years. He hasn't broken a single prison rule in the last 14. He has a loving, supportive family waiting to take him in. He's even got the promise of a job. He's a Fishback prisoner. And the governor has said he wants to release as many prisoners as possible because of the dangers posed by COVID-19.

What the board will look at is Jermaine's record in prison and the situation waiting for him on the outside, to determine if he's a good prospect for release.

They won't be re-examining his case to decide if he's actually innocent. They won't consider that the only evidence against him was the testimony of the self-admitted killer, who since Jermaine's trial has repeatedly said he only testified against him because prosecutors had told him that otherwise he would face the death penalty.

They won't hear that the detective who handled the cases of both the killer and Jermaine was the notorious Robert Glenn Ford, now serving 12-and-a-half years for extortion and then lying about it to the FBI. They won't hear how the judge at Jermaine's trial instructed the jury that murder is a "lesser-included offense" to murder-for-hire, but that murder isn't actually an included offense.

And they won't hear about how Jermaine's family submitted a request for a governor's pardon more than six years ago, but have never received one word in response.

No, the Parole Board won't hear anything about the injustice in Jermaine's case that his family has been publicizing for the past 20 years. All they will hear is that Jermaine is a perfect candidate for early release.

And all we can do is hope they do the right thing and finally send Jermaine Doss home.

Letters to the Editor

Inside the Richmond jail

While the global COVID-19 pandemic rages largely unchecked across the U.S., American jails and prisons have become something of a series of petri dishes, and the Richmond Justice Center is no exception.

In late July, two inmates in particular, Angelo Long and Virgil Tucker, found themselves dangerously familiar with this phenomenon when they were tasked with cleaning and disinfecting four COVID-19-positive pods within the Richmond Justice Center. By both Long's and Tucker's accounts (which they have given me permission to share), they were pulled off their pod with no warning, no briefing and instructed to begin sanitizing the positive pods.

It is unclear how or why they were chosen to perform this job. Neither were provided PPE beyond two thin, single-layer cotton face masks and a few pairs of nitrile gloves, and both were locked in the positive pods with harsh cleaning agents until their task was finished.

While hazmat suits are available within the Justice Center and were visibly stacked within reach on the cell block while Long and Tucker were cleaning, by Long's account, they are reserved for inmates making appearances in court and for deputies on staff, should they choose to wear them.

Both Long and Tucker were promised compensation for their work, although this was not expanded upon until they had each finished cleaning, at which point they received instant ramen, one pack of cookies and one bag of chips from the commissary.

Soon after, Long and Tucker were sent back to their pods in the clothing they cleaned in, despite the fact that their possible exposure endangered the other, unexposed in-



Jermaine Doss, center, with his brother Jabbar and sister Felicia. The photo was taken at Sussex II prison in Waverly, Va.

Photo courtesy the Doss family

mates still there. Eventually, after other inmates repeatedly complained to staff about the overpowering smell of cleaning agents on their clothing, they were both provided with clean jumpsuits and t-shirts. Since their exposure to these four COVID-positive pods and the agents they used to clean them, both Long and Tucker have reported to me headaches, sneezing, coughing, body aches, difficulty sleeping and breathing.

On July 2nd, in an email to the Richmond Free Press, Catherine Green wrote on behalf of Sheriff Irving that mass testing

was scheduled on the 6th and 7th of that same month. However, as of this writing on August 10th, Long relays to me that testing is optional, offered seemingly at random and that he estimates only 20 percent of the inmate population at the Richmond Justice Center has been tested.

Both Long and Tucker are nonviolent offenders; Long has been incarcerated without trial for 12 months and Tucker for seven.

Kat Harville
RICHMOND

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Why we are protesting

By Princess Blanding

After the unjust murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, the Richmond community, along with the rest of the country, has taken a strong stand to demand that legislative changes be made to address police brutality, especially in the Black community; to call for an end to qualified immunity for law enforcement; and to move forward with legislative changes that hold our police departments accountable for their behaviors.

After so many years of police murders of Black people, the brutal death of George Floyd was the last straw. To see the officers kneel on Mr. Floyd's neck while he continuously said, "I can't breathe" and called for his mother hit the hearts of people across all racial barriers.

The Richmond community has taken a strong, united stand to say, "No More!" and to demand accountability from our elected and appointed officials, who continue to condone and enable this racist system that continuously harasses, demonizes, dehumanizes, unjustly incarcerates and murders our Black People. The deep-rooted racism is very clearly seen and deeply felt in our Black communities.

Richmond has had our own local George Floyd: my brother, Marcus-David Peters, who was fatally shot by a Richmond police officer on May 14, 2018, while unarmed, completely undressed and experiencing a mental health crisis. After Mr. Floyd's death, my brother's killing was pushed back up to the front of our community members' minds.

Since 2018, my family and I have been fighting for the creation of a Marcus Alert system in which mental health experts would be the first responders in a suspected or confirmed mental health crisis, with police present only as backup, with nonlethal force.

We also have been fighting for the creation of an independent Civilian Review Board with subpoena power.

These demands, along with four others (see "The Rebellion's Demands: on page 9), have been embraced by the Richmond community, along with the demand that the names of all officers charged with misconduct during the protests be made public.

I believe that what Black people want to come out of this movement is that all seven demands be met. We want clear, concrete legislative changes that hold police officers accountable - in addition to the creation of independent civilian review boards with sub-



poena power, Virginia needs to do away with qualified immunity.

I believe that Black people also want to see the police department be defunded and Black futures be funded. We want to see police officers removed from our schools and replaced with school counselors to help end the school-to-prison pipeline. We want to see more systems of community care, to include equitable housing and health care. We want to see an end to the massive number of evictions, especially during this time of coronavirus pandemic that sees no sign of ending anytime soon.

I am a strong believer that there is a lot of power in Unity, and that We the People have a lot of power, and we have to continue to unite and show the people in power, that We the People have the ultimate power.

Princess Blanding is the sister of Marcus-David Peeters.

By Goad Gasby

Since May of this year, the city of Richmond has seen daily protests with one common theme: The police have an unchecked amount of power, and that must end.

When it comes time to shrink the budget of government services, one thing that is off the table is police departments. In the last decade, crime against property has stayed constant, while the annual police budget has gone up over \$15 million a year. While other government services are at risk of being slashed every year, the police budget keeps growing.

When it comes to use of force during these protests, there has been no sign that, no matter who the chief is, the Richmond police will stop using chemical agents, flashbang grenades and less-lethal rounds. No police officer has been held accountable for the use of these tactics, nor has their identity been made public since these protests began.

The June 1st event when Richmond police deployed chemical gasses on peaceful protesters at the Lee statue did not result in any officers being held accountable for their actions.

On May 31st, a police officer used pepper spray on a resident in his home, but that incident has yielded no announcements of disciplinary actions from the City.

A June 13th protest in which a Richmond police officer in his SUV jumped a curb and hit two protesters rather than go in reverse initially caused Mayor Stoney to call for an investigation, but then he was secretly



recorded telling Richmond police officers that he thought the protesters were at fault.

A few weeks later, the Richmond Commonwealth's Attorney determined that the police were not at fault and said no further action would be taken.

As I watch these protests continue, I see the mayor, the Commonwealth's Attorney and the majority of City Council members stand by and not take any actions to deter the police from abusing their authority.

Seeing democratically elected officials seem ineffective in challenging police procedure has made me believe that a democratic society and Richmond police are not compatible.

Goad Gasby is a Richmond activist who has been reporting on the Rebellion.

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reclaiming our sacred ground



Mayor Levar Stoney announces he has \$3.5 million reserved to create the Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park. In the background, from left: Ana Edwards, chair of the Defenders' Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project; Elizabeth Kostelny, Executive Director, Preservation Virginia; Shockoe Bottom business owner Susan Gaible; archaeologist Ellen Chapman; City Councilman Michael Jones; City Council President Cynthia Newbille; Untold RVA Founder Free Bangura; "Slave Trail" Commission member Rev. Ben Campbell; and "Slave Trail" Commission Chair Delores McQuinn. Except for Jones and Rev. Campbell, all are members of the mayor's Shockoe Alliance.

Photo by Phil Wilayto

Mayor Stoney has \$3.5 million for the nine-acre Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park - or does he?

By Phil Wilayto

In a major milestone in the decades-long struggle to reclaim and properly memorialize the downtown area that once was the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade, Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney has publicly committed \$3.5 million in City money to create the Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park.

Stoney, who is facing four challengers in the November mayoral election - all of whom have also endorsed the park - made the announcement July 28 at a press conference held at the site known as the Devil's Half-Acre where the notorious slave jail owned by Robert Lumpkin once stood.

Also speaking and - for the first time endorsing the community proposal for the memorial park - was Delegate Delores McQuinn, chair of Richmond City Council's "Slave Trail" Commission, and City Council President Cynthia Newbille, who represents council on the commission.

Joining them was Ana Edwards, chair of the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project of the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality. The Defenders participated in the 10-year struggle that in 2011 succeeded

in removing a Virginia Commonwealth University parking lot desecrating what is now known as the African Burial Ground; led the two-year campaign that blocked the corporate-promoted plan to build a baseball stadium in Shockoe Bottom; guided the community process that in 2015 produced the proposal for the nine-acre memorial park; and since then has led the campaign to win popular support and finally the mayor's financial commitment to the park proposal.

In her remarks, Edwards credited the work of thousands of engaged people with mak-

ing Shockoe Bottom an issue that could not be ignored, and specifically cited the ongoing "uprisings to protest historic injustices" with helping to produce the political will to commit to the memorial park. She also took the opportunity to list the seven main demands of the Richmond protests.

Mayor Stoney said the \$3.5 million for the memorial park is already available from "surplus" City funds, and is separate from a budget request he will make to City Council for \$25-\$50 million to be spent over five years for general memorialization in Shockoe Bottom.

As for a timeline for developing the park, he said it would be up to the Shockoe Alliance, the network he created to address issues in the Bottom, to develop the specific plans. Edwards, McQuinn and Newbille are all members of that group.

Significantly, Stoney, McQuinn and Newbille each described the proposed park as including the African Burial Ground, the Devil's Half-Acre and two blocks east of the CSX railroad tracks where at least three other slave jails once were located. Those two blocks, a sticking point in the Defenders' negotiations with the City, were included in the community proposal in order to block further attempts at inappropriate development in the area, such as a stadium.

Unfortunately, other than a passing reference to "community advocates," none of the three mentioned the decades-long struggle that brought the city to this moment.

Asked about a timeline for developing the park, Mayor Stoney told the Defender that the \$3.5 million was already available, but designing the park would take some time. Asked if the Black community would receive the primary financial benefits of the park's development, Stoney said that entities receiving contracts would have to have the "expertise" necessary to do the work, but that "Black and Brown voices need to be involved." To date, most of the conceptual, design and development companies hired to do work on the Devil's Half-Acre have been white-owned.

An Associated Press story about the announcement was carried in The New York Times, adding to the national exposure that Soney is receiving on this issue.

After the mayor's press conference, the Richmond Free Press ran a story that questioned if Stoney actually has the authority to allocate money for a new project, or whether he would need to ask permission from City Council.

The Defender wrote Council president Newbille for a clarification. We received this response, from Steve Skinner, from the Council Chief of Staff Office:

"Mr. Wilayto - Per your question - yes, such would need Richmond City Council approval - steve"

We also emailed Mayor Stoney to ask if he thought he had to go through council before he could provide the \$3.5 million for the park.

We sent the email on Aug. 7.

A week later, we were still waiting for an answer.



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Time to hit the brakes on the Seabrook deal?

By Ana Edwards

In September 2019, Richmond city council rejected a controversial resolution submitted by Mayor Levar Stoney on behalf of Weimans Bakery LLC. The resolution was for a 40-year lease between Weimans and the city for the Seabrook Tobacco Warehouse site on E. Grace Street between 17th and 18th streets in Shockoe Bottom. It was rejected because there was an outstanding 2014 ordinance calling for archaeological research of the historically significant site, and it was controversial because it involved a historic slavery-related site, and the mayor's own Shockoe Alliance had not yet completed the Shockoe Bottom small-area master plan.

The warehouse, operating from 1810-1910, had used enslaved labor for the 50 years before the Civil War. The bakery property across the street was purchased by local developer H. Louis Salomonsky (a major force behind the failed attempt to put a baseball stadium in the Bottom), who then formed Weimans Bakery LLC to build a multi-story boutique hotel. Plans were approved by city council in 2018, and the parking lease was a required step in securing financing for the project.

It stretches the imagination to believe that the mayor of Richmond, with a stated focus on the importance of Shockoe Bottom's history, was not aware of this ordinance, but when Mayor Stoney attended the October 2019 meeting of the Shockoe Alliance, he said, "This is an instance of the left hand not knowing what the right hand was doing," and apologized.

The Shockoe Alliance requested that the archaeological research be done before it could make any recommendations. That work took place that fall. In January 2020, the City's contractor, Dutton+Associates, presented their findings: Two trenches had shown only fill soil with no historical material to a depth of 10 feet. Because all improvements to the lot, beyond light and utility poles, would be above ground, the developer's representative agreed to submit to the Alliance a revised lease stipulating no underground disturbances and their reasonable participation in onsite historic preservation or interpretation so that the site's history would remain a visible part of the area's public history fabric.

In a difficult period, antiwar movement growing in Virginia

After President Trump ordered the January drone strike near Baghdad International Airport that killed top Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani, massive protests broke out across the Middle East, where the head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' elite Quds Force was revered as someone who had helped various resistance movements stand up to U.S. aggression.

There were also more than 200 protests in the United States, where the attack stirred fears of yet another war.

Here in Virginia, the protests spurred the

formation of two new antiwar coalitions, in Richmond and the Norfolk area.

The Richmond Coalition for Peace, Justice, and Jobs has produced a webinar titled "No More War." The virtual forum, moderated by Food Not Bomb's Jim Geary, features presentations by Adeeb Abed of Richmonders for Peace in Israel and Palestine; Vanessa Bolin of the Richmond Indigenous Society; Iranian-American activist Sanaz Ghodsi; and Phil Wilayto of the Virginia Defenders.

The presentations were followed by a panel discussion moderated by Geary and Austin Gonzales of the Richmond chapter of Democratic Socialists of America. Cathryn Virginia of the Richmond chapter of the Industrial Workers of the World helped with video production.

The forum can be viewed on the coalition's Facebook page.

Another new formation to come out of the protests is the Hampton Roads Coalition for Peace & Planet.

The two new coalitions, along with existing antiwar groups, can be contacted through their Facebook pages:

Charlottesville Center for Peace & Justice

Coalition for Justice (Blacksburg)
Hampton Roads Coalition for Peace & Planet

Norfolk Catholic Worker
Plowshare Peace Center (Roanoke)
Richmond Coalition for Peace, Justice, and Jobs
Shenandoah Valley Antiwar Coalition

Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality

Odessans celebrate victory over fascism

This past May 9 was the 75th anniversary of the day the German military surrendered to the Red Army and partisan forces in the Eastern Front of World War II. The date is celebrated there as the official victory over fascism.

To mark the occasion, a group of progressives in Odessa, Ukraine, recorded a video with their thoughts and feelings about the anniversary. During the war, the Black Sea city had been occupied by Nazi-allied Romanian fascists, who slaughtered thousands of Jews and other "enemies of the state."

The video message has been posted on the website of the Richmond-based Odessa Solidarity Campaign, which is coordinated by the Virginia Defenders.

For information about the anti-fascist struggle in Odessa, visit: www.odessasolidaritycampaign.org.

On March 9, a memo was circulated by the city's Department of Public Works to the mayor's office and members of city council stating that the Alliance had agreed that, as long as these stipulations were built into the lease, the project could go forward. Two days later, a copy of the memo and an incomplete draft of the new lease were emailed to the Alliance.

A week later, City government offices were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic precautions. As of this writing, no final draft lease has been submitted to the Alliance for review.

At this point, the Alliance should consider that it may have been premature to agree to any decision about one of Shockoe Bottom's historic or cultural resources before the small-area plan, and the guidelines yet to be established, are in place.



Photo by Adeeb Abed

A Candlelight Vigil for Lebanon Aug. 8 at Richmond's Monroe Park.

Vigil for Lebanon

Around 100 people attended a Candlelight Vigil for Lebanon Aug. 8 at Richmond's Monroe Park in a show of solidarity with the people of Beirut.

On Aug. 4, a massive explosion rocked Lebanon's capital city's port, taking the lives of at least 220 people, with another 7,000 injured and \$10-15 billion in property damage, a huge disaster for a country already experiencing a severe economic crisis and the effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

While most of those at the vigil were Lebanese ex-pats, many of whom had relatives affected by the explosion, they were joined by other Arab-Americans and members of the Black community.

The disaster was reportedly the result of the unsafe storage of 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate, a fertilizer widely used in agriculture, but which is highly volatile when placed under the stress of heat and pressure.

Vigil organizers called on people to make donations through the Lebanese Red Cross. There also was a local drive on Aug. 9th and 10th to send material aid to the devastated city.



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