

*In the Spirit of
Gabriel & Nan,
Nat Turner,
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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A COMMUNITY APPEAL:



**Come to Ashley
Williams' trial
Nov. 28**

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Richmond City Jail

**Defender's Questions &
Sheriff Woody's Answers**

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Unacceptable!

Business interests push for ballpark in Richmond's historic slave district

Staff Report

The trial balloon went up Aug. 5.

That's when two of Richmond's most powerful business leaders called for building a ballpark in Shockoe Bottom, once the site of this country's second largest slave market.

The call, by Venture Richmond Executive Director Jack Berry and Greater Richmond Chamber President and CEO Kim Scheeler, was published in the Commentary section of the Richmond Times-Dispatch's Sunday edition.

The piece, titled "Build a ballpark in downtown," was significant for one glaring omission: it never once mentioned the historic importance of this downtown area to the history of Black people in Richmond, in Virginia and throughout North America.

By August, discussions about putting a ballpark in Shockoe Bottom were already taking place between the Richmond

Flying Squirrels baseball team, Venture Richmond, the Chamber and City officials. That means the only purpose of the Berry/Scheeler piece could be to see if there would be any negative public reaction to the proposal.

The response was not long in coming.

Just two weeks later, a second opinion piece ran in the same Sunday Times-Dispatch Commentary section. This one, titled "Bottom Line: No Shockoe Stadium," was co-authored by Ana Edwards, Chair of the Defenders' Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project; King Salim Khalfani, Executive Director of the Virginia State Conference NAACP; Dr. Shawn Utsey, Chair of the African American Studies Department at Virginia Commonwealth University; and Phil Wilayto, Editor of The Virginia Defender newspaper.

As Edwards later observed, this opposing commentary "planted a stake in the

ground." Or, as the final lines of this piece read, "The bottom line is this: There will be no baseball stadium in Shockoe Bottom. Too many people are now too educated, too aware and too awakened to accept the desecration of this sacred ground."

Period.

Shortly after the response to their call for a Shockoe Bottom ballpark was answered, Berry contacted Salim Khalfani and said he and Scheeler would like to meet with the activists who wrote the second piece.

That meeting, with Berry, Scheeler, Khalfani and Wilayto, took place on Sept. 5 at the NAACP offices near Virginia Union University.

The discussion was cordial, but Khalfani and Wilayto made it clear that the same activists who had worked for 10 years to build community support for reclaiming Richmond's African Burial Ground were

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An exclusive Defender interview with

Ousmane Simaga Mayor of Segou, Republic of Mali

RICHMOND, VA; Aug. 1, 2012 – Ousmane Simaga is the mayor of Segou, the second largest city in the Republic of Mali, West Africa. The city of 135,000 is located in southern Mali near a bend of the Niger River, just as Richmond, with its 204,000 people, sits on a bend of the James.

Segou and Richmond have an official Sister City relationship. It's not the only connection. As pointed out by Richmond columnist Michael Paul Williams, the majority of Africans brought to Virginia to be sold into slavery came from the nine West African countries that once were part of the great Malian Empire.

Mayor Simaga was in Richmond this summer from July 24 to Aug. 1 to raise funds to help deal with a humanitarian crisis now facing his city. Since March, 7,238 people, more than 4,000 of them children, have arrived in Segou, displaced by the civil war raging hundreds of miles to the north.

Altogether, the conflict has reportedly driven some 100,000 people as refugees into neighboring countries, while internally displacing more than 90,000. Mali is one of the poorest countries in the world, so resources are already meager and the influx has presented local governments with formidable challenges.

A similar number of new arrivals in Richmond would mean having to provide food, shelter and medical care for more than 11,000 suddenly homeless people.

The following interview was conducted in English by Virginia Defender Editor Phil Wilayto. Defender Ana Edwards, who is president of the Richmond-based Virginia Friends of Mali, provided the translation.

In 2010, VFOM secured a \$115,000 Gates Foundation grant that Segou used to construct 34 new sanitary

facilities and a maternity clinic expansion in the city. The all-volunteer group is now trying to raise \$24,000 to obtain a grant from Project Cure, which could result in \$450,000 in medical supplies for Segou's hospital and medical clinic. VFOM hosted the mayor's visit to Richmond.

Married with three daughters, Mayor Simaga, 52, makes his living in transport and tourism. He also is vice president of the Segou's Chamber of Commerce and Industry. His family has lived in Segou since 1875.

Virginia Defender: What effect have developments in Northern Mali had on Segou?

Mayor Simaga: The first effect is on the territories in the north. It has affected them administratively, schools are closed, health care is not available in the same way it has been and people are leaving. In Segou, it essentially increases the population. Everyone who comes in from the North, we register them, so we know how many there are, how many are male, female, how many are older. These are the officially counted numbers. (7,238) Others may have arrived but may not have been counted.

Defender: Do you anticipate the numbers increasing, or have they leveled off?

Mayor: As long as the crisis continues, the numbers will continue to rise.

Defender: How is this influx of people affecting the ability of the government of Segou to care for its own people, as well as the new arrivals?

Mayor: That is the point of this trip, reaching out to the



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Mayor Ousmane Simaga

Virginia Friends of Mali, the elected officials of Richmond. It's a serious and delicate situation. Families in Segou are just able to feed themselves, so the additional need to feed families and friends who are displaced is just too much. And the pressure on the mayor's office is that, when people arrive, it is incumbent to deliver services, free of charge.

Defender: Are you able to do that now?

Mayor: Right now, yes, in terms of providing identification and other documents. And we received \$2,000 from Virginia Friends of Mali, and we are already using that, at two health clinics, for children whose conditions were weak or they were ill. And we have raised additional funds to accompany that. Also, 7000 euros (about \$8,600)

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THE DEFENDERS

for Freedom, Justice & Equality

PO Box 23202, Richmond, VA 23223
Ph: 804-644-5834 Fax: 804-332-5525
E-mail: DefendersFJE@hotmail.com
Web sites: www.DefendersFJE.org
www.DefendersFJE.blogspot.com

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHAT WE BELIEVE:

We believe in Freedom.

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

We believe in Justice.

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

We believe in Equality.

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

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

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

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

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

SOUTHERN WORKERS ASSEMBLY

Launching a movement to organize the South

By Saladin Muhammad

On Sept. 3, the opening day of the Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Charlotte, N.C., more than 300 workers representing local unions and worker organizations from eight Southern States, as well as supporters from outside the South, participated in the Southern Workers Assembly (SWA) to discuss the issues and challenges they face in their organizing efforts and the need to build a social justice labor movement in the South.

Workers in the public, private and agricultural sectors attended from North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, South Carolina, Louisiana, Mississippi and Georgia. Many were African American and Latino, with a delegation of workers on the "Undocu-bus" that traveled from Arizona to Washington, D.C., picking up undocumented workers and meeting with unions and community groups along the way.

The SWA discussed the weaknesses of the South in terms of union membership, pointing out that there are more union members in the state of New York than in all 11 Southern States combined; and that, aside from the J.P. Stevens textile campaign during the 1970s, the major national unions and the AFL-CIO have not made a serious and coordinated effort to organize labor in the South in 60 years. The workers agreed that there were very few union campaigns in their states that they have heard about.

A slide presentation showed the major shift of manufacturing companies, especially auto, to the South from the Midwest and for-



Photo courtesy of the Wisconsin Bail Out the People Movement

Assembly attendees, including many union members, meet in a plenary session.

eign-owned corporations. This helped workers better understand the role of the South in the U.S. and global economies and the need for international labor solidarity.

There were panels with workers speaking from the public, private and agricultural sectors, including dealing with the issue of attacks on immigrant workers and the need for worker unity across race, gender and nationality.

There had been some opposition by local unions in Charlotte and the national AFL-CIO to the DNC being held in North Carolina, because it is a right-to-work state with a strong anti-labor history, including its legal ban of collective bargaining rights for public sector workers. However, there were no calls made to increase organizing in the South.

However, during the week leading up to the DNC, the Charlotte City workers and members of the N.C. Public Service Workers Union-UE Local 150 held a daily picket line in front City Hall demanding a wage increase, meet-and-confer and the right to use payroll deduction for their union dues. They mobilized about 50 people, the majority of them city workers, to attend a City Council meeting to present their demands.

SWA participants came to Charlotte early to join the picket lines. UE 150 also sent a letter to the DNC and President Obama, calling

on them to urge North Carolina to repeal the ban on collective bargaining rights for public sector workers and end the so-called "right-to-work" laws. More than 1,000 online supporters emailed the letter to the DNC and Obama.

The picket line, letter campaign and the SWA itself attracted major coverage from the U.S. and international media. This brought about concern from the local government, resulting in representatives of City Council and the mayor meeting and communicating with leaders of the Charlotte City Workers Union-UE 150.

Public, Private and Excluded (agriculture and other workers not covered by labor laws) Commissions were formed to establish frameworks for communications, education and building solidarity. Workers also agreed to mobilize for the Southern Human Rights Organizing Conference (SHROC) on December 7-9, 2012 in Charleston, S.C., where they will hold a planning meeting to further develop the structure of the SWA and map out a plan of action for building a Southern Labor Alliance.

The SWA is continuing to reach out to local unions and worker organizations throughout the South to join this effort, asking them to send representatives to the SHROC.

For more information on the SWA, contact SWA Coordinator Saladin Muhammad at saladin62@aol.com or (252) 314-2363.

BLACK LEFT UNITY NETWORK

Rebuilding a national framework for Black Liberation

By Ana Edwards

We are Black people fighting for power and liberation.

We fight to end the system of capitalist exploitation, patriarchy, homophobia and all other forms of oppression.

We organize by connecting local battlefronts rooted in a working-class perspective to build national unity of action and international solidarity with other struggling oppressed people.

These are the organizing principles of the Black Left Unity Network, which met Sept. 15-16 for the fourth time since forming in 2008, to craft a national framework for rebuilding the Black Liberation Movement.

Members of BLUN and its Continuations Committee met to discuss administrative and strategic processes for uniting Black activists, engaged in and emerging out of mass struggles, into a national framework to help move the struggle for Black Liberation in the U.S. forward during a period of economic crisis, movement fragmentation and rising national oppression. NO MATTER WHO IS PRESIDENT.

Each of the participants presented reports about their local work, covering everything from eviction and foreclosure prevention to environmental racism, jobs and anti-military-recruitment, running local electoral candidates, police abuse and the criminal "injustice" system.

Given that the leadership role of the Black community in mass progressive struggles is mainly local, on the discussion list was how much of the contemporary organizing potential of the Black community has been absorbed by the Obama presidency, only to be silenced by the Democratic Party.

One of the most important, in-depth discussions focused on historically "under-represented sectors of the Black Liberation Movement," including African-American women's oppression, gay

rights and anchoring the liberation movement in the Black working class and in the Southern U.S.

The launch of BLUN's "Black Activists Journal" was announced for Oct 1. Initially, this biannual online publication of issues and analysis from Black activists will cover such topics as defending public education, extrajudicial killings of Black people, trade unionism in the South, demands on the Obama presidency and strategies for the aftermath of the 2012 election.

The BLUN meeting took place at the Stone Center for African American History and Culture at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Ashaki Binta and Saladin Muhammad, both longtime labor and Black liberation movement activists with Black Workers for Justice in North Carolina, served as co-chairs of the two-day meeting, with other participants facilitating discussion sessions.

"Going forward," said Muhammad, "BLUN would like to see local BLUN committees organized to unite Black activists at the local level as part of the national network."

BLUN's Background

Initiated in June 2007 at a meeting in Atlanta, Ga., during the time of the first U.S. Social Forum, BLUN was focused on uniting the Black Left to help build a national movement of support and challenge for survivors and victims of Hurricane Katrina's devastation in the Gulf

Coast region and displacement policies affecting hundreds of thousands of Black and poor families (many never to return).

At first a listserv for sharing information and seeking support for mass struggles, BLUN was officially founded in May 2008 and formed a Continuations Committee to function as a planning and coordinating body to build the operational components of the BLUN.

In 2010, BLUN held a Black Liberation Peoples Movement Assembly at the U.S. Social Forum in Detroit. Close to 130 Black activists from 10 states joined working groups dealing with key areas of Black life and oppression to develop a unity process to help develop national demands and campaigns.

In 2011, BLUN engaged Black activists from 14 states in its first series of National Dialogue Calls to analyze and relate to Occupy movements (young, white Occupy Wall Street and young, Black Occupy The Hood.) The calls sought to enable activists to arrive at some common thinking and possible actions to help influence the Occupy movement's character, as well as carry an anti-capitalist mantra into the struggles among the Black masses.

Learn more at BlackLeftUnity.org, BlackLeftUnity.blogspot.com and BlackActivistZine.org.

Defender Ana Edwards was one of the organizers of the BLUN conference.

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community news



Photos by Phil Wilayto

This was the scene that greeted passersby Oct. 18 on East Grace Street in downtown Richmond.



Relieved to be back on Mother Earth, James Berman, left, and his mother, Cheri Berman, seem justly proud of their achievement.

Rapelling donors

A reporter for The Virginia Defender was walking along East Grace Street in downtown Richmond Oct. 18 when he happened to notice two people hanging by ropes on the side of the SunTrust Building at Grace and 10th.

“Ah, that’s a rough job, window washing,” the reporter thought to himself.

Turns out, this was “Over the Edge,” an event sponsored by Special Olympics Virginia, which describes itself on its website as “a year-round program of sports training and athletic competition for children and adults with intellectual disabilities.”

People who had donated at least \$1,000 to the organization were being rewarded with a chance to rappel — descend by means of ropes — from the roof of the 400-foot, 24-story building.

These daredevil donors were a mother-and-son team: Cheri Berman, 62, and James Berman, 28. Originally from Northern Virginia, they’ve been Richmonders since 2002.

The Richmond event took place Oct. 18 and 19. A similar Special Olympics rappelling event was held last June down the side of the 15-story, 250-foot Chrystal City Hilton in Arlington.

Shockoe

Continued from page 1

more than ready to spend the next 10 years fighting to keep a commercial baseball stadium from desecrating another part of Richmond’s sacred ground.

There are those in Richmond, both Black and white, who say, “Look, that slavery thing was a long time ago. It’s got nothing to do with Richmond today. Why keep bringing it up? It’s time to move on!”

Here’s why: because before we can “move on” — before than can be any real racial reconciliation in Richmond, in the whole country — it’s first necessary to bring to light the truth about what actually happened here.

And this is how that truth was described in the “No Shockoe Stadium” piece:

“In the three decades leading up to the Civil War, between 300,000 and 350,000 human beings were sold from Virginia and sent to the newly opened plantations in the Deep South. Many of these Africans were sold out of Shockoe Bottom, home to dozens of auction houses, jails, pens, trader offices, dry good stores and other commercial enterprises that served the slave trade, making this site one of the largest slave-trading markets in the country.

“By 1860, there were about 4 million Black people in the United States, the vast majority



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Richmond Crusade makes its election choices — Members of the Richmond Crusade for Voters voted on their endorsements of candidates in the Nov. 6 elections after hearing recommendations from the Crusade’s candidate vetting committee, pictured above. From left: Delores Murray, Ralph Cramer, Ellie Merkle, Rufus Fleming, Carrie Cox (Chair), John Houze, Dietra Trent, Frank Hall and Amelia Lightner. Not shown: Sandra Antione, Bill Laffoon, Melvin Law, Eugene Mason, Vivian Mason, Ellie Merkle, Delores Murray, Eddie Radden, Bernice Travers, Charles Vaughan and Phil Wilayto. The committee interviewed candidates at the 533 Club in historic Jackson Ward. A complete list of the Crusade’s endorsements is posted at: www.rcfv.org.

of whom were held in slavery in the South.

“So just do the math: it is likely that the majority of African-descended people in North America today could trace some ancestry to Shockoe Bottom. As much as anywhere else on the continent, this surely is the birthplace of Black America.”

The only thing more amazing than the total racial insensitivity of proposing to put a sports venue on this sacred ground is the profound ignorance about what an amazing historical treasure the city has in Shockoe Bottom.

The great poet and Virginia Tech professor Nikki Giovanni once observed that white people can go to places like Ellis Island to find their roots — but where do Black people go?

Just give me a tree to sit under, she wrote.

Shockoe Bottom is that “tree,” that place where African-descended people throughout the continent could come to stand on the ground where their own ancestors once stood. They could walk the Night Trail of Enslaved Africans, from Manchester Docks on the James River on up through the dark woods to the rediscovered site of the notorious Lumpkin’s Jail in the Devil’s Half-Acre. They could sit and meditate at the African Burial Ground, a sacred site reclaimed after years of community struggle.

Richmond could be a new mecca for African-Americans and all people who want to learn about the system of chattel slavery that was the fundamental reason the United States developed first as a great agricultural country and then as an industrial power.

Richmond could be the site of a museum that told the real story of not only the oppression of African people in the Americas, but the proud and universally inspiring history of their endless resistance to that oppression.

There could be a genealogy center, where Black people could pour through the databases of the Freedmen’s Bureau records, the Mormon Church (which has compiled one of the most extensive collections of Black genealogy), the new database of Virginians held in slavery and other sources of family records.

The African Burial Ground could be properly memorialized as a meditative park, circled by covered benches where people could sit and absorb the spirits of the ancestors — and be moved by the spirit of Gabriel, executed on that sacred ground for trying to free all people from oppression.

If Shockoe Bottom were properly developed, literally millions of people would find their way to Richmond to experience this rich, complex, terrifying and inspiring history.

And by the way, they also would spend

millions of dollars on hotel rooms, meals and visiting the Greater Richmond area’s many other fine attractions.

Or, the small-minded Philistines who run this city could build a ballpark for a second-string farm team (no offense to the Squirrels, who themselves are one of this area’s finer attractions) that wouldn’t draw anyone from more than the surrounding counties, and then only for a short trip in and out of downtown.

Ultimately, the future of Shockoe Bottom won’t be decided in some private boardroom or in the rarified atmosphere of the elitist Commonwealth Club. It will be decided when Richmond’s Black community and its many allies, both here, across the country and around the world, make it crystal clear that they will not allow the further desecration of one of the most sacred sites in Black history, in Richmond or anywhere else.

Never, ever, again.



Edwards recognized by Malian ambassador

Ana Edwards, president of Virginia Friends of Mali, is presented a plaque by the Malian ambassador to the U.S., H.E.M. Al Maamoun Baba Lamine Keita. The inscription on the plaque, presented Sept. 22 during Richmond’s Malian Independence Day celebration, reads: “In appreciation for your dedication and commitment to promoting Virginia’s good relations with Mali, and your generous contribution to Segou, Richmond’s sister city.” Among other efforts, Edwards, who also is a founding member of the Defenders, was instrumental in getting a \$125,000 grant to assist Segou with improvements in its sanitation system.

Activists discuss holding 2013 Virginia People’s Assembly on Jan. 5, with local actions Jan. 9

A proposal to hold the fifth annual Virginia People’s Assembly on Jan. 5 in Richmond, followed by local actions across the state on Jan. 9, is attracting support.

Jan. 5 will be the last Saturday before the 2013 Virginia General Assembly’s first session, scheduled for Wednesday, Jan. 9.

In previous years, the VPA also has held its annual statewide networking conference on the Saturday before the GA opens, but combined that with a rally and march to the State Capitol. Last year’s VPA drew a record 177 activists, but many had to leave before the march and rally in order to travel long distances home.

“This way, we’ll be able to have more time at the conference for workshops, panel discussions and general networking, and still have a statewide presence the day the GA opens,” said Virginia Defender Editor Phil Wilayto, who raised the proposal in an email to members of the 2013 VPA Organizing Committee.

According to the proposal, the general theme for the VPA would be “Jobs, Peace, Justice,” the same as last year’s, but the actions on Jan. 9 would allow local activists to also emphasize whatever specific issues they felt were most important.

Plans for the 2013 VPA began last June when 19 activists from Hampton Roads, Northern Virginia, Charlottesville, Roanoke,

Blacksburg and the Richmond area gathered at the Wayside Center for Popular Education just outside Charlottesville. Eight more activists later joined the Organizing Committee, which is more than half women and a third people of color.

John Steinbach, Community Outreach Coordinator for the Northern Virginia immigrant rights group Mexicanos Sin Fronteras, says his organization supports the proposal for a Jan. 5 VPA and is committed to bringing a busload of immigrant workers and their families.

“We’ll also be bringing members of We Are One, an organization of African-American youth we’ve been working closely with,” Steinbach said.

Another key VPA member, Wayside’s Jeff Winder, said he’ll be organizing support for the VPA “because it is exactly the kind of gathering we need in these times.”

“People from across the state, rooted in struggles in their own communities, reach across the lines that divide us and come together around an agenda that includes all of our issues,” Winder said. “While the politicians in Richmond cater to the greedy corporate agenda that is hurting all working people, let’s gather to build unity and grassroots power. I hope to see everyone at the 2013 VPA!”

For more information about the VPA and how to get involved, call 804-644-5834 or email: DefendersFJE@hotmail.com.

cops, courts & prisons

Jermaine Doss supporters launch pardon campaign

By Phil Wilayto

The parents and supporters of Virginia prisoner Jermaine Doss, now in the 13th year of a life-plus-38-year sentence for a crime he swears he did not commit, are launching a petition campaign to win a pardon from Gov. Robert McDonnell.

The petition campaign will begin with an organizing meeting scheduled for 4 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 1, at the House of Consciousness bookstore, 600 W. 25th St. in Norfolk.

In 1998, an acquaintance of Doss named Nathaniel McGee was charged with the murder of Norfolk businessman James Webb. At the time of his arrest, McGee gave police a statement claiming Jermaine had hired him to kill Webb in a dispute over drugs.

McGee later retracted that statement in court. He also signed an affidavit stating he only testified against Jermaine because prosecutors had told him that otherwise he would face the death penalty. He also has written a letter to Jermaine apologizing for his original statement. McGee is now serving a sentence of 17 years for the murder, plus more time for related charges.

Jermaine was arrested and charged with capital murder-for-hire. In 2000, he was found guilty of a lesser, non-included charge, first-degree murder. He is now serving a life sentence on that charge, plus 38 years for related charges.

Jermaine maintains he was set up to be framed by Norfolk Detective Glenn Ford, who he says was demanding money from him in return for not finding a reason to arrest

him. Detective Ford is now serving a 12.5-year prison sentence after being convicted of extortion in another case. According to an article in The Virginian-Pilot newspaper, Ford was “accused of accepting money from criminal suspects in exchange for getting them favorable treatment within the court system.” He was also convicted of lying to the FBI during an investigation of the extortion.

Ford was also the lead investigator in the controversial case of the Norfolk Four, sailors convicted of a murder/rape but whom many believe were framed.

Jermaine’s parents, Ray and Willie Mae Doss, have spent more than \$100,000 in lawyers’ fees trying to free their son. Jermaine’s current lawyer says there is nothing more he can do: even though the courts used McGee’s original statement to convict Jermaine, they now say he is not a reliable witness.

“He’s been in jail for 13 years and he’s not guilty,” Jermaine’s mother told the Defender. “And the man that confessed, he lied on him. And he came back to court in 2006 and said he had lied, but they said he wasn’t credible. So if he wasn’t credible in 2006, how was he credible in 2000? So they made him credible when they wanted him to be credible.”

“And Ford was a crooked cop,” said Ray Doss. “He knew that stuff wasn’t right. And the judge knew it too, the prosecutor knew it and the head investigator knew it.”

Having exhausted their resources, the Dosses do not have the money necessary to mount a federal appeal. Jermaine, now 39, faces the prospect of spending the rest of his life in prison for a crime he did not commit.

The Dosses are hoping that, with enough signatures on their petition, enough publicity and enough public support, Gov. McDonnell can be convinced to look into their son’s case, see the injustice that has been committed and issue a pardon to free Jermaine Doss.

Copies of the petition can be downloaded online at www.DefendersFJE.org.

All out for the Nov. 28 trial of Ashley Williams!

By Phil Wilayto

This is an appeal to the community to come out on Nov. 28 and support Ashley Williams.

Ms. Williams is charged with second-degree murder and felony child neglect in the tragic death of her 2-year-old son D’Sean. When her son died, he weighed just 14 pounds – about half of what is normal for a child that age.

Without a shred of evidence, Richmond’s Commonwealth Attorney’s office is claiming that Ms. Williams neglected her child and basically allowed him to starve to death. But Ms. Williams had taken D’Sean to see a doctor, he had been seen several times at emergency rooms and also by Social Services just one month before he died. None of these professionals raised any concerns about abuse or neglect. And she has three other young children, all of whom are healthy.

Medical experts who have looked into this case have suggested that D’Sean likely suffered from DiGeorge Syndrome, a genetic disease that can prevent the victim from properly processing food. The state autopsy performed on D’Sean reported he had both food and liquid in his system, and yet he was severely malnourished.

Bolstering this theory is the fact that two of Ms. Williams’ sisters and a niece also have young sons who are dangerously underweight. But the private doctors of those boys have prescribed life-saving treatment. In contrast, Ms. Williams’s Medicaid-appointed doctor did not suggest any such treatment.

As a result of this travesty of justice, Ms. Williams’ other three children have been permanently taken from her and placed into a series of foster homes, where they say they have been physically mistreated. The home health care agency she was working for will no longer give her assignments, so she lost her source of income. She has lost her children, her job and her home. After all this, she has been diagnosed as suffering from severe depression, but, according to her sisters, the Richmond City Jail three times has “run out” of her medication.

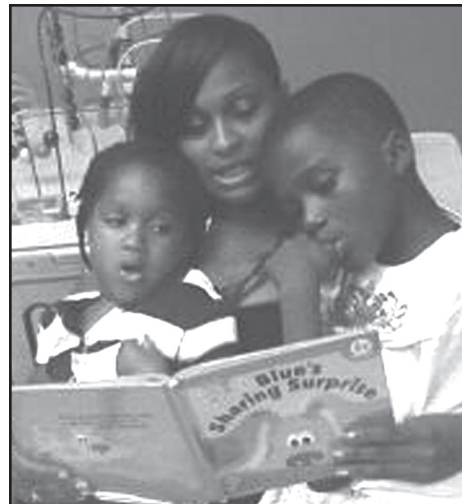
Ms. Williams was pressured by a court-appointed attorney to plead guilty to the lesser charge of involuntary manslaughter – a lesser charge, but still one that carried a long prison sentence. Today she would be in a state prison if it had not been for the timely intervention of the Virginia state NAACP, former Richmond City Councilman Sa’ad El-Amin and support from the larger community, which has packed the courtroom for

litical consciousness. This was the case with California prisoner George Jackson, who was given a one-year-to-“indefinite” sentence for stealing \$72 as a 17-year-old, but who became a celebrated author and Black Panther prison leader. Or Malcolm X, who met the Nation of Islam while serving a sentence for breaking and entering.

“Some political prisoners were conscious when they went in,” Abdulmumit said, “but today it’s more of a phenomenon of people who are prisoners for different crimes and then are politicized in prison – what we call the George Jackson phenomenon.

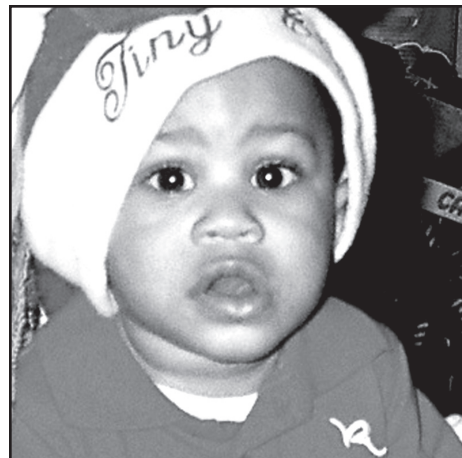
“The whole question of what is a political prisoner is being kicked around, but our definition is those who are imprisoned because of their beliefs or actions. We respect the evolution of defining who we are, which is a very political process. We want to be sure we’re not being dogmatic about it, so our emphasis is being able to work with other people.”

The Jericho Movement grew out of a 1998 march on the White House called to raise the issue of political prisoners in the United States. In addition to Richmond, it has chapters in New York City; Los Angeles;



Photos courtesy the Williams family

In a happier time, Ashley Williams reads to two of her children.



D’Sean Williams, before he began to show signs of malnutrition. He was the only one of Ms. Williams’ four children who was severely underweight, a situation his family believes was the result of a genetic condition. Three close relatives, all young boys, share the same symptoms.

each of Ms. Williams’ court hearings.

In the words of one of her sisters, “The only thing Ashley is guilty of is being young, poor, uneducated and following the advice of people who she thought knew what they were doing.”

Ms. Williams has been held in the Richmond City Jail since November 2011. The medical, Social Services and legal systems have all utterly failed her. Now they are trying to scapegoat her for those very failures.

Community support has so far kept her from prison. Let’s join together one more time to help her win her freedom.

Please attend Ashley Williams’ trial on 9 a.m. Wednesday, Nov. 28, Courtroom 307 in the John Marshall Courts Building, 400 N. 9th St., Richmond, VA 23219.

FREE ASHLEY WILLIAMS!

For more information on this case, see the Summer issue of The Virginia Defender at www.DefendersFJE.org.



Photo by Ana Edwards

Prisoner rights activists check out the literature table at an event sponsored by the newly formed Richmond chapter of the Jericho Movement, which supports political prisoners and “prisoners of war” in the United States. At right facing the camera is Jericho organizer Jihad Abdulmumit, a former political prisoner and Black Panther. The event was held Oct. 27 at the Fan Free Clinic in Richmond.

Jericho comes to Richmond

Staff Report

Richmond-area activists with an interest in supporting political prisoners gathered Oct. 27 at the Fan Free Clinic on North Thompson Street to hear about a new group in town: the Jericho Movement.

Jericho activist Jihad Abdulmumit has been living and working in Richmond for the past 12 years, but his work with Jericho has so far been as co-chair for the national organization. Now he and a few other members have decided to start a Richmond chapter. The Oct. 27 meeting was to meet similarly minded people and encourage them to work together.

“The Jericho Movement is a national or-

ganization to support political prisoners,” Abdulmumit told the Defender, “mainly people from the movements of the Sixties and Seventies, and some from today, like Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin, the former H. Rap Brown.”

Abdulmumit knows something about political prisoners. A former member of the Black Panther Party, he did 23 years in federal prison for what he says were “actions resulting out of the Black Liberation Army.” Originally from New Jersey, he was released in 2000.

At the same time, Abdulmumit said, it’s important for people to support those who may have been sent to prison for nonpolitical offenses, but who have developed a po-

Chicago; Albuquerque, N.M.; Portland, Ore; Nebraska, and the New England States.

Abdulmumit said Jericho believes in trying to encourage existing prisoner support organizations to work together.

“This should be a given,” he said, “but it’s not a given. So at the open house we made two resolutions: to meet every other month as a kind of collective coalition, and on the other month to have a community event where we show videos, and have guest speakers to let the community know what’s happening with issues of mass incarceration, political prisoners, prison conditions, and re-entry resources.”

The Defenders were represented at the meeting by Ana Edwards, who made a presentation on the case of Richmonder Ashley Williams and encouraged those present to attend her trial on Nov. 28.

For more information or to become involved with the Jericho Movement, contact the Richmond chapter at: richmondjericho@gmail.com or visit the national website at: www.thejerichomovement.com.

To see a brief video talk by Jihad Abdulmumit, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7CFwTJOjBc>

immigrant news

Victories over 287(g) in Prince William & Rockingham

Editorial comment: Across the country, agreements between local law enforcement agencies and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security have trained and empowered local police officers to act as immigration agents. These so-called “287(g) agreements” allow local police to take certain actions against people they suspect might be in the country illegally, instead of relying on an ICE investigation.

As of Oct. 27, ICE had 287(g) agreements with 57 local law enforcement agencies in 21 states. In Virginia, these included the police departments of Herndon, Manassas and Prince William County; the sheriffs’ offices of Prince William, Loudoun and Shenandoah counties; and the Prince William County-Manassas Regional Jail. (<http://www.ice.gov/news/library/factsheets/287g.htm>)

The 287(g) agreement bears a striking re-

semblance to the pre-Civil War Fugitive Slave Act, which required local law enforcement agencies — in free as well as slave states — to arrest and send back (deport) to their “owners” people of African descent fleeing slavery.

Even though the Fugitive Slave Act represented an unprecedented expansion of federal power, it was strongly supported by the “states rights” forces, proving that their real issue was the preservation of the tremendously profitable system of slavery.

Similarly, the Tea Party forces that protest so loudly against present-day expansion of federal power are silent when it comes to expanding that power over immigrants — also proving their real issue is not “states rights.”

Virginia has recently seen two victories in the ongoing struggle by the state’s immigrant community against 287(g). Both victories were led by progressive, anti-racist organizations.

The following are reports on these victories.

MSF: Major victory in Prince William County

By John Steinbach

After more than five years of struggle against racist immigration policies in Virginia’s Prince William County, Mexicanos Sin Fronteras (Mexicans Without Borders) is celebrating a major victory. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has announced that an agreement it had with the county allowing local police to act as federal immigration officers will be terminated on Dec. 31, 2012.

Under Section 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, local police officers are trained and authorized to enforce immigration law. Such enforcement normally is the function of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), operating under Homeland Security.

In Prince William County, long a center for anti-immigrant legislation, the 287(g) agreement was implemented as part of a 2001 anti-immigrant resolution unanimously passed by the County Board of Supervisors. Since then, more than 5,000 county residents have been turned over to ICE for possible deportation. Most had been arrested for minor, nonviolent offenses.

Inevitably, 287(g) led to widespread charges of racial profiling. It also has seriously eroded cooperation between local police and the immigrant community.

In addition, the program has cost the county at least \$600,000 annually at the same time there have been draconian cutbacks in social services.

To fight the agreement, Mexicanos Sin Fronteras led mass marches and rallies and also met with local officials and representatives of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Unfortunately, the 287(g) agreement

will be replaced by Secure Communities, a program that requires local police to run the name of anyone arrested through several national immigration and criminal databases. So this program still requires local police to play the role of immigration agents.

Anti-immigrant policies like Secure Communities and 287(g) destroy families and terrorize entire communities. Mexicans Without Borders, which opposes both programs, vows to continue the struggle for immigrant justice.

For more information, contact MSF at (703) 369-7427.

John Steinbach is Coordinator of Community Relations for Mexicanos Sin Fronteras.

Virginia Organizing reports victory in Rockingham County

The Shenandoah Valley chapters of the advocacy group Virginia Organizing also is celebrating a victory over 287(g).

According to a recent VO email post, “the Chapters have been working to end the partnership between local law enforcement in Rockingham County and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that allows local officers to be deputized as immigration officers.

“This program, called 287(g), has been devastating to immigrant families and communities. What Virginia Organizing found was that 88 percent of those deported under this agreement were deported for low-level offenses such as traffic violations or other civil infractions. The project also found that 287(g) had created a culture of fear among immigrant communities with 70 percent of the participants expressing fear of the police.”

According to VO, the Rockingham County Board of Supervisors has decided to let the 287(g) agreement expire.

“We are so happy about the decision,” said Maria Pena, a Harrisonburg Chapter leader. “This is a victory for the entire community, not just the Latino community. We are looking forward to experiencing some peace in our families and not living in fear.”

For more information, contact VO’s Charlottesville office at: (434) 984-4655.

reclaiming our sacred ground



Photos by Phil Wilayto

Participants in the Second Annual Ancestor Day and Fete circle a part of Richmond’s reclaimed African Burial Ground. The Oct 28 ceremony was the second day of a two-day event held to honor memory of the ancestors.

Ancestors are remembered and honored in second annual event

Staff Report

Their faces were thoughtful, determined and even joyous as two dozen people of African descent walked slowly but purposefully in a circle on the west side of Richmond’s African Burial Ground. Marked off by red, gold and green rope, the circle symbolized the fact that this ground covers a Black cemetery and so should not be disrespected.



Walking past the Gabriel historical marker at 15th and East Broad streets.

It was the second day of the Second Annual Ancestor Day and Fete (celebration), held to “honor ancestors, highlight their life-giving legacy and elevate their value in the socio-economic struggle to strengthen communities,” according to Monica Esparza of the African Ancestral Chamber, sponsor of the two-day event. “Honoring the memory of ancestors is a phenomenon that occurs all over the world during harvest season, particularly at burial ground sites.”

The first day of the observance consisted of workshops, lectures and a photo exhibit held Saturday, Oct. 27, at the Williamsburg Road Flea Market.

Sunday was reserved for an African Way Libation and Processional, beginning at 9:30 a.m. at the Burial Ground, located just north of East Broad Street between Interstate 95 and the CSX railroad. On each of the previ-

ous Sundays in October, a 4 p.m. vigil was held at the Burial Ground.

The first Ancestor Day and Fete was held on Sunday, Oct. 30, 2011, just five months after the Burial Ground had been reclaimed from the desecration of being used as a commercial parking lot by Virginia Commonwealth University. The now annual observance is an important example of how the African-descended community in Richmond has taken possession of this sacred ground.

After leaving the Burial Ground, participants made their way west on Broad Street, passing the “Gabriel’s Execution” highway marker that overlooks the Burial Ground, site of the Oct. 10, 1800, execution of the great slave rebellion leader.

They gathered in a circle in front of VCU’s Egyptian Building, to recognize painful sacrifices, but also as a gesture of hope, delivered in spoken word from Just the Kid. Starting in 1844 and extending into the 20th century, this was where white medical students were trained in the art of dissecting human bodies — in this case, Black bodies stolen from area cemeteries and purchased by the medical school, predecessor to today’s VCU Medical Center.

The remains of the cadavers were thrown into a well in front of the school, where many of them remain to this day. Dr. Linda Karim facilitated healing during the Ancestor Day ceremony. Participants ended the day with song, dance and “Ancestor Links” to lift the memory of near and distant relatives, as well as victims of the Maafa (slave trade) and to promote collaboration for a higher standard



The healing ceremony at the final resting place of Black Richmonders whose bodies were stolen from their graves for the training of medical students.

of value for life today.

For more information on the annual Ancestor Day and Fete, contact Monica Esparza at (804) 363-3282 or afrocacitytours@gmail.com.

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<http://blackworkersforjustice.org>

Questions for Sheriff C.T. Woody about the Richmond City Jail

To Our Readers: This past summer, when temperatures in the Richmond City Jail were soaring above 100 degrees, The Virginia Defender began receiving an increase in letters from the jail’s inmates. They told us there was no clean drinking water on the tiers, and that they were allowed only one cup of water at each meal. There were allegations of assaults by deputies, inmate grievances that were ignored and inmates being placed into isolation for up to 90 days, in violation of jail procedures. As part of our investigation into these charges, we contacted Sheriff C.T. Woody, the official elected by the public to run the jail. We told him we would be publishing an article on the jail that was critical of his administration and wanted to give him an opportunity to tell his side of the story. He agreed,

and we sent him a list of questions, which appear below. The sheriff’s answers also appear below, word for word, just as he sent them. We ask you, our readers, many of whom have been incarcerated in the jail yourselves or have friends or family members who have been held there, to please study our questions and Sheriff Woody’s answers. Then make up your own minds as to whether there needs to be an independent investigation into the physical conditions and administrative practices in the jail. **Your letters, emails and faxes will be published in the next Defender.** Please send them by email to Defenders FJE@hotmail.com, by fax to (804) 332-5225 or by regular mail to “Defender, PO Box 23202, Richmond, VA 23223. — **Phil Wilayto, Editor, The Virginia Defender**

[Editor’s note: These questions were sent to Sheriff Woody by email and Facebook message at 11 a.m. on Monday, Oct. 29. We asked him to respond by 3 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 31.]

Sheriff Woody,

Since early summer, our newspaper has been receiving requests for help from inmates at the City Jail, as well as from inmate relatives and concerned members of the community. The issues raised fall into two broad categories: the physical condition of the jail, and administrative policies. We understand that the jail is aging and overcrowded, and that is why a new jail is being built. We also know that many people come into the jail with serious medical problems and that the courts are reluctant to look for alternatives to incarceration. At the same time, many of the complaints we receive deal with issues that, if true, could be dealt with within the present limitations of space and resources.

Sheriff, I am familiar with the way the jail was run before you took over its administration, and I know you have made some important changes, particularly in the care of inmates with mental problems. Early in your administration I attended functions at the jail and saw the respect the inmates had for you. I am sorry to say that I do not see that same respect today. In addition, much of the outside community now has serious questions about your administration.

At the end of this list of questions I have included some concrete proposals I would ask you to consider.

QUESTIONS

Water – Numerous inmates have told us that the practice at the jail has been to provide inmates with one glass of water at each meal, and sometimes a container of ice in the evening that they could bring back to their tiers. We have been told that there are no drinking fountains on the tiers and that the water available from sinks in the tiers contains sediment. Given the extreme heat in the men’s tiers during the summer months, why isn’t there access to cool, clean water on the tiers? Why was water at the meals limited to one glass? Is this still the practice today?

Vermin – Inmates report a sharp increase in rats, spiders and other vermin in the jail, possibly the result of the nearby construction of the new jail. Is this true, and if so, what if anything is being done about it?

Administrative Segregation – Inmates report that, contrary to the jail’s rule book, some inmates are being held in administrative segregation for as long as 60 or 90 days, with loss of all privileges, such as phone

calls and access to the canteen. What is the jail policy on administrative segregation, is it being followed, and is there any recourse for an inmate if he or she feels they are being held longer than the jail’s rules allow?

Grievance Procedure – We understand that the jail’s Inmate Grievance Form states that the inmate submitting the form “will be notified in writing by the Grievance Coordinator of the action taken on your grievance concern within nine (9) working days of the receipt of your grievance by the grievance coordinator.” Inmate Vanterry M. Fields (#72749) says he filed an Inmate Grievance Form on June 15, 2012, but to this day has not received a response. The grievance stated that, while Fields was working in the kitchen on June 15, 2012, he was twice assaulted and cursed at by a Deputy Hercules. Our question is not with the grievance itself, but with the grievance procedure. Did inmate Fields receive a response to his grievance? If not, why not?

Deaths – We understand that 31 people have died while in the custody of the jail since you began your term as Richmond Sheriff. It has been reported in the Times-Dispatch that this is 2 ½ times the national rate for institutions of similar size, and that the rate has been increasing over the past six years. We realize that the physical conditions in the jail are terrible, for staff and inmates alike, but the high number of deaths is obvi-

ously alarming. How many inmates have died to date since you began your term as sheriff? Can you comment on this?

Katrina Jones – One death in particular raises serious questions, that of Katrina Jones, who reportedly was placed alone in a cell the day after she indicated to a deputy that she intended to kill herself. Can you comment on why Jones was placed in a cell alone?

E2 – We understand that the E2 tier is reserved for “problem” inmates. We’ve been told that this tier is the scene of frequent fights and assaults. Is this true, and is there an alternative to placing inmates with a history of violence with people who may have broken jail rules but who have no history of violence?

Ashley Williams – Ashley Williams is the young Richmond mother facing trial on Nov. 28 for allegedly allowing her young son D’Sean to starve to death. She had accepted a plea bargain and then asked to change her plea to not guilty. Her family tells us that, after she made this request to the court, she was moved to a separate wing of the jail. Also, that her two sisters then had a difficult time contacting her. Also, that anti-depressant medication prescribed for her have on at last three occasions not been available – she reportedly was told the jail had “run out” of the meds. Was Ms. Williams moved after she asked to change her

plea, and, if so, why? Has the jail on occasion “run out” of her anti-depressant meds? And does the jail have a problem keeping an adequate supply of meds, of any kind, prescribed for inmates?

General Questions

- How many inmates are currently held in the Richmond City Jail?
- What percentage of these inmates receive medication for depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, anxiety or other mental conditions?
- What percentage of these inmates are in pre-trial confinement, not yet having been convicted of a crime?
- Could we receive a breakdown of the charges filed against the inmates? How many have been charged with violent crimes, how many for drugs, parole violation, failure to pay child support, etc.?
- What is the racial breakdown of the inmates, male and female?
- Could we receive a copy of the jail’s rule book?

PROPOSALS

From the outside, it’s of course impossible for us to properly evaluate the conditions and administrative practices at the jail from the relatively few complaints we receive. However, the number of complaints we receive has been steadily increasing, as has the number of inmates willing to make their complaints public. And at

Our 8th District is moving forward!

A VOTE FOR ME
IS A VOTE FOR
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VOTE REVA TRAMMELL
on Tuesday, Nov. 6th



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this point it is obvious that there has been a serious deterioration in trust between the inmates and the administration and between the administration and the community at large.

I would like to suggest that a **delegation of local community, religious and civil rights leaders be allowed to tour the jail**, observe the conditions and speak in private with inmates willing to talk with them. I have been contacting some ministers, City Council members and NAACP leaders to ask if they would be interested in being part of such a delegation, and have received positive responses.

If you are willing, I could submit a list of names for your approval, and work with you to arrange such a visit.

If the complaints we have received are not valid, or are only valid for a few inmates, we could find that out for ourselves. If there are broader problems that you may not be aware of, we could be helpful in making you aware of them. And allowing such a delegation could go a long way toward showing the community that your administration is open to holding a dialog over these issues.

The water situation in particular bothers me a lot, both because access to cool, safe drinking water seems to be a basic human right, and because solving this issue seems so easy.

With your cooperation, the Defender would volunteer to approach stores in the Richmond area to **solicit donations of bottled water to be made available to inmates on the tiers**. If there are security issues with this particular proposal, perhaps we could work together on another solution.

We also have prepared about 50 small bags of basic toiletries – soap, shampoo, hair conditioner – that we would like to donate to indigent inmates. You and I have discussed this before – it just took us awhile to prepare the bags.

Finally, I have been promoting among some City officials a proposal for a **City-run jobs program to replace the City's reliance on temp labor agencies**. I would appreciate an opportunity to discuss this proposal with you, with the idea of setting up a means for inmates being released from the jail to be immediately hired by the City to perform jobs at their own skill levels.

The City now pays the prevailing wage to agencies for temp workers, who themselves receive only a fraction of those wages. A decent job



Photo credit: City of Richmond

Richmond Sheriff C.T. Woody, left, and Mayor Dwight C. Jones tour the site of the new city jail, now under construction next to the current jail on Fairfield Way in the city's East End. The new facility has a "rated capacity" of 1,032 beds. More than 1,300 inmates are regularly held in the present jail. The new jail is not expected to be fully operational until the end of 2014.

at a living wage could go a long way toward reducing recidivism and thus overcrowding in the jail. Please let me know if you would be interested in discussing this.

Our paper goes to press early Thursday morning, so I would need to receive your responses to these questions by 3 pm Wednesday, Oct. 31. I apologize for contacting you so late, but, as I said, I asked for your comments for the Summer issue of our newspaper and did not receive a response, and so thought a second request would basically be pro forma.

Thank you again for responding.

Sincerely,

Phil Wilayto
Editor, The Virginia Defender

SHERIFF WOODY'S RESPONSE

From: Woody, C.T. JR. - Sheriff
Sent: Tuesday, October 30, 2012 11:30 AM

To: philawato@gmail.com
Subject: My Reply to your questions
You would have had these facts much longer if you would not have waited until the last minute for a response as you always do.

Apparently you have already made up your mind. Thanks(Quote) 10-30-12)

Mr. Wilawato,

While I welcome public input into matters which concern the comfort of the residents and the staff here at the City Jail, I am deeply concerned by the allegations you put forth.

To begin with, your initial request for a comment from me appeared to already come to a conclusion about the conditions of the jail and of my administration.

Your initial inquiry to me stated "[T]he article is critical of your administration, and I would like to give you an opportunity to give your side of this story." What this indicates to me is that you, as the author of the article, have already formulated your position without a fair and balanced point of view.

As such, I am certain now by your request, that no matter what I may say or provide to you, this "critical" article will be just that, critical.

Let me be crystal clear. The treatment of inmates in this facility has been met with celebration and even certified by the Virginia Department of Corrections at 100%.

The Virginia Department of Corrections come at unannounced times and my agency has passed each and every single inspection; to include, life, health and safety. The jail has been organized to run at peak performance given the multitude of local, state and federal regulations.

The anthology of accomplishments which speak to the treatment of inmates and my administration are as follows:

3 meals a day;

Work force details where residents can work outside of the facility and saves the taxpayers over \$320,000 a year;

Residents are now triple bunked so they don't have to sleep on floors;
Large coolers of ice on tiers so residents can drink cold water, even though the tap water is the same that any citizen outside of the jail would be able to get;

More G.E.D. graduates than before;

A ballroom dance class so residents can learn the finer arts in life;
Yoga classes

Back to School events each year to help the children of the residents incarcerated;

Men in Recovery and the Belief tiers have been expanded to address the addiction problems of inmates BEFORE they are returned to society;

Pumpkin Patrol program to reach youth;

The Rule of Law Program to teach youth about the law before they become residents at the jail;

Meals on wheels to benefit our seniors;

VLEPSC certification;

100% Virginia Department of Corrections Certification;

Partnership with faith based counseling which SAVED the taxpayers over \$8million;

Video arraignment to help cut back from fuel costs and safety of court movement;

A new Richmond City Jail which no other administration was able to do and all WITHOUT having to file a lawsuit costing taxpayers thousands of dollars;

As a long time resident of the City of Richmond and now the elected Sheriff, I RESENT the Virginia Defender for believing in the rumors and hearsay which prompted you to write a "critical" piece on the Richmond City Jail.

In these highly political times, I challenge you to write a piece which is fair and balanced and report on all of the good that has been done as opposed to fall victim to believing what a few minority of folks tell you.

For every critical piece of information you receive from an inmate, I receive thank you cards from their families just the same.

With kind regards, I remain

Your Sheriff,
C.T.Woody, JR.
(Please quote verbatim.)

EDITOR'S RESPONSE TO SHERIFF WOODY

[Sent by email Tuesday, Oct. 30, 11:39 a.m.]

Sheriff Woody,

We will run your entire response, word for word. However, I am sorry you chose not to answer the specific questions I submitted. If you need more time, as I explained, we could receive your answers as late as 3 p.m. tomorrow. If you need more than two and a half days lead time to answer similar questions in the future, please let me know what would be acceptable to you.

The article itself has not yet been written. I am aware of the good programs you have initiated and those will be mentioned as well.

However, the fact that DOC thinks you run a tight ship doesn't mean the jail doesn't have serious problems. When I was covering City Jail issues for the Richmond Free Press, the DOC routinely gave the jail top ratings. So your argument really is that is you run the jail as well as Sheriff Mitchell. And that is a stunningly low bar.

As for "believing" allegations by inmates, we receive many complaints – from inmates, public housing residents, alleged victims of police brutality and more. When we receive the same or similar complaints from multiple people, we look into the issues, report the allegations and offer those who are targeted by the complaints a chance to respond– to give their side of the story.

If you prefer newspapers that ignore cries for help from the city's most vulnerable residents, there are other publications that may better suit your needs.

Sincerely,

Phil Wilayto
Editor, The Virginia Defender

Editor's Note: We will be following up on this issue in the next Defender. Your comments are welcome.



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In our opinion

Election Day 2012

No, we are not endorsing President Barack Obama for re-election.

Are we glad there is finally a Black person in the “White House?” Of course.

Is the president better than Mitt Romney on some issues, such as abortion and gay rights, the environment and picking the next U.S. Supreme Court justice? Yes, he is.

But domestically, Obama’s main role has been to save the Wall Street banks from collapse. Except for the auto industry, which was seen as “too big to fail,” he did precious little to help working people, of any race.

In terms of the Black community, the best you can say is that he isn’t Romney. Under Obama, there has been no FDR-type jobs program to address the Depression-era unemployment among Black workers. There has been no serious attempt to reverse the mass incarceration that author Michelle Alexander has so rightly called the “New Jim Crow.” There has been no effort to stop the epidemic of police shootings and extra-legal killings of Black people, such as that of Trayvon Martin by vigilante George Zimmerman.

In fact, in three nationally televised debates with Romney, Obama couldn’t even bring himself to mention the Black community, let alone advocate for it.

As for the Latino community, more undocumented workers have been deported under the Obama administration than under any other president in U.S. history.

When it comes to foreign policy, there is a difference between President Obama and his predecessor, George W. Bush: Obama is worse.

This year, the country’s first Black president became the first U.S. president to openly bomb an African country, letting loose the U.S.-led NATO aerial assault that overthrew the government of Muammar Gaddafi. He has presided over the military efforts, led by U.S. proxy states Kenya and Ethiopia, to take over Somalia. He has overseen the expansion of the U.S. Africa Command, AFRICOM, across the Continent. And, right now, his administration is planning the military intervention of the Republic of Mali.

President Obama has personally authorized each of the unmanned drone attack that have resulted in the deaths of hundreds if not thousands of innocent civilians in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

He has brought the Middle East to the brink of regional war by his unbridled military, economic and diplomatic hostility toward the Islamic Republic of Iran.

And it was his administration that aggressively pushed to have the 2012 National Defense Authorization Act include a provision that would allow the U.S. government, if it says it just *suspects* a U.S. resident or citizen of being involved in terrorism, to take that person off the streets, with no charges, no trial, no access to an attorney, nothing.

So no, we’re not endorsing Barack Obama. Our solution to either a Romney or Obama presidency is the same: building an independent, mass movement for fundamental economic, social and political change. (In Virginia, that means building the Virginia People’s Assembly – see the story on page 3.)

On the local level, things are different. Big money can influence the elections, but an honest person can still run for office with some hope of winning.

So here are our endorsements for the Richmond elections: For the 5th District City Council: **Marty Jewell**.

Ever since Sa’ad El-Amin was removed from Council, we’ve lacked a real elected champion for the city’s working people and especially its Black community. Marty has stepped up to take on the role. We don’t always agree with him, but he is a man of, by and for the community and we wholeheartedly support his re-election.

For Council’s 8th District: **Reva Trammell**.

Again, we don’t always agree with Reva, particularly in her unqualified support for the Richmond Police Department, which has a checkered record, to say the least. But if there’s a problem in the 8th at 3 a.m. and you call Reva, she’s there. She lives to serve her constituency, Black, Latino and white.

For the the 2nd District School Board: **Kim Gray**.

On issue after issue, Kim has been the one board member willing to stand up for the community. She was the only member to oppose the reopening of Norrell Elementary, a school built on a rotting landfill. She has been an outspoken critic of the city’s sole charter school, the local stalking horse for the national, right-wing-backed effort to privatize public education.

In the City Council’s 4th District, we would dearly like to see Kathy Graziano go back to lobbying on behalf of big corporations. Her challenger, Johnnie Walker, seems a decent person, but in our opinion he just hasn’t explained his specific goals for the 4th.

So on Nov. 6, we encourage you to vote – unless you’re one of the hundreds of thousands of Virginians who have been disenfranchised because of a felony conviction, the most glaring example of the New Jim Crow. The right to vote was won through bitter struggle and we should cherish it.

But we should only vote for something we really want.

If you vote for the lesser of two evils, all you can expect is more evil.

Something NOT to Crow About

Voter ID Rules Fail Court Tests Across Country



Letters to the Editor

Thank you

Dear Virginia Defender, Supporters, Occupy Movement and Public Seekers of Justice,

We as a family want to take a moment to say THANK YOU!

Thank you, for the continued show of unwavering support by your continued presence at the court dates and the Facebook postings.

Just by you speaking with your friends and family, making others aware of the injustice that our family is up against means, more than words can say. We as a unit and individually have been through a lot of emotional trauma because of this what seems to be a never-ending circumstance. But, are aware and appreciate your kind words, time and efforts that are made on Ashley’s behalf.

Please know that we can’t thank you enough and want to make sure you are aware of our gratitude.

Sincerely and with Love,

The Williams and Jones Family
RICHMOND

Jail not following rules?

I am writing this letter because of a big dilemma at the Richmond City Jail.

First of all, the Richmond City Jail is placing inmates in strip cells (without toilets) as a form of punishment. On top of that, leaving then in the cell longer than three days. Long as months.

The jail is not following the inmate rule book. According to the inmate rule book, these guidelines [must be] in compliance with the standards established by the Virginia State Board of Corrections for the administration of local jails.

The Richmond City Jail is also placing inmates [in segregation] that have been found guilty of more than one rule violation. ... The rule book states that the inmate cannot exceed 15 consecutive days for each offense. The jail is making the inmates do 90 to 120 days straight.

The inmates have filed grievance on these matters. The jail says they are non-grievable. But the rule book states [that] any situation in which you believe that any law, rule, regulation or policy is being misapplied or misused you can file a grievance. What can you do when the people in charge over you are not following the rules?

The Richmond City Jail is violating so many rules. I ask humbly that these mat-

ters be looked into. The jail has to follow the Department of Correction procedures, They are not following the [City Jail] rule book procedures, so you know they are not following DOC procedures.

I would like to thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

Thank you, again.

Respectfully,
David Hewlett #734
RICHMOND CITY JAIL

A New Mayor?

John F. Kennedy said, “Once you accept second place, when first place is available, you have a tendency to do that the rest of your life.”

Richmond is a city rich in diversity, culture, art, history, and architecture, and at one time more thriving than Atlanta or Charlotte. However, certain political decisions, or lack thereof, regarding finances, schools, job creation and transportation have held Richmond back from greatness.

The state auditor has determined that our City Hall is the most expensive city hall in the entire state. On a per capita basis, it costs \$10 million more dollars to operate than the city hall of Norfolk.

The city’s basic water rate has been labeled the most expensive in the United States. We have \$7 million in uncollected

storm water fees. Meals and entertainment taxes in the city discourage patronage to city businesses. This year we incredulously reopened a shuttered elementary school built on a landfill and offered parents, many of them with lesser financial means, no alternative as to where to send their children (imagine the uproar if this had happened in Henrico, Chesterfield or Hanover).

Yahoo Finance listed Richmond as the #5 city in the U.S. with vacant homes. Why do we consider plywood an acceptable window treatment?

Finally, and foremost, 40 percent of African-Americans residing in the city live at or below the poverty line. Our residents without private transportation are trapped in an economic prison as GRTC cannot take them to job markets in surrounding counties.

What we do not need are more feasibility studies and paid out-of-town consultants. We should not be the feasibility study capital of Virginia. We need jobs, transportation and financial accountability.

On November 6th we have the opportunity to point Richmond in a new direction. The choice is yours, “It’s our time right now!”

Mike Ryan Jr.
RICHMOND

The writer is a candidate for mayor of Richmond.

The Virginia Defender

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We welcome letters, while reserving the right to edit for clarity, length and style. To submit a letter, an item for the Community Calendar or to place an ad, contact:

The Virginia Defender

PO Box 23202, Richmond, VA 23223 • Phone: 804.644.5834 • Fax: 804.332.5225
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VCU's anti-crime measures fail to address underlying issues

By Lorena Castro & Gregory Nowotarski

As a revitalized wave of crime hits Richmond, Virginia Commonwealth University and City police officers scramble to prevent criminal activity from “spilling” over to the campus.

In early October, VCU administrators decided to expand on their previous crime prevention policies by hiring a private security force to assist the campus police. This, according to the administration, offers a short-term solution to the problem. With a fortified police force, they can now isolate the crime and build a wall protecting the students of VCU from the rest of Richmond.

Along with this headstrong announcement was an email sent out by the president of the school, Michael Rao. In it he writes, “Looking at the longer-term, we intend to replace some of the dilapidated areas adjacent to our campus with a robust business and retail environment.”

VCU's president explicitly shows interest in expanding the campus to surrounding neighborhoods. While VCU's email shows deep concern for the safety of the students, it does not address the root of Richmond's ever-growing problem.

Before the newly installed G4S private security team started, VCU ranked #1 as the largest university police force in Virginia. They pride themselves on being a model for other universities throughout the state. VCU controls 92 sworn police officers within their jurisdiction. The protective institution here at VCU includes these officers, the G4S team and the security personnel who guard the variety of buildings on campus directly.

The feelings are optimistic among VCU students and the administration on campus. On Oct. 9 at a City Hall meeting here in Richmond, VCU Police Chief John Venuti stated, “We expect these extra resources will go a long way to making anyone planning future robberies to think twice.”

Less than a week later, a VCU alert reported six suspects breaking into a house in the 100 block of South Laurel Street. They referred to it as an “armed home invasion robbery.” Chief Venuti claims that the expansion of security forces on campus is prohibiting crime, but the actions of criminals say otherwise.

In 2011, the rate of robberies on VCU's campus sat empty the entire first semester. This fall semester, the number of robberies reported already stands tall at three. With an increase in police force accompanying a further increase in major crimes, it is clear that officials are failing to target the source behind the misconduct. Instead of combating these problems with short-term solutions, it is necessary to step back and analyze the hidden community barriers built over time.

To many VCU students, the subtle connection between crime and desperation has not yet been made. The concern over personal safety seems to dominate over the desperation felt by surrounding communities.

During the Oct. 11 town hall meeting hosted by President Rao and Chief Venuti, the administration avoided topics of poverty and community relations. As a school that prides itself on diversity, the lack of interest in improving relationships between VCU and Richmond speaks loudly.

VCU has made many sincere gestures toward



working for the community, but has not yet made such actions. Many Richmond activists worked to restore the historical burial grounds formerly hidden beneath a VCU parking lot near East Broad Street. President Rao sought no direct action to include VCU in these efforts, thereby making his intentions clear.

The school seeks to expand and tear down parts of the community, while failing to preserve its history. In the midst of VCU's displacement of these “dilapidated” areas, the question arises: Where will these families live?

Among the public housing communities of Whitcomb, Mosby, and Fairfield, the district of Gilpin Court serves as a model of exploitation in Richmond. Displacing people into public housing creates economic vulnerabilities that enhance youth crime and risk-taking.

Poverty alone, however, cannot be blamed for the petty crimes around campus. Dr. Shawn Utsey, Chair of VCU's African American Studies Department, states, “The desperation tells the people, ‘You don't have a lot to lose.’ As a psychologist, that's the link between poverty and crime. It's a sense of desperation – a sense of being disposable.”

VCU is now faced with the choice to either forget the history and continue to isolate the poor from growing opportunities, or work together with the city in breaking down these barriers and economic exploitations, which breed desperation and crime.

As Dr. Utsey observes, these economic crimes are not on our radar, therefore they don't affect us personally. Petty crimes, however, can scare us because they affect us, and these are the only crimes we are concerned about.

Lorena Castro and Gregory Nowotarski are students at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Why is NATO supporting this Syrian war?

By Robin Edward Poulton, Ph.D

In her Oct. 18 story “Denial slipping away as war rattles Damascus,” New York Times reporter Janine di Giovanni eloquently describes the end of secular life as we have known it in the Syrian capital. People live in fear. Nightlife ends before midnight. Normal life is disappearing.

No one has been able – or willing – to explain to me why the U.S. administration and its NATO allies are supporting the destruction of Syria. The people we decry as “terrorists” and “Al Qaeda” are in fact the very same Sunni Muslim extremists – supported by Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States – whom we are apparently funding and arming in Syria.

Why? Is it simply because because the Alawite minority government is an ally of Iran? Are our international policies really so shallow?

For sure, the Alawites run a tough ‘mukhabarat’ (repressive) government, but it is no worse than any other government around the region. The governments of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are just as ruthless as the Assad regime. The Gulf States and Yemen are police states. Unlike Saudi Arabia and Iraq, Syria is a land where freedom of thought and freedom of religion are total and have flourished for centuries.

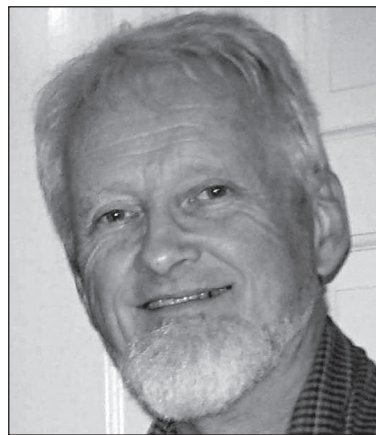
Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and the Alawites are now fighting for their lives. The Wahabbists, a fundamentalist and extremely intolerant branch of Sunnism, whom NATO is supporting, believe the Alawites are apostates and must therefore be executed. By supporting the Wahabbists, NATO is destroying Syria and is destroying the world's oldest Christian civilization.

I have been to Damascus and walked along the old Roman road described in the New Testament as “The Street called Straight,” where the blinded Paul of Tarsus was recuperated by Anastasius following instructions from God. I have prayed in the very room where Anastasius baptized Paul and restored his sight in the year 34, founding the oldest Christian Church of them all.

Christians have been worshiping in Damascus since the days of Christ and they still do – together with all the Iraqi Christians who fled and became refugees in Syria after the American invasion transformed Iraq into a place of sectarian Islamic civil war.

And where will the Iraqi and Syrian Christians go next, when NATO and Saudi Arabia have turned Syria into another Sunni-Shia battleground? Are Turkey and Western Europe ready to receive the 15 million Syrian refugees they are helping to create?

During the 1980s, America funded the same Sunni extremists in Central Asia, where we created Al Qaeda. Why do we love the Wahabbist Saudis, the people who gave us Al Qaeda and also 9/11? Are Western political leaders unable to see the extreme danger of Wahabbist Salafism flooding across the Muslim world, from



Morocco and Algeria to Syria and Pakistan?

Janine's article in the New York Times describes a Salsa dance evening in Damascus that ended before midnight. There will soon be no more Salsa, no more music, no more dancing. Salafists hate people who want to have fun.

The danger to the West and to Israel comes not from Iran, a country under permanent threat and hemmed in for 1,000 years between aggressive Arabs and expansionist Turks. The great danger comes from Wahabism. Anyone who analyses the lessons of our disastrous policies in Afghanistan and Pakistan and Iraq must be able to see that we have been encouraging this kind of extremism the world over.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice and President Barack Obama, can you not see what is happening and what harm you are doing?

French President François Hollande and UK Prime Minister David Cameron, are you unable to see that the martial rhetoric of your foreign ministers Laurent Fabius and William Hague is both dangerous and stupid?

Syria has been a pleasant and peaceful place to live. Compared to its neighbours, Syria has been open and tolerant to all its citizens – except to the Muslim Brotherhood and its other extremist offshoots. It is precisely this tolerance, and the Alawite refusal to accept Sunni extremism, that has led Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Al Qaeda (through its cousin Al-Nusra) to attack Syria. Yes there are Sunni Syrians fighting against Assad, but there are also extremist Turks, Iraqis, Saudis, Yemenis, Afghans, Pakistanis, Filipinos, Chechens and a host of other terrorists who are inside Syria using bombs and rockets to overthrow the regime.

Instead of actively supporting the Wahabbist-supported terrorists, we should be defending the Alawite regime in Damascus as a bulwark against extremism and terrorism.

Robin Edward Poulton, Ph.D., is a Professor of French and World Studies (affiliate), School of World Studies, Virginia Commonwealth University, and a Senior Fellow at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, Geneva. He can be reached at: repoulton@vcu.edu.

Mali

Continued from page 1

from Segou's sister city in France, Angoulême. That was 5,000 from the city and 2,000 from (the local organization, like the Virginia Friends of Mali.)

Defender: Are the new arrivals living in people's homes or in camps?

Mayor Simaga: All the families who have come to Segou have received help from their families. In Segou, they tend to live with family members. Outside of Mali, they tend to end up in camps.

Defender: What help do you expect to get from the central government?

Mayor Simaga: They can't do much, but they have sent cereal, sugar and milk. We have also received help from Programme Alimentaire Mondial (the World Food Program of the United Nations). Help from the central government at best will last one to two months, but until things are resolved, the

problem will continue. So it's clear the situation will get worse in one or two months. It depends on how ECOWAS, the U.N. and the African Union respond. (The 15-country Economic Community of West African States, or ECOWAS, was founded in 1975 to promote regional economic integration.)

Defender: Are you receiving any help from Non Government Organizations, the NGOs?

Mayor Simaga: Yes, from small NGOs and individuals who have the means and who are also helping in the North. But it's not enough, because most NGOs have already left Mali or have stopped doing everything because there is no security.

Defender: How about from other individual states?

Mayor Simaga: Niger, Mauritania, Algeria and Burkina Faso have taken large numbers of refugees and are supporting them. Algeria has given several tons of rice to Mali.

There may be more help, but I'm not sure.

Defender: How about from the U.S?

Mayor Simaga: Not at this point, but I'm not sure.

Defender: And ECOWAS?

Mayor Simaga: The prime minister (of Mali) is going to the U.N. next next week to present the situation concretely and the request will be for ECOWAS to be prepared to help financially – especially for the U.N. to help ECOWAS financially, then ECOWAS will take care of the situation.

Defender: What will you be asking for at your meeting with Richmond Mayor Dwight Jones? Financial assistance?

Mayor Simaga: Yes, for financial assistance for food, education and for health care. I want to be able to present the situation in Mali directly to him.

Defender: What can ordinary Virginians do to help, especially with the needs in Segou?

Mayor Simaga: It's a complicated question. I have confidence that the Virginia Friends of Mali will help spread the word, that they will help educate the people of Virginia about the situation.

Defender: If people want to make a contribution themselves, how can they do this?

Mayor Simaga: They could donate the money through the Virginia Friends of Mali, with the confidence that it would come to Segou.

Defender: Anything else you would like to share?

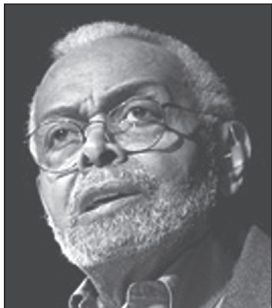
Mayor Simaga: We have a problem, but we are optimistic that we will overcome. Mali is a great country with a great history. I am confident that Mali's ship will make it, that it will sail these stormy waters and arrive intact.

EDITOR'S NOTE: To make a contribution by PayPal, regular mail or in person to help relieve the humanitarian crisis in Segou, please visit the Virginia Friends of Mali website: VaFriendsOfMali.org

from the anti-war front



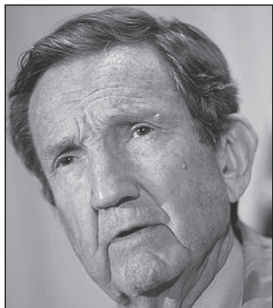
President
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad



Poet/Activist
Amiri Baraka



Ambassador
Muhammad Khazaei



Fr. Attorney General
Ramsey Clark



Minister
Louis Farrakhan



Foreign Minister
Ali Akbar Salehi



Defender Editor
Phil Wilayto

It was totally ignored by the Big Business media, but while he was in New York,
**Iran’s President Ahmadinejad leads discussion
condemning weapons of mass destruction**

**Recolonizing the Continent:
U.S. & France on verge of
major intervention in Mali**

By Ana Edwards

In February 2010, I was walking along a path to Kalabougou, a small village in the West African country of Mali renowned for the beautiful, utilitarian pottery made by its women and sold throughout the country from ports along the Niger River. Just a 40-minute boat ride west from Segou, Mali’s second largest city, and nearly 1,000 miles from the troubles in the north, this traditional and savvy community’s economy is dependent upon, and popular with, tourists and Peace Corps volunteers.

As I walked, I spotted a small, dusty piece of cloth on the ground. Looking closely, I saw that it was a patch, embroidered with the letters “U.S. ARMY.”

I had known the U.S. military was present in the north of the country providing material support to the Malian army, but I had not seen or heard of them working so far to the south.

And yet here was evidence of a close encounter between a U.S. Army or Special Operations soldier and a village typically visited only by tourists. Was the soldier on leave or on assignment? Or did the patch travel its own weird, non-military way 1,000 miles from north to south?

Virginians, especially Black Virginians, have a special relationship with Mali. Many of our ancestors torn from their African homes and brought in chains to Virginia came from the old Malian Empire. Richmond has an official sister-city relationship with Segou. Each October, a delegation of Malians comes to Richmond to attend our Folk Festival, while each February a delegation of Richmonders travels to Segou to attend their annual Festival on the Niger. And, thanks to efforts by Virginia Friends of Mali, the history of this important African country is now taught to our schoolchildren as part of the state’s Standards of Learning studies.

All this helps to explain the great concern a growing number of Virginians are feeling as we watch the tragic civil war unfold in Mali, a war that has its roots in the historic oppression of racial “minorities” in the north of the country.

We are growing even more concerned as we watch how France, the former colonial power of Mali, and the U.S. government, which would like to be the neocolonial power there, are now planning a military intervention that would have far-reaching consequences for West Africa and the entire Continent.

To help our readers better understand this rapidly developing situation, we offer the following analysis, an abbreviated version of a longer article posted on the website of the Pan African News Wire, edited by our good friend Abayomi Azikiwe, a Tennessee-born activist now fighting poverty and police brutality in Detroit.

We are now in the beginning stages of a great challenge for all African-Americans: Will we stand by and allow the government that acts in our name to take possession of our Motherland?

**France Deploys Drones &
Prepares for Imperialist
Intervention in Mali**

By Abayomi Azikiwe
Editor, Pan-African News Wire

Western imperialist states, with the support of the United Nations Security Council, are preparing for a full-scale military intervention in the West African state of Mali. Since March, the country has been in a severe political crisis with the advent of a military coup and the effective partitioning of the north and south of the country.

France, under the government of Francois Hollande, has moved surveillance drones to West Africa and is engaging in secret talks with the United States officials in Paris. Mali, which was colonized by France in the 19th century, won its independence in 1960.

Although the French and the U.S. claim that any military involvement must be led by a regional African force, both Paris and Washington have strong ties with the security apparatus in Mali. Prior to the coup that toppled President Amadou Toumani Toure in March, the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) had established training programs and joint operations with the Malian army.

This planned intervention is being carried out under the guise of fighting al-Qaeda in North and West Africa. The Tuareg people, represented by several organizations in northern Mali, have been at odds with the central government in Bamako in the south for many years.

In the aftermath of the U.S.-NATO engineered war of regime-change in Libya, many Tuaregs relocated back to northern Mali where they have had a presence for many centuries. The Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) is credited with leading the campaign for the seizure of several major cities in the north of the country earlier this year and the declaration of a separate state of Azawad.

The MNLA is viewed as a secular organization concerned with addressing grievances between the Tuareg and the central government. Other organizations of an Islamic orientation also have a formidable presence in northern Mali, and it is the existence of groups such as Ansar Dine, the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and the Al-Qaeda of the Islamic Magreb (AQIM) that the imperialists are utilizing to craft a justification for an intervention and occupation.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Johnnie Carson was involved in the talks in Paris designed to enhance intelligence gathering in Mali and throughout the Sahel region. During mid-October, the Security Council gave authorization for the establishment of a plan for military intervention.

The Security Council resolution passed on Oct. 12 called for the deployment of 3,000 troops under the ostensible authority of the West African regional organization. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon was given 45 days to put forward “detailed and actionable recommendations.”

A meeting on the Malian situation was

held during the weekend of Oct. 20-21 in Bamako. The meeting was attended by regional leaders from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the U.N., the European Union and the recently installed African Union Commission Chair, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma.

In Brussels on Oct. 19, the E.U. pledged through a resolution to “speed up planning of a possible (E.U.) military operation to help re-organize and train the Malian defense forces. The E.U. will maintain the option to adopt targeted restrictive measures against those involved in the armed groups in northern Mali and those hindering the return to constitutional order.”

France’s special envoy to the Sahel, Jean Felix-Paganon, told the international press during his visit to Mali that “we are at their disposal. In principle, the decision has been taken to respond to the needs of the Malian army in terms of what is necessary.”

U.S. State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland said on Oct. 10 in relationship to Washington’s involvement in Mali that “we are in close consultation with the French on the situation in Mali, as we are with the ECOWAS countries, as we are with the interim authority in Mali.”

General Carter F. Ham, the Commander of AFRICOM, said in a press briefing in Algeria on Oct. 3 that “The best way the United States military can help is through training, exchange of ideas, working in partnership with the nations in the region. This involves, sometimes, conducting training exercises in the region with our African partners.”

The rationale for imminent military action in northern Mali is related to a wave of news articles claiming that more fighters from various Islamists groups have been pouring into the region. The Voice of America reported on Oct. 22 that “Hundreds of additional Islamist fighters have deployed in northern Mali, as neighboring countries make plans to send troops to the troubled nation.”

This same article went on to claim that “Residents report seeing hundreds of Tunisian and Egyptian militants in the city of Gao, while many other militants went to the central town of Douentza, close to Malian army positions in Mopti. The al-Qaida-linked militants in the region have carried out public executions, amputations and floggings in an effort to enforce their strict version of Islamic law.”

However, the MNLA has denied these reports of a large group of Islamists entering the area. Ibrahim Ag Mohamed Assaleh, a spokesperson for the organization, said “the arrival of convoys of jihadists from Sudan and the Western Sahara are totally false. We categorically deny it.”

Even a Malian security source told the French Press Agency (AFP) that there is “the arrival of new terrorists in the north of Mali,” but claims of several hundred are “exaggerated.”

Consequently, the aims and objectives of the E.U., U.S. and U.N. Security Council are related to the overall imperialist agenda for the African continent. Africa is becoming even more strategic in regard to the exploitation of oil and other minerals that are indispensable to the world capitalist market.

Western intervention, even if it is masked by thousands of regional troops from ECOWAS, cannot resolve the problems of underdevelopment and lack of empowerment among the African masses. Africa and its people have no other choice but to take control of their resources and to develop mechanism for ensuring the security, stability and development of the continent.

Staff Report

He’s routinely and crudely criticized by Western media as a dangerous threat to world peace, but when Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came to New York City to address the United Nations General Assembly, he took the time to lead a panel discussion condemning weapons of mass destruction.

About 150 U.S. peace and social justice activists, along with members of the Muslim, Jewish and Christian faiths, attended the president’s meeting, held Sept. 25 at the Warwick Hotel in Midtown Manhattan.

Joining President Ahmadinejad on the speakers’ platform were the legendary poet and activist Amiri Baraka, former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark, Nation of Islam Minister Louis Farrakhan, Iran’s U.N. Ambassador Muhammad Khazaei, Iran’s Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi, MIT nuclear security expert Dr. Jim Walsh, Virginia Defender Editor Phil Wilayto, a Muslim scholar and a Christian theologian.

The president’s presentation focused on denouncing the use, by any country, of weapons of mass destruction, whether nuclear, biological or chemical. Iran’s religious leaders, including the country’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Khamenei, have forbidden Iran’s military from developing such weapons. Iran also has repeatedly called for a nuclear-free Middle East.

President Ahmadinejad also criticized the way the U.N. currently functions, with five countries having the power to decide how the other 200 should be allowed to interact.

This was the fourth year in a row that the Iranian president has met with U.S. activists. It will also be his last. He is nearing the end of his second term in office and, in accordance with the Iranian Constitution, will not be eligible to run in the June 2013 election.

Each year, there has been a steady increase in the number of Black and other people of color attending the meetings.

“It is not often that internationally recognized author/activist Amiri Baraka and the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan share the same podium,” commented Shafeah M’Baliala, an activist with Communiversity who traveled from Rocky Mount, N.C., to attend the meeting.

“But as guests of the Iranian Mission to the United Nations and to share the podium with a head of state, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, reflected the seriousness of the issue of weapons of mass destruction and the political climate that the Black Liberation Movement inside the U.S. was twice represented on the panel could be considered an important statement.”

But not by the commercial news media, which did not mention of this event.

In the event of any military attack on Iran, by the U.S., Israel or any other country, the Richmond Peace Education Center and the Defenders are calling for a protest to take place at 5 p.m. the following day outside the Federal Courthouse, 701 E. Broad St. in downtown Richmond.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

ONGOING - RICHMOND

DEFENDERSLIVE! - Every Monday with host Ana Edwards. Noon-12:30 pm on WRIR, Richmond's community radio station. 97.3 FM or worldwide online at www.wrir.org. (The program is rebroadcast online Tuesdays at 11 am.)

BYRD HOUSE FARMERS MARKET - "The freshest and localest foods." 3 pm-sunset, Tuesdays at the William Byrd Community House, 224 S. Cherry St. Information: (804) 643-2717; ByrdHouseMarket@gmail.com; www.ByrdHouseMarket.blogspot.com; www.WBCH.org

FOOD NOT BOMBS - Sundays at 4 pm. Free vegan meals served in Monroe Park, corner of Main and Belvidere streets. (804) 303-544, a16rva@hotmail.com or www.myspace.com/richmondfnb

ACTIVISTS EVENTS ONLINE CALENDAR - A Richmond activist has launched an online calendar to announce local news and opportunities for local action. Check it out at: <http://active-rva.tumblr.com/calendar>.

RICHMOND EVENTS

Thurs., Nov. 1 — **5th ANNUAL REPHRAME COMMUNITY FORUM** - 5:30-8:30 pm, Good Shepherd Baptist Church, 1127 N. 28th St. Dinner.

Mon., Nov. 5 — **WORKING PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS FORUM** - Join Students for a Democratic Society for an educational panel on working-class movements. Speakers include representatives of local labor unions, community organization and more. 7-8:30 pm, VCU Student Commons Theater, 907 Floyd Ave. Free.

Wed., Nov. 7 — **SONG EVENT** - "Join Southerners On New Ground, with co-founder Suzanne Pharr and local community organizer Cathy Woodson, for a post-election conversation about some of the most important issues the candidates didn't tackle this election year." 4-5:30 pm - VCU Student Commons Theatre. Information: Salem Acuña at (804) 933-9945 or salem@southernersonnewground.org.

Thurs., Nov. 8 — **PUBLIC FORUM ON HOUSING IN SEGREGATION** - Join

HOME and the Virginia Poverty Law Center. 6:30 pm, University of Richmond Downtown, Gallery Space, 626 E. Broad St., Richmond. Dr. Shawn Utsey, Chair of VCU's African American Studies; Rev. Ben Campbell of Richmond Hill; Dr. John V. Moeser, UR's Bonner Center of Civic Engagement; moderated by Ana Edwards, Manager of Library Programs & Byrd House Market at William Byrd Community House. Seating is Limited. Please RSVP The Future of Richmond's Past. Carolyn Martin at (804) 289-8088 or cmartin@richmond.edu. See: www.futureofrichmondspast.org.

Sat., Nov. 17 — **COOKING AS A 2ND LANGUAGE** - "West African cuisine from Senegal!! Wolof-central! Jolof-central! Home of Yassa and Thiebou Jen and Maffe and Curry and Oxtails. With Chef Boubaca. Register at EatGoodGrowGreat.blogspot.com. \$10. William Byrd Community House - Nutrition Room, 224 S. Cherry St., Richmond. www.wbch.org. (804) 643-2717, ext. 306.

Thurs., Nov. 22 — **THANKSGIVING FEAST** - 2012 Giving Heart Community Thanksgiving Feast. 11 AM-2 PM, Greater Richmond Convention Center. ALL ARE INVITED! Interested in making "in kind" donations? Information: <http://thegivingheart.org/thanksgivingfeast.html>.

Wed., Nov. 28 — **ATTEND THE TRIAL OF ASHLEY WILLIAMS** - 9 am, Courtroom 307, John Marshall Courts Building, 400 N. 9th St., RichmondD. (See story on page 4.)

Thurs., Dec. 6 — **STC MEETING** - Monthly meeting of the Richmond City Council Slave Trail Commission. 4- 5:30 pm, East End Initiative Government Services Building, 701 N. 25th St., Richmond. WARNING: These meetings are often changed with no notice to the public.

Wed., Dec. 12 — **SAVE THE DATE!** - 12/12/12 Fund-Raising Holiday Party for The Virginia Defender. Details to be announced. This will be the last time in nearly 90 years - until Jan. 1, 2101 - when the month, day and year will all be represented by the same numerals: 12/12/12. Let's mark this numerical occasion by raising some numbers so the Defender can start 2013 on a solid financial basis.

Sat., Jan. 5 — **HOLD THE DATE** - TENTATIVE DATE FOR 2013 VPA. (See story on page 3.)

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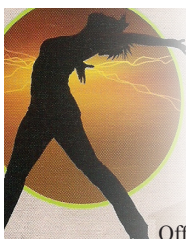
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5th District
Councilman Marty Jewell
DEMOCRAT

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- Eliminated twelve longstanding drug hot spots.
- Allocated \$300,000 for Lights for Randolph West.
- Repaved 90% of district streets *and more to come*.
- Recruited Rebuilding Together, for two years to repair 125 homes of senior and disabled residents.
- Voted to reduce the real estate tax rate from \$1.43 to \$1.20 per \$100.
- A proven advocate for Carytown, Main St. and minority businesses.
- Placed speed bumps at John B. Cary and Paved Amelia School's playground.
- Secured \$150,000 each for both George Wythe & Thomas Jefferson to improve the athletic fields.
- Voted against the Mayor cutting schools funding.
- Organized a taskforce to create youth recreational programs; and recruited funds for *city-wide* summer youth baseball tournaments 2008-2012.



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