

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

D The Virginia **DEFENDER**

FREE

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After decades of the Shockoe Bottom struggle: Is victory finally in sight?

By Ana Edwards & Phil Wilayto

Once again, the struggle to reclaim and properly memorialize Shockoe Bottom has entered another critical stage - and this one may be decisive.

This small district in downtown Richmond was once the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade. In the 30 years before the end of the Civil War, so many people were sold here that today the majority of African-Americans could likely trace some ancestry to this sacred ground. As such, it has national and even international importance.

After decades of community struggle, serious money is being proposed for a memorialization, but this important question remains: Will the memorial be large enough to convey the enormity of the suffering and resistance that took place here - which is the clear, demonstrated desire of the community - or will it be confined to the single site of one slave jail?

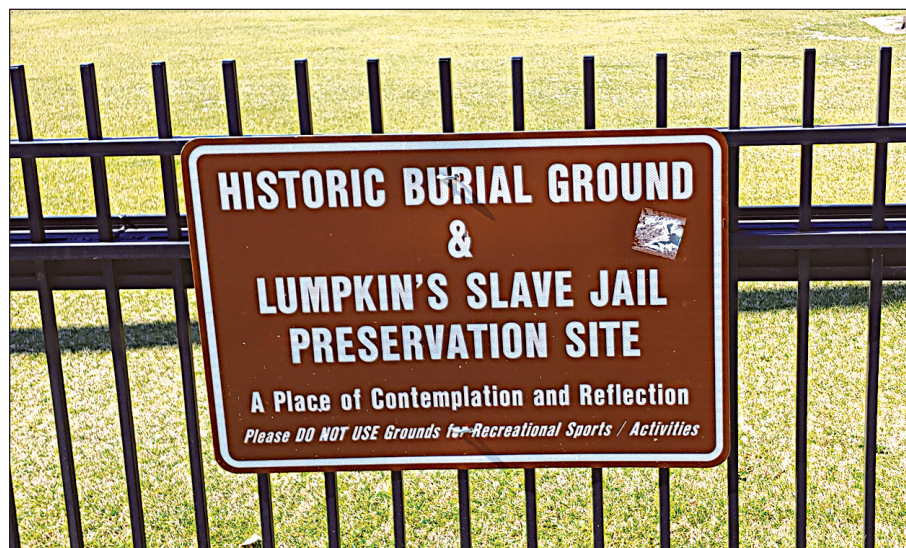


Photo by Phil Wilayto

Ten years after Richmond's African Burial Ground was reclaimed from its desecration as a VCU parking lot, the city government continues to refer to it as simply a "historic" cemetery, not the final resting place of enslaved Africans. For more examples of the city's poor stewardship of this sacred ground, see pages 8-9.

The Community Proposal for a nine-acre Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park is the result of five open meetings held in 2015 by the Defenders' Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project. The park would consist of three elements: the 3.1-acre African Burial Ground, the 1.7-acre Devil's Half-Acre (site of the notorious slave jail owned by Robert Lumpkin) and

two more blocks east of the CSX railroad tracks where many other slave-trade-related sites once stood. (See sacredgroundproject.net.)

This proposal has won the overwhelming support of the community, as opposed to memorializing the single site of Lumpkin's jail. It also has been endorsed, at a City press conference held last July 28 in Shockoe Bottom, by Mayor Levar Stoney, City Council President Cynthia Newbille and Del. Delores McQuinn, who chairs city council's "Slave Trail" Commission (STC).

This was the first time that Del. McQuinn and President Newbille had publicly endorsed the memorial park.

The proposal also calls for an "interpretive center," rather than a much more expensive traditional museum that would compete with the nearby Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia. The Defenders are suggesting that the

See SHOCKOE on Page 8

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." -- Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. -- Jan. 15, 1929 - April 4, 1968

regional & national news

Recovering from COVID, Mumia still faces severe health problems

By Phil Wilayto

Mumia Abu-Jamal, the former Black Panther and international symbol of the racist use of the death penalty in the United States, is reportedly recovering from a bout with COVID-19, but his medical struggles are far from over.

On Feb. 27, Mumia, 66, was rushed to a local hospital near Mahanoy State Correctional Institution in Pennsylvania, where he is serving a life sentence after being unjustly convicted nearly 40 years ago of murdering a white Philadelphia police officer. At the hospital, he was diagnosed with congestive heart disease. On March 3, after being returned to Mahanoy, it was revealed that he had tested positive for COVID-19.

Since then, he has lost 30 pounds, as a long-term skin condition flared up leaving “bloodied open wounds” all over his body, according to one of his supporters.

As reported March 8 in the Philadelphia Tribune, Johanna Fernández, an associate professor of history at Baruch College of the City University of New York and a member of the Campaign to Bring Mumia Home, said that Mumia was being isolated in the prison infirmary, seemed to be recovering from COVID-19 and was no longer receiving

intravenous fluids.

However, Fernández said, a skin condition thought to be linked to Mumia’s hepatitis C infection has left much of his skin cracked, whitened, bloodied and ruptured.

“It’s a horror show,” Fernández was quoted as saying about his condition.

Fernández said Abu-Jamal told her that a prison doctor had recommended he receive daily medical baths to treat his skin condition, but that the staff was not providing them.

Mumia’s many supporters have long maintained that prison authorities are trying to commit “murder by medical neglect” against Mumia, and that the only proper treatment would be to release him and allow him to receive proper medical care at a non-prison hospital.

“That a prisoner is being held under these conditions suggests that all standards of decency, morality and humanity have eroded in American society,” Fernández told the Tribune. “Mumia is not alone: This is what medical care looks like in American prisons.”

And yet, Fernández said, through it all, Mumia remains positive.

“He wants to live,” she said.

Mumia, formerly known as Wesley Cook, was convicted in 1982 of fatally shooting



Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner after the officer had reportedly pulled over Mumia’s brother during a late-night traffic stop. Mumia was sentenced to death and remained on death row until 2011, when, after years of mass protests on his behalf, his sentence was ruled unconstitutional. He is now serving a life sentence.

Mumia and his supporters have always maintained that he had been targeted by, first the police, and then the courts, because of his outspoken condemnation of police brutality

and systemic racism.

While in prison he has written several books and countless commentaries. That exposure, and the tireless work of groups like Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal, have helped win him broad international support. In 2006, the Paris suburb of Saint-Denis named a street after him.

For more information about Mumia and how you can help, see the website of Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal at: **freemumia.com**.

Want to fight for Freedom, Justice & Equality? Then JOIN THE DEFENDERS!

THE VIRGINIA DEFENDERS for Freedom, Justice & Equality

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odessasolidaritycampaign.org

The Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality is an all-volunteer organization of Virginians 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 sponsor the Virginia Defender quarterly newspaper and the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project and are affiliated with the Virginia Prison Justice Network, which we co-founded.

If you agree with the principles below and want to work to make these ideals a reality, we invite you to join us. Together, we can make a real difference in the life of our communities.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

We believe in Freedom

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

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

We believe in Justice

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

We believe in Equality

We live in the richest country in the world.

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

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

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

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

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

community news

The big gamble: Should Richmond allow a casino?

By Elaine Phillips

Six companies or partnerships have put their names in the hat hoping to build Richmond's first casino resort.

The process started last year when the General Assembly passed the Virginia Casino Act authorizing five cities to host casino operations, pending residents' voter approval. Bristol, Danville, Norfolk and Portsmouth have all voted in favor of casino development. Norfolk will have two operations.

A nine-member evaluation panel appointed by Mayor Levar Stoney is to report on community input April 8 and 9 and then select a proposal by May/June. Richmonders will vote on the issue Nov. 2. If approved, the casino would take 18 to 24 months to be built.

To study the issue, Richmond has tapped the New Orleans-based consulting firm Convergence Strategy Group to investigate the economic and social impacts that a casino would have on the area. Using market assessment data, Convergence estimates that a Richmond venue utilizing 1,870 to 2,000 slot machines and 80 to 90 gaming tables could draw as many as 2.6 to 2.8 million visitors annually. This could generate 1,875 to 2,035 full-time jobs and, per state mandate, produce \$10 to 10.5 million in annual tax revenue.

The six submitted proposals, which can be found on the city's government webpage rva.gov/economic-development/resort-casino, are variations on the same theme: gaming machines, tables and resort amenities, including hotel rooms, restaurants, and spas.

All but one of the groups are proposing sites south of the James River.

The contenders are:

Bally's Corporation - Based in Lincoln, R.I., Bally's is partnering with

Thompson Hospitality, a Black-owned company that is Virginia's largest "minority" employer, and two Black Virginia football greats, Willie Lanier and Darrell Green. Their proposed site is the northeast corner of Chippenham and Powhite parkways, the only location of all the proposals currently zoned for single-family housing.

Cordish Cos - Based in Baltimore, it owns several casinos on the East Coast. It's the only group proposing to build in Northside, on Arthur Ashe Boulevard near the Diamond.

Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino - Operates five casino resorts in Nevada, Louisiana, New Jersey and Mississippi. Like Bally's, it is targeting the northeast corner of Chippenham and Powhite parkways

Pamunkey Tribe - The only entirely Virginia-based and entirely "minority"-owned contender, the Pamunkey were the first occupants of the land that is now Richmond. They are proposing a site on Commerce Road off I-95. Currently preparing to break ground on a casino project in Norfolk.

Urban One - Based in Silver Spring, Md., Urban One is a Black-owned radio and cable company partnering with the owner of Virginia's Colonial Downs and Rosie's Gaming Emporium. This group has their eye on Walmsley Boulevard at the Philip-Morris Operations Center.

Wind Creek Hospitality - Owned by the Alabama-based Poarch Band of Creek Indians, with multiple properties throughout the United States and the Caribbean. Eyeing a Manchester location.

Richmonders have already voiced questions and concerns. After accessing the city's somewhat awkward digital platform, most raised fears of increased crime, along with strong opinions about the proposed building sites. Particularly opposed has been the Chippenham/Powhite location, due to its residential nature, expected increased area traffic and threats to local wetlands.

The public can learn more by visiting the city's website. Digital workshops and virtual meetings open for comments will run through April 4.

With casinos, who wins? And who loses?

By Elaine Phillips & Phil Wilayto

All the entities competing to build what would be Richmond's first casino are promising big benefits for the city and its residents. And casinos do bring jobs and tax revenue. But a hard look behind the upbeat promises reveals some real dangers, especially for a city where one out of every four residents lives in poverty.

Various studies of casinos do show increased tax revenue - in the beginning. But then the returns tend to shrink. In their 2016 study "Social and Economic Impacts of Gambling," researchers Douglas M. Walker and Russell S. Sobe reported that casinos produce some "modestly positive economic impact," but that the benefits tend to be short-term.

Another 2016 study, produced for the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute for Government, found that state revenues from gambling produced "short-term relief, long-term disappointment."

And a 2017 article by Melissa Chadburn for bloomberg.com reported that "public returns from gambling decline over time - often quite fast. This may be due to competition with other states for a limited market (saturation), or competition between different forms of gambling (substitution). The results are short-run yields, longer run deterioration."

For Richmond, this could mean some short-term improved financial prospects for the city - maybe until after the next mayoral election.

As for the jobs argument, will the jobs be filled by local workers? Will they pay a living wage, with benefits? Will there be opportunities for training and advancement? Is anyone asking these questions?

Then there are the social consequences.

A 2013 report by the Institute for American Values cites a Canadian study that found that "75% of casino customers who play only occasionally brought only 4% of casino revenues. It's the problem gambler who keeps the casino in business."

So casinos draw the problem gamblers - and produce more of them.

Anyone who has ever been to a casino knows that most of the gamblers are poor and working-class people, many of whom are betting money they can't afford to lose. These are the people providing new tax revenues for the city coffers. In effect, the city is exploiting its most vulnerable residents in order to improve its bottom line.

As CNN commentator David Frum wrote in 2013, "Low-income workers and retirees provide the bulk of the customers for the modern casino industry. And because that industry becomes an important source of government revenue, the decision to allow casino gambling is a decision to shift the cost of government from the richer to the poorer, and, within the poor, to a subset of vulnerable people with addiction problems."

Something to remember when Richmonders vote on the issue on Nov. 2.



Princess Blanding

'Marcus Alert' activist running for governor

In an important political development, a well-known social justice activist is running to be Virginia's next governor - and she's not doing it as a Democrat.

Princess Blanding, a former high school assistant principal, is described on her campaign website as "a single LGBTQIA+ mother based in the Middle Peninsula."

Princess' life changed dramatically after May 14, 2018, when her younger brother, Marcus-David Peters, was fatally shot by a Richmond police officer while experiencing a mental health crisis. Determined to obtain justice, she founded the advocacy coalition Justice & Reformation, which led mass meetings and marches, packed Richmond city council meetings and confronted the mayor and a succession of police chiefs.

As a result of her work and the support of grassroots organizers and community members, the General Assembly in 2020 passed a law authorizing localities to create systems in which mental health professionals, not police officers, would be the first to respond when someone is experiencing a mental health crisis. This is referred to as the Marcus Alert, after Princess' brother.

The law is not everything its advocates wanted, because the original version was watered down in order to satisfy conservative Democratic legislators.

As Princess told the Defender, "Due to the continuous failure of our legislators to pass needed progressive bills that would lead us towards Black Liberation and ensure that community care and safety is our first priority, I came to the conclusion that we cannot continue to expect our oppressors to be our saviors, because they won't be."

That's when Princess decided to run as the candidate of a new party that she and her supporters founded in 2020: the Liberation Party.

The general election will take place Nov. 2.

For more information:

princessblanding.com.

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community news

HOMELESS? YOU CAN STILL GET YOUR \$1,400

People who are homeless can still receive the \$1,400 that the federal government is providing to help them through this pandemic. The money is called an "Economic Impact Payment," or EIP.

Here's what you need to do:

People who file a tax return should see their \$1,400 deposited directly into their bank account, or they should receive a check in the mail.

In Virginia, people who don't make enough money to have to pay taxes don't have to file a tax return - but they can still get the \$1,400.

Last year, the IRS said that homeless individuals should register online by Nov. 21, 2020, using a "non-filer" tool for people who don't have to file a tax return. They also had to provide a mailing address. Those who registered in time should have received the first stimulus check, for \$1,200, and the second, for \$600.

People who did not register online last year can still get the \$1,400, but they need to file a 2020 tax return by May 14. One way to do this is to go to a local tax preparation service, like H&R Block, Jackson Hewitt or Liberty Tax Services. They will also need a mailing address, so the IRS can send them their EIP debit card. These companies charge for their services, but at least one told us that the payment can be deducted from the EIP debit card.

The United Way and some local community centers are also helping people file their tax forms.



Photo by Mallory Phillips

Friends and admirers of Richard "Red" Brown honor his memory outside RVA Light.

Red remembered with sidewalk vigil

By Mallory Phillips

On the cloudy evening of Saturday, Feb. 27, dozens of people gathered to honor and mourn the life of beloved community member Richard "Red" Brown, who just a few days before had passed away.

Reportedly homeless for about two years, Red regularly stayed near the intersection of West Broad and Belvidere streets in Richmond. He would take his morning coffee at the nearby RVA Light coffee shop. That's where his candlelight vigil was held. Standing before tables of food, drink, candles and red bandanas, his nephew and friends reminded attendees of his kind, giving spirit and his habit of always giving to those he thought more deserving than himself.

As Red's nephew Joseph Boulier described it, "He would always say to people, 'These aren't my hands ... they're His. And I will do anything and everything that I can to help someone.'"

The week of Red's loss coincided with another blow to Richmond's unhoused community. Three days before the vigil, a

group of people experiencing homelessness and staying outside the Richmond Coliseum had their personal possessions abruptly disposed of by the City. Among such possessions were brand-new cots charitably provided by Blessing Warriors RVA, a volunteer nonprofit that serves people without homes.

The action had echoes of the City's destruction in January 2020 of Cathy's Camp, a self-governing tent city set up outside Richmond's cold-weather shelter, which did not open until the temperature dropped below 40 degrees, even during thunderstorms.

Although the City cited unsanitary conditions as their reason for the Coliseum sweep, the destruction of the small encampment took place the same day that First Lady Jill Biden was visiting the nearby Massey Cancer Center to promote cancer education and research.

City Hall denies any connection, but with its frequent inability to adequately address homelessness in Richmond, many remain skeptical.

Defenders stand in solidarity with Asian-American Community

The staff of The Virginia Defender newspaper, members and friends of the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality and the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project wish to convey our solidarity with the Asian-American community of Atlanta, Ga., and throughout the United States, in mourning the loss of eight people's lives and injury to the one survivor, as we have mourned the loss of so many others to the culture of racial and gender-based scapegoating and violence. All of us - Black, Brown, Indigenous, Asian and white - must unite and defend each other from these horrible attacks.

Defenders' statement concerning Hollywood Cemetery

Issued March 15, 2021

The Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality have long recognized that burying the dead is one of the things that distinguishes humans from other species. We do not know why gravesites at Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery were vandalized this past weekend, but the desecration of graves is a crime against humanity and cannot be justified for any reason.

At the same time, we understand that as long as Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery continues to project the image of an actual shrine to the slavery-defending Confederacy, it risks being viewed as a reactionary promoter of the white-supremacist Lost Cause mythology that Richmonders today are finally rejecting.



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**R. M. HUNTER
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community news



Mutual Aid at work — Prevented from setting up their operation in Richmond's Marcus-David Peters Circle by the City's new 8-foot-tall chain-link fence, Guardian, pictured here, and several friends gathered Saturday, March 13, on an adjacent traffic median to collect supplies for vulnerable people in the area. They also distributed posters and yard signs for the gubernatorial campaign of Peters' advocate and older sister, Princess Blanding. (See story on page 3.) The group, which is informal but plans to return to the area for similar events, will distribute the collected clothing and food either directly to those who need it or donate it to organizations set up to provide the aid. Photo and story by Kat McNeal



In Memorium JOHN LEWIS

By Ana Edwards

John R.F. Lewis was not yet 40 when he died on Jan. 24, 2021. He was a Dad and a son, an educator, a martial artist, a foodie and a friend. A man of curiosity with a huge heart, he

believed that when kids get outdoors, dig in the dirt and grow their own food, better health and life attitudes were natural outcomes.

During a children's anti-racist book club session last summer, while still on pandemic lockdown, he said he hadn't known what his career would turn out to be, but he knew how he wanted to live: he wanted to help people, to have fun and be open-minded.

John was born in rural Floyd County, grew up in Roanoke and moved to Richmond in 2002 to study psychology. He was working as a drug prevention specialist in state public schools when he started his first school-based gardening project and began his path into healthy food advocacy. In 2011, he became executive director of a new nonprofit, RenewRichmond.org, and a well-known lecturer on food, health and economic disparities who influenced city food policy changes.

In 2016, John returned to Roanoke to help his father run Apple Ridge Farm, a summer camp for urban kids, and establish Infinite Way Studio, a holistic martial arts practice.

John left two sons, a best friend, a new love, his parents and a wide circle of family and friends. And there is now a generation of people who will always have the skills to feed themselves because they got their hands in the dirt for the first time with John Russell Faulkner Lewis.

#InfiniteJohn

Some good groups to support

These are some of the Richmond organizations that provide aid to our neighbors in need & are deserving of your support.

Blessing Warriors Blessingwarriorsrva.com

"We are a non-profit organization that exists on a group of people that care enough about others to actually help them. It's so simple yet so hard for many to comprehend. It is simply people lending a helping hand instead of sneered look."

Food Not Bombs richmondfoodnotbombs.wordpress.com

"Solidarity, Not Charity"

Mutual Aid Disaster Relief (MAD RVA) mutualaid Disasterrelief.org/co-conspirators/mad-rva

"Mutual Aid Disaster Relief is a grass-

roots disaster relief network based on the principles of solidarity, mutual aid, and autonomous direct action."

River City Medic Collective

On Facebook:

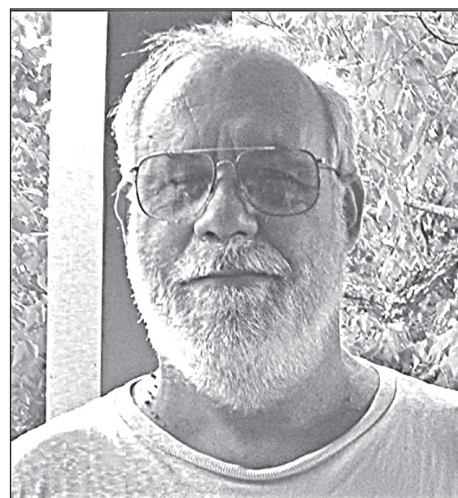
River City Medic Collective

"We are a collective of trained street medics, EMTs, paramedics, wilderness first responders, herbalists, and other health care providers based in Richmond, Virginia – traditionally Powhatan territory."

RVA 26

On Facebook: rva26

"Organizing against Black incarceration and for Black liberation to bring together the Richmond Community and give voices to Black community members."



In Memorium LARRY YATES

By Phil Wilayto

Virginia lost a lifelong fighter for social justice when Larry Lamar Yates passed on Dec. 20, 2020, at his home in Winchester. He was 70.

The list of organizations Larry worked with was impressive: Groups in Fairfax County fighting racial housing discrimination; the Democratic Party, when it was opposing the Byrd Machine; Students for a Democratic Society; the Weatherman organization; travelling to Cuba with the Venceremos Brigade

After he moved to Richmond in 1973, he became involved with the Cornucopia Trading Company, a natural foods cooperative; worked in the library of the city jail; was the first staffer at the Virginia Housing Coalition; and worked with Richmond United Neighborhoods.

In 1988 Larry moved back to the D.C. area, first to work for the National Low Income Housing Coalition, and then with the Center for Health, Environment and Justice, among other groups. His focus was always on helping grassroots people get the resources to empower themselves.

His wife, Carol Stroebel, was also committed to social change. In 2003 they moved to Shenandoah County, where Carol worked for the Children's Environmental Health Coalition, Larry for the Virginia Organizing Project and both were active with the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Shenandoah Valley.

In 2013, Larry ran, unsuccessfully, as an independent for the House of Delegates.

After Carol passed in 2016 from cancer, Larry sought to establish a "second best life" without his beloved wife. During this time, he wrote the book, "Not Just Monuments: The War for Whiteness in Virginia 1680-2020" and briefly opened the Virginia Museum of Veiled History.

When it becomes safe to gather again, memorials will be held in Winchester and Richmond.

Per his wishes, donations may be made in Larry's name to "any social justice organization that disrupts oppressive systems."

our working lives

VCU adjuncts demand better pay & benefits

By Phil Wilayto

Virginia Commonwealth University President Michael Rao was a no-show March 19, ignoring an invitation from VCU Adjuncts Organizing for Fair Pay to discuss that organization's demands for higher wages, greater job security and access to VCU's health services.

Yes, you read that right. During the pandemic, VCU adjuncts say they can't access the university's health services.

Adjuncts are professors who typically are hired by schools on a contractual, part-time

basis, often making wages so low as to keep them below the poverty line.

In contrast, according to Richmond's daily newspaper, President Rao's total compensation in FY 2018 was \$1,020,828.

According to a recent report from the National Center for Education Statistics, adjuncts now make up 47 percent of the 1.5 million faculty members in U.S. degree-granting, postsecondary institutions.

If you're an adjunct struggling with low pay or poor working conditions, you can reach out to AOFPP at:

vcu.aofpp@gmail.com.



Photo by Al Long

Union supporters rally Feb. 10 outside an Amazon warehouse in Chesapeake, Va. Many other rallies took place across the country, including at the Amazon Fulfillment Center in Clear Brook in northern Virginia. The actions were held to support Amazon workers trying to win a union in Bessemer, Ala.

Southern union struggle takes on Amazon

By Phil Wilayto

A labor struggle with enormous significance for workers throughout the country, and especially in the largely non-union South, has emerged in Bessemer, Ala. The predominantly Black workforce at a giant Amazon warehouse there has been organizing to bring in a union. The workers were scheduled to vote in late March on whether to join the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union.

If the majority of the 5,900 workers at the site eligible to vote in the election vote "yes," Bessemer will become the first unionized Amazon warehouse in the country, marking one of labor's biggest victories in decades.

With 1.2 million workers, Amazon is the

largest and wealthiest company in the United States, second only to Walmart in terms of revenue and employment. Its founder and CEO is Jeff Bezos, ranked as the world's richest person (\$183.9 billion), according to Forbes magazine. (Do the math: \$189.9 billion is equal to 122,600 workers making \$15 an hour with each one working for 50 years.)

With more people buying online during the pandemic, Bezos saw his personal net worth increase by nearly \$68 billion, according to an analysis by the Brookings Institution. That's enough to give every Amazon worker a \$56,666 bonus - which, by the way, he didn't.

More information at:

southernworker.org/amazon.



Photo by Taimir Gore

Adjuncts and supporters rally March 19 outside VCU's Cabell Library.

Live better - work union!

In 2019, nonunion workers earned just 81 percent of what union members made.

BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS - Feb 28, 2020



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PRESIDENT Mark P. Federici • SECRETARY-TREASURER Christopher Hoffman • www.ufcw400.org

no hay fronteras en la lucha de los obreros/as

Editor's note: The following is a press release, issued Feb. 28, in English and Spanish, by supporters of Abbie Arevalo.

For more information, write:

handsoffabbie@gmail.com

After 32 months living in the basement of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Richmond, area mother Abbie Arevalo, 33, left the church on the night of February 25, 2021.

Ms. Arevalo's lawyer, Alina Kilpatrick, reported that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has granted a 1-year stay of removal, allowing Ms. Arevalo to leave the church without fear of detention or deportation.

She has returned to living with her family in Henrico. The approval of Ms. Arevalo's stay of removal comes on the heels of new guidelines from the Department of Homeland Security directing ICE to prioritize threats to security and public safety (Memo, January 20, 2021).

Ms. Arevalo expressed her gratitude for church members and volunteers, saying, "Thank you so much for your support and for helping us feel safe for the last 32 months. I have received so much from all of you. When I came here, I knew no one and I was afraid. Today I am happy to have my freedom but am reminded I made good friends here."

Ms. Arevalo is also grateful for the support of Congressman Donald McEachin, Governor Ralph Northam, and Senators Tim Kaine and Mark Warner.

Ms. Arevalo had been living in the church since June 20, 2018, when she had taken sanctuary at the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Richmond. Ms. Arevalo sought sanctuary in the church rather than report to ICE to be deported to Honduras, where she feared she would be killed. Dozens of other immigrants have taken sanctuary in houses of worship, as internal ICE policy considers houses of worship to be sensitive locations where enforcement actions are generally not carried out.

The Reverend Sherman Z. Logan, Jr., Executive Minister at First Unitarian Universalist Church of Richmond, exclaimed, "Oh, Happy Day! The First UU members are overjoyed to have heard the news of Abbie and her family finally gaining their freedom. During the past 32 months, I was impressed with the way Abbie handled her ordeal with grace, dignity, courage, and faith. We all could learn a lesson on how to deal with adversity from Abbie, as I most certainly did. Abbie has certainly blessed my life and has enriched the lives of members of our congregation."



Abbie is home!

Ms. Arevalo's attorney, Ms. Kilpatrick, stated, "This was the right result. I am grateful to the Biden administration for keeping its promise to immigrant families. Abbie will continue to pursue her legal options as a free woman. Her children deserve to have a mother who can hold their hand at the doctor, cheer at their sports games, and play with them in the park. Now, they have that."

Para publicación inmediata: el 28 de febrero del 2021. Contacto:

handsoffabbie@gmail.com

Después de 32 meses, Abbie Arevalo salió de santuario en Richmond, VA

Abbie Arevalo, madre del área de Richmond, se fue a casa después de casi 3 años viviendo en el sótano de la Iglesia First Unitarian Universalist de Richmond.

Después de 32 meses viviendo en el sótano de la Iglesia First Unitarian Universalist de

Richmond, Abbie Arevalo, una madre del área, de 33 años, salió de la iglesia la noche del 25 de febrero de 2021. La abogada de la Sra. Arevalo, Alina Kilpatrick, informó que el Servicio de Inmigración y Control de Aduanas (ICE) ha concedido un stay of removal (suspensión de deportación) de 1 año, lo que le permite a la Sra. Arevalo salir de la iglesia sin temor a ser detenida o deportada. Ha vuelto a vivir con su familia en Henrico, VA. La aprobación del stay of removal de la Sra. Arevalo se produce poco después de los nuevos lineamientos del Departamento de Seguridad Nacional que dirigen a ICE a priorizar las amenazas a la seguridad y el bienestar público (Memorándum, el 20 de enero, 2021).

La Sra. Arevalo expresó su gratitud por los miembros de la iglesia y los voluntarios, diciendo: "Muchas gracias por su apoyo y por ayudarnos a sentirnos seguros durante los últimos 32 meses. He recibido mucho de todos ustedes. Cuando vine aquí, no conocía a nadie

y tenía miedo. Hoy estoy feliz de tener mi libertad, pero recuerdo que hice buenos amigos aquí." La Sra. Arevalo también está agradecida por el apoyo del congresista Donald McEachin, el gobernador Ralph Northam, y los senadores Tim Kaine y Mark Warner.

La Sra. Arevalo había estado viviendo en la iglesia desde el 20 de junio del 2018, cuando tomó santuario en la Iglesia First Unitarian Universalist de Richmond. La Sra. Arevalo buscó santuario en la iglesia en lugar de presentarse ante ICE para ser deportada a Honduras, donde ella temía que sería asesinada. Docenas de otros inmigrantes han tomado santuario en lugares de culto, ya que las políticas internas de ICE consideran que los lugares de culto son sensitive locations (ubicaciones sensitivas) donde generalmente no se llevan a cabo acciones de ejecución.

El reverendo Sherman Z. Logan, Jr., Ministro Ejecutivo de la Iglesia First Unitarian Universalist de Richmond, exclamó: "¡Oh, Feliz Día! Los miembros de First UU están encantados de haber escuchado la noticia de que Abbie y su familia finalmente están obteniendo su libertad. Durante los últimos 32 meses, me impresionó la forma en que Abbie manejó su rigurosa prueba con gracia, dignidad, coraje, y fe. Todos podríamos aprender

una lección sobre cómo lidiar con la adversidad de Abbie, como ciertamente yo lo he hecho. Abbie ciertamente ha bendecido mi vida y ha enriquecido las vidas de los miembros de nuestra congregación."

La abogada de la Sra. Arevalo, la Sra. Kilpatrick, declaró: "Este fue el resultado correcto. Estoy agradecida a la administración de Biden por mantener su promesa a las familias inmigrantes. Abbie seguirá buscando sus opciones legales como una mujer libre. Sus hijos merecen tener una madre que pueda tomar su mano en el médico, animarlos en sus juegos deportivos, y jugar con ellos en el parque. Ahora tienen eso."

For more information on Abbie's heroic struggle, see these stories in The Virginia Defender (online at virginiadefender.org.)

Vol. 14, No. 2:

"I'm going to fight for my freedom! An interview with Abbie Herrera"

Vol. 15, No. 1:

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

Vol. 15, No. 2:

"Update on Abbie"

Vol. 16, No. 2:

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

SHOCKOE

Continued from page 1



Photos by Phil Wilayto

Trash piles up at the “Slave Trail” parking spots at the Devil’s Half-Acre.

most appropriate site for the “bricks and mortar” interpretive center would be in the Main Street Station train shed, for the following reasons: (1) it would save millions of dollars that otherwise would go to a new building; (2) the train shed is located in the heart of and overlooks the memorial park footprint, affording stunning views to visitors; (3) the City has yet to designate a use for the recently renovated train shed; and (4) the shed sits above the Shockoe Bottom floodplain, which would present a major engineering challenge for a ground-level museum.

Community Proposal has been incorporated by the Shockoe Alliance

The Shockoe Alliance, an initiative of Mayor Stoney, is tasked with developing a shared vision for Shockoe Bottom, built around the area’s unique historical character. Its members include city employees, elected officials, preservationists, civic association leaders, local business owners and tourism officials, as well as community representatives from the African Community Network (immigrants from Africa); the Upper Mattaponi Indian Tribe; Community Unity in Action; and the Sacred Ground Project. (See <https://www.shockoealliance.org>)

Significantly, the Shockoe Alliance has incorporated the community proposal into its Shockoe Bottom Small Area Plan: A Guide for Growth and Memorialization, which is to be the Shockoe Bottom section of the Richmond 300

plan, the City’s 20-year strategic plan for growth and development, named for Richmond’s upcoming 300th anniversary in 2037.

Financing the Memorial Park

According to Kim Chen, Senior Manager in Deputy Chief Administrator Sharon Ebert’s office, there are two City-funded Capital Improvement Project (CIP) budgets currently established for use in Shockoe Bottom:

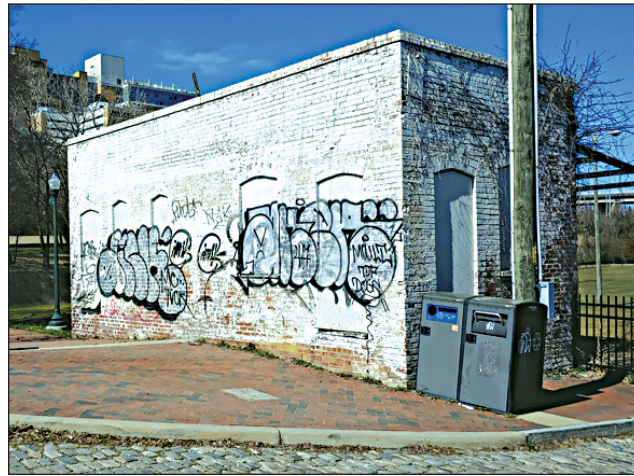
- The more recently established CIP budget is for planning, design, and construction of the parklike “Heritage Campus” (from the African Burial Ground to Main Street, and I-95 to 17th Street, an area a little larger than the proposed nine-acre park). These funds also can be used for the acquisition of privately-owned real estate for the campus and the design and construction of a parking deck that would serve the community, visitors to the campus and commuters using the Main Street Station. Currently, there is \$1.7 million available in this budget, with additional funds from the Delinquent Tax Sale Special Fund being allocated to this project on an annual basis.

- The second CIP budget was established

**It’s been nearly 20 years since the City acquired Winfree Cot-tage, which then sat deteriorating at the Devil’s Half-Acre.**

several years ago for the design and construction of a Heritage Center at the Devil’s Half-Acre (site of Lumpkin’s jail). This budget was recently amended to include funds for improvements to the Trail of Enslaved Africans (“Richmond Slave Trail”), and to provide funds for the acquisition of the Shockoe Hill African Burial Ground at Hospital and N. 5th streets. The current balance of funds in this CIP budget project is \$5.5 million.

In addition, Gov. Ralph Northam is proposing that the General Assembly allocate another \$9 million for Shockoe Bottom memorialization. It has been reported elsewhere that this money would be targeted for a museum at the Lumpkin’s jail site. Defenders Ana Edwards and Phil Wilayto wrote an opinion piece, published in the Richmond Times-Dispatch, arguing for the larger memorial park. With the help of allies, that led to a half-hour telephone meeting Jan. 21

**This graffiti-covered white brick building is what greets visitors to the African Burial Ground.**

with the governor, who explained that it would be up to the City government to decide how the money would actually be used, which means it could be used for the memorial park.

Also, Sen. Mark Warner has suggested that there also might be federal money available for memorialization in Shockoe Bottom. He made this statement during a tour of the Bottom that Edwards gave Feb. 16 to the senator and members of the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus .

Note: The community proposal specifically states that, because of Shockoe Bottom’s history as the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade, the financial benefits of designing, constructing and maintaining the memorial park primarily should go to the descendant community: to Black workers, trainees, businesses and students. To date, most of the hundreds of thousands of dollars the City has spent on planning and design have gone to predominantly white institutions.

Why we are concerned

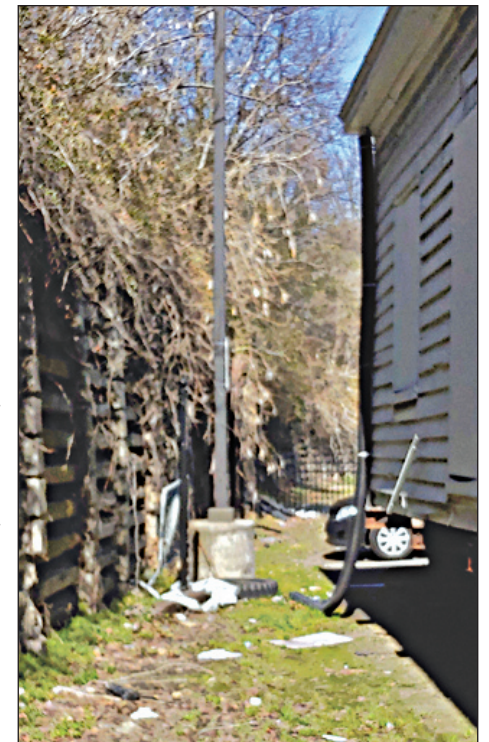
The reason the future of Shockoe Bottom is now such a prominent issue in the city and beyond is the fierce community involvement that began in the early 1990s and continues to this day. However, the closer we get to an actual memorialization, the more that community input seems to be diminished.

The money already allocated and the money being proposed by the governor and Sen. Warner would all be under the control of a City government that up until now has consistently concentrated on the single site of the Devil’s

Half-Acre.

There is no question that the site of Lumpkin’s jail is important. After the Civil War, this notorious jail, where rebellious slaves were sent to be physically subdued, was leased to a Northern missionary for a school for recently freed Africans. That school later developed into Virginia Union University, one of the oldest Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the country. During segregation, VUU played a critical role in Richmond’s Civil Rights Movement and produced

generations of graduates who went on to play leading roles in the community. (See the book

**Trash is left to accumulate behind the historic Winfree’s Cottage.**

review on page 9.) This important site, with its intact stone and brick foundation, would be a major part of the nine-acre memorial park.

However, there were another four or five major slave jails in the Bottom, along with 40-50 auction houses, dozens of slave trader offices and scores of supporting businesses, including blacksmiths, dry goods and clothing stores and more.

It should be more than clear that a museum on the single site of the Devil’s Half-Acre, wedged between Interstate 95 and the CSX

See SHOCKOE on Page 9



Graffiti and a broken fence at the northern end of the African Burial Ground are more examples of the City's neglect. The Defenders have scheduled a community cleanup.

SHOCKOE

Continued from page 8

railroad tracks, could not adequately convey the enormity of the slave trade practiced here from the 1700s until the end of the Civil War in 1865.

And that, of course, would be just fine with the city's ruling 1 percent, who have no interest in Richmond's public image being associated with its central role in the domestic slave trade.

A nine-acre memorial park, encompassing the African Burial Ground, Devil's Half-Acre and two blocks east of the railroad tracks, could accomplish this - and also would be large enough to prevent any more profit-motivated proposals for inappropriate development, such as the baseball stadium that former Mayor Dwight Jones and the business association Venture Richmond tried from 2015 to 2017 - unsuccessfully - to force on the community.

What's the problem?

But if local politicians have endorsed the proposal for the memorial park, and if city, state and federal money has been or may soon be committed, what's the reason for concern? Isn't this long struggle now headed for a successful conclusion?

Maybe, and maybe not.

After a decade of community struggle, the African Burial Ground was reclaimed in 2011 from its use as a Virginia Commonwealth University parking lot. But 10 years later, the City has yet to enact any kind of protective zoning for this sacred ground. In fact, it doesn't even call it the African Burial Ground. City signs at the site simply declare it to be a "Historic Burial Ground." (See the photo on the front page.)

In a similar misrepresentation of history, the glossy, full-color brochure produced by the "Slave Trail" Commission (STC) does call it the African Burial Ground, but describes it as

the final resting place of "many of Richmond's first citizens." Enslaved Black people were not citizens, and it's disturbing that the official city council commission charged with preserving Richmond's slavery-related sites would refer to it as such.

Meanwhile, the burial ground has been allowed to deteriorate. (See the photos on these two pages.) Who knows what visitors to our city think when they see the trash, broken fences and graffiti?

Note: At this time it isn't clear that the STC is even still functioning.

It's been years since there have been any announcements about its meetings, and its last press release appeared on March 4, 2015.)

Other concerns?

The brick foundation of the jail complex owned by Robert Lumpkin was revealed in 2008 during an STC-commissioned archeological dig.



Ana Edwards gives a tour of Shockoe Bottom Feb. 16 to Sen. Mark Warner, Mayor Levar Stoney and members of the Legislative Black Caucus.

Due to the lack of funding at the time, the site was covered again with soil and modest markers were installed to tell part of its story. That's it. And, like the African Burial Ground, this site lacks any protective zoning.

The historic Winfree Cottage, once the

cramped living space of a formerly enslaved woman and her children, was salvaged in 2002 by a local preservation group and in 2004 moved by the STC to its present location next to the Lumpkin's jail site, where it literally rotted in place for nearly a decade until finally receiving some light repairs and a protective coat of paint.

Further concerns? In early 2020, Mayor Stoney asked City Council to approve granting H. Louis Salomonsky - the local developer and very generous political donor who was sent to prison in 2003 for bribing a member of City Council on a development-related issue - a 40-year lease on city property located at 17th and Grace streets. That property, on the edge of the proposed memorial park, was the site of the Seabrook tobacco warehouse, which from 1810 until the Civil War used enslaved labor. City Council objected to the proposal, which would have undermined the work of the mayor's own Shockoe Alliance in developing an inclusive, small-area plan for the Bottom.

And although the City now is in the process of looking into buying properties on the east side of the CSX railroad tracks that would be part of the footprint of the proposed nine-acre Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park, there's no hard guarantee that that land actually would be used for that purpose.

While Mayor Stoney has stated his support for the nine-acre memorial park, he also has said that the memorialization of Shockoe Bottom would take place in stages - opening the possibility that the priority would be building a museum at the Devil's Half-Acre, and then - maybe - moving on to other areas - eventually.

These are some of the reasons we believe that decisions about the pending memorialization of Shockoe Bottom - the result of sustained community struggle over decades - cannot be left solely up to the politicians.

Next issue: The development of the Descendant Community Advocacy Council.

Stay tuned.

Ana Edwards is chair of the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project

Edwards' work recognized by VCU history department

Staff Report

Ana Edwards, chair of the Defenders' Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project, has been chosen as the first recipient of the Graduate Alumni Achievement Award from Virginia Commonwealth University's Department of History.

The award, the department's highest form of recognition bestowed exclusively on graduate alumni, was presented in a virtual ceremony March 18. It "... recognizes an alum of the master's degree program who has made distinguished contributions to their profession or chosen field of endeavor."

"Edwards has modeled some of the highest possibilities for our alumni — in her diligence in historical research, in her engagement with public history audiences near and far, and in her advocacy for social justice," said Ryan Smith, Ph.D., a professor in VCU's Department of History. "Along with a strong coalition of allies, her work has quite literally changed the historical landscape."

As a result of receiving this award, Ana was chosen as the Richmond Free Press' Personality in its March 18-20 edition.

In January 2020, Edwards and her work were featured in The New Yorker article, "The Fight to Preserve African-American History," specifically highlighting her vision for Shockoe Bottom as a site "of reflection and remembrance but also of resistance, offering visitors an alternative to the history that Richmond has long revered."

The Sacred Ground Project is an all-volunteer effort of the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality. Information about its work can be found at **sacredgroundproject.net**.

BOOK REVIEW:

The Richmond 34 & the Civil Rights Movement

Kimberly A. Matthews, Ph.D., & Raymond Pierre Hylton, Ph.D.

On Feb. 22, 1960, Richmond stepped into the national spotlight when 34 students from Virginia Union University students were arrested while courageously sitting in at Richmond's Thalhimers department store, demanding an end to its segregationist policies.

This book, published in 2020, is their story, and also a valuable history lesson in the origins of VUU and the important role it played in Richmond's civil rights movement.

During those years, many faculty members and administrators counseled and mentored the student activists who continued to challenge the city's racial status quo. The school also produced generations of graduates who went on to play leading roles in Richmond's and Virginia's Black community and beyond.

127 pages - Arcadia Publishing
arcadiapublishing.com.

P.W.

cops, courts & prisons



VAPJN caravan demands protection for prisoners

Covered with signs and banners, around 50 vehicles joined the "Not One More Death" caravan to the State Capitol Jan. 16 to demand better protection for Virginia prisoners during the COVID-19 crisis. The caravan was sponsored by the Virginia Prison Justice Network. A full report is posted at virginiadefender.org. Photo by Kristin Reed

Richmond jail sued over alleged teargassing

By Elaine Phillips

An attorney with the Commonwealth Law Group has filed a federal class-action lawsuit on behalf of several inmates of the Richmond City Jail against Sheriff Irving and certain staff members, claiming excessive force was used during a teargassing incident late last summer. Attorney Seth Carroll requested unspecified monetary damages and a court order addressing safety protocol in the prison.

The allegations, first reported by RVA Magazine, include charges that 50 to 60 inmates were teargassed Aug. 29 after a smaller group of inmates asked to speak with the prison's administration about the alleged exposure of inmates to COVID-19. According to inmate statements, those involved were calm, but refused to return to their cells until their concerns were addressed.

In response, correctional officers wearing riot gear allegedly shot a tear gas grenade into the inmates' pod after shutting off the ventilation system and water supply. All inmates in the pod reportedly were gassed, not just those seeking a dialogue with the administration.

The tear gas used, one inmate claimed, was of a type approved for outdoor use only. Residents allegedly had to sleep with gas on their clothing and were not permitted to shower for days.

Richmond jail makes progress with COVID-19

By Phil Wilayto

In response to a FOIA request by The Virginia Defender, Sheriff Antionette Irving reported March 23 that there were no active cases among the jail's 743 present inmates, with one case among staff members. According to the sheriff, 118 inmates have received a first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, with 103 having received the second dose.

At the height of the pandemic, about one in eight jail inmates had the disease, with 90 percent showing no symptoms.

Other allegations claim that one prisoner was forced naked into solitary confinement for three days, while another was sent to solitary for a week for criticizing the jail's COVID response.

As of presstime, the sheriff's office did not respond to a request for a comment.

In 2015, Commonwealth Law Group, which specializes in prisoners' rights, obtained one of the largest civil rights settlements of its kind in Virginia history, when Carroll and an attorney from the Halperin Law Center won a \$3,840,000 settlement on behalf of a Richmond prisoner who had suffered catastrophic heat stroke resulting in permanent debilitating injuries while serving a six-month sentence.

COVID-19: The view from inside the prisons

As of March 23, the Virginia Department of Corrections was reporting that there have been 9,008 COVID-19 cases among its 23,796 prisoners in 40 facilities. That's a third of all state prisoners, more or less, taking into account people entering and leaving the system. The DOC reports a total of 56 deaths among prisoners and five among staff. The good news is that the number of active cases had gone down significantly from the height of the pandemic, with 15 active cases among prisoners and 25 among staff members.

As of March 19, the DOC reported that 16,045 prisoners and 6,469 staff members had been vaccinated, a much higher percentage than among the general population.

We asked four prisoners in different facilities to tell us about their own experiences and received the following responses on Feb. 9.

RIVER NORTH - Askari Danso

The prisoners haven't received in-person visits in a year, and here there's only one video visitation booth, making scheduling video visits nearly impossible. So many of us have only communicated with loved ones by phone and email.

Many of us prisoners were vaccinated with our first shot of the Moderna vaccine on Jan. 27. Not much refusal from prisoners, from what I've seen. Still no Religious, Education, Vocation or Treatment programs in operation. We are still eating all of our meals in our cells, and limited to three hours of recreation a day. Still no transfers, keeping people on high-security levels an extra year or so. Also, the prison is unable to enforce any kind of social distancing policy.

Right now the major concern is how effective will the vaccine be against any of these new variants? How long will we be immune? When will things get back to normal and will they? I personally believe most prisoners need to be resentenced, because we don't know if the judges and juries would have given the sentences they have in light of the pandemic and its impacts!! Some sentences are now actually Cruel & Unusual! ... Northam's one-year remaining eligibility is bullshyt and needs to be expanded. Parole needs to be increased too.

FLUVANNA - Chanell Burnette

Since the pandemic began, there has been a surge in bed moves within the facility. Many of these moves were for convenience rather than security issues. If we all were forced to remain where we were when the pandemic began, transmission may not have been allowed to run so rampantly.

And staff shortages force unsafe practices as well. Officers travel within the facility and may go from a red zone, where there is an outbreak, directly into a green one, where there is none.

When an inmate has contracted the virus and must be moved from her usual Housing Unit, she is allowed to take her time, pack her

belongings and must remain among the rest of us until staff comes to take her to yet another Housing Unit. After which, the cell door is simply secured and that is the end of it. No one comes to thoroughly clean the cell and spray it in an effort to kill the virus. So the next inmate will move directly into a contaminated cell. These cells need to be sanitized properly before someone else moves in.

The rest is up to us inmates to protect ourselves by taking all preventative measures and to maintain cleanliness within our living quarters. If we each do our part, staff and inmates alike, maybe we can heal mentally and physically as a community and return to some sense of normalcy within our prison walls.

BUCKINGHAM - Cazonza Teasley

The Institutions here in the VADOC are unprepared for this pandemic, therefore most of these facilities are freestyling with our lives. ... We're being forced to live in the gym and closed-in classrooms (positive or negative) with no access to hot water, efficient amount of use to showers, and proper PPE ... They treat us as if we caused this virus to enter the prison, which is not only absurd, but outright disrespectful and demoralizing. The only way we're spreading it amongst ourselves is due to the poor handling of social distancing and care. ... They will put positive people in a positive pod (red pod), then when those people test negative, they will leave them in there at the same time other positive people are coming in the pod. This is a form of cross-contamination which can actually put us at risk of a negative becoming a positive again, which can cause a possible exposure once that person goes back to a green pod. ...

Buckingham is one of the few prisons in Virginia that still doesn't have air-conditioning. So during this pandemic we're vulnerable to any virus, germ, or disease that decides to reside in this facility.

See COVID on Page 11

cops, courts & prisons



Photo by Mallory Phillips

This was the message of a support rally held at Richmond's Maggie Walker Plaza.

Supporters rally for Uhuru Rowe

By Elaine Phillips

Around 50 people rallied Feb. 27 at Richmond's Maggie Lena Walker Memorial Plaza to demand freedom for Virginia prisoner Uhuru Rowe, a victim of racist sentencing. They also called for justice for all those, free or incarcerated, affected by systemic racism.

The youth-led Justice for Uhuru Coordinating Committee - concerned family, friends and supporters - is working to bring public awareness to the 93-year sentence Uhuru received in 1995 by controversial Richmond Judge James B. Wilkinson. State guidelines at the time called for a maximum of 13 years for the crimes for which Uhuru was convicted.

Shortly after his 18th birthday, Uhuru and three other Black youths were involved in a robbery that resulted in two fatal shootings. Although Uhuru didn't have a firearm or participate in the shootings, he expressed deep remorse for being involved in the crime and pled guilty to two counts of second-degree murder, robbery, and three counts of use of a firearm during the commission of a felony.

For these crimes, the recently formed Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission recommended a maximum sentence of 13 years. Wilkinson, the sole circuit judge in Richmond's Manchester court, commented, "I really admit I do not think the guidelines are adequate for serious crimes."

A 1998 Richmond Times-Dispatch analysis of more than 10,000 Richmond convictions from 1994 to 1997 found that Black defendants with felony convictions in Manchester Court received, on average, much longer sentences than those in Richmond's John Marshall Court. Further, white defendants sentenced in Wilkinson's court received terms 13 percent shorter than those at John Marshall.

Uhuru has filed several requests for clemency, the latest with the assistance of Charlottesville attorney Beth A. Norton. In addition to calling for his freedom, the coordinating committee is asking Gov. Ralph Northam to establish a commission to review the sentences handed down to Black defendants by Wilkerson, who died in 2011.

Speakers at the support rally included members of Uhuru's family, as well as the organizations RVA26, Richmond Indigenous Society, James River Anarchist Black Cross and Virginia Student Power Network. Uhuru's lawyer sent a letter. Participants were encouraged to bring donations for the mutual aid group MAD RVA. Note cards were provided for writing directly to Uhuru.

Uhuru's voice was also present, through a letter read by committee facilitator Tara McLaughlin. Drawing a poignant connection to Maggie Walker's life, Uhuru reminded the crowd of the past struggles and ultimate successes of this Richmond icon. His message was adamant that the rally was not just for him.

To learn more, visit the Justice for Uhuru Coordinating Committee on Instagram: @justiceforuhuru or Twitter: @justiceforuhuru. Uhuru's writings can be found at: conscious-prisoner.wordpress.com.

COVID

Continued from page 10

AUGUSTA - Cecil Guy Truman

With COVID sweeping the nation, for us in prison the conditions have become much worse. With little recreation, fresh air and social programs (including religious programs), that which we had before COVID has now been reduced to almost nothing at all.

There have been six deaths in this prison from COVID and the fact that we get no medical attention until we are at the brink of death is certainly a contributing factor to those deaths. When I fell ill with COVID, after being exposed by staff during a shakedown, I was sick for

over a week and was quarantined, yet I received no medical care at all for my condition - not so much as an aspirin for my many complaints, obvious symptoms and pain I suffered.

There needs to be a voice for us in prison. We are convicted without law, sentenced without mercy, confined in conditions unsuitable for human development, slowly poisoned by an unhealthy diet, deprived of proper medical care, and exposed, without guidelines, to deadly viruses!

I don't deserve to die in this prison. Many of us in here don't deserve the way the Commonwealth cruelly condemns us to these cages and robs us of any hope for justice or freedom.

Controversy continues around police shooting of Xzavier Hill

By Phil Wilayto

Was Xzavier Hill fatally shot by two Virginia state troopers because they saw him reaching for a gun, as the State Police say? Or did the two officers kill the teenager with no justification, as his mother and supporters maintain?

Hill, an 18-year-old recent high school graduate, was killed Jan. 9 in Goochland County as he was returning to Charlottesville after visiting his girlfriend in Richmond. At 4:35 a.m., police say they observed him on I-65 near Short Pump in Henrico County driving 96 miles per hour in a 65-mile-an-hour speed zone, and with only one headlight. They say they gave chase, with speeds reaching 120.

According to the officers' dashcam video, Hill pulled to the side of the road and briefly stopped, but then made a U-turn and ran down an embankment, where he came to a stop. In the video, the two officers can be seen approaching Hill's car and demanding he get out, then yelling at him to put his hands through the driver's side window. Hill can be heard saying his car door doesn't open. He briefly puts his left hand out - his mother says he is left-handed - and then one of the officers yells that he has a gun.

The two officers then fire a total of four shots, hitting Hill in the face, neck and left hand.

The officers look inside the car and initially are heard to say they can't see a gun. One officer then walks around to the passenger side, looks through that window and then says he does see a gun.

The officers then pull Hill's body from the car. At no time do they seem to be rendering any medical aid.

The police have reported they found a 40-caliber handgun with a round jammed in the chamber. They also report that, the next day, someone reported that the gun in question was theirs and had recently been stolen. That person reportedly knew Hill.

Xzavier Hill was African-American. From the dashcam video, the two officers - identified only as B. Bone and S. Layton - both appear to be white.

There reportedly were no witnesses to the shooting.

After being allowed to view the dashcam a few days after her son was killed, LaToya Benton said at a Jan. 16 press conference that she did not see a gun, and demanded that the video

To our sisters & brothers behind bars

We get many requests from prisoners for help, but we are not a law office and do not have attorneys who can represent prisoners.

We do encourage prisoners to write us a Letter to the Editor to let the public know the issue you are concerned about. We accept letters of up to 250 words. You can send them to: **Defenders**, PO Box 23202, Richmond, VA 23223. We are one of the very few publications in Virginia that publishes letters from prisoners.

We also invite you to subscribe to **The Virginia Defender**. Subscriptions for prisoners are \$5.00 for four issues, which is the cost of printing and mailing the newspaper. If you would like to receive the newspaper but cannot afford to subscribe, let us know and we may be able to provide a complementary subscription.

For general legal information, we suggest that you write the **Virginia Prison Justice Network**. The network does not have attorneys, but their volunteers are very familiar with DOC procedures and have been helpful to a lot of prisoners. You can write: VAPJN % Coalition for Justice - PO Box 299, Blacksburg, VA 24063.

be made public.

According to a report in the online publication vadogwood.com, Virginia does not require the State Police to outfit their officers with body cameras or to release any police video footage.

But LaToya Benton was not going away. She and her supporters held numerous protests in the area, demanding the police release the cam footage. Finally, a month after Benton's press conference, Goochland Commonwealth's Attorney D. Michael Caudill released the police dashcam video.

Separately, he also announced the decision by a regional grand jury that the two officers were justified in shooting Hill.

Undeterred, Benton has continued with her protests. Less than two weeks after the grand jury report, the Virginia State Conference NAACP asked Attorney General Mark Herring to review the shooting.

A spokeswoman for Herring said his office would look into the case.

"We understand the Hill family, NAACP, and members of the community want more answers than they have received, and we will explore all options to help get them," Charlotte Gomer said in a statement.

For more information:

#justiceforxzavier

In our opinion

Please - Get the shot!

So I went and got my second vaccine shot. Ana came with me, in case I had some of those dreaded side effects. We're trying to convince people to get vaccinated (see the op-ed by Dr. Danny Avula on the next page), so I thought, maybe if people saw that their faithful editor was getting the jab, it might help.

So we asked the VCU nurse giving the shot if it would be OK if Ana took a photo.

"Sure," she said, as she jabbed the needle into my arm. Then she turned to Ana and said - fairly slowly, I thought - "Did you get the shot?"

Now, the needle is still in my arm.

"Take the shot, Ana!" I said, "Take the shot!"

So Ana got the shot of me getting the shot.

Then we went and hit the drive-thru at Burger King. No bad side effects at all. And the shot was fine too.

But seriously, foks - as of press time, 541,000 people in this country alone have died from COVID-19. There is no side effect worse than death.

Please get the shot.

Thank you,

Your Faithful Editor



Photo by Ana Edwards

**Virginia Defender editor
Phil Wilayto getting shot.**

Letters to the Editor

Thank you from inside

On behalf of those of us who are incarcerated, I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the 4th annual Prison Justice Rally on Jan. 16. Whether you assisted through organizing or you sacrificed your time to show up in support, you are greatly appreciated. We want you to know that our voices are nothing without you.

For the first time, I was able to see the Rally beyond pictures via media coverage in Roanoke. Our Richmond rallies have never received the type of coverage that would allow prisoners in the region where I am housed to see clips of the rally. I was ecstatic as the reporter stated that the Virginia Prison Justice Network had organized a prison caravan in order to bring awareness to the deaths of prisoners due to COVID-19. With at least 50 cars, the message was heard loud and clear.

Let us not forget all those we have lost this year from the virus, and let us not forget those who proceed to suffer from it. We are all in this fight together, and as I proceed to get closer to release, I will not soon lose sight of all of the comrades that I leave behind, while also keeping focus on how I can aid the larger community beyond prison walls.

Once again, I thank you all for your undying support, and I wish you all success and safety as we move forward into this year.

Hassan Shabazz
AUGUSTA CORRECTIONAL CENTER

An appeal for support

My name is Antoine Pitt. I am 38 years of age, born and raised in Portsmouth, Va. I am currently seeking justice via a conditional pardon for a homicide that not only did I not commit, but was sentenced for a term of 40 years after my co-defendant was identified by an eyewitness as being the sole perpetrator of this al-



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Princess Blanding, center left, looks on as Gov. Ralph Northam signs the Marcus Alert bill. Asked to give remarks, she denounced the bill as deeply flawed.

leged crime, and confessed in a statement dated April 19, 2001, before committing suicide in Portsmouth City Jail after the preliminary hearing.

I am the author of "Thinking With a Purpose," a curriculum created to reduce the rate of recidivism and prevent criminal thinking and influences, and "C.O.R.T. (Countering Overdoses and Addiction Treatment)," co-authored by Carl Hicks and created to combat the opioid overdose epidemic that has plagued our nation. My publisher is Winter Giovanni of Infinity Publications - www.infinitypublications.com.

Support me in my fight for freedom. Sign my change.org petition, check out my interview on the Real Prison Talk Facebook Live page and Sonya Staples' "From Prison

to Promise" podcast and send support letters addressed to: Secretary of the Commonwealth, PO Box 2454, Richmond, VA 23218.

My conditional pardon has been submitted for approximately one-and-a-half years and I am in need of everyone's support who is against injustice and inequality and those who truly believe in rehabilitation. I have exemplified through action that change is possible and I am the epitome of rehabilitation. Also check out my prop on brilliancebehindbars.com.

Peace and Blessings

Antoinette Pitt
LAWRENCEVILLE
CORRECTIONAL CENTER

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The facts about the COVID-19 vaccine

By Dr. Danny Avula

A few weeks ago at a mass vaccination event at the Arthur Ashe Center in Richmond, I was chatting with an older gentleman who had just received the COVID-19 vaccine. He motioned to the enormous room around us where hundreds of people were cycling through to receive the COVID-19 vaccine and said to me, "This is the best thing I've ever seen the government do!" I laughed and thanked him - I was pretty sure (but not positive) that he meant it as a compliment.

Around us, many of the most vulnerable people in Richmond were among the first in the region to get the vaccine, including elderly African American neighbors, public school teachers, bus drivers, and residents with underlying conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure. Historically, the health and wellbeing of people like these - our most vulnerable neighbors and essential workers - has not been our top priority, and this has made it harder for many communities to trust that public health and healthcare providers are really on their side. Black communities in particular have good reasons not to trust the healthcare establishment after generations of low-quality care, exploitation, and outright neglect from some providers. So I certainly understand why many people are still reluctant to get the COVID-19 vaccine, especially in Black communities: it's new, it's being pushed really hard, and we're handing it out for free. It is understandable that some have reservations, but I hope that a deeper dive will lead you to believe as I do, that the reasons to trust the vaccine and get it as soon as possible, far outweigh the reasons to be hesitant.

First, the vaccine is safe, and it can help keep you safe. Mild side effects like headache, fatigue, and pain in the arm where you received the shot are common, and are signs that your immune system is revving up to fight off the virus if it were to ever encounter it. More severe side effects are extremely rare and not life-threatening. The three available vaccines from Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson are also incredibly effective, and every one of them has been shown to be virtually 100% effective against hospitalization and death from COVID-19. None of these vaccines can give you COVID-19, as they do not contain the actual COVID-19 virus. They work by inserting pieces of genetic material that tell your immune system to make the spiky protein that appears on the coronavirus. Your immune system then learns to recognize those spike proteins, and develops the ability to fight off the coronavirus.



Second, the vaccine protects your community and helps get us back to normal faster. We need to do everything we can to protect our older family members and people with medical conditions who are more likely to get very sick or die from COVID-19. The more people who get the vaccine, the faster we will stop the spread of the virus in our community. Higher vaccination rates also help get our kids back in school buildings, keep our businesses open, make our buses safer to ride, and free up space and staff in our hospitals to care for people with other serious health issues. Our communities are struggling more than ever during this pandemic, and choosing to be vaccinated is one way you can do your part to help them get back on their feet.

Lots of people who were hesitant to get the vaccine at first, including many people in Black communities, are learning the facts and changing their minds. According to a survey done by the Kaiser Family Foundation, more than half of all adults in the US (55%) have either received at least one dose of the vaccine or plan to do so as soon as it is available. The number of Black adults who have either gotten at least one dose of the vaccine or plan to get it as soon as it is available has also doubled since December, and the number of Black adults who say they plan to wait and see how the vaccine goes for other people has dropped by 18%. If you are still hesitant, try talking with the people in your life to see if their minds have changed at all - you may find that some are now planning to get the vaccine or have already received it.

Finally, we in public health and healthcare know that we have failed our most vulnerable communities in many ways over the course of many years. But we are working hard every day to do better, and we hope the way we are

See **VACCINE** on Page 15

Richmond & its neglected Black cemeteries

By Brian Palmer & Erin Hollaway Palmer

On March 10, a group of descendants of people laid to rest at Richmond's historic African American cemeteries, along with members of the broader Black community, sent a letter to Governor Ralph Northam and other officials. They made specific requests of the governor, among them that he halt the transfer of \$150,000 of taxpayer money to Parity LLC to buy property in the East End. Parity is the real estate arm of the Enrichmond Foundation, a white-led organization that acquired Evergreen Cemetery in 2017 and East End Cemetery in 2019 with significant monetary, administrative, and political support from the state.

Another request was to stop the City of Richmond from signing agreements with Enrichmond/Parity that would have given it control of two more Black cemeteries, Colored Paupers and a section of Oakwood, both owned by the city. The Stoney administration informed the letter writers this week that it would not pursue those agreements. This is very good news.

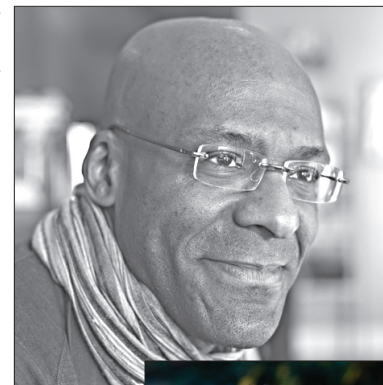
But it's not a full response to the descendants' letter, nor to a fundamental plea that citizens have been making for years: we need accountability, transparency, and genuine community engagement when it comes to these cemeteries.

Nearly five years of secretive deals and questionable decisions have damaged East End and Evergreen, and battered the public's trust. The Commonwealth bears some responsibility for this.

The Virginia Outdoors Foundation, a state-chartered agency, subsidized Enrichmond/Parity's takeover of Evergreen, then helped it acquire East End. These cemeteries, comprising 76 acres and tens of thousands of burials, are now owned outright by Parity, a company with a single member, Enrichmond's executive director. That entity has shown itself to be many things but a capable steward of these sites. One only need drive past the section of Evergreen off East Richmond Road to see that it's in terrible shape. Brush, branches, and logs cut months ago lie atop headstones and graves; trash is strewn at the entrance. Areas just behind these plots are heavily overgrown, as is much of the cemetery. One reason for this: Enrichmond/Parity displaced the grassroots organizations that had been reclaiming both cemeteries, preferring absolute control to collaboration.

After all these years, Enrichmond/Parity still has not produced a comprehensive preservation plan for the cemeteries. What it did publish was a 170-page "master plan," drafted by an engineering firm, to turn Evergreen, East End, and surrounding properties into a glorified park, with bike trails, a boardwalk, and a \$1.9 million visitors center.

For years, we have asked: Why did



government officials put these vulnerable sites into Enrichmond/Parity's hands? Where is the due diligence? One would expect to get binders full of studies and audits of Enrichmond's past projects, such as the 17th Street Farmers Market, La Plaza Market on Hull Street, Kanawha Plaza, or even the long-dead apple orchard at Chimborazo Park. We have seen no such documentation. And yet taxpayer money keeps flowing to Enrichmond/Parity.

In recent days, Enrichmond/Parity has launched a public relations campaign to blunt the impact of the descendants' letter and the Change.org petition created by the Friends of East End to support it. (As of Mar. 25, the petition has been signed by more than 11,000 people.)

We have had five years' worth of empty and slippery words. It's time for decisive action. Enrichmond/Parity and its government supporters must deliver what the descendants have asked for in their letter: a proper cultural landscape report for all the cemeteries in question; all due diligence and other material upon which the state based its decision to subsidize and support Enrichmond/Parity's acquisition of African American burial grounds; and public meetings to allow the community to deliberate on the future of these sacred sites with all of the necessary information in hand.

Brian Palmer and Erin Hollaway Palmer are founding members of the Friends of East End Cemetery. Brian is a descendant of people who are buried there.

international & antiwar news

Why we care about the international issues

With so many problems here at home - the COVID-19 pandemic, mass unemployment, the threat of an eviction tsunami, continuing systematic racism and police killings - you may wonder why the Defenders pay attention to international issues.

Maybe it's because, as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. pointed out, injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Or maybe it's because we remember the biblical story of Cain and Abel, in which God asked Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" And Cain answered, "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?" Maybe we don't want to be like Cain.

We believe that, if you live here in the United States, the richest and most powerful country in the world, you have a responsibility to at least pay attention to what the government is doing in your name - with your tax dollars, and with the blood of "your" soldiers.

And the truth is that most of the world's problems today can be traced back to the dominance of capitalism, in which the mad pursuit of profits takes priority over everything else. And the U.S. is the most powerful capitalist country. After all, does anyone believe we'd be embroiled in so many wars in the Middle East if the main resource of those countries were cabages? No, it's because the Middle East holds two-thirds of the world's known oil reserves, and whoever controls oil controls the world.

That also explains why Washington is so dead set against the

socialist government of Venezuela, which also has massive oil reserves. And it's the same with Iran, the first country to nationalize its own oil, which used to be controlled by the British. So if Washington is wreaking havoc around the world to protect and expand the profits of U.S. corporations, those who call themselves progressives should be paying attention.

Then there's the matter of money - our tax dollars, to be specific. All the money spent on wars - past, present and future - could instead be used to solve our many problems here at home, and also help make up for some of the damage the U.S. wars have caused the rest of humanity.

So we run these two pages in the Defender to try and share some knowledge about international issues. We promote good books and videos and webinars. We get out in the streets with protests. And we hope we get a hearing.

If these things concern you too, think about getting active with the Defenders' Antiwar Committee. (See the column on the right of the next page.)

And no, we're not going to stop working on all the issues that face us here. We're just not going to forget about our sisters and brothers in other countries who are suffering from the actions of the same government that oppresses us here at home.

(The brief stories here were contributed by Kat McNeal, Sanaz Ghodzi, Ana Edwards and Phil Wilayto.)

COVID-19 & Africa

The International Rescue Committee (IRC), a global humanitarian body, has estimated that all the extra vaccines bought by the United States, United Kingdom and the European Union could vaccinate everyone aged 16 and over in the 20 countries most at risk of humanitarian disaster because of COVID-19. Of these countries, 13 are in Africa.

John Nkengasong, head of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, says that African countries will need to vaccinate at least 60 percent of their populations in order to control the virus. His target for this year is 35 percent.

As of March 15, 23.6 million vaccine doses had been distributed on the continent, the Africa CDC says.

This is equivalent to around 1.7% of the population.

Meanwhile, the African Union is developing a plan to pool supplies on behalf of all 55 countries in the continent.

As of March 23, confirmed cases of COVID-19 from 55 African countries reached 4,116,102. Reported deaths reached 110,163, while 3,690,639 people have recovered and 5,599,955 vaccinations have been administered.

Mali

Throughout the world, competition for land and water has led to local conflicts. Central Mali is no exception.

The Fulani are semi-nomadic cattle-herders. The Dogon are farmers. Both need arable land and water. Long-standing competition for these resources - which are becoming scarcer due to neglect by the central government and an expanding Sahara Desert caused by climate change - were exacerbated by Mali's 2012 coup and conflict in the North.

In January and February of this year, leaders of both communities signed four peace agreements, facilitated by the Norway-based Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, with cooperation from the Malian government and funding from a Canadian nonprofit.

Philippines

In the early morning hours of March 7, the Philippine National Police and the Philippine Army deployed throughout the Calabarzon administrative region in a series of simultaneous operations, suppos-

edly to serve 24 search warrants. By dawn, they had killed nine progressive activists, arrested six and branded the remaining nine as fugitives. Their whereabouts - and fates - remain unknown.

Those murdered include a city coordinator for BAYAN, a coalition of progressive organizations; four housing rights activists with the poor people's advocacy group SIKKAD-K3; two indigenous Dumagat people; and two staffers with the peasant's organization UMALPAS KA.

For more information:
BAYANUSA.org

Haiti

Jovenel Moïse, the U.S.-backed president of Haiti, is refusing to leave office, even though his term ended on Feb. 7. Moïse and his Western allies - the U.S., Canada, Brazil, France, Spain and the European Union - are trying to push through a new constitution that takes power away from the people.

For months, the Haitian people have been bravely holding mass demonstrations, especially on Sundays, calling for Moïse to step down so they can appoint an interim leader and hold a new election. The state response has been violent repression.

The Haitian people will be out in the streets again on March 29, the date of the passage of their present constitution, which is being ignored by Moïse and his U.S. backers.

The U.S. corporate media has not been covering the protests in Haiti, since the State Department supports Moïse's violent undemocratic rule.

A new coalition to support the Haitian people has called for support actions to take place in local areas around the dates of March 27-29.

(Adapted from a statement by the United National Antiwar Coalition.)

Palestine

COVID-19 has highlighted the apartheid nature of Israel.

Today Palestinians who are not Israeli citizens live in the occupied West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, often called the world's largest open-air prison because Israel controls who can enter or leave the narrow strip of land. Gaza is only allowed 12 hours of electricity per day, but now Israel has blocked the fuel needed to sustain its only power plant. Hospitals have

international & antiwar news

resorted to relying on backup generators.

Israel also blocked the Palestinian Authority's delivery of vaccines for Gazans, with no explanation. When the Palestinian Authority inquired about whether Israel would assist in vaccinating the 5 million Palestinians who are not Israeli citizens, Israeli officials said they might provide whatever is left over after vaccinating Israeli citizens.

This weaponization of the virus by the Israeli occupation mirrors that of a biological weapon that is increasing the deprivation of Palestinians living under military occupation.

Yemen

March 23 marked the sixth year of the Saudi-led, U.S.-backed war in Yemen, which has caused the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Two-thirds of all Yemenis now suffer from hunger, according to the U.N.'s World Food Program. With Saudi Arabia blocking humanitarian aid and foodstuffs, Yemenis have resorted to eating leaves.

Along with COVID-19, the country has dealt with cholera outbreaks from contaminated water, which have killed many thousands.

And although U.S. President Joe Biden recently announced the end of U.S. support in the ongoing war, his stance remains unclear due to his commitment to supporting Saudi "defense."

It is clear that the humanitarian crisis in Yemen will continue so long as Saudi Arabia continues its embargo on the poorest country in the region.

Iraq

Pope Francis traveled to Iraq March 6 to support that country's besieged Christian community. He also visited one of Islam's most respected Shia clerics, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, who worked to unite

all Iraqis after the U.S. invasion through his fatwas urging religious unity to combat ISIS.

The mainstream media portrayed this as a general interfaith meeting, conveniently ignoring its political character.

Ayatollah Sistani made the following points: No to besieging civilian populations, directed at U.S. sanctions on sovereign countries; no to violence, directed at the U.S., for bombing Iraqis, but also the Iraqi government, calling on it to respect the will of the Iraqi people; no to injustice, directed at both the U.S. and Iraqi governments, which have ignored the plight of Iraqis; and no to normalization with Israel, pointedly mentioning "the absence of social justice which the Palestinian people are exposed to, especially to the Palestinian people in the occupied territories."

After their meeting, Pope Francis referred to the ayatollah as "a great man and sage" and "a man of God," calling his words a "message for everyone."

Ukraine

This May 2 will be the seventh anniversary of the massacre of scores of progressives by a fascist mob at the House of Trade Unions in Odessa, Ukraine. The brutal killings took place just a few months after the U.S.-backed coup that installed a pro-Western president.

In 2016, Virginia Defender editor Phil Wilayto organized a three-person delegation to travel to Odessa to attend the second annual mass memorial of the massacre, which was being threatened by some of the same fascist forces. Other international observers came from many other countries. The thousands of Odessans who turned out that day pushed back the fascists and the day passed with few incidents.

Since then, well-organized and heavily armed right-wing paramilitary organizations have grown stronger and now play a major role in the country. Anti-fascist forces are on the defensive everywhere.

The Odessa Solidarity Campaign, founded by the Defenders after the 2016 memorial, is discussing how best to commemorate this year's May 2 anniversary. Information will be posted on the campaign's Facebook page and at:

**odessasolidarity
campaign.org**

Some good books for serious activists

Capitalism & Slavery By Eric Williams

An African-centered analysis of the origins of Western capitalism; doctoral thesis by the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago.

Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare By Kwame Nkrumah

First section gives a brief overview of the imperialist strategy to control Africa in the post-colonial period.

Neo-Colonialism, the Highest Stage of Imperialism By Kwame Nkrumah

A longer explanation of the imperialist strategy to control Africa in the post-colonial period.

How Europe Underdeveloped Africa By Walter Rodney

An African-centered Marxist analysis; Rodney's doctoral thesis from 1940s

Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent By Eduardo Galeano

An overview of European and U.S. domination of Latin America

A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire & the Creation of the Modern Middle East By David Fromkin

How Britain and France created most of the modern nation-states in the Middle East; explains a great deal about the underlying causes of today's struggles.

Introducing the Defenders Antiwar Committee

Since our beginnings, the Defenders have always been involved with the antiwar movement, local, national and international.

From 2005 to 2008 we helped lead the Virginia Anti War Network, or VAWN. From 2008 to 2017 it was the Virginia People's Assembly for Jobs, Peace & Justice. From 2010 to 2018 we were active with and then part of the leadership of the United National Antiwar Coalition.

In 2007 we led a five-person peace delegation to Iran. In 2016 we organized a three-person delegation that traveled to Odessa, Ukraine, to stand with that city's anti-fascist movement. Then we founded and led the ongoing Odessa Solidarity Campaign.

But over the past 12 years, the national antiwar movement, for many reasons, has shrunk to a pale shadow of its former self. With hopes of contributing to reversing that trend, we've launched a new Defenders Antiwar Committee, mostly made up of our younger members. Our first project is to call for local "day-after" actions in the event the U.S. launches an attack against Iran or any other country. (On Facebook, see: "Day-After Action - Solidarity With Iran.")

We also have plans for creating webinars and, as the pandemic eases, forums, rallies and protests.

We could use your help. If interested, please call or text us at **804-644-5834** or email us at **DefendersFJE@hotmail.com**.

Together, we can make a difference.

VACCINE Continued from page 1

building trust with communities who have always deserved the best care available. We are offering the vaccine first to people in age groups and lines of work and communities that are most at risk. People can get the vaccine free of charge in clinics and facilities all across Virginia, and no one who wants to receive it will be excluded. The way we have been investing in and working more closely with our most vulnerable communities over the past year has given me real hope. Once enough of us are vaccinated to put this pandemic behind us, I look forward to seeing how this commitment

can grow into even more powerful change that builds better health and stronger trust in communities across Virginia.

At some point in 2021, each of us will have to decide for ourselves whether to get the COVID-19 vaccine. If any of the reasons above resonate with you, the vaccine may already be available to you or will be soon. You can pre-register to receive it when it's your turn anytime at vaccinate.virginia.gov, or by calling 1-877-VAX-IN-VA.

Dr. Danny Avula is director of the Henrico and Richmond Health Departments. He coordinates Virginia's COVID-19 vaccination effort.



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Richard is an everyday Virginian that will fight for everyday Virginians. Richard has an established record of influencing policy change as a community advocate. As the People's Delegate, Richard will bring his tireless work as a grassroots leader to the General Assembly, to fight day-in and day-out for the rights of all people to economic stability, clean air and water, and to have their voices heard over the interests of corporations.

- He will never take money from corporate interests
- He will work for true criminal justice reform
- He will fight for environmental justice and a clean energy economy
- His policies will lift the working class and marginalized Virginians, not corporations
- He will strive to ensure all Virginians have access to affordable housing, education, and healthcare

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