

*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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The housing crisis & Richmond's declining Black population

By Delaney Jooris

There's no doubt that Richmond is experiencing a housing crisis.

And, contrary to what the word might imply, the crisis has been largely manufactured, and its effects haven't been evenly distributed across our city's population. Black and poor Richmonders are being priced out of the city limits, which has major implications for the city's political balance of power.

2020 ended a 50-year period in which Richmond had been a majority-Black city. At the time of the 2010 census, Black people made up just over half the city's population. By the 2020 census, the Black population had declined to 40.5 percent, while whites made up 43.3 percent.

Meanwhile, Black populations are on the rise in neighboring counties. From 2010 to 2020, Henrico's Black population grew by 1,500 people and Chesterfield's by 13,860. Black people are becoming less concentrated within

the city and more so in the counties, where the cost of living is lower.

It is, in effect, Black Flight, from an increasingly expensive Richmond.

Poverty & rising housing costs

Poverty rates are following a similar trend. While neighboring counties have generally experienced a rise in poverty rates, Richmond's rate has been on a general decline.

John V. Moeser is professor emeritus of urban studies and planning at Virginia Commonwealth University and a retired senior fellow of the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement at the University of Richmond. He also is an expert on poverty and demographics in the Greater Richmond area. His research with "Unpacking the Census" at UofR shows the ongoing suburbanization in Greater Richmond.

In 2019, 23.2 percent of residents in the city were living in poverty. Fully 60 percent of those people were Black - a rate that has generally grown

despite the consistent decline in their share of the overall population. In 2019, just 24.7 percent of impoverished people in the city were white.

While Black poverty is rising, so is the cost of buying a home. This is true for the whole region, but it's rising at a much higher rate in Richmond than in the counties. According to data from Central Virginia Regional MLS, which includes all listings from the Richmond Association of Realtors, the average sale price of a home in Richmond increased more than 100 percent from the first quarter of 2012 to September of this year. In the same period, Henrico saw a 74 percent increase and Chesterfield 82 percent.

The Richmond Regional Planning District Commission, or PlanRVA, composed of nine local governments, reported that 30 percent of people surveyed in the city wanted to buy a house, but could not afford the down payment, while 24 percent worried about their rent going up to an amount

they could not afford.

According to Housing Forward VA, a resource for affordable housing data, 37.5 percent of households in the city were cost-burdened in 2019, meaning they were spending more than 30 percent of income on rent and utilities.

The effects of gentrification

Bill Conkle, a Church Hill resident and landlord in the city's East End, has witnessed the changing demographics of Richmond firsthand.

"The (Church Hill) neighborhood has really changed," Conkle told the Defender. "It used to be that mostly people of color lived here and mostly people that were probably of middle income or lower income. Over the last 10 years or so, there's been an influx of wealthier people moving in and paying more for houses."

Conkle said he's made a point of only purchasing vacant homes, so as not to displace anyone, and that he prides himself on "trying to be

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"The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them." — Ida B. Wells — July 16. 1862 - March 25, 1931

regional & national news

Study: Police killings in U.S. are grossly undercounted

The number of people killed by police in the United States has been grossly undercounted, according to a new study by a group of public health researchers.

Among the findings: More than 17,000 deaths caused by police since 1980 have been misclassified, and Black people die in such encounters 3.5 times as often as whites.

The researchers maintain that death certificates issued by medical examiners systematically underrecord deaths due to police violence. That data is then compiled by the National Vital Statistics System, which issues the official figures for police killings.

"The burden of fatal police violence is an urgent public health crisis in the USA," the researchers state in their report. "Mounting evidence shows that deaths at the hands of the police disproportionately impact people of certain races and ethnicities, pointing to systemic racism in policing."

Further, "The Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors Study (GBD) in 2019 found that police conflict and executions accounted for 293,000 global deaths ... from 1980 to 2019. In 2019, the USA accounted for 13.2% ... of the 8,770 global deaths ... due to police conflict while only accounting for 4% of the global population."

The study was reported in The Lancet, a peer-reviewed medical journal.

Tiny hands in cuffs

The headline on the Associated Press story was chilling: "Tiny wrists in cuffs: How police use force against children."

The story, published Oct. 20, reported on the widespread use of force by police on teenagers and small children, some as young as six.

"They've been handcuffed, felled by stun guns, taken down and pinned to the ground by officers often far larger than they were," the AP reported, adding that "Departments nationwide have few or no guardrails to prevent such incidents."

The AP said it had analyzed data on some 3,000 instances of police use of force over the last 11 years against children under 16. The data was provided by Accountable Now, a project of The Leadership Conference Education Fund and included incidents from 25 police departments in 17 states.

Most children in the dataset were teenagers, but there also were dozens of cases of children ages 10 or younger.

Among the findings:

- Black children are just 15 percent of the U.S. child population, but in the study made up more than 50 percent of those who were forcibly handled.
- The most common kinds of force used were "takedowns, strikes and muscling, followed by firearms pointed at or used on children. Less often, children faced other tactics, like the use of pepper spray or police K-9s."
- While some police departments spec-

ify how old a child must be to be handcuffed, there are no laws that specifically prohibit using force against children.

The AP story interviewed several experts in child behavior, suggesting that police needed to be taught that a child's brain is not the same as an adult's and can cause the child to act in ways that may seem threatening but are really motivated by fear.

Here's another way to look at it: If a cop needs to be "taught" not to brutalize a six-year-old child, the handcuffs are going on the wrong person.

SHOCKOE

Continued from page 9

park. City Council later supported investing that amount.

Gov. Ralph Northam has said he will ask the General Assembly for \$9 million. It has been reported elsewhere that that amount would be for the museum alone. However, in a telephone conversation that Defender Ana Edwards and this writer had with the governor earlier this year, Northam said the money would not be earmarked for a museum, but rather could be used for the development of Shockoe Bottom in general.

In addition, while getting a tour of Shockoe Bottom last spring by Ana, U.S. Sen. Mark Warner raised the possibility of federal money for the Bottom. That apparently would depend on Congress agreeing to lift the existing ban on funding so-called "pork barrel" local projects.

At any rate, add it all up and the money allocated, proposed and suggested doesn't come anywhere near \$220 million.

Rather than a museum, which was never a community demand in any of the more than 20 public meetings held by various groups about the future of Shockoe Bottom, the Defenders have been arguing for an interpretive center, which relies more on audio and visual presentations than the collection of artifacts. It's much less expensive than a museum.

But whether it's a museum or an interpretive center, honoring the site of Lumpkin's jail, which gave birth to what eventually would become Virginia Union University, should be an important part of the Heritage Campus.

And the place to locate that museum or interpretive center should be in the existing Main Street Station train shed. It's a large, beautifully renovated space that overlooks the Devil's Half-Acre on one side and the sites of the Omohundro, Goodwin and other jails on the other.

And it's above the floodplain!

Further, although it's been years since the train shed was renovated, the City has yet to decide what it wants to use it for, so it's available.

All food for thought. Meanwhile, we'll keep poring through the hundreds of pages of documents we got from the City and will report on more findings in the next issue of the Defender.

Do you want to fight for Freedom, Justice & Equality? JOIN THE DEFENDERS!**THE VIRGINIA DEFENDERS**
for Freedom, Justice & Equality

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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

By Phil Wilayto

The whole country now knows that there are three candidates for governor in Virginia: two rich white men and a working-class Black woman.

All three are on the ballot: Terry McAuliffe, Democrat; Glenn Youngkin, Republican; and Princess Blanding, candidate of the newly formed Liberation Party.

But very few people knew about Princess Blanding until Sept. 28, when she dramatically disrupted the second and final gubernatorial candidates' debate.

Princess Blanding, a long-time educator, a single mother, self-described member of the LGBTQIA+ community and a nationally known activist against police killings, is the first Black woman ever to achieve ballot status for the office of governor in Virginia.

That alone should have been news. Instead, her candidacy had been receiving little coverage and her name has been left out of most polls, relegating her to "Independent" or "Other," without mentioning her by name.

What happened at the debate

The disruption, which received national and even international news coverage, took place during the debate held at the Northern Virginia Community College in Alexandria and sponsored by the Northern Virginia Chamber of Commerce and other corporate entities.

Blanding had already been excluded from the first debate, at the Appalachian School of Law in Grundy in southwestern Virginia, and had asked the chamber of commerce to be included in its event.

The chamber's response was that "... Participants in this debate have historically been the nominees of the two major parties. Therefore, respectfully, we will not be inviting Ms. Blanding to participate. However, we would like to extend an invitation to her to attend the debate as our guest. We can also provide time for her following the debate to speak with the media that is covering the event in person if she would like."

"The way that felt to me was, yes, you can come and get on the bus like everybody else ... but you're going to sit in the back of the bus,"



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Princess Blanding speaks out against her exclusion from the debates for candidates for the office of Virginia governor. This second and final debate on Sept. 28 was sponsored by the Northern Virginia Chamber of Commerce and other big business interests. Blanding's dramatic disruption succeeded in breaking through the corporate and media white-out of her historic campaign.

The significance of Princess Blanding's run for governor: A Defender analysis

Blanding was quoted as telling the Associated Press. "I met the requirements just like they did to get on the ballot. However, I'm being blocked."

And so, about 15 minutes into the debate, which was being televised live statewide by local NBC affiliates, Princess Blanding stood up in the left aisle of the auditorium - which was barely half full, by the way - and opened up a tirade at Youngkin and McAuliffe, moderator Chuck Todd of NBC and the event's sponsors.

"I worked very hard to be on the ballot - I should be up on the stage!" she shouted. Dozens of people applauded as she demanded her right to be included in the debate.

After being unable to stop the intervention, a flustered Chuck Todd called for security and went to an unscheduled commercial break, as Blanding continued her protest. At one point, a male audience member got up, positioned himself directly in front of Blanding and began to body-push her back toward the exit. A Blanding supporter (OK, it was me) stepped in between them and stopped the assault.

After finally being escorted from the venue by police, Blanding was followed outside by a

gaggle of reporters eager to interview her.

Besides the Associated Press story that appeared in newspapers around the country, the disruption was covered by The Washington Post; NBC, Fox, Microsoft and Yahoo News; as well as lighting up Twitter. There also was a story in the Independent, a newspaper in England.

The significance of Princess Blanding's campaign

Princess Blanding's run for governor represents a long-overdue left break from the corporate-dominated Democratic Party, primarily over the issues of racism and police abuse.

After a long career in public education, Blanding became an activist in response to her brother, Marcus-David Peters, being fatally shot on May 14, 2018, by a Richmond police officer while Peters - naked and rambling incoherently - was experiencing a mental health crisis on the side of Interstate 95.

The police and city prosecutors insisted the officer acted in self-defense, but Peters had only become hostile after the officer approached him, pointing a taser gun.

Determined to get the officer indicted,

Blanding founded Justice & Reformation, an activist group that led mass rallies and marches.

The group also raised demands for civilian police review boards, with subpoena power, and an end to qualified immunity for police officers.

When Richmond prosecutors refused to indict, Blanding began working with leaders of the state Democratic Party to get a bill passed that would mandate that the first responders to mental health crises would be mental health professionals, not armed police officers. This became known as the Marcus Alert bill.

She also worked on bills to create civilian review boards and end qualified immunity.

Peters' death became a focal point of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests in Richmond, with activists including the Marcus Alert bill, review boards and an end to qualified immunity in their list of demands. The traffic circle around the towering statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee on the city's iconic Monument Avenue was popularly renamed Marcus-David Peters Circle.

But by the time the liberal Democrats finished appeasing their more conservative party members, the Marcus Alert bill had been so watered down as to be almost meaningless.

The same with the civilian review bill, while ending qualified immunity was dismissed out of hand.

It was at this point that Blanding publicly denounced the Democrats and decided to break with them once and for all.

'Blanding Factor' has potential to decide the governor's race

McAuliffe and Youngkin are both multi-millionaires supported by deep-pocketed corporate interests. The Democrat, a former chairman of the National Democratic Committee and a close associate of the Clintons, has been a banker, real estate developer, home builder, hotel owner and internet venture capitalist who has already served one term as a Virginia governor. Youngkin, a political novice, is a former co-chief executive of the private-equity firm Carlyle Group.

As of Oct. 20, according to a report by WAVY.com, McAuliffe had raised a total of \$44.5 million and Youngkin had raised \$42.3 million, while Blanding had brought in just over \$30,000.

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community news

White supremacists deface murals, spread hate leaflets in Richmond area

By Phil Wilayto

White supremacist organizations have been active in the Richmond area again.

Over the weekend of Oct. 16-17, Henrico County police say they received reports of bags of racist flyers left in neighborhoods in Varina and Fairfield, the two majority-Black districts in the five-district county. The bags “contained a flyer naming the Loyal White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan,” according to a police media release.

It’s not the first time this has happened. “Similar flyers were distributed in the Glen Allen area in January, and in Ashland and Hanover County earlier this year,” according to a report in the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

Around the same weekend, a Black-themed mural at the corner of Meadowbridge and Newbury in Richmond’s predominantly Black Highland Park neighborhood was defaced, including with the words “Patriot Front,” the name of a white hate group. The multi-colored mural had features the words “Black Monument Avenue.”

Then, on Oct. 21, the beautiful, large mural honoring tennis great and anti-apartheid activist Arthur Ashe in Richmond’s Battery Park was defaced with racist graffiti. Ashe, a Richmond native, had honed his craft on the park’s tennis courts while being barred from playing the segregated courts in the city’s Byrd Park, a public space still named after William Byrd II, one of Richmond’s earliest and wealthiest slave owners. In the vandalism, Ashe’s image was defaced and the mural was tagged with the name “Patriot Front.”

In response to the various incidents, Henrico police say they’re stepping up patrols in the Varina and Fairfriend districts, and Richmond police say they will be monitoring murals and other monuments across the city.

The Patriot Front is a white-supremacist organization that broke from Vanguard America, another neo-fascist group, shortly after the so-called Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville in August 2017.

James Alex Fields, the Hitler admirer who drove his car into a crowd of protesters after the rally, killing anti-racist activist Heather Heyer and injuring some three dozen others,

COVID-19 SHOTS: Why you need them, where to get them

As of Oct. 22, the Virginia Department of Health was reporting that there have been a total of 914,755 cases of COVID-19 in the state. That’s almost one out of every 10 people. This included 38,269 hospitalizations and 13,668 deaths.

Across the state, about two-thirds of all eligible African-Americans and whites have received at least one vaccination shot. Rates are higher among Latino/s, American Indians and Asians.

But in Richmond, African-Americans have the lowest vaccination rate of any racial group - just 45.8 percent, compared to 61.3 percent among whites and higher rates among Latino/s, American Indians and Asians. The rates are similar in Norfolk, Petersburg and Roanoke.

We know there are many reasons why Black folks might be hesitant to take the vaccine, including a general distrust of the healthcare system that has deep historical roots.

But at this point, almost everyone being

hospitalized or dying from COVID-19 are people who have not been vaccinated. You may THINK the vaccine could cause you a problem, but you KNOW that COVID-19 can kill you.

Besides, getting the shot isn’t just about you. It helps protect your loved ones, your neighbors, your co-workers and everyone else you come into contact with. Getting the shot is nothing less than an act of love for the people around you. Please think about this.

In Virginia, everyone 12 or older is now eligible to get the vaccine. If you decide to get it, here’s how to find it:

Log onto the website of the Virginia Department of Health at vaccinate.virginia.gov. Call the department at: (877) VAX-IN-VA (877-829-4682). The line operates Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Assistance is available in English, Spanish, and more than 100 additional languages.

Defenders in the news

Defender Joseph Rogers was quoted in a Sept. 21 Associated Press story about the Confederate statues on Richmond’s Monument Avenue coming down. AP stories are used by media outlets around the world. On Oct. 6, he was interviewed on Sunny Gardener’s WRIR’s program “Lightly on the Ground” about the Gabriel Gathering.

Sacred Ground Project chair Ana Edwards was quoted about Richmond’s Lee statue coming down in stories in the Los Angeles Times (Sept. 8), Salon.com (Sept. 16) and The New York Times (Sept. 25).

Virginia Defender editor Phil Wilayto was quoted in an Oct. 18 Virginia Public Media story and an Oct. 22 Associated Press story about gubernatorial candidate Princess Blanding. He also was interviewed by the Sputnik news service about a World War II Ukrainian Nazi collaborator who had avoided deportation from Canada until his death on Sept. 20 of this year.

was photographed earlier that day marching with Vanguard America, holding one of their shields with their neo-Nazi insignia.

Fields was convicted of the attack and given multiple life sentences. He is about to be in federal court as a defendant in a lawsuit filed by Charlottesville residents against more than a dozen Unite the Right organizers and participants. The lawsuit charges a conspiracy to commit racist violence.

The Loyal White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, based in Pelham, N.C., is a white supremacist and antisemitic organization formed around 2012. About 50 members held a rally in March of 2017 in Charlottesville, where they were met by more than 2,000 anti-racist protesters, including members of the Virginia Defenders.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

“A Winchester rifle should have a place of honor in every black home, and it should be used for that protection which the law refuses to give.”

IDA B. WELLS-BARNETT

*Newspaper editor &
anti-lynching activist - 1862-1931*



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

La Milpa: More than a restaurant, more than a market

LA MILPA

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Editor's note: Martín González was just 18 when he made the difficult journey from his home in Mexico City to Richmond. One of 14 children, he was leaving behind a life of poverty to try and find a new life in El Norte.

Today, Mr. González and his partner, Monica Chavez, run one of the most unique Mexican restaurants in the Richmond region: La Milpa. Located just south of Richmond at 6925 Hull Street Road in a small shopping center, the combination restaurant-grocery-market also offers a bakery, catering service, lunch van, food truck and a garden that grows fresh produce for the kitchen. But more than anything else, La Milpa offers a sense of community to everyone who enters its doors.

Meet Martín González, the founder and co-owner of La Milpa.



Martín González and Monica Chavez, partners in La Milpa. Photos by Phil Wilayto

When I got here, my first goal was to learn the language. Then, after six years, I got my GED, then went to community college and prepared for a four-year school. I wanted to go to VCU. When you're young, you can dream.

And at the same time, I was working at Mexico Restaurant on Horsepen Road, one of the first Tex-Mex restaurants in Richmond. I learned how to wait tables. I attended events in the city of Richmond, in Chesterfield, and learned how people make businesses, selling fruits, crafts, anything. So that got my attention. I said, I think I know how to do some of the things people do here, so I got in my mind to start a Latino store in the West End area, behind the Mexico Restaurant.



La Milpa, just south of the Richmond / Chesterfield County line, combines a restaurant, bakery, grocery, market, catering service and lunch van with a real sense of community.

We had the best business running in that small place, just 1,200 square feet. It was called Mexico Mini-Market. We had groceries and a kitchen so we could make meals to go. And it was a successful business for a long time. We started in 1995. It was something good for the community. Everyone came there, because there were no other stores like that available.

That was the first of Mr. González' business ventures, started as partnerships with other Latinos. Next came Mexico Mini-Market II, on what then was called Jefferson Davis Highway. And finally, in 2000, La Milpa, which is his sole business now.

At La Milpa, we used to have just a few tables, and groceries. Like with every business, you start slow, start using your skills, meeting the customers. You learn from the last business and bring it here.

I started bringing lunch boxes to the construction sites and spreading the word about La Milpa. We used to meet workers from different states coming to build the houses around here. We brought fresh, hot meals for them. And that's still going on.

When you learn about serving the community, you start learning the differences about the cultures. But you can really make one culture for everybody when you have a place that reminds you of home, where you can find traditional food, fish and you open your heart to everyone who comes here to try your food. You find something that is comfortable for everybody. And the differences don't matter, because you're making a common ground. Our customers now are about half Latino, half from other cultures.

About 15-20 people work at La Milpa. We have a family business operation. That's the difference between a short-term run and a long-term run. I've seen businesses that close their doors, for different reasons, but when you talk about families, they stay. ...

A restaurant, grocery, market, bakery - these skills come from the tradition. When you're home, you must learn all these skills. We have farming now, a small garden that provides us food for the kitchen. When you put all these skills together, you have a family, you have a tradition.

You bring this part, something that is directly connected to you. I love the tradition of Mexican music. And I learned an ancient art technique as a teenager called "popotillo art," made with straw. I'm one of a few artists that still do this technique. I don't sell my art, I only do shows. I think it's part of me. You are recreating your roots through these events, because you show something inside you through these activities. ...

The "Día de Los Muertos," or Day of the Dead is, I think, the most important holiday in Mexico. In the family, it's important, because it's an opportunity to remember the old ones who taught you a lot of stuff. I'm talking about baking, cooking, good values. So we make a tribute to them by remembering them. You go to the cemetery to fix their graves. You bring flowers to the cemetery. You have dinner there, tell stories.

This is how we keep the traditions alive. And supposedly, then they follow you to the home, where the celebration continues. Everything is so real, in your mind, in your heart. These are things from the ancient times.

This year for Día de Los Muertos we are bringing the Aztec dancers from Mexico City. We are celebrating 200 years of Mexican independence and 700 years of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán, which today is Mexico City. It takes place here, at the restaurant. The dancers will be outside and will pay tribute to the old ones, the ancient Mexicans.

That will be on Oct. 30 and Nov. 1 at 8 p.m. All are welcome. We are doing this because we are actually doing what we are talking about. We are making collaborations with everyone. We also are bringing the dancers to the Petersburg Area Art League, on Sunday, Oct. 31.

Then we have another event with the dancers on Nov. 1, with the Chesterfield Public Schools. It's part of the celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month. That will be from 6-7:30 p.m. at the Career and Technical Center at 13900 Hull Street Road.

When we have a chance to showcase Mexican culture, we do that. Next year, we're planning to celebrate the La Milpa anniversary, which is important so the community learns what we have been doing, how we have been participating in all the aspects about community, business and culture. ...

I can see progress in the community. The Latino community is getting better in the sense of, we own our own businesses, we participate in the growth of the state. I was one of the founders to



From festive hats to Mexican artwork to traditional foods, it's all here at La Milpa.

develop this type of business, now everyone else is modeling themselves on this way, and so I think the community likes this. They are always looking for the community aspects of what you're doing. It's different than coming into a Walmart.

our working lives

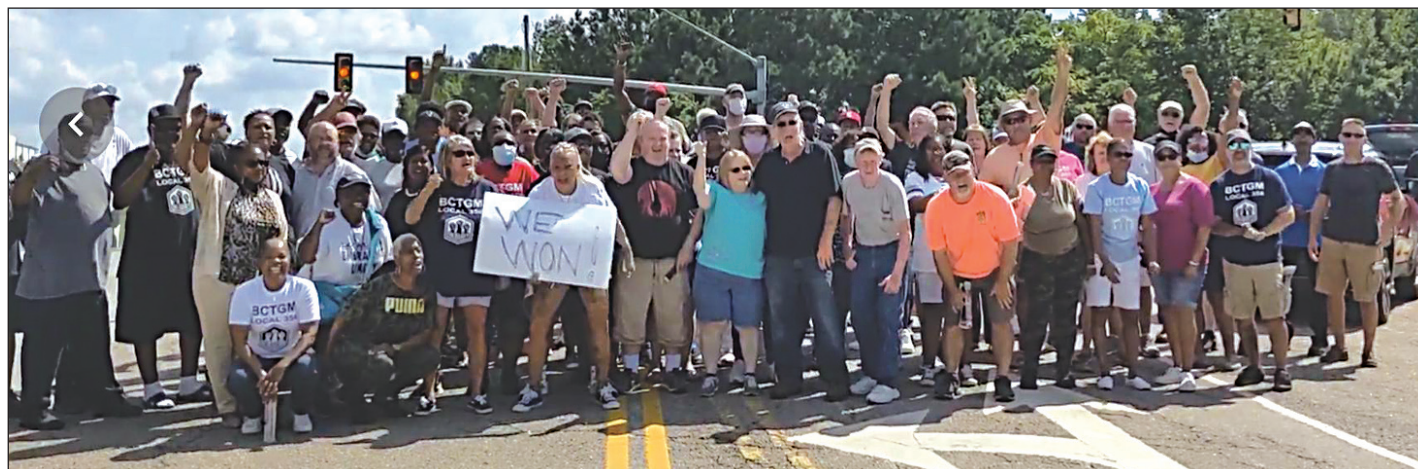


Photo by Ana Edwards

Union members celebrate their victory over the giant Mondelez bakery company. Their weeks of unified struggle, supported by other unions and community groups, saved their good wages and benefits and set a magnificent example for other workers.

Bakery workers win strike vs. giant snack company!

By Phil Wilayto

It was a beautiful scene outside the Mondelez industrial bakery in eastern Henrico County Sept. 19, as a jubilant crowd of union members gathered to celebrate their victory over the Chicago-based Mondelez corporation, one of the largest snack makers in the world.

"WE WON!" read a sign held high by one of the workers, while smiles and high-fives drove that message home.

The Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union had beaten back an attempt by the company to cut the good wages and benefits the workers have

won over the years.

Adding insult to injury, the company was demanding the cuts at a time when its profits are soaring, nearly doubling in the latest quarter as so many people, forced to stay home during the pandemic, have been increasing their consumption of such well-known Mondelez brands as Oreo and Chips Ahoy! cookies, Wheat Thins and Triscuit and Ritz crackers.

The company tried to keep up production during the strike with scabs (so-called "replacement workers"), but union members and their supporters had maintained a militant, 24/7 picket line outside the bakery since Aug. 16.

Henrico Local 358 was the third BCTGM

local to go out on strike, joining their union sisters and brothers at Mondelez bakeries in Chicago and Portland, Ore., as well as three distribution centers. Altogether, the strike involved about 1,000 workers.

More than 400 workers are employed at the Henrico County bakery, making it an important part of the overall strike effort. Some 60-70 percent are African-American, with many women workers. It has been especially inspiring to see the unity these workers showed as they stood together against the company.

Union struggles are rare in the Richmond area, and this one has inspired workers across the region. Encouraged by the Virginia AFL-

CIO, members of other unions came to join the picket line, bringing supplies and solidarity. Other supporters included the Richmond chapters of the DSA and IWW, as well as the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality, which publicized the strike, brought supplies and made a \$100 contribution to the union's strike fund.

With employers crying that they can't find workers to take their low-wage jobs, now is a good time for organized labor to increase its ranks by organizing the unorganized. The successful Mondelez strike shows that working people - when united and determined - can win.

It's a lesson we can all be grateful to the BCTGM union members for showing us.



Photo by Phil Wilayto

International union representative Lisa Gregory, left, accepts a check for the strike fund from Defender Kat McNeal.

Fort Lee, Pickett barbers strike, say NO to pay cuts!

By Kat McNeal

On July 4, around 20 civilian barbers who are contracted to serve soldiers at Fort Lee in Prince George County and Fort Pickett near Blackstone filed an Unfair Labor Practices complaint with the National Labor Relations Board and went out on strike. Now, as October closes, they remain stalwart in their struggle.

The barbers' primary grievance is that Missouri-based Sheffield Barbers, LLC, which took over providing hair-care services for the posts in 2018, has demanded the barbers accept a steep cut in pay.

The barbers are compensated per-haircut and have always received 55 percent of the posted price. This year, Sheffield raised the

price of a haircut to \$13.25, but then proposed a flat rate of \$6.24 per cut for each barber.

The union that represents the barbers, Public Service Employees Local 572 of the Laborers' International Union of North America, did the math: Given the number of haircuts each worker performs a week, this change in compensation amounts to a \$1,000 loss of income per month.

The proposed cut came after about a year of pandemic work conditions that prevented the three barber shops at Fort Lee and the one at Fort Pickett from being staffed at full capacity, meaning a cut in hours. Plus, a COVID infection control measure had already restricted earning potentials, making acceptance of the pay cut financially untenable.

Workers also allege that Sheffield deducted money from employee paychecks to pay for equipment required by the business, a form of wage theft. Sheffield has previously been charged with misconduct by the NLRB.

Local 572's business agent, Sonia Luna, told The Virginia Defender that the company and the union have met several times.

"We've asked for 53 percent and we've asked them to lay off the scabs so we can go back to work," she said, noting that the barbers are willing to take a pay cut, but not one that will leave them unable to provide for their families. "A resolution is coming," she said.

The striking workers, many of whom are African-American, are holding afternoon pickets every weekday across from Fort Lee's main gate on Sisisky Boulevard, just off Oaklawn Boulevard near I-295.

Luna reports a generally positive response from the more than 27,000 soldiers stationed there.

Among other union members who have

visited the picket line to show support have been representatives from BCTGM Local 358, fresh off their victory over the giant Mondelez snack company. (See story on this page.)

Local 572 has organized a strike fund and is accepting donations directly by check or via gofundme at: <https://tinyurl.com/rvmzdx7s>

Fort Lee is headquarters for the U.S. Army Combined Arms Support Command (CAS-COM), among other functions. It's named after Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee.

Fort Pickett, a Virginia Army National Guard installation, is named after Confederate Gen. George Pickett.

Both bases are among the Army installations targeted by Congress for name changes.

**LIVE BETTER
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cops, courts & prisons

Jermaine Doss gets 2nd annual parole hearing

By Phil Wilayto

After waiting eight years for an answer to his request for a governor's pardon - only to finally see that request denied earlier this year, wrongfully convicted Virginia prisoner Jermaine Doss went up for his second Parole Board hearing on Aug. 26.

That was followed Sept. 15 by an online meeting between a board representative and a group of Doss' family members and supporters, including this reporter. Among his supporters was a 30-year veteran of the Norfolk Police Department, who had known Jermaine since childhood; and a former Department of Corrections officer who knew Jermaine for two years in prison. Both men attested to Jermaine's upright character and good behavior.

Jermaine and his family are now waiting to hear the board's decision.

Meanwhile, Jermaine's father, Ray Doss, a Vietnam veteran and former government employee, has developed severe dementia and requires constant supervision, a responsibility mostly borne by his disabled wife, Willie May Doss, and his grown children, all of whom hold full-time jobs.

If granted parole, Jermaine plans to move in with his parents and help with home care, while training for a career as a truck driver.

"I am just praying that I get the right answer from the parole board granting parole," Doss wrote the Defender, "because I don't know how much longer my parents can stay strong to see me come home."

"The board don't care if someone is innocent, they just want to see remorse. I could be wrong, but I have shown that I am factually innocent, and legally innocent, but still have lost years of my life and the business I had worked hard and saved for too."

Jermaine Doss was convicted more than

20 years ago of murder in the death of James Webb, a white Norfolk businessman. Jermaine was originally charged with murder-for-hire, but when the jury was unable to agree on that charge, he was convicted of murder, even though he was not present at the time of the crime. Doss also disagrees with the judge's instruction to the jury that murder was a "lesser included offense" under the charge of murder-for-hire.

The actual confessed murderer, Nathaniel McGee, testified that Jermaine had hired him to kill Webb, but later recanted that testimony, saying in an affidavit and subsequent court testimony that prosecutors had threatened him with the death penalty if he didn't testify against Jermaine.

Jermaine has always maintained his innocence, insisting he was set up by a crooked cop - disgraced former Norfolk Detective Robert Glenn Ford, after refusing Ford's demand for a large sum of money. Ford is now in prison for extorting defendants in other criminal cases.

Although imprisoned for more than 20 years, it wasn't until 2020 that Jermaine got his first board hearing. That was the result of a law passed in the 2020 General Assembly that allowed the possibility of parole for prisoners sentenced after parole had been abolished in 2015, but before juries were allowed to be told that.

During that five-year period, hundreds of defendants

received longer sentences than jurors would have recommended if they had known that parole was no longer an option. These are the so-called "Fishback" cases, named for the lawsuit that successfully challenged the practice.

At Jermaine's first parole hearing, the board recommended that he be transferred from Sussex II Correctional Center, a Level 4 security prison, to a lower-level prison, to see how he did in a less restrictive environment.

A year passed before that recommendation was put into effect.

Jermaine is now housed at the Greensville Correctional Center in Jarratt, a Level 3 facility that is home to the state's execution chamber.

Save the date: SAT., JAN. 15 for the 5th ANNUAL VIRGINIA PRISON JUSTICE RALLY!

The **Virginia Prison Justice Network** will celebrate the birthday of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. by holding its **5th Annual VIRGINIA PRISON JUSTICE RALLY** on his birthday, Jan. 15, three days after the opening of the 2022 Virginia General Assembly, when all the state legislators will be in Richmond.

The plan is to **rally on Capitol Square from 1-2 pm** and then hold a **lobbying organizing meeting from 3-4 pm**. If rally permits are not being granted because of the pandemic, we will hold a car caravan through the city as we did last January. Meantime, please **SPREAD THE WORD!** - in your neighborhoods, workplaces, places of worship and especially inside the prisons. Help make Prison Justice a real issue in the 2021 General Assembly!

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

VIRGINIA PRISON JUSTICE NETWORK (VAPJN)

vapjn.wordpress.com - DefendersFJE@hotmail.com - 804-644-5834

VAPJN newsletter now reaching more than 1,200 prisoners

The Virginia Prison Justice Network, an alliance of 21 prisoner-led and prisoner advocacy organizations, publishes a monthly newsletter that is now sent to 1,276 prisoners in all 40 Virginia Department of Corrections facilities.

The newsletter carries information about conditions in the prisons, upcoming bills in the General Assembly, poetry and opinion pieces by prisoners and more. There is also a section in Spanish.

The newsletter is produced and mailed by members of the Coalition for Justice in Blacksburg, a founding member of the VAPJN.

For more information, contact the coalition at PO Box 299, Blacksburg, VA 24063.

Those outside the walls can read the newsletter on the VAPJN website at:

vapjn.wordpress.com

Prisoner Essays now on Defender website

The Virginia Defender website now includes a section called **Prisoner Essays**. We welcome submissions on any topic. These are easier to accept using the JPay email service, so if you are incarcerated and would like to submit an essay, first write to us at:

**Virginia Defender
PO Box 23202
Richmond, VA 23223.**

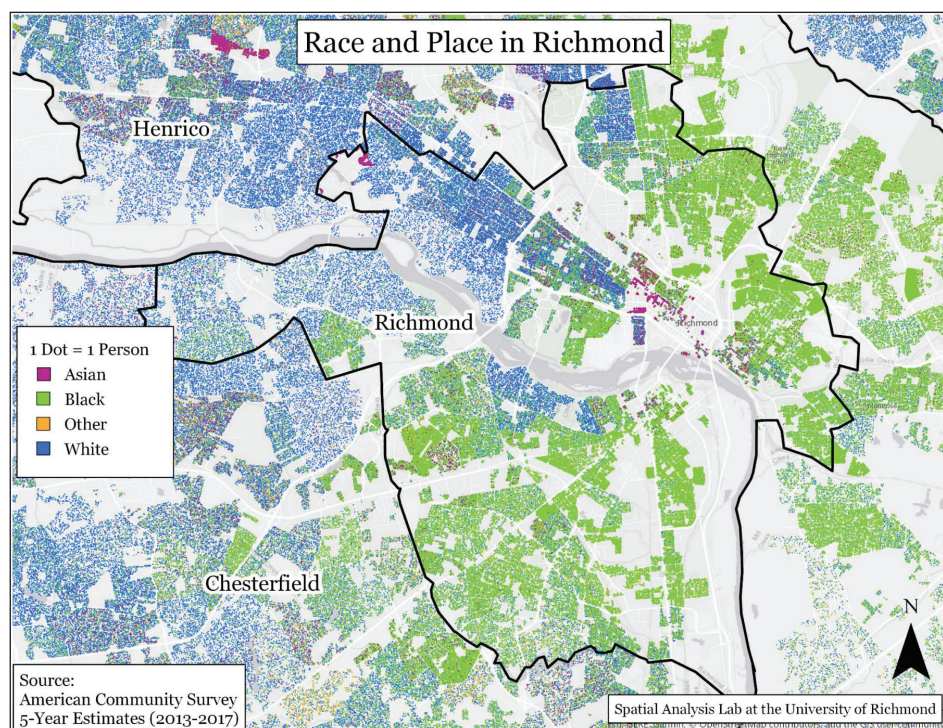
Restoring Parole www.rihd.org **RIHD INC**
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Fighting Mass Incarceration in Virginia



Photo courtesy F.O.R.

Members and supporters of the prisoner-led organization Freedom Over Everything (F.O.E.) gather on Oct. 23 outside the Broad Rock Library in Richmond where they held a community meeting to promote the return of parole in Virginia. Other meetings were held in Lynchburg on Oct. 14 and Newport News on Oct. 21.



Graph courtesy of the Special Analysis Lab at the University of Richmond

This graph illustrates the racial segregation patterns in the Richmond area, 2013-2017.

HOUSING

Continued from page 1

reasonable” with his rents. He noted that doing this has become increasingly difficult, because “it is more expensive to try to provide reasonably priced housing just because the price of providing housing has gone up.”

Attacks on public housing

Richmond’s Redevelopment & Housing Authority is in the midst of an ongoing effort to turn the city’s major public housing communities into mixed-income developments. This project will likely raise area home market values, while severely reducing affordable housing options in the city.

There has been no promise of a one-to-one replacement effort by RRHA, which would ensure that for every unit demolished, one of equal affordability would be built. In preparation for construction, many residents have been relocated to neighboring counties through use

of Section 8 vouchers, a rental subsidy funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

However, it seems RRHA’s continuation of current plans might be in jeopardy. Mayor Stoney recently announced an Equitable Affordable Housing Plan that includes a partnership with RRHA and “a commitment to no loss in the number of public housing units as reported in RRHA’s 2019-2020 Annual Agency Plan.”

It is unclear whether RRHA will be obligated to structure their redevelopment plans to meet this goal.

A recent amendment to Virginia’s Fair Housing Act that prohibits landlords from refusing Section 8 vouchers also aims to protect city residents seeking affordable housing. However, Omari Al-Qadafi, a housing organizer with the Legal Aid Justice Center, told the Defender he isn’t so optimistic.

“It’s like you’re trying to legislate away

racism ... you’re then just forcing racist landlords ... to rent to people they don’t want to rent to,” he said about the amendment. He also noted the potential for this to produce hostile situations and believes landlords will continue to try to work around the law.

“Just like during the so-called eviction moratorium, landlords found ways to evict people,” he said. “Landlords will adjust their behavior ... I think that they’ll find a way around it.”

The ongoing eviction tsunami

For many years now, Richmond has had the second highest eviction rate of any city in the country. In 2016, this meant more than 17 households were evicted every day, for a total of 6,345 evictions. Altogether, more than one in 10 renters here are evicted each year.

And it’s not only Richmond. Four other Virginia cities also make the top 10 list of cities for evictions:

Hampton (No. 3), Newport News (No. 4), Norfolk, (No. 6) and Chesapeake (No. 10). (Statistics are from the Eviction Lab at Princeton University, 2016 figures.)

Racism plays a major role

The reasons for the high rate of evictions include high poverty rates, low and stagnant wages, the rising cost of housing and racism. However, according to the RVA Eviction Lab,

housed at Virginia Commonwealth University, areas where eviction rates are highest are not necessarily the poorest. Rather, racial composition is the biggest predictor of high rates.

In 2018, the lab found that the top 10 evictors in Richmond owned 9 percent of all property here. It also found that poverty, income and neighborhood characteristics used to predict rates of eviction alone do not adequately explain areas that have either above or below average rates. This suggests that an undetermined factor is responsible in areas with extreme rates in either direction.

Despite the eviction moratorium, RVA Eviction Lab reported in June that 1,566 evictions had taken place in the city since the pandemic began. Dr. Ben Theresa, the lab’s co-director, noted that collected data likely underrepresents the scope of evictions, because many people facing the threat of eviction will leave their home before proceedings happen.

Homelessness on the rise

Many of these evicted people will end up on the streets. On any given night in 2020, 546 people were homeless in Richmond and Henrico, Chesterfield and Hanover counties, according to the National Alliance to End Homelessness. Chronic homelessness in this area saw a 76 percent increase from 2019 to 2020, a per-

See **HOUSING** on Page 9

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HOUSING Continued from page 8

riod when Virginia's overall rate declined.

The Richmond area has not had spare shelter bed capacity for individuals since at least 2007. This crisis led to the formation of Camp Cathy, a tent city of houseless people set up in August of 2019 just behind Richmond's cold-weather shelter on Oliver Hill Way. The shelter only opened on nights when the temperature dropped below 40 degrees, regardless of whether it was raining, storming or flooding. (The cutoff temperature used to be 32 degrees - freezing, until it was changed after a community campaign led by the Richmond chapter of Food Not Bombs.)

The self-governing Camp Cathy, assisted by the all-volunteer, nonprofit group Blessing Warriors, functioned for about seven months and grew to more than 100 tents and some 130 people before Mayor Levar Stoney's administration ordered its removal, relocating most camp residents to temporary shelter in hotels and displacing the rest, as a grappling truck showed up to remove the tents and people's personal possessions.

The cruel irony of the city destroying a functioning homeless encampment located outside a closed city shelter was not lost on the public. Since then, smaller homeless encamp-



Camp Cathy (written as Cathy's Camp in this sign) provided safe, supportive housing for some 130 people from August 2019 till January 2020, until the city had it torn down.

Photo by Phil Wilayto

ments have been forcefully removed from other areas, such as around the closed Richmond Coliseum.

Commonwealth Catholic Charities, which

provides services to the unhoused, is now preparing to renovate its facility at 809 Oliver Hill Way to include a new shelter, using \$1.8 million in federal funds allocated by city council in October. On the plus side, the new shelter will be open in any weather during cold-weather months, and at other times of the year in case of bad weather. On the negative side, it will only have 75 beds, half as many as the old shelter. Renovation is expected to take three to four months, meaning the shelter may not open until late February or March.

Weakened political power

All these factors - the gentrification of traditionally Black neighborhoods, the destruction of public housing, the fact that builders are not building new affordable housing, the rising assessments on existing homes and simple racism - contribute to what might be called Black Flight: The steady migration of African-Americans from a once-majority Black city to the surrounding majority-white counties.

This inevitably leads to a decline in Black political power. A smaller Black population means fewer Black voters, whether concentrated in Richmond or dispersed through the surrounding counties. Richmond already has moved to a majority-white city council. If this trend continues - and there are no signs that it won't, we will likely see Black political power continue to decline, with consequences for poor and working people, of whatever race.

BLANDING Continued from page 3

And yet, despite her lack of funds, the grassroots support Blanding has received from progressives in the state made it possible to collect the 2,000 valid signatures, including at least 50 from each of the state's 11 congressional districts, necessary to get on the ballot, a historic achievement for an African-American woman.

Blanding's candidacy is also important because, if she can garner just a few percentage points, she could decide the election. Recent polls have shown McAuliffe and Youngkin running virtually neck and neck. In addition, Virginia's contest is one of just two gubernatorial elections this year. The other is New Jersey's, but that's considered a likely win for the Democrats, while Virginia's race is a toss-up, so national attention is focused here, where the outcome is seen as a possible bellwether for the 2022 congressional midterm elections. And with President Biden sliding in the polls, the national Democratic Party desperately wants a win in Virginia.

But even without the "Blanding Factor," as it's being called in some political circles, McAuliffe has plenty of other problems. He's already served one term as the state's governor, from 2014 to 2018, distinguishing himself by being a vocal supporter of the hugely unpopular Atlantic Coastal Pipeline, promoted primarily by the state's most politically powerful - and financially generous - corporation, Dominion Energy. (The pipeline project was defeated.)

As governor, McAuliffe touted Virginia's rating as the best state to do business, but after his four-year term, the international relief organization Oxfam ranked it the worst state for workers.

And, until the political winds changed, he also strongly supported keeping up the state's many Confederate memorials, saying, "This is who we are." McAuliffe was born in Syracuse, New York.

Much worse, it was McAuliffe who, as the state's chief executive, had to have given the order for the State Police and Virginia National Guard to stand down during the massive neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville in August 2017, a decision that contributed to the death of anti-racist protester Heather Heyer and injuries to dozens of others.

As a result of these factors and more, polls are suggesting that McAuliffe's voter enthusiasm factor is weaker than Youngkin's, spelling trouble for him in the tight race.

Like their national party, Virginia Democrats have a liberal wing, but none of its members are nearly as progressive as Princess Blanding. It will be more than interesting to see how many are willing to break ranks with a corporate shill and cast their vote for a genuine people's candidate.

More information about Princess Blanding and the Liberation Party can be found at:

princessblanding.com

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reclaiming our sacred ground

Will the Black community benefit from the memorialization of Shockoe Bottom?

By Phil Wilayto

At this point it's clear that something big is going to happen in Shockoe Bottom. That's the long-neglected area in downtown Richmond that for 30 years before Emancipation was the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade.

The Shockoe Alliance, a working group created by Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney, has come up with a proposal for a 10-block Heritage Campus that includes the community-generated proposal for a nine-acre memorial park. That would include the Shockoe Bottom African Burial Ground just north of East Broad Street between I-95 and the CSX railroad tracks; the site of Lumpkin's jail, known as the Devil's Half-Acre, just south of East Broad Street; and two more blocks east of the railroad tracks where three or possibly four other slave jails once stood, along with slave trader offices and supporting businesses.

However, the Defenders have raised several concerns:

1 - What entity - public, private or a combination of the two - will own the Heritage Park? That's not addressed in the Shockoe Alliance proposal.

2 - Who will be in control of telling the story of Shockoe Bottom, including the suffering, the resistance, the accumulation of capital from the slave trade and the ongoing need for reparations?

3 - How will the Black community be represented in decision-making about the campus?

4 - How will the Black community materially benefit from the development and operation of the campus?

Our concerns have grown since The Virginia Defender submitted a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the City for information about how much money has already been spent on the separate project to develop a slavery museum on the site of Lumpkin's jail. That project began before the mayor launched the Shockoe Alliance and, after a contentious series of public meetings,

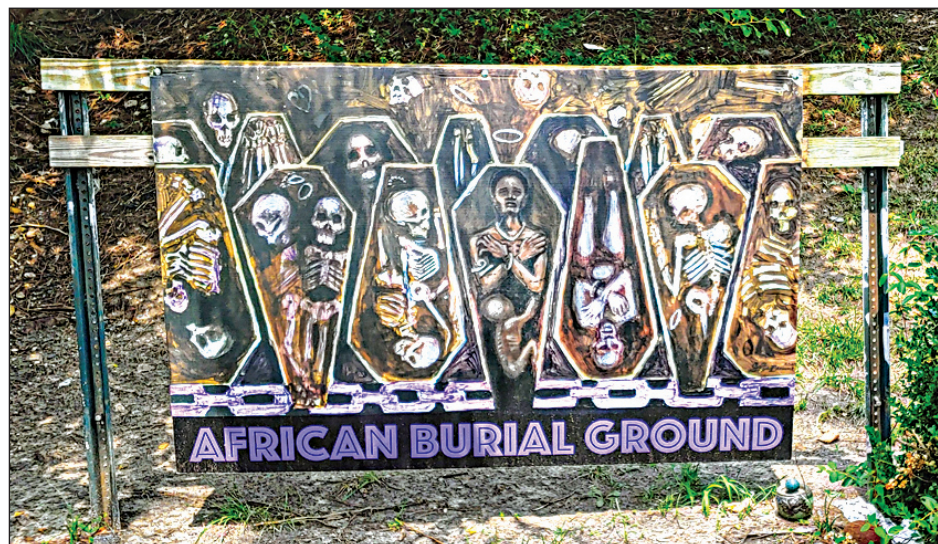


Photo by Phil Wilayto

This evocative mural stands behind the City plaques that explain the history of Shockoe Bottom's African Burial Ground. It was erected by a community group.

has been moving along, with little public scrutiny.

We have received many hundreds of pages of documents from the City and are only beginning to sift through them. But what we have learned so far is sobering.

Back on April 27, 2018, the City of Richmond, in partnership with the then-still-existing Slave Trail Commission (see story on page 11) issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for "the services of a professional architectural / engineering firm to provide complete architectural, engineering, archeology, and museum exhibition development services for the Lumpkin's Jail Site, located at 1500 E. Franklin Street, in historic Shockoe Bottom."

You'll notice the RFP does not mention the African Burial Ground, a site reclaimed through a sustained community struggle ignored and sometimes opposed by the Slave Trail Commission.

The firm the City chose was SmithGroup JJR, a Detroit-based international architectural, engineering and planning firm, which since that time has been engaged in what is called "pre-design."

Proponents for building a slavery museum on the site of Lumpkin's jail have touted the fact that SmithGroup played a role in de-

veloping the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C.

Actually, SmithGroup was one of four firms involved in that project. The other three are Black-owned. SmithGroup is not.

In fact, of the company's 49 partners, directors, principals and designers listed on its website, only one appears to be African-American.

Odd that this was the firm chosen to head up planning, designing and building a slavery museum.

Museum proponents had been saying the project would cost more than \$100 million and argued in an opinion piece in the Richmond Times-Dispatch that only such an expensive institution could convey the enormity of the slave trade as practiced in the Bottom. (The Defenders countered that a 10-block Heritage Campus would accomplish the same thing just as well, if not better.)

However, a feasibility study presented by SmithGroup to the City in late September reported that the actual cost of building a museum on the site of Lumpkin's jail would be between \$184 million and \$220 million. (This information was reported in the Oct. 21 edition of the Richmond Free Press.)

And money is already being spent.

According to information we received from the City, the first of four contracts to be awarded to SmithGroup, this one for the "pre-design" phase of the project, was for just over \$2 million - \$2,016,659.21, to be exact.

This year the contract was revised and the price tag went up nearly 25 percent, to \$2,509,486.66, which includes additional work done or to be done related to floodplain/floodway feasibility and design changes.

Oh yeah, that's right. The Lumpkin's jail site is in a flood plain.

Good catch.

And that realization apparently is what led SmithGroup to come up with the new figure for what the museum would cost to build: Not \$100 million, but up to \$220 million.

Meanwhile, with the old Slave Trail Commission having been unceremoniously dissolved some two years ago (again, see the story on the next page), the last remaining members - Del. Delores McQuinn, the Rev. Ben Campbell and the Rev. Sylvester L. Turner - apparently have launched a new venture, called the National Slavery Museum Foundation.

We asked Del. McQuinn and Rev. Campbell if another entity had been created to carry on the work of the Slave Trail Commission, but were not given any information. (Again, see the story on the next page.)

Curiously, a City website, lumpkinsjail.org, has a timeline that states that, in 2013, "The National Slavery Museum Foundation is established to preserve and interpret authentic sites and artifacts in Richmond to tell the story of the slave trade."

In a letter published in the Oct. 21 edition of the Richmond Free Press, Rev. Turner stated that "a foundation is in place" and that "we have raised more than \$30 million for its [the museum's] development."

It's not clear if that amount is separate from the money already allocated from the City and the Virginia General Assembly for general memorialization in Shockoe Bottom.

In June of 2020, Mayor Stoney announced plans to invest more than \$38 million in developing both the museum and the memorial

See SHOCKOE on Page 2

reclaiming our sacred ground

19th annual Gabriel Gathering: Reclaiming Sacred Spaces

Staff Report

Sunday, Oct. 10, marked the 221st anniversary of the day the great slave rebellion leader Gabriel was executed at the town gallows at what is now known as the Shockoe Bottom African Burial Ground. For the three decades before the U.S. Civil War, Shockoe Bottom was the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade. So many people were sold there that today the majority of African-Americans could likely trace some ancestry to this small area. It truly is sacred ground.

This was the 19th year that the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project of the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality held its annual Gabriel Gathering at the burial ground. This year's theme, "Reclaiming Sacred Spaces," expanded beyond Shockoe Bottom to include other burial sites in the Richmond area sacred to the Black community and in some stage of reclamation and memorialization.

Nearly 90 people attended the socially distanced program moderated by Ana Edwards, chair of the Sacred Ground Project and a descendant of people sold out of Richmond.

The speakers were:

Pamela Bingham, a direct descendant of Gabriel and the family's historian.

Princess Blanding, a candidate for governor representing the newly formed Liberation Party, who delayed the start of her statewide tour to express her continuing support for reclaiming Shockoe Bottom and other sacred sites.

Sister and brother **Jarene and J. Ron Fleming**, members of the Descendants Coun-

cil of Greater Richmond, Va., who spoke about the continuing white control of the historically Black East End & Evergreen cemeteries.

Christopher Rasheed Green, representing the Family Representative Council of the East Marshall Street Well Project, which is determining what to do with remains of Black bodies stolen in the 19th century from their graves by the Medical College of Virginia, which evolved into today's Virginia Commonwealth University Health System.

Joseph Rogers, an activist, educator & descendent of James Apostle Fields, a formerly enslaved man who was the last African-American to serve in the Virginia General Assembly before the Jim Crow era.

Lynetta Thompson, a co-founder of Community Unity in Action, who read a statement from **Lenora McQueen**, a descendant of people interred at the Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground.

Phil Wilayto, editor of The Virginia Defender newspaper, who gave an update on the city's plans, both positive and negative, for Shockoe Bottom,

Jarene Fleming closed the program with a moving song she learned from her grandmother, "Lost My Religion."

Following the Sacred Ground program, the organization Untold RVA Keepers of the Light presented "Gabriel's Ascension," an illumination project in collaboration with Networked Public Spaces, which presented "Crown of Lights," an environmental light and sensor installation.

For more information on these and other struggles, visit the website sacredgroundproject.net or call or text 804-644-5834.



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Sacred Ground Project chair Ana Edwards asks permission from a woman elder to begin the program. The permission was granted.

Whatever happened to the 'Slave Trail' Commission'?

Without a public announcement or any official explanation, the Richmond City Council body charged with assisting council with preserving sites related to the city's role in the domestic slave trade has been dissolved - years ago, apparently.

According to an article in the Richmond Free Press dated Oct. 14, state Delegate Delores McQuinn, who had chaired the city's Slave Trail Commission since 2003, "confirmed that the group has not met in at least two years and has no intention of meeting any time soon."

The commission was established in 1998, after being proposed by then-City Councilmember Sa'ad El-Amin, who first chaired the group and fiercely advocated for the reclamation of what is now known as the Shockoe Bottom African Burial Ground.

According to the City's website, the purpose of the commission was "... to assist Council with oversight and assistance in helping to preserve and present the history of slavery in Richmond."

Under McQuinn's leadership, the city-funded commission further developed what it called the Slave Trail; oversaw the excavation of the Devil's Half-Acre, site of the notorious slave jail owned by Robert Lumpkin; and placed the Richmond Reconciliation Slavery Statue at 15th and East Main streets.

McQuinn also publicly advocated for the proposal by then-Mayor Dwight Jones and the business organization Venture Richmond to build a commercial baseball stadium in Shockoe Bottom, a proposal that was defeated after a two-year com-

munity struggle led by the Virginia Defenders.

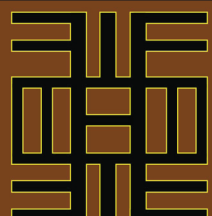
The commission had stopped processing applications for new members many years ago. The Free Press reported that, by the time the commission went out of existence, its only remaining members were Delegate McQuinn; the Rev. Benjamin P. Campbell, chair of the GRTC board; and the Rev. Sylvester L. "Tee" Turner, pastor of Pilgrim Baptist Church.

In the Free Press story, the three former commission members are paraphrased as saying that "their vision is to have City Council convert the commission into a foundation that would raise \$100 million to \$150 million to create a national slavery museum that would include the Lumpkin's Jail site." (See the story on SmithGroup JJR on page 10.)

The Virginia Defender looked into this issue last summer, sending emails to Delegate McQuinn and Rev. Campbell, asking if the commission was still functioning, or if another body had replaced it. McQuinn's office responded and said they would get back to us, but never did.

Rev. Campbell replied with this email:

"What I do not understand is why the Defender does not endorse the work of the Slave Trail Commission and the National Slavery Museum proposal. It seems to me that this is a win-win situation for all of the advocates of getting this history told, and above all for both past and future generations. The behind the scenes conflict depletes resources and dishonors the ancestors, I believe. Blessings to you in your work."



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PROJECT**

Tour Shockoe Bottom with the SACRED GROUND HISTORICAL RECLAMATION PROJECT

Whether you're a native Richmonder, a recent come-here or a visitor, you owe it to yourself to take an educational tour of Shockoe Bottom, the downtown Richmond district that once was the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade. In the three decades before the Civil War, so many people were sold from Shockoe Bottom that today the majority of African-Americans could likely trace some ancestry to this small, long-neglected area. Your guide will be **ANA EDWARDS**, a

public historian, chair of the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project and a descendant of several women sold from Richmond. For information, contact:

sacredgroundproject@gmail.com or 804-644-5834

In our opinion

It's past time to Dump the Dems

This editorial is being written just nine days before the Nov. 2 election and the Democrats are pulling out all the stops to try and get Terry McAuliffe back into the governor's mansion. Even former President Barack Obama was in town yesterday. The eyes of the entire country are on Virginia, we're told - everybody's got to Turn out for Terry!

Nope, not us. We'll be at the polls, but we're voting for Princess Blanding, the only real, honest, decent, for-the-people candidate in the race. (See our analysis on page 3.)

Yes, it will be bad, very bad, if "Trump Lite" Glenn Youngkin gets in. But there's one thing worse: To keep voting for whatever bozo the Democrats put up just because we think there's no alternative.

This election, we're thinking long term.

Take global warming. Scientists tell us we have maybe eight more years to totally change the way we do business or we'll reach the tipping point where life on earth will become unsustainable.

In other words, we'll die. And other people are already dying. Global warming is already here. Our only chance is to stop pumping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, and do it now.

Do you think McAuliffe, who shamelessly promoted Dominion Energy's Atlantic Coastal Pipeline, is going to do that? Please. He's never going to seriously threaten corporate profits, and neither is the Democratic Party.

Yes, the Dems have their progressives, but they don't run the show. Both major parties are funded by Big Money. That's who calls the shots.

And when it comes to international issues, the Dems are even worse than the Republicans. Remember, when the most prosperous country in Africa was bombed into a failed state (it was Libya), the president who ordered that assault wasn't a white Republican. It was the man who came to town yesterday to promote Terry McAwfull.

We're in hard times, but they're nothing compared to what's coming, and the Democrats are not going to save us. Not from global warming, not from a fascist movement, not from the next Great Depression, the one where things really start to fall apart.

We desperately need two things: A revitalized mass, popular movement that can hit the ruling class where it really hurts - in their wallets and pocketbooks. Political strikes. Economic boycotts. Disruption of financial centers. The General Strike. And an electoral alternative, a third party, that really represents the working class and communities of color. And both that movement and that party have to put fighting racism at the center of their programs.

If the Dems lose the governor's race, don't blame Princess Blanding. Blame all the people who voted for Youngkin. Blame the Democrats for putting up McAuliffe. Blame the nearly half of the electorate who don't bother to vote at all.

And then, on Nov. 3, let's get back to work.

Letters to the Editor

Re: Jermaine Doss

Reading about Mr. Doss's case for myself was alarming. I've ran across dudes that actually know him, etc. but to actually read about it for myself, again, was ALARMING and scary to be totally honest with you because of the similarity.

For the Commonwealth to concentrate on getting CONVICTIONS by any means necessary should be a crime in itself. Is there REALLY any solutions to this problem is the question to ask, because the creation of the Innocence Projects and the COMMONWEALTH'S Conviction Integrity Unit (CIU) by the Commonwealth's Attorney General Mark R. Herring and the words that came out his mouth on Jan.14, 2021. about C.I.U. was HYPOCRITICAL and CONTRADICTION !!

Sadly, LIP-SERVICE is a consistent method that is used by lawmakers to deceive the minds of the people.

We the VOICELESS are VICTIMS of this misconduct by the lawmakers that We the People go out and Vote for.

I do apologize for the length of this email, but I was forced to being a part of the VOICELESS community. Being wrongfully convicted and then recognizing how the Police, Prosecutor's, Lawyer's, and Judge's mislead the minds of the jury, and not having the opportunity to show how prejudice the COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA Judicial System really is feels like being handcuffed and ones mouth being duck taped, and thrown into the truck of a car. This is how CRIMINAL the Commonwealth Judicial System make US feel.

Having a voice (OUTSIDE ADVOCATES) is a sense of Freedom and Relief. Just being able to express myself to an ADVOCATE that understands is like releasing air out of a balloon before it bust.

I'm aware that you're not lawyers, but I'm so grateful and appreciative of being introduced to The Virginia's Defender because AGAIN, it's therapeutic to my (OUR) soul.

I'm gonna close by saying this Phil, GOD, regardless what name people may call him is REAL and we don't have to die to see him. The same goes for the DEVIL! They both live in HUMAN FLESH which comes in multiple classes, creeds, and colors. All we have to do is pay close attention to the actions of others as well as

the actions of ourselves and we will see who is WHO.

Sincerely your Comrade,

Tyrone D. Trowell
River North Correctional Center
INDEPENDENCE, VA

A call to action on housing

There is an urgent need to spark an approach that addresses the housing and health issues of low-income communities.

With that in mind, I bought three lots on Southside and a house on a fourth lot. All are fully paid. The plan is to build two models incorporating the latest green technology. By God's grace, I met a brother who's a Class A builder, founded a career training school and is interested in joining. There are licensed technicians in our communities eager to be approached because we are parents and grandparents.

My daughter and her husband are engineers and members of the National Society of Black Engineers, which is key for this plan. In addition, concerned professionals also belong to the National Organization of Minority Architects.

The most exciting aspect is the connection we have with professional musicians who see the need, are interested, educated in music and need this approach themselves. The plan is to organize a band able to perform the most popular genres specifically designed to entertain the financially successful and concerned. In addition, construction companies will be formed to save existing houses and a fund will be established.

I am requesting the help of a professional proposal writer. I am 69, Hispanic, a skilled construction worker with a clean record, collateral and eager to spark a movement which injects hope.

Call me at 347 485 2863.

Juan
RICHMOND

Neither rich nor famous

When prosecutors do Wrong, they suffer no consequences. The prosecutor on my case lied to the Jury to get a conviction. She hid and withheld Evidence proving my Innocence. Being so desperate to bring a case against me, she did so without Evidence. This lack of Evidence led the judge to rule judgement on my behalf as he argued with this prosecutor.

Judge: "There is no Evidence that he did anything, he didn't murder anyone."

"I don't know of any Evidence that he did it, that is before this court."

"I don't think that there's any evidence that he did it."

"I'm going to dismiss Wilson's murder charge, there's no evidence of that!"

This Judge "Reversed" this decision the next day, stating, "I now believe this is a Jury issue." The Jury convicted me on the prosecutor's lies. This prosecutor hid nine pages of testimony of a witness which proved my Innocence. (She) prosecutor lied to the Jury saying I was a murderer while knowing Evidence existed proving otherwise. I'm still serving a life sentence over her actions. She broke the law and ruined my life with a lie and she suffers no consequences.

If the Parole Board were to earnestly Investigate this matter. I would be set free. But I am neither Rich nor Famous, so the Parole Board will simply deny me Parole. [Unless] my case were to be made Public, I doubt I'll ever be Free.

Ocie Lee Wilson III
Nottoway Correctional Center
BURKEVILLE

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Gov. Northam: It's time to pardon Sergio Gray

By Queen Zakia Shabazz

The posthumous pardoning of the "Martinsville Seven" is 70 years and a day late. The following statement by Virginia's governor speaks to the point I am raising in this appeal:

"We all deserve a criminal justice system that is fair, equal, and gets it right - no matter who you are or what you look like. I'm grateful to the advocates and families of the Martinsville Seven for their dedication and perseverance," Northam added, later saying, "While we can't change the past, I hope today's action brings them some small measure of peace."

It's time to stop the symbolic redemption which really is an empty gesture and, in my opinion, highly insulting. I, along with many others, would much rather see present-day efforts by the Northam administration that exemplify real sincerity and action.

We, United Parents Against Lead and Other Environmental Hazards (UPAL), appeal to you on behalf of Sergio Gray.

In 1991, as a young child in Norfolk, Va., Sergio Preston Gray was poisoned by lead. After many years of minimal treatment, he was, at the tender age of 18, sentenced to 40 years in prison. Lead poisoning has always been linked to juvenile delinquency, criminal delinquency, violent crimes and impulsive behavior. The year Sergio was poisoned, several other babies in his same apartment building were also severely poisoned, one to the point of death.

UPAL is actively working with Sergio's mother, Mrs. Roycinda Alexander, to secure his release. On Sergio's behalf, the National Clemency Project, Inc., has filed a petition with the office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth. The pardon (application number P515668) is currently in "awaiting review" status.

Remember the case of Freddie Gray, the young Black man killed while in the custody of Baltimore police? Like Sergio, Freddie was



poisoned by lead while a young child. Sergio is presently incarcerated at the Keen Mountain Correctional Center in Virginia. We do not want Sergio to suffer the same fate as Freddie. Tell Gov. Northam to PARDON SERGIO GRAY WHILE HE IS STILL ALIVE!

Please sign this petition - <https://chn.g/6fG5HfbS> - and forward it to Gov. Northam at: Office of the Governor, P.O. Box 1475, Richmond, VA 23218.

Email the Secretary of the Commonwealth at: pardons@governor.virginia.gov. Mention Sergio's application number: P515668.

You can also call the governor's office to express your support for Sergio's pardon: (804) 786-2211.

Please voice your support in time for International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, Oct. 24-30, 2021. The goal of this week is to draw attention to the health impacts of lead exposure.

Queen Zakia Shabazz is the founder of United Parents Against Lead and Other Environmental Hazards (UPAL).

You talkin' to me?

By Queen Nzinga

Many of us can probably recall that iconic line uttered by Robert DeNiro's character, Travis Bickle, in the movie Taxi Driver. So if by chance you ARE talkin' to me, you will undoubtedly be offended by some of my words and how I choose to spell them, but I am NOT surprised and it is not intentional! Rather, it is my reality.

Having to acknowledge what people of color have experienced and CONTINUE to experience must indeed be a "bitter pill to swallow." But, my purpose is not to convince you to overstand how I feel simply because most of you "on the other side of the color divide" NEVER will.

Although "the times they are a-changing," the possibility of me as a person of color encountering a racially-motivated situation is exponentially greater! You have the option of retreating to the safety of white privilege even though many believe there is no such thing.

I have often said that I came of age during the '50s and '60s in Chesterfield KKKounty. And, whether or not you like my choice of spelling, I shall remind you that "it IS what it WAS," but I have no regrets.

As a matter of fact, those days and times became the motivation for my concerted social activism and eventually helped me to channel my ANGER in a more positive direction. I have LEARNED to ACCEPT that I cannot change the mindsets of other people. I can only speak from the vantage point of my past and current experiences as a person of color.

For me, the problem I have is some of you may actually believe a CONversation will make everything "all warm and fuzzy." Admittedly, it does get the ball rolling, but talk is cheap. Contrary to what some may have heard, I am NOT seeking validation, an interesting concept, but written with tongue-in-cheek, of course.

Tsk, tsk, such a heavy-duty subject and



my word count is quickly adding up. But, I would be remiss if I did not mention January 6, 2021.

I have also LEARNED some things are SO ridiculous they defy explanation and any resemblance to common sense which, by the way, is NOT that common. I cannot resist making this observation: Had that been Black people breaking into the U. S. Capitol Building...

Yes, I pulled the race card and I do not even NEED to finish that previous sentence. [Slightly aside: One day I shall tell you why I capitalized Black. You should already KNOW there is a story behind that.]

Four years ago, I used to be amazed by what some people do under the guise of patriotism and "taking Amerikkka back," albeit back to "where or what?" That last part is NOT about party loyalty or partisanship...

Uh-oh, there I go, but I imagine there is a BIG difference of opinion on THAT subject so feel FREE!

Peace and Blessings.

Queen Nzinga is a 50-plus-year social activist and visual artist whose collages reflect the times.

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international & antiwar news

Tensions grow in Lebanon after attack on Hezbollah supporters

By Sanaz Ghodsi

On Oct. 14, supporters of Hezbollah and its Shia ally Amal were gathering for a demonstration in Lebanon's capital city, Beirut, when they were fired on. Seven people were killed and more than 30 injured.

Live footage from the protest showed snipers affiliated with the organization Lebanese Forces shooting at the demonstrators from rooftops.

The protest had been called against Judge Tarik Bitar, lead investigator into last year's devastating port explosion in Beirut, whom the protesters believe had been purposefully targeting politicians sympathetic to Hezbollah, due to U.S. pressure.

The Lebanese Forces, a Maronite Christian Lebanese right-wing party, had a brutal history. In June of 1982, Israeli soldiers invaded Lebanon and began occupying West Beirut in an attempt to drive members of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) into exile again. That September, the Lebanese Forces assisted Israel in the Sabra and Shatila Massacre, in which up to 3,500 Palestinian refugees and Lebanese Shia Muslims were slaughtered in Beirut's Sabra neighborhood and the adjacent Shatila refugee camp.

The Oct. 14 attack came as Lebanon is experiencing a devastating economic crisis, compounded by the coronavirus pandemic and growing shortages of basic goods.

On Oct. 18, Hassan Nasrallah, head of Hezbollah, addressed the attack by sending his condolences to the martyrs of the massacre. He charged that the Lebanese Forces were attempting to orchestrate another civil war in Lebanon by convincing Lebanese Christians that Hezbollah is their enemy.

Nasrallah dispelled this conspiracy by explaining that, while the Lebanese Forces were allying with al-Qaeda factions in Syria who were persecuting Christians, Hezbollah was at the frontlines against al-Qaeda, defending Christians and Muslims alike.

Stating that the purpose of Hezbollah is to protect Lebanon, Nasrallah urged everyone to practice patience, saying that a civil war is what Lebanon's enemies want. He concluded by stating that Hezbollah consists of more than 100,000 trained soldiers against Lebanon Forces' 15,000, and that it would be foolish for Samir Geagea, the leader of that organization, to instigate a war, as the United States and Israel cannot back him.

For his part, Geagea has denied that his Lebanese Forces have an armed militia or are seeking a civil war.

Why are they telling us to be afraid of China?

By Phil Wilayto

It seems like every day now there's another story in the media warning us about China.

And the propaganda seems to be working.

According to a new Pew Research Center survey, roughly nine-in-ten U.S. adults (89 percent) consider China a competitor or enemy.

So let's think this through for a minute, before our dear leaders get us involved in another war.

OK, China is big. It has more people than any country in the world. India is number two, followed by the United States.

And China has the world's largest armed forces, with about 2.19 million active-duty soldiers. Again, India is second and the United States third.

And China has the world's second largest economy, trailing only the United States.

But let's back up a bit and start from the beginning - or at least from 1664.

Before its 1949 revolution, China was one of the poorest countries in the world, the result of a semi-feudal economic system at home and domination and exploitation from abroad. From 1644 to 1912 it was ruled by the imperial Qing Dynasty, followed by a great revolt and the establishment of the Republic of China, which was followed by years of rivalry between the pro-capitalist, pro-landlord Kuomintang, or Chinese Nationalist Party, and the Chinese Communist Party, which was increasingly winning the support of the workers and peasants.

Civil war broke out after the Japanese occupation during World War II and ended with the successful Chinese Revolution.

What the communists inherited was a desperately poor country whose economy mostly revolved around subsistence farming. In 1952, the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was just 1/44 that of the United States.

But by 2018 the Chinese economy had grown to the second largest in the world, right behind the U.S., whose GDP per capita was then just 6.4 times larger than China's.

The World Bank describes China's growth as "the fastest sustained expansion by a major economy in history," adding that "more than 850 million people have lifted themselves out of poverty."

Today China has a mixed economy. Substantial industries are still state-owned, as you would expect in a socialist society, but privately owned corporations and foreign investors control growing sectors. As a result, social inequality has been growing, but nowhere to the extent that it has in the U.S.

China has used its economic growth to develop ties to other countries around the world, breaking out of the economic and political isolation promoted by Washington. Its massive infrastructure project called the Belt and Road Initiative stretches from East Asia to Europe.

In short, the People's Republic of China is a powerful rival, undermining the political hegemony and economic dominance the U.S. has enjoyed since World War II.

This threat to the global dominance of U.S. corporations and financial interests is what is at the heart of U.S. hostility to China, whether it's promoted by a racist, xenophobic, would-be fuhrer like Donald Trump or President Joe Biden.

When it comes to defending the Empire, there is no substantive difference between the Democrats and Republicans.

So are we saying that China is a wonderful country with no particular ambitions to be the world's dominant economic power?

No. But neither is it trying to dominate the world militarily.

It's true that China has the world's largest army, with 2.19 million active-duty soldiers. But that's a land army, meant for defense of the country. Let's look at offensive power.

Out of close to 200 countries in the world, only eight have aircraft carriers, which essentially are floating air fields capable of projecting military power anywhere there is an ocean. Seven of those countries together have 10 aircraft carriers. The U.S. has 11. China has two.

China has one overseas military base. The U.S. has 800, in 70 countries.

The U.S. has more than 6,000 nuclear weapons. China has 290.

China has 1.4 billion people and in 2020 spent \$245 billion on its military, about \$175 per person.

The U.S., with 330 million people, spent \$767 billion - about \$2,324 per person.

And the U.S. figure doesn't include the cost of maintaining nuclear weapons, which comes under the Department of Energy, and which the Congressional Budget Office estimates will cost \$634 billion over the next 10 years. Or care for veterans, which comes under the Department of Veterans Affairs (currently \$240 billion a year), or interest on the national debt (\$378 billion for 2021), which is largely a result of paying for wars on borrowed money.

In addition, China is not at war anywhere in the world, while the U.S. is actively engaged in combat in Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen and Syria. Those are actual wars, and don't include other U.S. military involvements in Africa, Latin America and Asia, or supplying military arms and equipment to other countries at war, such as Ukraine (\$2 billion since 2014.)

So what's the conclusion?

China is a mixed economy run by a communist party that is presenting a serious challenge to the world dominance of U.S. corporations. But it's not a military threat. We're not going to see a Chinese army landing on the shores of California.

What this sort-of-socialist country is doing is beating the capitalists at their own game, and that, for the 1 percent of the population that runs our country, is an unforgivable sin - and more than enough reason to try and make us hate and fear it.

After Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and hundreds of other wars fought by poor people for rich people, let's not get fooled again.

THE ODESSA SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN

calls for global actions to mark May 2 massacre

May 2, 2022, will be the 7th anniversary of the Odessa Massacre, when a fascist-led mob murdered scores of anti-fascists in the city of Odessa, Ukraine.

The Odessa Solidarity Campaign, founded and coordinated by the Virginia Defenders, is appealing for local actions around the world to support the demand of the people of Odessa for an international investigation, something the U.S.-backed Ukrainian government has never allowed.

For more information, call or text 1-804-644-5834 or email DefendersFJE@hotmail.com



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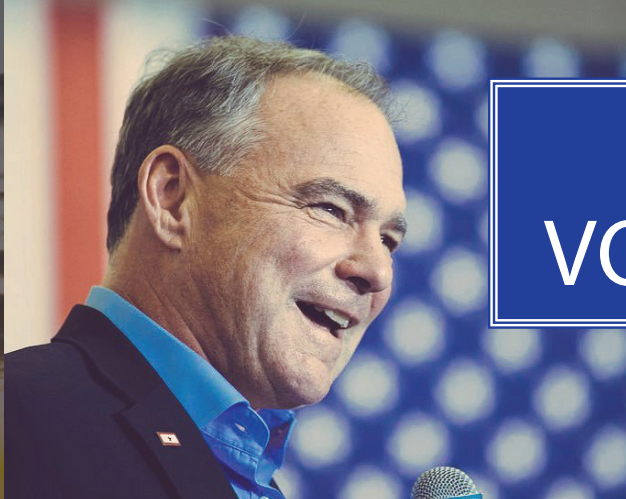
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