

*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 environment, Virginia & the Mighty James



At 348 miles, the James is Virginia's longest river. Above: A view from Rocketts Landing, just east of Richmond.

Photo by Phil Wilayto

This issue of The Virginia Defender comes out on April 21 - one day before Earth Day. To mark the occasion, we decided to devote our lead story to an examination of how pollution and global warming is affecting our state, with a particular look at the James River.

Scientists now tell us we have just three

years to change our ways and drastically reverse our dependence on fossil fuels, or life on Earth will become untenable. But meanwhile, the politicians continue to bow down before the Holy Altar of Big Business, worshipping the oil, gas and coal companies that line their pockets and keep them in office.

We wish we had some cheery news to offer, something like, "But we still have time!" Well, we do - just barely, but it will take a massive outcry from the people. Unless that happens, we may as well just apologize to future generations now, and hope that they'll be merciful.

See our story on pages 8 and 9.

"If there is no justice for the people, let there be no peace for the government." — Emiliano Zapata Salazar, Mexican Revolutionary — Aug. 8, 1879 - April 10, 1919

2022: celebrating 20 years of struggle!



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Defender Queen Nzinga speaks at the 17th Annual Gabriel Gathering in Shockoe Bottom, hosted on Oct. 10, 2019, by the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project of the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality.

Defenders to celebrate 20th anniversary

The Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality was founded in July of 2002.

We'll be marking our 20th anniversary sometime later this year. Depending on where we're all at with the pandemic, there will either be an indoor gathering or an outdoor event. Either way, there will be food, music, speeches and, of course, plans for the future.

For the Summer edition of The Virginia Defender, we'll be including a special supple-

ment with photos and stories about the many struggles we've had the privilege to engage in over the past two decades.

In the meantime, we invite our readers, friends and allies to consider working more closely with us in one or more of our areas of work: prisons, community, antiwar, Shockoe Bottom, labor support and the newspaper.

Together, we truly can bring forth a new world from the ashes of the old.

ENVIRONMENT continued from page 9

System Records from the city.

The problem is the city's Civil War-era sewage system. Older sewage systems direct sewage and stormwater to the same pipes. When it's dry in Richmond, the pipes direct sewage to the waste treatment plant, where it is properly cleaned before it is released into the river. But when it rains, stormwater enters these pipes and combines with the sewage. If it's a bad storm, the rainwater overwhelms the system's capacity and the rainwater-sewage combination is released into the river, without treatment.

The overflows happen so frequently that the city's Department of Utilities has created an online tool to allow residents to check whether sewage has entered the James in the previous 48 hours from any of the 25 sites, making those areas of the James unsafe for swimming or boating. With climate change increasing the frequency of severe storms, the problem has only gotten worse.

The state has given Richmond a deadline of 2035 to overhaul its sewage system and stop the overflows, but the job won't be cheap. Calvin Farr, the direc-

tor of Richmond's Department of Public Utilities, has estimated it will cost the city \$400 million to fix the problem. Mayor Levar Stoney proposes an even higher estimate, asking the state to help fund the project he says will take nearly \$900 million to complete.

Last December, several organizations, including the JRA and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, filed a lawsuit against the county of Henrico, alleging that the county is in violation of the Clean Water Act by exceeding the legally permitted limits for discharging into the river.

Either another mass pollution event or simply the continual dumping of sewage into the James could result in major economic losses for both Richmond and the state.

In 2020, more than 2.1 million people visited the James River Park System, according to the city's Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities. Based on the 2016 visitor count, a study conducted by Virginia Commonwealth University estimated that the park system has the potential to generate \$33.5 million in yearly tourism revenue - revenue that stands to be lost should the river's fragile health take a turn for the worse.

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

THE VIRGINIA DEFENDERS for Freedom, Justice & Equality

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

We started out in July 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 those 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 newspaper, Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project and Odessa Solidarity Campaign and are affiliated with the Virginia Prison Justice Network, which we co-founded.

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

WHAT WE BELIEVE

We believe in Freedom

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

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

We believe in Justice

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

We believe in Equality

We live in the richest country in the world.

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

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

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

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

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

community news



The Supreme Flea Market is Virginia's largest Black-owned multivendor institution - one with a strong community focus.

Photo by Safia Abdulahi

Community Profile: The Supreme Flea Market

By Safia Abdulahi

The hidden gem known as the Supreme Flea Market is the largest Black-owned multivendor institution in Virginia. It's located at 3302 Williamsburg Road on the Richmond-Henrico County line in a large, one-story building with a nostalgic essence outside and '90s music playing as you enter. It hosts mostly Black entrepreneurs with a variety of skills ranging from hairstylists and barbers to sellers of appliances, candles, clothing, furniture and much more.

The market is run by Harnella and Richard Walton, owners of Afrikongo, an African goods store housed in the market. The Waltons started off as vendors and then took over the market about 10 years ago.

Many businesses have struggled due to the pandemic, but the Supreme Flea Market used it to its advantage by creating more than 10,000 face masks. The pandemic was a "growth period" for the market, according to Ms. Walton.

The market hosts many Black business owners just starting their businesses who need a place to begin selling without worrying about the responsibilities of owning a store.

"This is a training ground right here, more

than anything else," Ms. Walton said. "This place provides a person an opportunity to learn how to run a business."

The Waltons plan to retire next April and move the leadership to someone who's going to "take it to the next level."

The word "flea" has a stigma surrounding it, leaving many individuals in the community to believe the market is a place where people can only find cheap items. Lynetta Thompson, owner of Lyn's Gallery in the market, said the word "flea" to her means "Finally Leaders Empowering Another."

One elevating aspect of the Supreme Flea Market would be Community Unity in Action, a nonprofit organization that has its office in the building. Their "Keepin' it Real Healthy" initiative works to end childhood hunger.

"It targets issues that are affecting the hardest economically challenged communities," said Infinite Allah, the program's director, "specifically with what is known as the Big Six, which is public housing from Gilpin Court all the way to Hillside. On that platform, it addresses what are known as 'food deserts.'"

CUIA has worked to help schools, including Miles Jones Elementary, where the superintendent of Richmond Public Schools, the mayor and community entrepreneurs came together to feed the children.

The market has been around for many years as a force that has brought many people in the community together. It has many vendors who have been there for as long as 12 or more years, including Sister Brown, owner of Francis Variety Store,

and Betty Dodson, owner of Framed Art Too.

Dodson worked for Virginia Commonwealth University for more than 30 years, retiring in 2014. She said she began her business so she would be able to have something to do after retirement.

"I knew I couldn't sit home, and I wanted something that would help us as Black people," she said. "I love to do this and I like to meet people, I like to talk to people, I like to tell people about the Lord."

Brown said she has been in sales for more than 50 years and has had shops all around the Richmond area. She even had her own store on Mechanicsville Turnpike before becoming part of the Supreme Flea Market.

"I tell my customers, if I don't have it in my shop, I don't have it in my truck, I don't have it in my garage and I don't have it in my bag, it's not worth having. That's my logo," Brown said.

Brown said she has stayed at the market so long, not because she felt she had to, but because she truly loves doing it.

"If I sell everything for a dollar, I'd be a millionaire," Brown said. "I built up everything all those years up until now."

Not only does the market host multitalented vendors, it also has an event space available for the community to host baby showers, parties and many different kinds of events.

Despite its many offerings, many members of the community do not seem to know the market exists. The vendors believe there is potential for the market to be something incredible, with the right marketing and resources.

"Maybe some more marketing will give it some more visibility," said Addie Rudd, owner of Rudd's Handcrafted Soy Candles.

Rudd said she thought people sometimes believe the market is abandoned when driving past and don't take the time to come in and look at the place.

"It's not just a regular flea market," she said. "We have people in here with mostly new items - very gifted, talented people. People need to come and try and take a look and not just be deterred by what it looks like on the outside," said Rudd.

Black people need to support Black entrepreneurs for there to be growth within the community, according to Richard Walton.

The Supreme Flea Market is located at 3302 Williamsburg Road in Richmond. The hours are 10 a.m. - 6:30 p.m., Wednesday through Sunday; closed Monday and Tuesday.

For more information: **www.facebook.com/SupremeFleaMarket** - **Phone: (804) 888-6684.**



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Green Party candidate Blai-zen Buckshot Bloom speaks at a campaign rally held April 2 at Chesapeake City Park. The recent high school graduate is running for a seat on the Chesapeake School Board. Other rally speakers included former New Jersey gubernatorial candidate Marilyn Hoffman and Virginia Defender editor Phil Wilayto, who was invited to speak on the war in Ukraine. For more information on the Green Party of Virginia, visit: vagreenparty.org.

New exhibit honors children killed in the Holocaust

The Virginia Holocaust Museum has announced the opening of a new exhibit honoring the memory of the 1.5 million Jewish children who perished in the Holocaust. According to the museum, this addition to the VHM's permanent collection is the first memorial of its kind in the United States.

Using mirrors and somber lighting for dramatic effect, the Children's Memorial creates a stunning visual of an infinite panorama of empty classroom desks representing the unfathomable number of children and their unborn descendants who were victims of the Nazis' Final Solution to exterminate Jews from Europe.

"It's truly impossible to comprehend that over a million innocent children were murdered by the Nazi regime," said Samuel Asher, the museum's executive director. "We wanted to create an exhibition that works simultaneously as a memorial and also provides space for reflecting on the enormity of the genocide."

The exhibit was designed by the Richmond-based firm Riggs Ward and made possible through donations by Dr. Donald S. and Beejay Brown.

The Virginia Holocaust Museum, located at 2000 E. Cary St. in Richmond, is free and open to the public. Hours are Monday-Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information:

vaholocaust.org.



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community news



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, 2021, 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. Photo by Phil Wilayto

An interview with Princess Blanding

Editor's Note: In 2020, Princess Blanding, a public school educator and sister of police shooting victim Marcus-David Peters, became the first African-American woman ever to qualify for the ballot for the position of governor of Virginia. She ran as a candidate of the Liberation Party, which she founded after becoming disillusioned with how the Democratic Party had dealt with the demands of the 2020 Black Lives Matter Rebellion. The Virginia Defender recently interviewed her about that political journey.

What happened after you made ballot status?

It was the first time a Black woman and an openly LGBTQIA+ person had made the ballot in Virginia for the position of governor. But then after we got on the ballot, I was excluded from the two gubernatorial candidates debates. I was invited to come to watch the second debate, but was told I would not be allowed to participate. I felt like I was allowed to get on the bus, but would have to sit in the back of the bus, and that did not sit well with me.

And there was no good justification other than that was the way things had always been done, with just the two major parties invited to participate. It had nothing to do with how much money we raised or how many signatures we

had gotten. And that's when I spoke up at the debate. I made my voice heard, and let people across the Commonwealth know that I was a candidate.

What about the legislation, the bills dealing with demands that came out of the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020?

We worked on two bills, for the Marcus Alert and Civilian Review Boards. And I was consulted about the bills to end qualified immunity for police officers.

The legislators and eventually the governor considered putting the bills on the agenda because of fear of the rebellion. They wanted the tension to calm down, so their strategy was, "Let's make them think we are listening to them."

At that time, the Democratic Party was the majority party and pretended to be for the people. And they had the power to pass the legislation, but they watered it down.

The Marcus Alert bill, named after my brother, was supposed to call for the first responders to a mental health crisis situation to be mental health professionals, with police only as back-up, not in uniforms or marked cars and only using nonlethal force, if indeed they had to be involved. That all was shot down. And the final bill just calls for pilot projects now, with statewide implementation not until 2026.

And the Civilian Review Board?

We see how this is a problem now in Richmond, where some activists objecting to Mayor [Levar] Stoney's bill had previously supported Sen. [Ghazala F.] Hashmi [D-District 10] in allowing the boards, but not making them man-



Defenders and friends gather April 3 to celebrate the 157th anniversary of the day Richmond was liberated from the slavery-defending Confederacy. Photo by Phil Wilayto

April 3: Richmond Liberation Day!

By Phil Wilayto

April 3 should be a state holiday in Virginia.

That was the date in 1865 when Union troops, led by Black soldiers, marched into Richmond and ended slavery and Confederate rule in Virginia's capital city.

For years afterward, April 3 was celebrated by Black Richmonders as Emancipation Day. A famous photo from 1905 shows thousands marching in the streets on the 40th anniversary

of the Liberation.

This April 3, several events took place to mark the occasion, including one by the Virginia Defenders. About 20 members and friends gathered at 8 a.m. at the site on East Main Street overlooking the James River where the Union troops entered Richmond.

Defenders and public historians Ana Edwards and Joseph Rogers read from eyewitness and historical accounts of the day: How the

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datory. How many police departments would say they want to be held accountable?

The bills on qualified immunity were killed twice under Northam, in the regular session and then in the special session, while the Democrats were in the majority.

That's when you decided to run for governor?

We rolled out our campaign in December 2020, after the 2020 session. We cannot keep begging our oppressors to be our saviors. After working with Jennifer McCullen, Ghazala Hashmi, Jeff Bourne, we saw we were putting our efforts behind these legislators who ... they wanted me involved because they thought I was a big part of the uprising, but they weren't serious. So I came to the conclusion that what we needed was a strong, independent party.

Where is the Liberation Party at now?

In a nutshell, we're going to be boots on the ground and build the Liberation Party. A lot of people still don't know about the party, so we need to move around the state and be a niche in the community, to work with the community to address their concerns.

In western Virginia, the Mountain Valley Pipeline is still a huge issue. In general, en-

vironmental concerns are very high. And the havoc that inflation is wrecking on us. Criminal justice is still a big priority. It depends where you're at in the state. An issue may be more pressing in one place than in another.

Will the party be running candidates?

At this time, there are no plans to run candidates, but that's part of our plans for the future, like for school boards, any leadership position in the community. And the Liberation Party would like to help support other campaigns that are willing to run either as independent candidates or as the Liberation Party. You don't have to be part of the Liberation Party for us to support you. We endorsed Marilyn Hoffman, the Green Party candidate for governor in New Jersey and she endorsed our run for governor in Virginia.

So how can people get involved in the Liberation Party?

Just go to www.liberationparty.org to sign up to volunteer or donate. Right now, blue looks like red and red looks like blue. We need a party that stands for the people. The two major parties are only concerned about their own financial gains or their political gains, and that's not us.

community news

APRIL 3

continued from page 4

the soldiers were met by wild cheering by Blacks and also many whites, not all of whom had supported the slavery-defending Confederacy; how the Union soldiers tore open the slave jails and freed the enslaved prisoners; how thousands of Richmonders held a rally on East Broad Street to celebrate the day.

The day after the ceremony, Rogers was interviewed about the significance of April 3 on the Gary Flowers Show, a popular Black-oriented radio talk show in Richmond.

A state highway marker (see the photo on page 12) was erected at the site in 1994, but was missing this April 3. In response to an inquiry by The Virginia Defender, Department of Historic Resources Highway Marker Program Historian and Manager Jennifer Loux sent this email:

"DHR was notified on March 7 that this marker had been knocked to the ground. We don't know whether the damage was caused by an errant vehicle or by vandalism. Richmond Public Works picked up the marker and determined that it is damaged beyond repair.

"This marker was installed in Nov. 2020 and was a replacement for the original one, which was damaged in or before May 2020.

"We hope to replace the marker, but it will take some time."

So the marker - the only official recognition of Richmond's liberation - has been damaged twice: Once in 2020 and again in 2022, both times close to the anniversary of the liberation.

The Defenders decided that, rather than holding the April 3 ceremony without the highway marker, they would recreate it, as a large print made at a local copy shop. The "new" marker can be seen in the photo above.

A photo of the original marker is on page 12.

Northern Virginia coalition fights to protect endangered cemeteries

By Phil Wilayto

An organization called the Coalition to Save Historic Thoroughfare has announced plans to protest what it says is the ongoing desecration of Black and indigenous cemeteries in Thoroughfare, an unincorporated community in western Prince William County in Northern Virginia.

The protest is scheduled to take place at 3:30 p.m. Saturday, April 23, across from The Farm Brewery at Broad Run, 16015 John Marshall Highway in Broad Run, Va.

The Farm Brewery now owns the historic Scott Cemetery, one of three burial grounds in the area the coalition says are being threatened by developers.

According to a press release announcing the protest, the coalition formed after "... developers purchased land containing the three major Thoroughfare cemeteries and, early in 2021, destroyed the Scott Cemetery, blocked access to the Potters Field Cemetery, and threatened the Fields/Allen Cemetery with development."

The release states that The Farm Brewery purchased property that includes the Scott Cemetery "... and despite several cease-and-desist orders from Prince William County, the brewery has repeatedly bulldozed, graded and landscaped the cemetery, and currently is trying to claim that the Scott Cemetery does not even exist."

The coalition maintains that the Scott Cemetery

was listed in 1966 on a U.S. Geological Survey map and, in the late 1990s, was listed by Prince William County as containing 75 to 100 graves.

According to coalition spokesperson Frank Washington, "Slaves, freed slaves, freedmen/freedwomen, and Native-Americans who worked and lived on the land of Thoroughfare, are under the threat of having their final sacred resting places decimated or completely removed by encroaching developers."

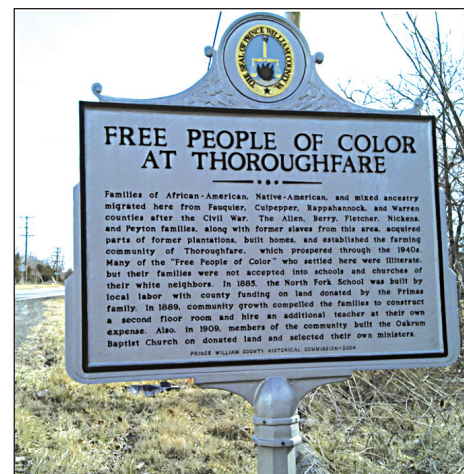
The Defender emailed The Farm Brewery asking for a comment on the coalition's allegations, but had not received a response by press-time, three days after the request.

According to a historical marker titled "Free People of Color at Thoroughfare" erected in 2004 by the Prince William County Historical Commission, African-American, Native American and mixed ancestry families migrated to the area after the Civil War and, along with local formerly enslaved people, acquired parts of former plantations, built homes and established the farming community of Thoroughfare, which prospered through the 1940s. In 1909 members of the community built Oakrum Baptist Church on donated land.

For more information, visit the Facebook page "Coalition To Save Historic Thoroughfare - A Town Under Siege."

To donate to the coalition, see "Save Historic Thoroughfare Cemeteries" at:

GoFundMe.com



This marker erected in 2004 by the Prince William County Historical Commission notes the history of people of color in the area.

Virginia Museum of History & Culture plans grand reopening May 14-15

After what it's calling "a landmark reimagining of the institution," an "expanded and reinvigorated" Virginia Museum of History & Culture will reopen to the public May 14 and 15 with free admission, live music and family activities.

The museum's more than \$30 million renovation includes a two-story entrance atrium; an immersive orientation theater; approximately 50 percent more exhibition space; a new research library; several community meeting and gathering spaces; a new campus connector between the VMHC and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; an enhanced green space; and a new café and museum store.

More importantly, the museum, long known for celebrating the Confederacy, has been re-examining its responsibility to tell the entire story of Virginia.

According to a museum press release, "Visitors will encounter a dramatically renewed, innovative and welcoming museum experience after the most extensive and transformative renovation in the institution's nearly 200-year history."

The museum is located at 428 N. Arthur Ashe Boulevard in Richmond.

For more information, visit:

VirginiaHistory.org

Virginia tribe regains sacred ground

Some 350 years after being driven off their land by white settlers, the Rappahannock Tribe has regained ownership of more than 460

acres of ancestral homeland along its namesake river in the Northern Neck.

The area known as Fones Cliffs, a major East Coast nesting place for bald eagles that is considered sacred in tribal culture, in recent years had been tar-

geted for commercial development.

"I'm elated about it," Rappahannock Chief Anne Richardson told The Washington Post. "It is special to us because the bones of our ancestors are there."

Archeologists have determined that the tribe lived in and dominated the area for thousands of years before the coming of the Europeans.

Tribal members now number about 300.

The Rappahannock Tribe was able to regain its land with assistance from the Chesapeake Conservancy, The Wilderness Society, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Charlottesville benefactor Carole Remmer Angle and musician and environmentalist Dave Matthews.

The tribe will place the land in trust with the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs.

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our working lives

Interview with a Starbucks union worker

By Kat McNeal

with its partners.

On April 19, workers at five Starbucks coffee shops in the Richmond area voted overwhelmingly to join the Workers United union. According to the Northern Virginia Labor Federation, an AFL-CIO affiliate working with Philadelphia-based Workers United, the overall vote was 82-14 at the shops at Westchester Commons, Forest Hill Avenue, Huguenot Village, Willow Lawn and Carmia Way.

Four other Richmond-area stores were yet to vote. As of presstime, there were 150 Starbucks locations with organizing drives out of a total of 8,947 company-operated and 6,497 licensed stores in the country. The first to unionize was in Buffalo, N.Y.

The Virginia Defender spoke with one of the organizers who are helping to turn Richmond into a union town.

Meridian Stiller is a 17-year-old high school senior from Powhatan County. Stiller, who uses the pronouns they/them, has worked as a barista at the Starbucks at Westchester Commons in Chesterfield County since June of last year.

That Starbucks was the first in Virginia to start organizing, although it wasn't the first to go public. There are now some 15 stores in the state with organizing campaigns: in Doswell, Falls Church, Farmville, Leesville, Midlothian, Newport News and Roanoke, in addition to the Richmond-area stores.

According to Stiller, the Westchester store has about 30 employees, about a third of whom are people of color. Most are high school or college students, with the average age 17 to 20 years old. The union organizing committee has five members, three of whom are seniors at Powhatan High School.

Here is our interview:

VIRGINIA DEFENDER: The first two stores to file with the National Labor Relations Board did so pretty quickly after the Buffalo store. Had the desire to unionize been circulating for a while?

MERIDIAN STILLER: It was spontaneous, to my knowledge. Buffalo went public in August, and then other partners went, wow, this is a great idea... It's growing exponentially. My store was one of the first 20 in the country to go public. Now we're up to 150. Eventually there will be a tipping point where Starbucks sees it's more economical to work

Would you say there's widespread support for the union among the workers in your stores?

About half are very strong definite "yes" votes, about half are very strong definite "no" votes and there's some small amount of "undecided." We did have about 70 percent of people sign the union cards. A lot of the "no" votes have been intimidated by management. We're now publishing "The Richmond Partner" magazine, modeled after Buffalo's "The Partner."

Can you speak a bit on the issue of COVID safety in the workplace, which I have seen listed as a major grievance?

At the very beginning of the pandemic, workers felt that Starbucks did a great job of keeping workers safe: Block scheduling to prevent contact between shifts, mask requirements, closed cafes, encouraging mobile ordering, etc. However, as Virginia's regulations changed, so have Starbucks', even though employees aren't comfortable with a lot of it. Masks are now optional, quarantining rules have changed, paid time off after exposure ended. At our stores there were plexiglass barriers between us and customers, but they took them down.

At our store, they took our plexiglass down and one of our older employees wanted it back up. We wrote a very polite letter asking for it back, and our manager got very angry and offended and said that this was inappropriate. This was actually right before we decided to organize.

Obviously, COVID protocols are not the bottom line of union organizing - worker organizing will live on after COVID, but I felt it really was an example of management not taking our voices into account.

How about the issue of seniority pay?

Seniority pay is an economic issue that Buffalo is bargaining for, and we're looking to them for guidance, although we're all going to be independent in what we choose to bargain for. At my store, we sent around a survey, and we are interested in seniority pay because Starbucks generally, and my store specifically, has a high turnover rate. Often it's just one experienced partner and five or so of what we call "green beans," or new workers. It's harder to be a senior partner, so it deserves more pay.

Every barista makes the same amount of money. I make \$12 an hour; a barista that works there for 15 years would also make \$12 an hour. There aren't any talent raises, either. The company decides if there will be a raise and they apply it uniformly. Shift supervisors are paid uniformly also.

What about cost-of-living raises or base pay?

Inflation-adjusted cost-of-living raises are another thing we're looking at. We want three steps: A base pay increase, as yet undetermined; seniority pay; and a cost-of-living increase each year.

The Genesee Street and Elmwood Starbucks in Buffalo [the first stores to organize], also has this other proposal: If someone calls out at Starbucks and doesn't come in, Starbucks just reabsorbs their pay. Their idea is that Starbucks should just redistribute that person's pay to everyone who has to work the short shift, since everyone on that shift is having to pick up slack.

What's been the public's reaction?

Nationally, there's been 69 percent support from the public and 67 percent customer support. We've been seeing support in my store. People have been coming in and giving their name as "Union Yes." We're seeing a lot of that.

This is extremely public - Starbucks is the third-largest fast food chain in the country - and people from other unions especially have been extremely supportive. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers have come

out to support, the DSA. Virginia Diamond is president of the Northern Virginia Labor Federation and another leader is with the United Auto Workers. Neither of them are directly from Workers United, so that just goes to show how cross-union the campaign has been.

There's been a lot of union support, but we're also a very independent, grassroots union. We want this to be partners-only. Our strongest support is partners for other partners, figuring out how we're going to run things.

What about Unity Fest, the rally that's scheduled to take place April 24 at the National in Richmond? [Editor: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/unity-fest-tickets-307813377097>]

Unity Fest is a thing that two workers from the Richmond area put together to celebrate six vote counts happening immediately prior.

What can the public do to support you?

I'd say the "Union Yes" cup thing. And we really love it if you come in and strike up a conversation with your barista about the union effort. We have Starbucks Workers United pins available for the public to buy. You can wear those pins into the store. [<https://sbworker-sunited.org>]

If you're with an organization, you can send a letter or a note. We love getting the notes, but Starbucks does not. In the Forest Hill store, they had an area where they were pinning them up and displaying them and the manager tore them down and said they couldn't have them because it wasn't "an official break room."

So, order under "Union Yes," share our stuff on social media, talk to your baristas, wear your pin.

Do you have any advice for other workers who are thinking about organizing?

Yeah, definitely. As someone who was brand-new to organizing and even to having a job, I would say that it seems scary, but networking is your friend. Find people, talk to them - it's so much more accessible than I thought it was.

My main advice is don't let fear of the unknown overwhelm you. The labor organizing community is very friendly and welcoming. I'm sure if I'd just contacted some guy at the IBEW and told him I was a Starbucks worker interested in unionizing, it would have gone somewhere.

For more information on the Starbucks union drive, see: sbworkersunited.org



SB Workers United

A Union of Starbucks Workers, By Starbucks Workers, For Starbucks Workers

our working lives

Virginia Beach workers organize for better pay

Staff Report

As we go to press, city workers in Virginia Beach are preparing to hold a press conference and public speak-out before raising job-related demands April 20 at a city council budget hearing.

According to a press release from the newly-formed Virginia Beach City Workers Union, UE Local 111, the City in March received its full report on the Market Salary Survey conducted by the Segal consulting firm, which made recommendations for adjustments to employee wages.

The union said it is backing many of those recommendations, including a Step Pay Plan that recognizes years of service; reclassification of all pay grades that are more than 5 percent below the market average; and increasing the minimum

wage for city employees to \$15 per hour.

"We are having lots of workers quit and no one is applying for the open positions because our wages are so low compared to other comparable cities," said Terry Green, a utility crew Leader and union member.

"I have been working with the city for 32 years and am still hardly above the midpoint of my salary grade. We are essential personnel just like police and fire, and we should be paid a Step Pay Plan just like they are."

Step Pay Plans, used by some government agencies, assign steps to reflect how long a person has been with the government. Each step increase raises a worker's pay by a certain percentage.

The union recently released its own report comparing Virginia Beach public worker wages with those of workers

in similar-sized cities in the Southeast. The report states that the pay range for a Utility Mechanic Aide currently has a mid-point of \$37,377, which, according to the union's study, is \$5,060, or 13.5 percent, below the market average. To reach parity, a worker in this position would need a reclassification of three pay grades higher, from a G13 to G16, the report states.

Also, according to the union's report, Virginia Beach is one of only a few cities its size that does not yet have a minimum wage of \$15 per hour. Currently, the report states, 825 city employees make less than that hourly wage.

Last November, the Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis found that nine out of 10 Virginia Beach city employees likely couldn't afford to support a family at a modest yet adequate standard of living on the wages they currently are paid.

For more information on UE Local 111, see:

locals.ueunion.org/111.

Sat., June 11: ¿Que Pasa? festival returns to Richmond

After two years of not being able to host one of Richmond's premier cultural festivals due to the pandemic, the Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce has announced the return of the annual ¿Que Pasa? festival. The chamber says it's "excited to showcase the diversity and beauty of Hispanic and Latin American cultures once again, along the canals in the capital city of Virginia."

The festival will take place from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday, June 11, along Richmond's Canal Walk (320 S. 12th St.) Visitors can count on enjoying tasty food, music and crafts from local artists, while enjoying live performances of Latin American dance and song.

According to a chamber press release, the VAHCC has held the festival for 21 years.

"Over the years, the ¿Qué Pasa? Festival has served as one of the largest Hispanic/Latino festivals in Virginia, achieving national and international recognition, and even breaking a world record in 2018, which was featured in over 42 newspapers worldwide."

More information is at:
quepasafestival.com

NOTE: The festival originally was scheduled for May 7, but rescheduled to June 11 because of inclement weather.



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The environment, Virginia & the Mighty James



The 348-mile-long James River offers near-endless scenic views.

Photo by Phil Wilayto

By Delaney Jooris

The world is in the midst of a rapidly worsening climate crisis.

The United Nations Climate Report released in early April stresses the urgency of this crisis: We have just three years to stabilize global temperatures and mitigate climate change, or we'll reach a point of no return, where sustaining life on Earth will become increasingly difficult.

Environmental problems are often portrayed as primarily an issue for the Global South. For example, a 2021 report from the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development estimates that developing countries have economic losses three times greater than high-income countries due to "climate-related disasters." While countries with weaker infrastructure are the most susceptible to environmental stress, the notion that these dangers are a non-issue for the United States is wishful thinking at best.

According to the National Centers for Environmental Information, the U.S. experienced 20 individual "billion-dollar weather and climate disaster events" in 2021 alone, with costs totaling an estimated \$148 billion. This was the third most costly year on record. Disaster counts and costs are on the rise, a trend the NCEI attributes to a number of factors, including climate change.

In addition, a 2021 report by the federal Environmental Protection Agency shows

that climate change disproportionately impacts "socially vulnerable" populations. Marginalized communities have fewer resources to prepare for and recover from environmental stressors, which takes a toll on the health and life expectancy of these communities.

Further, the labeling of environmental issues as "third-world" problems obscures the systemic nature of climate change and absolves countries like the U.S. of accountability for their role in damaging the environment.

U.S. Water Challenges

This year it was reported by the Environmental Integrity Project that nearly half the country's rivers and streams do not meet standards for "swimming, recreation, aquatic life, fish consumption, or drinking water sources." This is after the Trump administration in 2019 repealed Clean Water regulations. This April, the Supreme Court voted to narrow the criteria that state and tribal authorities can use to veto projects that might threaten water quality.

Since his election, President Joe Biden has taken steps to reinstate clean water safeguards. In November, the administration started the process of restoring protections for hundreds of thousands of smaller U.S. waterways. The administration also reported that it aims to clarify the language of the Clean Water Act, which simply protects "waters of the United States," a phrasing

that has allowed developers and lobbyists to argue that nonmajor or seasonal bodies of water are not protected by the law.

Even with the law intact, ensuring proper enforcement is its own problem. The Natural Resources Defense Council, Coming Clean and the Environmental Justice Health Alliance report that EPA data shows race is the strongest indicator "of slow and ineffective enforcement of federal drinking water law." Together, race, ethnicity and spoken language had the strongest relationship to the most serious and long-standing violations of the law.

Rural communities were found to be at surprisingly high risk for drinking water violations, with systems serving fewer than 3,300 people accounting for 80 percent of violations.

Drinking polluted water is known to cause a variety of severe health issues. As reported by the EPA, these include "gastrointestinal illnesses, nervous system or reproductive effects, and chronic diseases such as cancer." According to the American Cancer Association, Black Americans have the highest death rate and shortest survival rates for most cancers of any racial/ethnic group in the country.

Access to water, polluted or safe, is also at risk in the West. According to the NCEI, the current drought is the worst in the 22-year history of the U.S. Drought Monitor. In September through March, parts of Texas had not seen such a dry season since the Dust Bowl of 1895. Most major agricultural activity and some of the most populous areas in the country rely on the Ogallala Aquifer, which is being used up at unsustainable rates.

Virginia Water Challenges

According to the NCEI, Virginia was impacted by eight of the United States' billion-dollar disaster events in 2021, costing the state up to \$1 billion. Three of these events were hurricanes and tropical storms, largely affecting Virginia's coastline. Additionally, Virginia's waterways and the Chesapeake Bay, major sources of revenue for the state, remain in poor to abysmal condition.

According to the Virginia Tourism Corporation, before the onset of the COVID-

19 pandemic in 2019, the state's tourism industry generated \$27 billion in revenues and supported over 237,000 jobs. In 2020, Virginia ranked eighth in the country for domestic travel spending, and the travel and tourism industry accounted for 3.1 percent of the Commonwealth's total Gross Domestic Product that year.

Virginia's water features are responsible for a substantial percentage of the state's tourism revenue. In 2017, a record-breaking 19 million people visited Virginia Beach, generating \$2.45 billion in revenue.

In 2019, Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, which includes the Shenandoah River and a national park, generated \$1.57 billion in revenue. Despite years of troubling algae growth, arguably related to nitrogen and phosphorus pollution, the EPA approved the Department of Environmental Quality's decision not to list the Shenandoah River as impaired, which would have required the state to enforce pollution limits for the river.

Another large source of state revenue is seafood. According to a 2009 report from the NOAA, the Chesapeake Bay commercial seafood industry that year generated \$3.39 billion in sales and nearly 34,000 jobs.

However, the fishery's health remains damaged and fragile. In 2020, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation gave the bay a health grade of D-. That organization has attributed the stagnant health of the bay to the Trump administration's weakening of the Clean Water Act, as well as actions by the states of New York and Pennsylvania. Last year, the foundation, along with Virginia, Maryland and D.C., sued the EPA, alleging failure to enforce pollution reduction limits on the states.

Richmond Water Challenges

Indigenous peoples have been living in what is now called Virginia for some 12,000 to 16,000 years. Many used the river that came to be called the Powhatan, named to honor the chief of the Powhatan Confederacy, as an important resource for food, travel and defense.

This longest river in Virginia begins in

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the Appalachian Mountains and flows 348 miles to the Chesapeake Bay. The first English arrived in 1607, bringing colonization, disease and a new name for the river: James, named to honor an English monarch who never set foot on the land he so freely gave away. The English chose the river's banks for their colonial capitals: First Jamestown, then Williamsburg and finally, in 1780, Richmond.

Today, a third of the state's population lives in the 10,000-square-mile watershed of the James. The river stretches across 39 counties and 19 cities and towns and is a major source of drinking water, - as well as a beloved site for recreational activities. However, despite its importance, the James has been made to withstand substantial abuse.

The Kepone Disaster

In 1975, news broke nationally that workers at a chemical plant in Hopewell had suffered poisoning. It was soon found that the plant, which manufactured Kepone, a toxic, nonbiodegradable insecticide, for more than 10 years had been illegally dumping waste into the James River. The effect on the river's health was disastrous. Commercial and sport fishing were banned. By the time the bans began to be lifted in 1980, the fishing industry had collapsed.

Today the James is generally considered safe. However, because Kepone breaks down so slowly in the environment, it's been found in recent years in specimens

collected from the river. The monitoring of Kepone has been halted since 2009 due to budget cuts, and a 2016 study by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science at William & Mary found Kepone present in 65 percent of analyzed fish, although concentrations within the fish were below the FDA's limit of 0.3 parts per million.

Since the initial Kepone pollution, a layer of silt has slowly developed that covers Kepone in the riverbed. Although unlikely, there have been worries that a disturbance of this silt layer could potentially cause the river to decline in health once again.

The Kepone disaster wasn't the end of pollution in the James. For nearly a decade, the James River Association has given the river a health grade of B-. In 2021, the association scored the river 61 points out of 100, a fraction which typically would be converted to a grade of D-.

Raw sewage in the James

The James River Association considers a number of polluting factors to be issues for the James, such as sediment pollution, which is caused by agriculture and land development, and high amounts of nitrogen and phosphorus, caused by stormwater runoff. However, these issues pale in comparison to an alarming one that has been unaddressed since the 1800s.

When Richmond experiences heavy rainfall, raw sewage flows into the James River. There are 25 sites where this occurs. Between 2014 and 2018, 11 billion gallons of untreated waste water went into the James, according to Combined Sewage

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breakaway entities in the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine. Rarely does the media mention the violent, right-wing coup of February 2014, which preceded and led to the developments in Crimea and Donbass.

In 2013, anti-corruption protests broke out in Ukraine's capital, Kiev, against President Viktor Yanukovich, who favored closer economic ties with Russia, Ukraine's traditional major trading partner. He was replaced by a president who favored closer ties with the much wealthier European Union. What began as peaceful, even celebratory protests were taken over by openly fascist organizations that model themselves after the nationalistic militias that sided with the occupying Nazi forces in World War II. The memory of that war runs deep in both Russia and Ukraine and colors much of the

current conflict.

About 17 percent of Ukraine's people are ethnic Russian and about 30 percent speak Russian as their first language. And yet, one of the first acts of the new government was to ban the use of Russian as an official state language. Memorials for Soviet war heroes were torn down and replaced by memorials honoring Ukrainian fascists. Neo-Nazi militias marched in the streets of major Ukrainian cities - when they weren't attacking the camps of Roma people. And on May 2, 2014, at least 42 anti-fascists were murdered when a fascist-led mob set fire to the House of Trade Unions in Odessa.

Crimea, a peninsula on Ukraine's southern coast, had been part of the Soviet Republic of Russia until 1954, when it was administratively transferred to Soviet Ukraine. Before that, it had been part of Czarist Russia since 1783. The predominantly ethnic-

Russian peninsula, fearing domination by an anti-Russian, fascist-tolerant government, declared its independence from Ukraine, held a referendum and voted to rejoin Russia. Russia, which feared losing access to Sevastopol, a strategically important seaport and one of the only warm water ports available to it in the Black Sea, agreed.

Meanwhile, in predominantly ethnic-Russian Donbass, popular organizations declared their independence from Ukraine. Ukraine reacted with an attempt to militarily retake the region and the resulting conflict has led to the loss of some 14,000 lives. In recent weeks, Russia has charged that the Ukrainian military was building up its forces near Donbass and increasingly carrying out attacks against what are called the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic.

Viewed in their historical context, Russia's annexation of Crimea and its backing of the separatists in Donbass look less like a land grab than actions taken out of deep concern about the rightward direction of Ukraine's new Western-backed, NATO-friendly government.

Russia attacks

Washington views Russia as an obstacle to its ability to dominate the world for the benefit of U.S. corporations. It doesn't want to go to war with a nuclear-armed Russia, but it does want to weaken it and make it economically dependent on the West. Instead of an economic competitor, Russia would then be reduced to a supplier of raw materials and cheap labor and a captive market for Western goods. This is exactly what has happened to Poland, Hungary and other countries in Eastern Europe, and is exactly the neo-colonial relationship the U.S. and Western Europe have imposed on countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Our analysis is that President Putin believes that Russia was looking at an unfolding U.S./NATO strategy to encircle it militarily and find an excuse to strangle it economically by imposing devastating sanctions. There is precedent for this belief: The U.S. and NATO employed this same strategy against the former Soviet Union. And remember, Russia was invaded by Nazi Germany in World War II, at a cost of 20 million Soviet lives. That experience certainly influences how it views an increasingly powerful, threatening NATO. So instead of waiting for the current process to play out, Putin evidently decided to act now and bring the entire matter to a head, betting that the U.S. and NATO would not attack a nuclear-armed country and that it could survive the resulting sanctions.

Whether or not Russia should have car-

ried out its attacks can be debated for its morality, legality and wisdom, but Russia clearly sees the attacks as a pre-emptive strike necessary for its own survival.

No to war, sanctions & NATO!

What position should progressives take in the United States and Canada?

Working people and communities of color have nothing to gain from the U.S. and Canada intervening in this conflict. And we have a lot to lose from the U.S., European Union and Canada imposing devastating sanctions on Russia. Oil and gas prices would go higher than they already are, leading to warp-speed inflation as the price of transporting goods skyrockets.

Then there are the billions of our U.S. and Canadian tax dollars already spent in military "assistance" to Ukraine, the cost of the continued stationing of 90,000 U.S. troops and 1,500 Canadian troops in Europe - 77 years after the Second World War - and massive amounts spent to support so-called "pro-democracy" organizations in Ukraine.

The only correct thing to do in this situation is to demand the U.S. and Canada stay completely out of the conflict. We say:

**No to War with Russia!
No to Sanctions!
No to NATO!
No to the Wars
at Home & Abroad!**

For a more detailed explanation of the background to the present crisis, see the Winter 2022 edition of The Virginia Defender newspaper: <https://virginiadefender.org>

The **Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality** is an all-volunteer activist organization founded in 2002 to work for the survival of our communities through educational projects and social justice actions.

The **Odessa Solidarity Campaign** was founded in 2016 after the Defenders organized a delegation of U.S. peace activists to stand with the people of Odessa, Ukraine, as they marked the second anniversary of the massacre of scores of progressives by a fascist-led mob. odessasolidaritycampaign.org

The **Fire This Time Movement for Social Justice** is an all-volunteer activist organization founded in 2003 in Canada to end inequality and injustice and to fight for a better world through education, participation, and social justice action in unity with all oppressed people worldwide. **PO Box 21607, Vancouver, BC, Canada V5L 5G3 - Phone/Text 778-938-1557 - infoftt@mail.com - www.firethistime.net**

cops, courts & prisons

Black teacher, falsely suspected of shoplifting, charged with felony assault on arresting cop

By Whitney Moore

Alecia Nelson, an assistant teacher at Westover Hills Elementary School on Richmond's South Side, stopped by the Family Dollar on Westover Hills Boulevard March 7 to buy snacks for her daughter's third-grade class at the school. According to her attorney, David Whaley, "She was buying candy and snacks to encourage kids to do well in school - rewards for children who don't get a lot of positive reinforcement."

After checking out, Nelson was attempting to leave the store when she was confronted by Richmond police officer Graham Lang, who was responding to a call about suspected shoplifting. Nelson is African-American; Lang is white. A scuffle ensued and another customer in the store, Joshua Carter, 28, was able to capture a video of what happened next.

The now-viral video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHwSxK4nw9Q&t=781s>) shows Lang kneeling on Nelson's back as she lies facedown with her right arm handcuffed behind her. She is screaming, "I can't breathe!" and pleads for someone to call 911. Once Nelson is subdued, Lang is seen shoving another Black

woman who was holding Nelson's purse and then approaching and shoving Carter, also Black, as he continues to film the encounter. The video doesn't show what led up to Lang's actions.

According to Nelson, doctors have since diagnosed her with an acute concussion and post-concussion syndrome. She said she also has been placed on administrative leave without pay from her job due to the charge she now faces: assault on a law enforcement officer, a Class 6 felony. Her attorney said that, if convicted, she could face a mandatory six months in jail, with no option for house arrest.

The criminal complaint alleges that Nelson initially pulled away from Lang when he tried to detain her, struck him and scratched his face and neck. Carter has stated that Lang hurt himself when he fell into a gumball machine while trying to arrest Nelson.

Nelson was not charged with shoplifting. She says this is the second time the same store has falsely accused her of stealing.

"The first time, no cops were called, the store just asked to see inside my purse, which I opened and showed them," she told the Defender. "Nothing was stolen. If they would have just asked to see inside my purse this time, all this would have never happened."

Both Nelson and Carter have filed complaints about Lang with the Richmond Police Department's Internal Affairs unit, alleging assault and excessive force. As of presstime, the police investigation is still ongoing and Lang is still on active duty.

The community has demanded justice for Nelson's violent arrest. On March 12, supporters, including members of the Original Black Panthers of Richmond, Virginia; the Black Power Movement; and the Virginia Defenders protested outside the Family Dollar store. Management's response was to shut down the store for the day.

Nelson's preliminary hearing was April 8, but both the prosecutors and defense requested a continuance because the police body cam footage had not been released in time for both sides to review it before the hearing.

Eight days later, attorney Whaley said he still had not received the footage.

The preliminary hearing is now scheduled for 10 a.m. on June 3 in Courtroom 10 of the John Marshall Courts Building, 400 N. 9th St. in downtown Richmond.

"I just want justice," Nelson told the Defender. "I don't want anyone else to have to go through something like this."

Mother files suit on behalf of son killed by police

LaToya Benton, the mother of a Black teenager fatally shot by Virginia State Police troopers, has filed a \$60.35 million wrongful death lawsuit against the officers.

Eighteen-year-old Xzavier Hill was killed on Jan. 9, 2021, after being stopped by two officers in Goochland County. The officers reported that Hill had been driving at an excessive speed, with one headlight out, and attempted to elude them when they tried to pull him over.

They maintain that Hill refused to exit his vehicle and they thought he was reaching for a gun. A .40-caliber semiautomatic pistol reportedly was found in Hill's vehicle, with a round jammed in the chamber.

In February 2021, a multi-jurisdictional grand jury concluded that the officers were not criminally liable for Hill's death. The investigation was headed by Goochland Commonwealth's Attorney D. Michael Caudill, a former state trooper and Henrico County police officer.

Two weeks after the grand jury's decision, the Virginia State Conference NAACP asked then-Attorney General Mark Herring to review the shooting. Herring's office said he would look into the matter.

Benton does not have an attorney as she pursues her complaint in U.S. District Court in Richmond. At a news conference she held April 14 to announce the lawsuit, she said at least five attorneys had declined to represent her in the case, but that she would pursue the lawsuit, with or without representation.

For more information, see:

justiceforxzavier.org

Defenders submit testimony on police accountability

Earlier this year, the Virginia Defenders were invited to submit testimony to the Virginia Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, which is examining police accountability in the country.

Virginia Defender editor Phil Wilayto gave testimony April 11 alleging official cover-ups by the Richmond Police Department in four cases of fatal police shootings in the city: Levester Carter in 2001, Verlon Johnson in 2012, Keshawn Hargrove in 2015 and Marcus-David Peters in 2018.

Princess Blanding, Peters' sister and the 2021 Liberation Party candidate for governor, also testified.

GA actions on VAPJN demands

Staff Report

In the last issue of the Defender, we reported on the rally the Virginia Prison Justice Network held Jan. 22 in Richmond's Monroe Park. The rally raised four demands. This is how those issues were dealt with in the 2022 General Assembly:

Bring back parole

The bill promoting this failed. It never even got out of committee. It was supposed to go into a study, but that didn't happen either.

End solitary confinement

The committee examining this issue voted to send it into a study. And who's in charge of that study? The Virginia Department of Corrections. A lot of organizations have been working on this issue, including the Coalition to End Solitary Confinement, Interfaith Action for Human Rights, Sentencing Project, Bridging the Gap in Virginia, Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, R.I.H.D., SALT, the Virginia Defenders and the ACLU, among others.

Outside oversight over prisons & jails

Killed. The bill addressing this issue never made it out of committee.

Pass "Second Look" resentencing

Failed. The bill passed in the Senate but was shot down in a House committee.

Also: **Discretionary Sentencing Guidelines (SB-137).** "Requires that the written explanation the court files with the record of a case when departing from the sentencing guidelines adequately explains the sentence imposed to promote fair sentencing." This bill was promoted by R.I.H.D. (Resource, Information, Help for the Disadvantaged and Disenfranchised). Like the Second Look bill, it passed the Senate, but died in a House committee.

The Virginia Prison Justice Network has a division of labor. The Coalition for Justice in

See GA on Page 11

Defender editor speaks at Cold Springs event

Virginia Defender editor Phil Wilayto spoke by Zoom at a Black History Month event held Feb. 11 at Cold Springs Correctional Unit in Greenville, Va.

The topic was the reclamation and memorialization of Richmond's Shockoe Bottom, the downtown area that once was the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade.

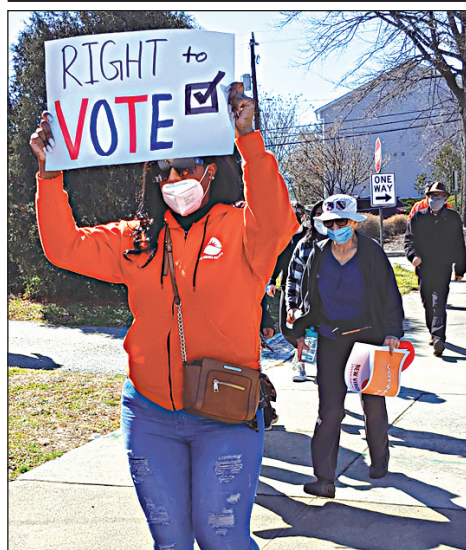


Photo by Phil Wilayto

Marching for voting rights - Around 50 people march in support of voting rights for Virginians convicted of felonies. The Feb. 21 march from New Life Deliverance Tabernacle on Richmond's South Side to the State Capitol was sponsored by the advocacy organization New Virginia Majority.

cops, courts & prisons

Doss denied parole - again

Jermaine Doss, a Virginia prisoner whom the Defenders believe was wrongfully convicted and sentenced to life-plus-34 years for a crime he did not commit, was turned down for parole for the second time on Dec. 6, 2021. The reasons given were the "Serious nature and circumstances of your offense(s); The Board concludes that you should serve more of your sentence prior to your release on parole."

GA continued from page 10

Blacksburg does the largest share of counseling and produces the network's monthly newsletter, which is sent to more than 1,300 prisoners in all 40 Virginia facilities. The Virginia Defenders also do some counseling, report on issues in The Virginia Defender newspaper, head up organizing the annual Prison Justice Rally and promote local Prison Justice Speak-Outs. R.I.H.D. organizes the annual Mobile Justice Tours and takes the lead on the network's legislative advocacy work. All three organizations are all-volunteer. There is no paid staff.

The Defender asked R.I.H.D. Executive Director Lillie "Ms. K." Branch-Kennedy how she evaluates the results of the 2022 General Assembly.

"There was a lot of progress when Northam was governor, but everything he did came out of advocacy," Ms. K. said. "I don't think he came into office saying he was going to do this or that. Under his administration, we saw progress on juvenile and adult parole, Fishback reforms, streamlining the restoration of rights and the pardon process - all stemming from related advocacy work since 2020.

"Then 2022 was a horrible year for continuing to pass fair and humane laws like oversight bills and to end solitary confinement. We went from a Democrat-controlled assembly to a Republican-controlled one. Truth is, at the end of the day, we're only going to get but so much from either side. The problem is far too much partisanship and too little common sense used when voting on important, life-altering legislation."

So why keep fighting?

"R.I.H.D. fights because it's the right thing to do," Ms. K. said. "We fight for fairness and equality in public safety laws. I'm fighting to increase public awareness and support, to end racial and economic bias in Virginia's criminal justice system.

"If you don't continuously fight for something, people will forget, feel hopeless and then when the administration changes, you have to start all over."

There's plenty in a name

By Ana Edwards

"Gabriel's House" is the new name of the building that houses the Department of African American Studies of Virginia Commonwealth University.

Removal of the former name, Harrison House, was approved on March 22 by the school's board of visitors and is part of a slate of recommendations made to the VCU Office of the President by its Committee on Commemorations and Memorials that has been completed since the summer of 2020.

As quoted in the VCU News on March 22, the department, "... cognizant of the historical importance of self-naming for Black people in this country and in this spirit of self-definition and self-determination - we began a process to select a name that reflected the spirit of the department and the pedagogical mission of our discipline," according to a document the department submitted to the board in support of the new name.

There is a history of association between the department and Gabriel's Rebellion. An anthropology lecture hosted by the department in 1999 introduced this writer to the rebellion. Ten years later, the chair of the department, Shawn Utsey, produced the first documentary film about the struggle to reclaim and memorialize the African Burial Ground where Gabriel is believed to have been hanged. In 2011, the Afrikan student association staged the only student-initiated protest to draw on-campus attention to the Burial Ground struggle.

The story of the organized attempt to end slavery and the reclamation of the site represent both principals of self-definition and self-determination applied by the Black community, and reaffirmed by the actions of the AfAm Studies department.

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reclaiming our sacred ground

How committed is Richmond to the Heritage Campus?

By Ana Edwards

How real is the city's commitment to the Heritage Campus?

As of today, it looks good. The decision to make Richmond's Black history and the Heritage Campus the thematic centerpiece of the small-area plan for Shockoe Bottom's development has had nearly unanimous support from the community and from the members of the Shockoe Alliance.

However, the status of the small-area plan is in limbo. A request for an update sent to the city's economic development department in April received no response.

The city has committed \$2.8 million of Capital Improvement Project funds for fiscal year 2023 to the community engagement, planning and designing of "multi-use enslaved African cultural and heritage park-like campus," the Enslaved Africans Heritage Campus. The total commitment is \$38 million, with almost half of that going to a parking structure to address the pressures of Shockoe Bottom's other function, that of a multimodal transportation hub and business district.

City funding for improvements to the Richmond Slave Trail at Ancarrow's Landing and the National Slavery Museum are listed separately, but amount to more than \$24 million proposed, with \$8 million al-

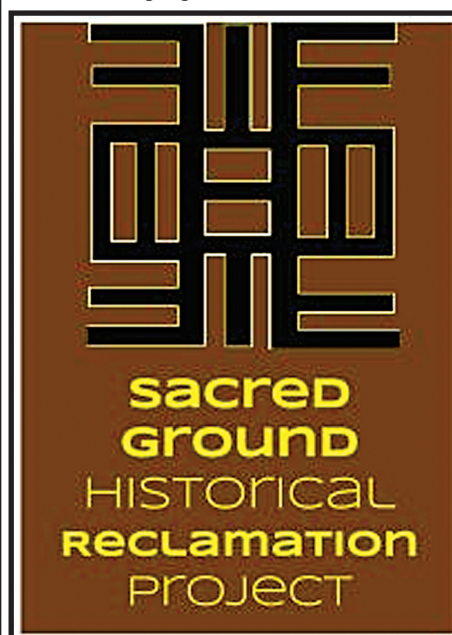
ready appropriated. Recent estimates for the full museum concept are \$220 million.

Obviously, the Memorial Park/Heritage Campus will cost far less than the planned museum while including its footprint, as well as the African Burial Ground and blocks east as far as 17th Street and south to Main Street.

There are those who believe it is important than the museum itself be a monumentally scaled structure, conceptually as large as the significance of the slave trade that once fueled Virginia's and this country's economy. That which fueled the economy was part of a system of racist laws and practices that simultaneously thwarted African-American progress, and part of our cultural and social responsibility is to ensure that what we create today furthers that progress.

The Sacred Ground Project believes the impetus for representing the significance of Shockoe Bottom to our complex and problematic past lies in our ability to make such a site acknowledge the past while addressing the very real needs of the present. How? By thinking creatively, not just "big."

I'd like us to imagine how the creation of the nine-acre area in Shockoe Bottom could be developed to serve all the functions outlined in our Community Proposal for a Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park - gathering, memorialization, reflection, education and equitable economic redevelopment. The city's commitment to the Heritage Campus needs to incorporate by design, engineering and implementation the aspirations for a truly equitable and environmentally sound social system and quality of life for all descendants of those who suffered during slavery and Jim Crow.



Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground Historic Marker Unveiling

2:30 p.m. Sunday, June 12
SAVE THE DATE!

Details to be posted on Facebook
and at sacredgroundproject.net

In our opinion

The cruelty of 'upgrading' public housing

Years ago, as a reporter for the Richmond Free Press, I had a conversation with Calvin Jamison, who at the time was Richmond's city manager. I remember him remarking that Richmond had become the repository for the region's poor, and that was why the city had a poverty rate of 25 percent. The goal, he said, was to bring it down to 15. (It's about 21 now.)

At the time, I thought he meant the city would be working to reduce poverty, but now I understand he simply meant it should reduce the number of poor people.

That's why, when it comes to tearing down public housing, no Richmond mayor or director of the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority has been willing to commit to one-to-one replacement, meaning that for every low-rent unit torn down, another would be built to replace it. The Defenders first raised that demand years ago.

There used to be 4,000 public housing units in the city - 4,000 homes, housing some 10,000 people. Not great homes, but homes nonetheless. Now the RRHA isn't even taking new applications. The goal is nothing less than to drive thousands of low-income Richmonders - almost all of them African-Americans, out of Richmond and into the counties - which the latest census tells us is exactly what's happening.

It's an example of inhumane cruelty that is stunning in its scope. And yet, where is the outcry?

Stoney's CRB lacks teeth

One of the demands of Richmond's Black Lives Matter Rebellion of 2020 was for civilian review boards, with subpoena power, to oversee the police. A bill was passed in the General Assembly, but instead of mandating that cities and counties create such boards, it merely "empowered" them to do so. Few did.

One city that's moving on the issue is Richmond. On March 14, Mayor Levar Stoney presented a paper to city council proposing a CRB "... that would be led by citizens committed to the objective review of Richmond Police Department internal investigations and policies."

In proposing his version of a CRB, the mayor ignored the recommendations of the city council-appointed task force addressing the matter and instead went with the recommendations of a hand-picked VCU professor.

The mayor's proposal is for a review board with no teeth. Its main focus would be reviewing cases of alleged police misconduct after those cases had been reviewed by the police department itself. It could investigate the cases further, but then only make recommendations to the chief of police, who would have the decision-making power.

In other words, the board can go through the motions of reviewing cases of alleged police misconduct, but would have no power to actually do anything about them.

We understand why police officers might not want to be disciplined by civilians. We also understand why civilians might not want to be abused - or killed - by police.

Once again, the mayor has gone through the motions of enacting reform, without actually reforming anything.

No teeth - and no backbone.

Letters to the Editor

A mother's plea

I'm asking you, the public, to help me, because I can't do this by myself. I have been fighting for some kind of justice after my oldest son was killed and one of my youngest sons was almost killed and is still suffering from environmental poisoning.

Sergio, at the tender age of two, was poisoned with enough lead in his body to damage him for life. As a young single mother, what was I to do? I contacted a lawyer and sued the landlord. The building has since been demolished! They awarded my son \$80,000. After the lawyers' fees, he was left with \$50,000. I continued to fight for him by reaching out to his teachers, school board members and medical doctors. They did what they knew how to do, which was very little. Virginia didn't really know what to do.

As Sergio became a teenager, I did everything I could to help him get through what he was going through as lead ravaged his body. He was very hyperactive, so I signed him up for football. He made it to varsity and played varsity football for three years until he broke his wrist. He could read a paperback book with understanding in 20 minutes. So I signed him up for the Gentleman's Club, a program established to build character, self-esteem and discipline for at-risk youth. Sadly, funding became an issue for Norfolk Public Schools, so they closed the program.

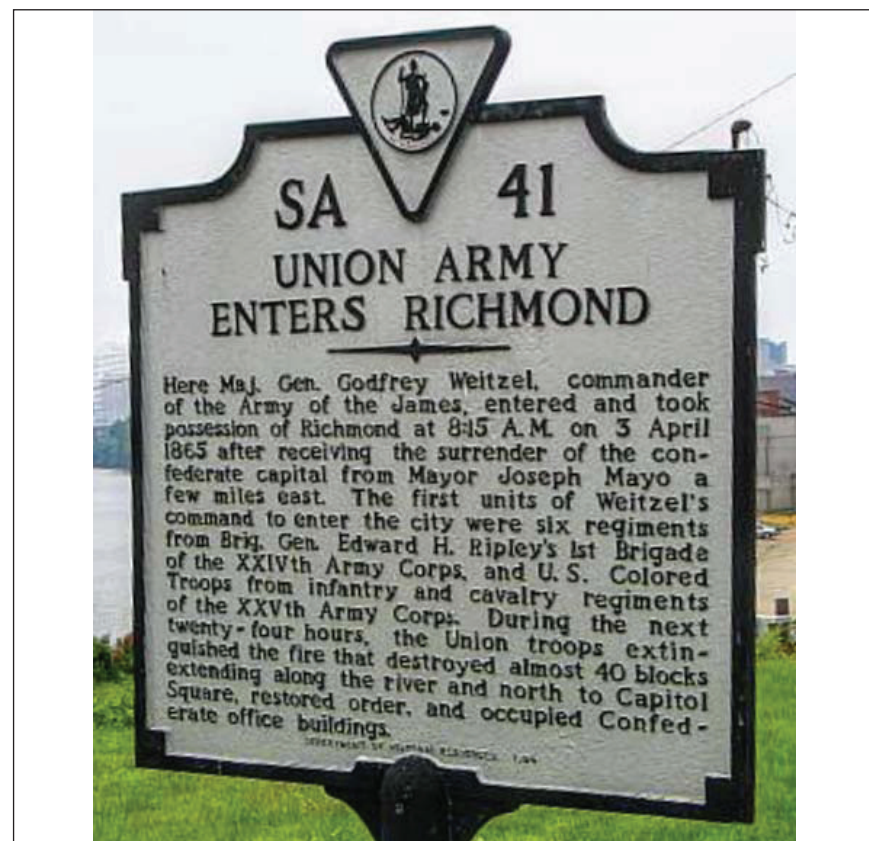
He never slept, was restless, his thoughts racing as the lead surged through his body. So I asked the school board for a mentor, but they laughed in my face.

Sergio hated loud noises. I took him to Riverside for counseling. He refused to talk and they said because he was 18 there was nothing that I could do. In school he could only be in a class with less than 12 students. He was said to be autistic as well. Nobody listened as I told them about his lead poisoning.

Finally, I went to circuit court because he was getting ready to receive his trust fund. I explained to the judge that he didn't need to give him any money at this time. The judge didn't listen at all to what I had to say, because my son was considered an adult.

Six months later, he was on his way to the penitentiary.

See **LETTERS** on Page 13



This state highway marker was erected in 1994 by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources to mark the site where Union troops entered Richmond on April 3, 1865. The marker was damaged in 2020 and again in 2022, both times close to the date of April 3. It is now being replaced. See story on page 4.

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

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LETTERS

continued from page 11

Now I'm asking the public to help my son, Sergio Gray, by supporting his appeal to the governor of Virginia for a pardon. In 2009, Sergio was sentenced to 45 years. Not for murder or rape. He has grown up in the system, again, with no help!

First they take his childhood and most of his adulthood. When does my son get to live a normal life?

Roycinda Alexander
NORFOLK

The burden is our reality

The last four years of legislative sessions have allowed me to reflect on many ideas and thought processes, those of my own and others. With the presentation of every bill, you notice the surge of enthusiasm with anticipation of what could be; the possibilities seem endless. However, with the failures or limitations placed on each piece of legislation, the enthusiasm wanes and defeatism becomes the ethos.

What once appeared to be support for the community activists and organizations that fight our cause quickly turns to criticism of their efforts. I've always been troubled by this.

With every criticism or critique of the activists' motives and efforts, the prisoner must first question their own: How diligent are you in educating yourself on the issues? How much of your time and finances are used in a way that advances our ability to assist the "conscious minority" in showcasing our cause?

To be critical, we've allowed our failure to work toward our own interest to somehow become the failure of those who support us. This is not the right mentality. Whether we win or lose is not the basis of our success.

The fight for more substantive prison reform is not going to be easy. And for us, "the prisoners of conscience," there are no days off. Just as the men and women on the outside sacrifice their time and effort, we must count the costs of our own sacrifices, or "lack thereof."

D. Ray Thomas
RIVER NORTH CORR. CTR.

America's ballooning military budget is a boondoggle for Virginia taxpayers

By Greta Zarro

Last month, President Biden proposed ratcheting up the Pentagon budget to \$770 billion, far surpassing Trump's sky-high military spending.

How does this impact Virginians? According to the National Priorities Project, the average Virginia taxpayer paid \$4,578 on military spending in 2019 alone. At the same time, Virginia currently ranks 41st in the nation in per-pupil spending on education, and studies show that just a \$1,000 increase in per-pupil spending is enough to raise test scores, graduation rates, and college enrollment. This is just one example of our nation's skewed spending priorities.

Likewise, the Pittsburgh bridge collapse earlier this year is a stark reminder of the risk of neglecting domestic needs, and one that hits close to home, since hundreds of bridges in Virginia are also structurally deficient and in need of repair. Our infrastructure is literally crumbling at the same time that our nation's military budget gets higher and higher every year. We're pumping billions into upgrading our nuclear weapons arsenal and maintaining 750+ military bases abroad — and the Pentagon can't even pass an audit to account for where all its money is going. It's time to cut the bloat and put our tax dollars where they're really needed.

"Move the Money" is a national movement that calls on the government to redirect military spending towards vital human and environmental needs. Instead of the \$2.3 trillion spent on the failed war in Afghanistan, imagine if that money had been spent on Americans' real needs, such as infrastructure, jobs, universal Pre-K, canceling student debt, and so much more. For

example, \$2.3 trillion would have paid 28 million elementary school teachers for one year, or created 31 million clean energy jobs for one year, or provided 3.6 billion households with solar power for a year. The trade-offs are enormous.

The Move the Money movement starts in our cities, where dozens of municipalities across the country — including Charlottesville right here in Virginia — have already successfully passed resolutions calling for cuts to the Pentagon budget.

Americans are supposed to be directly represented in Congress. Our local and state governments are also supposed to represent us to Congress. Most city council members in the United States take an oath of office promising to support the U.S. Constitution. Representing their constituents to higher levels of government, through municipal resolutions like the Move the Money campaign, is part of how they can do that.

In fact, the Move the Money movement builds on our country's rich tradition of municipal action on national and international issues. For example, as early as 1798, the Virginia State Legislature passed a resolution using the words of Thomas Jefferson condemning federal policies penalizing France. A more recent example, the anti-apartheid movement illustrated the power that cities and states can hold over national and world policy. Nearly 100 U.S. cities and 14 U.S. states divested from South Africa, putting the pressure on Congress to pass the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986.

Stocks in Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon, and other top arms



makers are currently soaring due to the unfolding Ukraine crisis and the U.S.' infusion of military armaments. This war is just the kind of leverage that weapons corporations need to justify continued lobbying for bigger defense budgets and corporate subsidies, year after year. But sending weapons into an active war zone will only further fan the flames of war, something we have witnessed on repeat throughout the 20-year 'War on Terror.'

At the same time, our government must urgently reorient its own spending priorities to address Americans' growing needs: skyrocketing hunger, homelessness, unemployment, student debt, and more. And contrary to popular opinion, studies show that investments in healthcare, education, and clean energy would create more jobs than military sector spending.

It's time to move the money.

Greta Zarro is World BEYOND War's Organizing Director and an organizer for the Divest Richmond from the War Machine Coalition.

Would you really like to help? Then join the DEFENDERS SUPPORTER PROGRAM!

The Defenders Supporter Program is for friends who want to support our work on an ongoing basis. Members make a monthly pledge - as little as \$1 - or as much as you can afford. We're all volunteers, so your donation goes directly into the organizing.

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- Log onto DefendersFJE.blogspot.com
- Click the "Donate" button on the right side of the home page
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- In the box "Use this donation for" choose "General Support"
- Then check the box marked "Make this a monthly donation"

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international & antiwar news

Israeli forces carry out brutal assault on al-Aqsa mosque

By Sanaz Ghodsi

On April 15, Israel carried out a violent assault on Palestinians congregating at the al-Aqsa masjid in East Jerusalem, the third holiest site for followers of Islam. It was a Friday, the Muslim day of worship, in the holy month of Ramadan.

In a deliberate attempt to provoke Palestinians, extremist Israeli settlers had planned to carry out a sacrificial ritual in the mosque compound that day, which was the first day of Passover. Heeding calls by religious leaders to defend al-Aqsa, hundreds of Palestinians gathered at the mosque and its courtyard to perform evening prayers to demonstrate their opposition to settler violence at their holy site.

Israeli occupation forces responded by storming the masjid and shattering the windows of the 1,000-year-old masjid to target worshippers inside with rubber bullets, teargas grenades, sound grenades and live ammunition.

Elders and children were beaten in the mosque courtyard by the Israeli forces. According to Mohammed el-Kurd, a Jerusalem-based correspondent for The Nation magazine, the occupation forces prevented ambulances from reaching the injured.

More than 400 Palestinians were arrested. These raids were coordinated by settlers with the protection of occupation forces in order to clear the al-Aqsa compound of any Palestinian presence and leave the masjid undefended.

Israel has occupied East Jerusalem since the 1967 war. In 1980, the entire city was annexed, in violation of international law. The assaults on al-Aqsa serve as a form of population transfer whereby native Palestinians are depopulated from the area in order to secure a Jewish majority.

On April 17, busloads of settlers wearing sacrificial garb arrived at the compound. More than 500 Israeli soldiers stormed the compound to clear the grounds for the settlers, who announced plans to continue the raids every day for the following week.

The settlers filmed themselves chanting "nakba" and "Abu Khdeir," referencing the mass displacement of over 700,000 Palestinians in 1948 and 16-year-old Mohammed Abu Khdeir, whom settlers abducted and burned to death in 2014. The occupation forces threatened that anyone who recorded evidence of the assault would be arrested.

More casualties are expected as settlers continue to storm the al-Aqsa compound. The Palestinian uprising in May 2021 began in response to evictions of Palestinians in Occupied East Jerusalem, most notably in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. A defensive military operation was carried out by resistance factions in Gaza in response to the brutalization of Palestinians who had gathered at al-Aqsa to com-



Norfolk protest says: "NO to NATO!" - Antiwar activists hold a protest outside NATO Command in Norfolk to demand: "No to War with Russia! No to Sanctions! No to NATO! No to the Wars at Home & Abroad!" The response by passing motorists, most of whom were active-duty sailors, was mixed, but generally either neutral or supportive. The action, held March 13, was co-sponsored by the Hampton Roads Coalition for Peace and Planet and the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality. Members of Norfolk Catholic Worker also participated. The Norfolk groups have been holding regular protests at the site since the beginning of the war in Ukraine.

Statement on the Present Crisis in Ukraine

Issued jointly by

VIRGINIA DEFENDERS FOR FREEDOM, JUSTICE & EQUALITY

ODESSA SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN

THE FIRE THIS TIME MOVEMENT FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

February 28, 2022

As this statement is being written, Russia has attacked Ukraine, bombing military installations, airports and other targets. There have been casualties, both dead and wounded.

Russia says it is carrying out these actions because Western political leaders have dismissed out of hand what it considers its legitimate security concerns. As for the U.S. and Canadian public, we're just supposed to go along with the official Washington and Ottawa line or else risk being labeled Russian dupes. As a result, we forget about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (2003), the Gulf of Tonkin "incident"

in Vietnam (1964), nonexistent threats to U.S. medical students in Grenada (1983) and dozens of other excuses for U.S. wars that later turned out to be lies.

Since 2016, the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality, the Odessa Solidarity Campaign and The Fire This Time Movement for Social Justice have been supporting the anti-fascist people of Odessa, Ukraine. We know that it's impossible to understand the present crisis without first examining the events and processes that led up to it, especially the steady eastward expansion of NATO to the very borders of Russia and the violent, right-wing Ukrainian coup of February 2014.

memorate International al-Quds (Jerusalem) Day and protest the violent dispossession of Palestinians in East Jerusalem.

In the event that Palestinian resistance forces carry out another defensive military operation in response to this new Israeli violence, it will be crucial for people in the West to understand that the oppressed indigenous people of Palestine have the right to defend themselves and the sanctity of their sacred grounds, by any means necessary.

NATO's existential threat to Russia

The 30-member North Atlantic Treaty Organization was founded in 1949 as a military alliance directed at the Soviet Union, which had been an ally in World War II but was now viewed as a mortal enemy. NATO started with 12 members: the United States, Canada and 10 countries in Western Europe. The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, but instead of disbanding, NATO expanded - eastward, toward Russia. Since then, all new NATO members have been former Soviet republics or parts of the former socialist Yugoslavia.

Today, two of the six countries actually bordering Russia's western flank - Latvia and Estonia - are members of NATO. Ukraine, with its 1,200-mile land border with Russia, has declared its intention to join, and NATO says it wants it as a member. Meanwhile, Ukraine operates as a member in all but name. The U.S. trains its military and, with the United Kingdom, supplies its military. Every year, NATO members conduct massive joint air, land and sea exercises with the Ukrainian military, including in the Black Sea, which Ukraine shares with Russia.

And here it's worth noting that, while Russia has nuclear parity with the West, its annual military budget is just 11 percent of that of the United States and just 8 percent of that of all 30 NATO countries combined.

Back in October of 1962, the U.S. almost went to war with the Soviet Union over the placement of nuclear-armed missiles in Cuba. How would Washington react today if Russia had built a military alliance of South and Central American and Caribbean countries and was now recruiting Mexico, while carrying out joint military exercises on the Texas border and in the Gulf of Mexico? Just to ask the question is to answer it, so it should be no great surprise that Russia would view Ukraine joining NATO as completely unacceptable - as an existential threat.

The 2014 coup

Virtually all Western media say the present crisis began in 2014 with a Russian invasion of Crimea and support for

See **UKRAINE** on Page 9

May 2: International Day of Solidarity with the anti-fascist people of Ukraine

On May 2 we remember the Odessa Massacre, when 42 opponents of the U.S.-backed right-wing coup of February 2014 were murdered by a mob led by openly fascist organizations in Odessa, Ukraine. For details of this year's events, visit: odessasolidaritycampaign.org.

April is National Lead Awareness Month



Support Lead Poisoned Children - Donate to www.upal.org

United Parents Against Lead & Other Environmental Hazards

Despite widespread recognition of the negative impacts of lead in water and the fact that many countries have taken action, health professionals and public health authorities around the world remain concerned about lead exposure, especially in children.

UPAL has advocated for a lead-safe world since 1996. Join us this year by donating to UPAL at www.upal.org. Contact us at 804.308.1518.

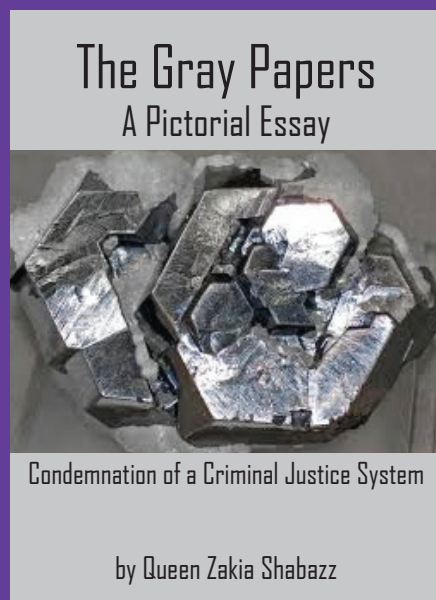
A CHILD IS A TERRIBLE THING TO WASTE!

Lead is considered the number one health threat to children and the effects of lead poisoning persist a lifetime. While lead in paint remains a problem not enough attention has been given to the health effects of lead in drinking water. United Parents Against Lead & Other Environmental Hazards (UPAL) instituted an annual call to action that brings together people, organizations, businesses, federal, state and municipal governments to raise awareness of the urgent need for full lead service line replacement in efforts to prevent lead poisoning.

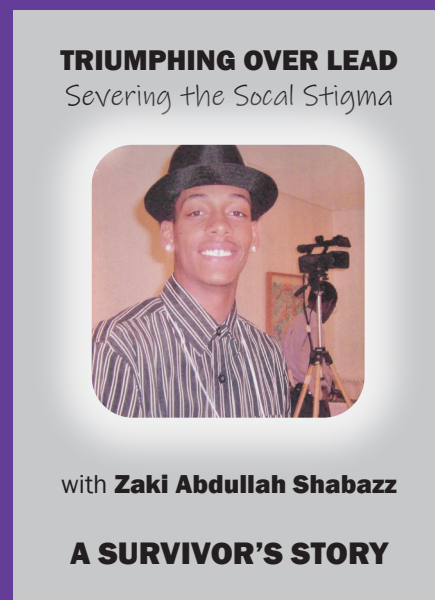
Founded by Parents of Lead Poisoned Children, UPAL is committed to protecting the basic rights of all children to live in a safe and healthy environment. We share a common experience and love for children, and we know firsthand the consequences of lead poisoning and the irreversible harm and suffering caused by this preventable disease. Parents' voices must be heard and their views and lived experiences taken into account in national health discussions grounded in the fact that the health and safety of children are ultimately everyone's responsibility.

Lead Awareness Month aims to raise awareness of the health effects of lead exposure, highlight initiatives by governments and partners to reduce lead exposure in children and accelerate efforts to phase out lead in paint and ramp up the replacements of lead service lines in Virginia and across the U.S. According to the American Water Works Association, there are an estimated 97,000 lead service lines in Virginia. UPAL is working with local and national partners to develop a statewide inventory by increasing awareness and gathering data that will create a mandate on replacement practices.

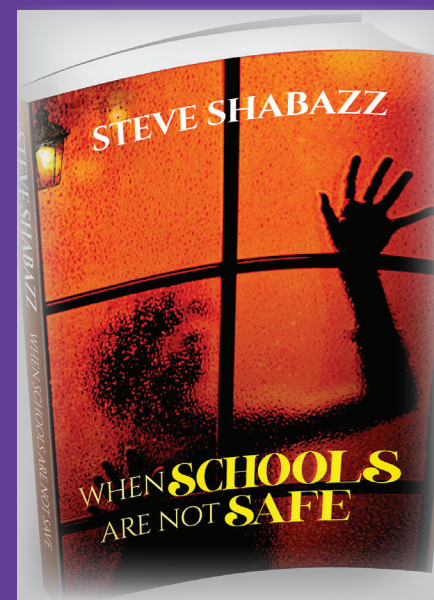
Soon to Be Released Publications of United Parents Against Lead!



What do Sergio Gray and Freddie Gray have in common? A Commentary on Racial and Environmental Justice.



Lead Poisoned Children become Lead Poisoned Adults.



What Happens to Trauma When Memories Can't be Suppressed?

END MASS INCARCERATION!



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