

In the
Spirit of
Gabriel, Nan,
Nat Turner,
John Brown,
Mary Bowser,
Elizabeth
Van Lew &
John Mitchell Jr.

The Richmond DEFENDER

FREE

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Nat'l anti-war forces unite to demand ...

'NO WAR ON IRAN!'

Special to the Defender

Representatives from a broad range of national and regional anti-war coalitions and local organizations have issued a strong condemnation of any military attack, sanctions or internal interference in Iran.

In addition, several organizations are calling for intensifying protests to press the issue.

Responding to a call by the newly formed National Assembly to End the Iraq War and Occupation, more than 400 anti-war activists gathered June 28 and 29 in Cleveland, Ohio.

The stated goal of the conference was to mobilize the anti-war movement for one day of mass protests next spring with the single demand of an immediate withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Iraq.

But the conference also adopted a resolution opposing any military attack on Iran after representatives of the Campaign Against Sanctions & Military Intervention in Iran (CASMI) and the Richmond-based Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality led an effort to broaden the new network's mission.

Both groups are affiliates of the Virginia Anti War Network (VAWN), which endorsed the effort to raise the issue of Iran at the conference.

Although some 70 percent of the U.S. public now favors withdrawal from Iraq, there has been no national anti-war conference or mobilization in the U.S. this year, in part because activists and other people of conscience are distracted by the November presidential elections.

In this context, it was significant not only that the Cleveland conference took place, but that it included among its speakers leaders of most of the

major anti-war coalitions, which in the past have not always worked together. These included Act Now to Stop War & End Racism (A.N.S.W.E.R.), Troops Out Now Coalition (TONC), United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) and U.S. Labor Against the War (USLAW). Dozens of statewide and local networks were also represented.

Rostam Pourzal, U.S. president of CASMI, and Phil Wilayto, editor of The Richmond Defender and organizer of the 2007 People's Peace Delegation to Iran, held a workshop on Saturday, June 28, to draw attention to the increasing threats against Iran.

They also drafted a resolution calling on the National Assembly to declare its unequivocal opposition to:

(1) any military attack on Iran, by the U.S., Israel, or any other country acting at the behest of the U.S.;

(2) the imposition or continuation of sanctions, whether economic or military, against Iran; and

(3) any attempt by the U.S. government or any of its agencies to interfere with or influence the internal political process in Iran.

Addressing more than 30 workshop participants, Pourzal answered the main U.S. lies – that Iran is attempting to develop nuclear weapons, that it is a military threat to the United States and Israel, that it sponsors terrorism and that it is a source of instability in Iraq.

Wilayto discussed how activists can more forcefully raise the issue of an attack on Iran in their ongoing work.

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Defenders endorse call for Aug. 2 protests against attack on Iran.
See page 5



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Members and supporters of the Defenders' Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project appeal to passing motorists to help save Richmond's "Burial Ground for Negroes." The June 14 vigil was one of many being held at the Gabriel Marker on East Broad Street overlooking the VCU parking lot that now covers the Burial Ground.

Struggle heats up to reclaim Richmond's African Burial Ground

By Ana Edwards

It was a chance encounter that just may have saved Richmond's oldest Black cemetery.

Richmonders Shanna Merola and Kenneth Yates were downtown this past May, visiting the parking lot that covers Richmond's "Burial Ground for Negroes." The 1.6-acre site lies just north of East Broad Street, between the entrance to I-95 and the CSX railroad tracks.

See BURIAL on PAGE 7

HUD vouchers fail Dove Court tenants - next up: Gilpin

By Phil Wilayto

So much for housing vouchers.

The Richmond Redevelopment & Housing Authority, or RRHA, was hoping that its renovation of the Dove Court public housing community would be a model for future renovations. The 59 units in the Highland Park complex are to be replaced with 64 townhouses that would then become the core of a new "mixed-income" community.

You know, break up the "concentrations of poverty" and spread them out among middle-class homeowners.

It's so much easier than actually addressing the issue of poverty itself.

If it works, RRHA could move on to redeveloping other communities, starting

with Gilpin Court, the 783-unit complex that sits on what has become prime real estate, just north of rapidly gentrifying Jackson Ward.

The problem is – as housing advocates across the city have pointed out – there's not enough low-income housing in the city to move people into before their public housing homes are torn down.

Not even with vouchers.

Case in point: as of late May, almost two dozen Dove Court families were still struggling with finding landlords willing to accept their Section 8 housing vouchers.

One of those was Mitzi Styles, president of the court's tenants' council.

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Immigration raids spread fear & fightback throughout Virginia

By Phil Wilayto

May 7 started out as just another workday at the new Federal Courthouse under construction at 7th and Broad streets in downtown Richmond.

"We were just standing there working," a construction worker across the street at the Performing Arts Center told Channel 12 News. "Next thing you know, one guy just yelled 'police!'"

That's when federal agents from the Department of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) jumped out of vans and surrounded the seven-story courthouse, grabbing anyone who ran.

Meanwhile, State Police officers were on the streets keeping traffic moving in

the area of the building. Richmond police officers were not involved in the raid.

Thirty-three workers were arrested: 29 men and four women. They were from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua – all countries that have seen poverty rates skyrocket in the current global economic slowdown.

Richmond's Channel 8 reported that the arrested workers were held in the new courthouse's own recently completed detention cells.

Immigrant rights workers in the area associated with the Virginia Immigrant People's Coalition (VIPC) immediately went to work, trying to contact the

See RAIDS on PAGE 4

"If a race has no history, if it has no worthwhile tradition, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world, and it stands in danger of being exterminated." — Dr. Carter G. Woodson, 1933, "The Mis-Education of the Negro"

THE DEFENDERS for Freedom, Justice & Equality

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

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

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

We now have a bimonthly newspaper, a weekly radio program and a Web site. Our members meet twice a month to discuss issues and plan actions. We are affiliated with Blacks United for Action, the Virginia Immigrant Peoples Coalition and the Virginia Anti-War Network.

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 community.

WHAT WE BELIEVE:

We believe in Freedom.

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

We believe in Justice.

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

We believe in Equality.

We live in the richest country in the world. But it's a country that owes its tremendous wealth to the barbaric oppression of Black labor on a historic scale, as well as the theft of American Indian and Mexican lands, the cruel exploitation of Asian labor and the labor of waves of poor European immigrants. This country does not belong to the wealthy few who have claimed it for their own. As human beings, we all have an equal right to its resources. As descendants of those whose blood, sweat and tears paid cruelly for its development, we have a right to collective reparations. And as people who struggle every day with ongoing inequality, we have the right to affirmative action.

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

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

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

regional & national news

National conference takes stock of Black Left

By Ana Edwards

Not too many years ago, leftist forces played a leading role in the Black Liberation Movement. Organizations on the front lines of heroic struggles, such as the Black Panther Party and the Detroit Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM), promoted an anti-capitalist, pro-socialist view in their communities.

In an attempt to revive that tradition in a way that's relevant to today's struggles, more than 80 people came together for the "2008 National Gathering of the Black Left: Black Left Unity Conference," held May 30 through June 1 at the Sonja Haynes Stone Black Culture and History Center on the University of North Carolina campus in Chapel Hill.

The goal was to develop a process for activating united responses to issues and crises affecting the national Black community.

The key points of discussion at the conference were 1) making the Gulf Coast a key battleground for the Black liberation movement; 2) building a national Black united front; 3) developing a "We Charge Genocide" campaign; and 4) evaluating the priorities of the Black Left in the current electoral period.

Conference endorsers and planners cited the Gulf Coast disaster, the police murder of Sean Bell in New York City and the Jena 6 crisis in Louisiana as examples of a recent intensification of the national oppression of Black people,

and of the need for national Black Left forces to help provide political direction to the many formations that could respond most strategically and effectively to these and other attacks. In particular, participants said, the failure of contemporary Black liberation formations to effectively defend the victims of the Gulf Coast disaster demonstrated the need to reassess the overall state of the struggle for black liberation.

Growing support by the Black masses for the possible presidency of Barack Obama also means that organized analysis and response to his campaign and policy platforms are critical to ensure that the needs of the Black, working poor and otherwise politically and economically vulnerable people of this country become a part of the public debate.

In other words, building Black Left Unity is an essential part of the struggle to achieve and maintain African-American self-determination.

From this conference emerged a structure based upon regional representative groups to act as the conduits for information between local communities and a national "continuations committee." Within three months of the conference, local report-back meetings are to be convened to share the goals of the conference and get feedback for moving the Black Left Unity process forward.

To learn more about the Black Left Unity conference, please visit www.WeChargeGenocide.org.

Organizations participating in the conference:

African American Institute for Public Policy, Alternate Roots, AYINET-USA, Black Radical Congress, Black Workers for Justice, Black Workers League, Boston Rosa Parks Human Rights Coalition, Critical Resistance, Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality, Fight Imperialism Stand Together (FIST), Freedom Road Socialist Organization, Fruit of Labor, Grupo Afro Descendiente, International Longshore Workers Union Local 10, Junebug Productions, KUUMBARreport Newsletter of Harambee Radio Online, Labor Community Strategy Center, Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, Miami Workers Center, Million Worker March Movement, Mississippi Workers Center for Human Rights, National Reparations Congress, National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA), North Carolina Public Service Workers Union - UE 150, Peoples Organization for Progress, Philadelphia Black Political Party, Reconstruction Party Organizing Committee, Rosa Parks Student Association, Sarah Lawrence College Katrina Solidarity Club, Southern Anti-Racist Network, Troops Out Now Coalition, Unity & Struggle, US Human Rights Network and Workers World Party.



Photo by Barry Carter

Participants in the Southern Route of the Longest Walk 2 cross into Virginia from North Carolina.

Native walkers declare: "All Life is Sacred, Save Mother Earth"

They left San Francisco on Feb. 11. They plan to arrive in Washington, D.C., on July 11.

They are Native Americans and supporters re-enacting a historic spiritual cross-country walk conducted in 1978.

The goal of the "Longest Walk 2" is to awaken other Native Americans and the general public to the ills facing Native Americans today, the threats to the environment and to inspire people to work for "peace, for justice, for healing of Mother Earth, for the healing of our people"

The Walk's Southern Route, which passes through Virginia, is being led by American Indian Movement (AIM) co-founder Dennis J. Banks, elders and some of the original 1978 Walkers.

Once in D.C., participants will hold a series of events, including a pipe ceremony, presentation of a Manifesto to Congressman John Conyers, a water ceremony by the Reflecting Pool and a Pow Wow and concert.

For more information, photos and video clips about the Walk, visit: www.longestwalk.org.

Faith Conversations

URGENT *State of Emergency!!!!*

Communities and Families are in Crisis!

Where is the Faith Community?

Please Join the Faith Community in

"Reaching Common Ground"

on Building Better Communities,
Strengthening Families and Saving Our Youth



Tuesday, July 29, 2008 from 9:30 am - 1:30 pm
at the Baptist General Convention, 1214 W. Graham St.

Guest Speaker

Dr. John W. Kinney

Dean of the School of Theology of Virginia Union University

Fellowship and Continental Breakfast begins at 9:30 a.m.

The Forum begins at 10:00 a.m.

Registration is free, but required to ensure
adequate lunch for all participants. Call (804) 231-3338
or e-mail mariefcenterprise@verizon.net.

Marie F. Coone
mariefcenterprise@verizon.net
(804) 231-3338

Questions?

theactivehandministry@tahm.org
(804) 222-6264

This program is supported by a grant from the Richmond Behavioral Health Authority
Prevention Services and the Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation &
Substance Abuse.

If you were homeless how would you ...
make your morning tea?
pick up your mail?
cut down on your electric bill?
reduce waste?
tuck in the kids?
find your quiet place?

On July 24, 2008 Homeward will conduct the second annual summer census of the people in our community living while homeless.

By partnering with individuals to conduct surveys and becoming part of outreach teams you can help Homeward gather the data that is used to prevent and end homelessness in the greater Richmond region.

Visit www.homewardva.org or call (804) 343-2045 to learn how you can become a Summer Point-in-Time Count Volunteer.

You make our census count.



Working to Prevent and End Homelessness

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NEWS U CAN USE

Free summer meals

Did you know that children between the ages of one and 18 can receive free meals during the summer months? From June 16 through Aug. 29, the Richmond Department of Parks & Rec serves breakfast, lunch and dinner to children at more than 120 locations through its participation in the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Summer Meals for Kids Program. No registration is required, and all meals are free. For a location near you, call (804) 646-5752.

Food-buying co-op accepting members

The Earthlings Co-op is a Richmond club that collectively purchases organic and natural food products with an eye to buying healthy foods at reasonable prices. The co-op is now accepting new members. For information, log onto <http://earthlingsco-op.info>.

Financial workshops

The Virginia Society of CPAs will present two free financial workshops this summer for the general public. "Exercise Your Financial Future" (11 a.m. - 1:30 p.m., Thursday, July 17) will explore budgeting, saving, insurance strategies, retirement planning, money management, financial planning and more. "Buy Smart, Borrow Smart" (11 a.m. - 1:30 p.m., Thursday, Aug. 14) will address topics such as renting versus buying, mortgage basics, choosing the right home, tax implications, home equity and rental and vacation property. Both workshops will be held at the Richmond CPA Center, 4309 Cox Road in Glen Allen. Complimentary lunch. Free, but register online at www.FinancialFitness.org or call (800) 341-8189.

Another chance to review City's Draft Master Plan

On Monday, July 7, the public will get another chance to review changes in Richmond's Draft Master Plan, which covers proposed changes to the city's downtown area. A public hearing is scheduled for 6:30 p.m., 5th floor conference room, Richmond City Hall, 900 East Broad St. A copy of the revised plan is available online at www.richmondgov.com/departments/communityDev/DownTownMasterPlan.aspx, and at the city's public libraries. For more information, contact Brooke Hardin, City of Richmond. Call (804) 646-6310 or e-mail Brooke.Hardin@richmondgov.com.

Beating the summer heat

Richmond's hot and humid summers can be brutal. You can protect yourself by drinking lots of water and avoiding prolonged exposure to the heat. The elderly with heat-related issues can contact the city's Adult Protective Service Unit at (804) 646-7367. For information regarding cooling services, contact the Department of Social Services Fuel Assistance Office at (804) 646-7046. In the event of a heat-related emergency, call 911.

Tenant-landlord issues?

Counselors at the Virginia Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services answer questions about landlord-tenant problems and other consumer issues through the Consumer Protection Hotline: (804) 786-2042 in Richmond and (800) 552-9963 in the rest of Virginia. For information about the rights and responsibilities of both tenants and landlords, go to the Department of Housing & Community Development's Web site (dhcd.virginia.gov) for a handbook with information about the Virginia Residential Landlord & Tenant Act. For information about your own case, call the Consumer Protection Hotline or the Virginia Lawyer Referral Service at (804) 775-0808.

'Medical Respite' open

The Daily Planet Medical Respite is a 20-bed center designed to provide convalescent care for up to 30 days for individuals who have been discharged from hospitals but lack appropriate living arrangements to support their recuperation. Open since July 1, the center provides a much-needed service to men and women experiencing a health crisis while homeless. For information contact, call (804) 329-1751.

community news



Photos by Phil Wilayto

Richmond's mayoral candidates, from left: Paul Goldman, Robert J. Grey Jr., Dwight C. Jones, William J. Pantele and Lawrence E. Williams Sr.

Jones, Pantele endorse '1-1 replacement' at mayoral candidates' forum

It was the first joint public appearance by all five candidates for the office of Richmond's mayor — and they got an earful.

More than 100 people attended a "Listening Forum" held June 19 at Plant Zero in Manchester. Co-sponsored by the Richmond Crusade for Voters and the Coalition for a Greater Richmond, the event's format allowed the audience to ask questions and make comments concerning the issues they felt were most pressing for the city.

Many of the issues were important, if

expected: the quality of schools and bus service, affordable housing, public safety and problems associated with the city's new form of government in which the mayor is elected in an at-large contest.

Comments by the candidates were mostly of a general character, although former mayoral aide Paul Goldman upheld his reputation as an "idea man" by daring to actually offer specific proposals.

On the other hand, Delegate Dwight Jones and City Council President William

Pantele were the only candidates to directly answer a question posed by the editor of The Richmond Defender: Where do you stand on the demand for one-to-one replacement of existing public housing?

Both candidates endorsed the concept.

Future Crusade candidate forums are scheduled for June 15, for Richmond School Board candidates, and Aug. 19, for City Council candidates. A second mayoral forum is planned for September. The Crusade is to make its political endorsements on Sept. 16.

'Tambour de Guine' & Elegba in concert at Dogwood Dell

Want to jump up and clap your hands? Want to celebrate heritage and life itself with traditional drummers, dancers and singers?

Then be sure to be at Richmond's Dogwood Dell amphitheater on Thursday, July 10, when the Elegba Folklore Society presents a special concert titled "African Dance, Music & the Oral Tradition."

The free concert will feature dance, music and folklore of the Manding cosmology of West Africa, with choreography by Mohamed Dacosta and Kadiatou Conte of Guinea and Elegba's own artistic director, Janine Yvette Bell.

A centerpiece of the program will be the premiere of Ms. Conte's "Tambour de Guine." Hear stories and folktales, enjoy the dancing and listen as the "Manding Diali" or griot, plays his 12-string kora, a harp-like instrument made from a cut gourd partially covered with cow skin.

"No matter your age or your background, the spirit and openness of the Elegba Folklore Society will enchant you, says Ms. Bell. "In a way that perhaps you will expect or in a way that is totally spontaneous, your energy will blend beautifully with ours, closing the gap between performer and audience."

The concert, part of Richmond's Festival of the Arts, is scheduled to begin at 8:30 p.m. The Dogwood Dell amphitheater is located in Richmond's Byrd Park, at the south end of the Boulevard.

For more information, call the Elegba Folklore Society at (804) 644-3900 or visit www.efsinc.org.

RRHA (Continued from page 1)

"I'm not happy about the situation," Styles told the city's daily newspaper, "and a lot of my people in the community are not happy about the situation. We're moving by force, not by choice."

The tenants have until July 24 to leave their homes so the buildings can be torn down.

RRHA officials say that, if it comes to it, the authority would temporarily move the tenants into other public housing, then move them again to permanent homes once they find someone willing to accept their vouchers.

Styles said she's not leaving Dove Court for another RRHA complex.

The Dove Court residents may have found housing by now, but the difficulties they had don't bode well for the hundreds of families in Gilpin Court.

That's why the demand of "one-to-one



Dr. John W. Kinney

Dr. Kinney to ask, 'Where is the faith community?'

Noted inspirational speaker Dr. John W. Kinney, Dean of Virginia Union University's Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology, is scheduled to address a July 29 forum in Richmond called "Faith Conversations."

The four-hour event, which will include a panel discussion and "open dialog," is designed to further involve leaders of the faith community in addressing the many pressing issues facing Richmond-area residents

The forum is scheduled to start at 9:30 a.m. at the offices of the Baptist General Convention of Virginia, 1214 West Graham Road in Richmond. It is one in a series of events called "Reaching Common Ground," which aims to "identify and solve problems and enhance service delivery intended to bring positive changes to the City."

Previous forums have dealt with issues such as parenting and financial fitness.

The series is funded by grants from the Richmond Behavioral Health Authority and Friends of Prevention Coalition, with support from local nonprofits and religious organizations.

Attendance is free, but participants are urged to register by July 15.

For more information, contact forum convener Marie F. Coone at (804) 231-3338 or the Rev. Junius Gash at (804) 222-6264.

replacement" is the only sane basis for any renovation of public housing in Richmond.

Before you tear down one low-rent housing unit, you have to build or find one to replace it.

Otherwise, all you're doing is evicting the poor.

UPAL offers classes at new Community Training Center

How to save someone suffering a sudden cardiac arrest. How to identify and deal with mold in your home. How to prepare for emergencies and organize a Family Survival Kit.

These are some of the topics that will be addressed at a series of classes offered by United Parents Against Lead National, Inc., the organization known for educating the public about and combating lead hazards.

The classes will take place at the newly opened UPAL / Community Training Center, located at 4809 Old Warwick Road in Richmond. (Zip code 23224.)

Sudden Cardiac Arrest, or SCA, is when the heart suddenly and unexpectedly stops beating. Blood stops flowing to the brain and other vital organs. If not treated within minutes, death usually results.

Each year, more than 200,000 people in this country die of SCA. Up to 50,000 of these deaths could have been prevented.

UPAL's one-day "Disaster Preparedness" class will cover Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), Automated External Defibrillator (AED) and first aid as they relate to SCA.

Successful participation in the class will result in a two-year certification.

This class is scheduled for 9 a.m. - 4 p.m., July 15. It is sponsored by the American Safety and Health Institute and is partially funded by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS).

UPAL is also offering a two-day class titled "Mold Remediation Training." Topics include learning what is mold; water damage and mold; health effects; site assessment and monitoring; proper PPE; APR and proper fit testing; remediation techniques; and hands-on activities.

This class is scheduled for 9 a.m. - 4 p.m., July 16 and 17. Training is presented by the International Chemical Workers Union Center (ICWU), in partnership with the Community Action and Response Against Toxics Team (CARAT), a special initiative of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU). It is partially funded by NIEHS.

To register for the classes, call Queen Zakia Shabazz at (804) 308-1518 or (804) 475-3198. Participants may also register on site on the day of the class, but space is limited so preregistration is encouraged.

Want to reach tens of thousands of Richmond voters at a fraction of the cost of the other publications? Then think about your ad appearing in 16,000 copies of THE RICHMOND DEFENDER! Full-page ads are only \$1,000. A 1/2 page, \$500. A 1/4 page, \$250. 1/8 of a page, just \$125. 1/16th? \$62.50. And a business card-sized ad is only \$35. For full color, add just 25%. Discounts are available for multiple ads. DON'T DELAY, CALL TODAY! (804) 644-5834

cops, courts & prisons

Virginia and Texas

When it comes to fairness in the criminal justice system, the state you don't want to be compared to is Texas.

But Virginia has now joined the home of George W. Bush as the only states to have carried out 100 executions since 1976, when the death penalty was reinstated by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Virginia reached that grisly milestone June 25 when Robert Stacy Yarbrough was put to death by lethal injection. The 30-year-old prisoner was executed at Greensville Correctional Center in Jarratt for the 1997 slaying of 77-year-old Cyril Hugh Hamby.

A moratorium had been imposed by Gov. Timothy Kaine while lawsuits challenging execution by lethal injection worked their way through the courts. Kaine says he personally believes the death penalty to be morally wrong, but nevertheless lifted the moratorium in April after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the method of lethal injection used in dozens of states is constitutional.

Virginia prisoner Kevin Green was executed in May. Percy Walton, convicted of three murders, was scheduled for execution June 10, but the governor commuted the sentence to life without parole, citing Walton's mental state. The decision also came after Kaine's office was deluged with objections from death penalty opponents.

Two other Virginia prisoners, Christopher Scott Emmett and Kent Jermaine Jackson, are scheduled to be executed in July.

Texas reinstated its own death penalty in 1976. Since then, it has put to death 406 people. Virginia resumed executions in 1982.

Police chief search team still searching

The Executive Search Committee Richmond Mayor L. Douglas Wilder announced on June 26 is still looking for a replacement for former Police Chief Rodney Monroe, who left the city earlier in June to take the Top Cop position in Charlotte, N.C.

Longtime leading Officer David McCoy is presently serving as Interim Chief.

These are the committee members chosen by the mayor:

Eva Teig Hardy — Executive Vice President for External Affairs and Corporate Communications at Dominion. (You know Dominion — its subsidiary Dominion Virginia Power is raising our electricity rates by 18 percent.) Previously served on Wilder's Human Services Committee. Secretary of Health and Human Services under Gov. Gerald L. Baliles.

Sharon Burton — Richmond school-teacher and community activist. Served on

the Wilder Transition Committee. Seventh District Representative on the Mayor's Neighborhood Roundtable, the parallel structure Wilder set up to try (in our opinion) to undermine City Council.

Michael T. Byrne — Owner of Richbrau Brewing Company, the Shockoe Bottom business that in November 2006 refused entry to a Sikh business executive because he refused to take off his turban, a religious requirement for men of his faith. Served on the Richmond Police Chief Search Committee in 2005 when Chief Monroe was chosen.

Mike Herring — Richmond Commonwealth's Attorney.

Jeff Neal - Northside business owner and a former president of the Brookland Park Area Civic Association.

Former Wachovia Bank President **James Cherry** will serve as a consultant to the Search Committee. Cherry, who now lives in North Carolina, chaired the 2005 committee.

Visiting Va. prisoners

Building state prisons in Buchanan and Wise counties in western Virginia brings jobs, tax money and even increased political representation to rural Republican areas.

It also means that many Richmond-area families can't afford to visit their loved ones.

That's why the prisoner advocacy group R.I.H.D.(Resource Information Help for the Disadvantaged) offers a nonprofit transportation service for families with friends and relatives incarcerated in faraway Virginia prisons.

The package deal includes round-trip transportation from Richmond to Keen Mountain, Red Onion and Wallens Ridge, plus a one-night hotel stay.

The next trip is scheduled for the weekend of July 19-20. Departure time is Friday at midnight, from Fairfield Commons Mall on Nine Mile Road. Pick-ups and drop-offs are available at no extra charge from Amtrak, Greyhound, Asian Bus and the Richmond International Airport.

The cost of transportation is \$85. (This is a slight increase, due to higher gas prices.) Hotel rates at Keen Mountain are \$50 for a single room (one queen-sized bed) or \$75 for double occupancy (two queen-sized beds). The Red Onion and Wallens Ridge rates are \$60 for a single and \$90 for double occupancy.

A \$50 nonrefundable deposit is required, with the balance to be paid by July 11.

R.I.H.D., founded and directed by Lillie Branch-Kennedy, meets on the third Wednesday of every month from 5 to 8 p.m. at Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church, 1720 Mechanicsville Turnpike in Richmond (zip code 23223).

For more information, call R.I.H.D. at (804) 562-2123 or log onto www.rihd.org.

immigration news: 'there are no borders in the workers' struggle'

RAIDS (Continued from page 1)

families of the arrested workers. They quickly learned that some of the workers had been taken to jails in Virginia Beach, far from their families. In some cases, they were able to locate the workers and arrange for legal representation. They also began raising donations of food, diapers and baby formula to assist the families who were now without their primary breadwinner.

There was also a political response. Members of VIPC, other area human rights groups and family members of some of those arrested quickly called a meeting to organize a protest, which took place just two days after the raid outside the new federal courthouse. More than 40 people took part, including members of the VIPC, Richmond Students for a Democratic Society, Virginia Anarchist Federation, People United and the Defenders.

Among the speakers was Defender Ana Edwards, who compared the ICE raids to the slavery-era practice of deliberately breaking up Black families.

"This tactic of separating families is an old tactic," Edwards told the protesters. "They did it during slavery to make profit and to demoralize people. They did it to the Native Americans to assimilate people and take away their values. Here we are again in present times where the ICE raids repress workers and families."

The speakers at the protest were repeatedly interrupted by passing motorists who honked their horns while giving a thumbs-up sign. Nearly every passing city bus driver - almost all of whom were African-American, expressed their support in some way.

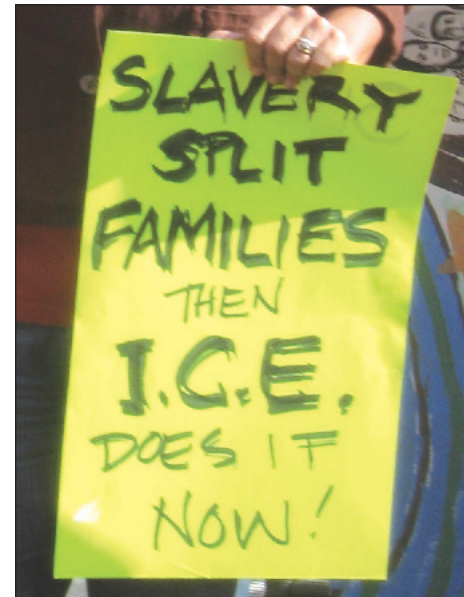


Photo by Phil Wilayto

A sign at the Richmond protest condemning the May 7 ICE raid in which 33 immigrant workers were arrested.

The contractor for the courthouse project is D.C.-based Tompkins Builders, Inc., which is owned by Turner Construction. Immediately after the raid, Turner issued a statement saying that those arrested were not employees of either Turner or Tompkins, but had been hired by subcontractors.

ICE apparently waited to carry out the raid until the courthouse was nearly finished. The \$104 million building is scheduled to open this summer.

As of Defender press time, it still is not known whether the families of those arrested ever received their relatives' last paycheck.

PW County residents air grievances

The past few months have seen federal raids on undocumented workers in Richmond, Leesburg, Harrisonburg and Amelia County, among other places. But the epicenter for the immigrant rights struggle in Virginia is still Prince William County.

In response, the county-based human rights group Mexicanos Sin Fronteras (Mexicans Without Borders) decided to raise the struggle to a new level. They planned a public hearing June 10 on immigrant grievances and invited a representative from the United Nations to come and listen.

Jorge Bustamante, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, agreed to attend. (A rapporteur is someone appointed by a deliberative body to investigate an issue.)

But at the last minute, word came from the UN representative that, due to "unforeseeable

circumstances," he would have to postpone his visit.

The organizers decided to go ahead with their plans and were able to arrange for a representative from the independent Mexican Human Rights Commission to hear the testimony, which they also planned to forward to Bustamante.

On the day of the hearing, hundreds of people crowded into the large hall. Dozens testified publicly about the abuses they had suffered or witnessed since the county passed a draconian anti-immigrant resolution in October.

Since the hearing, Mexicanos Sin Fronteras has been continuing the hard work of informing the immigrant community about their rights.

Donations to support the work of Mexicanos Sin Fronteras may be sent to the organization at PO Box K, Woodbridge, VA 22194.

For more information, visit MSF's Web site at www.mexicanossinfronteras.org.

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from the anti-war front

Bush speech disrupted at Monticello

Shouting "Impeach Bush" and "war criminal," anti-war protesters in Charlottesville, Va., repeatedly interrupted President George W. Bush as he welcomed new U.S. citizens at a July 4 Independence Day Celebration and Naturalization Ceremony. At least six activists were physically evicted from the ceremony by police as more than 100 other protesters held signs and banners along a nearby highway. No arrests were reported. Those opposed to the president noted the irony of Bush speaking at a ceremony where people swear allegiance to the Constitution, while at the same time he is severely limiting the very civil liberties guaranteed by that document. Even more ironic was the fact that the ceremony took place at Monticello, the former slave plantation mansion of President Thomas Jefferson, the man who wrote the Declaration of Independence while exploiting the free labor of captive Africans. The protest received international news coverage. Participating organizations included RVA4Peace, AfterDowningStreet.org, Augusta Coalition for Peace & Justice, Code Pink and members of MoveOn.org.



Defender editor interviewed by Press TV

Richmond Defender Editor Phil Wilayto was recently interviewed by Press TV, the Iranian English-language international television channel.

On July 2, Wilayto participated in a discussion on the channel's Four Corners program. The subject was the U.S. downing of Iran Airbus 655 on July 3, 1988. The U.S. government has never apologized for its killing of 290 civilians, a tragedy it called an accident. Speaking from Washington, D.C., Wilayto took the occasion to apologize on behalf of the people of the United States.

The following day, he was interviewed again, in Richmond, just before the Defenders' public meeting commemorating the airbus disaster.

The D.C. interview can be seen at: www.presstv.ir/Programs/player/Default.aspx?id=62403.

As of July 7, the Iraq War had cost Richmond taxpayers \$331.1 million, an amount that could have paid for 2,160 units of affordable housing. *

Was it worth it?

* www.costofwar.com



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Activists from a wide range of struggles participate in a group reading of a letter from Iranian Capt. Habib Ahmadzadeh to U.S. Capt. Will Rogers, commander of the ship that shot down Iran Airbus 655. The reading was broadcast internationally by the Iranian English-language television channel Press TV.

Activists commemorate 20th anniversary of U.S. downing of Iranian civilian airbus

July 3, 2008, was the 20th anniversary of the day a U.S. warship shot down an Iranian civilian airliner, killing all 290 passengers.

Iranians have never forgotten this disaster, but few in the United States remember it. That's probably why a modest program held in Richmond, Va., to commemorate the event attracted a film crew contracted by Press TV, the Iranian English-language international television channel.

The program, held by the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality at Asbury United Methodist Church, had two purposes: to commemorate the day the USS Vincennes cruiser shot down Iran Airbus 655 over the Persian Gulf, and also to rally the public to oppose any military attack against Iran.

A highlight of the evening was a group reading of a letter written by Iranian Capt. Habib Ahmadzadeh to U.S. Capt. Will Rogers, who commanded the Vincennes when it shot down the airbus. The letter, written on the 10th anniversary of the disaster, asks penetrating questions that probe the U.S. military mindset that led to the tragedy.

The letter was read in parts by 12 activists representing African-Americans, Iranian-Americans, labor unions, veterans, environmentalists and the anti-war movement.

Also on the program was a screening of the movie "Bam 6.6," which tells the story, through the eyes of two U.S. tourists, of the 2003 earthquake in the Iranian city of Bam.

Close to 50 people attended the program.

IRAN (Continued from page 1)

The next morning, after a floor debate, the conference participants overwhelmingly adopted the resolution on Iran. They also agreed to encourage their constituent groups and members "to incorporate these demands into any future protests."

It was also agreed that copies of the resolution on Iran be included with any press release about the results of the conference.

Two other resolutions were also adopted - over the objections of most of the conference organizers: that the network's name be broadened to the National Assembly to End the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Occupations, and that the struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination be a central focus of the network.

"Our motivation in attending the conference," Pourzal said, "was our concern that the Bush administration might misread the conference's focus on bringing troops back from Iraq as indifference in the anti-war movement regarding an attack on Iran."

President George W. Bush now has less than seven months before he leaves the White House, and he and Vice President Dick Cheney evidently feel the window of opportunity for an attack on Iran by the U.S. or Israel is closing.

"Some in the anti-war movement may feel that the threat of a new war is remote," Wilayto said. "But in the past, the month of August has presented an attractive time frame for the U.S. government to implement unpopular policies. Congress is not in session in August and students are dispersed,

as are many working people. The anti-war movement itself is in a less active mode in mid- to late summer, with many activists taking time off for needed rest. We believe that the possibility of an attack on Iran is credible and serious."

A post-conference report issued by Jerry Gordon, Marilyn Levin and Jeff Mackler, members of the Assembly's Administrative Committee, stated that 405 people had attended the two-day event. More than half came from the Midwest. Just over a third were from Ohio.

Speakers at the conference included Elliott Adams, President, Veterans for Peace; Riham Barghouti of Adalah-NY; the Coalition for Justice in The Middle East; Brian Becker, National Coordinator, A.N.S.W.E.R. Coalition; Leslie Cagan, National Coordinator, UFPJ; Colia Lafayette Clark, Richard Wright Centennial Committee; Donna Dewitt, President, South Carolina AFL-CIO; Jesse Diaz, Organizer, May 1, 2006, immigrant rights boycott; Jerry Gordon, Steering Committee, USLAW; Larry Holmes, Coordinator, TONC; Jonathon Hutto, Co-Founder, Appeal for Redress and author, "Anti-War Soldier."

Also, Marilyn Levin, Middle East Crisis Coalition; Jeff Mackler, Coordinating Committee, National Assembly to End the Iraq War and Occupation; Fred Mason, President, Maryland AFL-CIO and Co-Convenor, USLAW; Jorge Mujica, Chicago March 10 Coalition; Jeremy Scahill, author, "Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army;" Cindy Sheehan, Gold Star Families for Peace (by videotape);

L y n n e Stewart, attorney and 30-year veteran of civil liberties and civil rights defense work; and Clarence Thomas, Executive

Join the Defenders
AUG. 2
to demand:
'NO WAR ON IRAN!'

(Time & location to be announced.)

The Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality have endorsed a call for a **NATIONAL DAY OF PROTESTS ON AUG. 2** to oppose any war on Iran.

The call, by **StopWarOnIran.org**, states "The U.S. occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan is hated by the people there. These wars have no support at home and are ruining the domestic economy. Instead of pulling out, the Bush administration is preparing for still another war - this time against Iran. This must be stopped!"

The demands for the protests include "U.S. out Of Iraq, Money for human needs, not war!"

To date, this is the first attempt to coordinate a national day of protests against threats of a military attack against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

When the Aug. 2 date was announced at the Defenders' July 3 public program on Iran, 10 activists volunteered to help organize a protest in Virginia.

Any of our readers who would like to help distribute leaflets, send e-mails, make phone calls, help with banners and signmaking or volunteering for any of the many other tasks that go into building a protest are urged to **contact the Defenders at (804) 644-5834 or DefendersFJE@hotmail.**

Board Member, ILWU Local 10.

A Saturday night cultural performance was presented by progressive hip-hop artist Son of Nun.

While the speakers included many people of color, the participants themselves were overwhelmingly white.

Also, the one-person, one-vote rule followed in decision-making meant that one activist working alone would have as much voting power as a representative of a national organization, thus diluting the voice of the existing national coalitions.

For more information on Iran and the threat of war against Iran, visit CASMII's Web site at <http://www.campaigniran.org>.

SOUREH magazine of Iran covers 2007 People's Peace Delegation

Accounts of the 2007 People's Peace Delegation to Iran have been published in the current issue of Soureh, a well-established and influential Iranian magazine.

The reports, many taken from the pages of The Richmond Defender, are available in Farsi, the national language of Iran, on the magazine's Web site: www.ircap.com.

The English translations are at: www.ircap.com/magentry.asp?id=6894

In addition to other venues, the current issue is now available on all Iran Air flights.

The Peace Delegation was co-sponsored by The Richmond Defender and the Virginia Anti-War Network (VAWN). For more information on the delegation, visit VAWN's Web site at: www.vawn.org.

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In our opinion

Obama & the politics of change

It would be hard to overestimate the historical importance of Barack Obama's winning the Democratic Party nomination for president. After an unbroken succession of 43 white male presidents, we may see — this January — a Black person in the "White" House.

In a very real sense, this is a realization of one important aspect of the Civil Rights Movement — the basic democratic right to political representation at the highest levels of government. For that, we should all be celebrating.

Even so, The Richmond Defender will not be endorsing Barack Obama for president.

Yes, he's better than Republican presidential candidate John McCain.

We applaud Obama's stated willingness to sit down with the leaders of other countries and talk face-to-face.

We appreciate his lack of the swagger and imperial arrogance that has made George W. Bush such a hated figure both at home and around the world.

And yes, we too hope for real "change" in the country.

But we can't bring ourselves to endorse a candidate who, in the end, will also swear to defend the Empire. Or rather, defend the interests of those few wealthy and powerful (white) men who control the Empire.

Take Cuba — which these ruling-class figures would dearly like to do. Barack Obama, who is 46, says he has never known a day in which Cuba has had freedom.

Really?

What about the day the Cuban people, under the leadership of Che and Fidel, rose up and overthrew the hated, brutal, U.S.-backed regime of Fulgencio Batista? Wasn't that a day of freedom?

What about the day the Cuban Army and civilian militias repelled a CIA-backed invasion at the Bay of Pigs? No freedom there?

What about the thousands of Cuban soldiers, doctors, translators and support personnel who volunteered to go to Angola and help defend the revolutionary government there against the invading troops of apartheid South Africa?

"When Africa called, Cuba answered."

Were those the actions of people who live under a dictatorship?

Then there's Obama's pledge to, as president, immediately begin the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq — and redeploy them to Afghanistan.

No, Mr. Obama, the demand is for "No war in Iraq or Afghanistan — Bring the troops home NOW!"

And then there's the backpedaling on even that pledge. Now the promise is to "listen to the commanders on the ground."

But that's exactly what Bush says he is doing.

So where's the "change?"

Then there's the speech he gave before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, AIPAC, at its recent national convention in Washington, D.C. It basically came down to "Israel Yes, the rights of Palestinians No."

And when the Israeli military recently carried out belligerent war maneuvers and threatened to launch massive air attacks on Iran, Obama refused to criticize Israel or even urge restraint.

So much for the right to self-determination.

But, foreign policy aside, he's got to be better on domestic issues, doesn't he?

Well, if Barack Obama is for the working man and woman, why is it that his biggest single financial contributor is the Wall Street investment firm of Goldman Sachs? These folks are no friends of working people. What do they know that we don't?

Why has Obama picked as his top economic adviser Jason Furman, a supply-side proponent famous for declaring that it would be "damaging to working people" if Wal-Mart were to raise its wages and benefits?

Why, when questioned in a Fortune interview about his promise to renegotiate NAFTA to protect workers and the environment, did he answer, "Sometimes during campaigns the rhetoric gets overheated and amplified."

It's no secret the U.S. is heading into rough economic waters. The subprime mortgage crisis and related problems have expanded and expanded until they are threatening the very foundations of the economic system. The major banks are posting record losses. The dollar is still falling in the world currency markets. Auto plants are shutting down. Even Starbucks is closing 600 stores and laying off 12,000 workers.

Whoever is the next president will be ordered by the major financial institutions to enact a draconian cost-cutting regimen. There will be more cutbacks and layoffs and higher taxes and user fees for the working class and working poor. And as always, the blows will fall hardest on the most oppressed, including the Black community.

So if you were a rich person, who would you rather have carrying out these unpopular measures? A right-wing white guy like John McCain, or the country's first Black president?

Some have suggested that Obama may be getting set up to take the fall — turn the sinking ship over to a Black captain so he can take the blame for the coming disaster.

We don't think so.

We don't think the rich and powerful one percent of the population that really runs this country has any intention of seeing their system go down the tubes. They will fight for its survival with every ounce of strength they can muster.

In other words, they will be ruthless in trying to make the rest of us pay the cost of saving their system.

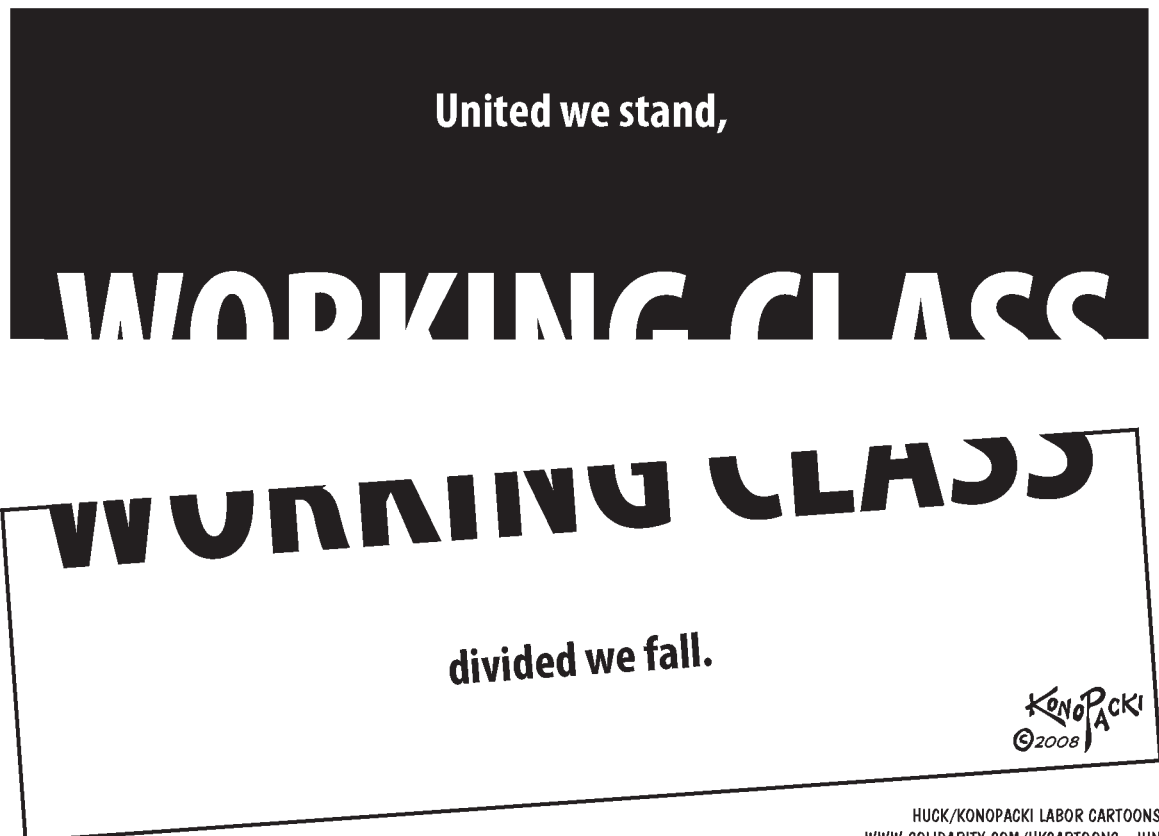
They just need someone in charge who might be able to blunt the anger a bit.

So yes, we too will cheer if the United States elects its first African-American chief executive.

But we won't have any illusions about what will follow.

And, more than ever, we will need an independent, determined, mass popular movement to defend the interests of the working class and oppressed peoples.

Then, we can hope for some real change.



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Letters to the Editor

Burial Ground No. 1

Just wanted to say that this tragedy you sent word about is much like one I have addressed in a novel set in Ireland, when in about 1890 the British paved over a sacred site on an island off the west coast of Ireland. They paved over horse hoofprints embedded in rock, believed to belong to the horse of a saint/monk. It's too disrespectful for words.

I wish you the best with this fight.

M. Sayres.
SPOKANE, WA

Burial Ground No. 2

[Editor's note: The following e-mail, sent to VCU President Eugene Trani and Slave Trail Commission Chair Delores McQuinn, is reprinted here with the permission of the author.]

Dear Mr. Eugene Trani and Ms. Delores McQuinn,

Coming from a still-colonized country — Curaçao, Caribbean territory occupied by Dutch colonialism and US imperialism — we live and experience every day what it means to exist but not to be, as slavery and colonialism made sure the Afrikans brought here during the Holocaust of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the worst crime humanity has known, would not remember their history, their culture, their languages, their spirituality, their traditions or their strength.

An oppressive education system and controlled media deny the right of knowing and the right to preserve to the children of these Afrikans. As an institute engaged in rebuilding self-worth and creating a society with justice and respect, we want to appeal to your sense of respect and ask you to do everything in your power to prevent the Burial Ground in Virginia, where our ancestors are, from turning into a parking lot, considering that when people lose that which is sacred to them, they lose themselves. It is in the interest of the whole community for the Afrikan people as well as others to know they are part of a society where the individual can feel protected and cared for. The Afrikan community in Virginia, like all other communities,

need their institutions, monuments and people to be complete. Please respect their right to do so.

We thank you in advance for defending the following principles with regards to the Burial Ground:

1. No reopening of the parking lot.
2. No "upgrading" of the parking lot.
3. No division of the site into a parking lot and a small memorial area.
4. Reclaim the entire site and — in consultation with Richmond's Black community — devise a plan to properly memorialize the Burial Ground.

With much respect,

Dr. Joceline Clemencia
Director
Instituto Kultural Independensha
(Cultural Institute Independence)
CURACAO, CARIBBEAN

Burial Ground No. 3

[Editor's note: The following e-mail, sent to VCU President Eugene Trani, is reprinted here with the permission of the author. Saladin Muhammad can be reached at PO Box 1863, Rocky Mount, NC 27802.]

Dear Mr. Trani,
As president of a university, a place of higher education, you of all people should be on the side of preserving historical landmarks, especially those

that remind the state of Virginia, the U.S. and the world of the crimes against humanity committed by the U.S. on the road to its development as a so-called democracy with institutionalized racism that continues partly because it refuses to acknowledge and deal with the truths of its history.

This plan to pave over the historical burial ground of African slaves and descendents is a continuing human rights violation, as it represents an attempt to destroy in whole or part the identity, culture and history of an oppressed people whose lives were taken, shortened, violated and denied human rights as a fundamental part of the historical development of the U.S.

I doubt that you would support the paving over of the burial ground in Arlington, Va., of those who fought and died in many of the unjust U.S. wars carried out to dominate other countries and governments throughout the world.

We call on you to stop this atrocity and to honor the dignity of those whose lives were taken against their will to build this country.

Stop the paving of the African Burial Ground.

Saladin Muhammad
Black Workers For Justice
ROCKY MOUNT, N.C.

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BURIAL (Continued from page 1)

Merola is a fine art photographer who had included photos of the parking lot in a collection of photographs displayed at the Valentine Richmond History Center, where she is a guest curator. The exhibit was of Black historical sites in Richmond that had been paved over or forgotten.

Yates is a sound experimenter with the Hz Collective.

When the two saw some people with clipboards walking around the area, they became curious and asked what was going on.

The people checking out the site said they were "planners" with Virginia Commonwealth University. They said they were surveying the site in preparation for VCU's "upgrading" of the parking lot.

The university's plans have been known for some time. Matthew Freeman, a member of the Gabriel House collective on the city's Northside, alerted the Defenders last year that information about the plans had been posted on VCU's Web site.

What wasn't known was that VCU had since repurchased the parking lot site (it owned it once before, but had sold it to a Cincinnati real estate outfit) and was planning to start the "upgrade" in June.

Alarmed, Merola and Yates called for a protest near the Burial Ground, under the Gabriel Marker on East Broad. (The Defenders led the effort in 2004 to erect the state highway marker near the Burial Ground, where the great slave rebellion leader Gabriel was executed on Oct. 10, 1800.)

The noontime protest, on Monday, June 2, was small, maybe a dozen people. Merola and Yates were joined by Matthew Freeman, Jackson Ward businessman Dawoud Shakur, members of the Defenders, the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project and a few others.

But the action was effective. It received broad media coverage, moving several public officials and representatives of nonprofit organizations to speak out against repaving the site. These included Dwight Jones, chair of the Virginia General Assembly Legislative Black Caucus; William Pantele, president of Richmond City Council; Delores McQuinn, Council Vice President and chair of the city's Slave Trail Commission; Robin Poulton, president of Virginia Friends of Mali; representatives of the preservationist group ACORN; and more.

Most of these made their statements opposing VCU's plans during a June 3 outdoor program marking the start of the second phase of archaeological work being conducted on the site of the former Lumpkin's Jail, an equally historically significant site a few blocks south of Broad Street not far from the Burial Ground.

Several of those speaking out against the "upgrading" plans called for a meeting with VCU President Eugene Trani in order to convey their concerns.

The following day, Delegate Jones, Councilwoman McQuinn and Council President Pantele met with VCU representatives and Kathleen Kilpatrick, director of the Virginia State Department of Historic Resources (DHR) to discuss the issue.

As a result of this meeting, VCU and the Slave Trail Commission on June 6 issued a joint statement agreeing that work on the parking lot would be "suspended" while an investigation is conducted to determine exactly where the

Burial Ground lies.

According to Councilwoman McQuinn, the first stage of this investigation will be to review the research conducted by local author and historian Elizabeth Cann Kambourian that confirms the existence of the Burial Ground.

Kambourian's work has been used many times before — often without credit — since she first presented it in the mid-'90s.

While researching a book she was writing, Kambourian came across an old city map drawn in 1780 and then revised in 1809 by the original cartographer, Richard Young.

There, on the site now occupied by the VCU parking lot, is a plot labeled "Burial Ground for Negroes." In the center of the site is a symbol for the city gallows.

Her research was accepted by the DHR to support the Defenders' application for the establishment of the Gabriel Marker. (Kambourian served on that project's advisory committee, along with Dr. Douglas R. Egerton, author of "Gabriel's Rebellion," and Dr. Haskell S. Bingham, a great, great, great, great-grandson of Gabriel and the family's oral historian.)

The next step, according to Councilwoman McQuinn, will be to work with the James River Archaeological Society or other experts in the field to determine the best location for an initial survey. Finally, McQuinn says, there will be a Town Hall-type meeting at which a report and recommendations will be presented.

A key issue at stake is the size of the area to be preserved. The actual lot that includes the parking lot measures 1.6 acres. The city map that Kambourian discovered seems to indicate that the entire lot was the site of the Burial Ground.

After trying unsuccessfully to interest city officials in her findings, Kambourian presented her research at a public meeting held at the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia in Richmond's Jackson Ward. One of those present was Janine Bell, founder and artistic director of the Elegba Folklore Society, who is also a member of the Slave Trail Commission. Bell invited Kambourian to make a presentation to the commission, and also decided to incorporate the site in Elegba's annual Night Walk Along the Trail of Enslaved Africans.

As a result, the site already ranks as an important gathering place for large numbers of people meeting to remember and honor Richmond's Black ancestors.

Reclaiming the Burial Ground also was vigorously taken up by former City Councilman Sa'ad El-Amin, who founded the Slave Trail Commission in 1998.

It should not be forgotten that it was public outcry that stimulated the current apparent progress in the reclamation of this important site. Public participation and an open community-driven process will serve a project like this best.

The Slave Trail Commission is scheduled to meet again on July 10 at 4 p.m. in the East District Center, 725 N. 25th Street in Richmond's Church Hill neighborhood. Aside from continuing to send letters and e-mails to VCU President Trani, this meeting provides the next opportunity for input.

Significantly, outgoing Richmond Mayor L. Douglas Wilder — a well-paid VCU employee and promoter of the U.S. National Slavery Museum based in Fredericksburg, Va. — has refused to comment on this issue.

OP-ED: Burial Ground stirs mixed feelings for Black Richmonders

By R.J. Fields

[Editor's note: The following piece includes quotes from Black Richmonders explaining their thoughts and feelings about the city's "Burial Ground for Negroes." For various reasons, some asked not to be quoted by name.]

"The paving over of the Burial Ground is like sweeping under the rug what has happened to us for years and years."

Those were the words of an educator at Virginia Commonwealth University. It's also the sentiment of several other Black Richmonders interviewed about how they feel about VCU's plans to "upgrade" the parking lot that now covers Richmond's oldest Black cemetery.

"The site needs to be memorialized," said Ricky Brown, 48, a communications specialist. "The way the site is being treated is parallel to the way other issues in the Black community are easily dismissed. I would like to see people treat the site like they do the Confederate cemetery: tend it and keep it up like you love the people there."

"You don't see them paving over Hollywood Cemetery or any place Confederate soldiers are buried," added another Richmonder. "But when it has something to do with Black people, they just do whatever they want."

Whether people want to recognize it or not, Black people played an important part in the creation of Richmond and the country as a whole. However, it is the means under which Blacks' contributions were made — slavery — that has something to do with the lack of respect for, and dismissal of, their part in U.S. history.

Slavery, being a divisive and painful aspect of this country's foundation, presses portions of American society to gloss over the subject all together, and with it the role of Blacks in America.

Kyle Epps, 22, a visual artist and community activist, said he believes that "slavery is linked to my life ... and is directly connected to the lives of Black Americans today. But do people want to admit that?"

Slavery is a shameful part of America's past. That shame, unresolved, still resides in the present. And that shame, for Blacks and whites, leads many to simply want to move on, to forget about the initial horrors of U.S. history. They want to move on without making reconciliation of the past, and slavery in particular, a priority.

While the last several generations of Blacks have not experienced the root pain of chattel slavery, many African-Americans continually taste slavery's lasting bitter fruits: disparities running the gamut from higher unemployment rates to health care inequities to segregated and poorly funded schools to lower salaries for the same work and higher rates of incarceration for the same crime.

This list of disparities within the fabric of American society is not definitive. All of these things have roots in the past that await honest acknowledgment, recognition and recon-

ciliation. But for that to happen, the issues of the past have to be a priority in people's lives today.

However, that task is less likely as the consequences of the past



R.J. Fields

mount and people struggle to navigate their daily lives.

"I think a lot of things have arisen in people's lives, living people's lives that supercede this issue," said the VCU educator. "I don't know if it's a priority. I think the priority for a lot of people is paying their rent, gas prices and their children — keeping them safe and giving them a good education."

Dr. Maya Corneille, 30, a psychologist and researcher, agreed. "I think we [the Black community] are more focused on cleaning up our immediate pressing issues," she said. "There are so many things in Richmond that are in your face, like the violence. You turn on the news and you see which Black man got shot today and which Black man was arrested."

These are the things — the shootings, the arrests, the possibility of losing a public housing community — that get reported on. They are the most accessible. "The things that affect our daily lives," as Dr. Corneille put it.

"People don't know about this issue [the Burial Ground]," Epps said.

"Maybe they don't know," added the VCU educator. "I haven't seen or heard about it on the news or in any mainstream media outlet. All the information I have on it came from friends and word-of-mouth."

Dr. Corneille was asked if she thought the preservation of the Burial Ground was an important issue.

"Not really," she said. "I feel we have bigger issues in Richmond. But do I think it is something we should ignore? Definitely not. Society as a whole recognizes sites like this and gives respect to the dead. So of course the site should be recognized and memorialized as such. The original problem was turning the site into a parking lot the first time, not repaving it."

"Make recognition of what it is," said Robert Wilson, 26, an actor.

Still, despite differences of opinion on the priority the site should receive, most agree that the history of the site should be memorialized. The form of such a memorial is still unclear, but the sentiment is that something must go up and that the history of Blacks in Richmond and this country cannot continue to go ignored.

"Drive down Monument Avenue," said Dr. Corneille. "There is only one story being told. We [Black people] were here. Ignoring our story and putting parking lots over our ancestors, which is symbolic of Richmond's interaction with the Black community, makes it seem Richmond is not for us."

"You can't deny history at all," ended Epps. "Trying to deny history only leads to the same thing happening again."

A native of Kinston, N.C., R.J. Fields now lives in Richmond. He has taught at Virginia Commonwealth University and John Tyler Community College. His writings appear in Sotac and Urban Views magazines.

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THE DEFENDER COMMUNITY CALENDAR - July / August 2008

The Richmond Defender is published on the first Friday of every other month, starting with the January/February issue. Information for the Community Calendar must be received by the Friday before the publication date. Please include the name of the event, the event sponsor, contact information, time, date, place and any admission cost. We do not normally list events held on a weekly basis.

Be sure and call ahead to make sure the information listed is current.

Note: Listing of an event does not necessarily imply an endorsement by this newspaper.

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WASHINGTON, D.C.

Fri., July 25 – Sun., July 27 – THIRD ANNUAL WASHINGTON AFRICAN DIASPORA FILM SERIES - National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1250 New York Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. Sponsored by TransAfrica Forum's Arthur R. Ashe, Jr. Foreign Policy Library, ArtMattan Productions and National Museum of Women in the Arts. \$9 per program. Information: <http://transafricaforum.org/pdf/filmseries2008.pdf>

RICHMOND - Ongoing

Through Aug. 31 – TELL ME WHERE YOU'RE MARCHING, TELL ME WHERE YOU'RE BOUND – Photography of former Richmond slave sites, including "Manchester Docks, Lumpkin's Jail and the Negro Burial Ground or, rather, the asphalt parking lots and empty fields that now cover these landmarks." By guest curator and photographer Shanna Merola. Valentine Richmond History Center, 1015 E. Clay St. Tues.-Sat., 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sun. noon-5 p.m.; closed Mon. Admission: \$10; \$5 members. Valentine Richmond History Center, 1015 E. Clay St. Information: (804) 649-0711; www.richmondhistorycenter.com.

Through Jan. 9, 2009 – BATTLE FOR THE CITY: THE POLITICS OF RACE 1950s-1970s -- "With stunning imagery and artifacts, the History Center revisits citywide conflicts over integration, civil rights, urban planning, transportation, and political representation, the outcomes of which affected Richmond's physical and social landscape." Information: See above item.

RICHMOND - Events

Thurs., July 10 – ELEGBA IN CONCERT AT

DOGWOOD DELL – A special concert titled "African Dance, Music & the Oral Tradition." Dance, music and folklore of the Manding cosmology of West Africa, with choreography by Mohamed Dacosta and Kadiatou Conte of Guinea and Elegba's own artistic director, Janine Yvette Bell. Premiere of Ms. Conte's "Tambour de Guine." 8:30 p.m., Dogwood Dell amphitheater in Byrd Park, at the south end of the Boulevard. Information: Elegba Folklore Society at (804) 644-3900 or visit www.efsinc.org.

Fri., July 11 – SMALL BUSINESS WORKSHOP – For owners and prospective owners of small business. Presented by SCORE, a "nonprofit association dedicated to educating entrepreneurs and the formation, growth and success of small business nationwide." 8 a.m. - 4:15 p.m., Capital One Town Center Building, 15000 Capital One Drive. Information: (804) 771-2400, ext. 131.

Tues., July 15 – SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATES' FORUM – Sponsored by the Richmond Crusade for Voters. For time and location, call (804) 908-7400.

Sat., July 19 – MOTIVE8'S 7TH ANNUAL "CITYWIDE" RECOGNITION DAY CELEBRATION - "Objective: To bring unity in the community through positive partnership building. We will offer free food and drinks, live entertainment, educational speakers, health care services, employment services, a fashion show, sack race, moon bounce, three youth and adult raffles and more." Noon - 8 p.m., Byrd Park Shields Lake. Information: www.motiv8s.org.

Sun., July 20 – SYMPOSIUM ON THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT – Library of Virginia.

Mon., July 21 – UNVEILING & DEDICATION OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MEMORIAL – Capitol Square.

Thurs., July 24 – "MONEY IN POLITICS: THE PUBLIC'S RIGHT TO KNOW" - "David Poole, executive director and founder of the Virginia Public Access Project, will discuss the VPAP and demonstrate how to use the system that tracks money in Virginia politics. The VPAP Web site also maintains a list of lobbyists and has election results dating back to 1997. Co-sponsored by the Society of Professional Journalists and the League of Women Voters of Virginia." Noon - 1 p.m., Library of Virginia, 800 W. Broad St. Information: (804) 692-3592.

Sunday, July 27 – COMMUNITY FORUM ON RICHMOND'S AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND – Sponsored by the UNIA-ACL Prosser-Truth Division No. 456. (Time and place to be announced.)

Tues., July 29 – FAITH CONVERSATIONS - A forum designed to further involve leaders of the faith community in addressing the many pressing issues facing Richmond-area residents. Featured speaker: Dr. John W. Kinney, Dean of

Virginia Union University's Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology. (See story on page 3.) Free, but preregistration is urged. Information: Contact forum conveners Marie F. Coone at (804) 231-3338 or the Rev. Junius Gash at (804) 222-6264.

Sat., Aug. 9 – FILIPINO FESTIVAL - "Celebrating the unique culinary and cultural heritage of the Philippine Islands. Flavorful cuisine with oriental and western influences. Tropical drinks and desserts. Internationally-oriented dances & music. Beer, bands, exhibits, children's ki-dieland, vendors." 9 a.m., Our Lady Of Lourdes Parish, 8200 Woodman Road. Information: www.filipinofestival.org.

Fri., Aug. 15, and Sat., Aug. 16 – 18th ANNUAL DOWN HOME FAMILY REUNION – Sponsored by the Elegba Folklore Society. Information: (804) 644-3900 or visit www.efsinc.org.

Sat., Aug. 16 – COMMUNITY MARCH – Noon, Oliver Hill Way Courthouse/Richmond City Jail. Sponsored by the prisoner advocacy organization R.I.H.D. Information: (804) 562-2123 or e-mail OneRastaQueen@hotmail.com or InMateResource@aol.com. Website: www.rihd.org.

Sat., Aug. 16 – TOWN HALL MEETING – Topics: Virginia Prison System Awareness and Restoration of Felon Voting Rights Application & Filing Assistance. 1 p.m., Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church, 1720 Mechanicsville Turnpike. (Zip code 23223) Sponsored by the prisoner advocacy organization R.I.H.D. Information: (804) 562-2123 or e-mail OneRastaQueen@hotmail.com or InMateResource@aol.com. Website: www.rihd.org.

Tues., Aug. 19 – CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATES' FORUM – Sponsored by the Richmond Crusade for Voters. For time and location, call (804) 908-7400.

Sat., Aug. 30 – HAPPILY NATURAL DAY - "A family-oriented, grassroots festival dedicated to social change, cultural awareness & holistic health." Music, lectures and workshops. Ginter Park Elementary School. Hosted by the Universal Negro Improvement Association & African Communities League in collaboration with Camp Diva. Information: (804) 687-8157; e-mail: hndsupport@gmail.com or visit <http://happilynaturalday.com/sponsorproposal.pdf>.

Important Dates in Black History

- July 1, 1889 - Frederick Douglass named U.S. Minister to Haiti.
- July 4, 1900 - Trumpeter Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong, jazz pioneer, born.
- July 6, 1957 - Althea Gibson wins women's singles title at Wimbledon, becoming first African-American to win tennis's most prestigious award.
- July 11, 1905 - W.E.B. DuBois and William Monroe Trotter organize the Niagara Movement, which demanded abolition of all race distinctions.
- July 15, 1867 - Maggie Lena Walker, first woman and first African-American to become president of a bank, born in Richmond.
- July 16, 1862 - Anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells Barnett born.
- July 28, 1868 - 14th Amendment granting Blacks full citizenship rights becomes law.
- July 29, 1895 - First National Conference of Colored Women Convention is held in Boston.
- Aug. 2, 1924 - James Baldwin, author, born
- Aug. 5, 1962 - Nelson Mandela, South African freedom fighter, imprisoned.
- Aug. 9, 1936 - Jesse Owens wins fourth gold medal at Summer Olympics in Berlin.
- Aug. 11, 1921 - Alex Haley, author of "Roots," born.
- Aug. 21, 1831 - Nat Turner leads slave revolt in Southampton County, Va.
- Aug. 23, 1926 - Carter Woodson, historian, author, inaugurates Negro History Week.
- Aug. 27, 1935 - Mary McLeod Bethune founds the National Council of Negro Women.
- Aug. 30, 1800 - Gabriel's Rebellion in Richmond is delayed by a terrible thunderstorm and then betrayed by two enslaved Africans.



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