The shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, 2014, catalyzed a renewed level of youth activism on the issue of police brutality.

It was, for many, the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back as young people in Ferguson organized demonstrations and protests that resonated around the world. Their demands for justice spread like a prairie fire, igniting Black Lives Matter and many other groups to begin organizing across the United States.

Some will say that similar moments have come and gone before. However, if we look with a more critical eye, we might find that missing from these earlier moments was the recognition and support of individuals and organizations with resources, and an unwillingness on their part to accept new leadership.

We are now on the cusp of a movement that should be nurtured and supported by all who work for justice and peace. Because police abuse and brutality are very real and sometimes very visible offenses. It’s a fact that can be seen by riding through some of our nation’s poorest communities.

Take the videotaped shooting of Walter Scott in Charleston, South Carolina, on April 4, 2015, the 47th anniversary of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination. Given the frequency of police shootings, this event salted wounds that had never healed.

In the report, Operation Ghetto Storm, The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement found that a black man, woman, or child is killed every twenty-eight hours by a police officer, security guard, or vigilante. Their

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One of the most important developments from this movement is the creation of new formations of young people dedicated to organizing for social change. Here in the South Region, AFSC’s New Orleans office has led the way by creating a model for organizing youth that is now being duplicated across the country.

The new collective, named Peace by Piece (PxP), is starting chapters under AFSC in the south and beyond. At this time there are Peace by Piece groups not only in New Orleans, but also in Baltimore, Atlanta, Mississippi, and now San Diego. Each chapter is moving not only to change policy and laws, but to create programs that can help build a lasting base in each respective community.

Within a year’s time, our hope is that Peace by Piece will be a leading force for social, political and economic change. Those are big dreams, but these young people are motivated, and we as their supporters will attempt to give them the necessary resources to lay a foundation for those dreams.

In the following pages, read more about the various activities and people involved who are motivating us—not only with their words, but with their actions. We are inspired by their struggle to recognize rights where they are not respected, create infrastructure where very little exists, and to build community where chaos has reigned, peace by piece.

— Kamau Franklin

The Friend of a Friend Program’s work in West Baltimore continues with newly renovated basketball courts at Gilmor Homes. Check out the story on YouTube via TheRealNews.

Please visit www.afsc.org for extended articles and support the South Region.
will run for its fifth year in September. In Baltimore, Farajii Muhammad will be guiding PxP through a busy summer with its new campaign, Summer of Us. Between teaching social justice workshops for high school students, volunteering at the new ConneXions Leadership Academy library, organizing a town hall meeting that will be broadcast live on two radio stations, and also sponsoring an activist camp at Mervo High School, the Summer of Us has PxP Baltimore youth out in the community non-stop.

Muhammad says his program won’t slow down when the summer is over, though. “PxP is focused and committed to ... making this year a game-changer to restore peace, unity and justice in broken communities.”

The collective’s most recent additions are in Georgia and Mississippi. In Atlanta, Joel Dickerson will lead with an emphasis on teaching the deep history of African American communities. “We are creating courses that guide our students to empower themselves to be the change they want to see in their neighborhoods,” Dickerson explains.

But the program offers more than a history lesson—Dickerson has planned a theater arts course, a sewing/fashion class, and a computer programming class that will teach coding and basics of computers. “With the Coding Collective, we aim to start a worker cooperative made up of high school and college-age students in the area … that provides both ownership and income for our youth.”

Michael Taylor, who represents PxP in Mississippi, will focus on educating youth about violence, AIDS/STD awareness, and teen pregnancy, while introducing creative outlets and opportunities for participants to serve their communities.

A recent ACLU report on police shootings found that in Maryland, African Americans make up 29 percent of the state’s population yet comprise 69 percent of the 109 people who died at the hands of police in 2014. In addition to these killings, black people face other forms of oppression such as mass incarceration. Often there is a direct link between police brutality and incarceration. Many prisoners in Maryland report that they have experienced physical abuse, including the use of stun guns, during their arrest.

While we lift up the murder by police of African American men, we cannot overlook the fact that this issue touches every segment of the black community. Women, children, and LGBTQ are all vulnerable to police brutality.

What makes African Americans potential victims is the invisibility of so many to the larger society. Up until the time of his death, Freddie Gray was an anonymous young man living in the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood of West Baltimore.

I did not know him, but I know many young men like him, and I know the difficulty of their lives and the struggle to survive a neighborhood that time and society has forgotten. Since the protests have begun here in Baltimore, I have been contemplating a question. Do we love these young black men in life, or value them more in death because they have become symbols of oppression and suffering? One of the best ways to honor Freddie Gray and the many victims of police brutality and murder, is to care about the hundreds of Freddie Grays that live among us now. We must work to end police brutality, but we must also remove the veil of invisibility that allows conditions of inequity and oppression to exist for so many.

It is time to stand with the new crop of activists. Many of them are the very people who will be the victims of police brutality and shootings.
D.C. VOLUNTEER SHARES YOUTH VISION OF PEACE

Children know the names Freddie Gray, Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin. Middle school students understand police brutality and racism are serious problems in our society. They know violence can come from those they are supposed to trust. However, they also have a vision of peace and non-violence—a vision of what our cities might look like without war and police brutality.

It is important to talk about violence and brutality with youth, to empower them to use non-violence and understanding when the deck may be stacked against them. It helps them realize their approach, their perspectives, and their choices can make a difference.

On May 18th, I facilitated a workshop of 15 D.C. middle school students. Their teacher, Monica Shah, is a former DC Human Rights Learning intern and has continued to work with the project to expand human rights learning at their school. The D.C. Human Rights Learning Project engages D.C. youths in a participatory exploration of human rights and guide them towards becoming agents of social change.

Together we explored the basic concepts of violence and peace. We shared the model of Transforming Power, a paradigm designed by the Alternatives to Violence Project intended to inspire inner strength and creativity to transform violence. We barely scraped the surface in our short hour together, but it gave the students ideas for problem solving. It showed them that they had the tools available, there were more skills to be learned, and it could be fun to do so. Eventually, event the shy kids were sharing their thoughts and experiences.

Following our discussion we engaged in an exercise that required looking at a drawing from different perspectives and comparing your ideas with a partner. The students picked up on the task right away. They were then able to process and apply the lesson to real life and how police might see one thing while they see another. I was very impressed with how quickly they were able to comprehend.

At the beginning of the workshop I was a little sad to know that these children had such a keen awareness of police brutality, that those designated to be their protectors may not be trustworthy or safe. However, I was also proud of their level of awareness and their ability to envision non-violent responses to a violent context.

By the end of this workshop, I felt sure that these kids could help build a more peaceful world given the right resources, attention, and nurturing. I feel that this kind of experiential workshop could help more children face a violent world with empowering, peaceful responses.

- Written by Young Friend and AFSC D.C. Volunteer Jessica Farley (Full article online at afsc.org)
ATL COALITION WORKS TO PREVENT HOUSING DISPLACEMENT

Last year, AFSC’s Atlanta Economic Justice Program partnered with residents and community organizations to facilitate a listening project in Peoplestown. After evaluating the results, it was clear that residents cared deeply for their community and have deep concerns about its future. On the top of the list of concerns were the lack of affordable housing, limited access to good food, and trash in the community.

Since the listening project, AFSC has worked with residents to develop an anti-displacement campaign and a series of housing justice trainings. There has been a strong effort to organize tenant associations in the communities surrounding Turner Field, and a weekly free tenants’ rights legal clinic was also launched with Attorney Joshua Davis.

It’s already been announced that the Braves will be leaving Turner Field in 2017, and that all of the land used by the team will be up for grabs for developers. Fighting mass displacement means pushing for a process that includes long-term residents and ultimately benefits the surrounding neighborhoods.

Residents have realized now is the time to organize around a platform that insures residents aren’t displaced, real jobs are created, and that those that live there have a say in what happens to the land.

One exciting development is that in the effort to organize a tenants’ association at Boynton Village, tenants have won a huge victory. The owners of Boynton Village, the Woda group, have agreed to sign a new agreement with HUD to keep the complex affordable for the next 20 years.

This is a big win considering other apartment complexes will consider converting to market rate as the price of rent in this area continues to increase with each passing month. This may not have happened if residents hadn’t organized together to hold meetings, launch petitions, and demand face to face negotiation with the Woda group. That work has been a launching point to meet with other tenant leaders in the Peoplestown area.

AFSC has joined and put energy into building and strengthening the Turner Field Benefits Coalition, a coalition of over 40 groups based mostly in neighborhoods surrounding Turner Field. At this point, the coalition is fighting to insure that those that live in the neighborhood will have a real voice and an impact on what happens to the land the Braves used after they leave.

AFSC has also organized big trash clean-up days, with college students focusing on the Peoplestown community. And responding to the lack of good food in the community, AFSC has been working with Pittsburgh (right next door to Peoplestown) resident Tommy Moore to help him raise funds to develop community gardens. Tommy is a miracle worker in the garden and has used the resources to develop multiple garden sites, teach young people to grow food, and feed neighbors free of charge. AFSC is so excited to help put Tommy’s ideas into action, including breaking ground on a new garden in June 2015.

- TIM FRANZEN, ATL ECONOMIC JUSTICE PROGRAM (FULL ARTICLE ONLINE AT AFSC.ORG)
Laughter, learning, and leadership lobbying filled AFSC’s 2015 If I Had a Trillion Dollars national youth film festival, which was held in Washington, D.C. for its fifth year. Young people from other AFSC office locations joined in to attend a four-day advocacy experience.

IHTD is a collaborative project with National Priorities Project, a non-profit, non-partisan federal budget research organization dedicated to bringing the federal budget home. During the IHTD festival and trainings, youth focus on human needs and offer a counter debate toward soaring military spending in the United States.

Macy Brittingham (UNCG graduate, May 2015) shared, “I expected this leadership training [to be] just another seminar about how to be a better leader, but it wasn’t at all. I learned so much about government spending and about ASFC in general. I was constantly taking in new information and new experiences.”

“I learned so much about government spending and about ASFC in general. I was constantly taking in new information and new experiences.”

Toni Etheridge from AFSC’s NC Peace & Economic Justice Program, who accompanied young leaders from Greensboro, expressed that she enjoyed the chance to witness young people discover how they can amplify their community message.

“IHTD action conducted in front of the US Supreme Court steps”

Another UNCG student, Zachariah Etheridge, offered, “I want to say that this entire experience completely exceeded my expectations and I was left with a very good impression of the American Friends Service Committee, an organization I previously had little experience with.”

“I learned so much about government spending and about ASFC in general. I was constantly taking in new information and new experiences.”

“[Elimu Learning Center students] Jason Wilson and Jacob Idassi discussed pointed facts and narratives about issues that affect them. When they met with the legislative assistant to Congresswoman Alma Adams, James Hauser, they shared with Mr. Hauser their concern about the poor lunch choices served to them,” Etheridge reported. “The lunches don’t get a passing grade. I could see this information resonated loudly with James because he happens to be on a nutritional committee.”

During the meeting, Etheridge and the young leaders also showed the One Minute for Peace illustration on the federal discretionary budget. This visual fold-out emphasized the need to shift limitless military spending and ask that more money be considered for education and human needs.

“IHTD action conducted in front of the US Supreme Court steps”

AFSC-NC participants visit the office of Congresswoman Alma S. Adams.
As I enter Paulette’s apartment, she introduces me to her Garden of Eden. Paulette is fascinated by floral design—she embellishes her residence in an arrangement of real and artificial flowers. Paulette’s apartment showcases her bright disposition and I instantly feel welcomed into her home. She hands me a can of Orange Fanta as I sit on the couch next to her piano. Paulette always had an affinity for playing music from what she tells me. I do not know what to expect from this interview, all I know is that I am instantly intrigued by her personality.

Paulette’s past is rooted in her hometown of Port-au-Paix in northern Haiti. She was married for 40 years and had four loving children. Unfortunately, after those 40 years, her husband passed away. At the time, one of Paulette’s children migrated to the United States, one migrated to Canada and the other two remained in Haiti. Her husband was dead and her children were spread all over the globe. Paulette suddenly felt alone, scared and helpless to arise from her devastating situation. With nothing to lose and hopefully all the more to gain, Paulette migrated to the US in 2007. She was 66 years old.

However, there is more to the story. Paulette did not simply leave her country of origin—for love and wishful thinking. She expresses that there were security issues in Haiti that threatened her well-being. There were grave crimes committed against Paulette and her family, most notably the kidnappings of her daughter and granddaughter. The first time they were both kidnapped, there was no ransom placed on them and Paulette’s family was easily able to retrieve them.

The second incident was nearly heartbreaking. The robbers demanded a $70,000 ransom for the two of them and the family was not able to front that large of an amount. Luckily, the robbers released the children, who were only eight and six years old. Incidents like these were severe enough to rattle the entire family and only encouraged Paulette to leave even more. She had to find a better opportunity for herself somewhere, anywhere but Haiti.

Initially, Paulette married an American man that won her heart. However, the love soon fizzled out and they separated. With nowhere to go, and only sustaining herself in the US on a travel visa, her daughter in Canada was able to petition for her to travel north. Paulette took a train into Manhattan, but in Manhattan she tragically fell off the train, causing serious damage to her knee. She spent three days in the ER and afterwards she decided to stay in the US.

Paulette lived in New York for five years before the frigid cold of Northeast became too unbearable for her rheumatism—a non-specific health condition related to joint pain and arthritis. Her sister lived in Ft. Lauderdale, which was the perfect reason to migrate to sunny Florida. After moving to Ft. Lauderdale, she decided that she never wanted to return to Haiti and that instead, she preferred to obtain her American citizenship.

The church that Paulette attended referred her to Paul-Andre Mondesir’s citizenship classes with American Friends Immigrant Services. When she was in class, she was able to escape her problems and focus solely on the lessons. Paul helped Paulette with memorization problems, but nonetheless Paulette was a great student. Paulette focused on her studies for eight months and passed the citizenship test on her first attempt in December of 2013.

The support that she received from Sister Marie and Paul was a tremendous help for her. She was very thankful and tried to use the goodwill that she learned in that class to help her classmates who struggled with studying. Paulette served as a role model for others by calling them and making appearances in class to discuss her experience.

Paulette feels much more comfortable in the US than when she was in Haiti. Since obtaining her citizenship, she has only visited Haiti once. She saw her family and prayed a lot for them when she was there. She started the process to petition for her two children to come to the US, who are now 47 and 43.

In spite of her ties that she maintains with Haiti, she solely identifies as American. Paulette plans to vote in the 2016 election and has a lot of gratitude for the second chance that the United States gave her to find happiness.

After Paulette concludes the interview, she is surprisingly cheerful. Our conversation resurfaced many repressed emotions of sadness, anger, frustration and sorrow, and yet she is cheerful. On the way out, she tells me that she sees me like one of her children, and gives me a long hug. As I leave, I look back and tell her to keep playing music, keep motivating people, and most importantly, keep being herself.

- STORY & PHOTO BY AFIS INTERNS GRACE SLAWSKI
All of us need to listen with open hearts and minds, and respond with support that reflects the guidance of the grassroots.

Many strategies have been initiated and suggested by groups around the country. Community control of the police is perhaps the most widely discussed possibility. This could be supported through a mass movement or a “bloc” of residents in different cities pushing city council resolutions.

Boycotts also have been effective when used strategically, and demonstrations that focus on a specific entity or individual have proven useful.

AFSC has a history of standing with marginalized groups and working on unpopular issues. We will use our resources to convene people to ascertain how they can best support this movement. We invite other groups with resources to do the same.

Now is the time to renew the spirit of our activism. Now is the time to stand with those who have had to remind the world that #BlackLivesMatter.

- DOMINQUE STEVENSON
PROGRAM DIRECTOR, FRIEND OF A FRIEND

Note: This article was published on AFSC’s Acting in Faith blog on May 24, 2015, with an introduction by Friends Liaison Lucy Duncan. South Regional Director Kamau Franklin also contributed to the piece.